

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

BUILDING LEAFS NATION: RHETORICAL DEVICES IN THE ONLINE
IMAGINED COMMUNITY OF THE TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

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ABSTRACT

Established almost 100 years ago, the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team is known for their large, dedicated fan base called Leafs Nation. I am a devoted member of this nation and, as such, the team's communication practices speak both to me, and about me. This major research paper (MRP) is an analysis of e-mails sent to a subscriber-only list in the context of marketing. Researching the e-mail communication from the Toronto Maple Leafs to their fan base lends itself to an understanding of the communication that occurs in a professional setting. Not only do the Toronto Maple Leafs communicate directly with their proactive fan base but I argue that the way in which they do this instills a sense of community within Leafs Nation through the use of themes, metaphors and rhetorical tropes. Communicating effectively with a fan base is an essential component in running a sports organization. Texts in the form of words and images do not only assist in getting an organization's message to the supporters, but their connotative meanings can also contribute to the senses of community and belonging. This paper will examine *how the Toronto Maple Leafs employ rhetorical devices in the e-mail newsletters sent out to Leafs Nation*, as well as analyzing the rhetorical connotations in these devices. Also, I will be examining *the way in which the use of rhetorical devices contributes to the creation of an online 'imagined community,'* a concept first introduced by Benedict Anderson in 1936 in the context of nations and nationalism. Anderson stated that an imagined community does not conform to traditional ideals of a community and is constructed by those that see themselves as being a part of this community, and I see the Leafs Nation as conforming to the ideals detailed by Anderson. As such, I will be completing a qualitative textual

analysis of 43 e-mails that have gone out to the subscriber-only fan list since 2012. By examining these e-mails I will attempt to identify the presence of the rhetorical devices of *pathopoeia*, *scesis onomaton* and *principle of scarcity* and the overall frequency with which they appear. Based on the data that emerges from my research, I will then attempt to draw correlations between the findings and attempt to link the presence of rhetorical devices as a contributing factor to the creation of Leafs Nation as an online imagined community through a qualitative textual analysis.

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“When you pull on that jersey, you represent yourself and your teammates and the name on the front is a hell of a lot more important than the one on the back.”

-Herb Brooks, Hockey Coach

INTRODUCTION

Gathering around the television to watch “the boys in blue” play hockey was a weekly tradition in my household growing up. The excitement of watching a heated, fast-paced, physical game and the anticipation of getting a win for our team – these were the moments I looked forward to sharing in with my family. My grandfathers and father fell in love with this team when they immigrated to Canada from Italy and they then passed on their love of the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team to me at a very young age.

Twenty-five years later I still “bleed blue” in supporting the team.

The Toronto Maple Leafs organization (originally known as the Toronto Arenas) was established in 1917 as one of the Original Six hockey teams of the NHL. This is an historic franchise with almost one hundred years of tradition behind it. The Toronto Maple Leafs are also infamous for not having won a Stanley Cup championship since 1967 and yet they remain a thriving organization. According to an annual report on National Hockey League (NHL) Team Valuations published by Forbes (2013) the Toronto Maple Leafs have been the most valuable NHL team since 2005 with a franchise value of \$1.15 billion. To put that into perspective, there are currently thirty teams in the NHL and the average NHL team has an enterprise value of \$413 million, making the Toronto Maple Leafs almost 3 times as valuable financially as its average counterparts in the league (Forbes, 2013). A company with such a large economic footprint is sure to

have a loyal and dedicated fan base that continuously contributes to the franchise's continuous success. In the case of the Toronto Maple Leafs, this fan base is known as Leafs Nation.

What is Leafs Nation?

Originally Leafs Nation began as an organic community that emerged out of the fan base of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Fans of the team began collectively referring to themselves as members of Leafs Nation. Leafs Nation today, however, has taken on a different identity in the online sphere. Over the last several years, tickets to the Toronto Maple Leaf home games sell out routinely and in the rare instance that home game tickets are available there existed a Leafs Last Minute Club that sought to provide its over 89,000 members with a chance to purchase a ticket. In order to be a part of the Leafs Last Minute Club an individual would have to sign up to a digital newsletter curated by the Toronto Maple Leafs by submitting their e-mail address to the organization through their website.

The Leafs Last Minute Club was re-named to Leafs Nation in 2014 and its newly developed online presence took the form of a marketing site for the organization. This online hub is complete with the ability to give the fans access to the Toronto Maple Leafs via multiple social media platforms including YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, FourSquare and several others, as well as the subscription-only e-mail newsletter service. The digital embodiment of Leafs Nation is described on the Toronto Maple Leafs website as being:

“The ultimate way to stay connected and get access to your team. Sign up today and receive all the exciting benefits that Leafs Nation has to offer. You will have first priority access to ticket releases for select Leafs home games, plus be

notified of exclusive Leafs Nation ticket pre-sales and VIP packages. In the coming months, new benefits and perks will also be announced, so stay tuned as we roll out the rewards for being a member of Leafs Nation (Toronto Maple Leafs, 2014).”

Leafs Nation-online presents itself as a one-stop shop for the ultimate Toronto Maple Leafs fan with the promise of exclusive access, benefits and insider information all given to the fan in exchange for their e-mail address.

Due to the fact that the Toronto Maple Leafs continuously retain a sizeable fan base, and the franchise consistently communicates with said fan base to persuade them to buy tickets, these e-mail messages lend themselves to be studied in the context of professional communication. Not only do the Toronto Maple Leafs communicate with their fans but in doing so they instill a sense of community within their membership group known as Leafs Nation. This major research paper (MRP) examines the rhetorical devices used by the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey organization in their e-mail communications to their fan base. Moreover, it seeks to address the way in which the use of these rhetorical devices contributes to the construction of the imagined community of Leafs Nation online through language. This paper consists of a qualitative textual analysis (involving both linguistic and semiotic analyses) on a set of e-mails sent out by the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team to their subscriber-only fan base. Within this textual analysis, the use of the following rhetorical devices will be identified within the texts: the *principle of scarcity*, *scesis onomaton* and *pathopoeia*. Although the scope of the study is limited to an analysis of e-mails sent to a subscriber-only list in the context of marketing, there is value in studying the language behind the construction of Leafs Nation in the way in which it may lend to an understanding in to how sports

organizations communicate to their fan bases. This is a novel research study and it is important because it can help to provide insight into the way in which words with connotative meanings are used to foster feelings of community and belonging, especially within the context of professional sports teams.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper focuses on the understanding of the theme of networked technology, community and communication as well as the theme of imagined communities as they relate to the study of the e-mail communications from the Toronto Maple Leafs to their fan base, Leafs Nation. The paper will also examine the importance of the rhetorical devices of *principle of scarcity*, *scesis onomaton* and *pathopoeia* in the e-mail communications as well as the understanding of the context of the chosen rhetorical devices within the existing research.

Networked Technology, Community and Communication

Networked technology has the ability to create a community through communication. The growth of new technologies, particularly the Internet, has allowed new communities of people to imagine and re-imagine themselves. These communities are linked by emotions and mutual interest (Pentecost, 2011, p. 44). These new communities can range anywhere from the fans of a popular boy band to a group of people sharing cat memes to everything in between. Pentecost (2011) goes on to state that “the internet – through e-mail, social networking sites, personal blogs, online publications, podcasts and other forms – offers myriad opportunities for people all over the world to re-conceptualize themselves as both individuals and communities” (p. 46). Individuals are given the ability to place themselves into communities of their choosing based on hobbies, interests and personal preferences.

The chosen medium of the technology of communication is the means by which the online imagined community is formed. It is through the understanding of Howard’s (1997) notion that “the medium is never neutral and technological tools are never value

free” (p. 25) that one can attempt to determine the importance of examining the use of an e-mail platform to communicate a message to its subscribers in a rapidly developing environment. That is to say that the particular platform of e-mail communication is explicitly chosen by an organization to best communicate with the members of a particular online community. E-mails can be constructed using a pre-fabricated template and updated with the most current information the organization wishes to include. Once the e-mail is written it can be easily sent to the subscriber list and all of the subscribers will receive the message at the same time. E-mail subscriber lists have the ability to reach a large number of individuals very quickly

The importance of examining the subscriber-only e-mails is supported by Cerulo’s (1995) notion that “the nation, like all other entities, exists in an environment that is increasingly reliant on audio-visual communication” (p. 168). In today’s society a large number of people have access to their e-mail almost anywhere. Individuals have become increasingly reliant on networked technology and it is quite possible that the subscriber may receive their e-mail ‘on-the-go’ via their smart phone highlighting the immediacy and convenience that can be provided by sending out an e-mail newsletter. Using e-mail as a form of communication almost ensures with absolute certainty that a subscriber will receive the messaging from the organization (pending it does not get sent to the trash or junk section of the individual’s inbox). E-mail is simply one communication channel that can be researched in order to begin to understand the implicit functionality of communication within an imagined community.

Lauden & Traver (2004) discuss the existence of two types of online communities: member-initiated communities (created and run by the members) and

organization-sponsored communities (commercially run). The organization-sponsored community is relevant to the thematic construction of this research as the Toronto Maple Leafs are indeed an organization. The purpose of organization-sponsored online communities is to “meet a firm’s specific purpose, mission or goal” -- these goals are normally financial in nature. According to Jin, Park & Kim (2010) organization-sponsored online communities are significantly advantageous to an organization. Online communities are essential in building trust, increasing brand awareness and commitment and adding value to the organization (p. 587). These potential benefits make establishing a strong online community an attractive option for the external communication of an organization.

Additionally, if the members of an online community perceive that there are benefits to be gained from their participation in said community then they are likely to reciprocate these benefits in the form of commitment to the organization (Jin, Park & Kim, 2010, p. 588). One such benefit is special treatment, which is further discussed in relation to the principle of scarcity under rhetorical devices. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler (2002) found in their research that the benefit of special treatment can actually have a direct effect on the individual’s increased commitment level to the organization that they are a part of. The relationship between the fan group and the organization is cyclical – the organization needs the fans in order to have a fan base and they therefore want to please them and the fan base will continue to stay committed to the organization if they see any benefits of being a part of the organization as a whole. The existence of the online community allows for a continuous cycle of exchange of benefits between the

organization and the members of the online community – essentially the networked technology is enabling the imagined community to continue to exist.

Imagined Community

An imagined community is a concept that was first established by professor Benedict Anderson in 1936. Anderson's development of the concept included establishing ties to its roots in nations and nationalism. Anderson (1936) states that the nation is defined as an imagined [political] community and is determined to be imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives in the image of their communion" (p.6). This definition enables one to conceptualize an imagined community as a notion that embodies individuality and yet at the same time camaraderie and feelings of belonging with others.

An imagined community has no borders or boundaries, it can exist both online and offline and it does not need to exist within the tangible confines of a building or a moment in time. Shazad (2012) expands upon this notion when the research discusses how a community can also be imagined because it can be conceived to stretch beyond the immediate experience (p. 23). A person may be able to experience their imagined community while reading an e-mail or attending a gathering of the imagined community, however, once the e-mail has been deleted and the gathering is over, the imagined community will continue to exist. The ability to experience commonality through shared belief and the ability to exist beyond tangible spatial constraints are factors that legitimize the notion of an imagined community as proposed by Fine & van den Scott in 2011. If people believe:

that they share a common social world – share belonging and linked outcomes – than both we and they can recognize the existence of a community...an imagined community shapes identities. An imagined community constitutes a tiny public in which identified believe that they have the right and sometimes the obligation to claim allegiance and to recognize boundaries (p. 1323-1324).

The experience of an imagined community in the sports world is the experience of a diverse public being united by the imaginative construction of an ongoing tradition and the passion that is inspired within the fans (Lechner, 2007, p. 217). This thought draws upon the idea that the ties of an imagined community can become stronger over time. If an imagined community has a rich historical background than it potentially has a foundation upon which to build the existence of its membership group. Within the literature there exists an understanding that a community can be narrated, or explained in words, highlighting the importance of language in community building (Smith, 1991). The community and its artifacts “become a kind of modern ‘text’ and a form of ‘discourse’... We are then invited to join in a ‘reading’ of text (and subtexts), as if the key to an explanation of the power of this form of discourse and text lay in a literary analysis of the meaning and devices employed by [the individuals] and others in their modeling of ‘nation-ness’” (p. 361). This is why it is essential to examine rhetoric as it applies to the notion of the imagined community.

Rhetorical Devices

Rhetoric has been used in the past to influence public opinion and as well as in the promotion of nationalism. Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first person to provide us with an understanding of the function of rhetoric within society. Ultimately, rhetoric is used as a means to persuade another individual.

Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not a function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject-matter ... But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.1.1355b).

Words are used to create meaning and rhetorical devices are techniques that are used as vehicles for creating that meaning. Rhetorical devices can be used in conjunction with one another to create or enhance meaning and understanding. There is great importance in studying rhetoric because it is a study of power, “the power to monitor what is said, to authorize who can speak...But even more important, it is a study to determine what is and is not thinkable or knowable” (Howard, 1997, p. 2). Language is one of the most powerful tools and it is commonly known as one of the most important pieces of evidence for establishing communities (Morgan, 2012, p. 1). Word choice is something that is always carefully considered when it comes to crafting and communicating a message. Readers of a seemingly factual text are encouraged to consider the following in order to understand how words can operate within the context they are situated: What is the context? How is something described? What actions are involved? (Potter, 1996, p. 66). Each community will have its own understanding of words and texts. One word may have more meaning and power in one community than it does in another. It seems to be almost cyclical that word choice embodies the characteristics of a community’s representation and that words are chosen in order to further engrain those characteristics into its public.

The rhetorical devices of principle of scarcity, scesis onomaton and pathopoeia are critical to the conceptualization of this research as they are the three rhetorical devices

that emerged prominently during a preliminary analysis of the data. There is an exhaustive list of rhetorical devices that could potentially be applied to the proposed data set, however it is not within the scope of this MRP to examine those aside from the ones indicated above at this point in time.

Principle of scarcity

The principle of scarcity has its roots in the field of economics within the basic principles of supply and demand. The condition of scarcity is created when the supply is low and the demand is high. The principle of scarcity states that when something is thought to be scarce, its value increases. If an individual acquires what is thought to be scarce they are then seen to be in possession of power. Consumers are generally thought to prefer scarce products, like them better and choose them more often than abundant products (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005, p.30). The research of Aggarwal, Jun & Huh (2011) supports this notion in such that when the opportunity to own or experience an object is constrained, it signifies a loss of freedom and “in an attempt to negate this loss, people have a tendency to desire objects on which such limitations are placed” and that this loss will directly influence the individual’s perceived value and desirability of those objects (p. 19). For example in 1982 Knishinsky found in a study that participants who were told that there was a shortage of a particular product purchased twice as much of the product when given the ability to purchase it. On the other hand the participants who did not have the message of the supply shortage communicated to them did not alter their buying habits.

By consuming that which is scarce one can effectively communicate their status to others and the element of being in competition with others becomes an important part

of the process. Schindler (1998) explains that this satisfaction through apparent “winning” as a “pride like satisfaction of having won in an implied game . . . against other consumers (p. 388).” Aggarwal, Jun & Huh (2011) go on to state that the impact of scarcity is most effective on a person’s behaviour behavior when “it is created in such a way that the person finds him- or herself in direct competition with other consumers (p. 20).” If a customer learns that Product A has one unit left on the shelf and Product B (same type of product, different brand) has 10 units left on the shelf, the customer is more likely to purchase Product A. This is because it is the last one of its kind and there is a sense of competition that exists in the fear that someone else might purchase the product instead of them.

Rajklin & Uyer (1996) state that “Both needs and wants might be characterized as desires of individuals to satisfy their quest for acquiring goods and services. The desire itself stems from two sources: one is biological and the other socio-cultural” (p. 50). The socio-cultural desire stems from the fact that a rare commodity is highly sought after. Keynes (1932) made the distinction that needs can fall into two classes, one of which being that “we feel them only if their satisfaction lifts us above, makes us feel superior to, our fellows...[these] needs satisfy the desire for superiority” (p. 365), again supporting the notion that competition against others is a driving factor in the principle of scarcity.

Scesis Onomaton

Scesis Onomaton is the repetition of key words, phrases or themes. The repetition enhances the importance and urgency of a message. Many researches have confirmed that there is indeed a positive correlation between the frequency of brand specific vocabulary terms and memory recall (Crowder, 1976). Repetition of the branding messages increases

the ability of the receiver to learn exactly what the organization has intended them to learn through their messaging. According to Davison (2008) the purpose of repetition as a rhetorical device is to provide emphasis and memorability (p.796). Davison goes on to explain that the historical purpose of repetition was to aid in the memorization of oral messages in a word of mouth society and for the passing down of myths and legends before writing and literacy (p. 797). Scesis onomaton may have its roots in a historical context but it is still very much applicable to today's society as well.

The concept of repetition is something that has been studied across many different fields. According to Campbell & Keller (2003) "Consumer researchers, psychologists, and marketers have attempted to understand the relationship between repetition and an audience's reception of a message," making this an important interdisciplinary concept (292). In 1970, Berlyne proposed the two-factor theory in relation to repetition and an individual's response to the repeated message. The first factor is often considered the "wearing in" phase whereby there is an attempt to reduce unfamiliarity and increase familiarity of a brand. The second factor is often considered the "wearing out" phase whereby an individual may become oversaturated with messaging and can often produce less than favourable results for the organization. Thus, it would appear that there is a fine balance between ensuring that your brand messaging is being communicated consistently and not overloading the individual and turning them off your brand. Moderation seems to be the key factor at work here.

In a review of a research study on the effect of repeated exposure to persuasive communication Weiss (1969) concludes that for the subjects who experienced multiple exposures to the same communication resulted in a greater opinion formation than did

one exposure (p. 669). Research by Ray & Sawyer (1971) supports this notion. Their studies showed that an increased exposure to a brand significantly increased the customer's ability to recall the brand and increased exposures resulted in an increased attitude perception of the brand and an increased willingness to purchase the brand (p. 28). An additional conclusion that can be drawn from the research of Keller & Campbell is that their study found that "high-equity brands (i.e. familiar brands) were able to maintain positive attitudinal responses over higher levels of repetition than were unfamiliar brands with little brand equity" (2003, p. 301). The results of this research are positive for well-known brand such as McDonalds or the Toronto Maple Leafs. These brands would be able to utilize more repetition in their communication strategies than lesser-known brands and their benefit would be greater.

Pathopoeia

Marketers are always looking for ways in which they can influence their target audience. Influencing an audience combined with the notion that the world is a global village associated with new electronic media -- these factors have greatly increased the importance of emotion in persuasion (Buck, Anderson, Chaudhuri & Ray, 2004, p. 647). Pathos is one of the three main means of effecting persuasion in others. Using pathos is done as an attempt to appeal to the emotions of a reader with an underlying attempt to persuade, logos is an appeal to logic and ethos is an appeal to the moral character of an individual. Pathopoeia, derived from pathos, is the use of rhetoric designed to arouse passions, "either by being moved oneself or by presenting a moving argument to the audience (Plett, 2011, p. 554)."

Arnold (1985) quotes former President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson in her research on the role of pathopoeia in persuasive appeals,

“We speak of this as an age in which the mind is monarch...but I take it for granted that if this is true, mind is one of those modern monarch who reign but do not govern. As a matter of fact, the world is governed in every generation by a great House of Commons made up of he passions; and we can only be careful to see to it that the handsome passions are in the majority (p. 26).”

Arnold attempts to highlight through Woodrow Wilson’s words that because emotional appeals are so powerful there is a possibility that instances may arise where emotional appeals are utilized in objectionable practices, such as individuals collecting money for charities that do not exist. Arnold goes on to state that, “if the emotions aroused are pleased and friendly, as they are likely to be, then the receiver may be inclined to make a generous contribution” (p. 26). Organizations should ideally attempt to appeal to emotions that are positive in order to gain a reciprocal positive reaction from their audience or consumer base.

A study by Bless, Bohner, Schwarz & Strack (1990) examined the routes to persuasion of their subjects through positive and negative messaging. Results of the study indicate that mood affects the way a recipient will process a message and that the result of putting an individual in a happy mood through positive messaging will enable the individual to be more receptive and open to the persuasive element of the messaging (p. 342). Positive messaging can be understood in several ways. Griskevicius, Shiota & Neufeld (2010) identify six functionally distinct positive emotions in their research. The positive emotion that fits most succinctly into the framework of this research is that of anticipatory enthusiasm. The critical features of anticipatory enthusiasm is the elicitation of cues of impending rewards, leads to feelings of wanting, “promotes rapid action to

acquire and consume the reward... [and] enhances one's attention to potential benefits in the environment (p. 192). Within the context of the literature, appealing to the emotions of an audience, consumer base or fan group can be a powerful marketing tool and is more likely to be successful when the emotions utilized and elicited are positive.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Communicating effectively with stakeholders is an essential component in running an organization. Consistency in communicated messaging helps to effectively establish and drive home the type of culture that an organization is attempting to cultivate. This paper looks specifically at the mechanisms in place behind the creation and proliferation of the fan base of the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team. The Toronto Maple Leafs have an established fan base known as Leafs Nation, and a number of these fans are subscribers to the Toronto Maple Leafs e-mail database.

The e-mails sent out the subscriber-only fan base consist of both words and images and are integral components in structuring the communication practices of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Texts in the form of words and images do not only help to get an organization's message across, they can also contribute to the overall notions of community and belonging to the stakeholders. The words and images have been specifically chosen to be included in these e-mails in order to facilitate the continued growth of Leafs Nation. As a result of my interest in examining the devices behind the Leafs Nation communication practices, the research questions that I am examining in my MRP are:

Research Question #1: *What rhetorical devices are present in the e-mail newsletters sent out by the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team to their subscriber fan base?*

With this question, I have already made the assumption that there are indeed rhetorical devices present within the e-mails. This question will allow me to uncover which rhetorical devices are most frequently present within the e-mails. The answer to this question will hopefully allow me to gain a better understanding of the specific

techniques employed by the Toronto Maple Leafs organization in order to communicate with their fan base of Leafs Nation. Knowing which rhetorical devices are present will allow for a deeper analysis into perhaps why these rhetorical devices have been selected by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Research Question #2: *How does the use of rhetorical devices in the e-mail communication by the Toronto Maple Leafs create an imagined community?*

After determining which rhetorical devices are present in the e-mails, with this question I hope to better understand how each of the rhetorical devices directly contributes to the creation of the imagined community of Leafs Nation. By answering this question I hope to uncover if perhaps the Toronto Maple Leafs organization favours one rhetorical device over another and which rhetorical device is (still important, yet) used less frequently.

METHOD

My interest in this topic comes from self-identifying as a member of Leafs Nation. As a student of communication I wanted to better understand what processes were at work behind the hockey team I had pledged my allegiance to twenty-five years ago. Throughout this research I have attempted to bracket my bias as a fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs, however it is important to acknowledge that my prior knowledge of the subject matter may have an effect on how I collect and interpret the data. An MRP is a well-defined paper that is to be completed within a short time frame and comes with several limitations. First I wanted to acknowledge the fact that my data set was a convenience sample and that I was limited to the number of e-mails I was able to utilize for my research. In the future, perhaps one could approach Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) in an attempt to gain access to the entire data set of e-mails sent out to Leafs Nation from beginning to present day. This would allow for more data to be collected and analyzed and would perhaps produce more rich and varied results.

For the purpose of this study I collected and reviewed 43 e-mails sent out by the Toronto Maple Leafs organization using the e-mail address *email@mlsefanmail.com* between 2012 and 2014. The reason I chose to use this number of e-mails (43) for my research is largely due to the fact that I am limited to the number of e-mails that are in my e-mail inbox. The collection of data was done through a process known as convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves the selection of the most accessible subjects and is the least costly to the researcher in terms of time and effort (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). The e-mails were sent out sporadically and not on a consistent basis (i.e. weekly, monthly). However, the frequency of e-mails during the hockey season (October to April)

was higher than during the off-season (May-August). One pattern that emerged from the e-mails is that if there was a home game, the likeliness that an e-mail regarding access to ticket sales was sent out, increased.

It is important to note that this is a subscriber-only database of e-mails and it is not within my means to obtain e-mails that have been sent outside of this time frame or retrieve e-mails that I may have permanently deleted in the past. The e-mails sent out from the Toronto Maple Leafs organization are not made publicly available and the only way to access them is to subscribe online via their website www.mapleleafs.nhl.com. When you sign up you will only be able to access e-mails that are sent to you from the sign up date and moving forward, you will not be able to retroactively access e-mails. The e-mails sent out from *email@mlsefanmail.com* go out to subscribers only; I have been a subscriber to the Toronto Maple Leafs newsletter since 2010.

When I decided to focus on the Toronto Maple Leafs e-mails I created a special folder in my inbox and directed all future e-mails to be saved automatically in this folder. I then searched back through my trash for any old e-mails that had been sent out from the organization. E-mails sent to the subscriber list contain both text and pictures and for the purpose of my research I will be focusing on both of these elements as they contribute to the overall message. Since there was a possibility that any number of rhetorical devices may be present in the e-mails, I chose to do a preliminary scan of all of the e-mails. After completing the preliminary scan I determined that the *principle of scarcity*, *scesis onomaton* and *pathopoeia* were the rhetorical devices that appeared most often in the e-mails.

Principle of Scarcity

When coding for the principle of scarcity I was looking for words and phrases that indicated exclusive access to a limited supply (i.e. tickets) or special opportunities. Some of the words and phrases I was looking for included:

- Get yours before they're sold out!
- Exclusive ticket pre-sales and VIP packages
- Buy these extremely limited packages
- Get them before they go on sale to the general public
- There's only a limited number of tickets available
- We want you to have the first opportunity
- Your private purchase window starts...
- First priority access to ticket release

Figure 1: Example of the principle of scarcity

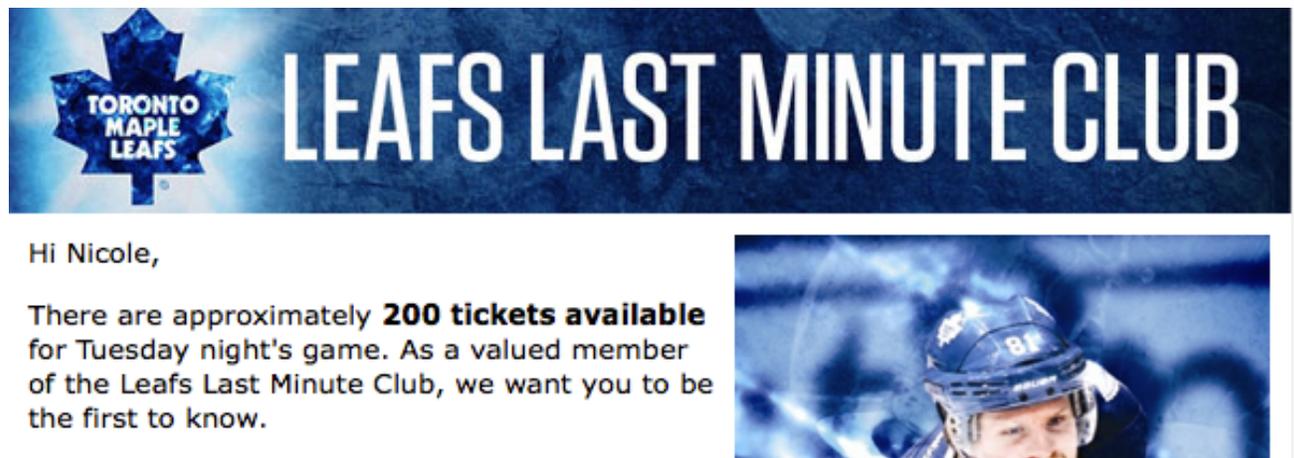


Figure 1 highlights an example where a mere 200 tickets were available for purchase and the members of Leafs Nation were being notified first in order to give the fans first access to this small number of tickets. Using the title Leafs Last Minute Club to highlight the time sensitive nature of the e-mail.

Scesis Onomaton

When coding for scesis onomaton I was looking for repetition of the Toronto Maple Leafs brand in both texts and images. Some of the words and phrases I was looking for included:

- Toronto Maple Leafs
- Leafs Nation
- Leafs
- The Leafs
- Your Leafs
- Maple Leafs
- Go Leafs Go
- Toronto Maple Leafs Hockey Club
- @mapleleafs
- mapleleafs.com

Figure 2: Examples of Scesis Onomaton

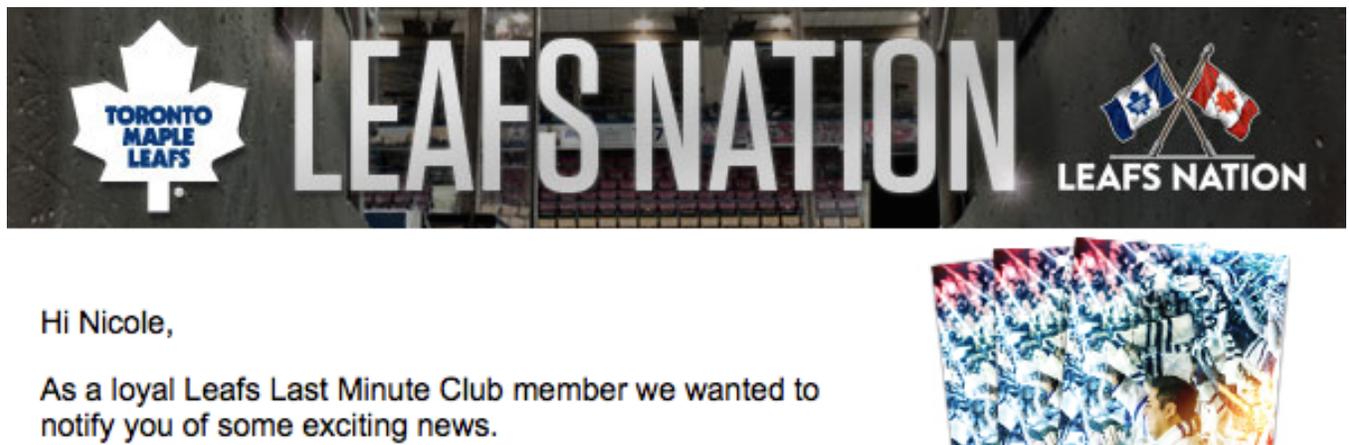


Figure 2 highlights an example where repetition of the Toronto Maple Leafs branding was used five times before the main text of the e-mail was being presented. The large Toronto Maple Leafs logo on the left, the small Toronto Maple Leafs logo inside the flag on the right, Leafs Nation in both small and large graphics as well as the mention of the Leafs Last Minute Club after the salutation line.

Pathopoeia

When coding for pathopoeia I was looking for mentions of the words nation and passion, including the phrase “The Passion That Unites Us All,” as well as the use of personal pronouns and direct personalization. Some of the personal pronouns I was looking for included:

- Your Toronto Maple Leafs
- Thank you for your participation
- Tell us about your experience
- You are a valued member
- We want you there
- Thank You again for your passion and loyalty

Some of the examples of direct personalization I was looking for included:

- Hi Nicole
- Dear Nicole
- Thanks for being a fan Nicole
- Thank you Nicole, we look forward to seeing you soon

Figure 3: Examples of pathopoeia



Figure 3 demonstrates the use of the key phrase “The Passion That Unites Us All” and the word “passionate” as well as the direct personalization of “Dear Nicole.” The personal pronouns of “you” and “your” are also used in this example.

After identifying which rhetorical devices I was going to be looking for, I then began a secondary data collection. I went through each e-mail and marked down with the when a particular rhetorical device was present. After going through each e-mail again I identified the overall frequency with which the rhetorical devices were present within the text. I kept a running tally of the number of times each rhetorical device was used.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

My results have provided me with insight into the communication practices of the Toronto Maple Leafs. The full list of results (see Appendix A) lists the e-mails from 1 (most recent) to 43 (oldest) and indicates the number of times each rhetorical device was found within the individual e-mail. First, the results show that there were a total of 823 rhetorical devices found overall in the data and that the average number of rhetorical devices used per e-mail is 19.14. This number is significant because the e-mails are actually quite short and do not contain a lot of content in terms of words or pictures. The e-mails analyzed contained an average of 60 words per e-mail, meaning that on average approximately 32% of the e-mail's written content contained a rhetorical device. Through this it is evident that the Toronto Maple Leafs are packing their e-mails full of specifically chosen rhetorical devices in order to communicate with their audience. The most number of rhetorical devices used in a single e-mail is 26, and the least number of rhetorical devices used in a single e-mail is 12. No single e-mail contained less than 12 rhetorical devices, which is still significant because that is still a high number of instances occurring in e-mails that do not exceed ten sentences.

I also wanted to address the fact that the quantitative results are being used in an attempt to answer Research Question #1: *What rhetorical devices are present in the e-mail newsletters sent out by the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team to their subscriber fan base?* In order to attempt to answer Research Question #2: *How does the use of rhetorical devices in the e-mail communication by the Toronto Maple Leafs create an imagined community?* I will be interpreting the quantitative results of the rhetorical devices and applying them to the concept of the imagined community.

Principle of Scarcity:

The principle of scarcity occurred an average of 10.13 times. The highest occurrence of the principle of scarcity was 11 times. Overall, the principle of scarcity was used a total of 223 times throughout the 43 e-mails, making it the least often used rhetorical device. An interesting note is that there were three separate e-mails where the principle of scarcity was not used at all. Since the principle of scarcity was not used in all of the e-mails, this could perhaps point to the fact that this rhetorical device may not be as effective as scesis onomaton and pathopoeia.

Tickets to Toronto Maple Leafs home games are a scarce commodity. As previously mentioned Leaf games have been routinely sold out for many years and tickets rarely become available for sale to the general public. The Toronto Maple Leafs employ the use of the principle of scarcity through the existence of their e-mail subscriber list. One of the main objectives of the subscriber e-mail list, as previously mentioned, is to provide the subscribers with the ability to purchase tickets to the Toronto Maple Leaf home games. The tickets for games at the Air Canada Centre are sold-out every season, so when tickets become available the eagerness to purchase already exists. By purchasing Toronto Maple Leafs tickets, a fan of Leafs Nation is outwardly communicating to others their status as a member of Leafs Nation (van Herpen, Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2014, p. 154). This notion is also supported through the research of Almadoss & Jain (2005) regarding the preference of scarce products and as well as by the research of Aggarwal, Jun & Huh (2011) in that objects with limitations place on them become more attractive. This prior research correlates with the findings of this study in such that phrases with

urgency and limitations were used – “Get yours now, only 200 being sold!” in order to encourage members of Leafs Nation to purchase tickets.

The guiding principle behind van Herpen, Pieters & Zeelenberg’s (2014) research is that individuals are more likely to purchase or consume a product when they believe it to be scarce and even more so when they believe it can communicate their superiority over another individual. This principle illuminates the reasoning behind why the Toronto Maple Leafs have chosen to employ the principle of scarcity in their e-mail marketing communications. By putting the fans in direct competition with one another to get their hands on a limited number of tickets would perhaps increase the fan’s willingness to purchase said tickets. Schindler (1998) explains that supposed ‘winning’ against other customers is a driving factor behind consumption and points to why the Toronto Maple Leafs use phrasing such as “Show us: YOU could be THE BIGGEST Leafs fan in the entire building.”

The Toronto Maple Leafs organization has effectively created a situation where an individual might start to confuse the notion of ‘want’ with the notion of ‘need.’ Rajklin & Uyer’s (1996) posits regarding socio-cultural desire can be explained in the case of the Leafs Nation fan to stem from the fact that Toronto Maple Leafs tickets are an extremely rare commodity. A Toronto Maple Leafs fan does not have to purchase a ticket to the game to secure his or her membership in Leafs Nation; however, securing a ticket to the game can communicate a sense of superiority over other Leafs Nation members. When attending a game, a member of Leafs Nation will be able to see the Toronto Maple Leafs in action and first-hand, and opposed to a second-hand viewing experience through

a television screen. The ability to be closer to the Toronto Maple Leafs is a notion that is desirable and sought after by members of Leafs Nation.

According to Benedict Anderson (1936) in order to understand an imagined community properly we need to consider why imagined communities command such powerful emotional legitimacy to the individuals in them (p.1). Feelings such as belonging, togetherness and pride can make an individual feel more connected to their imagined community and these feelings are perhaps strengthened when in close proximity to other members of the imagined community – for example, a home game at the Air Canada Centre. A function of sports team affiliation that is worthy of note is the ability of a sporting event to be effective in inspiring synchronized emotional reactions. Fox (2006) describes this synchronized experience in stating that when a team one is affiliated with wins a game there is a heightened experience of collective belonging (p. 229). By encouraging the members of Leafs Nation to purchase tickets to the games utilizing the principle of scarcity, the Toronto Maple Leafs are proliferating the synchronized emotional experiences that result in feelings of togetherness and belonging that can exist in a home game scenario.

The Toronto Maple Leafs use the principle of scarcity to indicate to the members of Leafs Nation just how valuable they truly are. The Toronto Maple Leafs are providing the members of Leafs Nation with unique and exclusive opportunities that are not available to just anyone. By doing this, the Toronto Maple Leafs are communicating their appreciation of the fan base that supports the team. Some phrases of principle of scarcity were effectively used to communicate the exclusivity of what the team was offering to its fan base. “Watch the action from a 600 level gondola, a unique vantage point not usually

available to the general public” – this is an opportunity that not everyone will get to experience and makes it attractive option for the members of Leafs Nation to be in possession of what others cannot be. “We have reserved a block of tickets especially for you” – the Toronto Maple Leafs are not hiding the fact that they want their members to feel special and valued.

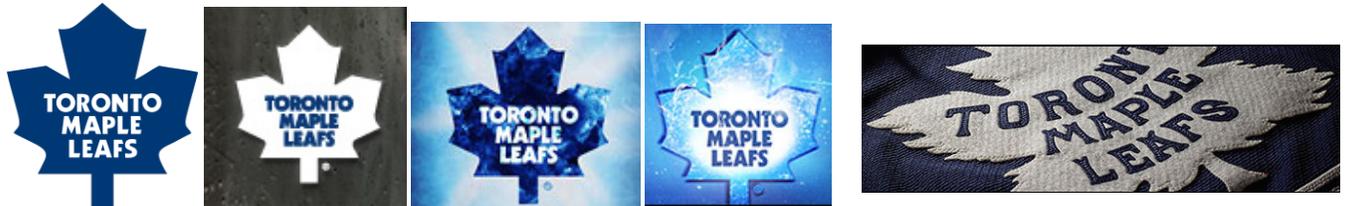
By allowing the members of Leafs Nation access to exclusive opportunities, the organization is communicating that they want the fans to be a part of the action. Whether it is an offer for tickets to game, or an invitation for a special event, the Toronto Maple Leafs want their fans to be part of everything that is happening with the franchise. By communicating to the members that they are valued, the Toronto Maple Leafs are enabling their fans to feel a stronger connection to the team because of this relationship, and as a result they may become more dedicated fans.

Scesis Onomaton:

Scesis onomaton occurred an average of 13.23 times throughout the e-mails. The highest occurrence of scesis onomaton was 14 times. Overall, scesis Onomaton was used a total of 291 times throughout the 43 e-mails, making it the second most often used rhetorical device. Pictures of the Toronto Maple Leafs players appeared frequently throughout the e-mails, however not as frequently as the logo of the team. There were also images of the Air Canada Centre and images of the Toronto skyline that we found to repeat throughout the e-mails. The logo of the Toronto Maple Leafs was used consistently in all of the 43 e-mails, appearing in different variations. The logo of the Toronto Maple Leafs is the only image that appears in all of the 43 e-mails. It was the image with the highest number of occurrences. There are several variations of this logo

that were included in the count. Figure 4 demonstrates various ways in which the Toronto Maple Leafs logo appeared throughout the e-mails. By having multiple incarnations of their logo, the Toronto Maple Leafs have ensured that their branding is recognizable in various states.

Figure 4: Examples of the Toronto Maple Leafs logo



Through the research of Ray & Sawyer (1971) it has come to be understood that increased brand exposure results in increased attitude perceptions of the brand by the consumer base. This view is further supported by the research of Weiss (1969) and Keller & Campbell (2003) – the more people that notice a brand, the more favourable the brand becomes in their mind. Keller & Campbell (2003) also state that this notion is more likely probable with brands that are familiar to consumers already, as opposed to new brands, which is why scesis onomaton has become a critical rhetorical device for the Toronto Maple Leafs.

With such a rich and storied past, members of Leafs Nation can familiarize themselves with the history of their team. There are many stories that exist behind each of the thirteen Stanley Cup victories of The Toronto Maple Leafs and many of these stories included legendary players from the franchises' past. Legends from the team's past include Syl Apps, Johnny Bower, Frank Mahovlich, Mats Sundin and Tim Horton – the very same Tim Horton that the Canadian institution of Tim Horton's Coffee was named

after. The fact that Tim Horton is one of the Toronto Maple Leafs legends also lends itself to the idea of repetition. The coffee franchise bears the name of the famous Leafs player and you can easily find a location on almost every street corner in Canada; there is constant repetition of the brand. The brand of Tim Horton's is synonymous with Canadian culture and can be tied directly back to The Toronto Maple Leafs. Davison (2008) highlights the importance of repetition for the purposes of emphasis and memorability. With scesis onomaton being the second most used rhetorical device, we can begin to understand its importance within the Toronto Maple Leafs organization. The Toronto Maple Leafs may be an historic brand, however they are continuing to ensure the memorability of their brand through constant repetition. The Toronto Maple Leafs employ the principle of scesis onomaton through the repetition of various representations of their brand, in the forms of both images and words. The Toronto Maple Leafs are often referred to multiple times (in multiple variations) in only a few short lines of text. Various conceptualizations of the team's logo are also represented in image form multiple times in a single e-mail.

According to this study, since the Toronto Maple Leafs organization has employed the device of scesis onomaton in their e-mails. It can be said that it is likely that the fans reading the e-mails will have a more positive view of the brand if they read or see repetitive messaging. It is quite possible that the Toronto Maple Leafs have employed this tactic in order to maintain and foster a positive brand image. Repetition in messaging serves the ability to get the message across more clearly to the reader. If something is repeated, the reader is better able to understand exactly what the take-away messaging is.

The repetition of brand specific content was a theme that emerged in the results. The Toronto Maple Leafs referred to themselves as “The Toronto Maple Leafs”, “Leafs”, “Leafs Nation” and other variations throughout the e-mails. Through the use of repetitive brand messaging including the phrase “The Passion That Unites Us All”, the Toronto Maple Leafs are effectively communicating their brand and how they want their brand to be viewed by the fan base. Through the use of scesis onomaton, the Toronto Maple Leafs have ensured that ‘make no mistake, WE are the Toronto Maple Leafs’ and not any other team, this is all about OUR brand. By using these repetitive messages, the Toronto Maple Leafs are communicating to their fan base exactly what they are a part of – Leafs Nation. Leafs Nation is here and has a strong presence and will continue to grow.

Pathopoeia:

The rhetorical device of pathopoeia occurred an average of 14.10 times throughout the e-mails. The highest occurrence of pathopoeia was 18 times. Overall, pathopoeia was used a total of 309 times throughout the 43 e-mails, making it the most often used rhetorical device. One noteworthy example is that the e-mail signature signoff “Your Toronto Maple Leafs” was used in each and every one of the 43 e-mails. The official slogan of Leafs Nation “The Passion That Unites Us All” was also used in all of the 43 e-mails. In the case of the Toronto Maple Leafs there are attempts to evoke positive emotions, most notably passion and pride through the evidentially consistent use of these words throughout the text of the e-mails. Pathopoeia exists in these e-mails largely through the personalization element and the use of personal pro-nouns. Pathopoeia through personalization creates a clear channel of communication when one is being addressed personally. Buck, Anderson, Chaudhuri & Ray (2004) discuss how the

role of emotion in digital communication has become exceedingly important and this is perhaps why the Toronto Maple Leafs have chosen to use pathopoeia more often than scesis onomaton or principle of scarcity.

In the case of the Toronto Maple Leafs it is likely that a member of Leaf Nation will experience feelings of pride due to the highly social nature of Leafs Nation itself. In order to feel a deeper sense of camaraderie and belonging, social emotions can be appealed to by The Toronto Maple Leafs. Arnold (1985) discusses the use of evoking positive emotions versus negative emotions. Positive emotions are more likely to elicit a positive response from the audience or consumer group and this is perhaps why the Toronto Maple Leafs have chosen to focus on evoking feelings such as passion and camaraderie. Pathopoeia was the most often used rhetorical device, indicating that a strategy aimed at targeting the emotions of the reader is the most effective choice for the Toronto Maple Leafs in order to strengthen the fan's ties to Leaf Nation. Bless, Bohner, Schwarz & Strack (1990) support this notion in their research as they acknowledge that there is a reciprocal and cyclical relationship that exists between the organization and the recipients of their messaging. Therefore, if the messaging from the Toronto Maple Leafs is positive the reaction from Leafs Nation is likely to be positive in return.

Some of the most emotionally charged messages in the e-mail communications were those that were able to set the scene for a member of Leafs Nation and explained to Leafs Nation fans how they could be a part of it. "The Air Canada Centre is full with fans cheering, the national anthem has been sung and you're approaching centre ice, ready to drop the puck" – being able to visualize this type of atmosphere can possibly increase the reader's emotional connection to the scenario. This type of example would perhaps incite

the fan's desire to attend a game and experience the collective togetherness and belonging by being in close proximity to other members of Leafs Nation. These examples can be seen as what is known as anticipatory enthusiasm as outlined by Griskevicius, Shiota & Neufeld (2010). The messaging sent out by the Toronto Maple Leafs repeatedly describes the impending rewards that are available to Leafs Nation thereby potentially resulting in increased interest levels and participation levels.

Another example of a scene being set through appeals to emotion is the following, "Our game is hockey, it lives vibrantly in many backyard rinks and on quiet streets. From frozen ponds and ice cold arenas it is always being played." This quote addresses the hockey culture that inevitably exists in connection with the NHL. Once again, allowing the reader to feel as though they are a part of something bigger than themselves, sometimes it is not simply about Leafs Nation only, it is also about being a part of the sport of hockey itself. The Toronto Maple Leafs organization is communicating the sentiments of togetherness and belonging through appeals to emotion.

Another technique that the Toronto Maple Leafs use in order to communicate to their audience, is the use of personal pronouns throughout the e-mails. The reader is *always* addressed directly and given a sense that, although this may be a mailing list, this e-mail was written especially for you. By using personal pronouns, the Toronto Maple Leafs are attempting to establish a strong interpersonal connection with their fan base in order to increase the effect of appeals to emotion. By making the reader feel special and valued, the reader is more open and receptive to the messages that are being communicating within the text.

Networked Technology, Community and Communication

The Toronto Maple Leafs have taken the original concept of Leafs Nation as an organic community and turned it into an online marketing tool. This is done through the understanding that Pentecost (2011) established in such that individuals are able to re-imagine themselves and place themselves within online communities of their choosing. The Leafs Nation fans have chosen to be fans of the team and they have chosen even more specifically to sign up for the e-mail communications from the Toronto Maple Leafs. With over 89, 000 subscribers, the Toronto Maple Leafs have established a networked community that is reliant on audio-visual communication in order to consume the messaging from the organization (Cerulo, 1995). The Toronto Maple Leafs have created a website and e-mail subscriber list in order to directly communicate to the members of Leafs Nation digitally in an attempt to meet the organization's goals: foster team spirit, sell tickets and encompass the fans in the cultivated culture of Leafs Nation. Howard's (1997) notion that the medium is never neutral helps to promote the understanding that e-mail as a medium was chosen by the Toronto Maple Leafs for a specific reason in order to meet the organization's aforementioned goals. Moreover, these goals are accomplished through the use of rhetorical devices. Through this research it has been determined that the Toronto Maple Leafs are indeed utilizing rhetorical devices within their e-mail communications to their subscriber-only fan base.

From the e-mail communication between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Leafs Nation we can see that the messages flow from the organization to the fan base. The messages about Leafs Nation are directly communicated to the fans via the e-mails, thus it becomes important to understand that the rhetorical devices used within these e-mails

are carefully chosen to achieve specific goals of the organization – chiefly the construction of Leafs Nation as an imagined community. The Toronto Maple Leafs have constructed an imagined community that Lauden & Traver (2004) describe as being ‘organization-sponsored’ in such that the imagined community exists in order for these goals to be met. The rhetorical devices of principle of scarcity, scesis onomaton and pathopoeia were explicitly chosen by the Toronto Maple Leafs and utilized in the e-mails examined in the data set for a combined total of 823 times throughout the 43 e-mails.

The use of the principle of scarcity 223 overall and an average of 10.13 times per e-mails indicates the reciprocal nature of the relationship between a member of an online community and the online community itself. If a member of Leafs Nation becomes aware that there are only ‘200 tickets available to tonight’s home game’ in one of their e-mails from Leafs Nation and they want to feel like they are a part of the community, then they are more likely to be encouraged to purchase the aforementioned tickets. The Toronto Maple Leafs cannot sell out home games without fans in the seats and the fans would have nothing to cheer for if there was no Toronto Maple Leafs organization; the relationship is cyclical in nature. Jin, Park & Kim (2010) outlined the cyclical and reciprocal relationships between organizations and their consumer bases in their research, citing it as an effective strategy for an organization. The notion of consumer-organization reciprocity is also supported by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler (2002). Through the understanding of the literature, it becomes evident to perhaps why the Toronto Maple Leafs have chosen to employ these concepts in their e-mail marketing strategy.

The use of scesis onomaton 291 times overall and an average of 13.23 times per e-mail indicates that there is a correlation that exists between the repetition itself and the

organization's attempts to establish the unique nature of their brand. Brand specific images and words are used repeatedly throughout the data set because the Toronto Maple Leafs need to be able to set themselves apart from any of the other teams. The networked technology of communication is the means by which the imagined community is formed. The part of the Leafs Nation imagined community that exists online through e-mail communication is created with symbols, signs and language and the messages being sent to the Toronto Maple Leafs fan base are done so through carefully crafted, visually appealing e-mails from the organization.

Imagined Community

According to Benedict Anderson (1936) in order to understand an imagined community properly we need to consider why they command such powerful emotional legitimacy to the individuals in them (p.1). Feelings such as belonging, togetherness and pride can make an individual feel more connected to their identified community.

Pathopoeia was used 309 times overall and with an average of 14.10 times per e-mail.

The fact that this was the most often used rhetorical device points to the power of the use of pathopoeia as a rhetorical device within Leafs Nation. This paper asserts that Leafs Nation is indeed an imagined community and it is therefore critical to understand what an imagined community is. For example, the 89,000 members of the Leafs Last Minute Club could potentially be in the Air Canada Centre (the Toronto Maple Leafs home arena) for a game, but it is unlikely that each of those 89,000 people will meet each other and yet it is quite possible that the feelings of togetherness and community remain.

Shazad (2012) discusses in his research the ways in which an imagined community stretches beyond immediate experience. The experience of the Toronto

Maple Leafs imagined community does not exist solely within the environment of a hockey game at the Air Canada Centre; it continues to collectively exist in the day-to-day lives of its members. The members of Leafs Nation may experience feelings of community when they notice another possible member of Leafs Nation wearing a piece of merchandise. A hat with a Toronto Maple Leafs logo functions in very much the same way as a Canadian flag on a travelers backpack would – these symbols are representative of the belonging to a particular group of people. Many fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs can be seen wearing white and blue and sporting the team’s logo in some capacity.

By self-identifying as a member of Leafs Nation, an individual in fact *becomes* a fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs. In doing so, the individual recognizes their shared allegiance to the Toronto Maple Leafs and Leafs Nation and will be able to proclaim and justify said allegiance to others. How does one determine if an individual is a member of Leafs Nation? Through Lechner’s (2007) research one can form the foundation for the understanding of how individuals might claim allegiance to the Toronto Maple Leafs and the ability to recognize boundaries of allegiance. The members of Leafs Nation are able to ascertain who is or who is not a member of Leafs Nation through both verbal and visual communication. You may be able to recognize an individual’s allegiance to the Toronto Maple Leafs simply through them stating that they are in fact a fan, or you may be able to recognize their membership if they are wearing a piece of Toronto Maple Leafs merchandise such as a hat or jersey.

Lechner (2007) describes the importance of an ongoing tradition as a facet that contributes to the imagined community in the sports world (p. 217). As in Figure 4, the Toronto Maple Leafs uses the repetition of visual images from past Leafs team jerseys in

order to establish community through electronic communication. This thought draws upon the idea that the ties of an imagined community can become stronger over time and in the case of the Toronto Maple Leafs they have been in existence since 1917, which is approaching almost 100 years of tradition. Understanding the history behind the Toronto Maple Leafs helps to foster a strong sense of historical pride within the imagined community. The team has a well-established foundation that enables the fans to feel a sense of belonging due to the importance of the past and the historical tradition.

The Toronto Maple Leafs franchise started from humble beginnings, on the team's website it is noted that the first home game in 1917 had an attendance of merely 700 people, most of which were soldiers in uniform that were there as the guests of the team management (Toronto Maple Leafs, n.d.). The importance of the historical past of the Toronto franchise can also be seen in the ties to the Canadian war heroes when the team re-branded as the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1927. Owner Conn Smythe reasoned the re-brand in saying that:

The Maple Leaf to us, was the badge of courage, the badge that meant home. It was the badge that reminded us all of our exploits and the different difficulties we got into and the different accomplishments we made. It was a badge that meant more to us than any other badge that we could think of... so we chose it... hoping that the possession of this badge would mean something to the team that wore it and when they skated out on the ice with this badge on their chest... they would wear it with honour and pride and courage, the way it had been worn by the soldiers of the first Great War in the Canadian Army (Toronto Maple Leafs, n.d.).

Knowing that the franchise has continued to grow year after year, from a meager 700-person attendance to routinely sold out games at a capacity of 20,000 can be seen as markings of great pride for Toronto Maple Leafs fans. Also understanding that the symbol for the team is also the symbol on the Canadian flag and has adorned the

uniforms of Canadian soldiers, it is no wonder that the Toronto Maple Leafs were once known as “Canada’s team.” Leafs Nation is not the same as every professional sports teams fan base, nor is it even the same as every fan base in the National Hockey League. Leafs Nation is something that began forming in 1917 and continues to change and grow over time.

A phrase that consistently reoccurs in Leafs Nation is “The Passion That Unites Us All.” This phrase communicates to the fan base that they are indeed a passionate fan base and in turn it enables the fan base to become more passionate. As previously mentioned, the word passion frequently occurs in the texts of the Toronto Maple Leafs, this is not something that is done accidentally. The word passion is explicitly chosen by the organization because the Toronto Maple Leafs want their fans to be passionate about the team; they want their fervent support and devotion. This further highlights the importance in going forward with the analysis of the texts of the Toronto Maple Leafs e-mails in an attempt to better understand the construction of their imagined community – the words serve to be a direct representation of the community itself.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Moving forward I would like to suggest that future research might attempt to consider and analyze the role of the themes of nation and nationalism as they might relate to Leaf's Nation and imagined communities. Nation and nationalism are topics of great interest to myself and the current body of knowledge surrounding them is quite vast, unfortunately they do not fit within the scope of the MRP.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the communication practices of the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey organization via their e-mail subscriber list to their fans. The e-mails have employed the rhetorical devices of pathopoeia, scesis onomaton and principle of scarcity in order to establish and proliferate the imagined community of Leafs Nation. By using pathopoeia the Toronto Maple Leafs have attempted to appeal to the emotions of their fan base in order to establish a stronger connection between the individual and their membership to Leafs Nation. The Toronto Maple Leafs effectively used the rhetorical device of scesis onomaton in order to communicate consistent brand messaging. The repetition of images and words allowed the Toronto Maple Leafs to establish the way they want their brand to be viewed by their fan base – they want no mistake to be made that the fans are indeed part of Leafs Nation. The use of the principle of scarcity by the Toronto Maple Leafs enabled the organization to communicate that there are limited opportunities to interact with the team, however, when opportunities did arise, that the members of Leafs Nation are valued and special and would be allowed to access said opportunities.

Overall the Toronto Maple Leafs have used the rhetorical devices of pathopoeia, scesis onomaton and principle of scarcity in order to establish and proliferate the concept of the imagined community of Leafs Nation. In the context of the Toronto Maple Leafs e-mails, we can understand that the words have been specifically chosen by the organization in order to facilitate a specific purpose. The most notable purpose in relation to this research is the way in which the e-mails can act as a catalyst in the formation and perpetuation of Leafs Nation as a fan base and imagined community.

Appendix A: Full Results

E-mail #	Date	Rhetorical Device			Total
		Scesis Onomaton	Pathos	Principle of Scarcity	
1	12-May-14	12	6	2	20
2	20-Mar-14	10	4	3	17
3	19-Feb-14	11	4	7	22
4	16-Jan-14	4	12	2	18
5	7-Jan-14	6	5	9	20
6	26-Sep-13	8	18	2	28
7	23-Sep-13	7	7	6	20
8	16-Sep-13	8	8	8	24
9	8-Sep-13	6	5	5	16
10	5-Sep-13	10	7	7	24
11	4-Sep-13	4	7	4	15
12	17-May-13	5	7	4	16
13	15-May-13	9	8	0	17
14	11-May-13	7	7	9	23
15	10-May-13	6	5	7	18
16	7-May-13	7	6	8	21
17	6-May-13	5	8	11	24
18	4-May-13	9	8	5	22
19	3-May-13	4	8	11	23
20	25-Apr-13	6	1	6	13
21	24-Apr-13	7	9	9	25
22	23-Apr-13	11	11	4	26
23	17-Apr-13	14	7	4	25
24	7-Apr-13	7	8	7	22
25	7-Apr-13	7	9	4	20
26	5-Apr-13	4	8	2	14
27	20-Mar-13	6	7	5	18
28	4-Mar-13	6	6	7	19
29	21-Feb-13	7	5	5	17
30	11-Feb-13	7	6	6	19
31	7-Feb-13	9	4	4	17
32	4-Feb-13	6	6	7	19
33	31-Jan-13	6	6	7	19
34	24-Jan-13	6	6	6	18
35	18-Jan-13	4	11	0	15
36	17-Jan-13	6	6	6	18
37	16-Jan-13	7	6	5	18
38	16-Jan-13	4	10	1	15
39	7-Jan-13	7	5	0	12
40	29-Nov-12	3	9	2	14
41	25-Jul-12	3	12	7	22
42	10-Jul-12	4	6	7	17
43	9-Feb-12	6	5	2	13
Totals:		291	309	223	Average
Average		13.22727273	14.0454545	10.13636364	19.1395349

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