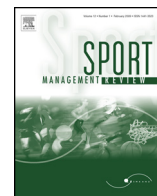




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Acceptance, motivations, and usage of social media as a marketing communications tool amongst employees of sport national governing bodies



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ABSTRACT

National governing bodies (NGB) of sport are not-for-profit organisations that typically receive less mainstream media coverage and have much smaller marketing budgets than mainstream professional sports. Therefore, they must seek alternative methods from mainstream media and traditional marketing in order to increase brand awareness and reach fans and stakeholders. While all sport organisations stand poised to benefit from social media, NGBs seem to be a segment of the sport industry uniquely positioned to capitalise on social media's benefits. Because there is currently no known literature on NGBs' use of social media, this study examined the role that social media plays within NGBs in the United States including employees' acceptance of social media, motivations to use social media, and the organisation's current usage of social media. An online survey was distributed to NGB employees in the spring of 2012, and results revealed that contrary to studies on other sport organisations, NGB employees reported high levels of acceptance and motivation to use social media regardless of demographic factors. Additionally, NGBs seemed to use social media as a communications tool to a greater degree than as a marketing tool. Implications for international and niche sport organisations are presented in the conclusion.

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1. Introduction

Scholarly research on social media and its marketing communications role within the sport industry is rapidly expanding. Research on this topic to date has focused on consumer responses to sport-related social media (e.g., Mahan, 2011), consumers' usage of social media (e.g., Clavio, 2011), methods utilised by sport organisations to engage fans (e.g., Ioakimidis, 2010), content on sport organisations' social media websites (e.g., Waters, Burke, Jackson, and Buning, 2010), the ways in which athletes present themselves on social media sites such as Facebook (e.g., Butts, 2008) and Twitter (e.g., Pegoraro, 2010), and social media policies for athletes (e.g., Sanderson, 2011).

Throughout the literature addressing social media's role in sport organisations, it has been identified as a valuable relationship marketing tool that has the ability to "build meaningful relationships through opportunities for communication, interaction, and value" (Williams and Chinn, 2010, p. 436). Furthermore, Ioakimidis (2010) noted that utilisation of online communities allows consumers and fans to have a virtual home where they can connect with others,

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express opinions, and feel a sense of belonging. Interacting with other fans or the sport organisation itself in an online social media setting might also increase a fan's level of identification with the sport organisation, as illustrated in Broughton's (2010) report that 61% of Major League Baseball (MLB) fans and 55% of National Football League (NFL) fans considered themselves bigger fans of the leagues since they started following their favourite teams on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Additionally, 51% of MLB fans and 43% of NFL fans reported spending more time watching the league as a result of following their favourite team on such sites. Michaelidou, Siamagka, and Christodoulides (2011) noted that using social media does not require a great financial investment, and the relatively low cost is certainly a benefit of utilising online social media as a marketing communications tool.

While research has documented the benefits of social media and the usage of social media from sport consumers' standpoint, a greater understanding of sport organisations' attitudes towards social media and motivations for using it is important, as it will shed light on the organisations' strategic intent and current social media practices. It will also allow sport managers to better understand and evaluate the ways in which similar organisations utilise new media platforms, and understand how to more effectively utilise such platforms. O'Shea and Duarte Alonso (2011) noted that much of the existing literature on marketing communications and technology is focused on "the end-user, the consumer" (p. 199). Of those researchers who have focused on the content creator (i.e., business organisation) instead of the consumer, Day (2011) asserted that social media is a source of complexity in today's market environment and businesses must become more adaptive in order to succeed. Stoldt (2012) surveyed college sports information directors to determine their social media usage, perceptions, and experiences in the college athletics setting, and concluded that one common flaw amongst respondents was a lack of organisational assessment of social media use. Stoldt (2012) noted that this "represents an area in which considerable disparity exists between current practice and best practice" (p. 10). Another study focused on the organisational perspective involved a survey of meeting industry professionals, in which Lee (2011) found that age had a significant influence on the acceptance of new technologies such as online social media.

National governing bodies (NGB) of sport seem to be one segment of the sport industry that could greatly benefit from social media, as these organisations are not-for-profit and operate on rather limited budgets when compared to those of professional or even collegiate sports. While all sport organisations stand poised to benefit from social media, most NGBs do not have budgets allowing for full utilisation of traditional marketing outlets such as paid television, radio, print, internet, and outdoor advertising methods. Therefore, social media offers a new and inexpensive method by which to increase brand awareness, reach more fans and stakeholders, and maintain public interest in non-Olympic years when traditional media coverage of these organisations is typically at its lowest. All 204 countries that compete in the Olympic Games have NGBs for those sports in which they compete. Examples of NGBs in the United States include USA Gymnastics, USA Track & Field, USA Swimming, and USA Volleyball, amongst many others.

The sports represented by NGBs can largely be considered niche sports, or those that do not receive mainstream media coverage on a daily basis (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). According to Greenhalgh et al. (2011), "niche sport properties must create and sustain their own publicity, market share, and fan base in order to survive" (p. 42). Similarly, Eagleman, Pedersen, and Wharton (2009) explained that while mainstream sports like men's football and basketball enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with the mass media, it is much more difficult for other sports to generate awareness and build fan bases, and such sport organisations must seek other means by which to achieve these goals. Although NGBs' sports and athletes typically receive greater attention during the time periods surrounding the Olympic Games, in the U.S. they are largely ignored by mainstream sports media during the three years between Olympics and therefore must attempt to generate publicity using methods outside of traditional media relations. To illustrate this, Leslie King, Vice President of Communications for USA Gymnastics, said her organisation attempts to overcome the difficulty of receiving mainstream media coverage by, "working to make our Web site more robust, as well as using social media to expand our outreach" (Eagleman, 2010, p. 283). To date, there is no known literature on NGBs' use of social media, nor on their employees' acceptance of and motivations for using social media.

Social media offer a unique marketing communications method by which niche sport organisations like NGBs can attempt to overcome previous challenges such as low interest levels from fans in non-Olympic years, less media coverage during non-Olympic years, and lower marketing budgets than other sport organisations. Based on these concepts, the purpose of this study was to examine the existing role of social media within NGBs in the United States, including NGB employees' acceptance of social media, motivations to use social media, and the organisations' current usage of social media.

While this study examined only U.S.-based NGBs, similar sport governing organisations are present in all countries that compete in the Olympic Games, and therefore the results of this study can serve as a guide, comparison, or learning tool for NGBs around the globe in terms of social media utilisation and strategy. Additionally, the findings from this study are useful for other niche sport organisations, both U.S.-based and international, that do not benefit from a symbiotic relationship with the mass media that mainstream sports in their respective countries have long enjoyed. The implications for these organisations are presented in the discussion section.

2. Literature review

According to Keller (2001), "Marketing communications are the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the brands they sell" (p. 819). Marketing communications allow organisations to have a dialogue with their consumers and can also serve as the voice of a brand (Keller, 2001). A wide and varied range of marketing communications methods exist, including all forms of advertising, promotions, publicity, public

relations efforts, marketing, and personal selling (Keller, 2001). O'Shea and Duarte Alonso (2011) cited websites, blogs, Facebook and Twitter as new marketing communication tools that can be utilised by sport organisations to cultivate relationships with their fans and stakeholders. Keller (2001) noted that the ever-increasing number of marketing and communication methods serves as a unique marketing challenge to organisations, and Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) explained that because of the newness of social media, it is often used experimentally by organisations who have no clear objectives or evaluation criteria for it.

As social media is much younger than other traditional marketing communications tools, so too is the sport management research that has been conducted on it. To date, few sport management researchers have examined social media and its role within sport organisations' marketing communications efforts. Of the existing sport management literature examining social media, Ioakimidis (2010) examined the websites of 12 professional sports teams in North America and Europe using a content analysis methodology to gain a better understanding of the various online services offered by each team, such as photo albums, social media, games or contests, video and audio clips, and mobile services. The study concluded that all teams utilised some form of online media-related services, but the teams in the Premier League, NFL, and National Hockey League (NHL) offered the most services. While Ioakimidis' (2010) study focused solely on the content posted to sport organisations' websites, a study by Wallace, Wilson, and Miloch (2011) also used content analysis to analyse Facebook pages, but did so in the context of understanding sport organisations' brand management techniques. Their careful analysis of the Facebook pages of NCAA sports and athletic departments of schools in the Big 12 Conference led to the conclusion that both types of organisations used Facebook as a tool for creating long-term relationships with fans and stakeholders, and the content posted on their Facebook pages focused on "experiencing the brand through real-time online interaction" (p. 439).

Other studies have also highlighted the importance of relationship building through the use of social media. For example, Garcia (2011) interviewed executives from the Real Madrid Football Club, and ascertained that the organisation relied heavily on fan feedback when developing its online marketing communication strategies. The author concluded that Real Madrid built its strong reputation partly by fostering these positive relationships with its fan base, which helped the brand remain strong even when the team did not perform well. Similarly, through the use of in-depth interviews with executives from three professional Australian sport clubs, O'Shea and Duarte Alonso (2011) found that sport organisation executives identified online media as a valuable marketing communication tool, but also viewed social media as challenging because of the learning curve associated with proper usage of new technologies and the difficulty in creating proactive marketing communication strategies when new media is constantly evolving. The authors encouraged future researchers to focus on a larger number of sport organisations and the ways in which these organisations utilise social media (O'Shea and Duarte Alonso, 2011). Kassing and Sanderson (in press) examined the relationship-building aspect of social media from an athlete-fan perspective, and explained that interactions between the two parties can be both constructive and destructive from a sport community standpoint. They recommended that sport organisations develop strategic social media training opportunities for athletes and sports figures, and encouraged "more integration between sport organizations/practitioners and academic researchers" (p. 13).

Another area of social media marketing communications that has been addressed by some sport marketing and management scholars is sponsorship. Dees (2011) posited, "sports teams and sponsors benefit from social networking because it strengthens and reinforces fan involvement and provides direct marketing opportunities" (p. 280). Indeed, Eagleman and Krohn (2012) found that road race series participants who visited the series' website more frequently indicated a higher likelihood of purchasing from series sponsors and were also more likely to correctly identify the series' sponsors.

All of the aforementioned studies on sport organisations' usage of social media as a marketing communications tool have focused on very small groups of sport managers (e.g., Garcia, 2011; O'Shea and Duarte Alonso, 2011), social media from the consumer's point-of-view (e.g., Eagleman and Krohn, 2012) or social media from a content analysis standpoint (e.g., Ioakimidis, 2010; Wallace et al., 2011). Therefore, this study sought to focus on the role of social media as a marketing communications tool from the standpoint of the organisations' employees.

3. Research questions

Based on the purpose of this study, which was to examine the role of social media within NGBs in the United States, including NGB employees' acceptance of social media, motivations to use social media, and the organisations' current usage of social media, the following research questions were developed:

- RQ 1 – What types of social media do NGBs currently utilise?
- RQ 2 – What organisational goals do NGBs of sport hope to achieve through the use of social media?
- RQ 3 – What do NGBs consider to be the greatest advantages of social media for their organisations?
- RQ 4 – What do NGBs consider to be the most challenging aspects of social media for their organisations?
- RQ 5 – What differences, if any, exist between the acceptance of social media of NGB employees?
- RQ 6 – What differences, if any, exist between the motivations for using social media of NGB employees?

4. Methods

This study employed an online survey methodology. The survey contained five sections: professional history, social media usage, acceptance of social media, motivations for using social media, and demographic information. The survey

utilised two previously tested scales, the first being the expanded Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which was used to assess respondents' level of acceptance of social media. The questions for this portion of the survey were adapted from Lee's (2011) research on meeting professionals and Yi, Jackson, Park, and Probst (2006) research on the expanded TAM. The second scale used in the survey was the Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS), developed by Guay, Vallerand, and Blanchard (2000), which assessed respondents' motivations for using social media in their organisation. Both of these scales are described in greater detail in the following sections.

4.1. Technology acceptance model

The TAM has been widely used to assess the determinants of individuals' acceptance and adopting of new technology (Mun, Jackson, Park, and Probst, 2006). In an examination of consumers' preferences for social media, Mahan (2011) explained the importance of including usefulness and perceived ease of use in the TAM model, which has been modified by some researchers since its introduction. The study found that "usefulness had significant effects on attitudes toward the use of social media" (p. 264), and perceived ease of use also influenced individuals' usage of social media, but to a lesser degree.

Using social media as a marketing communications tool can only be effective if the organisation behind the social media page (e.g., the organisation's Facebook page or Twitter account) is comfortable with social media and understands it. Therefore, Lee (2011) conducted a study on social media usage from the organisational perspective, surveying meeting professionals on their use of Facebook and Twitter. Lee's (2011) survey instrument included the previously cited factors, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, as well as three additional factors: attitude towards using social media, perceived innovativeness in IT (PIIT), and importance of technical support. The findings revealed that age had a significant influence on the perceived ease of use and the PIIT, with the younger survey respondents (ages 20–41) reporting greater ease of use and higher PIIT scores. The present study adopted the expanded TAM utilised by Lee (2011) in its examination of social media usage by NGBs.

4.2. Situational Motivation Scale

The SIMS was developed as a means for measuring situational intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Guay et al., 2000). According to Vallerand (1997), situational motivation is that motivation experienced by individuals who are currently engaging in an activity. As this study sought to understand motivations of sport organisations currently using social media, the SIMS served as an appropriate scale to measure motivation.

The SIMS consists of four factors: intrinsic motivation, external regulation, identified regulation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation includes behaviours that one engages in "for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from performing them" (Guay et al., 2000, p. 176). External regulation is related to external motivation, and occurs when an individual feels obligated to behave in a certain way. That is, the individual regulates his/her behaviour in a way that avoids negative consequences. Identified regulation is similar in that the individual exhibits a particular behaviour as a means to an end, but perceives the behaviour as being chosen by oneself. Finally, amotivation occurs when an individual is not intrinsically or extrinsically motivated and their behaviours are not derived from a sense of purpose or expectation of reward. According to Guay et al. (2000), amotivation is similar to the concept of learned helplessness, when an individual "experiences feelings of incompetence and expectancies of uncontrollability" (p. 177). Standage et al. (2003) asserted that intrinsic motivation is the most self-determined form of motivation, while amotivation is the least self-determined, as those individuals with high levels of amotivation are not intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

Sweetser and Kelleher's (2011) study on social media use amongst public relations practitioners used the SIMS to measure respondents' motivation for using Twitter for their jobs. The research revealed two moderate negative correlations between a respondent's internal motivation and the variables of age and amount of time lapsed since last using Twitter. The authors concluded that "motivation matters" (p. 427) and stated that organisations should attempt to hire social media enthusiasts whose internal motivation levels are high (i.e., those who score highly on intrinsic motivation and identified regulation) rather than trying to convert a non-motivated PR employee to champion the organisation's social media efforts. Additionally, they stated, "a keen awareness of what is motivating someone with regard to using social media will provide leaders with better tools for helping grown future leaders" (p. 427).

Aside from Sweetser and Kelleher's (2011) study, little SIMS research has been conducted in the realm of social media. Individuals must have a sense of motivation to use social media if their organisation's social media efforts are to be effective. Because motivated individuals are typically more effective in their jobs, this study utilised SIMS in order to better understand NGB employees' motivations for using social media as a marketing communications tool.

4.3. Validity

Content validity was achieved by administering the survey to three NGB employees who did not qualify to participate in the study because they did not work in a marketing, communications, or executive role. Based on the feedback received by these NGB employees, minor adjustments were made and the survey was then distributed via email to top-level employees (i.e., those with the title of President or CEO) and the marketing and communications employees (i.e., those with marketing or communications in their title) of every NGB in the United States listed on the United States Olympic Committee (USOC)

website ($N = 45$) in March of 2012. The total number of surveys distributed was 155, and 62 usable surveys were collected for analysis, yielding a 40% response rate.

4.4. Survey instrument

The survey was active for two weeks, and a reminder email was sent one week after the initial invitation to participate. It was administered through web-based survey software from Qualtrics, and allowed just one response from each IP address, eliminating the chance that participants would take the survey multiple times.

Demographic and descriptive information on survey participants was collected, including variables such as age, gender, race, education, level of employment, type of sport represented by the organisation, and number of years employed at the current organisation. The mean age of respondents was 37.40 years. In terms of gender, 59.7% of respondents were male, and 40.3% were female. The overwhelming majority of respondents were White (90.3%), with the remaining racial makeup of respondents as 3.2% Black, 3.2% Latino/a, and 3.2% defining themselves as “other”. Nearly all respondents had at least a Bachelor’s degree (64.5%), and an additional 30.6% of respondents earned a graduate degree. In terms of the level of employment, 21.0% of respondents were considered entry-level (coordinator position), 30.6% were managers, 33.9% were directors, and the remaining 14.5% were top-level executives such as CEO or President. Respondents were also asked if the sport in which they worked was a Summer Olympic sport, Winter Olympic sport, or not an Olympic sport (e.g., bowling, football, roller sports), and 71.0% responded that they worked for a Summer Olympic sport, 17.7% for a Winter Olympic sport, and 11.3% worked for a non-Olympic sport.

4.5. Data analysis

SPSS Statistics 19 was used for quantitative data analysis. Descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and ANOVAs were calculated using this software. In order to analyse qualitative data responses, the researcher utilised a qualitative content analysis methodology in which response themes (categories) were developed after an initial reading of the responses. Responses were then read again and assigned a theme or themes in order to assist the research with the analysis.

5. Results

The first research question sought to discover which types of social media NGBs currently utilise. Survey respondents were asked whether their organisation had its own Facebook page and its own Twitter account, then were asked to list any other forms of online social media used by their organisation. Results revealed that 100% of respondents indicated that their organisation used Facebook, and 98.4% said that their organisation used Twitter. Aside from these two popular forms of social media, respondents indicated that their organisations also used YouTube (51.6%), LinkedIn (12.9%), Pinterest (11.3%), FourSquare (11.3%), and Google+ (9.7%).

The second research question asked which organisational goals NGBs hoped to achieve through the use of social media. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse responses to the open-ended question, “Please explain your organisation’s objectives and/or goals for using social media.” Respondents indicated a wide variety of reasons for using social media within their organisation, with two broad themes appearing most prominently throughout the answers: enhancing the organisation’s relationship with fans, and promoting the organisation’s brand and sport. In terms of enhancing the relationship with fans, respondents indicated a willingness to inform fans of the organisation’s news, educate fans about the sport, attract new fans to the organisation, promote more interaction between the organisation and fans, and provide a forum on which fans could communicate and share information with each other. As for promoting the organisation’s brand and sport, results indicated that NGBs sought to utilise social media in order to increase brand awareness, maintain control over the organisation’s image, increase awareness and exposure for the sport, and develop respect amongst the public and media for the sport. Sample responses for this question can be viewed in [Table 1](#).

The third research question asked what NGBs consider to be the greatest advantages of social media for their organisations. Once again, respondents were asked an open-ended question about the benefits of social media to their organisation. Qualitative analysis revealed two main themes cited by NGBs. First, respondents credited social media with developing a greater connection between the organisation and its fans. Respondents cited the ease of answering fan and member questions, the ability to publicly thank fans and members, and the ability to interact with both current fans and potential fans as examples of this greater connection. The second theme was social media’s inexpensive nature, which gave NGBs the ability to reach a large number of fans at a very low cost. [Table 1](#) contains a sample of the responses given for this question.

In contrast to the third research question, the fourth research question asked what NGBs considered to be the most challenging aspects of social media for their organisations. Responses indicated three main challenges perceived by NGBs: maintaining message control, monitoring fan comments, and finding the correct balance between posting too much and too little from the NGBs social media accounts. In terms of message control and monitoring, respondents indicated that it was difficult to monitor inappropriate comments and to determine how to deal with such comments or discussions, it was difficult to control rumours about the organisation and/or its athletes, and it was difficult to find the time to provide updates and to respond to the numerous inquiries received via social media. As for finding the right balance of posting, respondents

Table 1
Sample responses from research questions 2, 3, and 4.

Survey item	Sample responses
Please explain your organisation's objectives and/or goals for using social media.	<p>"Goals are primarily to interact with new fans and create an online presence for the organization, as well as engage our current fans."</p> <p>"To establish a more direct connection and encourage dialogue with our members with the overarching goal of improving our organizational image and growing our sport."</p> <p>"Our goals are two-fold: to disseminate news and information about our organization, and to interact with followers and fans in an effort to answer customer service or organizational questions."</p>
What benefits do social media present to your organisation?	<p>"We're able to offer new avenues for people to discover our content, as well as answer questions about the organization. We can also directly engage with fans and followers who might not be members and thus might not otherwise know much about the organization."</p> <p>"Allows immediate contact with our fans/followers and provides us with the opportunity to get our message out directly. It can give you a very good read of the public's response to something you're doing."</p> <p>"Social media has given us a cheap but reliable way to communicate with members and fans. Social media is the only way we can reach those 100K people on a personal level each and every day."</p>
What challenges do social media present to your organisation?	<p>"Social media is an extremely time-consuming endeavor because we truly believe in the 'social' aspect. We monitor the comments and respond to people. We read questions posted and we answer. We're very interactive and that takes a lot of time. We have had to 'break up' some virtual fights amongst posters. It's challenging to keep our online space positive at all times."</p> <p>"The challenges are to appease the entire community of followers and to walk the line between too many updates or not enough updates. We want to find a happy medium and keep everyone involved and satisfied with how we run our social media."</p> <p>"It needs constant monitoring and updating, and it opens the organization up to 'haters' who want to do nothing but post negative comments."</p>

indicated that it was difficult to please all fans or members in this regard since each person's social media preferences are different. Sample responses to this question can be found in [Table 1](#).

The fifth research question asked what differences, if any, existed between the acceptance of social media of NGB employees. In order to answer this question, [Yi et al.'s \(2006\)](#) expanded TAM was used to examine respondents' individual acceptance of social media. The scale was modelled after the one used by [Lee \(2011\)](#) in an examination of meeting professionals' attitudes towards social media. Respondents were asked to respond to seven statements on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree". Results showed that overall, NGB employees accepted and embraced social media. Mean values for each question can be viewed in [Table 2](#).

To determine whether differences in acceptance of social media were present between employees based on demographic factors such as age, education, gender, race, or level of employment, bivariate correlations and one-way ANOVA tests were conducted. These tests found no significant correlations or differences in the level of acceptance based on any of these variables. This indicates that as a whole, NGB employees have mostly accepted social media use in their organisations.

The sixth research question asked what differences, if any, existed between the NGB employees' motivations for using social media in the organisational context. The survey respondents who worked in a marketing or communications role within the organisation had direct contact with the organisation's social media accounts. Although the top-level executives who responded to the survey did not have direct contact with the social media accounts, they were asked to respond to this question as it was thought that from an organisational strategy standpoint, they likely had some decision-making power over the NGBs social media use and therefore a motivation for utilising social media.

[Guay et al.'s \(2000\)](#) SIMS was used to measure motivation. Respondents were asked to respond to four statements for each of the following four measures for a total of 16 questions: intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, external regulation, and amotivation. A seven-point Likert scale was used, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree". Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the questions for each measure, and all achieved acceptable alpha levels of 0.70 or higher except for identified regulation. One question was removed from that measure, after which the measure was deemed reliable. Alpha levels, mean scores, and standard deviations can be viewed in [Table 3](#).

Table 2
NGB employees' acceptance of social media.

Item	M	SD
I have no difficulty using social media.	6.02	1.30
The use of social media will excite my organisation's stakeholders (fans, athletes, sponsors, media, etc.)	6.23	0.76
Interactions using social media will enhance stakeholders' experience with my organisation.	6.32	0.67
Using social media is useful in achieving my organisation's goals.	6.24	0.82
My superiors at work believe that our organisation should use social media.	6.16	1.01
I attempt to experiment with new online social media that I hear about.	5.40	1.14
It is important for me to have technical staff/support available when utilising social media for my organisation's purposes.	5.37	1.63

Table 3
Construct reliability and internal consistency of SIMS.

Factor	Item	M	SD	α
Intrinsic motivation	Because we think using social media is interesting.	6.06	1.07	.841
	Because we think using social media is pleasant.	5.15	1.30	
	Because using social media is fun.	5.39	1.34	
	Because we feel good when using social media.	5.47	1.17	
Identified regulation	Because we use it for our own good.	6.24	0.84	.761
	Because we think using social media is good for our organisation.	6.40	0.69	
	Because we believe that the activity is important for our organisation.	6.42	0.67	
External regulation	Because we are supposed to use it.	5.37	1.36	.780
	Because using social media is something we have to do.	5.53	1.57	
	Because we don't have any choice.	4.24	1.96	
	Because we feel that we have to use social media.	5.19	1.71	
Amotivation	There may be good reasons to use social media, but our organisation doesn't see any.	1.77	1.34	.773
	We use social media, but we're not sure if it is worth it.	1.92	1.06	
	We don't know why we use it; we don't see what it brings to our organisation.	1.65	1.07	
	We use social media, but we're not sure it is a good thing to pursue it.	1.61	0.84	

As with research question five, no statistically significant findings emerged to indicate a difference in motivation based on demographic factors such as age, education, gender, race, or level of employment.

6. Discussion

The findings from this study are unique in that no other known study to date has examined the role of social media within NGBs, which seem poised to capitalise on the communication and marketing capabilities of this low-cost communication method. Based on the results, three important findings emerged that are worthy of further discussion.

First, the findings that no statistically significant differences existed between employees' acceptance of and motivation to use social media based on demographic factors such as level of employment, age, gender, race, or education level was surprising given previous research findings. Lee (2011), for example, found that age had a significant influence on the perceived ease of use of social media amongst meeting professionals, with younger respondents indicating a greater perceived ease of use, yet this study noted no such differences based on age. Similarly, Sweetser and Kelleher's (2011) study on PR practitioners indicated a negative correlation between age and internal motivation for using social media. This study's finding that no significant differences existed between age and acceptance of and motivation to use social media is unique, though the cause of this difference between the current study and past research is unknown. It is possible that as social media becomes more prevalent in our society, differences in acceptance and motivation have begun to disappear. It is also possible that because of NGBs' unique position to capitalise on social media due to their limited financial resources and status as niche sport organisations, employees at these particular organisations have adapted to new social media technologies more quickly than in other businesses or industries because of the benefits that stand to be gained by using this technology. Finally, it might also be possible that those NGB employees who chose to respond to the survey held more positive attitudes and beliefs about social media than those employees who did not respond. While the cause can only be hypothesised, this finding indicates that employees at all levels of the NGB organisations seem to be in relative agreement regarding organisational use of social media. These findings are a positive sign for NGBs, as they reveal that employees, for the most part, seem to be open to using new online social media platforms to achieve organisational goals and they understand the value of using social media. This could result in less resistance from co-workers when trying to integrate new media platforms into an organisation's marketing communications plan, and an overall greater understanding of the need for organisational social media use. This finding also differed from that of O'Shea and Duarte Alonso (2011), who reported that sport organisation executives found social media to be challenging and difficult.

The second important finding from this study came from the qualitative data. While the purpose of this study was to better understand how NGBs use social media as a marketing communications tool, the results indicated that most NGBs utilised social media as a communications tool to a greater degree than they used it as a marketing tool. The two most prevalent goals reported for using social media were enhancing the organisation's relationship with fans and promoting the organisation's brand and sport. Based on the qualitative responses given by NGB employees, both of these objectives seem to be achieved primarily via traditional PR/communication methods such as posting stories, videos, or pictures, and engaging in discussions with fans on social media. Very few respondents, however, mentioned utilising social media for marketing-related purposes such as promoting or activating sponsorships, offering discount or promotional codes for tickets and merchandise, or holding online contests to gain more "likes" or followers on various social media sites. The NGBs' focus on PR/communication methods likely fulfils their goal of enhancing the relationship with their fans, as the methods utilised appear to be very interactive and involve two-way communication. This is a positive finding for NGBs, as research suggests that creating a conversation or dialogue between an organisation and its constituents is one of the most effective ways to

utilise social media and build relationships (Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton, 2012; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). As Waters et al. (2009) pointed out, “Solely having a profile will not in itself increase awareness or trigger an influx of participation” (p. 102). Engaging fans on social media not only allows organisations to create a brand image in fans’ minds, but also gives them a chance to develop new brand associations and alter any negative associations fans may have from previous experiences with the organisation.

While NGBs appear to be satisfied with social media as a communication channel and utilise it effectively from a relationship and brand-building perspective, it seems that they are missing out on a valuable opportunity to capitalise on the marketing capabilities of online social media. Based on Dees’ (2011) assertion that social networking provides direct marketing opportunities for both teams and sponsors, and Eagleman and Krohn’s (2012) finding that sport consumers who visited an organisation’s website more frequently indicated a greater likelihood to purchase from sponsors, it appears that NGBs are severely under-utilising the sponsor-related benefits and capabilities that social media can afford. As previously noted, NGBs are not-for-profit organisations and operate on limited budgets, therefore sponsorships are extremely important to ensure that these organisations can continue to operate in their current capacity or expand in the future. It would be prudent for NGBs and other similarly positioned niche sport organisations to explore ways to promote and include sponsors in their social media strategy. Additionally, none of the respondents mentioned social media assessment in their responses. As Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) and Stoldt (2012) pointed out, assessment and evaluation are important steps for any organisation wishing to utilise social media most effectively. If they have not already done so, NGBs should develop social media strategies with clear and measurable goals, and assess those goals periodically in order to get the most out of their social media use.

A third significant finding from this study involves the demographic information reported by marketing and communications employees and executives at U.S. NGBs. While this was not a central focus of the study, the reported race and gender demographics stood out, as respondents were overwhelmingly white (90.3%) and male (59.7%). When top-level executives were taken out of the equation, however, the gender breakdown became more equal, with a nearly equal split of 51% male and 49% female marketing and communications employees. The breakdown of marketing and communications employees by race, however, remained extremely skewed, with 88.3% white, 3.9% black, 3.9% Latino/a, and 3.9% other. This finding is significant, especially in the context of those employees who work with online social media, as it mirrors the greater sociological issue of the digital divide, which “refers to the gap in the intensity and nature of IT use” (Jackson et al., 2008, p. 437). Researchers have documented that this digital divide exists between races, and is particularly prevalent in terms of Internet use, with black adults using the Internet much less than white adults regardless of access, income, and education (Jackson et al., 2008). The findings of this study highlight that the digital divide remains an issue in U.S. society, and this could have major implications on the demographic makeup of workplaces, specifically for jobs relating to technology and the Internet, which in turn can have other implications and consequences for society as a whole. While the digital divide was not a central component of this study, it should be examined in greater depth in future research.

7. Conclusion

The findings from this study revealed differences between NGBs and other sport organisations that were previously studied in the context of social media use. While the findings from this study are unique to U.S.-based NGBs, they can be used by NGBs and other niche sport organisations in both the U.S. and internationally to gain a better understanding of how similar sport organisations currently utilise social media, while also learning about other opportunities social media provides, such as the ability to leverage sponsorships. Every country that competes in international sport competitions has NGBs of sport, and a quick search on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter reveals that these international NGBs are also exploring the capabilities of social media as a marketing communication tool. These organisations can utilise the findings of this study by comparing their social media efforts to those of U.S.-based NGBs in order to learn from their successes as well as the opportunities that the U.S. NGBs have not fully seized. It is also possible for international federations of sport to use these findings along with other research on social media use to assist their member NGBs in effectively utilising social media. For example, the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) could use the information in this study to assist its various national members such as USA Gymnastics, Gymnastics Australia, British Gymnastics, and Korea Gymnastic Association, amongst many others. Additionally, international sport management scholars can utilise these findings to examine social media usage by international sport organisations and to develop best practice guides for such organisations.

As previously mentioned, NGBs are one type of niche sport organisation that typically do not receive regular coverage in traditional media outlets. Along with NGBs, other U.S. and international niche sport organisations that struggle for consistent media coverage can benefit from the findings of this study as well. These niche organisations must rely heavily on their own communication efforts to develop brand awareness and relationships with fans. Therefore, communicating effectively is essential to the survival and growth of such organisations. Examples of niche sport organisations that could benefit from this study include other non-profit sport organisations and sport charities, community sport organisations such as parks and recreation departments, sports with smaller fan bases such as women’s sports leagues and teams, and participatory sports such as road races and triathlons.

The study is not without its limitations, and those should be addressed. First, the use of an online survey was somewhat of a limitation because it did not allow for follow-up questions to the open-ended questions that were asked. It is possible that

richer data could be extracted through the use of face-to-face or telephone interviews with NGB employees. Second, the findings are limited to NGBs located in the U.S. and the findings are not indicative of NGBs in countries outside the U.S. The response rate to the survey also serves as a limitation. Because only 40% of the invited NGB employees completed the survey, it is possible that the findings would be slightly different had a greater number of survey invitees responded. Additionally, utilising the ANOVA statistic in the results was also a limitation, as it relies on assumptions of randomness and a normal population, and this study surveyed a purposive sample. Finally, this study reported the ways in which NGBs utilise social media from the organisation's perspective. It is possible that conducting a content analysis of the NGBs' various social media accounts (e.g., Facebook page, Twitter account, etc.) might reveal additional information, such as the types of posts being made, type of content being posted, and the feedback/responses from the organisations' stakeholders. This limitation is also an opportunity, as it provides an idea for future research.

This study served as a solid foundation from which future research on social media use amongst niche sport organisations can be based. In addition to the suggestion made in the previous paragraph, future research should attempt to evaluate social media usage from a variety of perspectives. This study examined social media use from the organisation's perspective, but it is possible that a future study could take into account both the organisation's and the sport consumer's perspectives, and possibly the sponsors' perspectives as well. Additionally, NGBs in countries outside of the U.S. should be examined to determine how they utilise social media and their employees' levels of acceptance of and motivation for using social media.

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