Examining the Development of a Social Media Strategy for a National Sport Organisation

A Case Study of Tennis New Zealand

Ashleigh-Jane Thompson
Andrew J. Martin
Sarah Gee
Andrea N. Eagleman

Abstract

The application of technology and the rise in social media has not gone unnoticed in sports and has become a vital tool for sport marketers as sport consumers' media consumption grows. This paper offers an analysis on the development and maintenance of a social media strategy for a National Sport Organisation (NSO) in New Zealand. This initiative, implemented for Tennis New Zealand (TNZ) in 2010, was conducted to provide a minority sport (in terms of mainstream media) with its first online social media presence. This study involved a qualitative analysis of Tennis New Zealand's (TNZ) development and maintenance of a social media strategy through fieldwork, social media metrics data collection and analysis and evaluation, and highlights a number of issues in the development and effective utilisation of social media for an NSO. In particular, applying a "one-size-fits-all" approach to its management despite the uniqueness of the sport product. Creative online strategies using technologies such as Facebook must be employed, monitored, and evaluated to ensure they continue to meet the needs and expectations of all stakeholders. Such strategies include the use of promotions, 'behind-the-scenes' material, and constant engagement and conversation with fans and followers.

Keywords:　*social media; national sport organisations; online communities; marketing*

　　　Ashleigh-Jane Thompson is a PhD candidate in the School of Sport and Exercise, Massey University, New Zealand.
　　　Andrew J. Martin is an associate professor, **Sarah Gee** is a lecturer, and **Andrea N. Eagleman** is a senior lecturer in the School of Sport and Exercise, Massey University, New Zealand.
　　　Please address correspondence regarding this article to Ashleigh-Jane Thompson, a.j.thompson@massey.ac.nz

Introduction

The world of sport is continually changing, and the growing use of technology is one area that is greatly impacting sports in the modern day. With an ever-changing virtual landscape, sport organisations and marketers are presented with new technological opportunities, innovations, and challenges, most recently due to the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Many sport organisations are trying to establish a presence in this unique virtual marketing space in an effort to build and develop long-lasting stakeholder relationships and foster engagement with fans.

Sport marketing is a prominent form of communication for global sport organisations, and yet sport managers are faced with an increasingly discontented and disconnected sport public who are less willing to buy into traditional marketing approaches (Kim & Trail, 2011). As such, researchers have advocated for a fundamental shift in sport marketing from a traditional exchange paradigm to a relationship paradigm (Kim & Trail, 2011). While the academic field of sport marketing is an emergent area of study, its related principles have been applied and practiced in the sport industry for years. Research to date in this area has been limited to understanding and measuring the success of sponsorship, and exploring the motivators of fan behaviour (Frederick, 2012; Seo & Green, 2008; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999), and as a result, the application of relationship marketing in a sporting context has been largely overlooked (McCarthy, Pioch, Rowley, & Ashworth, 2011; Stavros, Pope, & Winzar, 2008). Relationship marketing focuses on achieving long-term relationships with customers, ultimately leading to customer retention (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013). These relational outcomes can be supported by communication and dialogue between organisations and customers.

The rise in use and popularity of the Internet has dramatically changed the way sport organisations communicate with their stakeholders (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). For example, in some instances, the Internet allows for interaction, providing a unique channel of communication that signals a shift away from the unilateral communication approach (e.g., television advertisements) that has previously been so dominant. Furthermore, by going beyond the arguably limited interaction of traditional media, the Internet provides largely unparalleled communication tools that help organisations, teams, and athletes strengthen their relationships with consumers (Abeza et al., 2013; Bei, Chen, & Widdows, 2004; Safko, 2010). In the past, traditional media (e.g., sports talk radio, print media, television coverage) provided fans with limited opportunities to connect with their sporting heroes, but this is changing with new Internet technologies, as fans now have unprecedented access to their sporting idols (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010).

The rising popularity and pervasiveness of the Internet is such, that for many, it is now integrated with everyday life (Pedersen et al., 2007). With the ease, access and availability of the Internet, and thus an increasingly connected population, sport organisations can now tap into a growing virtual community of sports fans

and followers. Recent research indicates that sports fans are online users and frequently turn to the Internet for sports-related reasons (BurstMedia, 2012). Sport organisations that effectively use the Internet as a new marketing communication tool to connect with stakeholders, such as sports fans, are seen to have a competitive advantage in what is otherwise considered an increasingly crowded virtual marketplace (Brown, 2003; Delpy & Bosetti, 1998; Duncan & Campbell, 1999; Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007; Pedersen et al., 2007). For sport organisations that have struggled to gain mainstream media attention and coverage in the past, the Internet provides these organisations, through their own websites or Internet channels, the opportunity to broadcast their brand to an ever-increasing online audience. Therefore, an organisation's Internet or digital strategy should be an integral aspect of its communication and marketing plan.

While there is a burgeoning body of literature surrounding the use of social media in the sports domain, few studies examine the development of a social media strategy specifically for a national sport organisation (NSO). Instead, much of the focus, from both an academic and practitioner standpoint, examines the use of various forms of social media by athletes, teams and leagues (e.g., Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; O'Shea & Duarte Alonso, 2011; Pegoraro, 2010). Furthermore, many scholars argue that the issue of social media is becoming so prominent for sport organisations that researchers and practitioners can no longer ignore this under researched and poorly understood topic (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; O'Shea & Duarte Alonso, 2011). The current study seeks to provide further insight into this emergent marketplace while contributing to research in this area.

Using an exploratory approach, this study examines the development of a social media strategy for an NSO in New Zealand. In particular, it explores the case of Tennis New Zealand (TNZ) and the development of its initial social media strategy. First, the paper offers a review of the literature on the use of social media as a marketing tool, with particular application in the sporting context. Second, based on the findings, the paper examines three emergent themes related to the use and management of social media for sporting organisations. Finally, directions for future research are suggested.

Literature Review

Social Media and Marketing

The phenomenon of social media use has grown exponentially over recent years, and so, too, has its influence. Some scholars argue that it is now as influential, if not more so, than traditional media (Drury, 2008; Reyneke, Pitt, & Berhton, 2011). Given the expansive nature and scope of social media, it is not surprising that there are numerous definitions provided by various authors. However, social media is most commonly used as a term to describe online tools that allow sharing of information and content (e.g., video, images, text, news, opinion) online, and

participation and collaboration through social interaction between individuals and entities such as organisations (Newson, Houghton, & Patten, 2009; Reyneke et al., 2011).

Examples of commonly used social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Foursquare (Drury, 2008; O'Shea & Duarte Alonso, 2011; Pfahl, Kreutzer, Maleski, Lillibridge, & Ryznar, 2012). However, there are a number of other social media platforms available, facilitating the sharing of everything from photographs (e.g., Flickr, Instagram), videos (e.g., YouTube) and audio (e.g., Last. FM), and even virtual worlds (e.g., SecondLife). Facebook and Twitter, though, are the two platforms that have largely become synonymous with social media due to their rapid uptake and continued growth (Pegoraro, 2010; Reyneke et al., 2011). Since its inception, Facebook has amassed more than 1 billion users, with over 70% of users located outside of the United States: if it were a country, it would be the third largest (Ang, 2011). Based on current usage, it does not appear as though this rapid growth is set to slow down (Nielsen, 2012).

However, despite this growth and the increased attention social media is receiving in marketing fields, Ang (2011) found that many managers still remain uncertain about how it can be integrated with their marketing efforts and are unclear on what benefits it can provide. Meadows-Klue (2008) also found that many of these marketers are approaching this new medium with traditional tactics, yet insisted that these technologies require a change in the way organisations approach their marketing strategies.

Drury (2008) highlighted that the rise of social media has caught many in the marketing industry off guard, and noted they have not been able to take advantage of the opportunities to engage with fans in ways traditionally not possible through offline channels. While marketing with traditional media delivers one-way messages to consumers, social media is more about relationship building and conversations with consumers. Until recently, the relationships between brands and consumers have largely been one way. However, the Internet and associated technologies are seen as catalysts in changing this traditional dynamic (Meadows-Klue, 2008). These new online marketing platforms provide organisations with the prospect of connecting with their fans at a level far beyond the reach of traditional marketing. These Web 2.0 technologies have facilitated changes to the nature of communication exchange and have assisted with a shift from "static hyper-linked text pages of the old web, to a participatory and socially driven web" (Kelly & Autry, 2011, p. 257). The ability to allow for two-way communication between an organisation and its fans, as well as between the fans themselves, is one of the most fundamental changes resulting from social media. Social media also offers a more humanistic approach to the communication between brands and their publics, and this has made it more accessible, inviting, and acceptable to fans as a marketing tool. Social media has also provided organisations with a new means to acquire and distribute information, along with the opportunity to communicate

with fans rather than *to* them (Pfahl et al., 2012; Safko, 2010; Tsai, 2009).

Social Media and Sport

The rise in social media has not gone unnoticed in sports. In line with the growing media-dominated sports consumer, social media has become a vital tool for sport marketers. One of the fastest growing areas for sport publicity and marketing is the area of social sites, or social media (Pegoraro, 2010). Yost (2010) argued that social media is no longer just a place to connect with friends and family; instead it is now a place for doing business, and therefore sport organisations should explore ways to integrate it into their strategic plans (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010).

Yost (2010) argued that providing a website is no longer enough for sport organisations, and said that organisations need to "meet people where they are to bring them to where you want them" (p. 49). Social media provides the bridge between the two, and while there is a plethora of social media platforms, professional sport organisations have mainly focused on Facebook and Twitter. There is increasing support for Facebook and Twitter as the two "must-haves" to enable sport organisations to connect with fans (Yost, 2010). The current generation of Internet users is so familiar with two-way communication that it expect its favourite sports brands to communicate and connect with it via these channels (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Sport organisations failing to adhere to these changes risk losing not only sports fans but also the opportunities social media provides. These opportunities include, but are not limited to, developing social connections, direct communication of brand image, and enhanced loyalty (Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Social media is thought to be the new rising force in marketing, and this new phenomenon has created a revolution in traditional marketing communication, which is now being embraced by all sectors of the sport industry (Pegoraro, 2010), providing organisations with an unparalleled opportunity to reach a large consumer base (Pegoraro, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Williams and Chinn (2010) propose that this new communication medium may see "Internet spectators become customers" (p. 428). Indeed, while some sport organisations are still trying to find their place in this changing landscape, others are creatively utilising these technologies and the functionality they provide to reach out to existing consumers and gain new ones. For example, in Spain, FC Barcelona has embraced this changing landscape and is now looking at ways to optimise its stadium for match day social media (Pellicer, 2011).

One key feature of social media use in sport is its ability to overcome the barriers to fan access (Pegoraro, 2010). The importance of this is supported by other scholars who argue the ability of fans to share their "consuming passions" also contributes to establishing and/or reinforcing bonds between individuals (Cova &

Cova, 2002; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Williams and Chinn (2010) indicated that if a sport organisation were able to use social media to make use of these benefits, it would aid it in achieving relationship marketing goals of brand building and customer loyalty. Moreover, Pfahl et al. (2012) offered a number of examples of how some sports marketers have adapted and are paying particular attention to the opportunities and options that social media provides. While these examples highlight the uptake of social media by various sport organisations, Ballouli and Hutchinson (2010) argued that every sport team or organisation should be involved in social media in some way.

However, while an extensive body of literature exists on the importance of relationship marketing and mass communication in the marketing and branding of sport organisations, and there is a growing body of research on social media and relationship marketing (e.g., Abeza et al., 2013; Hambrick & Kang, 2014), there is only limited research focusing on recent media developments and their associated impacts on professional sport organisations (O'Shea & Duarte Alonso, 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010), particularly related to their development of social media strategies. As with all businesses, sport organisations are not immune to the rapid technological changes taking place globally in their operating environment. In particular, social media is rapidly becoming a channel for sports fans to communicate and engage with their favourite sports brands (e.g., teams, players, coaches, and leagues) and as an outlet to express their enthusiasm (Bradstreet, 2009). As NSOs are an integral part of the sport landscape, it is important we understand their interaction with this new media.

The impact of these emergent technologies in the professional sport setting uncovers the need for sport marketers to better understand how they can maximise the full potential of this medium. Many scholars have identified the lack of theoretical knowledge and foundation in the area of social media and have requested that researchers contribute to this nascent field (Ballouli, 2012; Clavio & Kian, 2010; McCarthy et al., 2011; O'Shea & Duarte Alonso, 2011).

This paper seeks to begin to redress the dearth of theoretical knowledge in this field by providing a case study of TNZ, and exploring its development of an initial social media strategy. The findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of NSOs' social media strategy development and management. By providing a case study of TNZ, this research provides a practical context with which to explore this emerging area from an organisation's standpoint, allowing for a more focused examination of the issues related to social media strategy development and the resulting applied managerial implications (Yin, 2003).

Methodology

This study involved a qualitative analysis of Tennis New Zealand's (TNZ) development and maintenance of a social media strategy through fieldwork, social media metrics data collection and analysis, and evaluation. Ultimately, such a case

study provides a unique exploration into the various stages of the social media strategy life-cycle (i.e., development, implementation, maintenance).

Case Context

In New Zealand, as with many other countries, NSOs are governing bodies responsible for the overall administration and development of their respective sports at the national level. In general, one key objective of NSOs is sustaining and growing their sport nationally, which is achieved through the promotion of sport and their organisation, to both the organisation's members and the New Zealand population at large. TNZ is the national governing body for tennis in New Zealand, a member of the International Tennis Federation (ITF), and is responsible for the management and administration of all affiliated tennis in New Zealand. Over 300,000 people participate in club tennis in New Zealand, and TNZ is also an advocate for these players (Tennis NZ, 2011). There are six regional centres (e.g., Northern, Auckland, Waikato-Bays, Central, Canterbury, and Southern) that are responsible for the delivery of tennis in their respective regions.

TNZ delivers a number of tennis events annually involving in excess of 1,000 players, and continues to provide a number of national and ITF events, along with hosting home Davis Cup ties. New Zealand also hosts two leading Women's Tennis Association (WTA) and Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tournaments held annually in Auckland in the lead up to the Australian Open, the first Grand Slam and major tour event of the year. These main tournaments are the ASB Bank Classic (WTA International event) and the Heineken Open (ATP Tour 250 event), and are organised and administered by one of TNZ's regional bodies, Tennis Auckland. TNZ was selected for this case study for two key reasons. First, TNZ was identified as an organisation that lacked a social media presence, and the organisation acknowledged it would therefore be engaging in the development of a social media strategy for the first time. Building on this, TNZ was also considered on the basis of existing connections with the lead author.

As this study sits within a New Zealand context, it is important to understand Internet usage in a more localised context. In a recent survey conducted in a New Zealand setting, 58% of respondents felt the Internet was important or very important in their everyday lives (Smith, Gibson, Crothers, Billot, & Bell, 2011), indicating that the Internet was just as important in New Zealand as overseas (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2008; Pedersen et al., 2007). This provides sport organisations with an unparalleled opportunity to capitalise on the increased usage amongst populations when communicating their messages.

Social media platforms appear to offer New Zealand sport organisations meaningful opportunities to meet relationship marketing goals and engage with the sporting public. The adoption of social media by NSOs in New Zealand increased during 2010. A cursory view of the Facebook pages of New Zealand NSOs illustrates that implementation increased during 2010 (as indicated by their Facebook "born" or "joined" date). Use of social media ranks as the leading online

activity in New Zealand. It accounted for 1 of every 5 minutes spent online in May 2011 according to a study on Internet usage in New Zealand (Weinberger, 2011). Figures indicated that the use of social media was also the most engaging online activity for New Zealanders, accounting for 21.1% of all online minutes. Sports organisations, with their convenient niche markets in social media, are in need of devising strategies to capitalise on them.

Facebook was selected as the social media platform of choice to be used in the initial stages of the TNZ social media strategy development. Several reasons led to this selection, including (1) the typical Facebook user spends approximately 6 hours per day on the site, and two-thirds of users log in at least once a day (Reyneke et al., 2011); (2) in early 2010, Facebook was larger in terms of population than most of the world's nations and was second only to Google in the number of daily hits (Reyneke et al., 2011); and (3) Facebook was the leading social media platform in New Zealand, with 96% of those with membership to such a platform using Facebook (Smith et al., 2011).

Some practitioners have questioned the merits of using social media platforms such as Facebook for marketing purposes, stating that Facebook only appeals to a select demographic and therefore does not allow marketers to fully achieve the market reach often desired. However, Tsai's (2009) study suggested these assertions were misguided, and there is now a growing trend of older adults engaging with various social media platforms. A number of other recent studies highlighted this new trend, indicating that social media is now becoming age neutral (Parker & Thomas, 2010; Stroud, 2008). Social media users are, in fact, a heterogeneous group that is becoming increasingly diverse (Parker & Thomas, 2010; Tsai, 2009).

An ethnographic approach was employed in this study with the lead author being an active participant of the group responsible for creating a social media strategy for TNZ. This has afforded the lead author a unique perspective that does not inform other research currently being conducted in this area. While critics may argue that this introduces an undesirable level of bias, Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000) argue that an investigator's contribution can be useful and positive, and Creswell (2003) suggests that it affords an enhanced awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity, leading to a greater understanding of the context. In this case, the researcher had no influence on the strategic objectives or decisions of the organisation.

Research Design, Data Collection and Analysis

One-on-one, informal conversational interviews were conducted with six senior management personnel within TNZ, the Heineken Open and the ASB Classic. The interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of the organisation's current position and the strategic plan for its future direction regarding social media. The informal, conversational interview approach was deemed the most appropriate as it offers spontaneous generation of questions and maximum flexibility, while allowing for open dialogue (Patton, 2002). Participants were encouraged

to answer questions freely and, subsequently, most interviewees offered information from their perspective willingly, which aided in giving primacy to their comments. Interviews lasted between 15 minutes and 45 minutes. Due to geographical limitations, those interviews that could not be conducted in person took place via telephone.

Additionally, secondary data was collected from the organisation to complement interviews with key management personnel and included current promotional material and marketing plans, the strategic plan for the 2008–2012 period, along with the past three annual reports and initial online marketing brainstorming ideas. This data was used to provide a deeper understanding of the organisation as a whole, and its strategic objectives moving forward. A triangulation method was employed by converging these independent sources of information (Creswell, 2003).

In order to examine the development of the social media strategy for TNZ, the data gathered during this initial phase was used to develop a greater understanding of the NSO's current position and the outcomes it wished to achieve in launching this new online initiative. Both Google Analytics and Facebook's Insights data were used as metrics to determine Return on Objective (ROO) in this study. Facebook's Insights data is designed to provide measurements on a page's performance and provides interaction information (number of new, daily and monthly likes, page views, and unsubscriptions), demographic information (countries and cities, age, and language used), post views and exposure, and referrers. Google Analytics provides detailed statistics on website traffic and traffic sources. These tools provided demographic information on users and detailed information on how they interacted with the page and various content elements.

The demographic information was used to provide a more explicit picture of a TNZ fan, and included information on gender, age, and location. User interaction information collected included the time spent on each tab, the number of active users, the daily activity of users (wall posts, post likes, post comments), and the external referrers. This data was reviewed to provide an analysis of the various online strategies implemented by the organisation to generate page "likes" and fan engagement, and was completed manually by the lead author. The analysis of this data involved developing a fan feedback measure calculated using the data provided from Insights (likes, comments, and shares) and was used to determine the level of fan interaction for each post. These results were then combined by content type category to provide an average for each type. After each initiative was implemented, analysis was conducted by using Insights data to decide whether the various strategies resulted in a greater level of interaction from fans, determined by the daily activity of users and the time spent on each tab.

A general inductive approach was used to identify themes to allow findings to emerge from the raw data without restraints imposed by structured method-

ologies (Thomas, 2006). Short memos were utilised on the initial review of data, and became the first step in forming broader categories. Emerging categories and themes were then developed by reviewing the raw data and memos repeatedly to identify key issues, continuing until no new themes emerged. This suggests that major themes had been identified. Stakeholder checks were utilised to ensure trustworthiness (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). These checks included informal conversations with members of the organisation, and other interested parties, and the distribution of copies of preliminary social media strategic initiatives. This process allowed others to verify interpretations and to solicit written and oral commentary (Thomas, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

Using the Facebook Insights data collected over a six-month period, and the information provided directly by TNZ (i.e., interview data and strategic documents), three emergent themes related to the use and management of social media strategies were identified: content (quality, relevance, engagement), metrics and Return on Objectives (ROO), and barriers to engagement.

Content

Previous literature on social media fan engagement showed that there were two main concepts essential to creating an online environment that fans respond to: (1) sharing quality and relevant content, and (2) inciting comments (Smith, 2010). In order to ensure that quality and relevant content is shared and fans are encouraged to post comments, a number of recommendations have previously been proposed. Some of the key guidelines for ensuring quality and relevance of Facebook content include maintaining a high frequency of posts, providing a mixture of content type (i.e., photos, links, videos, notes), and creating a posting style that is open, warm, and personable (Smith, 2010). Various strategies recommended to promote fan interaction include ending statuses with a question, replying as often as possible to fans, and adding personal comments to encourage discussion (Smith, 2010).

These guidelines were followed in the initial implementation of the TNZ Facebook page to determine whether these approaches would be appropriate for this fan base, and were implemented to varying degrees of success based on weekly key performance indicator (KPI) targets and determined by the analytics gathered from Facebook's Insights data. Although not theoretically informed, anecdotal monitoring at the time of this study also suggested that the time of day can influence the response rate from fans and this was considered when reviewing Facebook's Insights data to ensure the reliability of these results. Subsequent to this study, results from recent industry report highlights the effect that time of day can have on fan interaction (SalesForce, 2012).

In order to achieve a greater rate of response, Insights data was analysed during the initial stage of this study to determine when TNZ fans were more likely

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to interact with the page, and this was used as the basis for future postings. These findings indicated that greater levels of interaction, based on raw Insights feedback data, were achieved on Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday. These results are similar to those found by SalesForce (2012). Also, TNZ fans responded more frequently to postings between 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. These findings are contrary to those present by SalesForce (2012) and highlight that a one-size-fits-all approach is not sufficient. Rather, organisations need to develop an understanding of their unique audience.

While this study supported the guidelines provided for ensuring the quality and relevance of the Facebook content, results from the application of those suggested for encouraging fan posts and replies provided mixed results. The most successful strategy for encouraging participation on the TNZ page was the use of questions. Conversation was encouraged through the use of questions at the end of status posts and through the inclusion of polls. It was also found that those strategies commonly associated with ensuring the quality and relevance of Facebook content, as proposed by Smith (2010), were also useful in this case study for encouraging interaction with fans.

In order to ensure that fans were provided with a range of relevant information and content to generate interest and engagement, one key focus sought to ensure a wide range of content was provided. For TNZ, when questioned, fans themselves, via feedback received on the Facebook page, expressed a desire for a range of different post content to be presented. Facebook's Insights data revealed that fans were more engaged with the Facebook Page when post content was mixed, and interaction numbers increased. An evaluation indicated that for this particular fan group, this was one of the most important factors for achieving a greater level of engagement and interaction, supporting findings from similar studies (Smith, 2010).

One of the initial strategies used to generate interest and encourage people to become fans of the TNZ Facebook page was to administer an Australian Open competition to coincide with the launch of the page. In order to be eligible for the competition, people had to "like" the TNZ Facebook page and answer a simple question about the 2009 Australian Open tournament. Fans were initially directed to a custom landing page as a tactic to promote this competition with users who were not yet fans, encouraged to "like" the page in order to see further details and enter the competition. The launch of the TNZ Facebook page and this subsequent competition was promoted through TNZ newsletters, the official website, TNZ staff Facebook contacts, and each region's promotional channels.

When comparing data recorded during the competition period with those recorded outside the competition period, there was an increase in traffic to the TNZ Facebook page while the promotion was running (see Table 1). In addition, data gathered from Google Analytics showed that users engaged with the TNZ Facebook page after they entered the promotion. Promotions, with results such

as these, were found to be a successful strategy for encouraging users to "like" the TNZ Facebook Page, and therefore raising awareness and exposure to the TNZ "brand."

Fans also responded favourably to behind-the-scenes content. For TNZ, this included the use of video clips with tournament staff, audio from player press

Table 1

Insights Data from the Australian Open TNZ Facebook Launch Competition

Measure	Week One	Week Two	Week Three
Active users (Month)	108	242	438
Fans	71	132	288
Visits	507	766	1374

conferences, videos of player cameos, and photos from official Davis Cup functions (draw ceremonies, welcome dinner, and *pōwhiri*). A *pōwhiri* or *pōhiri*, is a central part of Māori (indigenous people of NZ) protocol, and is a ceremony for welcoming visitors involving speeches, dancing, singing and *hongi* (a traditional Māori greeting done by pressing one's nose and forehead to another person). The inclusion of this "value-added" and exlusive content provided fans of the TNZ Facebook page with content they were not able to view elsewhere and, thus, incentivised people to become a fan. This was in accordance with Mangold and Faulds (2009), who suggested that people like to feel special and that these feelings can be fostered by providing exclusive content. Organisations are therefore encouraged to carefully consider the content that is presented to sports fans in order to ensure it promotes constant engagement and conversation.

A number of strategies regarding content were proposed at the end of this study to help TNZ build their online presence. Other organisations may also be able to implement these strategies, which included (1) acquiring more content from regional bodies with a particular focus on club and regional events; (2) including offers from club pro-shops exclusively for TNZ fans; (3) featuring blog posts from New Zealand players, particularly those invovled in international tournaments; (4) integrating quizzes with the option of providing monthly prizes from sponsors for the best performance; and (5) providing incentives for fans to get invovled during national tournaments and Davis Cup ties by encouraging fans to send in photos of themselves supporting a player(s)/team. All of these strategies were designed to help shape discussions and encourage engagement amongst the TNZ fans. In fostering this engagement, organisations have the opportunity to advance fan-organisation interaction and understand each other on a more per-

sonalised basis (Abeza et al., 2013).

Metrics and ROO

One of the challenges that organisations face when developing their social media strategy is determining how to measure performance and success. While social media provides organisations with further marketing opportunities and the ability to create personalised messages for customers and potential customers, some argue the difficulty to determine and measure the value of social media realms (Pfahl et al., 2012). The issue of metrics is often provided as a leading reason why organisations have yet to explore the social media landscape. A recent study found that one-third of the companies surveyed that did not engage in social media stated it was due to a lack in suitable performance measures (Tsai, 2009). Further exacerbating this problem is the lack of proven academic theory in measuring the success of social media strategies. However, according to eMarketer (2011), an opinion poll of marketers on the importance of selected metrics used to measure social media sponsorship revealed that the quality of the content, shares, click through rate, and cost per acquisition are the most important, while cost per impression is least important.

In order to determine the value and success of an organisation's social media presence, evaluation is necessary and, as such, was incorporated during various stages throughout this study via metric data based on ROOs. The key to worthy metrics is to link these to the organisation's objectives (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009). Arguably, because some of these could not be readily monetized it was difficult to relate these to return on investment. Consequently, this study utilised Return On Objective (ROO), which measures whether or not these objectives have been met. It is considered an effective metric because it is based on a specific set of objectives, which are unique to each organisation (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009). For this study, these were framed around four categories. The metrics measured in each category linked to the initial social goals (see Table 2).

The metrics that proved to be the most useful in evaluating the success of the TNZ social media strategy were consistent with those presented by eMarketer (2011). The most important metrics used within this study, which were generated from Facebook's Insights data, included likes, shares, comments, and sentiment of content. Sentiment is a popular measure marketers consider when evaluating the success of social media initiatives (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). It was determined by reviewing users' posts and categorising whether the content could be differentiated as positive, neutral, negative, or unclear. This information formed the basis for the fan feedback measure (see the previous section on Research Design, Data Collection, and Analysis) and showcased what type of content received the most engagement from fans (see Table 3). This information, when used alongside other metrics such as the impression count (the number of times a post is viewed anywhere on Facebook), can allow organisations to determine whether there are any

Table 2

Return on Objectives: Key Categories and Metrics

Category	Metrics
Audience	Audience demographics
	Number of followers, new followers, page likes, and new page likes
Engagement	Number of likes, shares, and comments
Perception	Sentiment of content
Reach	Impression count

Table 3

Insights Fan Feedback Data from January 2011

Content Type	Feedback Ratio
Competion	0.72115
Photo Set	0.29915
Picture	0.30197
Question	0.15737
Status Update	0.02786
Video	0.10905

similarites amongst posts and make it possible to identify any trends.

Also, the quality of content was evaluated, as higher quality content was thought to encourage more engagement and interaction amongst fans. This assertion was supported by Lieb (2011). In order to determine the quality of content, it was evaluated based on a number of criteria including timeliness, relevance, shareability, personality, and creativity (Smith, 2010). Along with these metrics, Insights data on active users and demographic data were also analysed to measure and evaluate the implementation of various strategies. All of the data gathered through Google Analytics and Facebook's Insights provided a robust understanding of TNZ Facebook users and their interaction with the page, allowing for more tailored content to be delivered.

Follower numbers have traditionally been viewed as an appropriate measure of social media success/failure and a way to highlight ROO (Hoffman & Fodor,

2010). However, evidence suggests that the quality of content is far more important than the number of fans or followers an organisation has on their social media platform of choice (eMarketer, 2011; Pfahl et al., 2012). As previously indicated, quality content provided an increased level of interaction. This is important as the level of "engagement" or "interaction" is a greater measure of how successful strategies are at getting fans involved with an organisation's social media efforts, which is important as engaged fans are more likely to develop a long lasting relationship with the organisation (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

One of the key issues that surrounds the development and effective utilisation of social media for an NSO is the incorrect application of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to its management. This is particularly important given the unique nature of the sport product. These findings further highlight the notion that this sort of approach is not appropriate when dealing with social media. In order to develop a successful social media strategy, organisations need to have a strong understanding of their fans' behaviour and what it is they want out of their social media experience. Strategies that were found to have been successful for other organisations were not always received with the same level of enthusiasm by TNZ fans, and therefore, strategies had to be tailored to the TNZ market based on feedback from evaluation and metric analysis.

Barriers to Engagement

Findings from this study indicated that there were three key areas that can potentially impact an organisation's ability to engage with fans. These three areas operate at organisational, sport sector, and technological levels, and include Facebook-induced changes, ability to sustain an online presence, and social media knowledge and understanding.

Facebook-induced changes. As with any technological product, Facebook is constantly changing and continually updating and re(de)fining. These changes have implications for those managing an organisation's Facebook presence. While some of these changes are innocuous, others have the potential to alter the way fans interact and engage with an organisation's Facebook page. For example, one of the most noteworthy recent design changes includes the introduction of Facebook's "timeline" feature, which highlights photos, posts, and key events. This replaced the traditional tab structure that previously allowed organisations to provide more customised pages to fans and provided organisations the opportunity to deliver different content to "fans" and "non-fans." The original tab structure was useful for TNZ in running competitions designed to encourage consumers to "like" an organisation's page (see the previous section on Metrics and ROO), and as a result, new strategies needed to be developed to overcome this change. For example, one of the key features of the new timeline is the ability to note key milestones and promote starred posts. Socialbrite (2012) argued that this was an important way to highlight an organisation's success and growth and to draw attention to the content that an organisation wants to promote.

In another recent development, Facebook changed the presentation of updates to users in their news feeds. Default settings were adjusted so posts were only shown from people a user recently interacted with or interacted with the most. In this case, unless fans commented on a post during the changeover to the new profiles, the organisation became invisible to them. For organisations such as TNZ, the implications of this were important, as a reduction in visibility impacts the number of impressions received. The news feed offers organisations the greatest opportunity to reach and engage with fans, with the majority of fans interacting with organisations via this feed rather than their Fan page (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich, & Bruich, 2011). This highlights the necessity to keep up to date with the changes that Facebook launched. Numerous other changes occurred throughout the data collection and implementation phases of this study, and the need to stay knowledgeable about these and the ways organisations could deal with any issues also indicated another key area affecting the ability to provide continual engagement and interaction with fans.

Sustaining an online presence—maintaining a strong brand image. One of the keys to using social media successfully is the need for continual communication, and as the name suggests, *social* interaction. However, one of the challenges that organisations face is achieving the right balance. An organisation's brand will suffer if it is considered a "spammer" by current or potential fans. Research has shown that the overwhelming responses to *why* people use social platforms are intrinsic in nature. They do so to feel connected, to learn and be inspired, and not because there is a reward to be received (Experian Simmons, 2010), and they do not appreciate being "marketed" to. One of the challenges in ensuring there is a continual conversation with fans is knowing how to manage this online presence.

In order to maintain a sustained online presence and ensure communication and engagement with fans, this study suggests that organisations consider how their online presence will be managed. This issue should be considered while developing the social media strategy, and plans put in place for the continual monitoring of it, before engaging with any social media platform. This decision will largely be dependent on the individual organisation and the level of resources available, and might involve a dedicated member of staff or the use of existing staff to manage and monitor online media. For many small sport organisations, as has proven to be the case with TNZ, there may not be the resources (time, money, or staff) to provide dedicated social media personnel to maintain an organisation's online presence. While TNZ management embraced the use of social media, Abeza et al. (2013) note this can be further exacerbated for other organisations "considering the contentiousness of social media" (p. 128). The findings from this study support the discussion presented by Abeza et al. (2013) regarding the challenges associated with the allocation of organisational resources. One of the major challenges noted in this study is the time commitment that is required, both within and outside business hours, to support real-time interaction, which is

one of the key benefits of social media. This was further heightened during tournament times when fans expected constant communication and updates. Therefore, in order for organisations to maintain a strong brand image, it is imperative that they establish strategies to ensure this critical area is addressed. It is therefore suggested that organisations engaging in social media include a dedicated section clearly outlining how and by whom their online presence will be managed within their strategy.

Social media knowledge and understanding. These barriers to engagement are further exacerbated by a lack of understanding and knowledge of the fundamental aspects of social media that is currently present at both the organisational and sector level in the sport industry. There appears to be confusion in the industry about what new media should be used for and how to best use it to add value and contribute to the organisation. One of the most important aspects that contributes to the success of an organisation's social media strategy is the internal usage and buy-in from everyone associated with the brand. Good social media does not start and end with the manager and should instead be integrated throughout the brand to generate engagement and empower staff to use social media to raise the profile of their sport (Francis, 2012).

However, in order for this to be successful, it is imperative that sport managers and those associated with an organisation's marketing communications have the appropriate knowledge and understanding of this emerging field. Without this knowledge, inadequate expectations and inappropriate KPIs are likely to be set (if they are set at all). For those with a fragmented organisational structure, this task can be hampered by the number of people involved and the geographical spread of resources (in TNZ's case, the involvement of each of the regional centres), but it is essential that this is considered, in order to deliver an effective social media presence.

Conclusions

The findings of this case study illuminate the issues and challenges faced by an NSO when developing and maintaining a social media strategy and online presence. Emergent themes indicated that there were three key areas related to the social media strategy development, along with three distinct areas that served as potential barriers to engagement. To develop a successful strategy, stakeholders involved in its development need a clear understanding of how social media aligns with the organisation, how and by whom the social media strategy will be managed, what their fans expect out of their social media experience, and clear guidelines for how success will be measured. For example, since 2010–2011, when this study was conducted, Facebook has introduced a number of new metrics.

While the initial social media presence for TNZ focused on Facebook, in June 2011 the organisation began using Twitter in time for their Davis Cup tie with the

Philippines. The experience and lessons learned from the utilisation of both of these platforms provide valuable insight for other sport organisations looking to develop or expand their social media presence. It is recommended that if organisations are going to engage in social media, they need to be committed to ensure a sustainable social media presence across all online profiles, and their ability to achieve this needs to align with the resources available to support it.

Given that social media is an emerging marketing tool, ongoing research on this topic is warranted. Globally, there have been increasing efforts to examine the links between social media and consumers, clearly showcasing the growing importance and need for research and understanding of this phenomenon. In a rapidly changing and evolving sports environment, where the adoption of technology is both an intrinsic part of the way sport is played and consumed, keeping abreast with such developments, particularly on the consumption (demand) side, will become increasingly relevant for sport organisations.

There is considerable scope for further research related to the impact of social media on marketing, fan engagement and interaction in sport. Future studies should examine a larger cross-section of sport organisations, preferably from differing geographical areas and from organisations with differing levels of financial and media support. Using this study as a point of departure for future research, it would be useful to observe differences in social media use, both in above terms and over time. Also, while this study focused on sport organisations, future research should look to examine how these organisations use social media to support sporting events. Finally, further research could incorporate wider elements of social media, including the range of social media platforms available, and the way in which each is accessed.

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