Examining Facebook Practice: The Case of New Zealand Provincial Rugby

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Abstract

Social media have become a defining feature of 21st century communications. Conceived in 2004 Facebook has risen from relative obscurity to become the most visited website in the world. While social media use has grown exponentially, so too has its influence. Sport organisations were quick to capitalise on Facebook's popularity particularly with the introduction of brand pages in 2010. The trend is no different particularly in New Zealand Rugby's (NZR) National Provincial Championship (NPC). However recent research indicates a lack of understanding and consistency in evaluating effectiveness within the context of Facebook. Scholars have further acknowledged a need to move beyond simple metrics as measures of performance.

Using a mixed method approach this case study of four NPC rugby teams investigated the understanding of effective Facebook practice. Thematic analysis of qualitative questionnaires completed by each page's main administrator explored their understanding of effective Facebook practice. The researcher also utilised an auto-ethnographic journal to document his own experience of managing one of the participating brand pages. Page performance was also investigated through analysis of Facebook insights data to establish how it may be more accurately interpreted to inform best practice.

Results reveal that administrators perceive lack of control, maintaining credibility, guaranteeing *reach* and resource allocation to be the most prominent challenges faced by these brand pages. Such issues provide further tensions when attempting to justify social media use and effectiveness within sport organisations. Furthermore, teams are faced with commercial obligations to post sponsor content that may negatively impact user engagement. In addition, findings suggest that contrary to popular belief, greater *total network sizes* do not guarantee greater *reach* and *engagement*. It is proposed that teams consider proportional measures of performance when seeking to measure Facebook performance. Holistically the research sets a platform that can be used in future studies to tangibly connect Facebook effectiveness to organisational strategy and objectives.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Nature of Research

1.1.1. Relationship Marketing

Social media, particularly Facebook, have emerged as effective marketing channels gaining prominence in contemporary marketing strategy (Collicev, O'Connor, & Vinzi, 2016).

Marketing strategy is guided by paradigmatic concepts driven by contemporary consumer trends (Day & Montgomery, 1999; Drucker, 1958). Traditionally a transactional exchange paradigm has largely guided marketing strategy and definition (Bargozzi, 1975; Bartels, 1965; Berry, 2002; Milner & MacDonald, 1999). Ballentyne, Christoper, and Payne (2003) characterize relationship marketing as the progressive answer to the 'straightjacket 'of traditional marketing thought.

Conceived by Texas A&M University Professor of Marketing Leonard Berry in 1983, relationship marketing contrasts with transactional marketing (Kim & Trail, 2011; Yang & Wu, 2007; Yu, Lee, & Sirgy, 2014). Gronroos (1990) described relationship marketing as;

> *"[The]…process of identifying, establishing, maintaining, enhancing and when necessary also terminating relationships with consumers and other stakeholders, at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties are met; and this is done by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises." (p. 5)*

The intention is to maintain a relationship over a long period to generate better profits through repeat purchases by loyal consumers (H. Ha & Janda, 2008). Gronroos (1994) states that the idea of maintaining relationships should not only be applied between the organisation and its consumers, but also strategic partners and staff members. Furthermore, Morgan and Hunt (1994) theorize that it's not just the act of forming a relationship, but rather the development of relationship trust and commitment that are the two most salient factors in achieving repeat business. Trust is present when the

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characteristics of reliability and integrity are associated to one party by another while commitment is present when there is a desire to maintain a valued relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The presence of both ensures cooperation between parties, preference for long term over short term benefits and reduces the sense of opportunism (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Kim and Trail (2011) conclude that relationship marketing consists of process, purpose and parties. Process refers to the chronological aspect of the relationship and is made up of establishing, enhancing and maintaining. Purpose refers to the relationship aiming to be mutually beneficial. Parties refer to the type of partners seeking mutual benefits in the relationship (Kim & Trail, 2011).

1.1.2. Social Media

Social media are not a new concept; its roots can be traced back to the very early beginnings of the World Wide Web and Web 2.0 technologies. The most prominent and earliest example of a social media platform was online personnel blogging site Open Diary (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However technological advancements have allowed social media to go from near gratuitous blogging sites to an imperative part of everyday communication across all age groups. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social media are defined as;

> *"…a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." (p. 61)*

Pronschinske, Groza, and Walker (2012) along with Groza, Cobbs, and Schaefers (2012) both identify social media as one of the most salient developments in relationship marketing. Social media facilitates on going two-way conversations between consumers and organisations enabling frequent anthropomorphised (see 2.1.3) brand interaction as well as instant feedback between both parties, characteristics that are central to relationship marketing.

1.2. Background to Research

1.2.1. New Zealand's Provincial Rugby Competition

New Zealand's National Provincial Competition (NPC) was originally formalised in 1976 and has gone through several format changes in the last decade. In its current format 14 provincial teams compete across two divisions. For the four provinces selected for this current research, prior to the 2015 season Province one (P1), Province three (P3) and Province four (P4), competed in the top division, or Premiership, while Province 2 (P2) competed in the lower division known as the Championship. Since the introduction of Facebook brand pages in 2010 all four have experienced mixed on-field success. Only P1 and P4 have won their respective divisions while P1, P2 and P3 have all held the Ranfurly Shield[1], New Zealand Rugby's (NZR) historic and most coveted provincial challenge shield. Both P2 and P4 have been relegated from the Premiership to the Championship. P1, P2 and P3 have each made the playoffs three times while P4 has made them just twice since 2010.

Two provinces have Super Rugby franchises in their respective cities. Super Rugby is a franchise based professional rugby competition featuring teams from Australia, Argentina, Japan, New Zealand and South Africa. In the context of New Zealand, provincial rugby unions are affiliated to a specific Super Rugby team based on geographical proximity and, in some cases, partial equity agreements. NPC in its current format exists as a second-tier competition in New Zealand behind Super Rugby. Three provinces created their Facebook brand pages in 2010 while the fourth launched theirs in 2012. The pages collectively total 117,112 *page likes* on Facebook (as at 1 November 2015). One province has consistently had the most followers since 2010 now totalling 74,165 followed by the other three provinces with *19,616*, *12,830*, and *10,511* followers respectively. Each is the only brand page to represent their team and only one has an unverified brand page[2]. While one of the pages

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[1] The Ranfurly Shield is a challenge shield that a holder must defend at each of their home games during the regular season. Should the holder be beaten by a challenger on their home ground, the challenger wins the shield. The challenger then defends the shield at their next home game. Defending the shield for multiple challenges is a great achievement in the NZR community.
[2] Represented by a blue tick on the brand page itself verification means a brand page has been confirmed as the official Facebook page of an organisation by Facebook.

is unverified by Facebook it has been confirmed as the official brand page by the contact and the provincial union. Each provincial team's Facebook brand page has more followers than any other social media account they hold, including Twitter and Instagram, by an average of 83.27% *(see Appendix One)*.

1.3. Motivation for the Research

During my time as Brand Manager of my provincial union I was responsible for the Facebook brand page. This part of my role was constantly challenging and consuming but ultimately enjoyable as Facebook quickly became our main communication channel with our fans. In the four years that I managed the Facebook brand page *total network size* went from approximately 2,200 to 13,500. Although not the highest *total network size* out of rugby teams in the NPC our *engagement* and *reach* seemed to regularly be a higher percentage of our *total network size* then other teams.

What intrigued me the most during this period was how performance was readily attributed to *total network size* among colleagues. If your *total network size* was the largest you were assumed to be the most effective Facebook practitioner. However, such analysis of performance left no room for context, failing to acknowledge how many of a page's *total network* were being reached or engaged on a regular basis. Furthermore, it also failed to acknowledge if on field performance had any impact on *total network size*. Hypothetically speaking, I felt that a brand page with low *total network size* and low on field *winning percentage* that was, for example, engaging 50.00% of its audience was outperforming a brand page that had a high *total network size* and a high on field *winning percentage* but was only engaging 15.00% of its audience.

This premise motivated me to establish more context around Facebook practice as well as measuring the performance of Facebook brand pages. I felt strongly that by basing this research along the lines of this premise I would not only add to an important area of marketing research but also begin the conversation on how to best compare Facebook brand pages to each other to make realistic assertions with regards to performance.

1.4. Rationale

Social media are widely accepted as important marketing channels for many organisations including sport teams (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013; A. Thompson, Martin, Gee, & Eagleman, 2014). With the popular growth and uptake across varying age brackets social media are featuring in a growing body of research (Achen, 2016; Rothschild, 2011).

With significantly more users than any other platform it can be suggested that Facebook is by far the most prominent social media channel for rugby teams in New Zealand (Ballings, Poel, & Bogaert, 2015). This research builds on the literature in order contribute towards the understanding of Facebook brand page practice and measurement.

The research focuses on examining the understanding of Facebook practice demonstrated by the page administrators of each team as well as the statistical performance of each team's brand page prior to, during and following the 2015 NPC Season. Ultimately it aims to provide greater context around the performance of Facebook brand pages so that more holistic comparisons of brand pages can be made.

For the case of New Zealand provincial rugby:

1. What are the perceived challenges for Facebook brand page administrators?

2. Is total network size relatable to the performance of Facebook brand page *reach* and *engagement*?

3. Are proportional measures relatable to the performance of Facebook brand page *reach* and *engagement*?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Emergence of Social Media

2.1.1. Relationship Marketing

Early critics of relationship marketing often argue that it is nothing new (Palmer, 1994). As Buttle (1994) explains many saw it is no more than a series of transactions over time and therefore not constituting a definition beyond transactional marketing. However, both Czepiel (1990) and Barnes (1995) argue that multiple transactions do not guarantee a relationship nor do they indicate loyalty. They state it is possible for multiple transactions to occur in the absence of relationship elements such as trust, special treatment and mutual benefit (Barnes, 1995; Buttle, 1994; Czepiel, 1990).

Despite early scholarly preference towards a relationship paradigm it took over 30 years for it to become the dominant school of thought in both theory and practice (Abeza et al., 2013; Ballentyne, Christoper, & Payne, 2003; Gummesson, 1987; Jackson, 1985; Sweeney, 1972).

Day and Montgomery (1999), Aijo (1996) as well as Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, and Rivera-Torres (2004) argue market saturation and in turn the reduction in the availability of new consumers ultimately resulted in the need to focus on relationship over exchange.

Kim and Trail (2011) go on to offer a sports oriented summarization of relationship marketing:

> *"...relationship marketing to sport consumers is a set of marketing activities to establish, enhance, and maintain a relationship with sport consumers for the mutual benefit of both the sport organisations and the sport consumers."* (p. 58)

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), relationship marketing, since its initial conceptualization, can be applied at multiple levels including organisation-to-consumer, business-to-business (B2B) and organisation-to-employee. Despite

its multiple applications, the consumer remains at the centre of dominant conceptual models (Bendapundi & Berry, 1997; Cravens, 1995; Iacabucci, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the context of sport Stavros, Pope, and Winzar (2008) interviewed a number of Australian professional sport franchises from Australian Rules Football, Rugby League, Basketball and Soccer. Their findings indicated an understanding of relationship marketing's contemporary prominence but a lack of application acceptance and implementation (Stavros et al., 2008). Contrasting findings were reported by Achen (2014) in a more recent study of professionals representing United States professional sport leagues. In Achen's (2004) study, respondents viewed relationship marketing "as essential for the survival of professional sport teams and used numerous tactics to build and maintain customer relationships" *(p. 14).*

Maintaining consumers as opposed to attracting them has been shown to largely reduce marketing costs and increase profits (Berry, 1995; Oliver, 1999; Payne & Rickard, 1997; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). For example, Reichheld and Sasser (1990) analysed 100 credit card companies and found that lowering defection to 5.00% could generate anywhere between 25.00-85.00% increase in profits. Reichheld and Sasser (1990) established that a 5.00% defection rate could lead to consumer life span doubling which in turn reduced net cost of consumers by 220.00%. In a similar study that surveyed 25 insurance companies and their corporate clients, Ismail (2009) concluded that positive relationship marketing improved performance and increased market share. Similarly adopting a relationship marketing approach with its premium consumers improved profitability by 9.00%. Consequently, it's argued that better relationships increase revenues along the whole relationship cycle due to the opportunity to cross sell and increased consumer penetration (R. Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987).

It is not only organisations that receive benefits from a relationship marketing approach. For consumers it reduces choices, making decisions cognitively consistent and efficient leading to increased satisfaction (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Marzo-Navarro et al. (2004) surveyed 228 consumers of retail clothing

stores, with mean averages derived from responses to questions designed to establish reasons consumers were satisfied with certain outlets. As a result Marzo-Navarro et al. (2004) reported that 34.00% of consumer satisfaction could be attributed to relationship marketing practice and the benefits they receive as a result.

Despite distinct mutual benefits of relationship marketing it can also present unique challenges (Gronroos, 2005; Kuster, 2002; Marzo-Navarro et al., 2004; Stavros et al., 2008). Internally relationship marketing is often set up superficially as a strategic tool as opposed to long term established value of an organisation's culture. In a survey of 25 British professional football clubs Adamson, Jones, and Tapp (2005) established that relationship marketing failed at the majority of clubs who implemented it because there was a lack of tangible commitment at both strategic and operational levels of the organisation coupled with under resourcing. Similarly, Peck, Christopher, Clark, and Payne (1999) offer the case of British retailer Laura Ashley to highlight internal challenges of relationship marketing. Laura Ashley struggled in the late 80s to mid-90s as result of failing to holistically address all six markets of relationship marketing; internal market, supplier/ alliance markets, recruitment markets, influence markets and referral markets. Furthermore, finding the appropriate leader to facilitate a relationship marketing culture can also be challenging (Peck et al., 1999).

In addition, externally consumers can present challenges as they become accustomed to a relationship marketing approach (Kuster, 2002; Marzo-Navarro et al., 2004). Following their survey of 228 retail sector consumers Marzo-Navarro et al. (2004) found long term relationship consumers tend to have increased sensitivity to service changes. Kuster (2002) explains this can make them costlier to serve due to their detailed knowledge of the service that often requires them to be tended to by senior staff members. Marzo-Navarro et al. (2004) also found that loyalty can often be strongly tied to the staff member providing the service as opposed to the organisation. Palmatier, Scheer, and Steenkamp (2007) supported the previous study following their survey of 3,000 buyer firms. It was found that high salesperson loyalty

accounted for 38.00% of latent financial risk. Conversely though Palmatier et al. (2007) outlined that low salesperson loyalty did not automatically result in increased firm loyalty. Mitigation of salesperson-owned loyalty can be achieved by highlighting firm enabled benefits, strictly ensuring consistency of offers made by different sales persons and maintaining consistent communication through all consumer facing channels from the firm (Palmatier et al., 2007; Viio & Groonroos, 2014). Within the context of sport the findings of Palmatier et al. (2007) would be applicable to an organisation's season ticket holders and ensuring that each season ticket holder has a similar experience. Inconsistent consumer experience and offers among season ticket holders could generate strong senses of despondence given the strong loyalties and emotions generated by the sport product (Kim & Trail, 2011).

2.1.2. Social Media Emergence

Bochenek and Blilim (2013) assert that social media are now a core management function. Coyle (2010) notes that sport brands can achieve a strategic advantage if they effectively engage with social media. Social media include, photo sharing sites (e.g. Instagram, Flickr, Snapchat) video sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Vine), microblogging sites (Twitter, Tumblr), geolocation sites (e.g. Foursquare) and multifunctional sites (e.g. Facebook; Williams & Chin, 2011) . Facebook is by far the largest platform and as of September 2016 it is reported to have 1.18 billion daily active users compared to 1 million in December 2004 ("Facebook," 2016).

Social media growth has largely been driven by technological advancements as well as economic and social drivers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Miller & Lammas, 2010). Technological advancement has come in the form of both software and hardware developments along with investment in infrastructure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Harrison and Barthel (2009) explain that Web 2.0 interfaces offer a contemporary platform for the facilitation of co-production via social media. Therefore, social media allows consumers to contribute to the experience, characteristics, core product[3] and product extensions a sport

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[3] For the purposes of this research 'core product' within the context of sport refers to the actual sport itself. With regards to rugby, therefore, core product refers to two teams competing on the pitch.

organisation has on offer (Askool & Nakata, 2011; Thackery, Neiger, Hanson, & McKenzie, 2008).

Such behaviour can be grouped under the term user generated content (UGC) (Askool & Nakata, 2011). While UGC is possible in the absence of social media, social media are now considered a powerful tool in UGC facilitation (Frow, Nenonen, Payne, & Storbacka, 2015; Kao, Yang, Wu, & Cheng, 2016). Malthouse, Calder, Kim, and Vandenbosch (2016) investigated the impact of UGC on consumer behaviour. Monitoring Air Miles Canada's Facebook page Malthouse et al. (2016) found that users who actively participated in UGC campaigns accumulated more Air Miles in the following four weeks then non-participants. Thus it was concluded that active UGC consumers are likely to be more profitable than non-active ones (Malthouse et al., 2016). Geurin and Burch (2016) examined the Instagram accounts of six running apparel brands and their findings indicated that UGC received more engagement then brand generated content. Content where the brand was the dominant feature, and captions focussed on differentiation as opposed to best-cost received the most engagement (Geurin & Burch, 2016).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) hardware developments include, investment in infrastructure, high speed connections and in more recent times powerful mobile devices. In New Zealand, government driven public investment in fibre optic infrastructure has set the country on track to become completely connected with ultra-fast fibre internet by 2019 (Cave & Martin, 2010; Given, 2010). Mobile phones have also advanced considerably since 2004 with the development of the smart phone and the advancement of mobile data networks. In a survey of American mobile phone users Duggan and Smith (2013) found that from 2009 to 2013 internet use on phones increased from 31.00% to 63.00% of all American phone users equating to 57.00% of the population. This increase directly correlated with an increase in smartphone ownership with 56.00% of adults owning a smartphone as of 2013 (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Such advancements have only served to increase the penetration and in turn prevalence of social media. For example, mobile

devices accounted for 92.37% *(n=1.09 billion)* of all Facebook daily active users as of September 2016 ("Facebook," 2016).

Economic drivers include free access to the majority of social media along with market variety (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Miller & Lammas, 2010). The affordability of high speed internet has also contributed to the adoption of social media by internet users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Duggan and Brenner (2013) demonstrated, via the results of their 2012 survey, that social media penetration only varied by 7.00% across four income brackets ranging from less than $30,000 to more than $75,000 per year.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe the most prominent social driver in social media emergence as the increasing number of technologically literate young people. Many early critics of such platforms as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram cited popularity among youth as its long-term weakness as older demographics continued to dismiss its relevance to them. However, over time research has shown, particularly with Facebook, an increased adoption by older people. For example in 2012, Duggan and Brenner's (2013) research reported that only 35.00% of all internet users over the age of 65 used Facebook. However by 2014, Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, and Madden (2015) reported that this percentage had increased to 56.00% adding increasing weight to the argument that Facebook has become age neutral as a product and communication channel. Internet use increases across older age groups has been reflected by the rapid growth of social media use among the online population. As of 2005 only 8.00% of adult internet users had social media profiles, by 2009 this number had increased to 35.00%, by 2012 to 67.00%, and most recently 81.00% (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010; Duggan & Brenner, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015). While the previous findings relate to social media use on a global scale, such usage levels are similar in New Zealand. The most recent research in New Zealand shows that 76.00% of internet users maintain some form of social media presence while 44.00% of internet users have Facebook profiles (Crothers, Smith, Urale, & Bell, 2016).

2.1.3. Sport Social Media Adoption

With its sheer scale of captured audience Abeza et al. (2013) explain that social media have become tools for facilitating marketing communication. Ballouli and Hutchinson (2010) further note that social media should be incorporated into strategic planning. Many organisations across many disciplines are engaging with social media (Askool & Nakata, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009) and sport organizations are no exception to this trend (Abeza et al., 2013). Coyle (2010) advocated the need for sport organisations to adopt social media in the most holistic sense to remain relevant and not lose ground to other discretionary industries.

Pronschinske, Groza, and Walker (2012) explain that social media provide an effective platform for sports organisations to execute a relationship marketing strategy. Emerging research supports the adoption of social media by sports organizations (Abeza et al., 2013; Achen, 2016; Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015; Mahan, 2011; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012; Williams & Chin, 2010). More specifically Walters, Burke, Jackson, and Buning (2011), Wallace, Wilson, and Miloch (2011) along with Waters and Walden (2015) advocate for the use of Facebook by sport organisations.

Walters et al.'s (2011) research focussed on Facebook use by 26 National Football League (NFL) teams during the 2010 season. At the time the organisations indicated a stronger preference towards using their own website to cultivate relationships. However, it was acknowledged that Facebook allowed for better two-way communication between an organisation and its consumers, a central component of relationship marketing (Gronroos, 2005; Kim & Trail, 2011; Walters et al., 2011). Wallace et al. (2011) cites Facebook's ability to provide unfiltered messages direct to consumers as one of its most salient advantages. Their research found that National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; n=10) and Big 12 (n=12) colleges all used Facebook pages to generate long term relationships. Their research revealed that Facebook allows for real time interaction with the brand experience that ultimately contributes to the stability of a long term relationship. Waters and Walden (2015) investigated Facebook use by all the

Major-League Teams (including teams from the NFL, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball and National Hockey League; *n*=122) in North America. Their findings, in contrast with Walters et al. (2011), indicated that teams were willing to use Facebook as a relationship marketing platform. Improved acceptance was grounded in an increased ability to customise sport brand pages and post interactivity (Waters & Walden, 2015). Waters and Walden (2015) reported that online Facebook fans were more likely to engage with a team offline however generating interaction on Facebook with fans did not necessarily correlate with investment. Interaction was concluded to be more a result of content relevancy and timing than content frequency (Waters & Walden, 2015).

According to Kim and Trail (2011) social media adoption by sport organisations can be logically associated to its ability to address unique attributes of the sporting product. In particular Kim and Trail (2011) acknowledge brand humanization or anthropomorphism, core product unpredictability and intense fan loyalty as the unique attributes of sport that social media can address. Complete anthropomorphism involves the humanising of inanimate brand objects. Fournier (1998) along with Fournier and Avery (2011) explain the aforementioned is essentially the transferral of human qualities such as emotionality, thought and volition to a brand.

Sports products are often humanized by their consumers (Kim & Trail, 2011; A. Smith & Stewart, 1999). As a result of 17 English premier league consumer focus groups and 30 interviews in depth with consumers Harris and Ogbonna (2008) established that the majority of consumers felt they had an emotional relationship with their chosen team (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). Establishing a bond on an emotional level is a central component of a successful relationship as it signals the presence of appropriate trust, mutuality and special treatment between the consumer and the organisation (Barnes, 1995; Buttle, 1994; Czepiel, 1990). Social media allows for a sport brand to establish an emotional connection with consumers allowing them to anthropomorphize their brand (Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden, 2015; Stavros et al., 2008).

Organisations can anthropomorphise their brand by establishing a brand voice that is consistent and utilises language that encourages social connection and also keeps consumers informed so they feel in control of their experience and understanding of a sport product (Hudson et al., 2015). A Thompson, Martin, Gee, and Geurin (2016) found that fans anthropomorphism of tennis tournament brands was largely based on social media presence. Hudson et al. (2015) survey of student and adult consumers across multiple product markets supports utilising social media to anthropomorphize a brand. Hudson et al. (2015) found that a stronger consumer-to-brand relationship along with increased tendency to engage in word-of-mouth marketing was displayed among consumers who followed an anthropomorphized brand on social media.

The sport product is also unpredictable in its outcome (Kim & Trail, 2011; A. Smith & Stewart, 1999). Such a characteristic has both positive and negative implications (Kaynak, Salman, & Tatoglu, 2008). In the positive sense, Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (2007) explain that marketers can leverage off the excitement that unpredictability causes. In the negative sense it can impact on satisfaction levels of consumers (Borland & MacDonald, 2003). Social media can be used to address dissatisfaction caused by unpredictability by focusing on other initiatives away from the core product such as charitable and/ or community partnerships as well as new stadium features or enhancement packages (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Kim & Trail, 2011).

Furthermore, the sporting product also generates intense loyalty often demonstrated by the majority of an organisation's consumers (Coakley, 2009; Depken, 2001; B. Dwyer, 2011; Giulianotti, 2002; Pronschinske et al., 2012; A. Smith & Stewart, 1999; Tapp & Clowes, 2002). Gladden and Funk (2002) found in a study of over 900 NFL Fans, and analysis of two focus groups, that sport consumer loyalty is both intense and distinct. Consumer brand loyalty was found to be based on product delivery such as style of play, facilities and entertainment; star player prominence and success; fan identification such as family history supporting a particular team and lastly nostalgia and pride associated to where the team was based (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Hill and

Green's (2000) research found that fan loyalty can account for as much as 53.00% of variance on future attendance.

Social media offers a platform for consumers to actively demonstrate their loyalty and identify openly with their team (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003; Bee & Kahle, 2006; Cialdini et al., 1977; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Active demonstration of loyalty is a central component of consumer-brand identification (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Mullin et al., 2007; A. Smith & Stewart, 2010). According to Bee and Kahle (2006) loyalty is related to the tendency to bask in reflected glory (BIRG) or cut off reflected failure (CORF). Wann and Branscombe (1990) found that sports consumers with increased frequency of BIRG had higher levels of loyalty to a sports brand. Bengini, Porter, and Wood (2009) describe sport consumers as highly likely to share their experiences of a sports brand via social media or other channels when compared to other industries. This is important as Collicev, O'Connor, and Vinzi (2016) found outward demonstrations of brand loyalty by consumers are considered highly valuable in strengthening a brand position within a market place.

Social media, particularly Facebook, have experienced a rapid rise to prominence in contemporary marketing practice over the past 10 years. This rise can be largely attributed to social media's ability to facilitate a relationship dialogue. In sport, social media are acknowledged as effective relationship marketing tools as they appeal to unique aspects of the sport product. Social media are therefore at the forefront of theoretical and practical sport marketing practice as understanding and execution of effective practice becomes more important.

2.2. Facebook in Practice

2.2.1. Facebook Use

Launched in 2004 social media site Facebook has risen from entrepreneurial obscurity to world leader status ("Facebook," 2016). As of September 2016 Facebook listed 1.18 billion average daily users ("Facebook," 2016). This gives the platform more than three times more users then its nearest rival Twitter

who, as of May 2016, reported 310 million active users ("Facebook," 2016; "Twitter Usage," 2016). Of Facebook's monthly users 2.5 million are New Zealanders accounting for 55.92% of the population ("NZ Statistics," 2016). According to Facebook, as of December 2015, over 50 million organisations worldwide have Facebook brand pages ("Managing Your Page," 2015). Collectively, consumers left 2.5 billion *comments* on Facebook brand pages every month in 2015 ("Managing Your Page," 2015).

Ballings et al. (2015), Williams and Chin (2010) and Wallace et al. (2011) explain that as a result of Facebook's uptake and large user base it has risen to become a major marketing channel for organizations and a central consideration in marketing strategy for sport organizations. Facebook is widely acknowledged as the most prominent social media platform in business to consumer businesses including sport (Abeza et al., 2013; Ballings et al., 2015; Bronner & Hoog, 2009; Jeong & Jang, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kwok & Yu, 2013; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Mack, Blose, & Pan, 2007; Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011; Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Williams & Chin, 2010).

While social media are acknowledged as important platform for contemporary sport marketing practitioners, scholars also acknowledge the benefits and challenges of social media in contemporary marketing practice.

2.2.2. Facebook Benefits

A number of sports related studies have illustrated the benefits Facebook provides to both professional, amateur and niche sport organisations (Abeza et al., 2013; Askool & Nakata, 2011; Eagleman, 2013). For example, after analysing eight-participation based running events in Ontario, Canada, Abeza et al. (2013) outlined specific sport organisation benefits of using social media platforms such as Facebook. Specifically, Abeza et al. (2013) established benefits of social media presence for relationship marketing. These included better knowledge of fans, advanced consumer-organisation interaction, effective consumer engagement and quicker evaluation of relationship status with consumers. Their findings also revealed that while Canadian National

Sport Organisations (NSO's) utilised Facebook as an effective information distribution channel, they struggled to generate effective relationship dialogue (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014).

Scholars have also argued that Facebook offers the potential to get to know fans as individuals (Abeza et al., 2013; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Walker, Sartore, & Taylor, 2009). Woodcock, Broomfield, Downer, and Starkey (2011) explain that traditionally consumer data revolved around focus groups, surveys, costly consumer relationship management (CRM) packages and third party providers. This was also the case in sport particularly with the wider adoption of relationship marketing (Abeza et al., 2013; Rein, Kolter, & Shields, 2006). However, Adamson et al. (2005) assert such data takes the consumer at face value treating them as purely an expression of data. In relationship marketing an organisation must know and understand the consumer as an individual (Abeza et al., 2013; Adamson et al., 2005) and Facebook presents a realistic platform to achieve such knowledge that would otherwise be unrealistic due to cost and time (Abeza et al., 2013). Consistent with Abeza et al. (2013), Askool and Nakata (2011) argue that social media allows for more regular interaction with consumers to the point that marketing insight becomes more relevant, timely, accurate, personal and cost effective for sport organisations.

Off-season brand interaction has also been highlighted as another Facebook benefit for sport organisations (Abeza et al., 2013; Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Askool & Nakata, 2011; Woodcock, Broomfield, et al., 2011). Traditionally interaction with a sports brand only came as a result of direct consumption of the core product (Rein et al., 2006). However, Drury (2008) explains that Facebook allows for real time direct communication with fans giving the opportunity for sports organisations to communicate activities beyond the core product. Woodcock, Green, and Starkey (2011) add Facebook allows for greater accumulation of both consumer groups and individual's information. Abeza et al. (2013) acknowledge that information accumulation regarding consumer preferences is central to effective relationship marketing.

In addition Abeza et al. (2013) found that sport organisations saw instantaneous feedback as a key benefit of Facebook presence. In Abeza et al.'s (2013) study the majority of cases indicated that Facebook proves beneficial in allowing consumers to feedback information in a timely manner allowing race organisers to address concerns more efficiently. Miller and Lammas (2010), along with Williams and Chin (2010), explain that such feedback allows for a two-way dialogue to be established allowing sport organisations to market their product with their fans more effectively. Furthermore, it allows consumers to participate in the co-creation of the sport product and brand, soliciting a greater level of ownership and in turn loyalty among fans increasing the chance of effective long term relationship dialogues (Frow et al., 2015; Kao et al., 2016).

Abeza et al. (2013) also found consensus among their case study organisations that social media have allowed for more efficient use of resources. Compared to other marketing platforms and techniques social media such as Facebook can be significantly more cost effective (Abeza et al., 2013). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain Facebook offers marketers significantly more *reach* at what can be a fraction of the cost. Furthermore the amount of time required to maintain, populate, track and analyse the channel is also minute compared to other marketing techniques (Abeza et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2009).

Abeza et al. (2013) also suggested that social media offers an opportunity to evaluate the consumer-organisation relationship status. However, while most participants considered this a possibility, they disagreed that this was already occurring. Likewise Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) found that Canadian NSO's also felt they were failing to establish any significant relationship dialogue with fans. However Waters and Walden (2015) found that professional sport teams in North America were actively seeking on going relationships within consumers via social media. Though, most platforms analytical set-up, including Facebook, make it hard to establish the information needed to confirm an interactive on-going relationship has been established (Abeza et al., 2013; Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Waters & Walden, 2015). While a number of benefits can be derived from social media use, Ang (2011) also found

uncertainty among practitioners, in particular their study revealed that many were unaware as to how to use social media to benefit their organisation. It is therefore clear that Facebook can also present challenges to sport marketing practitioners alongside the benefits.

2.2.3. Facebook Challenges

Despite a vast uptake of social media in the corporate industry, as well as commercialised sport, it is still challenging to manage (Mahan, 2011; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012). Extant literature identifies a number of challenges, including lack of control, credibility, crisis management, identifying offline consumers, allocating sufficient resources and guaranteeing consumers will see information. Abeza et al. (2013) state that lack of control is one of the key challenges in the use of social media to facilitate relationship marketing. Abeza et al. (2013) explain that it is hard to manage consumer posts to large organisation owned pages due to the audience size, and it is difficult to ensure that fans will not set up their own pages to compensate for their passion or perceived lack of relevant information being posted by the organisation (Abeza et al., 2013). McCarthy, Rowley, Ashworth, and Pioch (2014) found that five professional football clubs in the United Kingdom cited brand control as one of the main areas of concern on social media.

Abeza et al. (2013) also cites a concern with credibility and reliability of information on social media in turn making crisis management challenging. As Askool and Nakata (2011) outline, social media as a communication method can result in misrepresentation. For example, fan pages can change the brand voice or communicate incorrect pieces of information leaving other consumers frustrated as they try to ascertain what is correct. Furthermore, as Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) explain social media are made up of an unpredictable and multi-directional flow of information. Thus, information can not only go from organisation-to-consumer but from consumer-to-consumer and from consumer to other organisations simultaneously. This increases the chance of information becoming distorted as different users and organisations interpret and reproduce it. While an organisation can address this through

policy it cannot control the consumer or other organisations such as media outlets (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2010).

Kotler et al. (2010) explain a consumer's criticism can go viral at any point whether the information it is based upon is credible or not. Lack of personal accountability, according to Constantinides and Fountain (2008), can increase consumers' willingness to post such information. Despite consumer driven content often being ill informed its impact on a sport organisation's brand can be severe (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Miller & Lammas, 2010). In 2014 then National Rugby League (NRL) player Todd Carney was dismissed from his club and banned from the NRL for life on the back of a photo of him performing a lewd act went viral on social media (Honeysett, 2014). Similarly in 2016 NRL player Mitchell Pierce was banned for eight games following a video of the Sydney Roosters player simulating a lewd act on an animal (Tomarchio, 2016). On both occasions the images of Carney and Pierce were posted initially to social media by other people bringing their clubs and the NRL into disrepute (Honeysett, 2014; Tomarchio, 2016).

A further challenge with social media are the difficulties sport organisations have identifying if online social media followers transact with the brand outside of social media (Abeza et al., 2013). This issue is largely brought on by the anonymity of the Internet and the ease of which fans can withhold particular information (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). This anonymity proves particularly challenging in a relationship marketing sense as it is hard to establish if any tangible benefit is being derived from social media followers as they choose not to engage or provide feedback as well as personal information (Abeza et al., 2013). Woodcock et al. (2011) confirm that identifying online followers on social media who are also real world consumers is critical to the effectiveness of contemporary relationship marketing. Ang (2011) acknowledges online followers that are identified as real world consumers is an effective feedback channel.

In the context of sport Abeza et al. (2013), McCarthy et al. (2014) and A Thompson et al. (2016) go on to signal sufficient allocation of resources as

another challenge present with social media management. Gillan (2009) and Sernovitz (2015) see social media as an area that should be run by a professional whose role is dedicated to the channel. They suggest that humour, writing skills and the ability to quickly interpret, and when necessary act on, high volumes of data as central to social media management. Kietzmann, Hermkens, Mccarthy, and Silvestre (2011) recommend timely responses as crucial to social media practice. As a result, a dedicated social media professional is central to timely participation in the social media conversation. Gillan (2009), Sernovitz (2015) and Kietzmann et al. (2011) all indicate that social media managers should dedicate the majority of their time to the platform, including time after hours, to ensure success. This can prove problematic for sport practitioners who are often expected to work abnormal hours to account for sport occurring in peoples' leisure time (Leberman, Trenberth, & Collins, 2012).

Another challenge presented by social media is guaranteeing messaging will reach an organisation's consumers (Abeza et al., 2013). Walters et al. (2011) outline that the linear nature of contemporary social media means older posts are often pushed down a user's feed[4] as new content arrives. Despite Facebook running their content via an elaborate algorithm called EdgeRank, to bring the most relevant information to the consumer, there is no guarantee a consumer will see everything from all the organisations they follow (Abeza et al., 2013; Wallace et al., 2011). It is as a result of this issue that many social media including, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat offer paid services to organisations to guarantee desired *reach* within their algorithms (Chan, 2016; Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016; Stephen, Sciandra, & Inamn, 2015).

2.2.4. Facebook Administration

Despite Facebook's popularity among non-sporting and sporting organisations a congruent description of what administration entails has yet to be put

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[4] For the purposes of this research 'feed' refers to a user's home page on their social media account. Generally, a feed is where users can scroll through content posted by their friends and organisations that they follow. Generally, content is expected to be displayed chronologically according to the time and day it was posted.

forward. Many practitioners and researchers are unsure what effective practice is, making for a clear gap in the literature (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Ang, 2011; Eagleman, 2013). Research points towards several effective and ineffective contributors to page and content success. Effective practices include utilising conversational keywords, ensuring content fits the context of social media, guaranteeing credible sources and ensuring high levels of content interactivity (Kwok & Yu, 2013; Su-Fang, Yuan-Cheng, & Jih, 2006; Unal, Erics, & Keser, 2011). Ineffective practices can include saturating social media with brand content and posting purely transactional content (Cho & Cheon, 2004; Gritten, 2007; Kwok & Yu, 2013; Speck & Elliot, 1997).

Kwon and Sung (2011) found posts that contained personnel pro-nouns and imperative verbs were more frequently used by the top 100 *BusinessWeek* most valuable brands. Phrases such as "follow us", "join us" and "sign up" were put forward as more effective in stimulating a connection or soliciting a longer term relationship (Kwon & Sung, 2011). In contrast Kwok and Yu (2013) found that less direct imperative verbs to be more effective. Kwok and Yu (2013) focussed on ten restaurants as part of their research into what types of words were associated with more *likes* and *comments*. From 982 posts Kwok and Yu (2013) found posts that contained industry relevant conversational words performed better than transactional terms. Kwok and Yu (2013) established that a post with transactional keywords on average accumulated significantly less *likes* and *comments (SD=.883; SD=.758)* then posts with conversational keywords *(SD=1.193; SD=1.410)*. Conversational terms included terms like days, tried, dinner, lobster and flavours while transactional terms included week, check, winners, watch, chance, contest, sign, vote and commercial (Kwok & Yu, 2013). Kwok and Yu (2013) also, found that plain text statuses along with photos received more *likes* and *comments* than links and videos.

Unal et al. (2011) as well as Su-Fang et al. (2006) found that more positive consumer reactions are solicited if brand content is entertaining, informative, personalised and the user has given permission to be contacted or the user has prior association with the brand. Aydin (2016) also found consumers were

more likely to react positively to brand content if it was from a credible source to which they have had prior association and is also entertaining. Entertaining content appeals to a consumer's sense of pleasure and is generally short and succinct (Altuna & Konuk, 2009; Kwok & Yu, 2013). Informative content is accurate, timely and easily accessible and in turn it instils trust in consumer attitudes towards the brand (Altuna & Konuk, 2009; Xu, 2006). Personalisation refers to direct messaging to the consumer in order to enhance a relationship (Xu, 2006). Prior association refers to a consumer providing permission to see an organisation's brand content or having some indirect association such as a friend or family member (Wong, 2010). Credibility of content refers to the legitimacy of its source along with the extent that consumers trust what the content is proposing or implying (Aydin, 2016; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Kelly, Kerr, and Drennan (2010) conducted focus groups with young people aged from 13-17 years old finding that legitimacy was often reduced if content did not look professional. Participants quickly likened such content to spam based on their experiences.

Perceived interactivity refers to the level at which a consumer can participate in the co-creation of content (L. Ha & James, 1998). Interactivity is both intangible and tangible (L. Ha & James, 1998). Intangible interactivity refers to the how a channel enables people to communicate regardless of time or distance (L. Ha & James, 1998). Tangible interactivity refers to the component of branded content that allows the consumer directly to co-create that very content (Steuer, 1992). Yaakop, Anuar, and Omar (2013) found the higher the level of perceived interactivity the better attitudes were towards Facebook advertising and in turn branded Facebook content. In the context of sport McCarthy et al. (2014) found that lack of interactivity led to consumers of professional football clubs in the United Kingdom migrating to unofficial sources of information, thereby limiting the ability of the clubs to manage the co-creation of their brand as well as directly influence their relationship with consumers. Clavio, Walsh, and Vooris (2013) found that Indy Car Racing drivers sought interactivity with fans by directly responding to them in a timely manner, as drivers saw interactivity as an important factor in effective social media practice (Clavio et al., 2013).

Market saturation has led to increased consumer exposure to commercial messages (Gritten, 2007) and social media are no exception with commercialisation and paid content on an upward trend (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; McCarthy et al., 2014). McCarthy et al. (2014) explains that social media users are not immune to avoiding content produced by a brand page if they feel it has become overly commercialised. According to Cho and Cheon (2004) advert avoidance tends to be more likely if a consumer has experienced interruption, cluttering and/or negative outcomes due to advertising. Advertising avoidance refers to cognitive, behavioural or mechanical actions to reduce exposure to advertising (Speck & Elliot, 1997). Cognitive can be purely ignoring branded content. Behavioural refers to, for example, scrolling past branded content on Facebook. Lastly mechanical actions include unfollowing an organisation's brand page on Facebook or changing your settings to see less content from an organisation.

No consistent definition of effective Facebook practice exists. However, research points towards the need to utilise conversational keywords, ensure content fits the context of social media, guarantee credible sources, and ensuring high levels of content interactivity. Furthermore, practitioners need to ensure content is well timed and not overly commercialised. These items could be suggested as key components of effective practice. Being able to identify and implement these key components would therefore be central to ensuring effective practice. However effective practice can only be determined once analytical performance of a page has been measured and examined.

2.3. Facebook Performance

2.3.1. Reach

Prior to the introduction of Web 2.0 interfaces such as social media traditional digital marketers prioritized *reach* as the most important advertising metric (Plummer, Rappaport, Hall, & Barocci, 2007; Rappaport, 2007). Generally speaking more *reach* led to more click through's, which increased the likelihood of a transaction occurring (Ballings et al., 2015; Cvijikj &

Michahelles, 2011; Rappaport, 2007; Vries et al., 2012). According to Facebook *reach* refers to:

   "The number of people your posts were served to."

<div align="right">*("Facebook Reach," 2016)*</div>

In other words, *reach* is the number of people who see a Facebook page's post(s). Ballings et al. (2015) sought to explore how to best guarantee increased *reach* for a Facebook page. Ballings et al. (2015) cite three main strategies for improving *reach* on Facebook; improving post effectiveness, increasing network size and lastly paying for increased *reach*.

The first is via improving the effectiveness of posts (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2011; Kwok & Yu, 2013; Vries et al., 2012). Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) found that post type, category and timing effect the number of 'interactions' (*comments* and *likes*) by users. Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) objective was to establish how post type influences the *likes* ratio (LR) *comments* ratio (CR) and interaction durations (ID). Data was drawn from Facebook's graph application programming interface (API) applied through a script created by Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) and analysed using a Kruskal-Wallis test. As explained by Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) such an approach reduces the influence of changing Facebook policies allowing for consistent data. From 120 posts Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) found that photos had the highest median LR (n = 0.00338) CR (n = 0.00122) and ID (n = 2.121). Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) also found that day of the week had a significant effect on CR ($H(6)$ = 14.00, p = 0.030) while there was no evidence that day of the week influenced LR and ID for the brand page.

Similarly Kwok and Yu (2013) analysed keywords in order to determine the drivers behind successful posts. Utilizing text mining data analysis along with support from vector machines Kwok and Yu (2013) investigated 982 posts from ten restaurant Facebook pages. As noted earlier Kwok and Yu (2013) found that informational/ conversational keywords associated with the industry such as tried, chocolate and lunch scored highest in terms of *likes* and

comments. Conversely transactional posts with key words like winner, check, watch and contest scored significantly less *likes* and *comments* (Kwok & Yu, 2013).

Ballings et al. (2015) cite the second method to improve Facebook *reach* as increasing network size based on two previous studies of network size on Facebook. The first, by Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2007), utilised a web crawling script in order to analyse 30,773 user profiles finding that those with the most recent and regular posts along with the oldest accounts on Facebook had more friends. The managerial implication of Lampe's (2007) study is that regular content can increase network size which should result in increased *reach*. The second study Ballings et al. (2015) cite is Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, and Christakis (2008) who after analysing 1,112 Facebook pages came to the same conclusion as Lampe et al. (2007).

The last method to increase *reach,* according to Ballings et al. (2015), involves investing funds to purchase more *reach*. An already widely accepted practice, this investment on Facebook is closely associated to traditional digital advertising (Ahmed & Kwon, 2014; Deane & Agarwal, 2012; Deza, Huang, & Metel, 2015). Yaakop et al. (2013) surveyed 350 Facebook users in order to establish attitudes towards Facebook advertising. Yaakop et al. (2013) found three factors influenced user attitudes towards Facebook advertising; perceived interactivity, advertising avoidance and privacy. Perceived interactivity refers to the level at which a consumer can participate in the co-creation of content (L. Ha & James, 1998). Yaakop et al. (2013) found the higher the level of perceived interactivity the better attitudes were towards advertising. Advertising avoidance refers to cognitive, behavioural or mechanical actions to reduce exposure to advertising (Speck & Elliot, 1997). Market saturation has led to increased consumer exposure to commercial messages (Gritten, 2007). According to Cho and Cheon (2004) advert avoidance tends to be more likely if a consumer has experienced interruption, cluttering and/or negative outcome due to advertising. Privacy refers to whether the consumer perceives a site to be secure. As Cranor, Reagle, and Ackerman (1999) argue consumers are for more likely to part with information

if they feel a site will keep it secure. Hence attitudes towards advertising can be influenced by the amount of information they may be requesting from a consumer (Yaakop et al., 2013).

Ballings et al.'s (2015) research focused on the second strategy of increasing organic reach by increasing network size. This decision was based on the premise that if *reach* is the most important determinant of effective practice, practitioners would want to increase their *reach* organically first. Furthermore Ballings et al. (2015) cited a lack of research on generating *organic reach* when compared to generating *paid reach*. Ballings et al. (2015) created an algorithm to determine and recommend optimum behaviour in order to increase network size on Facebook, and found that users who followed the recommendations presented to them by the algorithm experienced a 61.00% increase in network size. Ballings et al. (2015) recommended that organisations could adopt the findings to their own pages to increase network size and in turn *reach*.

Despite Ballings et al. (2015) recommendations, Aydin (2016) argues that *reach* has lost its relevance as a result of an adjustment in the Facebook algorithm. In 2012 Facebook brand pages could expect to *reach* 16.00% of followers (DeMers, 2015; Manson, 2014). According to Sloane (2014) and DeMers (2015) as of 2015 averages are less than 8.00% with brand pages over 500,000 *likes* expected to *reach* just 2.00% of their audience. Thus, brand pages looked to maintain *reach* through Facebook paid media which rose from 9.00% of all posts in 2013 to 17.00% in 2014 (Manson, 2014; Sloane, 2014). Aydin (2016) analysed 281 responses to questionnaires to establish attitudes towards paid media on Facebook, and results showed that only 10.00% of respondents felt positively about paid media on Facebook. Sloane (2014) and Aydin (2016) explain that this presents a dilemma for Facebook page administrators in that on one side *organic reach* remains low and on the other *paid reach* has a poor reputation in the market place.

Aydin's (2016) findings were in line with numerous other studies that also found poor consumer attitudes towards digital paid media such as Facebook

(Cortes & Vela, 2013; Su-Fang et al., 2006; Tsang, Ho, & Liang, 2004; Unal et al., 2011). Sloane (2014) suggested that a reduction in *organic reach* would require Facebook brand pages to become more creative in order to avoid paid media's potentially negative connotations with their consumers. Unal et al. (2011) and Su-Fang et al. (2006) found that more positive reactions were apparent if brand content generated engagement via entertaining, informative, personalised, and with permission to contact the user or the user has prior association with the brand. Furthermore, Aydin (2016) found consumers were more likely to react positively to brand content if it was from a credible source for which they have had prior association and is also entertaining.

Initial preference to focus on reach as a key indicator of Facebook performance is grounded in traditional digital marketing. Although network size does increase reach potential, reach has become less of an indicator of performance after adjustments to the Facebook algorithm. Furthermore, aiming purely for reach can risk over commercialising content and in turn alienating consumers. Although suggestions on how to increase reach have been discussed, there is no explicit suggestion of how much *reach* a Facebook brand page should be aiming to achieve. Engagement is put forward as a much more appropriate measurement of performance with interactivity, information accuracy, credibility and prior brand association put forward as central to effective content (Aydin, 2016).

2.3.2. Engagement

In contrast to Ballings et al. (2015), Pronschinske et al. (2012) argue that engagement should be considered as the defining metric for Facebook brand pages. Facebook describes engagement as;

"Actions taken by brand page followers on brand page content and include *post clicks*, *post likes*, *post comments* and *post shares*."

("Facebook Engagement," 2016).

Pronschinske et al. (2012) asserts that in order for benefits of Facebook to be realised fans must be engaged over simply being made aware of a brand through *reach*. Rappaport (2007) supports this quoting Digitas, CEO David Kenny who concisely summarises that;

"Engagement Trumps Awareness" (p. 4.)

Pronschinske et al. (2012) position engagement as the most important Facebook metric by asserting that it is a more relevant function of a relationship marketing paradigm. Pronschinske et al. (2012) hypothesised that total Facebook *page likes* were a function of the page's ability to cultivate a relationship with consumers via four key components, (1) disclosing details about the business aspect of the sport organisation, (2) engaging and involving fans through interactivity, (3) disseminating relevant information and (4) communicating authenticity.

Disclosure, according to Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas (2009) refers to organisations being transparent with consumers. Disclosure can be ensured by remaining accurate, honest and open when updating consumers on the organisations activities and performance (Waters et al., 2009). Ensuring consumers are kept up to date with information directly from the organisation as opposed to third party sources, such as media outlets, further enhances the level of disclosure between an organisation and its consumers (Waters et al., 2009). Kelleher (2007) strongly advocates for organisations to incorporate this aspect as a central component of their social network strategy.

Involvement refers to the interactivity and variety of content presented to the consumer. Jo and Kim (2003) determined from the survey results of 197 graduate students that higher interactivity improved the relationship from the consumer's perspective. Of eight relationship variables including trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationships, community involvement, reputation and exchange relationships only the perception of an organisations community involvement was not improved by higher interactivity content (Jo & Kim, 2003).

Information refers to relevance and applicability of what is presented to the consumer (Waters et al., 2009). Facebook pages should ensure all information is useful to their followers while remaining relevant to the organisation (Carrera et al., 2008; Crespo, 2007; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). For sports teams in particular this means utilising all of Facebooks features to disseminate timely information to consumers such as events, videos, photos and milestones (Pronschinske et al., 2012). Waters et al. (2009) found these four aspects to be the most prominent in affecting user engagement. According to Pronschinske et al. (2012) authenticity is established through transparent, legitimate and trustworthy brand content. Ultimately these three components look to generate trust which in turn enhances authenticity (Kim & Trail, 2011; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Within the context of Facebook authenticity can be impacted by unsolicited fan created pages and, more recently, non-verified organisation pages (Pronschinske et al., 2012).

Pronschinske et al. (2012) investigated the Facebook pages of professional sport franchises from the four major North American sports leagues *(n = 114; NFL, NBA, NHL, MLB)*. Utilising a statistical regression Pronschinske et al. (2012) assessed the significance of base population, weeks involved on Facebook, winning percentage, play-off berth, authenticity, involvement, disclosure and information dissemination in terms of influence on t*otal page likes*.

Findings from this study revealed that winning percentage *(n = 1.52)*, authenticity *(n = .49)* and involvement *(n = .36)* all had statistically significant influence on the number of *total page likes* whereas disclosure *(n = .04)* and information *(n = -.05)* did not (Pronschinske et al., 2012). Furthermore, winning percentage had more of an influence when it was considered in conjunction with Pronschinske et al. (2012) components of relationship cultivation than without *(n = 1.63).*

Based on the literature *engagement* appears to be a more appropriate measurement of Facebook brand page performance given its relevancy to a relationship marketing approach. Winning percentage has the most significant

effect on performance while content authenticity and interactivity are also significant factors. However, no suggestion was made in prior literature as to what is an acceptable level of engagement for a brand page to average.

2.3.3. Posts

The performance of Facebook brand page posts makes up a sizable proportion of recent literature (Ballings et al., 2015; Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) investigated 314 Facebook brand pages in Europe to establish a set of metrics to be utilised in measuring performance, and proposed three metrics that gauge consumer involvement with a brand that are directly relatable to Facebook actions. The first is popularity represented by post '"*likes*", commitment is represented by "*comments*" and lastly virality is represented by "*shares*". Following a validation process Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) selected 10 companies to apply the metrics to, recording the past 50 posts from each. Their findings revealed that posts consistently averaged more *likes (n = 1,500*) than *comments (n = 123*) and more *comments* than *shares (n = 29*)*. In other words, *likes* accounted for 91.00% of a page's engagement on posts, *comments* accounted for 7.00% of engagement while *shares* accounted for just 2.00%.

With regards to the components of engagement shared content has a higher tendency to generate further engagement from other consumers such as *likes* and *comments* (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013; Gerlitz & Helmond, 2011, 2013). Vries et al. (2012) explain that *shares* within Facebook help to generate digital word of mouth (WoM). This is important for sport organisations as sharing, within the context of Facebook would therefore also be the most outward display of BIRG and/or CORF (Cialdini et al., 1977; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). *Shares,* although the most infrequent, are the most effective form of interaction in generating further engagement with content.

Extant literature strongly focuses on how to increase *total network size*, *post reach* and *post engagement*. However, increases are discussed purely at face value and in the absence of context. For example, the literature does not

establish what could be an expected level of *likes*, *comments* and *shares* for a post based on the *total network size* of the page the content was posted by. Achen (2016) does provide some tangible context with regards to the influence of Facebook performance by quantifying its impact on sport event attendance in the NBA finding that the number of Facebook fans was significant indicator of home game attendance. However, in practical terms the current body of literature would lead practitioners to accept any increase in *post reach*, *post engagement*, *likes comments* and *shares* as not only acceptable but a reflection of effective practice. This sets a false precedent that could lead the performance of any page to be argued as effective or even ineffective.

2.4. Proportional Performance

2.4.1. Reach

Ballings et al.'s (2015) research focussed on increasing network size to increase *reach*. While this confirms a relationship between *total network size* and *reach* it does not provide context as to what is an appropriate level of *reach* given a certain network size. Given that traditional digital branded content would expect to generate a proportion of advert views from the expected number of hits on a website page, scholars suggest that Facebook branded content is similar in this respect (Plummer et al., 2007; Rappaport, 2007). *Reach* that equals more than *total network size* could be justified as effective performance because branded content is potentially being seen by new consumers increasing the chance of new engagement and in turn new relationships being cultivated. It is proposed then, that organisations could therefore expect to *reach* a certain proportion of their *total network size* as an indication of performance (DeMers, 2015; Manson, 2014; Sloane, 2014).

2.4.2. Engagement

Engagement is commonly considered to refer to the number of people who interacted with content. Pronschinske et al. (2012) found that winning percentage had a significant influence on levels of *engagement*. Similarly, Achen (2016) found that NBA teams with larger total networks also

experienced higher levels of *engagement*. That said no context is provided to indicate what is an acceptable level of *engagement* for a Facebook brand page. If Facebook *engagement* is considered within a relationship paradigm, engaged consumers are more likely to exhibit BIRG and CORF (Achen, 2016; Bee & Kahle, 2006; Bengini et al., 2009). In this sense, scholars argue *engagement* is the best indication of an on-going relationship with the consumer group that follow a page (Achen, 2016; Pronschinske et al., 2012). In a more traditional digital marketing setting *engagement* could be compared to the number of consumers that open and click through when receiving direct email. *Total network size* could be readily compared to the number of people who have agreed to receive direct emails (Unal et al., 2011). Therefore, it could be logical to consider *engagement* against *total network size* as well as winning percentage.

2.4.3. Posts

The content and performance of actual Facebook posts by brand pages underpins the majority of research on social networking sites (Achen, 2016; Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013; Malthouse et al., 2016; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Although Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) quantified expected levels of *likes*, *comments* and *shares* on a post there still remains the absence of comparable context. Furthermore, extant literature only considers positive performance metrics, and to date, no known research has considered negative metrics such as *hide posts*, *hide all posts*, *unfollow page and unlike page*. The literature fails to provide any contextual approaches that would allow practitioners to accurately critique both positive and negative performance as well compare it against other sport team brand page posts on Facebook.

2.5. Summary

The literature clearly documents a shift from a transactional paradigm to relationship paradigm in marketing. This shifting school of thought, along with social and technological drivers gave rise to the rapid growth and popularity of social media particularly Facebook. Facebook as a platform has characteristics that coincide with a relationship marketing paradigm as well as complement unique

elements of the sport product, and it has clearly been acknowledged as an effective contemporary marketing tool in recent literature. The literature widely acknowledges and advocates the use of Facebook brand pages by sports organisations particularly professional teams.

To operate a Facebook brand page there is a need for practitioners to be aware of the benefits and challenges of managing a Facebook brand page. Benefits of Facebook as a marketing platform are knowing consumers as individuals, maintaining brand presence, receiving instantaneous feedback and providing the ability to assess the consumer organisation relationship status. Challenges of managing a Facebook brand page include credibility and reliability, managing the impact of consumer driven content, identifying offline consumers, allocating sufficient resources and guaranteeing the *reach* of brand content. The literature outlines that page administration involves using relational keywords in posts, ensuring content is entertaining, informative, personalised and with prior permission and brand association. Lastly high frequency of posts that are overly commercialised should be avoided.

Facebook performance measures in the literature include *reach*, *engagement* and components of *engagement* on brand page posts (*likes*, *comments* and *shares*). *Reach* as a measurement is in line with traditional digital advertising metrics but is also opposed as being too transactional in nature. *Engagement* is pushed as more appropriate measurement of Facebook performance as it is more relatable to a relationship marketing approach. Winning percentage, as well as *total network* size, are shown to influence level of engagement for sport brand pages. Both total *page reach* and *total page engagement* are influenced by performance of posts with *likes*, *comments* and *shares* positioned as the most important metrics to consider.

Despite the growing body of research on Facebook as a marketing platform the literature clearly lacks any investigation into quantifying performance in a manner that is contextual and comparable within Facebook. Much of the research focusses on measurements of *reach*, *engagement*, *likes*, *comments* and *shares* taken at face value. Although current findings indicate how to improve on these performance measurements there is no comparable data or system to confirm that a brand page

is performing at an effective level. Furthermore, negative performance indicators are yet to be analysed.

Considering this, this thesis aims to address the shortage of research in this area by examining Facebook practice within the context of New Zealand Provincial Rugby.

For the purposes of this research four provincial unions were approached to establish the perceived challenges and benefits of Facebook brand page administration. Analytical Facebook Data from all four pages was also utilised to examine page performance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

A relativist viewpoint was assumed in order to acknowledge Facebook brand page performance as a subjective social reality (Killam, 2013; M. Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). Furthermore as M. Smith et al. (2012) explain a relativist viewpoint acknowledges that within the context of Facebook different practitioners and researchers may deem effectiveness to be determined by different approaches depending on what in particular they are aiming to achieve. A relativist viewpoint is also assumed in order to openly acknowledge the speed at which Facebook changes and that changes will result in analytical measurements, content types and desirable user behaviours evolving and shifting over time (M. Smith et al., 2012).

A constructivist epistemology was adopted to openly acknowledge the value of multiple data sources including Facebook practitioners, observations made by the author and analytical measurements (Christie & Fleischer, 2009; Killam, 2013; M. Smith et al., 2012). Essentially constructionism allows for a triangulation of data to better address the relevancy of assessing Facebook performance as per the research questions. Furthermore, given the research attempts to look beyond face value analytical measurements of Facebook performance, constructionism offers the flexibility to make assumptions beyond the sampled data in order to provoke further research in this area (M. Smith et al., 2012). It is acknowledged that access to data can be a weakness of a constructionist approach. However, all data sources including administrator access to all Facebook brand pages as well as the availability of the page administrators themselves was confirmed prior to the commencement of the research.

The research is approached from a pragmatist perspective in order to better solicit a focus on practical problems and the production of practical solutions (Putnam & Mumby, 2013). Cherryholmes (1992) explains that pragmatism is suited to clarifying intellectual concepts. Therefore, a pragmatist perspective is suitable for exploring the research rationale, given that it is based on an intellectual concept born out of practical first-hand experience and ultimately seeking practical solutions (Cherryholmes, 1992). A pragmatic approach also allows for flexibility within a mixed-methods approach (Putnam & Mumby, 2013). Given that social media

research is a rapidly evolving area pragmatism allows the research design to adapt to ensure the most effective qualitative and quantitative methods are used as the investigation develops (Putnam & Mumby, 2013).

The research outlines the perspective of three NPC Facebook brand page administrators as well as the observations of the author as a page administrator and explores how their interpretation of best practice compares to their analytic performance on a face value and proportional basis.

3.2. Method

A mixed-method case study was used in the research. Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007) highlight that opinions on case studies vary in terms of their appropriate placing in research design. However Stake (2008) sees it as a prominent method of inquiry involving an in depth thick description and detailed analysis of a bounded system. A mixed-method approach is also highly suited to addressing the complexity of social science research (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) asserts that utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods increase the level of triangulation that can be gained around a research problem.

Triangulation is an important characteristic of mixed-method case study research (Maxwell, 2004; Yin, 1999). Olsen (2004) explains that triangulation involves mixing two to three viewpoints from different data sources to provide an in-depth understanding of the research topic. Furthermore, Maxwell (2004) argues that triangulation is an effective means by which to reduce uncertainty and biases. Bickman and Rog (2008) outline the importance of triangulating using different collection methods as well as data types. This research includes qualitative and quantitative data types as well as three sources including Facebook analytical data, questionnaire responses and the researchers own journal entries as a brand page administrator.

The research uses a prominent mixed-method case study design called concurrent triangulation (Creswell, 2013). Concurrent triangulation involves collecting both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. Data is then compared in order to establish confirmation, disconfirmation, validation or corroboration (Borrego,

Douglas, & Amelink, 2009; Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) cites well validated substantiated findings and shorter collection periods as one of the potential advantages from utilising concurrent triangulation. Disadvantages include difficulty studying a phenomenon effectively when trying to comprehend both quantitative and qualitative data sets. Creswell and Clark (2011) explain that discrepancies can emerge when comparing quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative research methods and resulting data are viewed as the most accurate, reliable, valid and repeatable (Bernard, 2013; Creswell, 2013). Quantitative data is particularly valuable in demonstrating trends over time (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Given the analytical elements of Facebook a quantitative method is an appropriate form of collection and analysis (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative data produces an objective view of a phenomenon ensuring that results represent a viewpoint in the absence of external influence (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). However, as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) explain no quantitative data can truly be produced in the absence of moral, ethical and preferential influence as it is ultimately produced by a human being with either a conscious or sub-conscious agenda. Furthermore, quantitative data can often be prematurely assumed as fact without fully considering the political, environmental, social, technological, economic and legal context the research was produced in (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Qualitative research methods, although contested as untrustworthy by some, produce rich data that is otherwise hard to quantify (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The data produced by qualitative research provides insight into the intangible influences that produced a phenomenon (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As Creswell (2013) explains qualitative methods are effective in understanding a person's social experience and interpretation of a bounded system. Considering that Facebook performance is connected to a page administrator who will interpret effective practice within their own context qualitative data provides an important insight (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, it must be acknowledged that qualitative research methods are vulnerable to the interpretation of the researcher and therefore can lack objectivity (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In response to the lack of objectivity Huberman

and Miles (2002) explain that it is important to implement transparency, coherency and clarity into the research design so data may be open to interpretation but maintain the original accounts of participants.

3.3. Participants

A convenience sample was used to select the participating teams. Four NPC team brand pages made up the research sample. The researcher was the brand page administrator as part of their role as Brand Manager, for one team. Three teams competed in the Premiership division while one competed in the championship division for 2015. Two teams were based in cities that also had Super Rugby franchises. Whilst the remaining two were selected as they did not have a Super Rugby team based in their province but were affiliated to the same Super Rugby teams as the other participants respectively.

One of the pages was established in March 29, 2012. While the other three were established on March 29, 2010 followed by July 24, 2010 and November 10, 2010 respectively. All four pages are run by a professional whose role is part of the marketing and/ or public relations function. P4's administrator has had control of the team's brand page the longest at 30 months although they had had no prior social media page administrator experience. P3 (12 months in control of the page), P2 (12 months) and P1's (11 months) page administrators had social media experience in a prior role.

Anonymity was provided to all page administrators who were required to sign informed consent forms *(see Appendix Two)*. Administrator access was granted to the researcher by all participating page administrators to facilitate the collection of analytical data. Page administrators were approached in mid-June 2015 with approximately eight weeks until the commencement of the NPC regular season.

3.4. Data Collection

Polonsky and Waller (2011) as well as Malhorta (2010) class primary data as new information gathered specifically to address the research topic. For the purposes of this research two forms of primary data were collected. The first were two sets of questionnaire answers completed by one page administrator from each

participating provincial union other than the author. The first questionnaire (questionnaire A) was answered in the last week of June 2015, prior to both the season and quantitative data collection while the second (questionnaire B) was answered in the first week of December 2015 following the conclusion of the season and the quantitative data collection *(see Appendix Three & Appendix Four)*. Boynton and Greenhalgh (2004) explain that questionnaires are a common method for data collection.

Mixed questionnaires were used containing a combination of closed and open ended items (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Closed items include simple 'yes' and 'no' answers, as well as Likert Scales (Oppenheim, 2000; Sapsford, 2006). Closed items are more readily quantified however the selectable answers are pre-determined by the researcher often resulting in the respondents' desired answer not being available. (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004). Griffith, Cook, Guyatt, and Charles (1999) found from a survey of 1192 Canadian Physicians that 33.00% of closed questions were not answered while 55.00% of open ended questions were not answered. However Boynton and Greenhalgh (2004) explain that open ended questions offer an opportunity for respondents to reveal personal insight from their own context. Personal insight from respondents adds richness to the data allowing for a more in-depth interpretation by the researcher (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It must be acknowledged that collating responses to open items into recognisable themes is time consuming and challenging (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Boynton and Greenhalgh (2004) explain that prior planning along with carefully considered codes can mitigate the challenges of open items.

The second source of primary data was compiled from an autoethnographic journal recorded by the researcher from late June to early December 2015. Duncan (2004) outlines that the salient difference between an autoethnography and an ethnography is that the researcher is already an insider within the research context as opposed to trying to become an insider. The researcher held the position of Brand Manager at P4 and was the sole person in charge of the P4 Facebook brand page. Further, Duncan (2004) explains accessibility, permissibility and unobtrusiveness issues are minimal for autoethnographers compared to

ethnographers as they are already immersed. Effective auto-ethnographies consist of observation, reflective writing, interviewing and documenting artefacts. For the purposes of this research observations were recorded in a journal format along with reflective writing and documentation of artefacts in the form of screenshots. Both Atkinson (2006) and Sparkes (2002) criticise auto-ethnographies for being self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective and individualised. Duncan (2004) and Wall (2006) cite lack of systematic and methodological rigor as one of the criticisms levelled at auto-ethnographies. However, Reed-Danahay (2009) argues that autoethnographic data is more authentic then ethnographic data. Laslett, Church, Gullestad, Kaplan, and Kreiger (1999) also argue that auto-ethnographies tell as opposed to infer meanings and relationships. Bochner (2001) and Ellis (1991) argue that no research is conducted in the absence of co-constructed societal influences and meanings. Conversely, Wall (2006) maintains that rich data, personal experience, connection to cultural context and influence are therefore what strengthen auto-ethnographic data collection.

Secondary data was sourced from Facebook's analytical pages found in the brand page administrator consoles (*see Figure 1*). A constructed week sample was utilised to collect data from all four of the participating team's Facebook brand pages. Stempel (1989) explains that constructed week samples see variation of content on different days of the week as cyclical. Therefore, all days of the week must be represented (Stempel, 1989). Days are selected at random to represent a seven-day week over a defined period. According to Riffe, Aust, and Lacy (2009) constructed week sampling is suitable in the professional sport and fan *engagement* setting as results tend to be weighted towards the weekend when games take place. Wallace et al. (2011) effectively used a constructed week sample to examine social media of NCAA and Big 12 Conference athletics for an entire year. For the purposes of this research constructed week sampling was used to represent a seven-day week during the pre, regular and post season periods. Both pre-and post-season data was randomly selected from a window of six weeks. Regular season data was randomly selected across the full ten-week window accounting for all ten rounds of the NPC.
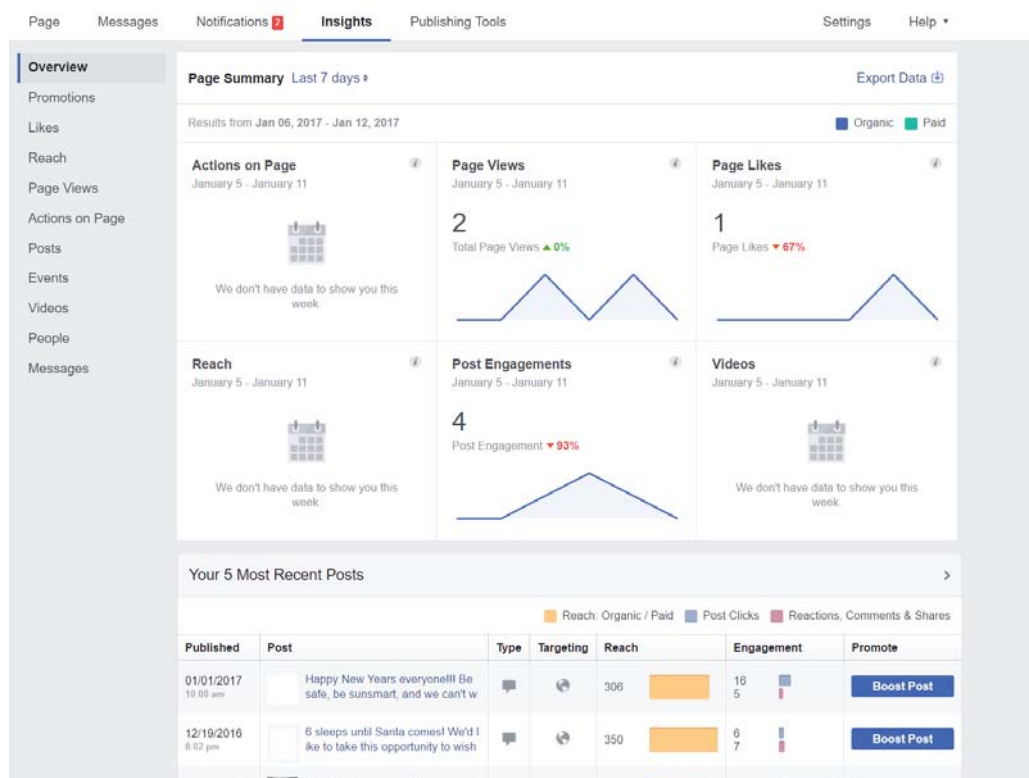
Figure 1: Facebook insights as displayed in the brand page administrator console

On each of the constructed week sample days, data for each post made by the participating brand pages was exported to an Excel spreadsheet from the Facebook brand page administrator panel (*see Table 1*). To ensure consistency all posts were recorded at 10.00pm (NZST) the same evening. *Total reach*, *engagement* and components of *engagement* (e.g. *likes*, *comments* and *shares*) were recorded for each individual post. Peripheral insights were also recorded for each post including *date*, *day of the week*, *time posted*, *post type*, *post characters*, *content description* and when applicable number of *hashtags*, *hashtags used*, *post clicks*, *photo views*, *clicks to play*, *link clicks*, *video views*, *30 seconds or less video views* and *average view duration* of videos. Data for *paid content* was also recorded, if applicable, including *budget spent*, *paid reach*, *total paid actions*, *paid photo clicks* and *paid link*. Negative user actions were also recorded for each post including *hide post*, *report as spam*, *hide all posts* and *unlike page*. As noted earlier negative actions were considered as they could provide important insight into consumer-organisation relationship status as they may indicate disengagement and break down of the relationship marketing process among a consumer group.

Table 1

Constructed Three-Week Data Collection Period

Day	Data Collection Period		
	Pre-Season	During Season	Post-Season
Monday	13/7/15	19/10/15	16/11/15
Tuesday	07/07/15	06/10/15	27/10/15
Wednesday	23/7/15	09/08/15	2/12/15
Thursday	29/07/15	15/10/15	26/11/15
Friday	10/07/15	04/09/15	13/11/15
Saturday	08/08/15	26/09/15	21/11/15
Sunday	19/07/15	30/08/15	08/11/15

In addition to individual post data, total page performance for the week was recorded on the Sunday of every week during the sample period at 10.00pm. Data was exported from the Facebook brand page administrator panel for each participating team into an Excel spreadsheet. Data recorded included *new page likes*, *total page likes*, *number of posts*, *total page reach*, *total reach on posts*, *total engagement*, *likes* on content, *comments* on content, *shares* on content, *post clicks*, page ranking as listed by Facebook and general notes about content posted that week.

3.5. Data Analysis

A six phase thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from both the questionnaires as well as the auto-ethnographic journal (B. Smith & Caddick, 2012). B. Smith and Caddick (2012) outline phase one of thematic analysis as involving full immersion in the collected data. Each set of questionnaire answers as well as the researchers journal entries were read three times with brief notes taken to establish an initial familiarity with the data. B. Smith and Caddick's (2012) second stage involves collating and coding the data in a manner that suits the research. All answers were compiled into one document under the corresponding question they most suited and numbered by team. The data was then coded per the team it came from using the corresponding number allocated to each team (i.e. P1, P2, P3 and P4) and numbered to indicate what part of the research it corresponded to as well

as the question it was in response to. For the purposes of the auto-ethnographic journal excerpts were coded according to the question they best referred to. For example, 'P1 A20.2.4' meant the quote or excerpt corresponded to P1, questionnaire A, question twenty and was thematically relevant to section 2.4 in the literature review. Coding in this manner helped ensure that a logical format was maintained throughout the final document. The platform set by phase one and two allowed for themes to be identified in phase three before being reviewed in phase four (B. Smith & Caddick, 2012). Phase five involved refining the themes identified and allocating the relevant sub sections in the literature review. For example, 'P1 20.2.4.2' meant the initial code had been refined further and now related specifically to section 2.4.2 of the literature review. B. Smith and Caddick's (2012) final stage of thematic analysis sees the creation of the research paper itself.

The quantitative data was analysed by producing mean averages for each of the analytical measurements recorded. This was done for both the data collected from the constructed week sample for post-performance as well as the weekly total performance data taken for overall page performance. Averages were then compared at face value[5] to determine how each of the participating brand pages performed when compared to the other. The mean averages were then represented as a percentage of average *total page likes* for the entire collection period. Performance of the participating pages was then compared again to see how ranking differed when considering the proportional measurements.

3.6. Research Limitations

Limitations exist with regards to the quality of the qualitative and quantitative data collected for the purposes of the research. Utilising questionnaires to collect data left no opportunity to explore open ended answers further to gain clarity and insight from participants (Klenke, 2008; Yin, 2009). Inability to further clarify questionnaire answers limited the depth of data available to answer the first research question resulting in a heavier reliance on the autoethnography. Writing an auto-ethnography was exposing at times for the author when it came to discussing core product performance as well as the researchers own performance

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[5] For the purposes of this research 'face value' refers to Facebook data that has been taken straight from the Facebook administrator panel and not adjusted using any equations.

as a page administrator. As Méndez (2013) explains auto-ethnographies can be challenging and complicated as they require a degree of honesty that may provoke professional retaliation from colleagues or peers. Once again this made it difficult to address the first research question with some auto-ethnography extracts lacking in honest clarification. While there is now a plethora of social media related research quantitatively the research is limited by the shortage in the current body of social media literature that focusses on this area. The quantitative data could only be assessed within its own context with minimal prior literature that takes on this research focus to make direct comparisons to and in turn the absence of longitudinal data to compare results to. Although this did not directly impact the ability of the researcher to answer the second and third research questions, it did limit the ability of the researcher to ultimately confirm whether the performance measurements utilised were generalisable to other contexts.

Although questionnaires can be used to generate a large amount of data from participants through open and closed responses they limit the ability of the author to clarify answers and enhance the richness of the data collected (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004; Klenke, 2008; Yin, 2009). This limitation could have been addressed by using semi-structured interviews to generate the rich description necessary to answer the first research question (Klenke, 2008; Yin, 2009). However, conducting interviews with industry professionals can often be challenging in terms of geographical location of participants and finding suitable times to conduct interviews (Carr & Worth, 2001; Whiting, 2008). Therefore, questionnaires were viewed as the most appropriate qualitative data collection method for this study.

Auto-ethnographies as a qualitative data collection method produce rich descriptions due to the full immersion of the auto-ethnographer in a context they are viewed as an expert in (Duncan, 2004). However, auto-ethnographies can limit the honesty of data produced by the auto-ethnographer given that they have a vested interest in the context they are evaluating (Méndez, 2013). While some may argue that this could have been addressed by alternatively triangulating data with an ethnography or interview on another NPC team and their Facebook page administration to be assessed alongside the questionnaire answers, an auto-ethnography allowed for increased accessibility, permissibility and unobtrusiveness

as well as simultaneously acknowledging the researcher as a page administrator of one of the Facebook brand pages. Lastly including an autoethnography helped to provide rich descriptive data that at times may have been lacking following questionnaire responses (Wall, 2006).

3.7. Ethics

The research was peer-reviewed and recorded as low risk by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee following the completion of a Massey University Screening Question and subsequent low risk notification form by the researcher *(see Appendix Five)*. Data collected for the purposes of this research was collected from three sources, questionnaires, auto-ethnographic journal completed by the researcher and Facebook administration panels of all four participating provincial unions.

Participants completing the questionnaires completed participant informed consent letters and were assured their identity and information they provided would remain confidential (*see Appendix Eight*). Once participants had voluntarily opted into the study and completed the informed consent letters questionnaires were sent directly to the individual provincial union representatives prior to, and following the completion of, the 2015 NPC season. Questionnaire responses were analysed solely by the researcher and stored in a password protected file to ensure full confidentially was maintained.

In order to complete an autoethnographic journal informed consent and in turn permission was provided by the CEO of the team the researcher worked for. The research was deemed by this team and the researcher to be of mutual benefit to not only the researcher and their organisation but the wider rugby community in New Zealand. Informed consent from this union ensured that all four provincial unions had explicitly provided the same level of consent for the research to go ahead.

To complete the data collection, the informed consent letters outlined access required to each pages Facebook administration consoles. Following the completion of the informed consent letters a phone call was made to the other

three respondents in order to clarify the request for access to their respective brand pages. The researcher was then given administrator access for the duration of the study before access was removed at the completion of the of the data collection period.

4. Results

The results demonstrate that Facebook brand page administrators appear to understand Facebook in terms of its contemporary relevance, benefits, challenges and administration. The results show that *total network size* has a large influence on rankings per *total reach*, *engagement* and individual post performance of *likes* and *comments* with P3, P1 and P4 ranked from first to third respectively. Conversely the results show that P2 appears to have underperformed in terms of *total reach*, *engagement* and post-performance considering their *total network size*. Finally, the results show that considering *total reach*, *engagement* and post-performance of *likes*, *comments* and *shares* as a proportion of *total network size* alters the face value rankings considerably. Proportional performance is more readily comparable to how page rankings were listed by page administrators with P1, P4, P2 and P3 ranked first through fourth respectively.

Results are presented in a descriptive fashion with associated data, generated from questionnaire answers, auto-ethnographic journal entries and Facebook brand page administrator panels.

4.1. Facebook in Practice

4.1.1. Facebook Use

Of the four participating unions, all have Facebook brand pages. All participants indicated Facebook as the most important social media;

> *"Our quickest and biggest tool to reach those interested in our product. Instant communication and easily measurable."*
>
> *P1 B22.2.2.1*

P2 dedicated the most time to Facebook overall listing it as accounting for 30.00% of their weekly workload. Two others both dedicate 10.00% of a working week to Facebook. Within my own role at P4, 2.50% of my average workload is dedicated to the P4 Facebook brand page. All participants, and I, acknowledged that social media administration must be carefully managed within the context of wider responsibilities allocated to a role:

"Facebook is actually a very small part of my role. Being in a non-profit sport organisation that relies heavily on community funding my role is made up of multiple components. My role is split across event planning and execution along with marketing strategy and marketing collateral design. On top of this I am also responsible for maintaining the two websites from a design point of view as well as a content point of view. This leaves little time for Facebook really."

<div align="right">

P4 B4.2.2.1

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However, from the respondents, only P2 listed social media as being one of the biggest parts of their job. Instead most listed marketing as their biggest time consumer. Taking the sum of the workloads provided and dividing it by the number of provincial unions participating yields an average weekly workload of 13.00% dedicated to Facebook.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, given they dedicate more time to social media, only P2 regularly planned their content more than one week in advance. P1 and P3 would only schedule content the day before or post in real time. For the P4 brand page content is also planned a day in advance or posted in real time. P1, P2 and P4 all cited the need to remain dynamic and remaining able to post content in real time as the main reason for not planning in advance:

"I do a loose monthly plan, then a more specific two-week plan."

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P2 A22.2.2.1

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"I tend to plan content a day in advance, but I schedule posting on the day in case other information comes up that needs to take priority such as a new signing. I can then post the content we were going to on another day."

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P4 A22.2.2.1

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Two respondents reported similar traits that they saw as necessary for Facebook practitioners to possess, and from my auto-ethnography, I also listed similar traits. However, one neglected to provide their opinion:

"Factual accurate, attention to detail and sense of humour"

P1 A6.2.2.1

"Probably someone who is cautious and thorough, someone who is innovative and creative, witty, thick-skinned or able to take consumer feedback, curious "

P2 A6.2.2.1

"I firmly believe that sense of humour and a willingness to try new things are crucial, I have to be ingrained and passionate about what I am doing and what P4 represent."

P4 A6.2.2.1

All four participating unions utilise Facebook as one of their most important communication channels. Only P2 planned content more than a week in advance with the other three unions opting for a dynamic real time approach to posting content. The provincial unions listed similar personal traits as being preferred in order to be a Facebook brand page administrator.

4.1.2. Facebook Benefits

A key benefit of Facebook use, as expressed by all the provincial unions, was the ability to interact easily and build knowledge of fans. *Engagement* with consumers is seen by the respondents as one of the many facets of social media usage. For two respondents, there was an acknowledgement of the benefit of advanced consumer interaction and in turn increased knowledge of fans that Facebook provides. All participants also explicitly or implicitly cited Facebook as a tool to evaluate relationship status with consumers. This was particularly relevant when they considered it in relation to being an essential part of relationship management. I felt Facebook was the most accurate means for assessing how our consumers felt about our team:

"Yes - it's how a large portion of our audience remains in touch with our organisation. We also find it more user friendly and easier to navigate than most websites and it provides instant interaction [with the consumers]."

P2 B23.2.2.2

"Over the years, I have recognised many fans that are constantly on our social media and very active with comments and shares. I have always tried to reinforce their behaviour by liking their comments and replying if relevant to ensure they continue to engage with the content. Almost like positive reinforcement."

P4 B23.2.2.2

"Facebook gives us the most accurate picture of how people are engaging with our brand and how they feel towards it."

P4 B22.2.2.2

One of the inherent features of sport is its unpredictability, which has the potential to impact on fan sentiment (Kim & Trail, 2011). Social media provide fans with an outlet through which they can engage in BIRG and/or CORF behaviours. Sport organisations can witness such behaviour on their pages, and thus view the potential impact on the fans' relationship with the team. For instance, P1 explained they would know if a loss had impacted their relationship with their consumers by the tone of *comments* they received. Similarly, P2 found their Facebook analytics would stay the same but their consumers were a lot more negative towards the brand following a loss:

"We probably had similar engagement, but the negative comments after a loss far outweighed the positive ones after a win."

P2 B76.2.2.2

This is an important finding that the provincial unions need to be mindful of, particularly given the power of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and in turn word of mouth (WOM) marketing. Utilising social media to observe BIRG and/or CORF behaviours can provide valuable insight into how responsive a

consumer group may be to the next marketing activity carried out by the team and the likelihood of positive e-WOM and WOM being generated.

Despite this feedback only one of the participating provincial unions reported regularly recording performance to evaluate the relationship with their consumer group over time as opposed to purely glancing at the current analytical measures:

"We run through analytics .... [weekly, before] setting targets going forward."

P1 B43.2.2.2

The results clearly indicate that the provincial unions utilise Facebook to make real time assessments on their relationship status with their consumers. This is a valuable insight that should continue to inform their practice moving forward to ensure they can manage their relationship with consumers and influence it in a positive well timed manner.

4.1.3. Facebook Challenges

The central challenge described by all the provincial unions was described as a lack of control over core product performance. One of the main features of the sports product is unpredictability and inconsistency. These features can often leave fans despondent with a sport brand. Product extensions and relationship maintenance through alternative content, aside from that referring to the core product, can be strategies that help to mitigate the impact of poor core product performance. In my own experience impact of poor core product performance was very noticeable during 2015:

"We have had their worst season to date, the impact on our brand page has been compounded by the fact that last year [2014] the team had their best season so I feel that expectations were high among our consumers. When things did not go as planned I did not have as of successful posts as I usually have in the season."

P4 B28.2.2.3

Both P3 and P2 indicated UGC credibility as another challenge of running a brand page, P2 in particular cited struggling during the 2014 season when their winning percentage sat at just 10.00% and they were ultimately relegated from the premiership:

"It's very tough to stay silent during those times where you just want to write back and give people a piece of your mind I refer to the 2014 season which was somewhat of a challenge…"

P2 A13.2.2.3

"Keyboard Warriors! People often find negative spin on things..."

P3 A13.2.2.3

Both P2's and P3's *comments* add another level to the difficulty of marketing an unpredictable core product. It appears the reaction of the consumer group is also unpredictable particularly when a team is performing poorly. Consumer reactions being unpredictable would suggest that posting content that contrasts with what is already proven to solicit positive responses from fans may damage a page's credibility.

P1 described maintaining their content credibility as one of their main challenges. P1 explained the challenge is presented by contractually obligated content that contrasts with what fans engage with on their page, and during the season, I noted the impact of commercially oriented content on *engagement* and *reach* for a post:

"Posting too much, balance of content from different departments, must do posts (sponsor of week, rep coach adverts, etc.) versus what the fans want…"

P1 A13.2.2.3

"… received very few entries for the "We Love It Here" promotion by NZR but one school did submit with one more home game to come... I compiled a web story to give the competition a push and encourage more entries. I posted it at peak time to try get the most reach and engagement but barely

anyone interacted with the post. It may have come across as too much like
an advertisement."

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P4 A13.2.2.3

</div>

Reduction in credibility due to overly commercialised content that does not engage a consumer group is clearly an important consideration for provincial unions. This is a good insight as it suggests that pages must be aware of what is relevant to their consumer group and in turn solicits *engagement*.

Content relevancy in my own context at P4 also came down to maintaining an appropriate frequency of posts and was most challenging during the competition's nine-month off-season:

"Posts in the off-season has always been challenging as they tend to be less
relevant to the competition we are in."

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P4 A21.2.2.3

</div>

"The biggest challenge now is keeping the page content relevant and
engaging over the long off season."

<div align="right">

P4 B38.2.2.3

</div>

Long off season periods are a unique aspect of the sport product. While social media provide the benefit of maintaining a dialogue with consumers for extended periods of time it also puts pressure on a sport organisation to deliver a valuable experience to consumers for the entire year. This is important for their brand to remain relevant and not risk losing consumers to other discretionary pursuits by not engaging with them.

Not maintaining a relevant dialogue with consumers via social media during the off-season may make it harder to identify offline consumers come the regular-season and target them with promotions. Although I believe that tangible impact via offline consumers was hard to identify P1 presented examples of overcoming this challenge:

"Yes, kids eat free example, kids doubled on the night (social media) was a major driver in marketing this promotion. Merchandise - a post is easily the biggest way to attract sales and awareness, proven with our hoodies in 2015."

P1 B23.2.2.3

This comment supports the need to maintain a dialogue with consumers during the off-season to ensure a strong relationship with consumers and in turn enhance the success of such promotions. After reviewing my brand page I still challenged the concept of offline based tangibility citing Facebook *engagement* as an indirect tangible outcome:

"Having fans send images of themselves wearing P4 merchandise all over the world is in my mind a tangible impact as it signals the strength of the brand in that it generates that kind of passion in people. Furthermore, at some point they would have had to purchase the merchandise."

P4 B23.2.2.3

All participants also cited resource based challenges in their feedback, which centred largely on time. P2 and P3, the largest *total network size*s of the participating pages, both described the difficulty of finding time to respond to consumers:

"Finding the time to run it effectively and reply to everyone who gets in touch (resource based)."

P2 A13.2.2.3

It could be suggested from the findings that *total network size* increases the number of direct responses a provincial union must make and therefore puts pressure on organisation-consumer relationship. If consumers are used to a certain response time they could become frustrated should this response time begin to increase. This highlights an important consideration for provincial unions, it could be suggested that provincial unions should establish a policy with regards to response time to ensure they can remain consistent as the

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page grows or remain aware that as a page grows they may need additional staff to respond to all enquiries in a timely manner.

P1 described finding time to create relevant content as a challenge citing Facebook's scheduling system as important in combating lack of resources. For the purposes of running the P4 brand page scheduling certainly improves the ability to manage the time dedicated to the platform. As mentioned knowing what appeals to a provincial consumer group and mitigating commercially obligated content is also a challenge when creating relevant content:

> *"Scheduling has been lifesaving today! Certainly, takes the edge off social media's constant need for attention. Scheduling allowed me to post important news at peak times for today while shifting some filler content[6] back a few days."*
>
> *P4 A24.2.2.3*

P2 further explained that the NPC post-season and off-season periods present challenges for providing relevant content on the P2 page. This was attributed to the page administrator having to run the brand page for the P2 and a SR Franchise as well:

> *"Continuing the content through the off-season [is our biggest challenge], with our focus now shifting to Super Rugby."*
>
> *P2 B38.3.2.2.3*

P2's perceived human resource challenge may therefore be exaggerated by the need for the administrator to run two pages. This would highlight a need for provincial rugby unions to ensure that their page administrators are responsible for one brand page, particularly, as mentioned, considering that their time is already predominantly committed to other areas of their roles.

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[6] Filler content refers to content that has no time urgency unlike news items and is used to keep consumers engaged when there is no news to report. For example, pictures of a passionate fan yelling at one of the home games.

Another key challenge that was identified was guaranteeing a successful level of *reach* and *engagement*. This was largely attributed to post type including plain text, photos and videos as well as content that made up the post as opposed to timing. For example, all participants reveal that posts that referred to a winning result, team selection or performance of players at international level performed favourably:

> "Other than teams winning, posts on player naming in national teams, successful news, interest pieces about well-known P3 players/people"
>
> *P3 A28.2.2.3*

Within my own context for the 2015 regular-season, I found that posts regarding winning results and losing results were in high contrast:

> "So far this year I can easily expect a post about losing to have around 1000.00% less engagement then one about winning. I know some fans slam their teams for losing but ours tend to just disengage entirely I'm not sure which I would prefer."
>
> *P4 B75.2.2.3*

National selection and performance was particularly prominent for the P4 brand page. For example, based on the level of *reach* (*n* = 55,091) and *engagement* (*n* = 2,663) the most successful post of the 2015 season was one of our two All Blacks on their way to the Rugby World Cup:

> "Because the post was the All Blacks I believe we would have got a lot of people engaged that don't even support [P4] as their primary team as well as our own fans. Furthermore, because it was a selfie I feel it was a lot more engaging and relatable to consumers then a generic shot of them, for example, training."
>
> *P4 B55.2.2.3*

All participants had sought to guarantee positive performance through Facebook's paid media function or as it is termed "post boosting". P1 and P2

spent the most on paid media with $400 and $500 respectively for the entire collection period. For P4 spending totalled $150 while P3 only spent $10 during the collection period. However, all participants reported another key challenge was associated with being consistently prompted to boost posts by Facebook. While P1 and P3 reported generally ignoring suggestions P2 described concerns regarding the consistency and justification of such prompts:

"Generally, they were regarding game day ads, or videos, so made sense. But often it was match results etc., which don't really need to be boosted."

P2 B84.2.2.3

Whilst administrating my brand page there were several occasions I felt that the prompts to engage in paid media were unnecessary and under handed:

"Usually we get prompted to boost posts that are performing really well but recently Facebook has been suggesting that I boost some really poor performing content. This occurred despite the preceding posts being viral in nature. Facebook would still push the low engagement post saying "This post is performing 80.00% better than your recent posts. Boost it to get even better results" It seems to be trying to corner me into boosting. As if when I see the post they say is doing really well is not actually doing that well and thus I think to myself 'better boost it anyway'."

P4 B82.2.2.3

This prompting by Facebook could generate confusion among practitioners as when is appropriate to boost content. If Facebook is inconsistent with prompts to boost content it could require Facebook page administrators to have a 'better' understanding of not only their own Facebook analytics but also Facebook's algorithms. P2 was the only participant who reported making unplanned investment in paid media. During the season I cited further concerns regarding the circumstantial prompt that led to an additional investment:

"There were a couple of occasions in the season, including today, where I posted things that usually get a lot of attention like contract signings and they just did not take off despite being posted at peak times. This was strange and it really felt like Facebook was forcing our hand to get money out of us."

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P4 B86.2.2.3

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"We suffered several times in the season when our reach and engagement would decrease from a viral post to almost 0 on the next post the following day. I am questioning whether this is because Facebook's algorithm punishes pages that perform well organically but do not boost regularly. This to me further confirms that the Facebook algorithm is geared towards forcing us to invest."

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P4 B28.2.2.3

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4.1.4. Facebook Administration

As noted earlier, a defeat can solicit negative interactions with consumers. Whilst remaining credible through the type and subject of content posted has been outlined as important participants also acknowledge the importance of balancing honesty with positivity following a defeat and wording posts appropriately:

"Definitely. The tone and wording needs to be honest. [There's] no point in writing 'awesome game' if the team played terrible. You just need to word it in a positive manner that doesn't imply you have your head in the clouds."

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P2 A20.2.2.4

</div>

"Yes, it differs from game to game, we still try to put a good spin on any outcome."

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P3 A20.2.2.4

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I also acknowledged the need to remain honest but also would try to divert attention away from the core product by posting about other positive initiatives;

"Sometimes it is hard to face up to a loss on Facebook. Generally, I tend to change our language and just state facts...I am then quick to utilise cause marketing initiatives to soften the fan base .... So, I try to shift peoples focus onto the positives..."

P4 A20.2.2.4

Another key aspect related to Facebook administration that both P1 and P2 acknowledged, was the need to avoid transactional content. This is particularly important with respect to helping to achieve relationship marketing outcomes. P1 implicitly acknowledged the negative impact of being too transactional in nature citing their least successful content as that which was too commercial;

"...posts we have to do such as sponsor content does not go as well..."

P1 B72.2.2.4

P2 clearly explain the need to stay away from such content also citing that high frequency can also push consumers away as they begin to feel as though they are being marketed to generically as opposed to engaged relationally. In a relationship marketing sense, high frequency of content can therefore impact the level of trust between consumers and an organisations;

"[We try to] stay away from too much advertising, [or] spamming on behalf of sponsors, or just spamming people's news feeds in general. Too much content is not always good."

P2 A17.2.2.4

All participants indicated that they perceived that effective practice involved sustained two-way *engagement* with consumers. In this sense, P2 explained the use of Facebook to humanise their brand as a regular feature in the consumer conversation:

"Positive and frequent interaction, engaging and interesting content that has a certain personality and quirkiness behind it, relative to the season's campaign."

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P2 A12.2.2.4

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I also noted there is need to humanise the brand via Facebook in consistent manner:

"It enables us to give the brand a consistent voice which helps us position it as one with dignity and desirability aside and apart from on field results."

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P4 B22.2.2.4

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P1 succinctly explained the use of Facebook to push a relationship paradigm rhetoric. This rhetoric also appears to be guided by a consistent philosophy that guides their content:

"Put the fans at the centre of what we do, [with] informative interesting posts."

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P1 A12.2.2.4

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Putting the consumer at the centre of marketing efforts is paramount in relationship marketing. P3 described effective *engagement* as being more informative as opposed to relational therefore content was strongly focussed on telling fans when, where and what team based activities were taking place.;

"[Effective engagement relates to] keeping our fans informed and updated with all news from P3."

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P3 A12.2.2.4

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Although, based on the previous, the provincial unions make their Facebook brand pages more appealing relationship marketing channels it is not necessarily brand anthropomorphisation. None of the provincial unions describe their brand's personality traits. Establishing a brand personality could

ensure consistency particularly when new page administrators take over a brand page. Consistency in relationship exchanges with consumers from different staff members is central to mitigating sales person owned loyalty in relationship marketing. To put this suggestion in a social media context It could be argued that not establishing a brand personality to guide content could result in decreased *engagement* among consumers if a change in page administrator occurred.

For our page I feel there is a strong need for a balanced approach maintaining interactive relational content while also informing consumers. Therefore, content is often more about the brand voice trying to stimulate interaction with consumers using such things as humour, posts about standout fans, charitable causes, weighing in on rugby based debates and social media trends than purely when and where our events are taking place:

> *"Facebook is our main point of contact for the fans, and as such I aim to provide fans with various opportunities to interact with the brand. To achieve this interaction, I try and create engaging content that stimulates likes, comments and shares as well as informative content that encourages offline interaction such as outreach events as well as match day events."*
>
> *P4 A12.2.2.4*

The participating provincial unions all place importance on the content they post on their pages to facilitate a relationship marketing approach with their consumers. Therefore, types of posts are an important consideration for the provincial unions. All participants scored types of posts in a similar fashion (*see Table 2*). Video and photo were outlined as generating the most *reach* and *engagement*. Of the two P2 felt as though still images performed better than videos. Links to web pages, cover photo changes and text statuses were viewed as achieving less *reach* and *engagement*. Lastly profile picture and event posting were viewed as receiving the least reach and *engagement*.

Table 2

Effectiveness of Post type according to Provincial Unions (Likert Scale 1 – 5)

Type	P1	P2	P3	P4	Average (1:1)
Text Status	2	2	2	3	2.25
Photo Status	4	5	4	5	4.5
Video Status	4	4	4	4	4
Link + Preview Image	3	2	3	3	2.75
Cover Photo Change	3	3	3	2	2.75
Profile Photo Change	3	3	1	1	2
Event Post	1	-	1	3	1

From the constructed week sample, average *engagement* on posts that did not contain photos or videos was lower (*n* = 140.47) than posts that did contain photos and videos (*n* = 338.97) for all four participating pages (*see Table 3*). This adds weight to the provincial union responses that photos and videos are better performing than other types of content.

Table 3

Average reach and engagement for non-photo and non-video posts vs. photo and video posts

Non-Photo or Video Posts	P1	P2	P3	P4	Total Average
Reach Average	5199.818	3098	22457.286	2507.818	8315.7305
Engagement Average	82.546	75.25	300.714	103.364	140.469
Photo and Video Posts	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**Total Average**
Reach Average	5472.177	2832.875	15712.130	4368.161	7096.336
Engagement Average	291.059	210.375	639.044	215.387	338.966

The most notable discrepancy came with regards to event posts. Event posts are generated when a brand page activates an event via the event tab. Once all information has been filled in Facebook automatically posts the event information and photo to the brand pages' newsfeed. P4 was the only team that felt as though events were generally effective:

"Events are a mixed bag. Their reach and actions aren't recorded in your *engagement*. That being said posting in events or having a really popular one where people like and tag their friends in the post can be very successful."

<div align="right">P4 B55.2.2.4</div>

Ranking page performance against the other participating organisations generated some inconsistencies, particularly with regards to the ranking of P3 (*see Table 4*). Ranking was initially produced by the participating administrators based on their opinion of how the pages were performing relative to each other from first through fourth. P3 was the only participant to not be ranked in the same position twice or more despite having the largest number of total *likes (see Table 4).*

Table 4
Provincial union ranking according to page administrators

Team	P1	P2	P3	P4
P1	2nd	1st	1st	1st
P2	4th	2nd	4th	4th
P3	1st	4th	2nd	3rd
P4	3rd	3rd	3rd	2nd

None of the participants used the ranking system provided by Facebook. From my own perspective, I noted concerns over accuracy when looking at the rankings provided to both myself as an administrator and the P1 administrator:

"It is inaccurate as it never lines up with the insights data emailed out from Facebook or even just above on the page performance area. Furthermore, it is sporadic often indicating that a page has posted over 100 times for the week. Lastly it has both us and P1 ranked as 5th on our respective administrator consoles."

<div align="right">*P4 B492.2.4*</div>

The other participants had varying reasons as to why they did not use the ranking system provided by Facebook. P2 felt as though they should use the Facebook ranking system to provide better indication of how they were

performing while P3 thought they had no reason to. P3 may be justifying their lack of concern over rankings on its inaccuracy or on the fact that theirs is the largest Facebook brand page in the sample. P1 also felt no need to use Facebook ranking systems as they had their own measures in place.

4.2. Facebook Performance

4.2.1. Reach

P3 averaged the highest average *total reach* (n = 140,276.83) of the entire collection period, and scored the highest average *total reach* in the individual pre-season, regular-season and post-season periods (*see Table 5*). P1 had the second highest *total reach* average followed by P4 with n = 55,493.48 and n = 55,493.57 respectively. P2 on the other hand had the worst weekly average for *total reach* over the course of the entire 24-week data collection period (n = 46,575.17; *see Table 5*).

Table 5
Average Total page reach and total weekly post reach per week

Period	Team	Total Reach	% Change	Post Reach	% Change
Pre	P1	50644.00	-12	50358.83	-12
	P2	14197.17	360	13900.67	855
	P3	120114.17	25	118682.00	26
	P4	45487.67	9	45179.17	9
Regular	P1	67040.50	14	66630.30	16
	P2	93711.20	38	93076.10	38
	P3	206432.20	50	204110.10	51
	P4	63576.40	7	63315.00	7
Post	P1	34748.67	-11	34584.00	-11
	P2	9621.17	-13	9497.83	-13
	P3	64353.67	33	62718.00	35
	P4	46449.00	62	45861.00	63
TOTAL	P1	55493.57	3	55190.48	1
	P2	46968.70	106	46575.17	235
	P3	140276.83	36	138423.78	37
	P4	52919.48	21	52566.09	21

In contrast to the above, during the 10 weeks of the regular season P4 averaged the lowest average weekly *total reach* (n = 63,576.40), while P3 had the highest average during the regular season (n = 206,432.20). However, P2 had the second highest average (n = 93,711.20) representing an increase on

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their average weekly pre-season *reach* of approximately 80,000 ($n = 14,197.17$).

4.2.2. Engagement

Much like *reach* P3 also averaged the highest weekly *engagement* in the pre-season ($n = 15,026.17$), regular-season ($n = 20,404.40$) and post-season ($n = 7,354.67$). Similarly, P2 had the lowest weekly average total *engagement* for the entire data collection period ($n = 4,569.22$). However, during the regular-season P4 had the lowest *total engagement* week-to-week ($n = 6,565.70$; *see Table 6)*.

Despite the *total engagement* averages, discrepancies exist within the components of *engagement*. The same order of performance is not consistently reflected in the weekly averages of *total likes, comments*, and *shares*. For example, P4 records the highest average for *likes* per week ($n = 1,985.83$) during the off season followed by P1 ($n = 1,885.33$), P3 ($n = 1,689.33$) and finally P2 ($n = 368.17$). P1 averaged the highest amount of *comments* per week in both the pre-season ($n = 391.67$) and post-season ($n = 138.00$) collection periods with P2 recording the least in all three periods. With regards to *shares* P4 performed the worst during the regular-season collection period ($n = 116.10$), while P1 recorded the highest number of *shares* in the post-season ($n = 69.17$). Overall P4 had the lowest average of weekly *shares* for the entire collection period ($n = 83.39$). *Post clicks* is consistent with total engagement scores as well as averages during each collection period with the provinces ranking from one to four as P3, P1, P4, P2 respectively.

4.2.3. Posts

The performance of 137 individual posts was recorded across the four participating teams during the entire collection period. Of the 24 data collection days, P2 and P3 did not have any content on 12 and 6 occasions respectively. P1 had the most posts recorded within the collection period ($n = 53$). P4 ($n = 41$) had the second most, followed by P3 ($n = 31$) and then P2 ($n = 12$).

P3 scored the highest mean average for *people reached* per post (*n* =
17,740.81) and *organic reach* (*n* = 17,333.35) *per post* for the entire collection
period. *People reached* includes any *paid media reach* and *organic reach*
combined on posts whereas *organic reach* describes all *reach* that was not
paid for. P2 averaged the lowest for both *people* (*n* = 3,688.50) and *organic
reach* for the entire collection period (*n* = 2,921.25) P1 and P4 averaged the
second highest and third highest respectively in both categories *(see Table 7)*.

P3 also recorded the highest average for *engagement* per post (*n* = 554.71)
over the entire collection period. Similarly, P2 averaged the lowest amount of
engagement per post (*n* = 165.33) for the entire collection period. Again, P1
and P4 average the second and third highest amount of *engagement* per post
respectively *(see Table 7)*.

Table 6

Average total engagement, likes, comments and shares per week

Period	Team	Total Engagement	%	Likes	%	Comments	%	Shares	%	Post Clicks	%
Pre	P1	7975.00	-8	2501.00	-4	391.67	28	103.67	-7	32769.50	0
	P2	1996.33	258	442.00	1671	86.83	1161	28.00	337	6128.50	162
	P3	15026.17	1186	4096.83	53	362.00	54	178.00	69	51393.17	21
	P4	5377.17	12	2444.17	35	198.33	29	72.50	39	14725.50	24
Regular	P1	8932.30	9	3311.90	10	413.00	8	134.60	13	27895.70	2
	P2	8650.30	19	2106.70	36	313.20	52	215.90	136	14218.90	21
	P3	20404.40	29	8444.00	79	933.10	71	441.80	209	62253.10	27
	P4	6565.70	4	3580.90	12	352.80	25	116.10	19	16074.40	35
Post	P1	4873.50	-11	1885.33	-8	138	-18	69.17	2	10378.33	-14
	P2	1091.33	5	368.17	36	21.83	-28	15.50	182	2277.00	4
	P3	7353.67	71	1689.33	73	134.83	49	56.33	17	20061.83	107
	P4	4248.50	10	1985.83	0	101.17	-8	45.67	16	7026.83	0
TOTAL	P1	7814.00	0	2787.87	1	339.39	6	112.30	4	24873.96	-3
	P2	4569.22	77	1127.35	468	164.57	333	105.26	204	8400.70	52
	P3	15059.91	339	5228.87	70	541.39	60	254.78	119	46646.04	47
	P4	5518.78	6	2780.78	15	238.26	17	83.39	24	13137.22	23

Table 7

Average, time, characters, hashtags, reach, engagement, likes, comments and shares per post

Period	Team	Posts	Time	Characters	#'s	Reach Total	Organic Reach	Engage'	Likes	Comments	Shares
Pre	P1	21	13:46:17	324.50	0.13	6293.71	6276.57	149.19	131.67	13.00	4.52
	P2	5	12:07:00	222.40	1.00	2742.20	2742.20	72.00	47.20	20.80	4.00
	P3	12	12:27:50	682.50	0.00	14356.25	14356.25	377.50	342.83	21.33	13.52
	P4	14	17:23:26	113.58	2.07	4653.36	4161.50	212.86	196.64	11.93	4.29
Regular	P1	23	14:08:10	356.27	0.38	6760.09	4744.13	287.04	252.43	25.78	8.83
	P2	6	10:11:10	246.20	0.67	4556.67	3022.17	242.83	186.17	36.33	20.33
	P3	14	14:01:43	532.29	0.36	21561.79	21581.07	831.43	411.93	51.93	13.71
	P4	15	18:28:04	141.29	2.29	4606.00	4038.33	192.80	162.07	26.13	4.60
Post	P1	9	12:24:45	356.27	0.00	5160.38	4618.88	184.63	157.25	22.38	5.00
	P2	1	21.05.00	246.20	0.00	3211.00	3211	167.00	160.00	5.00	2.00
	P3	5	11:34:12	532.2	0.00	15165.00	12584.80	205.0	174.20	22.80	8.20
	P4	12	19:09:00	139.92	2.33	4230.42	3526.83	140.42	132.08	6.58	1.67
TOTAL	P1	53	13:43:25	356.78	0.32	6325.63	5343.73	215.62	189.02	20.10	6.50
	P2	12	11:53:55	237.09	0.75	3688.50	2921.25	165.33	126.08	27.25	12.00
	P3	31	13:01:35	656.73	0.17	17740.81	17333.35	554.71	346.84	35.39	12.65
	P4	41	18:17:59	132.11	2.23	4512.24	3930.68	184.32	165.10	15.56	3.63

When examining average *likes per post* P3 and P2 are the highest and lowest average with P1 and P4 again second and third highest respectively. *Likes* made up an average 79.00% of post engagement, and P4 had the highest percentage of post engagement made up of *likes* (n = 89.57; *see Table*). Average *comments* per post do not follow the same order as average *likes* per post. Although P3 again average the most per post (n = 35.39) P2 averaged the second highest (n = 27.25). P1 averaged the third highest amount of *comments* per post (n = 20.10) while P4 averaged the least (n = 15.56). *Comments* on average account for 10.16% of post engagement with P2 having the highest percentage (n = 16.48; *see Table 8 & Table*).

The same performance is replicated for average *shares* per post. P3 had the highest average (n = 12.65) for the collection period with P2 second (n = 12.00), P1 third (n = 6.50) and P4 averaging the least (n = 3.63; *see Table*). On average 3.63% of post *engagement* was made up of *shares* with P2 averaging the highest percentage of *engagement* made up of *shares* (n = 7.26; *see Table 8*).

Table 8
Components of post engagement as percentage of total post engagement

Team	*Likes*	*Comments*	*Shares*	Other
P1	87.66	9.32	3.01	0.01
P2	76.26	16.48	7.26	0
P3	62.52	6.38	2.28	28.82
P4	89.57	8.44	1.97	0.02
Average	79.00	10.16	3.63	7.21

Out of the five types of clicks on posts P3 again has the overall highest average for each *(see Table 9)*. However, P4 as opposed to P2 recorded the lowest average across *post clicks* (n = 439.44), *clicks to play* (n = 74.50), *link clicks* (n = 112.27) and *other clicks* (n = 244.73). *Photo views* was the only type of click that P2 averaged a lowest (n = 76.75; *see Table 9).*

Table 9

Average post clicks, photo views, clicks to play, link clicks and other clicks per post

Period	Team	Posts	Time	Characters	#'s	Post Clicks	Photo Views	Clicks to Play	Link Clicks	Other Clicks
Pre	P1	21	13:46:17	324.50	0.13	1001.90	317.09	0	403.58	605.19
	P2	5	12:07:00	222.40	1.00	466.80	25.00	0	216.20	240.60
	P3	12	12:27:50	682.50	0.00	1726.00	784.75	0	351.00	1015.67
	P4	14	17:23:26	113.58	2.07	361.57	135.89	51.00	217.20	193.00
Regular	P1	23	14:08:10	356.27	0.38	766.96	258.78	327.50	46.57	489.35
	P2	6	10:11:10	246.20	0.67	448.33	96.60	100.00	29.60	390.80
	P3	14	14:01:43	532.29	0.36	1774.57	240.50	720.50	289.07	1264.93
	P4	15	18:28:04	141.29	2.29	669.87	348.58	98.00	19.67	380.53
Post	P1	9	12:24:45	356.27	0.00	463.75	84.71	0	34.88	349.25
	P2	1	21.05.00	246.20	0.00	456.00	81.00	0	97.00	278.00
	P3	5	11:34:12	532.2	0.00	3454.80	2470.60	271.50	64.33	845.60
	P4	12	19:09:00	139.92	2.33	242.25	133.89	0	30.00	135.33
TOTAL	P1	53	13:43:25	356.78	0.32	815.19	242.75	327.50	144.02	514.58
	P2	12	11:53:55	237.09	0.75	456.67	76.75	100.00	120.55	312.27
	P3	31	13:01:35	656.73	0.17	2026.77	860.68	496.00	279.04	1116.94
	P4	41	18:17:59	132.11	2.23	439.44	220.37	74.50	112.27	244.73

For video posts P3 has the highest total average for *video views* (*n* = 5,050.33) and *30 Second or more view* duration (*n* = 1,635.00). However, P3 have the lowest average view duration with just 13.02 seconds. Despite again averaging the lowest in the first two categories (*n* = 889; *n* = 411) P2 averaged the longest *view duration*[7] with 58 seconds. In each measurement for video performance P1 and P4 again finished second and third respectively *(see Table 10)*.

All four unions experienced some form of negative feedback in the form of *hide post*, *hide all posts* and *unlike page*. None of the posts from any of the pages were reported as spam by users. P4 had the lowest averages across the three measurable categories. *Hide post* saw P4 average *n* = 0.63 over the entire collection period while P3 averaged the highest (*n* = 5.50), followed by P2, (*n* = 1.55) and then P1 (*n* = 1.48). P4 only averaged *n* = 0.34 with regard to *hide all posts* from users while P3 had the highest average (*n* = 2.07). P2 averaged the most *unlike page* actions following interaction with a post from

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[7] View duration refers to the length of time a consumer watched a video before stopping viewing.

users ($n = 0.11$) followed by P3 ($n = 0.03$). Both P1 and P4 did not have anyone unlike their pages from the sampled data *(see Table 11)*.

Table 10
Average Video View, 30secs or more views and average view duration per post

Period	Team	Posts	Time	Characters	#'s	Video Views	30secs or More	Avg. View Duration
Pre	P1	21	13:46:17	324.50	0.13	0	0	0
	P2	5	12:07:00	222.40	1.00	0	0	0
	P3	12	12:27:50	682.50	0.00	0	0	0
	P4	14	17:23:26	113.58	2.07	2025.00	634.00	21.00
Regular	P1	23	14:08:10	356.27	0.38	2078.00	764.50	40.00
	P2	6	10:11:10	246.20	0.67	889.00	411.00	58.00
	P3	14	14:01:43	532.29	0.36	5050.33	1635.00	13.02
	P4	15	18:28:04	141.29	2.29	1078.00	430.50	26.00
Post	P1	9	12:24:45	356.27	0.00	0	0	0
	P2	1	21.05.00	246.20	0.00	0	0	0
	P3	5	11:34:12	532.2	0.00	0	0	0
	P4	12	19:09:00	139.92	2.33	0	0	0
TOTAL	P1	53	13:43:25	356.78	0.32	2078.00	764.50	40.00
	P2	12	11:53:55	237.09	0.75	889.00	411.00	58.00
	P3	31	13:01:35	656.73	0.17	5050.33	1635.00	13.02
	P4	41	18:17:59	132.11	2.23	1393.67	498.33	23.50

Table 11
Average hide post, report as spam, hide all posts and unlike page per post

Period	Team	Posts	Time	Characters	#'s	Hide Post	Report as Spam	Hide All Posts	Unlike Page
Pre	P1	21	13:46:17	324.50	0.13	1.33	0	0.33	0
		5	12:07:00	222.40	1.00	3.00	0	1.00	0.50
	P3	12	12:27:50	682.50	0.00	9.08	0	2.00	0.08
	P4	14	17:23:26	113.58	2.07	0.79	0	0.14	0
Regular	P1	23	14:08:10	356.27	0.38	1.83	0	0.65	0
	P2	6	10:11:10	246.20	0.67	0.83	0	0.50	0
	P3	14	14:01:43	532.29	0.36	3.14	0	2.21	0
	P4	15	18:28:04	141.29	2.29	0.53	0	0.47	0
Post	P1	9	12:24:45	356.27	0.00	0.88	0	1.00	0
	P2	1	21.05.00	246.20	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0
	P3	5	11:34:12	532.2	0.00	3.00	0	1.75	0
	P4	12	19:09:00	139.92	2.33	0.58	0	0.42	0
TOTAL	P1	53	13:43:25	356.78	0.32	1.48	0	0.58	0
	P2	12	11:53:55	237.09	0.75	1.55	0	0.50	0.11
	P3	31	13:01:35	656.73	0.17	5.50	0	2.07	0.03
	P4	41	18:17:59	132.11	2.23	0.63	0	0.34	0

4.3. Proportional Performance

4.3.1. Reach

When average *weekly page reach* is displayed as a percentage of *total page likes* performance rankings change considerably. Averages were firstly calculated by the dividing sum of *total reach* over a collection period by the number of collection weeks in that period. This was then divided by the mean average *total page likes* of a brand page for a collection period. The resulting number was multiplied 100 to produce a percentage value *(see Figure 2)*. This was repeated for all other Facebook post metrics.

(Sum of Weekly Total Reach for Period/No. Collection Weeks in Period)
_____   X   100
(Average Total Page *Likes* for Period)

Figure 2: *Formula for calculating averages as a proportion of total page likes*

All pages on average reached more consumers than their immediate *total page likes* network. P4 recorded the highest percentage for the entire collection period reaching on average (n = 549.00%) more consumers than their *total page likes*. P1 had the second highest *proportional reach* percentage (n = 478.00%) followed by P2 (n = 260.00%) *(see Table 12)*.

Table 12

Total reach and engagement as a proportion of total page likes

Period	Team	Total *Likes*	Total Reach	% of *Likes*	Total Engagement	% of *Likes*
Pre	P1	10363.50	50644.00	489	7975.00	77
	P2	15066.00	14197.17	94	1996.33	13
	P3	67216.00	120114.27	179	15026.17	22
	P4	8542.83	45587.67	532	5377.17	63
Regular	P1	11873.00	67040.50	565	8932.30	75
	P2	19036.10	93711.20	492	8650.30	45
	P3	70741.40	206432.20	292	20404.40	29
	P4	9945.00	63576.40	639	6565.70	66
Post	P1	12733.00	34748.67	273	4873.50	38
	P2	19583.67	9621.17	49	1091.33	6
	P3	73774.00	64353.67	87	7354.67	10
	P4	10467.17	46449.00	444	4248.50	41
TOTAL	P1	11620.17	55493.57	478	7814.00	67
	P2	18081.22	46968.70	260	4569.22	25
	P3	70387.22	140276.83	199	15059.91	21
	P4	9641.04	52919.48	549	5518.78	57

During the pre-season P2 recorded the lowest *proportional reach* (n = 94.00%) while P4 recorded the highest (n = 532.00%). P1 and P3 recorded the second (n = 489.00%) and third (n = 179.00%) highest respectively *(see Table 12)*.

During the regular-season P4 again recorded the highest *proportional reach*, while P3 recorded the lowest. However, P4 (n = 639.00%), P1 (n = 565.00%), P2 (n = 492.00%) and P3 (n = 292.00%) reached a much higher percentage of their *total page likes*. During the regular-season, proportional measurements of *reach* for P2 experienced the largest increase between pre-season averages and regular-season averages (n = 398%). P3 had the second largest increase (n = 113.00%), followed by P4 (n = 107%) and then P1 (n = 67.00%; *see Table 12)*.

The post-season *proportional reach* results match the pre-season in that P2 (n = 49.00%) scored the lowest while P4 (n = 444.00%) again averaged the most. P1 (n = 273.00%) have the second highest while P3 (n = 87.00%) as the third. P2 (n = -443.00%) and P1 (n = -292.00%) both experience the most significant change in percentage from regular season to post season. P3 (n = -205.00%) experienced the third lowest change followed by P4 (n = -195.00%; *see Table 12)*.

4.3.2. Engagement

Much like *reach* when average weekly page *engagement* is shown as a percentage of *total page likes* results differ from face value. Overall P1 engaged the highest percentage (n = 67.00%) of their *total page likes* on average for the entire collection period. P4 averaged the second highest (n = 44.00%) followed by P2 (n = 25.00%) and then P3 (n = 21.00%; *see Table 12)*.

During the pre-season P1 recorded the highest level of *proportional engagement* (n = 77.00%). P2 (n = 13.00%) scored the lowest *(see Table 12)*.

During the regular season, P3 recorded the lowest (n = 29.00%) *proportional engagement*. P1 maintained the highest percentage with (n = 75.00%) *(see Table 12)*.

In contrast to pre-season and regular-season P4 recorded the highest (n = 44.00%) *proportional engagement* in the post-season. P2 experienced the largest change in *engagement* percentage (n = -39.00%) from the regular-season to the post-season followed by P1 (n = 37.00%; *see Table 12)*.

4.3.3. Posts

Ranking of post-performance also differs from face value when adjusted to be shown as a proportion of *total page likes*. P1 averaged the highest *proportional organic reach* (n = 45.99%) per post followed by P4 (n = 40.77%) *(see Table 13)*.

Proportionally, per post for the entire collection period, P4 averaged the highest *engagement* (n = 1.91%) followed closely by P1 (n = 1.86%). In contrast P3 recorded the lowest average for *proportional engagement* (n = 0.79%; *see Table 13)*.

The components of *engagement* see P3 consistently average the lowest score while the other three participants averaged highest on one component each. P4 proportionally averages the most *likes* per post (n = 1.71%). P1 average the most *comments* (n = 0.17%). Lastly proportional measurement of average

shares per post saw P2 record the highest percentage (n = 0.66%; *see Table 13)*.

In terms of content specific measurements P2 consistently averages the lowest proportional score in all but *link clicks*. Conversely P1 score the highest proportional average on all but *photo views*. P4 proportionally average the most *photo views* (n = 2.29%). P2 records the lowest proportional average for *post clicks* (n = 2.53%), *photo views* (n = 0.424%), *clicks to play* (n = 0.553%) and *video views* (n = 4.92%). While P3 recorded the lowest amount of *link clicks* per post (n = 0.40%; *see Table 14)*.

Negative consumer actions presented as a proportion of total *likes* see P1 record the highest level of *hide posts* (n = 0.012%; *see Table 15)*. P1 also recorded the highest proportional average of *hide all posts* (n = 0.005%). P4 proportionally averaged the least amount of '*hide post*' actions (n = 0.0065%) while P2 proportionally averaged the least '*hide all posts*' (n = 0.0028%). P2 conversely averaged the most '*unlike page*' actions (n = 0.11%).

Table 13

Average post reach, engagement, likes, comments and shares as a proportion of total page likes

	Team	Total *Likes*	Organic Reach	% of *Likes*	Post Engagement	% of *Likes*	Likes	% of *Likes*	*Comments*	% of *Likes*	*Shares*	% of *Likes*
TOTAL	P1	11620.17	5343.73	45.99	215.62	1.86	189.02	1.63	20.10	0.17	6.50	0.056
	P2	18081.22	2921.25	16.16	165.33	0.91	126.08	0.70	27.25	0.15	12.00	0.066
	P3	70387.22	17333.5	24.63	554.71	0.79	346.84	0.49	35.39	0.05	12.65	0.018
	P4	9641.04	3930.68	40.77	184.32	1.91	165.10	1.71	15.56	0.16	3.63	0.038

Table 14

Average post clicks, photo views, clicks to play, link clicks, video views as a proportion of total page likes

	Team	Total *Likes*	Post Clicks	% of *Likes*	Photo Views	% of *Likes*	Clicks to Play	% of *Likes*	Link Clicks	% of *Likes*	Video Views	% of *Likes*
TOTAL	P1	11620.17	815.19	7.02	242.75	2.089	327.50	2.818	144.02	1.239	2078.00	17.883
	P2	18081.22	456.67	2.53	76.75	0.424	100.00	0.553	120.55	0.667	889.00	4.917
	P3	70387.22	2026.77	2.88	860.68	1.223	496.00	0.705	279.04	0.396	5050.33	7.175
	P4	9641.04	439.44	4.56	220.37	2.286	74.50	0.773	112.27	1.165	1393.67	14.456

Table 15

Average hide post, report as spam, hide all posts, unlike page as a proportion of total page likes

	Team	Total *Likes*	Hide Post	% of *Likes*	Report as Spam	% of *Likes*	Hide all Posts	% of *Likes*	Unlike Page	% of *Likes*
TOTAL	P1	11620.17	1.48	0.0127	0	-	0.58	0.005	0	-
	P2	18081.22	1.55	0.0086	0	-	0.50	0.0028	0.11	0.0006
	P3	70387.22	5.50	0.0078	0	-	2.07	0.0029	0.03	0.000043
	P4	9641.04	0.63	0.0065	0	-	0.34	0.0035	0	-

5. Discussion

5.1. Facebook in Practice

5.1.1. Facebook Use

Facebook is now widely regarded by certain scholars as the most prominent social media platform for sport organisations (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014). Consistent with this, participants in this study positioned Facebook as their most important social media platform. Interestingly this was largely based on audience size as opposed to any specific features intrinsic to Facebook itself, which appears to be counter to findings by others (Ballings et al., 2015; A Thompson et al., 2016; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Ballings et al. (2015) cites Facebook's rapid growth and large user base as the primary driver behind the adoptions of brand pages by organisations.

Utilising professionals with prior experience would suggest an appreciation for the professionalism required for Facebook (Gillan, 2009; Sernovitz, 2015). Gillan (2009) and Sernovitz (2015) explain that social media should be assigned to a professional with as much experience as possible. Prior experience among participants in the current study would suggest an emerging trend that social media and Facebook may now be considered an established technology. Positioning Facebook as an established technology that solicits familiarity, awareness and experience among professionals indicates a clear shift forward from Eagleman's (2013) earlier findings where Facebook was viewed as an accepted but emerging communications tool amongst sport professionals.

Participants identified innovation, accuracy, being thick skinned or open to feedback and having a sense of humour as the preferred traits of a brand page administrator. This is, in part, consistent with Gillan (2009), who lists desirable traits of page administrators as sense of humour, receptive to feedback and passionate about their work place. Furthermore, Aydin (2016) explains that credibility is better ensured if information is trusted by consumers to be correct. Therefore, accuracy, as identified by the participants in this study,

could be linked to this and thus confirmed as a desirable trait for brand page administrators.

Gillan (2009) and Sernovitz (2015) also suggest that in order for Facebook practice to be effective, a staff member should be dedicated to the platform. Based on the comments from the auto-ethnographic entries it is suggested that most of the participant's workload is dedicated to non-social media related tasks. Although not necessarily best practice this is reflective of Abeza et al's (2013) study which found that resource allocation was acknowledged as a key challenge in social media management for sport organisations. However, none of the respondents indicated that they felt the time they dedicated to social media and Facebook needed to be increased or decreased.

5.1.2.Facebook Benefits

Participants identified three key benefits of maintaining a Facebook brand presence for their respective teams. All four acknowledged that Facebook allowed for better knowledge of consumers, effective consumer engagement and quicker evaluation of relationship status with consumers. These three benefits align with, and are significant components of relationship marketing practice.

Abeza et al. (2013), Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and Walker et al. (2009) advocate social media and Facebook's ability to facilitate a more comprehensive knowledge of consumers. Specifically for P4, Facebook has enabled the organisation to gather knowledge on a variety of consumer's backgrounds as well encouraging the same consumers to repeat BIRG actions more frequently. This is a crucial benefit of social media usage as Adamson et al. (2005) and Abeza et al. (2013) state that better knowledge of consumers is a central component of effective relationship marketing practice. Askool and Nakata (2011) further note that such interaction that occurs between an organisation and consumer on social media enables marketing insight to become more relevant, timely, accurate, personal and cost effective.

P3 advocate that Facebook allows them to engage more effectively with consumers placing emphasis on being able to respond instantly. Abeza et al. (2013) acknowledges the benefits that can be realized from instantaneous feedback on Facebook. Reducing the response times between enquiries has previously been found to increase the level of credibility and therefore trust of an organization (Gronroos, 1994; H. Ha & Janda, 2008; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Furthermore, Miller and Lammas (2010) along with Williams and Chin (2010) explain that instantaneous feedback allows for a two-way, and therefore relational, dialogue with consumers. On-going two-way communication is pertinent to a relationship marketing paradigm (Abeza et al., 2013; Askool & Nakata, 2011), and thus it is important for organisations to capitalise on opportunities for this.

Participants also appear to be using Facebook as means to collect qualitative market insight on the relational status with their consumers (Abeza et al., 2013). Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) also found Facebook practitioners acknowledged that social media benefits organizations by allowing for quicker evaluation of relationship status. Acknowledging this as a benefit of social media usage is noteworthy as Woodcock, Broomfield, et al. (2011) explain that being able to gain a real time 'snapshot' of consumer groups allows for an organization to make more informed relationship marketing decisions. All participants explained that Facebook allows them to establish the relationship status they have with their consumer group at large. For example, both P1 and P2, through Facebook, now understand that their online consumers respond very negatively to the team losing and thus must ensure that their content remains honest and accurate so not to create greater despondence following a loss.

5.1.3. Facebook Challenges

All participants experienced challenges in managing their Facebook brand pages. Four key challenges were identified: lack of control, maintaining credibility, guaranteeing *reach* and resource allocation were the most salient among participants.

Abeza et al. (2013) positions lack of control as referring to user managed pages. However, participants in the current study more readily cited core product inconsistency as the most concerning factor that they could not control. Although in contrast to Abeza et al. (2013), the participants concern can be better grounded in Kaynak et al.'s (2008) explanation of the challenges the sport product and its unpredictability presents. Moreover, Borland and MacDonald (2003) describe how unpredictability can impact consumer satisfaction leading to reduced engagement with a brand. Bee and Kahle (2006) suggest that unpredictability would lead to higher levels of CORFing behaviour and therefore outward demonstrations of brand loyalty would be less frequent (Collicev et al., 2016). However, consistent with Bee and Kahle (2006) and Kim and Trail (2011), participants indicated that they are utilizing other initiatives to compensate for the core products impact on Facebook performance. This approach is consistent with both Leberman et al. (2012) as well as Klap (2006) who state that focusing on extensions of the core product is a central component of sport management practice.

In addition, Kotler et al. (2010), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) and Constantinides and Fountain (2008) all place emphasis on the ability of consumer driven pages and content to impact credibility, whether it be positive or negative. However, participants in this study saw credibility as being influenced by their own actions, or inaction, more so than the action of consumers. Specifically, participants expressed that commercially obligated content and posting relevant content in the off-season presented key challenges in maintaining credibility among the followers. Given the increasing importance of sponsorship revenue, and the need to provide a return on investment to sponsors, this particular challenge is one that may become further exacerbated in the future, and is something that page administrators will need to manage carefully.

All participants alluded to the difficulty in guaranteeing *reach* and *engagement* on a post. Posts announcing winning results were suggested to consistently be the most successful. Furthermore, P4 highlighted the challenge of remaining relevant and generating interest in the competitions nine month off-season.

Goh, Heng, and Lin (2013) explain that in order to solicit engaged responses from consumers, content must be relevant. Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, and Wiertz (2013) describe brand relevancy as being at its strongest when communications are easily associated to the core product. For these teams, the posts that received the lowest *reach* and *engagement* during the collection period could be considered to have low brand and core product relevancy. P4's lowest *reach* and *engagement* post was the announcement of an assistant coach appointment, P1's requested fans to like a sponsor's page to be in a halftime show, P3's advertised an upcoming U19 national tournament while P2's called for applications to be the teams next mascot.

This appears to support Bee and Kahle (2006) who, based on their findings, suggested that successful teams were more likely to generate BIRG behaviour among fans via social media as content remained focussed on the success of the core product. Given that sport is produced and consumed simultaneously, as a perishable commodity, remaining relevant is an understandable challenge, yet a crucial requirement, for participants (Askool & Nakata, 2011; Coakley, Hallinan, & McDonald, 2011; B. Dwyer, 2011; Mullin et al., 2007; Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). Moreover Bee and Kahle (2006) and Kim and Trail (2011) suggest focussing consumer attention on extensions of the core product during the off-season. In line with this, all participants reported success with off-season post initiatives such as national team call ups, signings and charitable causes all of which could be utilized in the content to maintain relevancy (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Gensler et al., 2013; Kim & Trail, 2011).

Additionally, all participants reported some level of spend on Facebook posts to help guarantee a desired level of *engagement* and *reach*. However, the proportion of P4's marketing budget allocated to social media spend only equates to 0.0055%; while P3, despite running the largest page in terms of followers, only spent $10 on boosting Facebook content in 2015. Lahav and Zimand-Sheiner (2016), Chan (2016) and Stephen et al.'s (2015) document a spend of $5.64 billion on Facebook paid media worldwide in 2015. Despite industry wide recommendations for increased spending on social media all participants spend, by comparison, remains minimal (Abeza et al., 2013; Chan,

2016; Stephen et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2011). With the case of P4 a boosted post recorded in the sample only engaged six more people than the average for purely organic content posted on the page. Such findings appear to align with the sentiment of Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair (2014) who explain that while utilising paid posts is encouraged by some increasing spending on Facebook paid media does not guarantee significant increases in *reach* and *engagement.* Furthermore, for organisations considering a relationship marketing approach it is important to recognise that utilising too much paid media on Facebook may come across as transactional to consumers and therefore be deemed non-engaging (Abeza et al., 2013). While it is not clear what content will work for different organisations or indeed industries, it proposed that identifying and utilising content that solicits high levels of *organic reach* and *engagement* should be the priority before considering paid media (Lee et al., 2014).

Lastly responding to *comments* and direct messages to the page are acknowledged as the biggest consumer of time for two of the pages. P2 also cited allocating their brand page administration time to the P2 Super Rugby team brand page as presenting a major challenge during the post and off-season periods. This finding is consistent with prior studies that argue the amount of time dedicated to Facebook brand page management is the main resource based challenge (Abeza et al., 2013). This is further exacerbated by the desire to maintain constant engagement with fans in order to develop loyalty while also acknowledging that page administrators need to respond to fans in real time to be the most effective (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

5.1.4. Facebook Administration

The participating page managers were aware of remaining effective ensuring page content is more conversational than transactional in nature, and that content is interactive. As argued earlier, credibility was described as important in practice, particularly when a team suffered a defeat. Participants sort credibility through accurate and informative information that is delivered in a tone that suits the context of the post and the organisation itself. However

participating administrators were unable to rank pages consistently or provide context with regards to their performance against other teams.

It was found that both P1 and P2 were aware of the need for their Facebook content to remain conversational. The findings also show that P1 and P2 described the need to minimise commercial content frequency. P1 cited advertising frequency for coaching positions as having a negative impact on their page credibility. According to Kwok and Yu (2013) this content is transactional in nature. This point is in line with Kwok and Yu (2013), Pronschinske et al. (2012) and Groza, Cobbs, and Schaefers (2012) who reason that such posts do not appeal to social media as a relationship marketing platform. In the context of the P4 page commercially obligated content was posted in September in line with a NZR promotion for the NPC. This content featured transactional words that included grab, prize and competition. The *total engagement* on the post was below the average of the P4 page for the entire collection period by 131 components of *engagement* (e.g. *likes*, *comments* and *shares*). This finding is consistent with findings from Kwok and Yu (2013), who found that relational language and structure of content could improve engagement while transactional words such as 'grab' and 'competition' could reduce performance. Conversational language and in turn content were more effective in generating *likes* and *comments* on Facebook pages (Kwok & Yu, 2013).

The findings further indicate a preference among participants to avoid interaction with consumers without prior association as demonstrated by P2's suggestions that you can post too much content. Furthermore, participants describe that interactive content, such as photos and videos, are the most successful to use on Facebook. The data from the constructed week sample of Facebook posts appears to support the participants' position here. On average posts that contained either a photo or a video engaged 198 more consumers than posts that did not.
The data also shows that average negative post actions coincide with *total network size*, with P4 receiving the least and P3 the most on measures related to *hide post* and *unlike page*. However, with regards to *hide all posts* P1

averaged more *hide all post* actions (*n* = 0.58) than P2 (*n*= 0.50) despite having a smaller *total network size*. P1 posted the most for the entire collection period (*n* = 53). This indicates that posting too often may in fact have a negative impact on performance.

Such findings appear to align with Cho and Cheon's (2004) study that found advertising avoidance is more prominent when cluttering has occurred for the consumer. Furthermore, Gritten (2007) makes it clear that with market saturation of digital advertising cluttering is now more likely than ever to occur. Thus, posting too frequently on a Facebook page can clutter and interrupt a consumer's newsfeed increasing the chance they will avoid or un-follow content from that organisation (Speck & Elliot, 1997). Additionally, Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm pushes content to users who do not follow an organisations page but are 'friends' with someone who does. Therefore, there is a high chance that cluttering could also have a negative impact on other consumers opinion towards a brand due to the lack of prior association (Su-Fang et al., 2006; Unal et al., 2011). Acknowledging and recording negative *engagement* actions could lead to ensuring an ideal frequency of posts is established for a brand page. Thus, it is imperative that page administrators consider both positive and negative measures.

The results indicate that both photos and video elicit more *engagement* than other types of posts. This is important as Yaakop et al. (2013), Su-Fang et al. (2006) and Unal et al. (2011) found that the higher level interaction (or engagement) on a post the more likely it would garner a positive response from consumers. This findings is consistent with Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) who found that videos and photos generated more *engagement* among 100 sponsored brand pages and were therefore more effective in generating *engagement* than other types of content (e.g. plain text statuses or links).

Participants described maintaining credibility of content by ensuring it is relevant to the core product as well honest about the core product performance especially in defeat. In contrast to the current findings Aydin (2016) positions credibility as largely being made up of the legitimacy of an

information source. Yaakop et al. (2013) however, describes credibility as being influenced by the believability of content. Hence utilising honest relational language when posting about a poor performance would be considered best practice (Aydin, 2016; Kelly et al., 2010; Yaakop et al., 2013). Therefore, as the participants outline, reporting a result is important however being honest about how the team performed on route to the results is important to maintaining a credible relationship with consumers.

Lastly the findings indicate a clear gap in Facebook administration practice, as well as the literature with regards to ranking brand page performance. P1 was ranked first by three participants, P4 was ranked third by three participants and P2 was ranked fourth by three participants. However, P3 was ranked in a different position, ranging from first to fourth, against the other brand pages by all four participating provincial unions. Furthermore, both P1 and P4 reported not using Facebook's own rankings tool, while P3 felt there was no need too. This would suggest that no credible method for ranking pages currently exists in the opinion of the participants. Furthermore, the literature although able to provide insight with regards to how to increase *total network size*, *reach* and *engagement*, does not currently address what is an appropriate amount of increase in these areas for a page (Ballings et al., 2015; Pronschinske et al., 2012). Therefore, it is appropriate to suggest that producing rankings that consider brand page context may be more pertinent to developing a more consistent way of presenting how a page is truly performing.

5.2. Facebook Performance

5.2.1. Reach

P3 averaged the highest *total reach* for the entire collection period ($n = 140276.83$) while P2 averaged the least ($n = 46575.17$). On average the participating pages reached 371.50% more people than their *total network size*. The performance of the participating brand pages is exponentially more than what is suggested as expected levels of *reach* in the literature. For example, Aydin (2016) suggested that brand pages could expect *reach* to

continue to diminish moving forward. Both Manson (2014) and DeMers (2015) explain that brand pages could expect to *reach* 16.00% of their total Facebook followers in 2012. However as of 2015 averages could be expected to be as low as 8.00% for pages with less than 50,000 followers due to adjustments in Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm (DeMers, 2015; Manson, 2014).

Ballings et al. (2015) found that the greater network size was the greater *reach* could be expected to be. Ballings et al. (2015) argued that *reach* was the most relevant analytical measure to marketing practitioners using Facebook.

Based on this rationale one would expect P2, who averaged the second most followers *(n* = 18,081.22*)*, to also average the second highest *total reach* for the entire period. The results however contrast with this, with P4 and P1 averaging better *total reach* than P2 despite having fewer followers. It could be suggested that in contrast to the other participants P2 is under performing (Ballings et al., 2015). Conversely it could be suggested that both P4 and P1 are exceeding expectations (Ballings et al., 2015). The contradictory results of *total reach* taken at face value would suggest that it is not the most accurate means by which to measure performance as well as make comparisons of Facebook brand pages.

5.2.2. Engagement

Total weekly *engagement* varied across all three collection periods. P3 averaged the most *total page engagement* for the entire collection period (*n* = 15,059.61). The regular season saw the highest level of *engagement* for all participants. In similar fashion to *reach, total network size* did not necessarily correlate to *total engagement* as P2 averaged the least *engagement* for the entire collection period (*n* = 4,569.22). Conversely winning percentage in the regular-season did not correlate with rankings by *total engagement*.

During the regular-season teams averaged the highest levels of *total page engagement*. During the regular-season on average 46.20% more people were engaged than the pre-season and off-season periods. This is important as Pronschinske et al. (2012) found that authenticity of brand page content was

associated to levels of *engagement*. Additionally, Leigh, Peters, and Shelton (2006) explain that authentic marketing communications are the result of the presentation of legitimate information. Legitimacy of content is largely grounded in how easily associated content is to the core product (Leigh et al., 2006). Although Mullin et al. (2007), Leberman et al. (2012), Bee and Kahle (2006) as well as Kim and Trail (2011) all advocate the need to utilise product extensions in sporting communications, Pronschinske et al.'s (2012) findings demonstrate the importance of the core product messaging. Therefore, the regular-season is an important time for generating *engagement*.

As with *reach, total network size* did not correlate to *total engagement* for the entire collection period. This finding is in contrast with both Ballings et al. (2015) and Pronschinske et al. (2012). Of relevance is the fact that P2 have the second highest number of followers, but averaged the least *engagement* for the entire collection period. As noted earlier, Ballings et al. (2015) explained that network size would result in increased *reach*. While Pronschinske et al. (2012) found that higher levels of *engagement* were significantly associated to *total network size*, they also found that frequency and quality of content was an important factor in generating *engagement* and in turn network size. However, the discrepancy between the findings of this current study and the literature would suggest that the actual content plays a greater role and that network size alone cannot generate *reach* and/ or *engagement* (DeMers, 2015; Manson, 2014; Rappaport, 2007; Sloane, 2014).

P2 recorded the highest winning percentage but it did not appear to affect the level of *engagement* compared to other participants. This finding is true for the entire collection period, but also true for the regular-season. Pronschinske et al. (2012) clearly demonstrated that level of *engagement* along with winning percentage had a significant relevance to *total network size*. Conversely it would therefore be logical to assume that higher winning percentage would lead to higher *engagement* (Pronschinske et al., 2012). The notion that content is a more significant factor in determining analytical performance in terms of *reach* and *engagement* than network size or core product performance is therefore further reinforced.

5.2.3. Posts

Post-performance rankings were consistent in terms of *reach* and *engagement* when compared to *total page reach* and *engagement*. On average P3 had the most *reach* (*n* = 17,740.81) and *engagement* (*n* = 554.71) across all thee collection periods on individual posts. However, performance did vary across components of *engagement*; *likes*, *comments*, *shares*.

Once again in contrast to Ballings et al. (2015), *reach on posts* was not always directly relatable to *total network size*. Three of the four pages' average *reach* on individual posts did rank in the same manner as their *total network size* (e.g. P3, P1, P4). However, P2 averaged the lowest *reach* on individual posts despite having the second largest network size and best on field performance for the collection period. This would suggest that P2's brand page was either under-performing or, contrary to previous findings, *post reach* is not significantly relatable to *total network size* or on field performance (Ballings et al., 2015; Pronschinske et al., 2012).

Similarly, to *post-reach*, *post-engagement* did not appear to be directly relatable to network size. Again, three of the four participating pages *engagement* did rank in accordance with their *total network size* (e.g. P3, P1, P4). However, once again P2 averaged the least *engagement* on posts for the entire collection period. This would once again suggest P2 is either underperforming compared to other participating pages in terms of engaging their audience and/ or winning is not necessarily linked to *post engagement* (Ballings et al., 2015; Pronschinske et al., 2012).

On average post *engagement* was broken down as 79.00% from *likes*, 10.16% from *comments* and 3.63% of *shares* with the remaining 7.00% attributed to other post actions (e.g. *link clicks*, *photo views* and *post clicks*). Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) found that brand pages could expect *likes* to make up 90.80% of *engagement* followed by *comments* (*n* = 7.45%) followed by *shares* (*n* = 1.76%). With regards to *comments* all participants exceeded Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) findings by more than 10.00% with only P3 not exceeding the expected level of *comments* (*n* = 6.38%). All participants exceeded Bonsón and

Ratkai (2013) findings with regards to *shares* on average by 1.87%, which is noteworthy given that Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) state that *shares* demonstrate the strongest interaction with a brand. The level of performance on *comments* and *shares* suggests that a two-way relationship does exist between participating brand pages and their consumers.

Additionally, Malthouse et al. (2016) argue that *comments* and *shares* are the most salient form of UGC. Malthouse et al. (2016) acknowledges that higher levels of UGC actions such as commenting and sharing among consumers leads to greater brand interaction and increased potential for a transaction to occur. Therefore, it can be further reinforced that participating brand pages are creating content that generates higher levels of *comments* and *shares* which in turn signals a stronger relationship with consumers.

5.3. Proportional Performance

5.3.1. Reach

Considering *reach* as a proportion of *total network size* generated a shift in page performance rankings compared to face value performance. For the entire collection period P4 reached an audience 549.00% the size of their total network, followed by P1 (n = 478.00%), P2 (n = 260.00%) and P3 (n = 199.00%). During the pre-season and post-season collection periods P2 achieved the lowest proportional ranking for *reach*. During the regular season and for the entire collection period average proportional rankings of *page reach* match *total network size* rankings in reverse (e.g. P4, P1, P2, P3).

Proportional rankings of *page reach* being a reverse of *total network size* could be described as mathematically expected. Therefore, as P4 had the smallest *total network size* and in turn the best proportional ranking for *reach* during the all three collection periods, it would initially suggest proportional ranking of *reach* is not necessarily an effective indicator of performance. However, during both the pre-season and post-season period P2 had the lowest *proportional reach*. During the pre-season period P2's most recent core product performance was the 2014 regular season campaign that saw them

relegated from the Premiership division with a 10.00% winning record. During the 2015 regular season P2 produced a 60.00% winning record, the best of the participating teams. The post-season however saw them lose the Championship final and in turn their chance to be promoted back to the Premiership division. Furthermore, during the post and off season periods P2 shifts their time and human resource focus to a SR brand page reducing the amount of content posted on the P2 NPC page. Hence P2's reduction in *proportional reach* during the pre-season and post-season periods could be argued to reflect despondence and disconnection with the core product among consumers during these periods (Bee & Kahle, 2006). P2's *proportional reach* performance during each collection period is also reflected by the *total reach* data. This would once again indicate that in contrast to Ballings et al. (2015) network size can correlate to increased *reach* but it does not guarantee *reach*. Therefore, representing *reach* proportionally produces more comparable performance rankings by factoring in *total network size* as a component of *reach* as opposed to the determining factor that produces *reach*.

5.3.2. Engagement

Representing *engagement* as a proportion of *total network size* produced different performance rankings across the pre-season, regular-season and post-season collection periods compared to *engagement* taken at face value. During the pre-season period P1 engaged the highest proportion of their total network (n = 77.00%) followed by P4 (n = 63.00%), P3 (n = 22.00%) and P2 (n = 13.00%). During the regular season, P1 once again had the highest *proportional engagement* (n = 75.00%) followed by P4 (n = 66.00%), P2 (n = 45.00%) and P3 (n = 29.00%). During the post-season P4 had the highest *proportional engagement* (n = 41.00%) followed by P1 (n = 38.00%), P3 (n = 10.00%) and P2 (n = 6.00%).

Pre-season *proportional engagement* potentially reflects the current relationship between the brand pages and their respective consumer groups. Both P1 and P4 were approaching the 2015 season following division wins in 2014. Bee and Kahle (2006) explain consumers are more likely to exhibit BIRG when a team is winning while consumers are more likely to exhibit CORF if a

team is losing or has a history of losing (Bee & Kahle, 2006). P2 approached the 2015 season following a 10.00% winning percentage in 2014 that saw them relegated to the Premiership. Similarly, P3 narrowly missed relegation from the Premiership in 2014 on the back of a 40.00% winning percentage. If *total engagement* was only considered at face value and in the absence of any alternative longitudinal data P3 would be assumed to have the highest-ranking performance revealing no context regarding the potential impact of core product performance. *Proportional engagement* performance rankings therefore could be argued to provide a more accurate reflection of on field performance and in turn the relationship status of consumers and organisations than *total engagement* taken at face value.

Further support for the previous supposition is provided by P2's level of *proportional engagement* during the regular season. The regular season saw P2's *proportional engagement* increase from 13.00% to 45.00% the largest increase of all four participating brand pages by 38.00%. Conversely P2 achieved a winning percentage of 60.00% and made the final in the Championship division. Once again consumers are more likely to exhibit BIRG if a team is winning (Bee & Kahle, 2006). By representing *engagement* as a proportion of *total network size* changes in performance can be put in a context that not only provides context but is also comparable to other pages.

Lastly during the post-season collection period P2's *proportional engagement* decreased by 39.00% from 45.00% to 6.00% the largest decrease of all four participating brand pages. This could be a direct reflection of P2's page administrator shifting efforts to another brand page immediately following the NPC season's conclusion. Also notable is the *engagement* decreases experienced by the other three participating pages which ranged from 19.00% to 38.00%. The decreases in *proportional engagement* would suggest that all the participating brand pages struggle with disconnection from the core product during the post-season (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Gensler et al., 2013; Waters & Walden, 2015).

5.3.3. Posts

Analysis of individual post data from the constructed week sample as a proportion of total *likes* yielded different performance rankings than post data taken at face value. P1 and P4 averaged proportionally the highest *reach* (n = 45.99%) and *post engagement* (n = 1.91%) respectively. P2 averaged the lowest *proportional post reach* (n = 24.63%) but P3 averaged the lowest post *engagement* (n = 0.79%). With regards to the components of *engagement* P4, P1 and P2 recorded the highest proportion on for *posts likes*, *post comments* and *post shares* respectively. P1 recorded the highest proportional averages on all content specific measures except for *photo views*. P2 recorded the lowest proportional averages on all content specific measures except *post clicks*. Lastly P1 recorded the highest proportion of negative consumer actions for both *hide post* and *hide all post* while P2 had the highest proportion for *unlike page*.

P1 proportionally averaged the highest *reach* on individual posts (n = 45.99%) collected in the constructed week sample. P2 recorded the lowest *proportional reach* (n = 16.16%). P1 and P2's proportional ranking contrasts with *reach* on posts taken at face value. Furthermore, their ranking does not coincide with their ranking according to *total network size* unlike *total proportional page reach*. Based on Ballings et al.'s (2015) findings it would be mathematically expected for proportional rankings to match *total network size* rankings in reverse (e.g. P4, P1, P2, P3). Deviations from the mathematical expectation could therefore represent above or below average performance when compared to other brand pages. For example, P2 would have been expected to have the third highest *proportional post reach* ranking given that they have the second largest *total network size*. P2 ranking fourth could be argued to be a sign of the page underperforming within the context of the other participating brand pages. Therefore, *post reach* presented as a proportion of *total network size* could be argued to be a comparable insight as to how brand pages are performing against one and other.

P4 averaged the highest *proportional engagement* on individual posts (n = 1.91%) while P3 averaged the lowest (n = 0.79). *Proportional post engagement*

averages see the pages ranked according to *total network size* in reverse (e.g. P4, P1, P2, P3), suggesting it may be a predictable and therefore unnecessary performance ranking. However, post *comments* and post *shares* represented as a proportion of *total network size* are not comparable to page ranking according to network size. P1 proportionally averaged the most *comments* per post (*n* = 0.17%). P2 proportionally averaged the most *shares* per post (*n* = 0.07%) followed by P1 (*n* = 0.56%), P4 (*n* = 0.04%) and P3 (*n* = 0.02%). Considering the recommendations of Bonsón and Ratkai (2013) it can be suggested that P1's content is better at producing higher levels of commitment from their consumer group compared to the other brand pages. Conversely by generating proportionally more *shares* than the other brand pages P2 could be argued to produce content that is more viral in nature and that generates higher levels of BIRG among their consumer group (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013; Cialdini et al., 1977). These contrasting results indicate a further challenge in determining how effective a page is performing overall. Therefore, effectiveness may ultimately be a result of what an organisation chooses to be their key performance indicator on Facebook.

P1 proportionally averaged the highest content specific measures for *post clicks* (*n* = 7.02%), *clicks to play* (*n* = 2.82%), *link clicks* (*n* = 1.24%) and *video views* (*n* = 17.88%). P4 proportionally averaged the highest *photo views* per post (*n* = 2.29%). P2 proportionally averaged the lowest on each content specific measure except *link clicks* which sees them rank third. These results would suggest that P1's content encourages more frequent interaction then other participating pages (Yaakop et al., 2013). Interactivity is also considered to be a strong indicator that content is effectively engaging consumers. As Yaakop et al. (2013) notes high levels of interactivity lead to higher levels of commitment and trust between the consumer and the organisation helping to ensure the consumer is more open to commercialised content. Conversely, it could be suggested that P4's photos generate the highest level of interactivity among consumers while P2's content does not stimulate high levels of interaction at all (Yaakop et al., 2013). Proportional representations of content specific measures therefore provide context to brand page performance that is comparable as well as insights into interactivity.

P1 proportionally averaged the highest levels of negative consumer actions for both '*hide post*' (n = 0.0127%) and '*hide all posts*' (n = 0.005%). Only P3 and P2 had *'unlike page'* actions during the sample period. P1 posted the most frequently of the four participating pages during the constructed week sample. Cho and Cheon (2004) states that high frequency of branded content can lead to increased levels of avoidance among a consumer group. Hence P1's negative action data could be the result of posting too frequently. Representing negative consumer actions as a proportion of total *likes* provides context around P1's data. Should negative actions be represented at purely face value P1 would have averaged the third highest '*hide post*' actions and the second highest *'hide all posts'* potentially leading one to conclude that post frequency was not an important consideration.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Facebook in Practice

The participating brand page administrators demonstrated a holistic understanding of Facebook as a contemporary relationship marketing channel that solicits unique challenges, benefits and administration practice. Facebook was identified as the most prominent social media for the four provincial unions, due to its large base. Findings revealed that a Facebook professional administrator is required, but not necessarily one that is full-time. Participants identified prominent challenges presented by Facebook including lack of control, maintaining credibility and ensuring content relevancy prior to engaging in paid media. Benefits of maintaining a Facebook brand page included enhanced knowledge of consumers, instant responses and assessment of consumer organisation relationship status. Important administration considerations included commercialisation of content, frequency of posts, utilising photos and videos to increase *reach* and *engagement* and remaining honest to ensure credibility.

6.1.1. Facebook in Use

P1, P3 and P2 brand pages were all run by administrators with prior experience in social media indicating channel has become an established marketing technology. Innovation, sense of humour, receptivity of feedback and accuracy were all confirmed as desirable traits of brand page administrators. Participants did not dedicate their full work load to social media nor did they deem it necessary to do so salient among responses suggesting a full time social media role may not always be necessary for organisations.

6.1.2. Facebook Benefits

Participants utilised Facebook to facilitate a more enhanced knowledge of their consumers. The ability to respond instantly to consumers via Facebook was reported as a salient benefit to the organisations enabling them to establish and maintain trust and credibility with their consumers. Lastly Facebook was viewed as an important tool to qualitatively assess the

relationship status between consumers and the participating pages allowing them to adjust content accordingly.

6.1.3. Facebook Challenges

Participants outlined lack of control was caused by inconsistency and unpredictability of the core product as opposed to consumer driven content. In contrast to the literature brand page credibility was being influenced by overly commercial content as opposed to consumer created fan pages. Constructed week sample data supported the participant's opinion that posts with low relevancy to the core product achieved lower *reach* and *engagement*. Paid media is not a guarantee of *reach* or *engagement* reinforcing the premise that appropriate content needs to be the priority ahead of paid media to maximise *reach* and *engagement*. Facebook brand page's constant requirement to be monitored was viewed as both a time and human resource challenge.

6.1.4. Facebook Administration

Commercialised content was shown to have a negative impact on *reach* and *engagement* confirming the responses of the participants. High content frequency also caused higher levels of the negative *'hide all posts'* consumer actions. The impact of high frequency and over commercialisation both highlight the importance of maintaining relevance to the core product and monitoring negative consumer actions to provide more holistic insight into the impact of what is being posted and how often. Participants cited photo and video content as performing the best in terms of *reach* and *engagement* compared to other types of content. The data confirms photo and video content from the participating pages on average engages more consumers than other content types but does not *reach* more. Honest language was described as crucial practice when posting content particularly when describing a loss. Use of honest language is supported in the literature as central to ensuring believability and in turn credibility is maintained. Lastly there is a need for a reliable method to rank pages consistently while

considering the context they operate within to better present how well a page is performing in terms of network size, *reach* and *engagement*.

6.2. Facebook Performance

P1, P3 and P4 brand pages' performance ranking in terms of total page *reach* and *engagement* as well as *post reach* and *engagement* matched their order for *total network size*. However, P2 recorded the lowest averages for *total page reach* and *engagement* as well as *post reach* and *engagement* despite having the second largest *total network size* and best winning percentage for the 2015 season. P2's performance contrasts with what could logically expected per recent literature. The findings therefore indicate that ranking the performance of brand pages against each other according to face value quantitative data may not be the most accurate indicator.

6.2.1. Reach

In contrast to the literature all participating pages' *reach* exceeded *total network size*. *Total page reach* saw pages ranked in the same order as *total network size* for all participating teams except P2. P3 averaged the highest *total reach* while P2 averaged the lowest. The findings therefore indicate that either P2 underperformed or *total reach* is not influenced by *total network size*. Therefore, contrary to extant literature, it is suggested that *total page reach* taken at face value may not be an indicator of comparable performance for brand pages.

6.2.2. Engagement

P3 averaged the highest total *engagement*. *Engagement* was highest during the regular-season. *Engagement* correlated with *total network size* for all participating brand pages except P2. Despite having the second largest *total network size* as well as the highest winning percentage P2 recorded the lowest average total *engagement* in contrast to what is expected based on recent literature. Therefore, once again it is suggested that face value total page *engagement* may not be a comparable indicator of brand page performance. Furthermore, the findings indicate that *engagement* is more likely to be

influenced by effectiveness of content than *total network size* and/ or winning percentage.

6.2.3. Posts

P3 averaged the highest *reach* and *engagement* on individual posts while P2 averaged the lowest. *Reach* and *engagement* on posts was relatable to *total network size* for all participants except P2. The findings indicate that P2 was either underperforming or *post reach* and *engagement* is not relatable to *total network size* or winning percentage. All participating pages had a higher proportion of *engagement* made up of *comments* and *shares* then could be expected per recent literature. This would suggest that all participating pages are capable of producing content that solicits a strong relationship with their consumer groups.

6.3. Proportional Performance

P4 and P1 averaged the highest *proportional reach* and *engagement* while P2 averaged the lowest. P4 and P1 averaged the highest *proportional post engagement* and *post reach* while P2 averaged the lowest. P1 proportionally averaged the highest content specific measures but also received the highest proportional average for negative consumer actions. Proportional performance reveals different brand page rankings from face value data. Representing averages as a proportion of *total network size* provides greater insight into how a page is performing within the context of the pages it is being compared to.

6.3.1. Reach

P4 averaged the highest level of *proportional reach* followed by P1, P2 and P3. P2 averaged the lowest level of *proportional reach* for both the pre-season and post-season collection periods. The *proportional reach* findings were in line with total reach findings in reverse. This indicates that *total network size* should be considered a component of *reach* as opposed to the only determining factor. From the findings, it is therefore suggested that representing *reach* as a proportion of *total network size* provides more appropriate comparable performance rankings.

6.3.2. Engagement

P1 averaged the highest *proportional engagement* in both the pre-season and regular-season with P4 averaging the highest in the post-season. P2 averaged the lowest in both the pre-season and post-season with P3 averaging the lowest in the regular season. Presenting *total page engagement* as a proportion of *total network size* provides a greater level of context allowing page performance to be ranked, compared and analysed in greater detail than face value *engagement*. The success of the core product along with maintaining relevance to the core-product, both appear to affect *engagement* with content.

6.3.3. Post

P1 proportionally averaged the highest *post reach* while P2 recorded the lowest. Page rankings according to *proportional post reach* differ from face value *post reach* suggesting that P2 is underperforming. Representing *post reach* as a proportion of *total network size* allows for pages' performance to be compared. Considering the components of *engagement* proportionally provides context to levels of popularity, commitment and virality of content providing insight into consumers' relationship status with a brand page in terms of their tendency to engage in BIRG behaviours. Proportional representation of content specific measures provides insight into content interactivity that is comparable to other brand pages. Representing average negative consumer actions as a proportion of total networks size provides a greater level of insight into brand page performance then would be realised through face value statistics.

6.4. Future Research

This research establishes an understanding of Facebook brand pages in practice among page administrators in New Zealand provincial rugby. The performance of the four participating brand pages was compared at face value. Performance was then represented as a proportional measurement of *total page likes* providing greater context as to how and why they rank against one and other. While the research provides important insight into why the participating pages experience

certain levels of performance and how these levels may be compared it, only adds towards the early stages of understanding and quantifying Facebook brand page performance in the wider context of social media research. Moving forward it is recommended that larger data sets are investigated around proportional page performance via larger samples, longitudinal studies and multiple industry samples to establish expected levels of performance. Continued research into Facebook practice and resulting proportional performance will allow for better refinement related to page performance measurement, ultimately resulting comparable industry standards being established for both positive and negative analytical measures. Research into potential disengagement and breakdown of relationships highlighted by negative brand page interactions is also recommended to further expand on what has been touched on in this study. Holistically the research presents an opportunity to establish a tangible platform that could be used to evaluate Facebook effectiveness according to organisational strategy and objectives. Such a direction of research will allow practitioners and organisations to better evaluate if their Facebook brand page is performing effectively, within the context of Facebook itself and the wider context of their organisational objectives and strategies, as opposed to accepting continued increase or decrease in total networks size, *total reach* and *engagement* and/or *post reach* and *engagement* as the only indicator. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that research into Facebook and social media needs to be re-visited regularly in order to facilitate the continued adaption of administration practice and methods for measuring performance to rapidly changing algorithms and marketing trends.

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Appendix One: Participating Team Social Media Presence

Team	P4	% Diff to Facebook	P2	% Diff to Facebook	P1	% Diff to Facebook	P3	% Diff to Facebook
Facebook	10511		19616		12830		117112	
Instagram	3597	-65.78	3545	-81.93	5617	-56.22	7315	-93.75
Twitter	3069	-70.8	4359	-76.86	4971	-61.25	5817	-95.04
YouTube	53	-99.5	73	-99.63	25	-99.8	1595	-98.64
Mean Average Difference				-83.27%				

Appendix Two: Informed Consent Form Template

Brand Engagement in a Relationship Paradigm Era:
An examination of Facebook practices in the New Zealand Provincial Rugby

Consent and information form

Dear Provincial Union Representative,

I am writing to request access to the Manawatu Turbos Facebook page the content of which will help enable me to complete a Masters of Sport and Exercise at Massey University. My supervisor for this research is Associate Professor Andy Martin who can verify any details you may wish to enquire about.

The current study examines Facebook practice effectiveness in the National Provincial Competition. Primary data will be collected using a questionnaire. Secondary data will be obtained through the insights interface of the Facebook Admin Console. Your participation in this research project will provide and improve the body of knowledge on the use of social media in sport and the way it can influence fan engagement in a productive manner.

Posts will be analysed and random both prior to, during and after the 2015 season. A questionnaire will be sent prior to and following the 2015 season. Information that is obtained as a result of being in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. If you have any further questions about this research please contact me directly by telephone 027 338 4440 or email jasonc@manawaturugby.co.nz. Alternatively you can contact my supervisor, telephone 06 350 5799 extn. 83823 or email a.j.martin@massey.ac.nz.

> *"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*
>
> *If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact, Dr. Brian Finch Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 356 9099 etxn 86015, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".*

If you are prepared to take part could you please sign the consent declaration form and email it back to me. I will then arrange an interview time that suits you. Your contribution to this research project would be greatly appreciated.

Regards,

Jason Cole

………

Consent Declaration

I have read and understood the information set out on this form and I willingly give my informed consent on behalf of Manawatu Rugby Union to participate in this research project in accordance with the terms and conditions.

Name (PRINT) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Examining Facebook Practice: The Case of New Zealand Provincial Rugby

The research focuses on the understanding of Facebook practice demonstrated by the page administrators of each team as well as the statistical performance of each team's brand page prior to, during and following the 2015 NPC Season. Ultimately it aims to provide greater context around the performance of Facebook brand pages so that more holistic comparisons of brand pages can be made.

For the case of New Zealand provincial rugby:
What are the perceived challenges for Facebook brand page administrators?

Is total network size relatable to the performance of Facebook brand page reach and engagement?

Are proportional measures relatable to the performance of Facebook brand page reach and engagement?

Questionnaire

Staff Member

- How long have you worked at the Union for?
- How long have you been Admin for the Facebook page?
- Have you had any previous experience working with social media?

General Social Media

- What social media platforms dos the union operate?
  Rank them in order of strategic importance;
- What traits does a Facebook Brand Page Admin require?

Facebook Page

- How many people admin the page?
- What are the total likes for the page?
- What is the weekly average engagement (i.e. total likes, comments & Shares on posts) for the page over the past year?
- What is the average increase in likes per week over the past year?
- By how many likes has the page increased by in the past year?

- What is the weekly average reach for the page over the past year?
- What do you aim to achieve with the page?
- What do you perceive to be the biggest challenge in running a Facebook page?

If you could change anything about your page what would it be?

Posts

- How often do you post on the page?
- What type of posts do you do most often i.e. links, photos, videos, text?
- What type of content do you refrain from posting?
- Do you reply to fans in the comments?
    o If so how often?
    o How do you determine what posts to reply to?
- Do you use emojis? (why or why not?)
-
- Does the team losing change what you post? (why or why not?)
- How do posts in the off season differ to posts in the regular season?
-
- When is the best time for you to post?
- How far in advance do you plan content?
- Do you use the scheduling system?

- What level of community rugby activity do you report on your page? i.e all grades, some grades etc.?
- How often do you post about purely community rugby?

- What would you deem a successful post?
- What type of posts do you find most successful?
- What type of posts do you find the least successful?
- What do you perceive to be the biggest hindrance on page growth?

Staff Member

- What is your official title at your provincial union?
- What does your role do for the organisation?
- What is the biggest part of your job?
- What percentage of your work load is social media?
- How did you arrive at this percentage?

Team

- How would describe the team's performance this year?
- How did the team win i.e. easily, gritty, flukes?
- How did the team lose i.e. no heart, the referees, hard done by, silly mistakes, no dignity, close hard fought games?

General Social Media

- Have you introduced any new social media platforms over the season?
- If so which ones?
- Have you stopped using any social media platforms over the season?
    - o   If so, which ones?
- What platforms does the team now operate?
- Can you rank them in terms of strategic importance?
- Why have you ranked them in this order?
- Which platform do you find most challenging?
- Which platform do you dedicate the most time to?
- On average how many hours per week is dedicated to this platform?

Facebook Page

- How many people admin the Page?
- Has this changed in the past 6 months?
- If so what was the reasoning?

- Why does your organisation use Facebook?
- Do you think Facebook is a vital part of your day to day practice?
- Why do you think it is important?
- Does it have any tangible impact on the organisation to your knowledge?
- What to you indicates that a page is successful?

- Did you have objectives for the page?
- What were they?
- Were they achieved or not?
- What reason do you think is behind them being achieved or not achieved?

- By how many total likes did your page increase from the start this season to know?
- Is this enough and why/ why not?

- Did your page grow as expected?
- In what manner did it grow, i.e more likes, more engagement?

- What is you weekly engagement average?
- Is this what you expected?
- If not what were you expecting?
- What do you base this on?
- Why do you think your engagement was at this level?

- What is the biggest challenge now?
- What do you see as the biggest challenge next season?

- How would you describe effective practice?
- How do you determine effectiveness?
- How often to measure page effectiveness?
- What does this process consist of?
- Has the page been successful or effective this season?
- Why or why not?

- How would you rank your pages performance for the season against others?
  (Please mark one box with an 'X')

Last	Bottom Four	Middle	Top Four	First

- How would you order the following in terms of performance?

  (Please write 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th in the desired box)

Wellington	Taranaki	Manawatu	Waikato

- Do you use Facebooks ranking system?
- If not why not?
- If so where does your page sit on the ranking and against who?
- What do you think this ranking system is based on?
- Where do you think your page should be ranked on this scale against the other provincial unions and why?

Facebook Posts

- What type of post do you utilise most often?
- Why do you post this type of content the most?
- Rank the following post types in terms for their effectiveness;
  1 – Not Effective
  2 – Somewhat Effective
  3 – Generally Effective
  4 – Effective
  5 – Very Effective
  (Highlight the one that applies)

Text Status				
1	2	3	4	5
Why have you scored this type in this manner? Were there any exceptions to this? If so why were they exceptions? Do you have any reasons for these exceptions that you think may have caused them?				

Photo Status				
1	2	3	4	5
Why have you scored this type in this manner? Were there any exceptions to this? If so why were they exceptions? Do you have any reasons for these exceptions that you think may have caused them?				

Video Status				
1	2	3	4	5
Why have you scored this type in this manner? Were there any exceptions to this? If so why were they exceptions? Do you have any reasons for these exceptions that you think may have caused them?				

Link to site with Preview Image Status				
1	2	3	4	5

Why have you scored this type in this manner?

Were there any exceptions to this?

If so why were they exceptions?

Do you have any reasons for these exceptions that you think may have caused them?

Cover Photo Change				
1	2	3	4	5

Why have you scored this type in this manner?

Were there any exceptions to this?

If so why were they exceptions?

Do you have any reasons for these exceptions that you think may have caused them?

Profile Picture Change				
1	2	3	4	5

Why have you scored this type in this manner?

Were there any exceptions to this?

If so why were they exceptions?

Do you have any reasons for these exceptions that you think may have caused them?

Created Event				
1	2	3	4	5

Why have you scored this type in this manner?

Were there any exceptions to this?

If so why were they exceptions?

Do you have any reasons for these exceptions that you think may have caused them?

- How many times a week do you post now the season is over?
- How many times did you post on average during the season?
- What is your reasoning for this difference if any?

- What times do you post?
- Why do you schedule at this time?
- Do you use scheduling?
- How many posts do you schedule?
- How far ahead do you schedule?
- What would lead you to change the scheduled post time?
-
- What are your average comments per week?
- What is your average increase in likes per week?
- What is your average shares per week?
- What is you page average total amount of likes on posts per week?
- What is your average post clicks per week?

- What do you deem as a successful post?
- How do you quantify a successful post?
- If a post does not go as well as you thought it would what do you do to ensure the next post is more successful?
- Out of reach, engagement, likes, comments, shares, post clicks, other clicks, Hide Posts, Hide All Posts, Report as Spam, unlike page which do you look as the most important in deeming a post successful?
- Can you rank them in order;
  1 –
  2 –
  3 –
  4 –
  5 –
  6 –
  7 –
  8 –
  9 –
  10 –
  11 –
  12 –

- Was there any difference between posts about winning and losing?
- If so what was different?
- What did the comments consist of if the team lost?
- What did the comments consist of if the team won?

- Have you used Facebooks boost feature this season?
- How much have you spent on Facebook boosts this season?
- Has Facebook prompted you to boost posts?
- What posts does it suggest you boost?
- Do you feel the suggestions are consistent and justified?
- Why or Why not?
- Have you ever boosted something you did not plan to boost initially?

- Why did you make that decision?

- What was the most successful post in the last six months for the page? What were the statistics on the posts for reach, engagement, likes etc.
- Why do you think this post was so successful?
- How many posts have you had in the past 6 months with over 1000 likes?
- What usually led to such a post?

Facebook Audience

- What is peak time for your audience?
-
- Have you banned anyone this season?
- If so why?
- Have you hidden any comments this season?
- If so why?
- How many people have opted to hide post?
- How many people have opted to hide all posts?

- Do audience members post to the page?
- If so how often do they post?
- What do they tend to post?
- What is the engagement on these posts?

- Describe your typical Facebook audience member?
- Can you name any key fans on your Facebook page i.e. really active fans?

Appendix Five: Massey University Low Risk Acceptance Letter

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
ALBANY

24 June 2015

Jason Cole

Dear Jason

Re: Brand engagement in Relationship Paradigm Era: An examination of facebook practices in NZ Provincial Rugby

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 8 June 2015.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 356 9099, extn 86015, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Brian T Finch (Dr)
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

cc   Associate Professor Andy Martin   Dr Andrew Foskett
        School of Sport and Exercise   Head of School of Sport and Exercise
        Palmerston North campus   **Palmerston North campus**

Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council

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