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Social Media Platforms' Use in Building Stakeholder Relationships

The Case of National Sport Organizations

Gashaw Abeza

Norm O'Reilly

Abstract

Social media has been widely touted by the popular media as an ideal tool to develop and sustain positive relationships between an organization and its stakeholders through the creation of dialogue. This research explores the validity of this claim via relationship marketing theory. The specific goal was to investigate how National Sport Organizations (NSOs) use their official Facebook and Twitter pages to create relationship dialogue with their stakeholders. A content analysis was conducted on the official Twitter and Facebook pages of 24 Canadian NSOs, and three hypotheses were tested. Results are contrary to the claims of those promoting social media, finding that Canadian NSOs' Facebook and Twitter use did little to create a relationship dialogue. Results further note that NSOs preferred Facebook over Twitter.

Keywords: *relationship marketing; relationship dialogue; interaction; communication; not-for-profit organizations*

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Over the past two decades, sport-related research has reported on the value and benefits of relationship marketing (RM) to sport organizations (e.g., Cousens, Babiak, & Slack, 2001; Gladden & Sutton, 2009; Harris & Ogbonna, 2008; Stavros, 2005; Stavros, Pope, & Winzar, 2008; Yu & Trail, 2011). Olkkonen (1999) describes RM as “a philosophy or a holistic pattern of thought” (p. 65). Others (e.g., Ferrand & McCarthy, 2009; Girginov, Taks, Boucher, Martyn, Holman, & Dixon, 2009) note RM to be an effective management approach for many voluntary and not-for-profit sport organizations. This is particularly true in the current environment that the majority of not-for-profit sport organizations are facing, which includes financial restraints, political pressures, and increased competition (O’Reilly & Brunette, 2013).

RM, both as a theoretical framework and as a management approach, is about building a two-way collaborative relationship through communication (a term we employ throughout the article to refer an act of transmitting or broadcasting content) and interaction (referring to a two-way or reciprocal ongoing exchange of content) between organizations and their stakeholders (Abeza, O’Reilly, & Reid, 2013). This relationship involves fulfilling promises, building trust and commitment where two parties, on an ongoing basis, talk to each other, listen to each other, learn from each other, become familiar with each other, and in due course, reach a common understanding (Grönroos, 2004; Peppers & Rogers, 2010). When organizations reach an understanding of their stakeholders by fulfilling promises they made in their communications and interactions, they produce and deliver a co-created, customer-valued product (Grönroos, 2004; Peppers & Rogers, 2010).

Sport organizations, in adopting an RM approach, are typically seeking to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with their stakeholders with the purpose of creating long-term mutual benefits for the parties involved (Stavros et al., 2008; Williams & Chinn, 2010). In the case of National Sport Organizations (NSOs), the governing body for a given sport in a particular country (e.g., UK Athletics, USA Track & Field, Athletics Australia), they work with a variety of stakeholders in carrying out their mission and pursuing their objectives. Specifically, NSOs serve their members’ needs and develop their sport from the grassroots to an elite level. In many countries across the world, NSOs operate under government funding, and are regarded as not-for-profit organizations. Their stakeholders include grassroots participants, elite athletes, clubs, state/provincial sport organizations, regional sports organizations, media, commercial partners, and local authorities. Therefore, in an effort to create, maintain, and enhance long-term relationships with these stakeholders, NSOs are compelled to employ effective communication platforms (Girginov et al., 2009). In this regard, social media (SM) has become an ideal and cost-effective tool for building a two-way collaborative relationship through a relationship dialogue between sport organizations and their stakeholders (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

The use of social media has been studied in a number of different sport contexts. These include, but are not limited to, athletes (Browning & Sanderson, 2012), teams (Sanderson, 2011), events (Blaszka et al., 2012; Hambrick, 2012), and fan loyalty (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). However, little research to date has examined social media's use from the perspective of national sport organizations. The purpose of this research is, therefore, to explore the NSOs use of SM in building stakeholders relationships. In particular, although the supposed advantages of SM have been touted largely and widely by the popular media, consultants, and public relations companies (Waters, Burke, Jackson, & Buning, 2010), uncertainty about the benefits for NSOs from SM remain unclear.

Literature Review

Not-For-Profit Organizations Use of Social Media

As the public embraces SM to express, listen to, learn about, contribute, and circulate interests and experiences (Abeza et al., 2013), scholarly research on SM and its role as a communication tool has been rapidly growing (Eagleman, 2013). However, few studies have examined the use of SM in the not-for-profit sector (e.g., Eagleman, 2013; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Practically, not-for-profit organizations are increasingly engaging in SM in an effort to understand the needs of and communicate their programs and services with donors, clients, the media, volunteers, and the general public (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013; Waters et al., 2009), and to make their management functions more efficient (Waters et al., 2009). For example, Hockey Canada embraced SM with a registered number of 370,000 Facebook users and 65,000 Twitter followers (as of early 2013, see Table 9).

Not-for-profit organizations use strategically targeted content to activate stakeholders, build rewarding relationships, and ultimately promote accountability and public trust (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Eagleman (2013) examined the use of SM amongst employees of NSOs in the US and found that they were (i) open to using SM to achieve organizational goals and (ii) understood the platform's value. The employees perceived SM to be a communication tool that helped enhance relationships with fans while promoting the organization's brand and sport. Though organizational size has been perceived to yield a negative relationship with SM adoption and use, Nah and Saxton (2013) contend that Twitter and Facebook have become particularly popular, especially amongst not-for-profit organizations. Thus, the current study is based on the use of SM in the not-for-profit sector, focusing on two popular SM platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). The specific goal is to investigate how NSOs use their official Facebook and Twitter pages to build a two-way collaborative relationship with their stakeholders through a relationship dialogue.

Facebook and Twitter

Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has become increasingly popular, growing from 5.5 million active users in 2005 (Hoffman & Novak, 2012) to 1.28 billion monthly active users as of March 31, 2014 (Facebook, 2014). Facebook users can add friends and update their profiles to inform friends about their interests, hobbies, and relationship statuses. On Facebook, users can post web links, pictures, and videos. According to Hoffman and Novak (2012) and Hughes et al. (2012), users upload 250 million photos every day. Users can form and join virtual groups as well as develop applications (Hughes et al., 2012), enabling the exchange of messages in real time (Smith et al., 2012). Facebook opened its registration process to organizations in 2006, attracting more than 4,000 organizational users within the first two weeks (Waters et al., 2009). In early 2013, the company announced that 15 million businesses, companies, and organizations are now using its services. In their study of U.S. collegiate sport organizations use of Facebook pages, Wallace, Wilson, and Miloch (2011) found Facebook was being utilized to cultivate long-term relationships and enabled organizations to interact in real-time with fans and stakeholders. A content analysis conducted by Abeza et al. (2013) on the Facebook page of sporting event organizers found four major opportunities that the platform presents to RM approach: better knowledge of customers, advanced customer–organization interaction, effective sport participants and fans engagement, and efficient use of resources (time and money).

Microblogging site Twitter has also grown rapidly since being established in 2006. The site allows users to communicate with “followers” using short messages (i.e., “tweets”) that are a maximum of 140 characters in length (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Witkemper, Choong Hoon, & Waldburger, 2012). Twitter users, whether individuals or organizations, can create an account through personalized home pages and follow other Twitter users (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Smith et al., 2012). A user’s tweets are broadcast to followers, who can respond by providing commentary or retransmitting (i.e., “retweeting”) the message to their own followers (Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). Twitter has 255 million monthly active users generating more than 500 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2014), although third-party estimates range as high as 500 million registered accounts (Hoffman & Novak, 2012; Hughes et al., 2012; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). Many organizations are using Twitter to share information, communicate, and interact with their stakeholders (Hambrick, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). According to Lovejoy et al. (2012), organizations in tweeting public messages they are publicly showing their responsiveness. Witkemper et al. (2012) study showed that Twitter presents an opportunity for organizations to engage in a timely and direct contact with their audiences.

As outlined in Table 1, Facebook and Twitter share many similarities, but the manner in which each site and site users is approached needs to be customized specifically to that site.

Table 1*Features of Facebook and Twitter*

Features	Facebook	Twitter
Connection	• Users need approval from another user to contact them. Friendship has to be mutually agreed and accepted. • Users cannot view some other users' profile, posts, or feeds unless connected.	• Users do not require the same type of approval as Facebook. Users can follow anyone without the permission of the person one follows. • Users can view other users' profiles and tweets.
Users' intention of use	• Users connect with friends and members and other people they care to keep in touch with. • More on expanding the breadth of the conversation networking and connection.	• Twitter is less about social friendships; it rather allows users to follow important topics, people, and conversations that are relevant or interesting to them. • It is more of a portal to get fresh and breaking news, to connect with people with whom users have no means of connecting otherwise.
Data Sharing	• Users can share pictures, videos, and links by posting the URL using the status update interface.	• Users can share pictures and videos via Twitpic and tweet other URLs by shortening the URL with tinyURL

Conceptual Development

Dialogue and Relational Value

RM focuses on creating an added value to the core product offering that results from a relationship dialogue (i.e., through ongoing communication and interaction between parties) (Grönroos, 2004). The phrase *relationship marketing* incorporates a profit-making motive, yet the approach is a philosophy that emphasizes creating a long-term mutually appealing value to the parties involved in an ongoing relationship dialogue (Grönroos, 2004; Harridge-March & Quinton, 2009). A *relationship dialogue* is the process of reasoning together so that organizations and their relevant stakeholders can develop a common knowledge that leads to additional value for the parties involved beyond the value of the products or services exchanged (Grönroos, 2000; 2004). The parties involved reach a common understanding by talking, listening, and learning from one another and then knowing each other closely (Gummesson, 1998). When organizations fulfill the promises made to their stakeholders in their communications and interactions, they produce and deliver a co-created and stakeholder-valued product (Grönroos, 2000; Peppers & Rogers, 2011). In maintaining and enhancing this process on a continuing basis, organizations understand stakeholders' ongoing needs, build intimacy, develop long-term relationships and ultimately secure long-term mutual benefits (Grönroos, 2000; Gummesson, 1998; Peppers & Rogers, 2011).

Application of Dialogue to Relationship Marketing

The success of an RM, as a relationship dialogue process, requires three key components: (1) a communication process (an act of transmitting or broadcasting a content), (2) an interaction process (a two-way or reciprocal exchange of content), and (3) the creation of value (Williams & Chinn, 2010). In Grönroos' original model, planned communication messages occur via media such as advertising, brochures, TV commercials, websites, and sales calls. Although integrated marketing communication centers on consistency of messaging, it does not necessarily result in dialogue and does not guarantee a long-term relationship (Williams & Chinn, 2010). According to Grönroos (2004), for an organization to develop a successful relationship with its relevant stakeholders, value-enhancing interactions must be present; thus, for communication processes to promote interaction, parties should engage into an ongoing two-way dialogue. The two parties might not meet, but they will acquire access to the shared or common information through interaction. It is only from the continuing flow of interaction that relationship emerges (Abeza et al., 2013).

Grönroos (2004) further asserted that interactions are central to the RM process and occur through both direct and indirect channels. An organization applying the RM approach should show a genuine interest in stakeholders' needs and value systems as well as demonstrate that their feedback is both appreciated and utilized for the organization's improvements (Grönroos, 2004). In such a situation, the communication aspects of RM merge into the interaction process to form a relationship dialogue. Thus, dialogue emerges only when planned communication messages are integrated with messages from the interaction process. Through this process, the combined effects of communication and interaction result in added value to customers and relevant stakeholders (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Not all types of dialogue lead to relationships; dialogues based on mutual interest and trust will lead to a long-term relationship and the co-creation of value (Abeza et al., 2013).

In Grönroos' (2004) original model, organizations initiate the relationship-building process focusing on a planned communications strategy, followed by other traditional marketing activities, such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, and personal selling. However, with the emergence of SM, this assumption might no longer be valid (O'Brien, 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Therefore, in their modified model, Williams and Chinn (2010) suggested interactions between the sport organization and proactive SM users or "prosumers" (users having a blended role as a producer and consumer) occur in a more nonlinear fashion as opposed to Grönroos' unidirectional interaction. Williams and Chinn (2010) stated that sport organizations embrace SM platforms as part of planned promotional strategies (e.g., through tweets and Facebook profile updates). Sport organizations also have the opportunity to interact with SM users on a more informal, unplanned basis (e.g., replies to Facebook updates/tweets or

user-to-user conversations). Through SM platforms, sport organizations are able to hear from their customers and relevant stakeholders, react aptly, maintain on-going dialogues, and eventually co-create value (Williams & Chinn, 2010). The value that emerges through the integrative process of communication and interaction is depicted in the centre of the model. Figure 1 depicts Williams and Chinn's (2010, p. 433) modified version of Grönroos' (2004) RM process model, showing communication, interaction, and value creation between sport organizations and sport consumers.

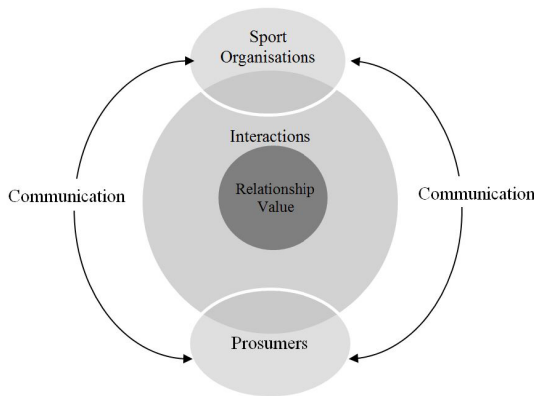


Figure 1. Modified Relationship Marketing Process Model

The value element of the model is difficult to assess in this study because a) it is not a manifest content (i.e., a message that is on the surface and easily observable), and is better examined through what is referred in applied communication research as a latent content analysis (i.e., an examination of the meaning underlying the message) (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999); b) as Williams and Chinn (2010) pointed out, an emerged value could be, for instance, new market research data mined from the interactions which can be better established on the use of suitable digital metrics; and c) as Witkemper et al. (2012) pointed out, SM provides the opportunity to focus on two of the three key components, communication and interaction. As a result, this study put emphasis on the communication and interaction elements of a relationship dialogue process. Therefore, employing, the above discussed, expanded version of Grönroos' (2004) RM process model developed by Williams and Chinn (2010), this study attempted to investigate how NSOs use their official Facebook and Twitter pages to build a two-way collaborative relationship with their stakeholders through a relationship dialogue.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

SM, as a relationship dialogue tool, facilitates communication and interaction processes between organizations and their relevant stakeholders, and thereby promotes the creation of value (O'Brien, 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). However, little is known about the way in which information and dialogic functions manifest in not-for-profit organizations' SM platforms (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Waters et al., 2009). As Grönroos (2004) pointed out, it is only when a communication process becomes an interaction process that a relationship dialogue emerges (see Figure 1). With the emergence of a relationship dialogue, organizations will be able to understand stakeholders' ongoing needs, build intimacy, develop long-term relationships and ultimately secure long-term mutual benefits (Peppers & Rogers, 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). However, it is not clear if NSOs use SM platforms to go beyond an act of transmitting or broadcasting content (a communication element of relationship dialogue) and advanced the communication process into a two-way or reciprocal exchange of content (an interaction element of a relationship dialogue).

RQ₁. How do NSOs use their Facebook and Twitter pages for the purpose of communication and interaction with their stakeholders?

Per the work of Williams and Chinn (2010), organizations that use SM platforms can easily engage in a communication process; but for organizations to develop a successful relationship with their relevant stakeholders, a value-enhancing interaction process must be present (Grönroos, 2004). As Abeza et al. (2013) and Grönroos (2004) stated, the promotion of an interaction process is not always easy and demands a reconsideration of many existing structures, behaviours, and attitudes of an organization. As such, an examination of whether NSOs are using the SM platforms for the purpose of communication and interaction is suggested.

H₁. NSOs are more likely to use their Facebook and Twitter pages for communication purposes than for interaction with their stakeholders.

There is also a limited understanding of the important distinctions among the various types of SM (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). In fact, a salient feature of SM platforms such as Facebook and Twitter is that they are distinctly different (see Table 1), and do not all offer the same services or have the same focus (Hughes et al., 2012). Clavio (2011) posits that some SM platforms might be more popular among certain groups than others. Organization-level studies of SM have found that there is variance in not-for-profit organizations' use of social networking sites for the purpose of engaging with other stakeholders (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research on NSOs' use of Facebook and Twitter in creating relationship dialogue. There is a pressing need for relevant data that

can create an understanding of how differently organizations are using various SM sites to create a relationship dialogue (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), specifically in terms of the two key components of an RM: communication and interaction.

RQ₂. Are NSOs more likely to use Facebook or Twitter to create a relationship dialogue with their stakeholders?

H₂. NSOs are equally likely to use Facebook and Twitter to create a relationship dialogue with their stakeholders.

There is little clear guidance on the use of SM for the purpose of engaging stakeholders (Waters et al., 2009), and its use as an organizational communication tool is found to be largely experimental (MacNamara & Zerfass, 2012). Certain organizations have adopted SM, believing that they were in a time-based competition and would face a competitive disadvantage otherwise (Bughin, 2008). Some organizations favour the option of sitting back, and waiting and learning from others; but these businesses increasingly face a difficult choice and fear lagging behind the rapidly evolving SM development (Woodcock et al., 2011). Therefore, there is a need to examine whether organizations that assumed SM early on are using the platforms differently from the late adopters in terms of creating a relationship dialogue.

RQ₃. Do NSOs that were early adopters of SM use Facebook and Twitter differently from late adopters?

As Askool and Nakata (2011) and Woodcock et al. (2011) argued, organizations that adopted SM early on are gaining new advantages. Given its role as the leading SM platform (Hoffman & Novak, 2012; Hughes et al., 2012), Facebook was used to define three periods of adoption of SM by the NSOs considered in this study. As noted in Table 9, these periods are pre-2009, 2010-2011, and post-2011, each representing 1/3rd (or 33.3%) of the NSOs in the sample.

H₃. Facebook and Twitter pages adopted by NSOs before 2009 are highly likely to show more relationship dialogue content than those that were adopted during 2010 - 2011 and after 2011.

Method

This study (i) examines how NSOs use their official Facebook and Twitter pages to create a relationship dialogue, (ii) compares how the two key elements of a relationship dialogue (i.e., communication and interaction) manifest on the two platforms, and (iii) assesses if early adopters use the platforms differently than late adopters. The appropriate approach to achieve the study purpose was to perform a content analysis, which has long been used by researchers interested in system-

atically examining the content of all forms of recorded communication such as printed materials, media advertising, and various nonverbal and verbal messages (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999), Websites (e.g., Girginov et al., 2009) and SM platforms (e.g., Lovejoy et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2009).

Content analysis provides the researchers a systematic and objective way to examine and compare the content manifested on the NSOs' Facebook and Twitter pages. The study focuses on NSOs operating in Canada; namely the 61 listed by the Department of Canadian Heritage's Sport Canada branch. Among those listed, 24 NSOs were selected using systematic random sampling. For this purpose, all the NSOs ordered alphabetically, a starting point was chosen at random, and every third organization was selected. Systematic random sampling was used due to the homogeneity of the study sample and efficiency that the technique provides than the other probability sampling techniques (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011). Moreover, systematic random sampling allowed the researchers to add a degree of system or process into the random selection, and provided the assurance that the listed NSOs were evenly sampled (Li, Pitts, & Quarterman, 2008).

The content analysis was conducted on 24 Canadian NSOs' official Facebook and Twitter pages over a three-week period. Given the lack of an established content analysis coding scheme, a coding strategy was devised to identify a list of specific items (i.e., create a coding sheet) underlying the two key elements of a relationship dialogue (i.e., communication and interaction). For this purpose, the coding sheet was initially developed through a deductive process based on the literature that coincides with the expanded version of Grönroos' (2004) RM process model developed by Williams and Chinn (2010). Once the coding sheet was developed, the items were further enhanced using an inductive process based on a review of six randomly selected NSOs' Facebook and Twitter pages. Then, the list of the specific items was sent to three practitioners for review. Their suggestions were taken into consideration and the coding sheet was revised accordingly.

Two independent coders were used in this study, and a codebook and definitions were developed to help guide them. The list of specific items representing the communication and interaction elements of a relationship dialogue is presented in Table 2. Before the data coding process, the researchers conducted training sessions to ensure that the coding procedures were familiar to the two coders. The reliability of the coding sheet had been tested through a pilot study where the coders conducted a separate content analysis of six provincial sport organizations' official Facebook and Twitter pages. From the pilot study, the inter-coder reliability was calculated (per Kolbe & Burnett (1991) and Neuendorf (2002)), and the coders achieved reliable results with high Cohen's kappa scores for both elements of the relationship dialogue: communication ($\pi = .93$) and interaction ($\pi = .91$). These scores indicate a high level of inter-coder reliability, i.e., coefficients of .90 or greater (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

Data Analysis and Variables

Following coding, the item frequencies were tabulated, descriptive statistics were computed, and statistical differences were assessed using paired sample *t*-test and mixed ANOVA. SPSS Statistics 19 was used for data analysis.

H₁ posited that NSOs are more likely to use their Facebook and Twitter pages for communication purposes than for interaction with their stakeholders. The independent variable was 'type of SM' (Facebook or Twitter) and the dependent variable was 'relationship dialogue' (i.e., on communication and interaction) that is the content that manifests on the SM platforms. As can be seen in Table 2, this hypothesis was addressed through descriptive statistics, where NSOs used the Facebook and Twitter pages for communication purposes ($M = 85.9$, $SD = 17.4$) most often than for interaction purposes ($M = 50.0$, $SD = 25.5$).

H₂ posited that NSOs are equally likely to use Facebook and Twitter to create a relationship dialogue with their stakeholders. Paired sample *t*-test ($\alpha = .05$) was performed to test this hypothesis, where the independent variable was the type of SM platform (Twitter or Facebook). The dependent variable was relationship dialogue (i.e., scores on communication and interaction), as the content that manifests on the SM platforms.

H₃ posited that Facebook and Twitter pages adopted by NSOs before 2009 are highly likely to show more relationship dialogue content than those that were adopted during 2010–2011 and after 2011. A mixed ANOVA with follow-ups using the Bonferroni procedure ($\alpha = .05$) was performed to test this hypothesis, where the independent variable was time (non-repeated—three different times/groups: pre-2009, 2010–2011, and post-2011) and the two SM platforms (repeated—Facebook and Twitter), and the dependent variable was relationship dialogue (i.e., communication and interaction).

Results

Table 2 summarizes how the 24 NSOs in the sample were coded on a total of 16 (13 communication and 3 interaction) relationship dialogue items. The values across each item represent the number of a dichotomously coded "present" or "not present" coding. For example, the value 24, the first value in the table that is listed in "NSOs official Facebook page" column across the "Provided logo" row, indicates the number of NSOs from the sample of 24 that provided their logo on their Facebook page. The mean and standard deviation scores for each element of relationship dialogue (i.e., communication and interaction) were computed as recommended by Kent, Taylor, and White (2003), Taylor, Kent, and White (2001), and Waters et al. (2010) by dividing the sum total of the percentage of "present" of each items under the elements by the total number of items in the element under consideration.

How Do NSOs Use SM Sites for the Purpose of Communication and Interaction?

It was hypothesised that NSOs were more likely to use their Facebook and Twitter pages for communication purposes than for interaction with their stakeholders. As referred to in Table 2, NSOs used the Facebook and Twitter pages for communication purposes ($M = 85.9$, $SD = 17.4$) more often than for interaction purposes ($M = 50.0$, $SD = 25.5$).

The majority of NSOs used both the Facebook and Twitter pages for the purpose of addressing 10 of the 13 communication items, namely to communicate the organizations' logo, mission statements, history/ basic information, contact information, updates, pictures, videos, organizational publications and other relevant information, updates on athletes and coaches, and updates on events. However, for the remaining three communication items, the data revealed that only a little over half of the NSOs are using the two platforms for the purpose of publicizing their partners, sponsors, and stakeholders (60%); gathering users input (52%); and conveying various announcements including sales, special events, and volunteers recruitment (64%).

Concerning interaction, overall, all of the three items scored poor on both platforms. Only half of the NSOs (50.0%) used both platforms for the purpose of interaction. The only interaction item that was manifested on 80% of the NSOs' SM platforms were messages posted by users. Yet, the two other items, user-to-user conversations manifested on 31.25% and organizations to users on 39.58% of the NSOs' two social networking sites. Therefore, the results showed that H_1 has been supported, and Canadian NSOs use their Facebook and Twitter pages for communication purposes than for interaction with their stakeholders.

Do NSOs Use Their Facebook and Twitter Pages in Similar Proportions?

It was hypothesised (H_2) that NSOs were equally likely to use Facebook and Twitter to create a relationship dialogue with their stakeholders. As shown in Table 2, NSOs used their Facebook pages ($M = 87.8$, $SD = 17.5$) modestly more often than their Twitter pages ($M = 83.9$, $SD = 19.0$) for the purpose of communicating with their stakeholders. Similarly, the organizations used their Facebook pages ($M = 61.7$, $SD = 22.3$) comparatively more often than their Twitter pages ($M = 40.3$, $SD = 27.7$) to create interaction with their stakeholders.

As can be seen in Table 3 and 4, statistically significant results have emerged for interaction $t(23) = 2.80$, $p < .05$, but not for communication $t(23) = 1.41$, $p = .17$. It can be inferred that NSOs use Facebook pages in relatively preferable way than Twitter pages in interacting with their stakeholders. While interaction is the core element in creating a relationship dialogue, the study results do not support H_2 .

Table 2

Comparisons of NSOs' Use of Facebook and Twitter Pages in Terms of Creating a Relationship Dialogue

Elements/ Items	NSOs official Facebook page (n=24)	NSOs official Twitter page (n=24)	Combined total (n=48)
Communication	(M=87.8, SD=17.5)	(M=83.9, SD=19.0)	(M=85.9, SD=17.4)
<i>Provided logo</i>	24	24	48
<i>Provided mission statement/ philosophy/vision</i>	21	13	34
<i>Provided history/ basic information</i>	23	21	44
<i>Provided contact information</i>	23	24	47
<i>Provided updates</i>	24	24	48
<i>Provided pictures</i>	24	24	48
<i>Provided videos</i>	22	20	42
<i>Provided external link or link to organizational publications</i>	24	22	46
<i>Mention of partnerships/ sponsors/ stakeholders</i>	16	13	29
<i>Requests for users input / comments/ opinion/suggestions</i>	12	13	25
<i>Provided athletes/ coaches profile/information</i>	24	23	47
<i>Provided information on recent, past and upcoming events</i>	23	24	47
<i>Mention of announcements (e.g., invitation to special events, calling for volunteers) and sales promotion</i>	14	17	31
Interaction	(M=61.7, SD=22.3)	(M=40.3, SD=27.7)	(M=50.0, SD=25.5)
<i>Users post on the page</i>	21	17	38
<i>Users to user conversation</i>	11	4	15
<i>Organizations to users conversation</i>	11	8	19

Table 3

With-in Communication Comparison of the Use of Facebook and Twitter (Paired Samples Test)

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Commfb - Commtw	.50000	1.74456	.35611	-.23666	1.23666	1.404	23	.174

Table 4

With-in Interaction comparison of the use of Facebook and Twitter (Paired Samples test)

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Intrenfb - Intrentwt	.58333	1.01795	.20779	.15349	1.01318	2.807	23	.010

Do NSOs that Adopted SM Early on Use the Platforms Differently?

It was hypothesized in (H_3) that Facebook and Twitter pages adopted by NSOs before 2009 were highly likely to show more relationship dialogue content than those that were adopted during 2010– 2011 and after 2011. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviation for the communication and interaction on Facebook and Twitter over the three period times.

As can be seen from Table 5, there is no pattern in the data that verify H_3 . This can be examined further by looking at Table 6 and 7.

As can be seen in Table 6, there was no *interaction* between the use of SM platforms for the purpose of communication over the different periods the platforms adopted $F(2,21) = .39$, $MSE = 1.03$, $p = .39$. Similarly, it was found that there was no interaction between the use of SM platforms for the purpose of interaction in the different periods the platforms were adopted $F(2,21) = .41$, $MSE = 2.33$, $p = .66$. In a like manner, it can be seen in Table 7 that there was no main effect of the time ($F(1,21) = .28$, $MSE = 4.10$, $p = .75$) on the overall use of the platforms for the purpose of creating a relationship dialogue. Hence, as opposed to what H_3 states, NSOs who adopted SM pre-2009 do not use their official Facebook and Twitter pages in a different way than those adopted during 2010–2011 or post-2011 for the purpose of creating a relationship dialogue.

Table 5

Mean and Standard Deviation of Communication and Interaction on the Two Social Media Platforms Over the Three Periods

	Year	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Communication Facebook	pre 2009	11.3750	1.30247	8
	2010-2011	10.7500	2.37547	8
	post 2011	11.8750	.99103	8
	Total	11.3333	1.65940	24
Communication Twitter	pre 2009	10.8750	2.03101	8
	2010-2011	11.0000	1.85164	8
	post 2011	10.8750	1.95941	8
	Total	10.9167	1.86307	24
Interaction Facebook	pre 2009	1.8750	1.12599	8
	2010-2011	1.6250	1.06066	8
	post 2011	1.8750	1.24642	8
	Total	1.7917	1.10253	24
Interaction Twitter	pre 2009	1.5000	1.19523	8
	2010-2011	1.0000	.75593	8
	post 2011	1.1250	1.12599	8
	Total	1.2083	1.02062	24

The hypotheses summary shows that contrary to the claims of those promoting SM, NSOs' Facebook and Twitter use did little to create a relationship dialogue with their stakeholders. In other words, Canadian NSOs were not found using their official Facebook and Twitter sites to go beyond an act of transmitting or broadcasting content (a communication element of relationship dialogue) and advancing the communication process into a two-way or reciprocal exchange of content (an interaction element of a relationship dialogue). However, the report found that the NSOs modestly preferred using Facebook to Twitter for the purpose of communication.

Table 6*Within Communication and Interaction Main and Interaction Effect*

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Communication	Sphericity Assumed	2223.375	1	2223.375	2140.556	.000
	Greenhouse-Geisser	2223.375	1.000	2223.375	2140.556	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	2223.375	1.000	2223.375	2140.556	.000
	Lower-bound	2223.375	1.000	2223.375	2140.556	.000
Communication * Year	Sphericity Assumed	.812	2	.406	.391	.681
	Greenhouse-Geisser	.812	2.000	.406	.391	.681
	Huynh-Feldt	.812	2.000	.406	.391	.681
	Lower-bound	.812	2.000	.406	.391	.681
Error (Communication)	Sphericity Assumed	21.813	21	1.039		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	21.813	21.000	1.039		
	Huynh-Feldt	21.813	21.000	1.039		
	Lower-bound	21.813	21.000	1.039		
Interaction	Sphericity Assumed	6.000	1	6.000	2.568	.124
	Greenhouse-Geisser	6.000	1.000	6.000	2.568	.124
	Huynh-Feldt	6.000	1.000	6.000	2.568	.124
	Lower-bound	6.000	1.000	6.000	2.568	.124
Interaction * Year	Sphericity Assumed	1.938	2	.969	.415	.666
	Greenhouse-Geisser	1.938	2.000	.969	.415	.666
	Huynh-Feldt	1.938	2.000	.969	.415	.666
	Lower-bound	1.938	2.000	.969	.415	.666
Error (Interaction)	Sphericity Assumed	49.063	21	2.336		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	49.063	21.000	2.336		
	Huynh-Feldt	49.063	21.000	2.336		
	Lower-bound	49.063	21.000	2.336		
Communication * Interaction	Sphericity Assumed	.167	1	.167	.112	.741
	Greenhouse-Geisser	.167	1.000	.167	.112	.741
	Huynh-Feldt	.167	1.000	.167	.112	.741
	Lower-bound	.167	1.000	.167	.112	.741

Table 7*The Main Effect of Year*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	3825.375	1	3825.375	930.721	.000
Year	2.312	2	1.156	.281	.758
Error	86.313	21	4.110		

Table 8*Summary of Findings*

H ₁ : NSOs are more likely to use their Facebook and Twitter pages for communication purposes than for interaction with their stakeholders	Supported
H ₂ : NSOs are equally likely to use Facebook and Twitter to create a relationship dialogue with their stakeholders	Not Supported
H ₃ : Facebook and Twitter pages adopted by NSOs before 2009 are highly likely to show more relationship dialogue content than those that were adopted during 2010–2011 and after 2011	Not Supported

Discussion

Our first research question was concerned with how NSOs use their SM sites for the purpose of communication and interaction. The findings of the descriptive analysis show that both SM platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) have been mostly used by NSOs for communication purposes; the interaction element scored very poorly on both platforms. This implies that contrary to the supporting voices' enthusiastic promotion of SM for the purpose of creating a relationship dialogue, the platforms were predominately used for communication purpose, yet failed to integrate the communication element with the core element of relationship dialogue (Williams & Chinn, 2010): interaction. This suggests that NSOs' Facebook and Twitter use did little to interact with stakeholders.

During the content analysis, it has also been observed that users themselves did not engage in relationship dialogue. For instance, on the majority of the NSOs' Facebook pages, users tend to prefer simply to "Like" the content rather than engage in conversations. This is perplexing, particularly in today's world, where the public is progressively embracing SM tools as part of their daily communication mix (Abeza et al., 2013), where users are becoming producers and distributors of information and real-time information exchange is becoming an inherent behavior of our society (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). At times, NSOs themselves were also found to be non-responsive to some of the opinions, comments and questions that users post on their Facebook and Twitter pages. Again, this is perplexing, considering the Girginov et al. (2009) suggestion that NSOs are expected to communicate, interact, and engage in dialogue with their stakeholders so that their mission values can be widely and more effectively accepted, internalized, and acted on by all parties (Girginov et al., 2009).

Findings further suggested that NSOs use their Facebook pages modestly more often than their Twitter pages to create a relationship dialogue with their stakeholders. Statistically significant results have also emerged, showing that NSOs use Facebook pages more often for the purpose of communication and interaction than the Twitter pages (interaction with poor scores on both platforms). This finding implied that even if Facebook and Twitter share many similarities (as shown in Table 1), the two do not offer the exact same services, and the manner in which each platform is approached needs to be tailored specifically to that network. Yet, the frequent use of Facebook does not conclusively infer that the depth or the magnitude of relationship dialogue carried on Facebook page is richer than the Twitter page. Rather, the result simply indicates that a content exhibiting a nature of communication and interaction manifested more on Facebook pages than Twitter pages of the NSOs. This, somewhat, echoes Lovejoy et al. (2012) statement that there is variance in not-for-profit organizations' use of social networking sites for the purpose of engaging with other stakeholders.

The findings also showed that even if those NSOs that adopted the platforms pre-2009 may seem to perform better on all factors (see Table 5), there is no pattern in the data that verify the early adopters use of the two platforms in a better way than those of the later adopters. Hence, it can be claimed that NSOs who adopted SM pre-2009 do not use their official Facebook and Twitter pages in a different way than those adopted during 2010–2011 or post-2011 for the purpose of creating a relationship dialogue. As a preliminary explanation, this may have resulted due to the lack of guidance on the use of SM (Waters et al., 2009). Perhaps organizations are joining the platforms simply because they are in a time-based competition that has left them with no time and choice (Bughin, 2008), or perhaps they are using the platforms just to try to stay relevant. Yet again, as referred to in Table 9, at least 8 Facebook and 13 Twitter pages of the NSOs out of the total of 24 were adopted before the year 2009. The time period of the last three years during which the organizations started using the sites should have been enough time in which they could teach themselves how to advance their use of the sites, particularly in terms of the interaction element of a relationship dialogue. They presumably should have been able to take into account the highly promoted supposed advantages of the SM platforms.

The study found that with both platforms, the interaction element was used by fewer organizations than what has been widely touted by popular media, consultants, and public relations companies. In fact, the study found that NSOs use Facebook and Twitter pages more often for the purpose of communication. However, as Grönroos (2004) argued, interactions are considered central to the RM process, and a dialogue emerges only when the communication process is integrated with messages from the interaction process (Grönroos, 2004). But this study has not found the communication process promoting the interaction process. In that case, as Grönroos (2004), and Williams and Chinn (2010) argued,

Table 9

Canadian NSOs' Official Facebook and Twitter Pages: Number of Users and Year Joined

Canadian NSOs	Facebook		Twitter	
	Year Joined	Likes	Year Joined	Follower
1. Athletics Canada	2010	4,752	2009	7,329
2. Baseball Canada	2010	5,134	2010	8,470
3. Biathlon Canada	2010	554	2010	713
4. Boxing Canada	2012	337	2012	460
5. Canada Snowboard	2009	2,822	2009	3,358
6. Canadian Curling	2010	9,658	2010	4,627
7. Canoe Kayak Canada	2012	5,312	2010	2,161
8. Cricket Canada	2009	10,359	2009	4,620
9. Cycling CAN	2010	2,101	2009	1,665
10. Diving Plongeon CAN	2012	1,841	2011	734
11. Freestyle Ski	2009	5,132	2009	1,583
12. Hockey Canada	2009	369,651	2009	64,863
13. Judo Canada	2012	1,487	2011	1,123
14. Rugby Canada	2012	10,764	2008	13, 829
15. Skate Canada	2009	16,015	2009	7,540
16. Ski Cross Country	2010	5,634	2009	3,334
17. Soccer Canada	2011	7,248	2010	20,614
18. Speed Skating Canada	2011	583	2011	592
19. Swimming Canada	2009	11,145	2009	5,192
20. Tennis Canada	2010	2,174	2009	9,067
21. Volleyball Canada	2009	21,315	2009	6,647
22. Water Ski & Wakeboard	2010	229	2010	426
23. Wheelchair Basketball	2009	7,172	2009	1,699
24. Wheelchair Rugby Can	2012	5,903	2012	342

Note: The "Like[s]" and Followers numbers are as of January, 2013

the whole process fails to result in a relationship dialogue and thereby fails to create added value. Therefore, despite the promotion of SM as an ideal platform in meeting RM goals, Canadian NSOs' Facebook and Twitter use did little to create a relationship dialogue.

SM platforms inherently enable parties to talk to each other, listen to each other, learn from each other, get to know each other closely and then facilitate the emergence of a common knowledge. When organizations reach a common knowledge with their stakeholders by fulfilling the promises that they made in their communications and interaction, they will produce and deliver a co-created and mutually valued benefit (Grönroos, 2000, 2004; Gummesson, 1998; Peppers & Rogers, 2011). In order to maintain and enhance this entire process on an ongoing basis, a relationship dialogue process relies on two key elements: communication and interaction process. In this regard, the basic nature of SM is enhanced by the

distinct promotion of the supporting voices (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Waters et al., 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010) that portrayed the platforms as likely to realize the two key elements of a relationship dialogue. Canadian NSOs have the opportunity to reap these benefits that utilizing SM platforms offer through the communication and interaction process and therefore enhancing RM. However, this study found that SM did little, primarily in terms of creating a relationship dialogue and thereby addressing RM goals, among Canadian NSOs.

Implications of the Study

While this study examined only Canadian-based NSOs, sport managers of similar other not-for-profit organizations can draw lessons from the study. One of the most important implications to emerge was the importance of developing clearly identified objectives concerning the use of SM platforms. This is an important implication for management because it helps sport organizations to capitalize on the available opportunities of SM. It was also noted in this study that NSOs are progressively adding more members to their SM sites, and hence if they are seeking to meaningfully and effectively realize the benefits of SM as a RM tool, they will be required to allocate appropriate resources such as human, financial, time, etc. In addition, in order to meaningfully realize the benefits of SM as an RM tool, organizations have to ensure that the platforms are well integrated into an organization's overall marketing and communications strategy. Furthermore, as noted above and revealed in the data, both platforms have been mostly used by NSOs for communication purposes; the interaction element scored very poorly. Therefore, in order to capitalize on the opportunities available with SM and thereby gain the values and benefits of RM, sport managers can use the 16 specific items identified in this study and listed under Table 1 as a checklist.

Limitations of the Study

This work attempted to present an original empirical research on the topic, however it has some limitations. The study's content analysis has been conducted in January 2013 over a three-week period. Since then, perhaps some modification might have taken place on both of the NSO platforms. Thus, the study should be considered as a reflection of that specific period. Also, the research has focused only on Canadian based NSOs. This selection was partly due to time and budgetary constraints. As a result, the study involved relatively small participants with respect to the entire population of NSOs involved in SM. Additionally, the study focused solely on a manifest content and did not examine the meanings underlying the messages (i.e., the latent content). The study is not aiming to generalize from the sample to the population but aimed at insight about the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, generalization should not be drawn from the study.

Suggestions for Future Research

The study enriches the body of sport management knowledge by adding to a relatively underexplored area of research. Yet, the application of further research to the present study is highly recommended. First, while the study findings are insightful, they raise one legitimate question: if SM presents an ideal platform (at least theoretically) for creating a relationship dialogue, then why are the NSOs not utilizing the platforms accordingly? It is recommended that explanatory research be conducted on the same research participants. Second, while this study examined only Canada-based NSOs, a comparative study from different countries would be highly recommended to further enrich the findings. Third, while this study focused only on a manifest content, it would be worthwhile to investigate the meanings underlying the manifest content to provide more insight into the research questions.

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