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**BUILDING BRANDS AND FAN RELATIONSHIPS
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA:
THE CASE OF THE GRAND SLAM TENNIS EVENTS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Social media have become pervasive parts of society and modern consumer culture. However, sports scholars have noted a distinct lack of knowledge and understanding related to their use among sports properties. This thesis, through the novel use of a modified circuit of culture framework (du Gay, Hall, Jones, McKay & Negus, 1997) explores how Facebook and Twitter were utilised by the four Grand Slam tennis events (Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and U.S. Open) to build their brands and relationships with fans. A unique multi-perspectival, multi-method approach involving semi-structured interviews, a content analysis of Facebook and Twitter posts, and online surveys provided rich sources of data.

The findings reveal that these events are deliberately and proactively using social media. It is apparent that social media aid in two key functions: (1) a facilitator of socialisation and emotional connections, and (2) a cultivator of brand image and brand experience. Furthermore, two unique challenges were identified: (1) providing value and meeting fan expectations, and (2) organisational adaptability. Importantly, this research has significant practical and scholarly implications, providing one of the first empirical examinations into how social media assist sports event brands in brand management efforts. Social media are shown to be sites that provide opportunities for practitioners to create a quasi-virtual brand experience, representing an online substitute for the live event. This particular aspect represents a unique finding and an aspect that is of particular relevance for sports event brands. In addition, this study was one of the first to employ a multi-method approach, framed within the circuit of culture, in sports-related social media research. The use of this approach revealed the need to modify the circuit of culture with a centralised moment of “prosumption” for future social media related studies. It is proposed that this approach would be transferable to other sports contexts, advancing the research agenda of sport management scholars.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The Emergence and Role of Social Media in Modern Society.....	1
1.2 The Dilemma of Social Media for Sports Events	2
1.2.1 Australian Open	3
1.2.2 Ryder Cup	5
1.3 Rationale for the Research	6
1.4 Purpose and Research Questions	7
1.5 Personal Motivation for the Research	8
1.6 Nature of the Research	9
1.7 Delimitations	9
1.8 Structure of the Thesis	10
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1 Social Media	13
2.1.1 Facebook	16
2.1.2 Twitter.....	17
2.1.3 Social Media and Sport	19
2.1.4 Criticisms of Social Media Research	23
2.2 Branding.....	26
2.2.1 The Brand Building Process	27

2.2.2	Branding and Sport	30
2.2.3	Branding and Social Media.....	33
2.3	Consumer-Brand Relationships	36
2.3.1	How Brands Affect Consumer-Brand Relationships.....	41
2.3.2	Criticisms and Challenges.....	44
2.3.3	Consumer-Brand Relationships and Social Media	46
2.4	Summary	50
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....		52
3.1	Research Philosophy	52
3.2	Research Context	55
3.2.1	The Grand Slam Events – Tennis’ ‘Majors’	57
3.3	A Multi-Perspectival Research Approach.....	65
3.3.1	Multi-Method Approach	68
3.4	Ethics.....	70
3.5	Summary	71
CHAPTER FOUR: EVENT PERSONNEL’S PERSPECTIVES OF		
 SOCIAL MEDIA.....		72
4.1	Literature Review.....	74
4.2	Methods.....	77
4.2.1	Data Collection.....	77
4.2.2	Data Analysis	82
4.3	Results	84
4.3.1	Context	84
4.3.2	Benefits and Value	86
4.3.3	Activities and Strategies.....	93

4.3.4	Challenges and Issues	100
4.4	Discussion	105
4.4.1	Benefits and Values	106
4.4.2	Activities and Strategies.....	108
4.4.3	Challenges and Issues	111
4.5	Summary	113

CHAPTER FIVE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK AND

	TWITTER.....	114
5.1	Literature Review	115
5.2	Methods.....	119
5.2.1	Data Collection	120
5.2.2	Data Analysis	133
5.3	Results.....	134
5.3.1	Sample Characteristics	134
5.3.2	Form of Communication	138
5.3.3	Brand Associations	146
5.3.4	Marketing Strategies	148
5.3.5	Relationship building	150
5.4	Discussion	153
5.4.1	Management of Brand Perceptions	154
5.4.2	Unique Management Approaches	156
5.4.3	Specific Platform.....	157
5.4.4	Evolution in Social Media Use	159
5.5	Summary	161

CHAPTER SIX: FANS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

BY PROFESSIONAL TENNIS EVENTS 163

6.1	Literature Review	164
6.2	Methods.....	168
6.2.1	Data Collection.....	168
6.2.2	Data Analysis	176
6.3	Results	178
6.3.1	Sample Characteristics	178
6.3.2	Interaction	182
6.3.3	Information Source.....	186
6.3.4	Brand Anthropomorphism	190
6.3.5	Platform Preference.....	191
6.3.6	Challenges	192
6.4	Discussion	196
6.4.1	Interaction	197
6.4.2	Information Source.....	199
6.4.3	Brand Anthropomorphism	200
6.4.4	Platform Preference.....	201
6.4.5	Challenges	202
6.5	Summary	205

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS 207

7.1	Social Media as a Site to Build Brands and Relationships with Fans.....	207
7.1.1	Facilitator of Socialisation and Emotional Connections.....	209
7.1.2	Cultivator of Brand Image and Brand Experience.....	210
7.1.3	Providing Value and Meeting Fan Expectations.....	212

7.1.4	Organisational Adaptability	213
7.2	Implications of the Study	215
7.2.1	Changing Nature of Brand Management in the Social Media Era	215
7.2.2	Modification of the Circuit of Culture	217
7.2.3	Duality of Live-Event versus Online-Event Experience.....	219
7.3	Recommendations for Future Research	220
7.3.1	Co-created Brand Identity	220
7.3.2	Modification of the Circuit of Culture	220
7.3.3	Live-Event vs. Online-Event Experience.....	221
7.3.4	Stakeholder-Nexus	221
7.4	Limitations and Ongoing Relevance of Research.....	222
7.5	Concluding Statement	222
REFERENCES	224
APPENDICES	269
Appendix A:	Invitation to Participate in Interviews	269
Appendix B:	Interview Guide	271
Appendix C:	Between-Event Constructed Week Collection Dates	273
Appendix D:	Expanded Description of Coding Categories and Examples	274
Appendix E:	Online Survey Questions	279

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Definitions of Social Media	14
Table 2: Grand Slam Events Context and 2013 Audience.....	59
Table 3: Social Media Presence by Event.....	60
Table 4: Event Interviewee Information	79
Table 5: Overview of Each Event’s Social Media Team.....	84
Table 6: During-Event Data Collection Period for Each Event.....	121
Table 7: Inter-coder Reliability Results	131
Table 8: Facebook and Twitter Post Count by Event and Time Period.....	135
Table 9: Daily Post Count for Facebook by Event and Time Period.....	137
Table 10: Daily Post Count for Twitter by Event and Time Period.....	138
Table 11: Frequencies and Percentages of Events’ Posts by Communication Tools ...	142
Table 12: Frequencies and Percentages of Posts by Branding, Marketing and Relationship Building Strategy	143
Table 13: Online Survey Data Collection Period by Event	176
Table 14: Demographic Information of Survey Respondents.....	180
Table 15: Social media Usage Characteristics of Survey Respondents.....	181
Table 16: Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform to Follow Events	191

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1:</i> Australian Open 3D hashtag in Garden Square.....	4
<i>Figure 2:</i> Australian Open Social Shack, Twitter vending machine and selfie station.	5
<i>Figure 3:</i> The Circuit of Culture.....	66
<i>Figure 4:</i> Key emergent themes: social media and grand slam tennis events - brand personnel perspective	106
<i>Figure 5:</i> Facebook <i>interaction</i> example post	125
<i>Figure 6:</i> Key emergent themes: content analysis.....	153
<i>Figure 7:</i> Recruitment tweet posted to Twitter (via @ashton99).....	174
<i>Figure 8:</i> Recruitment message posted MensTennisForum.com	174
<i>Figure :9</i> Fan perceptions of events' social media usage	197
<i>Figure 10:</i> Synthesis of research findings	208

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Tennis is often viewed as a sport for purists...for a sport as historic as tennis, it is easy to understand why it may be slow to adapt... [but] the Australian Open is not only adapting...it's changing the tennis world with its use of social media. (Gandolf, 2013)

1.1 The Emergence and Role of Social Media in Modern Society

With the change towards user-driven technologies, social media are central to any discussion about online activity. As a result, online social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and more recently Instagram, Pinterest and SnapChat have been created, and are increasingly integrated into consumers' everyday lives and routines (Billings, Qiao, Conlin & Nie, 2015; T. Smith, 2009). Weber (2009) argues that the future of marketing lies in branded destinations, which includes social platforms. While social media are an emerging concept around the world, their use is common. The following figures serve to illustrate the rapid rise and growing pervasiveness of social media usage in modern society:

- Facebook has amassed more than 1.44 billion users; over 82.8% of users are from outside of the United States of America (U.S.A.) or Canada (Facebook, 2015).
- Twitter has over 300 million users; over 77% of users are from outside of the U.S.A. (Twitter, 2015).
- Users spend, on average, at least two hours per day on social media (Gaille, 2013).
- 18% of social media users cannot go more than a few hours without checking Facebook (Gaille, 2013).

However, while such usage statistics are impressive it is more important to consider the wider implications. Such statistics reveal a more deeply engaged user population, where social media platforms have gradually inundated users' professional and personal lives. Social media usage is now "penetrating every fibre of culture today" (van Dijck, 2013, p. 4). Across all global regions, social media have the potential to influence consumers' decisions and it represents a vast opportunity for brands to gain positive favour with consumers (Nielsen, 2012), and thus it represents an important area for scholarly research.

1.2 The Dilemma of Social Media for Sports Events

Branding is an increasingly important aspect for many sports organisations (Miloch, 2010; Pritchard & Stinson, 2014; Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2011). Given the importance of brand management, the development of strong consumer-brand relationships, and the emergence of social media, it is imperative to understand the role of social media within this sporting context. Brands are traditionally thought to evoke a certain personality, presence, and product or service in consumers' minds (D. A. Aaker, 1991), and are intangible assets, considered to be one of the most important to an organisation (Kaynak, Salman, & Tatoglu, 2007). They are thought to be a source of sustained competitive advantage that provides value to both the organisation and consumer (Nandan, 2005). This benefit is conceptualised in terms of brand equity (D. A. Aaker, 1991).

Traditionally sports events have not commonly been recognised outright as a "brand". However, Bouchet, Hillairet, and Bodet (2013) state this view is changing and sports events are now widely considered and managed as brands. Sports events such as the four Grand Slam tennis events (Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and U.S. Open) are now developing into legitimate global brands in their own right. Given the increasing commercialisation of sports, it is not surprising that events are propelled into

the branding spotlight. Sports events are now seen as prime opportunities to generate further revenue for stakeholders (e.g. sponsors, investors), and thus it is not unexpected that event personnel are protective of a brand's image. Therefore, the branding of sports events is seen as an important part in ensuring both their success, and maximising extra financial revenue (Bouchet et al., 2013).

Scholars argue that social media have the potential to have a profound impact on branding (Yan, 2011). Within specific industries such as sports, the advantages of social media appear well suited to brand and relationship building with fans (Wallace et al., 2011). Enhanced fan connectedness can result in, among other benefits, longer and more profitable relationships through increased consumptive behaviour (End, 2001; Trail, Fink, & Andrew, 2003; Wakefield & Wann, 2006). New technological opportunities, innovations and challenges present an ever-changing virtual landscape for sports marketers and their events. Despite potential opportunities afforded by social media, not all sports events are as willing to embrace its usage. Social media are viewed as a challenge, rather than an opportunity, for some events. The following two examples of the Australian Open and the Ryder Cup¹ serve to illustrate this point and highlight the dilemma of social media for sports events.

1.2.1 Australian Open

In 2015, Australian Open personnel actively encouraged social sharing and the creation of user-generated content, along with active promotion of event-related hashtags.² A number of initiatives were used to inspire at-event fan engagement. While the #ausopen hashtag has existed for a number of years, in 2015 it was promoted in

¹ The Ryder Cup is a men's golf competition played between teams from Europe and the United States of America. Contested every two years, the venue alternates between courses in Europe and the U.S.A., and is jointly administered by the PGA of America, and the PGA European Tour (Harig, 2014).

² On social media platforms, users can preface text with the # symbol, called a hashtag. It is used to mark keywords or topics in a post.

prominent positions around the venues that were most likely to be photographed. For example, a giant 3D version of #ausopen was located in Garden Square and others were posted on giant Australian Open tennis balls around the tennis precinct in Melbourne (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Australian Open 3D hashtag in Garden Square.

Following its successful launch in 2014, the *Social Shack* reappeared at the 2015 Australian Open as a one-stop location for all social media-related activities, taking fan engagement to a deeper level than ever before. It featured a multi-media studio for player visits and live tweet-ups³, a mosaic selfie wall containing fans' #aoselfie photos, and, for the first time, an insta-print station allowing fans to get a Polaroid picture of photos they uploaded to Instagram with the #aoselfie hashtag. In addition, a Twitter vending machine provided fans with opportunities to win tickets and other Australian Open merchandise after they tweeted a specified message (see Figure 2).

³ A “tweet-up” is an organized or impromptu gathering of people who use Twitter. It is typically arranged and advertised via a user’s public Twitter timeline (Loureiro-Koehlin & Butcher, 2013)



Figure 2: Australian Open Social Shack, Twitter vending machine and selfie station.

1.2.2 Ryder Cup

In contrast, consider the Ryder Cup. As with many sports, it is not just the sport's fans, but players too, who are active on social media. During the weeks prior to the 2014 Ryder Cup competition, the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) of America and the PGA European Tour elected to ban both fans and players from publishing photos from the event to social media. This hard-handed approach is reminiscent of strategies taken by brands and content creators in the early days of YouTube, when it was commonplace to remove infringing content. A spokesperson for Ryder Cup Europe explained the reasons behind the PGA officials' approach as follows:

The Ryder Cup is one of the world's most recognized sporting events and as such, we need to ensure that the brand, encompassing fair play, teamwork and camaraderie is protected at all times which means ensuring that images of the event are not used for monetary gain in a manner, which may go against those principles. (Telegraph Sport, 2014)

Yet, days after this statement and the announcement that the PGA would ban the use of websites like Facebook or Twitter to upload photos from the tournament, they retracted the social media ban. Officials released an updated statement on the tournament website, which stated:

Spectators will be allowed to take photos and video on their mobile phones during the event, and will be encouraged to share their experiences on social networks. ... Selfies are positively encouraged ... and [we] expect to see plenty of them. We want people to share their stories online and feel part of the Ryder Cup. (Telegraph Sport, 2014)

These two examples present contrasting approaches to the management and incorporation of social media by two distinct sports event brands. While Australian Open personnel have actively promoted its use for a number of years, Ryder Cup officials were hesitant to embrace its use for fear of potential damage to the long-established Ryder Cup brand. Given that prior research has linked social media use with increased opportunities to build fan bases, through fans' identities and consumptive behaviours (Pegoraro, 2010; Phua, 2010); they represent important tools for future brand and relationship-building endeavours. Therefore, as the popularity of social media increase, sports events must look to develop specific strategies to enhance fan loyalty, develop strong consumer-brand relationships and ultimately build brand equity (Ioakimidis, 2010; Parsons, 2013; Yan, 2011). The impact of these emergent technologies in the professional sports setting uncovers the need for sports marketers to understand how they can maximise the full potential of this media.

1.3 Rationale for the Research

While there is a burgeoning body of literature surrounding the use of social media in the sports domain, there is limited research on its use as a brand and relationship building communications tool. Furthermore, much of the focus to date, both from an academic and practitioner standpoint, examines the use of various forms of social media by athletes, leagues and teams (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Clavio & Kian, 2010; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Ioakimidis, 2010; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). As a result, there is an absence of scholarly enquiry related to social media usage among sports events, particularly in a

global context. The Literature Review (see Chapter Two), outlines a more detailed discussion of the research conducted to date.

Moreover, it is argued that since social media are so prominent, sports researchers and practitioners can no longer continue to ignore this under-researched and poorly understood topic, and note the need for expanded research (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Clavio & Kian, 2010; J. McCarthy, Rowley, Ashworth, & Pioch, 2014; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012). Consequently, many scholars call for further research into the utilisation of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, in order to contribute to the development of a theoretical foundation for marketing and brand-building in this arena (Beer, 2008; Fuchs, 2009; Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). In 2014, Filo, Lock, and Karg (2014) conducted a thorough examination of sports related social media research, and concluded that there was still a need for expanded social media research in the sports context. The authors argued that in order to extend scholarly knowledge, future research could be “extended through a more in-depth analysis or investigation...[and] expanded through multi-faceted examinations of different social media platforms” (p. 7).

1.4 Purpose and Research Questions

The primary purpose of this thesis is:

To explore how social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, serve as sites for professional tennis event brands to build their brands and relationships with fans.

Four secondary research questions have been developed, in order to answer this:

- How do event personnel perceive the benefits and value of using social media to build brands and relationships with fans?
- According to event personnel, what are the barriers and challenges of social media usage?

- What is the nature and extent of the content on sports events' social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter?
- How do fans perceive events' social media usage?

This thesis advances scholarly knowledge in an area that has received limited attention to date. The findings from this exploratory thesis offer a deeper understanding of the role of social media as strategic brand management tools. In addition, while findings from this thesis are not widely generalisable to all other sports brands, sports marketers can learn from the examples set forth by the event brands examined here. Such findings may serve as a valuable source for other sports organisations to formulate their own social media marketing and communications strategies.

1.5 Personal Motivation for the Research

This thesis is also personally motivated. My initial exposure to developing and managing social media usage in the sports context was through my involvement with Tennis New Zealand during 2010 - 2011 as they sought to create a social media presence for the first time. This experience afforded me the opportunity to examine the development of a social media strategy for a national sport organisation (NSO). This illustrated that “in a rapidly changing and evolving sports environment, where the adoption of technology is both an intrinsic part of the way sports are played and consumed, keeping abreast with such developments will be increasingly important” (Thompson, Martin, Gee, & Eagleman, 2014, p. 59). In concluding the study on an NSO, it became apparent that further research relating to social media usage in a broader sporting context was warranted.

In addition, as a long-time follower of tennis, 2015 marked my eighth time attending the Australian Open. Over the years, I have witnessed the growth of the event, and the commitment of the event's management personnel to build the Australian Open

brand and its relationship with fans. I believe a fundamental part of this shift has been the event management's embracing of social media and outward encouragement for fans to share their experiences via social media. This view appears to coincide with the quote that opened this chapter. These experiences, along with an interest in the theoretical exploration of social media usage in building brands and fan relationships, and the dearth of scholarly knowledge in this area, have motivated me to conduct this research.

1.6 Nature of the Research

Acknowledging social media as cultural texts and the relationship of brands to consumer culture, a modified version of du Gay, Hall, Jones, McKay, and Negus's (1997) circuit of culture is used to investigate the production, representation and consumption of social media within a brand management context. In doing so, it does not consider two components (regulation and identity) that are incorporated within the complete model. This thesis undertakes a multi-perspectival analysis (as outlined below), and as a result these two components were omitted as they were not considered to be within the scope of the current study.

Consequently, this thesis employs a multi-perspectival approach and multi-method design to analyse the cultural means and processes of producing and consuming professional tennis events' social media. In doing so, this thesis is underpinned by a pragmatic research philosophy (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Aligned with this pragmatic approach, both qualitative (i.e., semi-structured interview and online survey) and quantitative (i.e., content analysis) techniques were used to collect the data.

1.7 Delimitations

This thesis explores four global, professional tennis events that are collectively known as the Grand Slams. These events are based in Australia, France, the United

Kingdom and the United States of America. As a result, it does not consider any other tennis events based in these countries, nor does it explore any other professional sports events.

For the purposes of this research, two of the most established social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, are considered in an effort to understand this phenomenon. As a result, this thesis does not explore or assess how other social media platforms (i.e., Instagram, Pinterest) are used by the events examined in this thesis.

The term ‘fan’ is used in this thesis to refer to those individuals who follow, and consume, online social media content. This view is in line with Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler (2008) who argue that in the sports context, a “fan can be defined as someone who perceives him-or herself as a follower of a certain sport product” (p. 206). In this thesis, the sport product relates to these events’ social media. Furthermore, it is consistent with extant literature on sport consumer behaviour, whereby such terminology is used to describe individuals who make a conscious effort to engage in activities that signal their support of a specific sport property (Steward, Smith & Nicholson, 2003).

This research was based on a set of event personnel and self-identifying fans of each event that were willing to participate in the research. Participants identified themselves as relevant event personnel, or event fans at the time the research was conducted. These participants may or may not still be considered as such.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The content in this thesis is structured into seven chapters. Chapter Two begins with an overview of social media and provides a review of the literature. The focus of this chapter is on locating this thesis within current theoretical groundings and conceptual understandings of the branding process and consumer-brand relationships, and highlights social media’s role in these areas.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology used in this thesis. It begins with a discussion of the underpinning research philosophy, then outlines the reasoning for selecting a case study approach, along with justification for the selection of the four tennis events examined. The chapter then discusses the overarching research methodology and provides rationale for employing a unique multi-perspectival, multi-method research approach to investigate the moments of production, representation and consumption from a modified version of du Gay et al.'s (1997) circuit of culture. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the ethical considerations relevant to this research.

In this thesis, three unique perspectives were sought and are thus presented as three individual and distinct studies (Chapters Four, Five and Six). Each chapter begins with an overview of the study before presenting a brief review of literature relevant to the specific focus of the study. The chapter then describes the subsequent research methodology adopted. Finally, the results and a discussion of the findings are presented. Issues of research quality, along with relevant ethical considerations are presented in each chapter, as they are study-specific. It is acknowledged that this may not be a traditional thesis format, however, given the distinct focus of each chapter, they are purposefully written so that they can be read as independent studies. Consequently, there is some necessary and deliberate overlap and repetition of the literature in order to link it with the key themes of brand building, relationships with consumers, and social media.

Chapter Four, the first of three analysis chapters, explored the moment of production through the perspective of event media personnel for each of the four tennis events. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted and a general inductive, thematic analysis was used to examine these personnel's perspectives regarding the perceived benefits, value and challenges of producing social media, along with the

strategies employed to build their brands and relationships with fans. This chapter is one of the few studies to examine this unique perspective.

In Chapter Five, a content analysis was used to investigate the representation (i.e. nature and extent) of Facebook and Twitter posts and strategies used during each professional tennis event in 2013, and in the time between each respective 2013-2014 event. A coding framework was modified from previous content analysis research to meet the needs of this study.

Chapter Six presents the results of an online survey of the events' social media fans, in order to explore the moment of consumption and understand the events' usage of social media from the perspective of a fan or follower. Similar to chapter four, an inductive, thematic approach was used to examine these fans' perspectives. Although fan-related research is emerging, this chapter is a major contribution to the field, as the qualitative results provide direct feedback from the fans, on the nature of the events' social media usage, which represents a unique approach among extant literature.

Chapter Seven draws together the findings of the analysis chapters with the broader overarching purpose of the thesis, to consider how Facebook and Twitter serve as sites for professional tennis events to build their brands and relationships with fans. In light of the findings presented, implications and contributions of the thesis are offered. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, as marketing strategy grapples with the question of how to work with social media, old paradigms die-hard. Marketing may be less a matter of domination and control, and more a matter of fitting in. (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009, p. 4)

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of current literature relating to the main concepts of this thesis. This chapter begins by providing a discussion on social media, along with an overview of existing sports-related social media research. An introduction to the two social media sites to be considered in this study, Facebook and Twitter, is also included. It then offers detailed information on branding, the importance of branding in sports and the role of social media in branding. Following this, the final section discusses the concept of consumer-brand relationships and the role of social media in developing these.

2.1 Social Media

The phenomenon of social media use has grown exponentially over recent years, and so, too, has its influence. Some scholars argue that they are now as influential, if not more so, than traditional media (Drury, 2008; Reyneke, Pitt, & Berthon, 2011). Given the expansive nature and scope of social media, it is not surprising that numerous definitions exist. Table 1 presents the definitions provided by prominent authors in the field of social media. It is worth noting that one of the most recent definitions of social media, provided by Hoffman and Novak (2012), makes special mention of mobile applications. This is of particular importance given recent technological advancements in the smart phone industry that have resulted in the increased usage of mobile-based online applications (Brenner, 2013).

However, the term social media is most commonly used to describe online tools that allow sharing of information and content (e.g. video, images, text, news, opinion), and participation and collaboration through social interaction between individuals and entities such as organisations (Filo et al., 2014; Reyneke et al., 2011). While social media were originally designed for friends to connect with friends (Fournier & Avery, 2011b), there has been a significant change with private, public and non-profit organisations joining social media platforms in an effort to engage with their targeted stakeholders.

Table 1:

Definitions of Social Media

Author	Year	Definition
Boyd & Ellison	2008	Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.
Mangold & Faulds	2009	Technology that enables instantaneous, real-time communication, and utilizes multi-media formats (audio and visual presentations) and numerous delivery platforms (Facebook, YouTube, and blogs, to name a few), with global reach capabilities.
Kaplan & Haenlein	2010	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.
Chan & Guillet	2011	A group of internet based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform and enable the Internet users from all over the world to interact, communicate and share ideas, content, thoughts, experiences, perspectives, information and relationships.
Hoffman & Novak	2012	Media that enable and facilitate conversations among consumers, occurring through web-based tools, including mobile applications that people use to create and share content.

Examples of commonly used social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Foursquare (Drury, 2008; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012; Pfahl, Kreutzer, Maleski, Lillibridge, & Ryznar, 2012). However, there are a number of social media platforms available, facilitating the sharing of everything from photographs (e.g.

Instagram, Flickr), videos (e.g. YouTube), audio (e.g. Last.FM), and even virtual worlds (e.g. SecondLife). Facebook and Twitter, though, are the two platforms that are largely synonymous with social media due to their rapid uptake and continued growth (Pegoraro, 2010; Reyneke et al., 2011).

Findings from a study conducted by Forrester Research (as cited in Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) found that 75% of Internet users used social media sites, in the second quarter of 2008, representing a significant increase on the 56% reported in 2007. This research also indicated that this growth was not limited to a specific age range, and instead represented a universal increase. A. M. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that, based on these figures, “social media represent a revolutionary new trend that should be of interest to all companies operating in online space” (p.59).

However, despite the growth and increased attention social media receive in marketing fields, Ang (2011) found that many managers are still uncertain about how they can be integrated with their marketing efforts and remain unclear on what benefits social media provide. Similarly, Kwak, Kim, and Zimmerman (2010) concluded that both academics and practitioners have struggled to understand their value and consequences. Meadows-Klue (2008) also found that many of these marketers are approaching this new media with traditional tactics, yet insisted that these technologies require a change in the way organisations approach their marketing strategies. Drury (2008) highlighted that the rise of social media have caught many in the marketing industry off guard, and noted they have not been able to take advantage of the opportunities to engage with fans in ways traditionally not possible through offline channels. Furthermore, according to Fournier and Avery (2011b) as social media were only meant for individuals to share and connect with others, organisations and brands have to negotiate the ‘private space’ of consumers, necessitating different marketing and branding practices to overcome this.

Some critics argue about the merits of using social media for marketing purposes, stating they only appeal to a selected demographic and therefore do not allow marketers to fully achieve the market reach often desired. However, recent studies show that this conventional wisdom appears to be flawed and there is a growing trend of older adults engaging with various social media platforms (A. M. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Tsai, 2009). While these new forms of communication initially attracted many early adopters, new demographics are now engaging with it. In particular, those 55 and older are the fastest growing demographic on Facebook, with women outnumbering men two to one (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). A number of studies highlight this new trend and indicate that certain social media are becoming age neutral (Stroud, 2008; Universal-McCann, 2010).

2.1.1 Facebook

Facebook was originally created in 2004 as an exclusive online social network for Ivy League Universities; however, it quickly became an open network allowing users to join from any geographic location. In its early stages, Facebook worked as a site where individuals were able to create online profiles and upload their own content to be shared with others. However, in 2006 Facebook provided the opportunity for organisations to register as site users (Yan, 2011). Initially organisations created profiles that mimicked that of an individual, but in 2008 Facebook introduced the 'Page' feature, allowing organisations to customise their presence and communicate with users in a new way (Wallace et al., 2011). Facebook allows users to post web links, pictures and videos. In addition, users have the ability to join virtual groups and develop applications (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012), enabling real-time message exchange (Andrew Smith, Ficher, & Yongjan, 2012).

Reflecting the widespread adoption of Facebook, a number of sports entities are developing a social media presence. Scholarly research examining Facebook usage within the sporting context is also emerging. Researchers have examined fan motivations for interacting and engaging on Facebook. Such research reveals that sports fans appear to be largely motivated by interactivity (Clavio & Walsh, 2013), information (Clavio & Walsh, 2013; Özsoy, 2011), and enjoyment (Mahan, 2011; Stavros et al., 2014). More recently, Stavros et al. (2014) found that followers of several National Basketball Association (NBA) teams were also motivated by passion, hope, esteem and camaraderie. Research in this context has also uncovered distinct usage patterns among sports-specific followers, based on certain demographic variables such as gender, age, and sport (see Clavio, 2011; Clavio, Walsh, & Coyle, 2013; Özsoy, 2011). In addition, Pronschinske et al. (2012) examined how Facebook page attributes influence participation by professional sports fans, and discovered page attributes that signal authenticity and engagement have the greatest impact on Facebook fan bases.

Furthermore, while limited, scholars have conducted content analyses to explore Facebook usage and its relevance to brand management for college athletic departments (Wallace et al., 2011), Canadian national sports organisations (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014) and North American sports leagues (Walden & Waters, 2015). Results from these studies reveal that Facebook is underutilised by these sports organisations, with little evidence that they use this platform to create or support a relationship dialogue.

2.1.2 Twitter

Twitter is “a real-time information network that connects [users] to the latest information about what [they] find interesting” (Twitter, 2012). While Facebook has enjoyed substantial growth, Twitter has amassed a large user base since its inception in 2006. It is most commonly referred to as a microblogging platform, within the wider

social media framework, allowing users to post updates to “followers”, using short text-based messages (referred to as “tweets”) of 140 characters (Pegoraro, 2010; Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012). Twitter allows users, whether they are individuals, organisations or brands, to create personalised accounts to share “tweets” and follow other users (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). Users can then respond to other users’ messages directly, or retransmit (referred to as “retweet”) messages to their own followers (Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012).

Due to its increased usage, a number of organisations have sought to utilise Twitter to share information, communicate and interact with various stakeholder groups (Hambrick, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). In line with this, Twitter is a tool of choice in recent years for many sports organisations to engage socially through the Internet (Pegoraro, 2010), and research exploring sports-related Twitter research is emerging. In addition, a number of studies have examined why sports fans are following Twitter accounts and revealed that they are largely motivated by interactivity (Clavio & Walsh, 2013; Gibbs, O’Reilly, & Brunette, 2014), information (Clavio & Walsh, 2013; Dhurup & Dlodlo, 2014; Witkemper et al., 2012), news (Gibbs et al., 2014) and enjoyment (Dhurup & Dlodlo, 2014; Mahan, 2011; Witkemper et al., 2012). Clavio and Kian (2010) found that users followed a retired athlete based on their affinity to the athlete or the uniqueness of the content.

Other studies have considered why sports organisations utilise Twitter. Gibbs et al.’s (2014) recent study identified promotion as a motivating factor for Twitter usage, which is consistent with Dittmore et al.’s (2013) study of American intercollegiate athletic administrators who perceived Twitter usage fell into one of three primary purposes: interpersonal (i.e., two-way communication), informational (i.e., information

dissemination), and promotion (i.e., relating to upcoming activities as a marketing function).

Scholars have also analysed how athletes are using Twitter. Hambrick et al. (2010) examined athlete use of Twitter and discovered the most common use was personal diversion. Less common uses among athletes in their study included sharing sport information, promotion, fan-ship and content. Kassing and Sanderson's (2010) study of professional cyclists found similar uses along with emergent themes of sharing of opinions and commentary, interactivity engagement, and "cultivation of insider perspectives" for fans (p.113). Fan responses have also indicated potential outcomes derived from following sports entities on Twitter. As Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pedersen, and Burch (2012) discovered, fans felt a greater sense of engagement with athletes that were more social and interactive. According to Pegoraro (2010), Twitter could be used by athletes to "create positive exposure, engage fans, and increase their visibility" (p. 512), allowing them to build their brand and strengthen their reputation. It remains to be seen if the same is true for sports events.

2.1.3 Social Media and Sport⁴

As with other industries, the rise of social media has not gone unnoticed in sports. Reflecting the growth of social media, and the widespread adoption in the sports industry, scholarly inquiry has explored their use in a range of contexts. For example, studies have examined the motivations of fans in using sport websites and social media (Seo & Green, 2008; Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014); fan and athlete use of Twitter (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012), Facebook (Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker,

⁴ Due to the structure of this thesis, a preliminary overview of current sport-related social media research is presented here. To limit repetition, a more complete review of extant literature relevant to each unique study is provided within each chapter.

2012; Scott, Bradshaw, & Larkin, 2013) and Instagram (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, in press); the use of social media by sports organisations (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Hambrick & Kang, 2014; Meng, Stavros & Westberg, 2015; Thompson et al., 2014), sports teams and leagues (C. G. Armstrong, Delia, & Giardina, 2014; Bruffy, Scott, & Naylor, 2013; Bruffy, Scott, Naylor, & Beaton, 2014; Walden & Waters, 2015; Waters, Burke, Jackson, & Buning, 2011); and college sports (Dittmore, McCarthy, McEvoy, & Clavio, 2013; Dixon, Martinez, & Martin, 2015; Jensen, Ervin, & Dittmore, 2014; Sanderson, 2011; Wallace et al., 2011). In addition, research is emerging that considers organisational perspectives of social media usage (Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid, 2013; Eagleman, 2013; J. McCarthy et al., 2014), along with its impact on sports journalism (Gibbs & Haynes, 2013; Kian & Zimmerman, 2012; B. McCarthy, 2014; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Schoenstedt & Reau, 2010; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010).

In line with the growing media-dominated sports consumer, research shows that social media are vital tools for sports marketers. One of the fastest growing areas for sports marketing is the area of social media (Pegoraro, 2010). Yost (2010) argued that social media are no longer just places to connect with friends and family; instead, they are places for doing business and, therefore, sports brands should be looking at ways to integrate them into their strategic plans (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). Researchers have even stated that sports brands may be at a competitive disadvantage if they do not engage in social media (Coyle, 2010).

Furthermore, research suggests the current generation of 'net-users' are so familiar with two-way communication that they expect their favourite sports brands to communicate and connect with them via these channels (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Sports brands failing to adhere to these changes risk losing sports fans, and the opportunities social media provide. These

opportunities include, but are not limited to, developing social connections, direct communication of brand image and enhanced loyalty (Walden & Waters, 2015; Wallace et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010).

Social media are regarded as the new rising force in marketing and brand management and these new phenomena have created a revolution in traditional marketing communication, which is now being embraced by all sectors of the sports industry (Lu-Anderson & Pitts, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010). As such, they provide sports brands with an unparalleled opportunity to reach a large consumer base (Pegoraro, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). After examining perceptions of sports and entertainment venue managers Rothschild (2011) concluded that the significant rise in social media use in sports has resulted in the decline of traditional marketing and communication methods.

Indeed, while some sports brands are still trying to find their place in this changing landscape, others are creatively utilising these technologies and the functionality they provide to reach out to existing consumers and gain new ones. For example, in an attempt to reach international fans, and drive international membership sales to combat a saturated market in the U.K., Arsenal Football Club launched various digital media applications to extend its relationships and interaction with an international fan base beyond that experienced in-stadia (Knoop, 2012). In addition, sports brands are looking at ways to integrate social media into their facilities to support in-stadia engagement. For example, the Cleveland Indians launched a ‘social suite’ providing fans the opportunity to discuss the “Tribe” with other attendees and online followers from a Wi-Fi enabled suite at Progressive Field (Pfahl et al., 2012).

Research has shown social media have transformed sports media and its subsequent consumption. While much of the extant literature exists within the context of professional sports entities (i.e., athletes, leagues, teams) in the United States, the results

indicate that the majority are using social media to grow their brands and increase fan loyalty (Rice, 2009). In addition, these sites are utilised to drive real-time interaction, while offering direct feedback and updates (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Scholars indicate that one of the key features of social media use in sports is the ability to overcome the barriers to fan access (Pegoraro, 2010), and state that social media are particularly effective in sports, as they allow fans, athletes and teams to easily connect with one another (Hambrick et al., 2010; Sanderson & Kassing, 2011; Walden & Waters, 2015). This is important, as fans' accessibility to sports entities is central to the development of team identification (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997).

In addition, social media aid in developing online communities that bring sports fans together. Recent studies provide evidence to suggest that many uses of social media are focused towards creating fan unity and developing online communities that allow for fan interaction (Greene, Dotterweich, Palmero, & Good, 2014). The importance of this is supported by other scholars who argue the ability of fans to share their 'consuming passions', also contributes to establishing and/or reinforcing bonds between individuals (Cova & Cova, 2002; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). Williams and Chinn (2010) indicate that if sports brands were able to use social media to make use of these benefits, they would aid them in achieving brand and relationship building goals.

Moreover, Pfahl et al. (2012) offer a number of examples of how sports marketers have adapted and are paying attention to the opportunities and options that social media provide. Indeed, Sanderson and Kassing (2011) argue that such direct communication provided by social media have revolutionised sports media by giving athletes and teams an opportunity to circumvent traditional media outlets. As a result, sports entities can now produce their own content and shape communication messages that support brand and

relationship building endeavours. Consequently, as Ballouli and Hutchinson (2010) claim, every sports team or organisation should be involved in social media in some way.

However, research also highlights that due to its perceived infancy and unsubstantiated ability to deliver on certain marketing objectives, sports organisations are hesitant to engage in branding endeavours on social media. To this end, previous literature emphasises barriers and perceived challenges, both internal and external, to the adoption of these new technologies among various sports entities. For example, Abeza et al. (2013) identify five challenges that impact on the benefits that brands can derive from social media: lack of control, concerns over credibility, concerns over effectiveness, difficulties identifying true customers and the allocation of organisational resources. Likewise, scholars state that constant technological developments necessitate organisations to adapt their strategies accordingly (O'Shea & Alonso, 2012; Thompson et al., 2014).

2.1.4 Criticisms of Social Media Research

While many scholars espouse the benefits of social media use, it is important to recognise and acknowledge the many criticisms that social media research has received to date. Of critical significance here is that scholars have indicated that current research has suffered from “a lack of theoretical sophistication, insufficient explanation of methods, and weak arguments relating to the merits and importance of the research” (Sanderson, 2014, p.128). For example, in a commentary on the emergence of social media, and more specifically Twitter, Rowe (2014) noted that the rapidly changing nature of such media has resulted in an “undertheorised and ahistorical presentism” (p. 119). Similarly, Pedersen (2014) argued that due to the relative ease with which certain data can be collected, social media have provided opportunities for sport communication scholars to build their publication history quickly through studies without significant rigor or originality. In addition, Pedersen (2014) contended that the rise in social media related

submissions for publication has “raised risks of an academic groupthink within delimited quarters of the sport communication academic community” (p. 1).

Moreover, Rowe (2014) has stated that social media research needs to consider the cultural context within which such communication occurs. Indeed, Hardin (2014) also reflects on social media, and in particular Twitter’s presence in contemporary life, and notes that lack of extant literature that considers social media’s role in a wider sociocultural context. Similarly, Pegoraro (2014) considers Twitter as a disruptive innovation in sport communication, one that has important links to cultural discussions. As a result, Rowe (2014) argues that social media research now needs to be “appropriately located within the media sports cultural complex” (p. 120).

Despite an increase in scholarly inquiry into social media use, scholars have criticised the limited scope of extant research examining their use in the sporting context (Filo et al., 2014; Wang, 2013). Furthermore, while providing valuable insight into the current state of social media usage within the sports setting previous studies have encountered various limitations that signal opportunities for future research endeavours.

Firstly, much of the extant literature is contextually limited in its focus. For example, research to date either explores North American sports entities exclusively, such as Tiger Woods, the National Basketball Association, and the National Football League (e.g. Clavio & Kian, 2010; Hambrick & Kang, 2014; Hambrick et al., 2010; Ioakimidis, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010, 2012; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010; Walden & Waters, 2015; Wallace et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2011) or examines one specific social media platform. While it is acknowledged that research with a European focus is emerging, it is situated mainly within the football (soccer) context (Dima, 2015; J. McCarthy et al., 2014).

Secondly, research has shown there is a marked difference between usage and application of Facebook and Twitter (Hopkins, 2013; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011).

Facebook users connect with their friends (D. M. Boyd & Ellison, 2007), and by becoming friends with other users, they gain access to their friends' content and can post information about personal issues, send birthday wishes, or comment on status updates (Parr, 2010). Twitter users, instead, share observations on their surroundings, information about an event, or opinions regarding a certain topic (Aaron Smith, 2010), and they choose what information they want to receive (e.g. news, links) and which brands to follow (Parr, 2010). Despite this, research examining multiple platforms within the same context to date is scant. Therefore, an examination of these two distinct platforms is important to determine whether they are being utilised in the same manner by sports brands seeking to leverage opportunities to build their brands and relationships with fans.

Finally, much of the user-focused research centres on exploring social media usage within the theoretical framework of uses and gratification theory or para-social interaction. Therefore, a definite gap exists within which to explore fans' perceptions of sports brands' actual social media usage, necessitating further scholarly inquiry to examine user-perspectives within a new context.

Indeed, Pedersen (2014) and Filo et al. (2014) argue that some areas of social media research have reached what they consider to be a saturation point, and have requested scholars seek out innovative ways, and different methodologies upon which to advance work and knowledge in this area. Importantly they note the need for research on sport and social media to advance its agenda to inquiry that is more innovative, rigorous, substantive and significant.

The following section in this chapter considers the branding process and the importance of building brands in the sports setting, before narrowing the focus to consider the role of social media in branding.

2.2 Branding

Scholars have described branding as an ongoing communication process with an organisation's market (Simmons, 2007). To succeed with branding, organisations need to communicate their distinctive attributes in order to create differences that ensure their product is distinguishable from competitors' and to increase the strength of the product image (Kotler, 1997; Simmons, 2007). Through the development of unique products and services that embrace emerging market segments, businesses can stay relevant in today's cluttered market place (D. A. Aaker, 2004; Miloch, 2010). As a result, marketers "agree on the importance of the role of the brand in marketing strategies" (Kaynak et al., 2007, p. 338), and note it should be any enterprise's central focus (Miloch, 2010). Scholars propose that brand management is a process, in which brand-building strategies should uniquely cultivate brand equity. By developing exclusive traits, brands are able to leverage a competitive advantage through short and long-term brand initiatives (Keller, 1999), that enable the development of a distinct brand identity which "help[s] to differentiate its products from the competition" (K. L. Armstrong, 2014, p. 303). According to Fink, Parker, Brett, and Higgins (2009), for sports teams, such competitive advantage extends beyond tangible features (i.e., logo, colours and names) and into unique intangible features (i.e., fan-identification, social status of attending certain sports events).

Moreover, research posits that effective branding, and brand management is essential in cultivating loyalty among consumers, and is therefore a key focus of marketers as it places the respective brand at an advantage over competing brands (D. A. Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993). Marketing scholars, who study the concept of brand loyalty in various settings, conclude that loyal consumers are more likely to spend more on the brand's products, providing a consistent and reliable revenue stream (Berry, 1999; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Miloch, 2010; Shocker, Srivastava, & Ruekert, 1994). Moreover,

loyal consumers provide an additional benefit in that they are more likely to recommend the brand's products to other consumers (Miloch, 2010).

In order to understand the branding process though, one must first understand the brand construct. One of the key considerations here is the acknowledgement that a brand is not the same thing as a product. A product by definition is a good or service that is purchased, most often to satisfy a need (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998). In contrast, a brand invokes meaning for a product (i.e., good or service) that is linked to the associations a consumer develops about it (Miloch, 2010). According to D. A. Aaker (1991), a brand is a distinguishable “name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate...from those of competitors” (p. 7). As Keller (1998) affirms, “a brand is a product, then, but one that adds other dimensions to differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need” (p.4). Consequently, the brand is often considered the most important asset that a company possesses (Kaynak et al., 2007).

2.2.1 The Brand Building Process

The concept of branding is well established in extant literature. As a result, a number of scholars provide empirical models that serve to illustrate the brand-building process, both in general business and sports contexts (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Gladden & Funk, 2001, 2002; Keller, 1993). In the sporting context, the spectator-based brand equity model links factors of brand association to awareness (Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008). The key aspects of this are described in the following section.

The brand-building process begins with establishing brand awareness in consumers' minds, as they will not purchase a product they do not know exists. D. A. Aaker (1991) defined brand awareness as “the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category” (p.61). Brand awareness

encapsulates two key constructs: brand recognition and brand recall (Keller, 1993). Brand recall reflects the consumer's ability to generate the brand correctly from memory (Keller, 1993). In contrast, brand recognition relates to the consumers ability to determine whether they have had prior exposure to the brand.

D. A. Aaker (1996) concluded that brand recognition alone provides a competitive advantage and determined brands can work to build recognition among consumers by providing opportunities for exposure through marketing promotions. According to Miloch (2010), such brand awareness serves as the foundation for developing strong brands, as it assists in generating associations for the brand. This view supports Keller's (1993) earlier findings, that it is a necessary condition for the creation of brand associations and resultant brand image.

Once awareness is achieved, brand management efforts can focus on building a positive brand image. It is important to note here that this is different from the construct of brand identity, which originates from the organisation and is reflective of how the organisation seeks to identify itself (Marguiles, 1977). Research emphasises the brand-focused view of identity (Kapferer, 1997), noting that it consists of the following components: brand vision and culture, positioning, personality, relationships and presentations (De Chernatony, 1999). In contrast, brand image relates to the consumer's set of beliefs and perceptions of a brand, as measured by the brand associations held in memory (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Kotler, 1997; Miloch, 2010; Ross, 2006).

Consumer perceptions of a brand are reflective of the deeply rooted associations that they hold about a specific brand, which can be obtained through consumer experience with the brand (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Various brand association factors have been studied in a range of sporting contexts (e.g. Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, Bang, & Lee, 2007; Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). While it is the marketers' goal to develop positive

brand associations, Keller (1998) cautions that unfavourable perceptions do exist and these have the potential to affect the resultant brand image. Keller (1993, 1998) outlines three dimensions of brand associations: attributes, benefits and attitudes.

Brand attributes symbolise the intrinsic product and non-product properties or characteristics of the brand (Bauer et al., 2008; Keller, 1993). Product related attributes are defined as the physical features that are fundamental to its function (Keller, 1993). In contrast, non-product attributes relate to the external aspects of its purchase or consumption (i.e., price, brand personality, previous experience) (Kaynak et al., 2007; Keller, 1993). Gladden (2014) notes that due to the nature of the sports product, a unique set of brand attributes are required. Consequently, a number of studies have examined sports-specific product-related attributes (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kaynak et al., 2007; Ross et al., 2007; Ross et al., 2008). These previous studies indicate that for sports products, product-related attributes include, but are not limited to, success, players/star players, rivalry, logo/mark, history and venue.

Brand benefits represent the personal meaning or value consumers attach to a product and can be categorised according to three underlying motivations: functional, symbolic and experiential (Keller, 1993). Functional benefits are intrinsically related to the product-related brand attributes (Bauer et al., 2008), whereas symbolic benefits serve to fulfil internally generated needs (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986), which align with non-product related attributes (Miloch, 2010). Experiential benefits relate to the resulting sensory feeling that is evoked when a consumer uses a specific product, and in the sports setting, this has been linked to both product and non-product-related attributes (Miloch, 2010). Ultimately, these benefits may motivate consumption of a particular sports brand. While such benefits may be difficult for a brand manager to control, they can be managed by focusing on the related attributes and understanding the link to resulting benefits.

Finally, brand attitudes relate to the consumer's accumulative evaluation of the brand, relying on the strength and favourability of the attributes and benefits provided by the brand (Keller, 1993). However, scholars note that the abstract nature of this concept can make it difficult to measure (Kaynak et al., 2007; Miloch, 2010). That said Kaynak et al. (2007) highlight the importance of brand attitudes, as they constitute the basis of consumer behaviour. Scholars further note the importance of brand associations for sports entities, arguing that sports managers need to understand these components so they can be effectively leveraged (Ross et al., 2006). Sports entities have an ability to develop promotional messages that emphasise specific brand attributes to aid in the creation (or transformation) of brand image (Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008).

Once created, brands need to be communicated to the relevant target market. Scholars suggest an emphasis on three aspects of a successful brand: (1) a brand is dependent on consumer perception, (2) perception is influenced by the added-value characteristics of the product, and (3) the added value characteristics need to be sustainable (Rowley, 2004; Simmons, 2007). Indeed, research indicates that the creation of a successful brand involves more than an effective product or service and instead includes understanding the customer, marketing communications and ongoing interactions with customers (see Simmons, 2007).

2.2.2 Branding and Sport

Scholars note that sports industry's changing nature provides unique and challenging opportunities for sports marketers to develop lasting impressions and relationships with sporting publics (Gladden, Irwin & Sutton, 2001). Accordingly, Gladden et al., (2001) conclude that brand management and relationship building are two of the most important factors that sports marketers need to consider in the new millennium. Sports brands endure a range of challenges including: the evolving nature of

the industry (i.e., globalisation), growing clutter of the marketplace (i.e., available products and services), and changing technologies (i.e., media communication tools). As a result, there is an obvious need to develop, manage and innovate brands in the sport industry (D. A. Aaker, 2007, 2010). Previous research underscores the importance of branding in the professional sport setting (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Ross, 2006; Ross et al., 2006), and highlights that brand associations are directly linked to sport consumption behaviour and brand loyalty, which influences fan attendance and sport consumer motives (Bauer et al., 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2001; Kaynak et al., 2007).

For sports organisations, brand management is an important concept, made particularly more relevant because of the very nature of the sport product; for example the unpredictability, perishability, and simultaneous production and consumption⁵ (Bauer et al., 2008; Stewart & Smith, 1999). Miloch (2010) notes that these unique aspects, along with declining revenue streams, necessitate the development of strategies focused on attracting and retaining loyal consumers. The development of a strong, favourable brand image represents one of the few constants in fans' perceptions of the product. Therefore, Bauer et al. (2008) conclude that brand management offers sports marketers opportunities to present a consistent and stable appearance to consumers, which may ultimately lead to the development of brand loyalty and equity (Bauer et al., 2008; Keller, 1993, 1998; Miloch, 2010).

Despite this, sports brands may appear to have three distinct advantages over other non-sport products when it comes to branding and brand management. Firstly, Miloch (2010) contends that for many sports entities they have a geographic monopoly, such that they are the only sport entity of the type in the region, thereby eliminating or reducing the competition. Miloch provides the following tennis related example to illustrate this point,

⁵ Here, unpredictability relates to the idea that the outcome of a sporting contest is uncertain, and perishability acknowledges that certain sporting products or services cannot be stored and used at another time.

A U.S. Tennis Association member may access professional tennis in a respective region, but to see tennis at the Grand Slam level, they would need to travel to New York City for the U.S. Open...sport entities can cultivate a brand image without the worry of responding to competitors. (p. 7)

Secondly, Miloch (2010) also points to the vast and dominant media coverage sports entities receive, noting that this allows them to generate exposure to mass markets. Thirdly, compared with other products, sports brands often have the advantage of a highly identified fan base (Wallace et al., 2011). K. A. Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw (1999) formally define a sport fan as “an enthusiastic devotee of some particular sports consumptive object” (p. 440). Much of the sport marketing literature suggests that avid sports fans are a persistent part of modern culture (Lieberman, 1991), and their attitude-behaviour relationships are more complex than they are for consumer goods (Mahony & Howard, 1998). They are often characterised as having high levels of commitment and emotional involvement, and are identified as having a deeper and more textured set of expectations and responses than non-fans when viewing sports (J. Carlson, Quazi, & Muthaly, 2002). This is supported by Underwood, Bond, and Baer (2001) who suggest that the sports industry:

Can be placed near the anchor point of the high involvement end of the services identification continuum, with spectator sports providing an increasingly rare sense of community in today’s disconnecting society. (p.732)

The very nature of the sports product provides the prospect for sports marketers to take advantage of opportunities to maximise identification (Stewart & Smith, 1999). In the simplest form, sports consumers often view the product as an extension of themselves (J. Carlson et al., 2002) and, as a result, project success with personal success (Shilbury, Westerbeek, Quick, & Funk, 2009). Fans who have these characteristics are viewed as possessing long-term loyalty (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Clearly, identification is a key component of a sports fan that many sport organisations seek to take advantage of. However, Richelieu and Pons (2009) note, as with other brands, the challenge arises in

turning fans into paying consumers. Sports entities rely on revenue generated from fans (i.e., through the purchase of tickets, related merchandise), and therefore Couvelaere and Richelieu (2005) conclude that sports brands need to provide opportunities for fans to “live the brand at different moments of their daily lives” (p. 25). Social media, at least theoretically, are one way for sports brands to accomplish this.

2.2.3 Branding and Social Media

As the popularity of social media increases, scholars note that sports marketers must develop specific strategies to use social media to enhance fan loyalty and build brands (Ioakimidis, 2010). However, brand managers are warned not to simply transfer traditional marketing efforts and strategies to these new emergent media. According to Edelman (2010), “consumers today connect with brands in fundamentally different ways...that means traditional marketing strategies must be redesigned to accord with how brand relationships have changed” (p. 65). Kassing and Sanderson (2010) illustrate that social media offer considerable shifts in the interaction and consumption of sport. Professional sports brands now have the opportunity to foster a personal relationship with consumers, facilitated by increased brand interaction (Gladden et al., 2001; Ross et al., 2008). It is suggested, that through increased interaction via these media, brand associations and symbolic and experiential benefits (i.e., fan identification, escapism, and entertainment) can be reinforced (Bauer et al., 2008; Yan, 2011).

In the online branding context, research has concluded that brand experience plays a crucial role in brand building (Simmons, 2007). Ha and Perks (2005) found that brand experience significantly affects consumer satisfaction and brand trust and improving consumers experience with a brand can lead to increased brand familiarity. Both Simmons (2007) and Bowden (2009) posit that high-quality online interactions and engagement play a central role in this process, such that consumers develop positive

brand associations that lead to increased brand loyalty and identification. As Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, and Ilic (2011) indicate, it is closely tied to the trend of creating an “interactive experience and value co-creation within marketing relationships” (p. 253). Consequently, the emergence of social media has had a profound effect on brand management and the potential to build brands via these media (Wallace et al., 2011). Scholars suggest that brands identify methods for enhancing consumer experiences (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

It is evident that communication plays an essential part in the branding process, and thus its centrality to branding strategy cannot be ignored (Gummerus et al., 2012). Social media have dramatically changed the communication landscape, with brands now able to have direct contact with fans (A. M. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Brands seeking to develop relationships with both current and potential consumers pursue social media as a means to achieve this. According to Yan (2011), in the social media age, brands need to build a connection with users that fosters a sense of belonging, concluding that the act of engagement itself may provide this. However, Yan (2011) cautions that brands’ perceived misuse of social media platforms by consumers might be defined as “failure to engage sincerely” (p. 694), and thus jeopardise any brand-building endeavours.

In one of the few studies that explicitly explores social media as brand management tools, Wallace et al. (2011) suggest that social media provide sports brands the opportunity to build and maintain brand image, association and awareness through their communication with fans. However, they also report that little marketing-related activity was undertaken. The authors conclude that the capabilities of Facebook were underutilised by this group, as links and status updates were the most dominant communication method, and thus possibilities for interaction were limited. That said this

study appears limited in its context, only considering Facebook and U.S. collegiate athletic departments. Pegoraro (2012) conducted a similar study in the context of the Women's National Basketball Association's (WNBA) use of Twitter, and found that product related attributes were used more than non-product attributes, which were underutilised. In addition, Pegoraro (2012) showed little promotional activity was undertaken (i.e., sponsor mentions, tickets and/or merchandise sales), and opportunities to display interactivity were limited. Once again, this study was contextually limited. In order to provide a more robust understanding of the role of social media in aiding sports entities to build their brands, further research is required to address the limitations of these previous studies.

According to Keller (2009), brand managers must understand the critical nature of identifying potential opportunities for social media brand management, proper activation of the features, and the associated opportunities for brand extension growth. Similarly, Yan (2011) notes that brand managers must consider how to best leverage social media to “build positive brand associations, build the perceived quality of the brand and build greater awareness of the brand to audiences that it has not yet reached” (p. 692). However, equally important is the need to investigate current market risks associated with developing and implementing any branding strategy (Keller, 2009; Thompson et al., 2014). Despite these assertions, current research has not yet fully considered these perspectives.

In the process of building a brand, it is also necessary to build relationships with consumers. According to Keller (2003) brand development includes building consumer-brand relationships. Research linking these two ideas together notes that many of the tactics and strategies utilised to accomplish one will succeed in helping with the other (Keller, 2003; Nicole, 2000). Moreover, research suggests that by employing strategies to

build brand knowledge, and thus brand equity, brands will also enhance consumer-brand relationships (Chang & Chieng, 2006). The following section discusses consumer-brand relationships.

2.3 Consumer-Brand Relationships

Research demonstrates that branding and brand-based differentiation are powerful means for creating and maintaining competitive advantage. In addition, scholars recognise the importance of relationships in creating brand differentiation. This is of central importance to brand marketers since consumer attachment to a brand is reinforced by relationships that enhance a consumer's self-concept and help them to express their own identity (Breazeale & Ponder, 2012; Fournier, 1998). Perhaps more importantly, Whan Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010) conclude that consumers who feel they have a positive relationship with a brand are more likely to engage in behaviours that will benefit the brand. For sports entities this is vital, as Kim and Trail (2011) note that sports consumers are increasingly discontented and disconnected, and call for "a fundamental shift in sport marketing from a traditional exchange paradigm to a relationship paradigm" (p. 57).

Berry (1983) claims that relationship ideas first emerged within business-to-business, and service contexts, where it was necessary to understand, and cultivate, long-term engagements with relevant stakeholders. However, the notion of developing relationships was slower to develop within the consumer realm. Fournier and Avery (2011a) assert that at least to some extent, brand marketing has always incorporated a relationship between consumers and products and brands (i.e., in the notion of brand loyalty). However, during the 1990s, scholars forecast that this relational approach would become the next dominant marketing paradigm in consumer research (Grönroos, 1994; R. Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Research argues that strong relationships were crucial to

establishing brand value and it was necessary for a paradigm change from the traditional transactional exchange to a relational-oriented one (Grönroos, 1994, 1996). Furthermore, sports studies researchers advocate that such a shift was necessary to meet the challenges of the sport marketplace (Gladden & Sutton, 2009; Kim & Trail, 2011).

Consequently, this paradigm shift has resulted in a distinct change in the art and practice of brand management (Peppers & Rogers, 1993). According to McKenna (1991), marketing shifted “from manipulation of the customer to genuine customer involvement; from telling and selling to communicating and sharing knowledge; from last-in-line function to credibility champion” (p. 68). Thus, scholars assert that the idea of developing and strengthening long-term relationships with consumers is fundamental to strategic brand development and modern marketing (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Fournier, 1998; O'Malley & Tynan, 1999).

The concept of consumer-brand relationships is a topic of enduring, yet increasing importance. Marketing research has evolved to consider the networks of relationships between a brand and its consumers (Ambler, 1997). D. A. Aaker (1997) credits Max Blackston with the original development of a consumer-brand concept, which considers consumer-brand relationships as a means for overcoming limitations associated with brand image research. More recently, researchers note that consumers differ both in how they perceive brands and in how they relate to brands (Fournier, 1998; Muniz Jr & O'guinn, 2001). This line of inquiry emerged from Fournier's (1994, 1998) seminal work that presents a brand management paradigm based on the foundational principles of relationships. Moreover, this resulted in research that suggests people form relationships with brands in much the same way they form relationships with each other in a social context (Aggarwal, 2004), providing further opportunities for brand differentiation.

Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) define consumer-brand relationships as the long lasting bond between a brand and consumer that can be clearly distinguished from other aspects such as brand attitudes, satisfaction and involvement, through development of strong emotional attachment. They contend that the degree of an individual's emotional attachment is a predicator of their commitment to a relationship. However, according to Veloutsou (2007), while the term relationship is widely used in the marketing literature, its application and interpretation lack sufficient explanation.

Previous research examining the relationship between organisations and consumers focuses on the links directly between organisational personnel and consumers, but not the brands themselves. In examining such consumer-brand links, Veloutsou (2007) found that consumers form interactions with brands and often expressed feelings towards branded products, similar to those expected when describing interactions with other humans. Indeed, research claims that a consumer-brand relationship may take different forms, depending on the personality of the consumer and the manner in which he/she develops relationships in general (Fournier, 1998). In this context, relationships with brands are often described in the same terms as a consumer's relationship with people (Fournier, 1994), with links drawn from interpersonal relationship theory and social psychology (see Miller, Fournier, & Allen, 2012; O'Malley & Prothero, 2004; O'Malley & Tynan, 1999; Tildesley & Coote, 2009; Veloutsou, 2007).

For example, Fajer and Schouten (1995) draw from a friendship analogy to identify a continuum of five potential stages in the consumer-brand relationship building process: potential friends (brand trying), casual friends (brand liking), close friends (multi-brand resurgent loyalty), best friends (brand loyalty) and crucial friends (brand addiction). In a more detailed study, Fournier (1998) offers a comprehensive review of consumer-brand interactions, beginning with basic relationship principles and building on

an integrative framework to explain the dynamics of those interactions in everyday life. As a result, Fournier's typology of relationship metaphors categorises fifteen distinct forms of relationship including best friend, courtship, arranged marriages and enslavement.

The development of such consumer-brand relationships is important as they provide numerous advantages to both brands and consumers. Keller (2012) notes that marketers value strong relationships due to the financial benefits they provide. Research indicates that as relationships with customers develop, so too does their loyalty, which leads to repeat business, lower marketing costs and, ultimately, increased profit (Keller, 2012; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Stavros, Pope, and Winzar (2008) explain that sport organisations seek to build relationships with fans in order to enhance fan loyalty. Furthermore, Blackston (2000) and Keller (2001a) argue that strong relationships serve to strengthen brand equity and are therefore an important concept in building brands.

Sport around the world has seen significant changes over the years, particularly in response to technological advancements and the commercialisation of sport (Shilbury et al., 2009), and therefore the importance of recognising sports fans is imperative. In light of this, Bühler and Nufer (2009) conclude that there is a pressing need to develop fans who are prepared to invest their time, emotions and money in these organisations. They therefore see building and maintaining relationships with fans as one of the most important aspects of sports marketing. Similarly, Kim and Trail (2011) highlight the importance of developing relationships between sports organisations and consumers. They identify four key reasons why a relational approach is beneficial to sports entities: (1) increased importance of customer retention; (2) can mitigate potential damage of disgruntled fans; (3) emergence of new technologies provides cost-effective means to develop customised relationships; and (4) inherent characteristics of sport provide the

necessary basis upon which to establish relationships. Moreover, a recent study found that behavioural outcomes of sport fans were predicted by relationship quality, with fans who perceived higher relationship quality intending to consume more sport through media, and buy products and attend games (Kim, 2008, as cited in Williams & Chin, 2010). These findings further validate the importance of building relationships with sports fans. Thus, a relational approach to marketing practices can serve to increase a consumer's value to the sports brand.

Additionally, research illustrates that through the development of consumer-brand relationships, consumers become devoted to brands for reasons beyond functional performance, which leads to the idea of brands having symbolic value (Aggarwal, 2004). Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013) stress the importance of this, noting it is crucial as functional benefits can be easily replicated and thus these relationship benefits create a strong foundation for long-term success. Fournier (1998) notes that identity is central to this notion as these relationships provide meanings that allow people to construct and negotiate their lives. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) expand on this, arguing that a consumer's identification with a brand represents a deep, committed and meaningful relationship, and is something marketers should try to foster. According to Keller (2012), the value of this is achieved when consumers who form these committed relationships, function as brand ambassadors and help to build brand loyalty with other consumers.

However, while consumers form these relationships with brands, they are not mutually exclusive. Fournier and Yao (1997) argue that consumers may form attachments to more than one brand in the same product category, as long as they are aware of it. As Veloutsou (2007) note, "no bond can be created and further developed if the brand is unknown" (p. 11). Knowledge of a brand is not enough to start the development of a relationship. As Veloutsou (2007) claims, while consumers acknowledge brands are very

important to them, some are unwilling to accept that they form relationships with them. Veloutsou concludes that brands need to develop an understanding and a strategic awareness of the ways in which they can affect the consumer-brand relationship in order to ensure the development of such bonds.

2.3.1 How Brands Affect Consumer-Brand Relationships

Aligned with the emergence of research into consumer-brand relationships, scholars have examined how brands affect the relationship in an effort to ensure its longevity and continued value. After a two-month investigation of the development and evolution of relationships between consumers and brands, J. Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004) conclude that everything a brand does affects the relationship, including the colours and fonts of the organisational website and tonality of brand collateral. Alternatively, O'Loughlin, Szmigin, and Turnbull (2004) suggest that successful relationships emerge from positive experiences with the brand. This calls attention to two key constructs that dominate the extant consumer-brand relationship literature: communication (also referred to as interaction) and brand anthropomorphism.

Scholars argue that communication is the foundation process facilitating relationship development and its ongoing maintenance (Brodie et al., 2011; Donaldson & O'Toole, 2002; Veloutsou, 2007). As such, it remains a crucial issue for a brand's survival. Central to Fournier's (1994, 1998) relationship metaphor (i.e., best friend, courtship, arranged marriages and enslavement) is the notion that the brand is an active, contributing member of the consumer-brand relationship dyad. Mohr and Nevin (1990) compared this construct of communication to the 'social glue' that holds the two parties together. Moreover, Andersen (2005) argues that involving consumers in dialogue is one of the keys to achieving brand involvement and loyalty, and therefore establishing positive market relationships. Indeed, research suggests that relationships begin when

consumers and a brand commence interaction and as the duration and frequency of interaction increase, the relationships become stronger and more sustainable (Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). The continued interaction of the consumer with the brand results in experiences that can create and reinforce emotional ties between both parties (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013), which serve to strengthen the resultant relationship.

The extent and quality of the communication between consumer and brand has a direct effect on the creation of customer loyalty and relationships. Mohr and Spekman (1994) conclude that the quality and sharing of information influences the process of forming the relationship, and its possible success, thus becoming a central part of the relationship atmosphere (Hallen & Sandstrom, 1991). Similarly, Fournier (1998) explains that the quality of the relationship between consumers and brands evolves through meaningful brand and consumer actions. However, while these actions serve to enhance the relationship and shape its quality, Fournier (1998) cautions that brand managers need to be mindful that such actions can also dilute or even dissipate the relationship. Furthermore, scholars indicate that the absence of communication also sends distinct messages to consumers, and therefore contributes to the total communication process (Grönroos, 2004; Yan, 2011).

In addition to communication, current research argues that the interpretation of a brand, in terms of a relationship, is a logical extension of the idea that brands have a personality and can be anthropomorphised. Consequently, a brand has an important role to play in maintaining a relationship. J. Aaker et al. (2004) state that the concept of a brand has now evolved to that of a relationship based on trust, predicated by meanings attributed to them, beyond the physical characteristics. D. A. Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 347). Aaker’s

research identified five dimensions of brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness) with multiple facets that allow brands to be described as being wholesome (i.e., Disney), tough (i.e., Oakland Raiders), and hip or cool (i.e., Absolut Vodka).

As consumers develop relationships with brands, similar to forming relationships with humans, the personality traits of each partner affect the relationship (J. Aaker et al., 2004; Fournier, 1998). Research shows that brand personality affects a consumer-brand relationship and recent marketing research concludes this is an important issue for brand managers, in order to maintain strong consumer-brand relationships (Gummesson, 2002; Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, & Blaszk, 2013). As such, brand personality is considered a central driver of consumer preference and usage, and more importantly as a common denominator that can be used to market brands across cultures (J. L. Aaker, 1997).

While much of the extant literature examining brand personality is applied in a traditional business context, Kim and Trail (2011) note that sports entities are often believed to have personality qualities that make the sport context a natural setting within which to develop such consumer-brand relationships. That said, research on brand personality in sports is emerging, yet still in its infancy (Walsh et al., 2013). Such sport-related studies have examined brand personality as it relates to sports teams (e.g. B. D. Carlson, Donavan, & Cumiskey, 2009), sports events (e.g. Walsh et al., 2013), and sports entity-sponsor connections (e.g. Lee & Cho, 2009). Research to date suggests that brand personality is an important construct for sports entities and it must be actively developed in order to effectively market, position and differentiate sports brands (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). Furthermore, Ross (2006) concludes that for sports entities, developing a favourable and unique brand personality may also assist in generating revenue through ticket sales and sponsorship.

In addition, research states that relationship partners must collectively contribute to the process, requiring an explicit two-way communication between consumer and brand (Berry, 2000; Fournier, 1994, 1998). Thus, Fournier (1998) concludes that the central assumption on which any consumer-brand relationship is established is the consumer's ability to personify a brand. However, others argue that the simple act of personification is insufficient for a brand to be considered a legitimate relationship partner (Ambler, 1997), and that instead, brands need to be anthropomorphised, or humanised, in order to behave as an active, contributing member of the dyad (Berry, 2000; Fournier, 1998). Scholars note that this is a logical extension of imbuing brands with personalities (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Kwon & Sung, 2011) and identify the decision makers of a brand as the key drivers behind its humanising process (Veloutsou, 2007).

Aggarwal and McGill (2012) define brand anthropomorphism as “the attribution of uniquely human characteristics and features to non-human creatures and beings” (p. 308). Brand managers encourage anthropomorphism via a number of means. For example, by creating brand characters or spokespeople (i.e., Ches N’ Dale, Michelin Man), brand names that conjure imagery of real people (i.e., Aunt Betty’s, Dr Pepper), and brand communication that utilises first-person language. Research shows that anthropomorphised brands influence consumer behaviour (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012), and help generate trait inferences that influence consumer perceptions of the brand, which may help elevate the brand to the status of relationship partner (J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995).

2.3.2 Criticisms and Challenges

While some scholars espouse the benefits of consumer-brand relationships and document their similarities to traditional interpersonal and social relationships between people, others criticise this approach and identify two key areas of dispute: consumers’

willingness to be a relationship partner and the applicability of the relationship metaphor. Arnould and Price (2006) are the primary critics in challenging the brand relationship notion, contending that consumers have no interest in forming relationships with brands. They argue that people have more important things to do than cultivate intimate relationships with brands (Arnould & Price, 2006). This view is shared by Bengtsson (2003), whose study considered consumers' views of such relationships and concluded that consumers were unwilling to accept that they would have a relationship with their brands.

Moreover, several scholars indicate inherent limitations that have led them to question the legitimacy (Aggarwal, 2004) and transferability (Huang, 2012) of the relationship metaphor. For example, Huang (2012) argues that a relationship must be defined and refined collectively by relationship partners, which further facilitates the two-way communication between person and brand (Fournier, 1994). For this to occur however, consumers must first personify a brand, which then becomes an active partner with the consumer. While marketers make attempts to personify their brand, Bengtsson (2003) argues that this is not enough for the brand to be considered a legitimate partner, stating "a brand is an inanimate object and cannot think or feel; thus it likely to respond to consumers in a highly standardized manner" (p. 154).

In addition, research indicates that while numerous benefits can be achieved through the development of consumer-brand relationships, the creation of value is a difficult task. To develop and nurture such relationships necessitates an organisational culture and willingness that is aligned with relationship principles and ideals. Furthermore, Fournier, Breazeale, and Fetscherin (2012) note that these relationships are complex psychological and cultural phenomena, which link with attachment theory (see

Swaminathan & Dommer, 2012) and social psychology, specifically social identity and self-categorisation theory (see He, Li, & Harris, 2012; Tildesley & Coote, 2009).

As consumers attach deep social meaning to brands such that they influence their lives and their social interactions, Keller (2012) argues that it is an important avenue for continued research. While previous research provides empirical support for the development of consumer-brand relationships in an effort to build brands and improve commercial viability and competitive advantage, Keller also contends that these resultant relationships have significant cultural importance. He also notes that relationships represent a complex phenomenon that are “an inherently multi-dimensional concept” (p. xiii), and that in order to understand them fully, future research must include “many different points of view and perspectives ... only through such multiplicity of viewpoints can the richness of consumer-brand relationships be captured” (p. xiii). While research related to the broader concept of relationship marketing in sport is emerging (see Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Achen, 2014; Hambrick & Kang, 2014; Williams & Chinn, 2010), few sport studies explicitly examine consumer-brand relationships (B. D. Carlson & Donovan, 2013; B. D. Carlson et al., 2009), and even fewer explore social media in the explicit context of consumer-brand relationships (Pegoraro, 2012), particularly in regards to sports event brands.

2.3.3 Consumer-Brand Relationships and Social Media

As previously illustrated, there has been a significant shift from a transactional to a relational marketing approach, in which interaction, communications and connecting with fans is the central focus. Social media provide organisations with the ideal platform to apply this type of marketing approach, as they support interaction and novel ways to engage with consumers (Wallace et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Research also

shows that social media allow organisations the opportunity to communicate *with* fans rather than *to* them (Pfahl et al., 2012; Safko, 2010; Tsai, 2009).

Scholars note that the current generation of internet users are so familiar with two-way communication that they expect organisations to engage with them and embrace relationships (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Likewise, Davis, Piven, and Breazeale (2014) examined consumers from Facebook brand-related communities and concluded that consumers anticipate specific two-way interaction with brands that can only be satisfied via social media. With that said content that is engaging to fans plays a critical role in soliciting such interactions as well as retaining customers. This is a fundamental requirement for building relationships, and Mitic and Kapoulas (2012) describe how providing relevant and interaction-driven content on social media sites is crucial.

Research indicates that this is just as important for sports entities. For example, Williams and Chinn (2010) provide a conceptual examination of the application of online technologies in helping sports organisations meet their wider relationship marketing goals. The authors note that opportunities for interaction and communication are central to the process upon which relationship value is determined. Similarly, Fisher (2008) explains that sports teams view their presence on Facebook as a way to strengthen relationships with fans.

However, Pegoraro's (2012) examination of Twitter use by the WNBA found few examples of relationship-building strategies evident in the Tweets included in her study. Similarly, in a subsequent study examining Facebook usage by four major North American professional sports leagues, Walden and Waters (2015) found that little two-way interaction was supported by these leagues, with usage focusing on promotion and publicity rather than delivering engagement and supporting discussions by way of

responding to fans' questions. The authors conclude that while social media were used to generate brand awareness, the leagues would be more likely to ensure the development of relationships through the provision of opportunities for "true engagement" (p. 14).

In addition, recent research has found that social media may influence fans' emotional connection to the brand, such that it affects their relationship (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). For example, Dholakia and Durham (2010) extend their discussion of brand management benefits and argue that brands' fans generate more positive word-of-mouth, and exhibit more emotional attachment to the brands than non-fans. Laroche et al. (2013) concluded that brands should therefore seek to foster such feelings.

Similar results exist in the sporting context. In their examination of IndyCar drivers, Clavio, Walsh, and Vooris (2013) found drivers were convinced that their Twitter use allowed them to engage with fans on an emotional level. A similar finding was reported by Davis et al. (2014), yet they also acknowledge that a lack of enjoyment and entertainment in brand interactions negatively affected emotional ties resulting in "on-off consumption encounters with a brand" (p. 473), which may ultimately damage the development of such consumer-brand relationships. While this research suggests that social media can be used to help affect emotional bonds, both positively and negatively, Clavio, Walsh, and Vooris (2013) indicate that further research is required in order to examine whether social media interaction and consumption creates greater emotional bonds between fans and sports entities. These discoveries have important theoretical and practical implications, as emotional bonds developed through social media interaction may influence the strength of fans' relationships with the brand; necessitating development and management of a brand's social strategy accordingly.

Indeed, extant literature posits that social media provide organisations with the means to support the development of consumer-brand relationships. However, Fournier et al. (2012) argue that rising use and reliance on such technologies may in fact further complicate the relationship-building task. In support of this notion, Mitic and Kapoulas (2012) found that personnel were sceptical about negative implications on brand image from engagement in Web 2.0, and concluded that the entertaining nature of popular online social networks clashes with the “serious nature” of banking, thus engaging with social media may be detrimental to relationship-building efforts (Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012). In addition, with a plethora of online tools available, brands face questions about where to focus their efforts. For example, Waters et al. (2011) found that National Football League (NFL) teams used their website more often than Facebook to cultivate relationships with fans. Current research has not yet addressed whether such results stem from a conscious decision on the part of brand personnel, or rather whether it is reflective of personnel’s lack of understanding of how social media can be used to cultivate relationships.

What is clear when examining the literature on consumer-brand relationships is the current dearth of scholarly enquiry that is acknowledged by researchers who call for further research in this area (i.e., Blackston, 2000; Dall’Olmo Riley & De Chernatony, 2000; Fournier, 1998; Fournier et al., 2012). Moreover, much of the extant literature is conceptual (Veloutsou, 2007), and exists in the general business context, with few studies to-date explicitly examining consumer-brand relationships in the sport industry. Additionally, while scholars conclude that at least theoretically social media are worthy sites to develop and foster consumer-brand relationships, little empirical research has been conducted to examine and support this claim. Therefore, there is a clear need for scholarly attention to unpack this notion particularly in light of the growing use of social

media and their apparent suitability to contribute positively to the development of consumer-brand relationships.

2.4 Summary

This chapter provided detail on the nature of social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, and current sports-related research in this context. Branding and brand development was shown to be an important aspect of modern marketing and its significance to sports was identified. This chapter also highlighted the link between brand building and the development of consumer-brand relationships. Specific consideration was given to the emergence of social media and their role in these two constructs.

From this discussion, interrelated issues emerge. Firstly, an evaluation of prior research has highlighted the dearth of scholarly inquiry into producer and consumer perspectives related to social media usage in a wider sports context and exclusively related to sports events. Secondly, current content analysis studies use a small sample that limits the potential understanding of social media usage. Thirdly, literature related to the context of brand and consumer-brand relationship building is scant. Finally, there are calls in the academic literature for greater sports-related social media research. Together these elements form the basis of this thesis, and are encapsulated in the four secondary research questions: (1) how do event personnel perceive the benefits and value of using social media to build brands and relationships with fans; (2) according to event personnel, what are the barriers and challenges of social media usage; (3) what is the nature and extent of the content on sports brands' social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter; (4) how do fans perceive events' social media usage?

In summary, prior literature has enhanced our knowledge of social media, branding, and the development of consumer-brand relationships. However, there is a clear gap related to social media usage by sports events brands and more specifically, how

Facebook and Twitter serve as sites that allow such events to build their brand. Furthermore, as is often the case with technological products, they evolve and change in nature, often quite rapidly. This mandates researchers to examine these platforms carefully in order to provide deeper and more practical understanding for both academics and practitioners alike. The following chapter outlines the methodological approach undertaken to explore these questions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach and offers contextual information about the problems, questions and methods utilised in this research. As this research employs a multi-method approach through three independently focused studies, the specific methodological issues such as sample size, research instrumentation, corresponding collection and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations are not discussed in this chapter. Instead, they are addressed in each subsequent chapter.

This chapter begins with an outline of the relevant research philosophy that underpins this research. Following this, the chapter then discusses the research context that provides the rationale for its selection. As indicated above, this research employs a unique multi-method approach and the chapter concludes with the justification for selecting this approach.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The debate for choosing a particular research philosophy is often considered within the context of a ‘paradigm war’ and is frequently framed in terms of either a positivist or interpretivist approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Saunders et al., 2009). Such philosophical worldviews are defined as “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105), allow the researcher to determine which problems need exploring and what methods are appropriate to undertake such exploration (Bryman, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Saunders et al., 2009). In the context of this thesis, the researcher chose to use the term philosophy but acknowledges that other scholars refer to them as *paradigms* (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Mertens, 2009); *epistemologies and ontologies* (Crotty, 1998); or broadly conceived *research methodologies* (Neuman, 2000). Notably, within social sciences the two aforementioned

approaches, positivism and interpretivism, are the broad research approaches that are most commonly used (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001; Neuman, 2000).

The interpretivist approach provides a beliefs system structured on exploring the social world through immersion, understanding, and interpretation (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is particularly important in fields where work is still required in conceptualisation and theory development (Harker, 2004). In contrast, the positivist research paradigm places importance on measures, with the researcher focusing on working with an observable social reality that provides the ability to produce law-like generalisations similar to those produced by natural scientists (Saunders et al., 2009).

However, there has been a shift resulting from combining qualitative and quantitative methods, which sees the rise of another research philosophy based on a pragmatic stance (D. L. Morgan, 2007). Within this philosophy, researchers focus on the consequences of research and place primary importance on the purpose and research question(s) rather than the methods (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009). Using this stance, researchers use all methodological approaches available to understand the problem (Creswell, 2013). Saunders et al. (2009) contend that various methods may be more appropriate than others to answer particular research questions and this philosophy recognises and acknowledges the pragmatic stance to research.

Aligned with the pragmatic approach, this thesis utilised both qualitative and quantitative techniques to collect the data. While those who follow the more traditional positivist or interpretivist philosophies would raise questions regarding the likely impossibility to mix epistemological or ontological positions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), a multi-method approach is consistent with the pragmatist's philosophy. Researchers who advocate for a pragmatic philosophy argue that there is a need for a convergence of these two methods, reiterating that they are not different at an

epistemological or ontological level and in fact share many commonalities in their approaches to inquiry (Feilzer, 2010).

Moreover, research is often multi-purpose and a pragmatic approach allows researchers to mix various philosophical viewpoints within the context of a single study and ultimately facilitates the utilisation of multiple methods of data collection to form mixed methods research (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Thus, pragmatic approaches are not confined or limited to one pre-determined worldview about the relationship between knowledge and the process in which it is developed (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), it is appropriate for researchers to think about philosophies adopted as a continuum rather than as opposing positions and they suggest that “at some points the knower and the known must be interactive, while at others, one may more easily stand apart from what one is studying” (p. 26). This view is supported by Creswell (2013), who acknowledges the development of research approaches, and notes that the situation today is less “quantitative versus qualitative and more how research practice lies somewhere on a continuum between the two” (p. 4). As such, the philosophical debate should not be considered as a ‘paradigm war’.

These reasons provide justification that pragmatism is typically the philosophical position that underpins many multi-method studies. Several scholars (i.e., D. L. Morgan, 2007; Patton, 1990; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) convey the importance of pragmatism in focusing on the research problem in social science research, and using pluralistic approaches oriented toward “what works” and practice to derive knowledge (Creswell, 2013). In pragmatism, the approach may combine deductive and inductive thinking, as the researcher mixes both qualitative and quantitative data. As pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy, individual researchers are free to choose methods, techniques, and procedures that best meet their needs and purposes. Further, Creswell and

Clark (2007) argue that practical and applied research philosophy should guide methodological choices. As a result, in order to address the research questions in this thesis, the pragmatic view set forth by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) is the underpinning philosophy.

3.2 Research Context

This thesis employs a case study approach, deemed appropriate when exploring an area where little is currently known (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). It is argued that case studies enable researchers to deal with complex situations (Yin, 1994), and examine contemporary phenomena within a real-life context (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, they allow the researcher to explore these phenomena with “a bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).

Researchers also suggest that the purposes of social research can be categorised into one of three areas: the exploration of a new topic, the description of a social phenomenon, or an explanation of why something occurs (Neuman, 2000). Yin (1994) identifies that these three approaches also apply to case study research, and while each approach has its own advantages, it is acknowledged that a degree of overlap exists among them. Yin (1994) also proposes that there are three criteria to help determine the most appropriate approach: “(a) the type of research question being posed; (b) the extent of control an investigator has over events; (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (p. 4). Based on these criteria, this thesis is an exploratory approach. It is also underpinned by some explanatory and descriptive outcomes, as noted in subsequent chapters. This specific approach is consistent with the richness of data that cases provide (Yin, 2003). In addition, it allows for the integration and contrasting of

different perspectives that can give a detailed understanding of context (Andrew, Pederson, & McEvoy, 2011).

The first step in defining the research context involved identifying the sporting context to be explored in this thesis. A number of factors were considered to address this issue. Firstly, while research is emerging on social media use in IndyCar racing, golf, and football, much of the current research focuses on selected sports such as basketball, American football, and cycling. Secondly, most of the existing research on social media in the sports setting centres on North American sports or personalities, and research in the European context is only now emerging. Therefore, scholarly attention on the utilisation of social media from a more global perspective, focusing on an unexamined sport, is warranted.

Tennis was identified as the sport-specific context within which to situate this thesis, further extending the body of knowledge related to social media use in sports and addressing some of the gaps acknowledged. This sport was selected primarily due to the researcher's preconceived knowledge, understanding, and prior involvement with the sport. In support of choosing tennis as the sport-specific context, research also shows that tennis is experiencing an expansive global growth and increases in event sponsorship (Brouwers, Sotiriadou, & De Bosscher; Marshall, in press). The worldwide competition structure of the sport and its increasing reputation in the Olympic Games (Brouwers et al., in press) serve to illustrate its global reach. According to the ATP (2013), tennis is the second highest popular global sport after football, played in 190 countries, has 4.4 million fans and attracts 800 million television viewers globally. Furthermore, as this thesis focuses on event brands, tennis was considered an appropriate context within which to frame the research as a number of professional tennis events have achieved global brand status (Bouchet et al., 2013).

Once tennis was identified as the sport-specific context, the next step was to select the events to be examined. In order to determine which events would be explored, this thesis drew on guidelines presented by scholars familiar with case study research. As such, a purposive and pragmatic approach was utilised with respect to selecting the events, which is consistent with the recommendations noted in literature. Yin (1994) cautions researchers against using a random approach, while Creswell (1998) states that purposive sampling is particularly relevant for case study research. Stake (2000) extends this discussion by noting that the small sample size often found in case study research does not allow for random selection and that “purposive sampling, building in variety and acknowledging opportunities for intensive study” (p.446), is therefore the most appropriate.

In order to provide significant insight and address the research questions, four tennis events were selected, based on a number of considerations including access, cooperation, theoretical applicability, likely outcomes, possible uniqueness and representation of the sporting landscape. In addition, the four selected events collectively form the Grand Slam tournaments, otherwise referred to as the tennis “Majors”, and represent the four most prestigious annual professional tennis events (Brouwers et al., in press). These particular events have also been previously identified as well-known global sports event brands (Bouchet et al., 2013). A brief contextual discussion of the Grand Slams and each of the four individual events is provided in the following section.

3.2.1 The Grand Slam Events – Tennis’ ‘Majors’

While many major sports events are only organised every four years (e.g. Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, UEFA Euro, IRB Rugby World Cup), some occur annually (e.g. Tour de France, Super Bowl, Formula One World Championship) (Bal, Quester, & Plewa, 2010). As part of the latter category, the four Grand Slam tennis events occupy an

important place in the global sports landscape. The events are geographically and temporally distributed throughout the year – in the Asia/Pacific region (Australian Open, January), Europe (Roland Garros, May; Wimbledon, June/July) and North America (U.S. Open, August/September) – and all benefit from substantial audiences, as shown in Table 2. With such extensive worldwide coverage, it can be said that the four events dominate the annual global sports calendar.

As a collective, the four tennis events are recognised as the premier events in the sport. Though each tournament is unique, allowing personnel to highlight distinct brand associations and differentiate the event product, taken together they serve to highlight the best of tennis and the myriad of professional stars to a worldwide audience. The four events represent major milestones on the tennis calendar each year, and they represent a “significant part of the history of the sport and its remarkable growth on a global scale” (USTA, n.d.). Table 2 also provides a contextual overview of each of the four tennis events. In addition to the evidence of a significant audience (provided in Table 2), Table 3 offers an overview of each event’s social media presence; qualifying them as a worthy context for examination.

Table 2:*Grand Slam Events Context and 2013 Audience*

Context	Events			
	Australian Open ⁶	Roland Garros ^{7,8}	Wimbledon ⁹	U.S. Open ¹⁰
<i>Founding date</i>	1905	1891	1877	1881
<i>Owner</i>	Tennis Australia	Fédération Française de Tennis (FFT)	All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club (AELTC), Lawn Tennis Association	United States Tennis Association (USTA)
<i>Location</i>	Melbourne Olympic Trusts Park, Melbourne, Australia	Stade de Roland Garros, Paris, France	All England Lawn Tennis Club, London, UK	Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre, New York, USA
<i>Main stadia</i>	Rod Laver, Hisense, Margaret Court	Philippe Chatrier, Suzanne Lenglen	Centre Court, No. 1 Court	Arthur Ashe, Louis Armstrong
<i>Court Surface</i>	Hard (Plexicushion)	Clay	Grass	Hard (DecoTurf)
<i>Audience</i>				
<i>Onsite^a</i>	684,457	428,751	486,898	713,026
<i>TV^b</i>	200+	184	198	200+
<i>Website^c</i>	14.1	12.0+	19.7	12.6
<i>Mobile^d</i>				
<i>iPhone</i>	918,966	*	890,000	811,000
<i>Android</i>	601,640	*	640,000	300,000

Note: * = data not publicly available.

^a cumulated. ^b number of territories. ^c unique users, millions. ^d unique app downloads.

⁶ <http://www.tennis.com.au/news/2013/01/28/australian-open-2013-the-final-word>

⁷ http://2013.rolandgarros.com/en_FR/tournament_info/201307161374012338649.html

⁸ <http://www-05.ibm.com/innovation/fr/rolandgarros/en/pdf/Roland-Garros2014-CustomerCase-EnglishVersion-BD.pdf>

⁹ http://web.archive.org/web/20140502003539/http://www.wimbledon.com/en_GB/about_aeltc/201205091336574376496.html

¹⁰ <http://www.cio.com/article/2599428/data-analytics/how-ibm-serves-up-data-to-tennis-fans-at-u-s-open.html>

Table 3:*Social Media Presence by Event*

	Event			
	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	U.S. Open
Joining dates				
<i>Facebook</i>	15/12/2008	09/12/2009	28/05/2008	13/06/2009
<i>Twitter</i>	12/11/2008	24/05/2009	21/05/2008	19/05/2008
Social media followers				
<i>Facebook</i>	887,158	784,000	1,500,000	637,291
<i>Twitter</i>	565,738	208,000	700,000	328,614
Social media platforms used				
<i>Facebook</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Twitter</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Instagram</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Google+</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Pinterest</i>	✓	✓	✓	
<i>YouTube</i>	✓		✓	✓
<i>Foursquare</i>		✓		✓
<i>Tumblr</i>	✓			

Australian Open. The Australian Open is the first Grand Slam tennis tournament every year. In recent years, its popularity and attraction has increased to the point where it is now regarded as an international tennis event, premier entertainment spectacle and Melbourne tourist attraction (Tennis Australia, 2010). Over the years, the Australian Open has managed to forge a unique and distinct brand identity among the other three events. It is widely considered the ‘friendly’ slam, for both players and fans alike, and is known for its vibrant and passionate fans. The “Barmy army at the tennis vibe” draws on Melbourne’s fun-loving and high-spirited mood (Telegraph Sport, 2015), which sees fans dress up as cheer squads for their favourite players, a unique sight compared to the other slams. While the tennis is an important part of the Australian Open, many other aspects of the event are just as important to its identity including Garden Square, Grand Slam Oval and the Heineken Beer Garden.

The Australian Open management appear to have openly embraced emerging technologies actively seeking to ensure they have a presence in the online space. In order to achieve this, in 2008 Tennis Australia, as the governing body, underwent an organisational restructure. During this time the Marketing department was reformed with its sole focus becoming fully centred on “developing the Australian Open (AO) and AO series brands and communicating with our customers through a myriad of multi-media channels... the new e-communications department delivered online and offline products” (Tennis Australia, 2008, p. 52). This new department viewed the Internet as a “key media vehicle in our growing customer relationship...[through] the provision of content second to none in the sports and entertainment world...with a drive towards personalised, contemporary and uplifting relationships with customers” (Tennis Australia, 2008, p. 56).

Since 2008, perceptions towards the Australian Open’s increased focus on digital and online strategies appear positive. Industry analysts provide numerous commentaries on the use of social media by Australian Open personnel, to such an extent that it is regarded as one of the most ‘fan-friendly’ tournaments and is often reputed to lead the way in social engagement (Conway, 2012; Laird, 2012). The use of social media by the Australian Open is highlighted in their 2012 Annual Report where fan engagement through social media is clearly highlighted (Tennis Australia, 2012). Figures in this report illustrate significant growth in social media followers, particularly on Facebook and Twitter.

Roland Garros (French Open). Roland Garros (French: Les Internationaux de France de Roland-Garros or Tournoi de Roland-Garros) is the year’s second Grand Slam tennis tournament, and is more commonly known in English as the French Open. Since moving to Stade de Roland Garros in 1928, the aura of the event has improved annually. While the largest proportion of spectators are French (approximately 80%), an increasing

number of foreign visitors and media are seen each year (Leblanc, 2013). Roland Garros has garnered a reputation for being one of the most physically gruelling tournaments in the world and it is considered the premier clay court tennis championship event globally (Leblanc, 2013). Most recently, Roland Garros sought to develop its brand by promoting and drawing on links that create associations with Paris, elegance, quality and lifestyle (BFMBusiness, 2013).

In addition, the Fédération Française de Tennis (FFT) has shown a willingness to embrace and expand its online and digital properties, including its online communities on Facebook and Twitter. In 2012, with the strategy to grow its brand globally, the FFT partnered with social marketing firm Tigerlily, to develop an enhanced Roland Garros social media strategy (Fischetti, 2013), which saw Tigerlily staff work with FFT marketing and communication personnel. FFT Head of Marketing and Communication, Edouard-Vincent Caloni explained that three key pillars could achieve the brand's development and growth:

1. Increase the spread of our content that generates the most engaging experiences with our community.
2. Live the tournament in a digital way for those who can't live the experience at the stadium.
3. Boost interactivity with our followers and fans who are present at Roland-Garros. (Fischetti, 2013, para. 3)

Because of their 2012 campaign, Roland Garros witnessed the biggest growth, in terms of Facebook fan numbers, of all Grand Slam events. The strategy focused on “the visibility of the brand and maximis[ing] its audience ... working on the brand content to offer content that engage fans and boost their virality” (Fischetti, 2013).

Wimbledon. The year's third Grand Slam tennis tournament is Wimbledon, or The Championships as it is often referred. It is the oldest tennis tournament in the world (founded in 1877), and is widely regarded as the biggest and most prestigious. Many repute the tournament as "one of the most iconic hallmark events in the global sporting calendar" (de Haan, 2014, p. 62). In contrast to the other three Grand Slam events, which are owned and operated by their National Tennis Associations, the All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club (AELTC) organises Wimbledon and, consequently, the branding of The Championships is now synonymous with the traditions of the club (de Haan, 2014).

Wimbledon is a unique event that has managed to retain its quintessential Englishness, upholding long-standing traditions inherent in its distinctive history while also adapting in order to meet modern sporting event's needs. Even though some critics question the event's traditionalist features (i.e., players are required to wear white and bow to the Royal Box, and the serving of strawberries and cream), these attributes are now intrinsically part of the essence of the Wimbledon brand. As de Haan (2014) asserts:

Despite the fact The Championships is simply a two-week single-sport event, the Wimbledon brand has grown into a cultural icon, inextricably linked to the traditions of an English 19th Century sports club. The brand is British to the core, yet international in its appeal. (p. 63)

While history and tradition are an important part of Wimbledon's brand, it is not to say that modernity and remaining contemporary is disregarded. Wimbledon, like the other Grand Slam events, has taken a proactive approach to social media utilisation. Indeed, the marketing director at AELTC noted new media has opened up the possibility of extending into new markets (Meikle & Addley, 2008), and the event's digital strategy is seen as a way to help the 137-year old event attract a younger and more geographically

diverse fan base. Use of digital and social media allows Wimbledon to extend the fan experience globally (O'Brien & Warner, 2014), with just 21% of its social conversation generated from the domestic market (Plastiras, 2014).

U.S. Open. Established in 1881 and played in New York, the U.S. Open is chronologically the fourth and final tennis tournament comprising the Grand Slams each year, and is the top-ranked annually attended international sporting event in the world (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). As the United States Tennis Association's (USTA) flagship event, it also represents one of the largest supporting events in the U.S.A, with attendance numbers higher than the Super Bowl and Indianapolis 500 over two weeks (Popp, Miller, & Hambrick, 2013). The Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre, where the U.S. Open is held, is the world's largest public tennis facility (Popp et al., 2013).

Tournament demographic information reveals that nearly half the event's local fan base has an annual income of \$75,000 (USD), thus reflecting an affluent consumer group (Popp et al., 2013). This is also reflected in the higher-end luxury brands that have multi-year sponsorship deals with the event (Popp et al., 2013). To that end, the U.S. Open is promoted as a "spectacle, whether it's the tennis, music, fashion or celebrity. Those are all parts of the Open; it's a high-end luxury brand...a premium brand, with the energy, passion and spirit of New York City" (J. Brown, personal communication, August 8, 2013). In fact, in 1997 when the U.S. Open sought to revitalise its brand identity it drew upon these characteristics. Its new logo, the "flaming ball", is said to express the passion and personality for which the U.S. Open is renowned, while also alluding to the power, energy and intensity required to win the event (Landor, 2010).

Traditionally viewed as the trendsetter among the Grand Slam events (Popp et al., 2013), the U.S. Open has embraced technological developments and the growth of social media. Prior to the 2013 event, an announcement declared that fans would be able to see

their social media posts about the tournament appear on a 50-foot-by-8-foot social media wall, adjacent to Louis Armstrong Stadium (Sports, 2013). Nicole Jeter West, Director of Digital Strategies and Partnerships, suggested that the wall “connects our global fan base, combing them with the live event and the attendee” (Sports, 2013), and serves to “showcase fans’ passion for the tournament” (Mogg, 2013). A senior communications coordinator for the USTA noted that Twitter is about selling a brand (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012), and akin to its three Grand Slam counterparts, the U.S. Open has incorporated social media to do so.

This section has offered insight into the research context and, more specifically, the four Grand Slam tennis events selected for this case study research. As indicated, tennis represents a sports context with a growing international audience and these four events have emerged as global sports event brands in their own right. Importantly, they also appear to be seasoned social media users and therefore are a worthy context for further exploration. The following section discusses the underlying research approach of this thesis and provides justification for its selection.

3.3 A Multi-Perspectival Research Approach

Schultz and Sheffer’s (2010) study on the impact of Twitter on sports journalism indicates that individuals’ perceptions of social media management were not congruent when they analysed an individual’s usage of actual social media management techniques. By failing to draw upon different perspectives within the same research context, previous research ignores a plethora of evidence about the production, representation and consumption of social media within the sports industry. Therefore, in order to address the shortcomings associated with these previous studies, this thesis examines three unique perspectives: event personnel, social media content, and event fans.

Research from cultural (i.e., Kobayashi, 2011; Scherer & Jackson, 2008) and educational (i.e., Gill & Johnson, 1991) studies suggests that there is merit in considering multiple perspectives in tandem, rather than in isolation, to provide rich sources of data. To do so, such scholars use the “circuit of culture” (du Gay et al., 1997), which is based on five interrelated moments or processes in which meanings of cultural artefacts are determined and negotiated throughout various sites and interactions between producers and audiences. These moments are representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation (du Gay et al., 1997, see Figure 3).

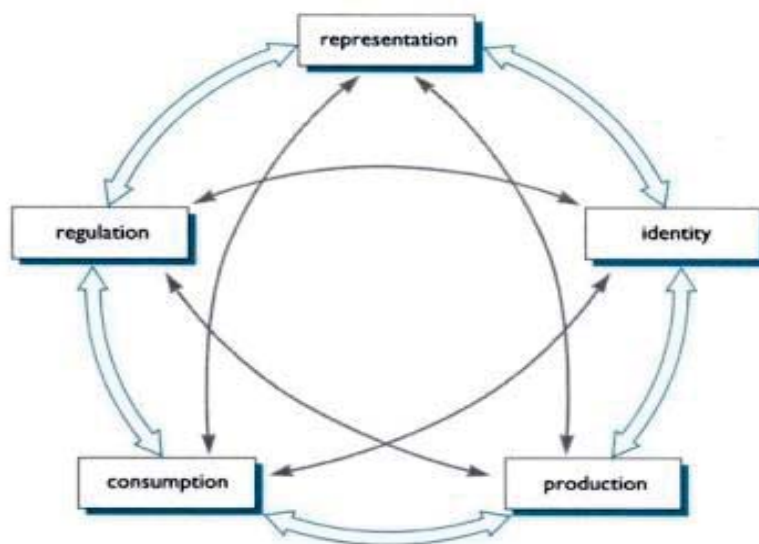


Figure 3: The Circuit of Culture (from du Gay et al., 1997)

Previous scholars utilise the circuit of culture as a framework, either in part or as a whole, within a range of media studies including: the examination of advertising and promotional culture (i.e. Gee, 2015; Scherer & Jackson, 2008), cyber-culture and Web 2.0 (i.e. Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Taylor, Demont-Heinrich, Broadfoot, Dodge, & Jian, 2002), cultural representation (i.e. Kobayashi, 2011) and public relations (i.e. Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Han & Zhang, 2009). Furthermore, Moisander and Valtonen (2006) note that new perspectives and methods are required in the field of marketing and consumer

research in order to gain a better understanding of the increasingly multicultural and globalised marketing environment.

As Denzin (2001) asserts, “each point within the circuit of culture becomes a nodal point for critical” consumer research (p.325). Scherer and Jackson (2008) echo this sentiment and state that each moment of the circuit represents an opportunity for in-depth, critical analysis. While the model consists of five discursive moments, this thesis uses a modified circuit of culture to explore three unique perspectives, by focusing on the moments of production, representation and consumption to examine the social media's use as a site to build brands and relationships with fans.

du Gay et al. (1997) argue that meanings attributed to a product do not directly arise from the item itself. Instead, the way in which the product is exemplified in both oral and visual language prompts an analysis of such *representations*, which play a crucial role in fixing the meaning and image of an item, or in this case the event brand. In examining such representations, scholars are able to consider the creation and recreation of a product's identity. According to this model, products are ‘encoded’ with certain meanings during the *production* process, which contributes to the establishment of identification between object and consumer (du Gay et al., 1997). In the context of this thesis, event personnel play an important part in the production stage, as their branding strategies and communication messages impact on the representation of the event brand on social media and thus shape the connection between production and consumption (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

Furthermore, while producers attempt to encode products with specific meanings and associations, the same meanings and associations assigned to the product are actively ‘decoded’ by consumers through *consumption*. As Han and Zhang (2009) suggest, “consumers take in what resonates with them and reject what does not” (p. 396).

Therefore, it is necessary to examine the perception of consumers. However, Moisander and Valtonen (2006) caution that consumers should not be examined as “autonomous subjects” (p. 12), and instead propose that both marketers and consumers should be studied together in “cycles of commodification” (p. 12). This thesis supports this viewpoint, in the utilisation of a modified version of du Gay et al.’s (1997) circuit of culture to explore production, representation and consumption.

Moreover, to examine each moment in this thesis, a multi-perspectival approach (Kobayashi, 2011; Scherer & Jackson, 2008) is employed. Kellner (2003) defines a perspective as “an optic, a way of seeing” (p.98), used to analyse specific phenomena. Best and Kellner (1991) argue that no one perspective exists that offers a valid view enabling one to make sense of the world. They propose a multi-perspectival approach that investigates and interprets a range of perspectives. Kellner (2003) asserts that:

A multi-perspectival cultural study combines 1) analysis of the production with 2) textual analysis and interpretation, and 3) analysis of audience reception and use of media culture (p. 199).

In this thesis, an in-depth understanding of event personnel’s motivations and strategies for using social media (production) is of crucial importance in relation to analysing the content that is then posted by the event brand (representation) and presented to fans and followers (consumption). Such multiple perspectives make it possible to compare data collected from different perspectives and sources for the purposes of triangulation (Gill & Johnson, 1991), in order to address the overall research question.

3.3.1 Multi-Method Approach

To explore these three unique perspectives compels the adoption of a multi-method approach. Brannen (1992) defines multi-method research as the application of two or more sources of data or research methods utilised in the investigation of a research

question. Mingers (2001) expands on this definition by stating a multi-methodology represents a combination of methods, which may or may not embody different paradigms (i.e., qualitative and/or quantitative) developed specifically for the task. While several scholars argue that these paradigms are incompatible due to their derivation from different epistemological and ontological positions (see Bryman, 2006), the emergence of the pragmatic research philosophy sees a rise in multi-method research by those who argue there is more to gain through the combination of their respective strengths (Brannen, 1992; Brewer & Hunter, 2006; Bryman, 2006).

As such, drawing on multi-methods research is widely recommended by scholars as a means to study complex social phenomena (Brannen, 1992; Brewer & Hunter, 2006; Creswell, 2008). Furthermore, Mingers (2001, 2003) notes that employing a multi-method approach permits the researcher to explore a phenomena from multiple lenses (including different perspectives), allowing for a more comprehensive examination. Applying a multi-method approach in this thesis serves to enhance our critical thinking and knowledge and provides a richer understanding about the use of social media within a branding context, more so than through a single approach.

This thesis uses three distinct studies, each with its own purpose, perspective and research method, to examine and address the ways in which the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter serve as sites for professional tennis events to build their brand and relationships with fans. First, Chapter Four discusses insights from event personnel through in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore the production context of using social media. In particular, it investigates the value, activities, and issues encountered by these key individuals when creating an event's social media presence. Second, Chapter Five uses quantitative content analysis to analyse the nature and extent of strategies used by event personnel on Facebook and Twitter. This chapter explicitly quantifies how these

events represent themselves on social media in relation to brand and relationship building. Finally, through a qualitative online survey, Chapter Six considers the fans' opinions and beliefs about the tennis events' use of social media. Specifically, fans' responses highlight their online consumption practices and preferences. Given the distinct focus of each chapter, they are purposefully written so that they can be read as independent studies. Consequently, there is some necessary and deliberate overlap and repetition of the literature in order to link it with the key themes of brand-building, relationships with consumers, and social media.

3.4 Ethics

Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that the importance of ethics cannot and should not be ignored as they affect research integrity. To ensure that this research was conducted in accordance with Massey University's ethical procedures, it was examined by peer review. The researcher's supervisors, senior academic staff and the Chair of Massey University's Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) were part of the peer review process, which involved completion and evaluation of the MUHEC screening questionnaire that analyses ethical research, and discussion of the ethical issues pertinent to this research.

The key ethical considerations discussed in relation to this thesis related to confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants. As this thesis provides a case study of the four Grand Slam tennis events, personnel were advised that their events' identity would be explicitly documented, and they agreed that they were willing for this to occur. However, in order to protect the event personnel's identity, data collected through interviews (see Chapter Four) was analysed by themes and concepts rather than as individual events. In utilising this approach, meanings are collectively represented in the analysis, rather than represented individually. Similarly, data collected through online surveys with event fans (see Chapter Six), was also analysed by themes and meanings

represented collectively. All participants involved in this research had the purpose of the research thoroughly explained to them and informed consent was attained.

Following this review, it was recommended that a 'Low Risk' ethics application be submitted, and this research was subsequently recorded on the "Low Risk Database" in the Annual Report of the MUHEC. Because of this consultation, it was agreed that this research has been conducted in accordance with Massey University's research ethics procedures. Specifically, this thesis has considered the following Massey Research Code of Ethics practices:

- all responses have been treated as confidential;
- all aspects of the Privacy Act (1993) have been observed and followed;
- participation in the research is voluntary;
- participants had the right to withdraw their participation at any time; and,
- participants are entitled to receive a copy of the summary results.

3.5 Summary

Social media are a rapidly developing environment and field of study that both academics and practitioners are seeking to understand. This chapter described the overarching research methodology for this thesis and provided a detailed description of the research context. The rationale for employing a unique multi-perspectival, multi-method research approach was discussed. Finally, the chapter highlights the ethical considerations of this research. The next three chapters present the justification, specific data collection and analysis procedures, results and discussion for each of the three perspectives examined in this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVENT PERSONNEL'S PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

[C]ultural intermediaries¹¹ of marketing and public relations can play a critical role in connecting production to consumption in such a way that their practices can shape the product and, in some significant way, feed the practices of the public back into the design and marketing process as a form of social knowledge. (Negus, 2002, p. 507)

Keith Negus' critical essays and investigative research on cultural intermediaries' working practices highlights a significant area of cultural studies research that examines the opinions, contributions and influences of such key cultural practitioners. According to Nixon and du Gay (2002) there is "considerable strategic value to be gained" (p. 498) from focusing on the perspectives of these personnel. They argue there is a need to consider perspectives beyond the 'moment of consumption' that has dominated much of the extant literature in order to explore links between production and consumption and "the interplay between these discrete moments in the lifecycle of cultural norms" (Nixon & du Gay, 2002, p. 498).

Gee (2015) argues there is an important need to examine the viewpoints of these cultural 'gatekeepers' (or intermediaries) due to their involvement in the decision making process of producing marketing strategies. Through their use of various persuasion and marketing techniques, cultural intermediaries shape contemporary consumer culture and media consumption (Kobayashi, 2011). Therefore, it is vital to gain their insights in order to understand the symbolic production that takes place (Negus, 2002; Soar, 2000).

While a burgeoning body of literature exists related to the cultural production of sports advertising, and the role of such cultural intermediaries (see Gee, 2015), few studies have explored this within the context of social media use for sports branding.

¹¹ Cultural intermediaries are defined by Bourdieu as workers involved in the provision of symbolic goods and services. Practitioners involved in PR, marketing and advertising fit within the category of "new cultural intermediaries" (Nixon & du Gay, 2002).

Much of the research conducted to date provides insights into how social media are being used. However, there is a growing need to understand why sports brands use social media and explore the perceived benefits and associated challenges. This chapter explores these areas from the perspective of tennis event personnel who create and produce the brands' online presence.

Acknowledging the paucity of academic research in this area, scholars examining social media in the sporting context also note the lack of personnel perspectives and call for qualitative research that serves to provide insight into their perceptions (Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; J. McCarthy et al., 2014; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012). To address this dearth of research, this study aims to: (1) examine the perceived benefits and value of social media use; (2) understand strategies used; and finally (3) identify the perceived challenges or issues of using social media in relation to building brands and relationships with fans. To achieve this, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with key personnel involved in social media for each professional tennis event (Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open). Across the four Grand Slam events, five individuals were interviewed and a qualitative content analysis was implemented to develop common themes.

Through interpretation of the participants' responses, this study reveals that practitioners appear to identify that social media provide a number of benefits, including interactivity, understanding and increased knowledge of customers, reinforcement of brand identity, and finally the ability to support promotion and marketing activities. Additionally, these benefits or opportunities are perceived to be achieved by implementing a range of activities and strategies. Specifically identified activities to emerge from the research suggest that content, co-creation, platform uniqueness and brand personality are all considered important in building brands and relationships.

However, in developing social media strategies to build their brands and relationships with fans three challenges are identified that have the potential to inhibit the use of social media to achieve the previously benefits. These relate to meeting fan expectations, adaptability and flexibility, and synergy and integration with other marketing activities.

This chapter begins with a brief review of literature relevant to the current study and then outlines the methodological approach. Results are then presented followed by a discussion to illustrate how the findings contribute and extend the current body of knowledge relating to event personnel's perspectives on using social media to build brands and relationships with fans.

4.1 Literature Review

As social media use continues to grow, scholarly research on social media and their marketing communications role within the sports industry is rapidly expanding. Existing research on this topic to date considers: consumers' consumption of social media (e.g. Clavio, 2011); sports organisations' use of social media to engage fans (e.g. Ioakimidis, 2010); content on sports organisations' social media websites (Pegoraro, 2012; Walden & Waters; Wallace et al., 2011); athlete self-presentation on Facebook (e.g. Butts, 2008), Twitter (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012, 2014; Pegoraro, 2010) and Instagram (e.g. Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, in press); social media strategies for national sports organisations (e.g. Thompson et al., 2014); employees' perceptions of national governing bodies' social media use (e.g. Eagleman, 2013); and, social media use in building stakeholder relationships (e.g. Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014).

Research also documents the perceived benefits of social media use, along with insights into possible tactics for social media engagement. Scholars have conducted studies to examine the perceived benefits of general social media use (e.g. J. McCarthy et al., 2014; Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014), along with those

specifically related to Twitter use (e.g. Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2014). According to personnel interviewed by Clavio, Walsh, and Vooris (2013), Twitter is used to share authentic information, engage in personal branding, and promote surveillance¹² and social extension¹³. In contrast, Gibbs et al.'s (2014) respondents perceived Twitter as a way to share news information and facilitate fan engagement.

Studies examining general social media use recognise a number of commonly suggested tactics for success. These include encouraging engagement and interaction, fostering a sense of community and a careful focus on content (J. McCarthy et al., 2014; Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). In particular, J. McCarthy et al. (2014) argue that social media allow brands to share content that revert fans back to the official website, providing opportunities for further revenue generation due to advertising possibilities.

Prior literature also suggests social media are viable sites, at least theoretically, for brands to engage in relationship marketing activity (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Personnel-oriented research examining relationship marketing endeavours and social media are emerging. Abeza, O'Reilly and Reid's (2013) study on participation-based running events claims that personnel view social media usage as an opportunity to develop a better understanding of customers, to advance customer-organisation communication and engagement, and as an efficient use of resources. Similarly, O'Shea and Alonso (2012) found that executives from three professional Australian sports clubs identified online media as valuable marketing communication tools, however these professionals also considered their use challenging because of the new technologies and the learning curve required for proper use. In contrast, Achen's (2014) study of personnel from U.S.

¹² Promoted surveillance related to drivers purposefully placing their conversations with other drivers in a place where fans and the public could view them.

¹³ Social extension was defined as the drivers' attempts to fulfil public demand for their time and attention.

professional sports leagues found that respondents do not focus much of their marketing attention on social media. Achen concludes that marketing professionals did not necessarily view social media as marketing tools, instead they merely used them because it is considered the 'norm', viewing them as channels to disseminate information.

While practitioners acknowledge these uses and benefits of social media, they also note barriers, both internal and external, relating to the utilisation of social media in the context of branding and relationship marketing. Personnel acknowledge that while social media provide marketing related benefits, their use is not without challenges. Mitic and Kapoulas's (2012) study discovered personnel were concerned with the apparent lack of control over content, resulting from consumers' ability to co-create content in the social space. Respondents in McCarthy et al.'s (2014) examination of UK football clubs echoed this sentiment stating that unfavourable comments about a club or the posting of offensive language by fans may ultimately affect brand identity and image. Mitic and Kapoulas (2012) also argue that the entertaining nature of popular social media sites creates tension for established brands that strive to promote a serious or traditional brand image and thus marketing via social channels may in fact jeopardise efforts to establish relationships with consumers.

In addition, many brands are slow to adopt these new technologies due to perceived barriers such as lack of money, time and training, negative views about usefulness, as well as unfamiliarity with technology (e.g. Abeza et al., 2013; J. McCarthy et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2014). What is evident from these studies is a paucity of scholarly research examining sports events' personnel's perspectives. While previous research has laid the foundation for examining sports-related social media usage, from a scholarly standpoint, this study provides much-needed insight into the thought processes behind social media use by professional tennis events attempting to build their brands and

relationships with fans. Given the earlier acknowledgement of the crucial role cultural intermediaries (or event personnel) play in shaping online marketing strategies, it is essential to examine their perspectives in order to allow for the development of new approaches to theory related to social media use and sports marketing and communication (Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013).

4.2 Methods

Social media are rapidly developing environments. As a field of study, both academics and practitioners are seeking to expand their understandings. Moreover, limited research exists that provides a detailed practitioner's perspective of social media use. Therefore, there is a need for greater insights into the thought processes behind social media usage, by sports event brands attempting to build their brands and relationships with fans. It is for these reasons a qualitative exploratory methodology was deemed most appropriate. This approach is identified as a suitable method to utilise in areas where there is limited current knowledge, for which there is the potential to develop new knowledge, and identify variables that can be utilised in future studies (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003). Given earlier acknowledgement that the pragmatic research philosophy underpins this thesis (see Chapter Three), it is important to indicate that this chapter is also grounded in the pragmatic realist approach.

4.2.1 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key personnel involved in social media at each organisation. Semi-structured interviews are generally characterised by an open and only partly structured guideline that allows interviewees to freely define and describe situations and events. This approach encourages responses that are extensive and developmental, which may lead to the revelation of attitudes or facts (Grummit, 1980), as semi-structured interviews offer the ability to explore new phenomena in-depth, and allow

researchers to “find out what’s happening [and] to seek new insight” (Robson, 2002, p. 59). The strength of this approach also offers the interviewer flexibility to vary the order of questions based on the flow of conversation, to omit certain questions, to pose follow-up questions and ensure that misunderstandings are clarified. As Merriam (2009) states, researchers utilising this approach are able to adjust to the “situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondents, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 90). In light of these benefits, and the potential to develop a more in-depth understanding of this emerging area, this method is deemed appropriate for the needs of this current study.

Participants. The interviewees were recruited using a mix of convenience and snowball sampling techniques, with individuals sought from each of the four tennis events. The researcher reviewed the organisational structure of each event and created a list of potential participants. Initial contact was made with senior marketing and management personnel within each event via an email that outlined the purpose of the research (see Appendix A), and invited the individual to participate in an interview, or provide details of a more suitable personnel member. If no response was received, the researcher then phoned the individuals personally. If the potential participant did not respond, the researcher contacted another senior level member of the organisation. In two cases, the initial participant indicated they were not the most suitable person to answer the required questions and provided contact details for another member of staff.

Following this initial contact, five suitable and willing participants were identified. These participants were provided with a participant information sheet that outlined the research topic, the purpose of the research and suggestions for possible questions. This approach was used to ensure that participants could reflect on the area of exploration and therefore provide detailed examples and opinions during the interview (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). From those interviewed, three had previously been sports

journalists, four had experience working in online environments and providing digital content, three had previous experience working in social media prior to their current position and one had experience working on social media with non-sports brands. The majority of participants had more than five years' experience and most had worked in multiple roles throughout their career. Table 4 describes the participants and their background.

Table 4:

Event Interviewee Information

Interview Date	Event	Experience
January 2013	Australian Open	Interactive media (Major) Assistant Digital Producer
February 2013	Australian Open (Wimbledon, RG)	Journalist Website editor (7 years) Freelance social media advisor (clients, brands and celebrities)
June 2013	Roland Garros	Web content production
June 2013	Wimbledon	Tennis sports journalist Editorial team member
August 2013	U.S. Open	Broadcast journalism (Major) Sports publishing company Manager of Advanced Media Department

During the interviews, it was identified that one of the interviewee associated with the Australian Open also worked with the Wimbledon and Roland Garros events in an advisory capacity. With the exception of this participant, all others indicated they were the prime member of staff associated with their event's social presence year round and therefore are reflective of a sample that includes all possible participants. This was also within Eisenhardt's (1989) suggested sample size of between four and ten that allows for an in-depth analysis and therefore this sample was deemed appropriate.

In-depth, one-on-one, interviews were conducted with those individuals who were responsible for the social media accounts for each of the events. These individuals were knowledgeable in the creation of social strategies and content for each event and in social media use in general. Interviewing these cultural intermediaries was beneficial in order to

understand how social media use in building brands and relationships with fans is perceived by practitioners.

Interview procedures and protocol. The few previous studies that have considered the organisational perspective have attempted to elucidate themes from interview data that have been informed by prior research (see Abeza et al., 2013; J. McCarthy et al., 2014). While the research aimed to investigate social media use in the branding and relationship marketing context it was also acknowledged that it was important for participants to be provided with the opportunity to present their understandings of the concepts being explored (J. McCarthy et al., 2014). Therefore, as a point of departure from previous studies, and in an attempt to develop a more comprehensive understanding of social media driven by the practical experiences of the participants, this study did not draw on previous research when developing the interview protocol and questions for this study. This approach is deemed appropriate when attempting to gather both “facts” and to gain “an understanding of the meanings that the respondents attached” (J. McCarthy et al., 2014, p. 189) to the concepts under consideration. It also further justifies the use of the semi-structured approach as it allows insight without pigeonholing participants’ responses.

The interview process was based on an interview guide (see Appendix B) and piloted prior to data collection with four social media personnel from four other events. As a result of the pilot-test, minor changes were made to the wording of some questions. Once emendations were made, the survey was deemed usable for the main study. The interviews consisted of an open-ended, semi-structured format, with 20 questions that were designed to understand each event personnel’s perspective on using various social media platforms, their opinions of social media’s value in promoting their brand and developing relationships with fans, and the challenges they face in using these platforms

to achieve brand-building and relationship marketing goals. During the interviews, when needed, the researcher asked follow-up questions to seek further explanation and explore a phenomenon in more detail. Participants also discussed any points they felt were important and worthy of mention that had not been addressed, which allowed the researcher to explore ideas and opinions presented by the participants in more detail (Stylianou, 2008).

Scholars note that interviews can be facilitated in a face-to-face setting, via telephone or through new internet technologies such as Skype (Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2009). In this study, interviews were conducted via telephone due to geographical locations of participants, prohibiting the researcher from conducting face-to-face interviews. This approach is recognised as appropriate when dealing with groups that are dispersed (Bryman, 2012), and has previously been employed in research related to organisational social media use (Briones, Kuch, Fisher Liu, & Jin, 2011; Gibbs et al., 2014; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012).

Each interview was conducted at a time most suitable for the participant. Interviews ranged between 82 and 95 minutes in length, and these were digitally recorded upon gaining the participant's consent. By recording the interview, it was possible for the researcher to concentrate more fully and listen attentively to the responses, rather than focus on strict note taking (Saunders et al., 2009). However, as recommended by Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005), brief notes were also made in order to maintain concentration and focus and to record any points that were worthy of further follow-up.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim at the completion of each interview by the researcher. This process offered great benefits in bringing the researcher closer to the data (Thomas, 2006), and generated awareness of similarities and differences between responses while also encouraging the identification of key themes (Bryman, 2012).

Interview transcripts were then sent to participants for review. During the process participants were asked to make any adjustments or comments they deemed necessary and provide final confirmation of the transcript. This form of member checking is recognised as the “most useful technique for establishing credibility” in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) adding to the rigor of the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

4.2.2 Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts was implemented to develop categories or common themes. A general inductive thematic approach was employed to identify themes and allow findings to emerge from the raw data without restraints imposed by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2006). While Bryman (2012) acknowledges that the heritage of this approach is not readily identifiable, it is an emerging analytic approach that is becoming more prominent in qualitative studies. Utilising an inductive approach to data analysis, without conforming to preconceived categories (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002), allowed resulting themes to flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and provided for a deeper analysis of the latent content.

A number of computer software packages are available to analyse qualitative data, and are recommended by several authors (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, Gratton and Jones (2010) highlight a number of issues that arise in using this approach including: (1) the manual process of coding data allows increased familiarity with the data, (2) using a computer can lead to a ‘mechanistic’ approach, (3) much of the tagging performed by the available software requires specific words or coded data to be defined by the researcher beforehand, and (4) most of the available software can fail to contextualise findings. In order for the researcher to ensure familiarity and maintain

closeness to the data a manual approach was most suitable and allowed the researcher to maximise the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, as indicated by Eisenhardt (1989), this allows the researcher to identify emergent themes.

Short memos were utilised on the initial review of data, and became the first step in forming broader categories. A two-step coding method was employed in this study to analyse the interview responses. First, cycle coding, also referred to as structural coding was undertaken and was utilised to group together related data for the development of data-driven categories (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008). Saldana (2013) states this is an appropriate method for qualitative research particularly with the use of semi-structured interview transcripts. Using this approach enables researchers to identify text that fits within a broad range of topics that will form the basis for further in-depth analysis (Namey et al., 2008). To conduct this more detailed analysis and identify the most salient themes and categories emerging from these initial categories, the second step utilised a focused coding approach (Saldana, 2013). Throughout the process, emerging categories and themes were then developed by reviewing the raw data and memos repeatedly to identify key issues, continuing until no new themes emerged. This suggests that major themes had been identified.

Member checks were utilised to ensure trustworthiness and confirmability (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Merriam, 1998). Scholars consider this to be of utmost importance in qualitative research studies due to their reliance on data interpretation (Byrne, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, participants were asked to review the resultant themes to confirm that the meaning and interpretation assigned was correct. Additionally, triangulation through multiple analysis was utilised, as themes were discussed with different observers (e.g. senior sport management faculty), thereby providing another method of external validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ritchie, Lewis,

Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Transferability was enhanced through the provision of a ‘thick’ description (Merriam, 1998).

The results are presented in a descriptive format that includes the use of direct quotes from the participants, along with analysis explaining the researcher’s interpretation. This approach is consistent with sports studies (Gratton & Jones, 2010) and accepted practice within qualitative research studies (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1966; Knafel & Howard, 1984).

4.3 Results

This section reveals the results of the analysis outlined in the previous section to examine media personnels’ perspectives on the benefits, strategies and challenges of social media use to build their brands and relationships with fans.

4.3.1 Context

An overview of each event’s social media team is provided in Table 5. With the exception of Roland Garros, which joined Facebook and Twitter in 2009, each event has been active on social media since 2008 across multiple platforms.

Table 5:

Overview of Each Event’s Social Media Team

Event	Team Size	Department
Australian Open	YR: Two EP: Four	Media: Digital media stream
Roland Garros	YR: All department members	Editing and content – communications and marketing ¹⁴
Wimbledon	YR: One EP: Four	Commercial and marketing department
U.S. Open	YR: Two EP: Six	Marketing department

Note: YR = year round. EP = during the event period.

¹⁴ During and post the 2013 Roland Garros event the organisation was in the process of conducting a re-structure. As a result, this may no longer be an accurate reflection of the social media team during the 2013-2014 timeframe of this study.

In an effort to gain an overall and broad understanding of the contextual factors behind social media use for these event brands, interviews with key media personnel revealed a common theme between the brands regarding their initial decision to engage in social media. As noted by the participants, this was driven by two factors, identified as internal and external motivators.

Internal motivators. These factors appeared to be guided by the organisation's willingness to embrace this new form of media as part of their overall marketing strategy. As one participant claimed, "*you need to have a strategy behind each one [platform], but they need to fit in with everything else, your overall strategy*". Additionally, participants stated that it was through the commitment and support from their organisation that they began to focus more readily on using social media:

I think in terms of investment...that shows that the company has recognised them as an investment that needs resources.

A lot of bodies are frightened of social media and they think they pose a risk to them, but not here. Here they are very supportive.

External motivators. Participants also noted that the growth and popularity of social media, coupled with a fan-centric view, contributed to their foray into social media:

It is a forum for fans to connect and communicate, and become involved with the event and to be heard. I think that that is the key thing through all of this.

It is about looking at where your fans want to have their conversation, going to them, and then being receptive to what it is they want to see from you or hear from you.

For us, like many organisations I think, as marketers, we realise that we need to reach people wherever they congregate.

It was further acknowledged that social media provide them with the opportunity to engage with audiences that they had not been able to reach previously, and commented:

"I think it's also having access to an audience that you might not be able to reach in

another way". For global brands striving to attract a wider, more global audience, this is an important consideration.

Furthermore, participants clearly identified that their brand's social media strategy was brand-specific, with a unique approach rather than replicating or adapting what other brands do: "*we build our own way without paying attention to or following other tournaments*". This comment hints at the strategic thought process that takes place about social media use by these event brands, providing a point of exclusivity to distinguish their brand and differentiate it from others.

4.3.2 Benefits and Value

All participants acknowledged that there were benefits and value that their event might accrue from efforts to utilise social media to develop a brand and relationships with fans. These considerations are interpreted as: interaction and engagement, understanding and increased knowledge of consumers, reinforcement of brand identity, and support for promotion and marketing related activities.

Interaction and engagement. One key benefit of social media use, as expressed by the participants, was the ability to interact easily and engage with fans. Engagement is one of the many facets of social media usage. Participants explained that the ability to have deeper levels of fan engagement and more meaningful conversations through social media were what they considered to be the most important factors that enabled marketers to build their brands and relationships:

It allows for that direct engagement that wasn't possible before.

We are reaching them and connecting with them so they feel like the event is part of them, and people know we are a trusted source in the social space. They can then celebrate their passion for the event and foster that deeper connection.

...generate the most engaging experiences with our community and boost interactivity with our followers and fans.

Participants also emphasised the need for this interaction to be focused on two-way communication between the brand and fans as opposed to one-way dialogue. This two-way communication was most often expressed as a way to provide a conversation, which suggests a commitment to continued interaction between brand and consumer and a long-term strategy rather than a short-term fix. This was particularly evident when participants discussed it in relation to being an essential component in building relationships:

It is not about a one-way display. I think the two-way conversation is essential, especially in order to help build those relationships.

You have to be conversational...it's a year-round thing. You know the conversation continues and that has made the numbers grow the way they have. That year round conversation.

In light of this, it was suggested that brands should review the way they currently look at engagement and ensure they focus on interactions that provide some form of value:

The best way to engage successfully is to listen...rather than try to ask a question, like who do you think is going to win this match? It does not add anything if you have 10,000 people tweeting back Novak. It is not adding to your conversation...it is not providing any quality information. You are better to listen to what people are saying and try to buy-in to some of those conversations.

In addition to allowing for these deeper levels of fan engagement, participants extended this view and indicated that this interaction provided an avenue to turn conversations into opportunities to create personalised relationships with fans:

It is such a great vehicle to have that one-on-one relationship with our fans and to take people inside the event, which we like to think we do a better job of every single year.

It's [a reply or re-tweet] an acknowledgement and a personal communication and it helps them to feel like they have an actual relationship with the brand they follow.

One participant was a strong advocate of this particular aspect and further highlighted its importance by indicating that fans themselves want to create relationships with brands: *"These days consumers are looking for a relationship with a brand. They*

want to feel that they have that relationship with the brand". In this regard, the participant acknowledges the fans' preconceived wants and needs from a brand as well as fans' proven receptiveness to interaction, which suggests that brands may be more successful in their online strategies if they offer such relationship opportunities.

Furthermore, social media appear to have overcome barriers associated with traditional marketing strategies, with conversations now taking place online at all hours of the day and night. Participants recognised that due to their largely international fan base, brand media personnel need to ensure that the interactions continue outside of 'traditional working hours': "*It's about making sure that there's that sort of continual conversation that we have with them. So we have a resource [overseas] who will take over our accounts overnight to continue that conversation*". Largely related to resourcing and staffing implications, media personnel are aware that ongoing interaction and engagement with fans is a necessity that ultimately benefits and adds value to their brand. Moreover, as one participant stated: "*It comes back to people needing to have an authentic relationship with their fans these days, to be commercially viable, or commercially powerful*", linking interaction to the development of authentic relationships as an essential requirement in order to be financially successful in the current environment.

Emotional connection. Extending their discussion of interaction and engagement, three participants spoke of social media as a site that allows them to take advantage of fans' passion for the event. They indicated that this could be used to help develop an emotional connection with the brand:

They can celebrate their passion for the event, and foster a deeper connection. It makes them feel like they own a little piece of the event, and that is what we want.

We want everyone to feel like they are part of the brand.

This increased opportunity for interaction appears to have changed the landscape of sports communication and provided new opportunities for those able to leverage these

new media for branding and relationship marketing goals. While technology previously limited real-time internet communication to social groups (i.e., through services such as online chat forums and applications), social media have provided this link between brands and consumers. This direct communication channel creates a sense of engagement between consumers and brands, akin to that of friends and social groups, allowing for the potential development of stronger emotional connections and relationships. These resulting feelings of ownership of, and membership to, the brand are important as the creation of emotions among fans and followers may serve to determine the degree and longevity of their attachment to the brand, and thus may ultimately lead to increased brand loyalty and brand equity.

Understanding and increased knowledge of consumers. A second apparent benefit of social media that emerged from the interviews with participants was the ability to develop a better understanding and increased knowledge of consumers. Participants acknowledged that social media, and the ensuing interactions, provided a convenient way for brands to learn about and listen more easily to the needs of their customers. Based on this increased understanding, the participants indicated they were then able to work on developing what they considered deeper relationships with fans, and could then potentially provide a better ‘fit’. As several participants noted:

We can better define who our fans are.

I think that is where, for us, the customer service activation comes in, because it shows a willingness to hear them, and listen to their needs. The relationship comes through listening to them.

It is always interesting to see how you are perceived and we get a lot of ideas based on what people come back to us with.

One respondent also indicated that they developed an understanding of their fans and their social habits through listening and monitoring the various social platforms. In

doing this, they discovered fans were sharing content while at the event and about things they were previously unaware of:

Firing up Instagram last year, we discovered there are a lot of people who are coming to the tournament for the day, taking lots of photos with their friends or watching a match and sharing those. It is when you discover that people are talking about you or sharing things about your event that you did not know about that is quite surprising.

With this knowledge, brand personnel can endeavour to provide content and options that reflect what fans' desire by offering support at their event to cater to this and enable fans to share this content.

Participants also noted that through social media, event brands have the ability to respond instantly to fan feedback as they would in traditional customer service roles. Through this interaction, participants felt that they are able to gain a clearer understanding of what consumers and fans want, *“the feedback, and building that relationship with our audience in terms of customer feedback, it tells us how we can make our programmes and tournaments better to benefit them”*. Participants suggested this then allows these events to make further improvements to the event experience that may ultimately lead to the development of favourable brand associations.

Reinforcement of brand identity. A third benefit perceived by participants was that in using social media to provide unique content, they can seek to reinforce their brands' identity and congruence of the brand image in consumers' minds. This was seen as particularly important for international consumers and markets, where previous exposure may not have allowed them to develop brand associations that led to the creation of an accurate brand image. In order to build their brand, the participants viewed social media as a valuable site to rectify this:

While the biggest thing is about reach and engagement, it is not necessarily that we want X number of followers or this much growth, but the more people we tell the story to and accurately reflect our brand image, then the better.

I think that we are lucky that we have such a powerful brand, that it resonates beyond that [the national geographic barrier], but I think it helps to confirm that image [internationally].

In particular, the participants thought that social media allowed them to focus on developing associations that were inherent to their brand, which may serve to reinforce the uniqueness of their event in consumers' minds, further differentiating their brand from competitors:

We will be doing on the court and off-the-court stuff, showing people what is happening around the grounds. We have all the other stuff that happens on site, with the live bands and live entertainment as well. This is all part of our event experience.

We always try to layer in history, which people really care about; there is a rich history in this area. We see fans and families coming year after year, generation after generation. It makes it special, and unique.

Well it is the next best thing to being here. We can accurately reflect and replicate what is going on here, in order to build those associations.

Participants asserted that in using social media as a site to help develop the correct brand image in consumers' minds, there needed to be congruence with their existing identity. If this was not achieved, participants felt that consumers would then be likely to become confused and unable to identify with the brand accurately:

Essentially, we consider ourselves as a premium brand, and our clientele definitely skews that way. It is important that we maintain that image too, which, in many ways, is similar to [x]; a high-end luxury brand with the energy passion and spirit of the city, and the country as a whole.

I think it comes back to staying true to what you are and who you are in your brand. Inconsistency is very evident; it shows when you do not have a clear identity.

One participant commented that in their opinion, a benefit of ensuring consistency is the perceived establishment of trust between brands and consumers, which is central to establishing a quality relationship. They stated, *"it's also about staying true to the brand, and being consistent, and ensuring you have a clear identity. That will help you build*

trust". Their perception that social media may be used to establish trust, and then reinforce brand identity, was considered an important benefit and value of their usage.

Support for promotion and marketing related activities. The final benefit that participants acknowledged is support for promotion and marketing related activities. Participants indicated that promoting various marketing actions through social media were important to their events:

It allows us to have a direct connection to our tournament fans and to tennis fans nationally and internationally, and to those fans of the sport. Once we start connecting to people that way...we are able [to] communicate specific tailored commercial messages to our fans. For example, messages about ticketing, sponsorship, and merchandise.

It has given us flexibility. It is one of the easiest ways for us to disseminate pertinent information to our fans; we are constantly showing what is going on with all the marketing things...and what is going on with tickets.

In particular, one participant further mentioned the ability to utilise social media to leverage sponsorship activations: *"This year we have sponsor activations and we used a company called Pop to do real time polling around fans favourite all-time matches and we saw incredible engagement out of that"*.

Finally, participants also acknowledged the potential of social media to allow event brands to promote their own content, rather than having to rely on other media outlets. For example in the past, journalists and other media have served as outlets to disseminate information to interested parties. However, social media have changed this landscape and brands now have the opportunity to deliver content directly to consumers. Participants viewed this as an important step in working to create trust and develop quality relationships with fans:

We try to use social media to emphasise and promote the exclusive content we have access to as the tournament's organising body. Instead of having to use media outlets and their content, we are starting to build an outlet ourselves. It gives us the ability to control and promote our message.

This has seen event personnel become content creators and quasi-media distributors and broadcasters of event-related information. Social media provide these events with the added benefit of being able to communicate this content directly to fans such that they hope to become the credible and trusted source for event-related information and content.

4.3.3 Activities and Strategies

Gaining knowledge and understanding of the perceived benefits and value of social media from the perspective of the producers (i.e., media personnel) serves to locate social media within a brand management context. From this, participants acknowledged factors that personnel need to be aware of when gauging the use of particular activities and strategies on social media to develop brands and relationships with fans. Undoubtedly, these factors link to the previous section on benefits and value (and the identifiable considerations therein). However they are more applied in nature, in that they are perceived as the 'how-to' by these participants in order to obtain the aforementioned benefits and value. These factors are: content, platform uniqueness, displaying brand personality and co-creation.

Content. One factor participants identified was that brand personnel needed to embrace content that is most likely to foster and drive interaction and engagement. In the case of the Grand Slam tennis events, a number of strategies regarding content were suggested, however all participants indicated that they felt that the inclusion of behind-the-scenes content was imperative:

Everything is about giving...everybody who is passionate about tennis wants to get behind-the-scenes and have that experience, and that's the thing we try to give them through our social media; a peek through the doors where the fan can't necessarily go.¹⁵

¹⁵ This same participant compared the behind-the-scenes content to a digital accreditation pass and signaled that the experience enabled by an accreditation pass is a privileged experience, yet one they wanted to try to present to their fans, "anybody who's passionate about tennis, that doesn't work in

Noting the supposed importance of capturing and posting content from private versus public spaces, or the areas of the tournament not accessible by fans, another participant stated, “*we tried this year to show more behind-the-scenes photos. Our reporters went to places the public could not go to*”. This suggests that social media allow brands to bring fans into previously closed off areas that may provide value to fans’ experiences. This representation and showcase of private spaces has the potential to impact on fans’ identity with the brand, as it serves to bring them into a privileged space making them part of a group and fostering feelings of membership. Therefore, this type of content may serve to foster fans’ relationships with the event for both those who physically attend the event and those local and global fans who are experiencing the event at a distance.

Each participant was mindful that while employing a content-marketing approach, content posted to social media needed to provide added value to fans and a sense of uniqueness to the brand:

You have to add value somehow. For us we attach pictures to tweets. It is trying to offer something unique, not doing something for the sake of doing it.

We are all about trying to capture unique stuff...whereas a photo may not be suitable for the website, we can still post it on social media.

We have quite a few channels. If we deliver the same content across all these channels then there would not be any reason for people to use all these different social media to connect.

Additionally, participants claimed they took advantage of the opportunities provided by the Internet and used a combination of diverse types of content (e.g. photos, videos, text) to seek brand and relationship-building benefits. This allowed them to present and highlight different aspects of the event, the brand, and further encourage fan interaction and engagement:

tennis, knows how prized the accreditation pass is”. In this context an accreditation pass relates to the official security pass that allows ‘accredited’ persons access to restricted event areas that members of the general public would not normally have access to.

We embrace more visual posts. Whether it is photos or videos, or custom graphics we create. Nevertheless, we really try to mix our media types as much as we can, and the styles. That is what appears to get people talking.

Sometimes you can do that with pictures, sometimes you can do it with video, but it has to stay true to the place and the brand.

Competitions are definitely what we try to do. We will be doing a live blog this year, bite-sized chunks of the tournament that are not just straight news stories.

Furthermore, participants suggested that brand managers and sports marketers should take the opportunity to promote calls-to-action¹⁶ within their posts to encourage further engagement and interaction. As one participant noted, “*we keep it [the post] short; with a clear call-to-action... [these] are extremely effective. Whenever possible to foster more of that one-on-one relationship any time you can include a call-to-action you really need to do it*”. The participants acknowledged what they considered the growing importance of content, and more specifically deliberately directed content, in terms of their overall social media strategies.

Platform uniqueness. Based on the participants’ responses, it appears that a second factor media personnel need to be cognizant of is the distinct uses between social media platforms. Participants affirmed that for them each platform (Twitter or Facebook) serves a different purpose and allows different opportunities to foster fan interaction and engagement.

Twitter. Participants viewed Twitter as a tool to engage in real-time interaction and conversation with fans. Twitter was also described as a site that enables brand personnel to join in with conversations fans were having, along with sharing information and content related to the brand itself. Furthermore, participants considered Twitter as a tool that facilitated a more direct, conversational link between the brand and consumers:

¹⁶ A call-to-action was described by the participant as any content that serves to ask fans to do something or take action. For example, “tag your photos with #OpenScenes to see them featured on the big screen”.

Twitter is really much more about having a conversational forum. It is a much easier platform to respond to individuals on. So I always think of that as where we have our conversation.

For us, Twitter is about making sure that people are up-to-date and that we are getting positive feedback, and promoting our content.

Twitter is the best way to spread news and to get very quick feedback from our fans/followers.

Facebook. By contrast, participants viewed Facebook as a site to showcase their brand and endeavour to develop deeper connections with fans which had the potential to lead to longer-term relationships. Rather than redirecting online users away from Facebook (i.e., through links to the official website), participants emphasised that the focus was on getting people to stay on the event's Facebook page and interact with people there, in an effort to foster a sense of community among brand followers:

Facebook is a bit more of a showcase for the event. It really lends itself to images, and obviously, we have hundreds of amazing images so we really try to use that functionality so that we can have various competitions running and different things like that.

Facebook has evolved to the point now where you can have deeper, more meaningful connections, creating a community of fans.

Facebook is our biggest platform for presenting content in an attractive way.

Participants also acknowledged the need for content and strategies to be distinct for each social media platform. While automation tools may help media personnel schedule posts, which may also be useful to brands that are not able to provide around-the-clock real-time support, the participants cautioned against replicating posts from one platform to another.

I think it is important for the content you have to be distinct. You actually need a strategy for each platform and I think that is something that is a real strength here.

They all do serve a different purpose and we try to deliver unique content to each one. We look at why people are on those social media platforms and then try to deliver content that is appropriate to it.

[With Facebook] we also fully embrace more visual posts, whether it is photos or videos, or custom graphics. More and more we are focused on that. We need a consistent presence, a consistent voice and tone, consistent branding, but unique content on each platform.

During conversations about platform uniqueness, participants often referred to other social media sites (e.g. Instagram) indicating cross-platform integration whereby media personnel utilised other social media platforms in tandem with Twitter and Facebook. However, it was noted that they often aimed to drive fans to other branded social sites, or provide a showcase and awareness of their other platforms. As such, participants indicated the need to have a clear strategy and purpose for each platform based on its functionality consumers' needs.

Showcasing brand personality. A third factor expressed by all participants was their use of social media to develop and showcase brand personality. Participants suggested that when media personnel perceive their brands as people, fans and other consumers would better receive them. Therefore, social media was viewed as a means to connect brands to fans in an organic manner in an attempt to change the relationship dynamic rather than focusing on the traditional business-like exchange previously exhibited:

It really gives consumers an insight into the personality of the brand. Therefore, brands are almost like a person or an individual. They have to have some personality and that is what you use social media to develop.

I think we like to think of the event as the people's slam. It's so friendly, it's open and engaged and it's fun, it's happy, it's bright and colourful and positive and inclusive, and warm, and that's what I try to convey in the voice of the tournament, when I'm speaking as the tournament.

According to the participants, developing online personalities that humanise brands was seen to be a key strategy to help them achieve brand and relationship-building goals. To do so participants spoke of employing a humanistic approach to social media:

We are humanising the event and personalising it, particularly with a lot of the activations we do.

With our tone of voice and the way we interact with our fans, we try to make it feel like they are interacting with another person. I think that also builds trust between us and our fans.

In particular, one participant noted that they were mindful of treating fans as equals, and stated, “*we take a very humanistic approach to social media. We really try not to speak as something separate to the fans, we try not to position ourselves above the fans...we try to talk to them as contemporaries*”. From this viewpoint it appears the media personnel are attempting to leverage social media as places to portray their online brand personality. They appear to do so in ways that seek to encourage fans to view them as friends and thus potential relationship partners.

While showcasing brand personality was crucial, one participant indicated that this needed to be carefully monitored to ensure that their online personality was congruent with their existing identity:

You can show that you can have a bit of fun. However, I think if we were to suddenly start cracking jokes every five seconds and being too tongue-in-cheek then I think people would think, “Hang on a sec, this isn't [event x]. This doesn't sound like [event x].”

If these events promote an online personality that is too distinct from the view currently held by fans, they risk fans questioning the true nature of their social media use, while potentially jeopardising the establishment of trust between the event and fans.

Co-creation. Finally, participants expressed ideas about the notion of co-creation. All participants discussed their use of co-creation as a strategy to endeavour to develop relationships with fans and reinforce brand engagement. Participants’ ideas about co-creation included the co-creation of content, of the brands and of the events themselves.

Of content. In terms of co-creation of content, participants acknowledged that fans, through the ability to disseminate user-generated content (UGC), also have a role in the production and circulation of content related to their brand. As a result, participants

recognised the apparent value of this practice and have integrated more of the fans' UGC in the material they post on their brands' social platforms:

Social [media]...open up to more UGC content. More and more we are using social as a vehicle to let fans do the work for us in a way.

We had a Facebook app with a hashtag where fans could send their photos about the event, photos onsite or from outside the stadium.

Participants claimed that they were pro-active in their approach to content co-creation and encourage fans to share their content across the social platforms where the brand occupies a presence. Moreover, the participants perceived co-creation of content as an opportunity to nurture relationships with fans by providing an avenue through which fans can showcase their content in conjunction with the brands' official content:

We are encouraging fans to submit their social content, so that we can gather, curate and push it out, so it is not a one-way conversation. We want to give them a place to display that.

We are amplifying messages of our fans and sharing their content. Suddenly our fans are starting to become content creators as well, and we try to build that relationship with them.

Of brand and of event. While all participants mentioned the co-creation of content, they further identified social media as a site to incorporate fans into the process of creating and shaping brand and event identity. This finding appears to highlight a fan-centric approach and is further captured by the comments of one participant who stated, "we're using social media as a vehicle to let our fans create and mould our brand in their own eyes. They can celebrate their passion for the event, which I think fosters a deeper connection". Regarding the co-creation of the events, participants also indicated that interaction with and feedback from fans enabled them to work towards improving the overall event experience based on fans' responses:

We will see what people's experiences are like and what feedback there is ... then you can look to that for future tournaments. People may then recognise they have played a part in improving the event experience.

This highlights willingness by these event brands to embrace fans' feedback and strategically use it to help shape future events and other fans' event experience.

4.3.4 Challenges and Issues

Despite the benefits and value of using social media, and related activities and strategies as a site to build brands and develop relationships with fans, participants also indicated that there were a number of perceived challenges. The challenges were described as: meeting fan expectations, adaptability and flexibility, and synergy with offline marketing.

Meeting fan expectations. Participants identified this challenge as the most crucial barrier that inhibited their ability to try to build their brand and relationships with fans. The increasing prevalence of social media has changed the way fans communicate with brands and, in turn, participants thought their expectation of brands has altered. They are aware that fans currently view social media as direct communication portals and expect brands to provide real-time engagement:

Fans expectations these days are that somebody will respond immediately. They turn to social media first. They won't go to the website; they expect a quick response and interaction on social media.

It never stops. Fans expect that information, and expect it all the time, especially with a global audience. It just never stops.

Therefore, while we try to build those relationships and build that trust, social media have knocked down all those walls where people expect everything from a brand and they expect to be answered.

The challenge of meeting fan expectations appears to be further compounded by the sheer volume of data available and the need to provide content that adds value.

Volume of Data. Participants acknowledged that a catch-22 situation could arise when using social media. Admittedly, while one goal of social media use is to increase fan and follower base, participants noted that increased numbers of fans and followers can

lead to an increase in the volume of data media personnel are exposed to, creating a situation that participants termed “feeding the beast”:

When you have such large followers and engagement, you simply cannot respond to them all. Some people will get irate about that and they will be very vocal in criticising you for not caring about the fans. Therefore, I think the volume is definitely the challenge.

[Fans] want to communicate with you the way that they want to and they are not thinking from the social media person's point of view, they are just thinking, “I asked a question and I haven't had an answer”. The volume is massive. You have to see them [the question] in the first place to do that [answer them].

This indicates that social media managers and personnel need to be mindful of the resources required to support their social endeavours and have strategies in place to deal with this accordingly. Without the development of such strategies, there is the potential for sports events to run the risk of alienating or angering fans who expect instant gratification and responses from personnel on these channels.

Unique value added content. As identified in the previous section, platform uniqueness and the content displayed on Facebook compared to Twitter was one key strategy that is thought to help to develop their brand and relationships with fans via social media. However, participants signalled that this presents an inherent challenge:

It is a challenge to know what content to provide on channels. Should we be doing Facebook ads? Google+ has Google Hangouts; Instagram is all about getting the photos up there. Tumblr is a different beast altogether and the same with Pinterest. Therefore, it is not a one-stop shop for all the channels.

Knowing what content is appropriate for each platform appears to be important if media personnel are to deliver value to fans on various social media. Ultimately in order to be successful on social media it is considered that sports brands must seek to address and overcome challenges associated with meeting fan expectations.

Adaptability and flexibility. According to participants, challenges associated with the need for brands to be adaptable and flexible on social media related to having a

planned versus unplanned strategy, obtaining a level of organisational nimbleness, understanding technology and the social environment and knowing what to respond to.

Planned vs. unplanned strategy. Participants addressed the need to balance social media strategies with the ability to adapt and change in order to be flexible:

What I have discovered is that we can plan for maybe 70% of what we are going to do, and the other 30% we just do not know and we have to be prepared to change and adapt as it happens. That is the nature of this whole area and industry now. You just have to pick things up at the drop of a hat and that can be challenging.

It is a vicious cycle. In all honesty, we could be active 24 hours a day. Therefore, it is being able to plan effectively in advance while staying flexible enough with that. With everything constantly changing, that is a huge challenge.

One participant described a social media success story for their event that organically evolved from their willingness to adapt and be flexible with their strategy. Consequently, it helped in the formation of a community of fans among their social media followers:

Because we have a big audience in [different time zones], many of our fans stay up late to watch the tennis. As a result, the hashtag #sleepisfortheweak started a few years ago. We now call these people the 'sleepisfortheweakcrew'. People start talking about us months ahead of the event. It is something that was not planned but just happened.

Organisational nimbleness. Participants identified organisational nimbleness as a challenge to adaptability and flexibility whereby organisations need to support the changing dynamics and fast-paced nature of communication and interaction in the social space:

The unknown may need us to go out there and get content, or quickly pull something together to give them and continue the conversation. So really, it is all about needing to be able to adapt. However, to do that...it is also about having a good team that you can rely on in those moments.

Other participants noted that, from an organisational perspective, nimbleness has been a tangible issue, yet one they are continually striving to overcome:

We have tried to become more nimble as an organisation. We had this reputation of being bureaucratic, like I am sure some of the other slams do, but we want to be able to react in real time. It is a challenge if you are not.

Technology and social environment. Technology was viewed as a challenge and barrier to these brands' ability to adapt and be flexible, such that participants claim that media personnel need to be current with relevant changes in technology and social media spaces to keep one-step ahead of increasingly media-savvy users. Participants advised that this is not a time for complacency:

Some of the biggest challenges are staying up-to-date on all the channels. From the technical perspective, everything changes all the time, on any number of social platforms that you use day-in and day-out. It is a constant challenge and then there is so many new social entities popping up all the time.

You could spend ages on developing something and making it fit perfectly and then they [social media sites] change their API¹⁷ and it is then broken and you have to go back and fix it.

Furthermore, with changes in technology and advancements in the social space, comments reveal that participants consider that new opportunities exist for brands. However, the challenge is ensuring there is a clear purpose and strategy relating to the use of each platform. Without this, resources (time, personnel and finances) are deemed wasted on social media trends that may not provide any return. One participant provided a detailed account to illustrate this situation:

Twitter said to us, "We've got this Twitter mirror. We would love to give it to you. [Event X] is going to have it. It's been very successful at the IPL." We thought, great - it will be something fun for the players to do. We put it on the player lawn, but Twitter insisted on staffing it themselves, and managing it themselves. Therefore, it is a perfect example of something, a slight fad that did not necessarily serve its purpose.

¹⁷ In computer programming, an application programming interface (API) is a set of routines, protocols and tools for building software applications. Designer and digital media expert Maeda (2005) has suggested the following accessible metaphor for conceptualizing APIs: [An] API can be thought of as a company's internal telephone book with descriptions of key personnel's titles and job descriptions where you (the outsider) are free to call those people up to do your bidding... You [access] a running computer application [via] an interface (the "phonebook") that one can program (the "phone call") externally. (Stolley, 2009, p. 13).

Knowing what to respond to. The final issue mentioned by participants in relation to adaptability and flexibility was the idea of knowing what exactly personnel should respond to. As previously discussed, all participants indicated that interaction and maintaining a conversation with fans was considered important. However, participants recognised that one of the challenges to attain this was identifying which conversations were advantageous for the brand to be seen to be part of and which ones to withdraw from. Participants noted that this was particularly important when ensuring that they provided content and communication that they believed would foster both engagement and add value for fans:

It is finding that fine line between tracing trends and latching onto things that are big for the sake of doing so. One recent thing comes to mind, the Royal baby. You see all these brands trying to latch onto it. It is always very tempting. We constantly have dialogue going on. Should we get into the conversation around xyz? And why? What result is that going to give us? We have really moved past the point of those basic measures. It is not just about how many followers you are able to obtain, it is about the deeper level engagement.

Others elaborated on the issue concerning the labyrinth of responding to fan criticisms and potentially making a bad situation worse:

I think it is about feeding the beast, in a way. Once you start to engage with people, you could make a small problem a worse one. ... You do not want to get into a wrangling match with someone. ... [At times] it is much more this is the situation and that is it.

Synergy and integration with other marketing activities. While social media appear to be growing in popularity, it is suggested that their usage by sports brands needs to be managed in partnership with more traditional marketing practices. Participants revealed that one of the challenges in using social media is the potential to become engrossed in it to the extent that they disregard other online and offline strategies. As one participant indicated:

We always have to remind ourselves that while social is sexy and in the news right now at the end of the day, it represents a small, but growing, percentage of our overall business. The challenge is to realise for as much as we do through social,

we still need to spend as much time, if not more time, thinking about traditional media.

Another participant, who acknowledges that marketing efforts by brands need to be managed and coordinated accordingly, discussed such synergies between traditional and social as well as between differing social platforms:

The challenge for everyone with social media is how you integrate it with everything else that you are doing. It does not just exist in isolation. You can be too caught up in them [social media] as a whole all on their own, but you need to work out how they fit in with everything else.

Furthermore, while social media use is emerging, participants admitted that they are aware that not every fan or potential fan uses this media. As a result participants claimed there was still a need to communicate with fans via other avenues. Despite the identified benefits and value of using social media as a site to build brands and develop relationships with fans, participants acknowledged this use was not without its challenges. Indeed, their comments revealed the need to be mindful of aspects related to meeting fan expectations, adaptability and flexibility, and synergy with offline marketing when developing and crafting their social media strategy.

4.4 Discussion

This chapter explored the perceptions of media personnel from professional tennis events in relation to the utilisation of social media as a site for building brands and relationships with fans. In particular, the results of this study illuminate the potential value, use and challenges associated with using this media. To this end, Figure 4 summarises the key emergent themes from these interviews. Taken together, this research attempts to bridge the paucity of research on sports event personnel's perspectives of social media.

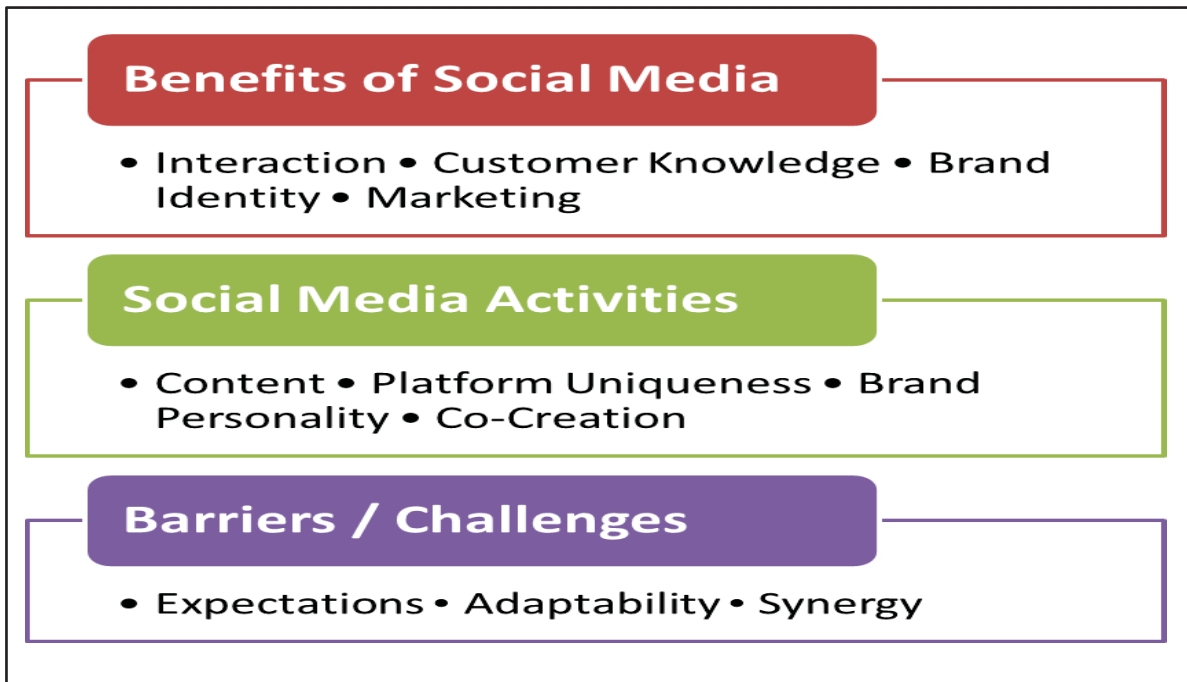


Figure 4: Key emergent themes: social media and Grand Slam tennis events - brand personnel perspective

4.4.1 Benefits and Values

Participants appeared cognisant of the value social media can provide, with effective management and strategies, to help them build their brand and relationships with fans. Comments from the personnel were consistent with emerging research that focuses on media personnel's perspectives (e.g. Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; J. McCarthy et al., 2014). These findings resonate with the views that sports brands may accrue potential benefits through strategic utilisation of social media.

Interaction and engagement. These personnel's acknowledgement of this perceived benefit aligns with prior literature relating to new and social media (e.g. Clavio & Walsh, 2013; Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; J. McCarthy et al., 2014), and suggests that event personnel recognise opportunities provided by the interactive nature of these tools. However, the current findings delve further, by explicitly describing such opportunities as two-way conversations that are seen to require commitment from both the brand and the consumer. Such opportunities are thought to serve as a possible basis in the development of the consumer-brand

relationship. Moreover, it aligns with studies that have identified practitioners as seeking to exploit social media to build enduring relationship exchanges (Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012) as a means to build their brand, and therefore take advantage of their interactive nature, something that traditional marketing has not previously afforded them.

Emotional connection. Consistent with Clavio et al.'s (2013) study, interaction was thought to support the development of emotional connections with fans. This suggests it is important for brands to build a connection and foster a sense of belonging through interaction and engagement. The value of an emotional connection between the sports event brand and its fans is essential in building enduring relational exchanges that motivate brand consumption (Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012), and build brands through increased loyalty (Berry, 2000; Harker, 1999; Hwang & Kandampully, 2012).

Understanding and increased knowledge of consumers. In line with prior research addressing the opportunities of social media (Abeza et al., 2013; Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Williams & Chinn, 2010), the acknowledgment of this as a perceived benefit in the current study resonates with Fournier and Avery's (2011a) view that "brand relationships are built...on a nuanced understanding of people and their needs, both practical and emotional" (p. 232). Therefore, sports marketers should look to capitalise on opportunities provided by these sites to develop an increased knowledge and understanding of their fans, particularly as this has previously been identified as a key concept inherent in both relationship marketing (Grönroos, 2004; Williams & Chinn, 2010) and brand management (Simmons, 2007). In order to do this, participants discussed a need to listen to fan conversations on social media. This aligns with Fournier and Avery (2011a) and Davenport, Harris, and Kohli (2001) who indicate that it is through listening and the interpretation of signals consumers send during transactions that enables brand personnel to develop such knowledge and understanding.

Reinforcement of brand identity. This benefit was an unexpected result, given that media personnel have not previously acknowledged it in prior research. Participants in the current study argued that social media allowed them to reinforce brand identity as they sought to ensure congruence with the brand's image and its associations in consumers' minds. This was considered to be of particular importance given their global audience, and coincides with Eagleman (2013) and Wallace et al.'s, (2011) views that identified the potential of social media usage to build and maintain brand associations and awareness through communication with fans.

Support for promotion and marketing-related activities. The emergence of this benefit was also unanticipated, given prior research has indicated that social media were underutilised as a promotional and marketing tool. For example, Eagleman's (2013) study of National Governing Body employees asserts that few organisations mention its utilisation for marketing related purposes. In addition, Fournier and Avery (2011b) suggest that brands would struggle to build their brand and relationships using these media, arguing that brands were considered uninvited gatecrashers on social media. Clavio, Walsh, and Vooris (2013) acknowledged promotion within their study of IndyCar drivers; yet, in contrast to the current study, it was not considered an important part of driver's usage. However, the acknowledgement of this aspect as a benefit is noteworthy given both Dees' (2011) and McCarthy et al.'s (2014) assertions that social media provides direct marketing opportunities and suggests a growing understanding of its value as part of a marketing strategy for event brands. This is something that has lacked clarity in previous research.

4.4.2 Activities and Strategies

Along with the identified value and benefits, media personnel of the four event brands acknowledged four major factors relating to activities and strategies: content, co-

creation, platform uniqueness, and showcasing brand personality. Consistent with extant literature, the identification of these themes suggest that sports brands appear to be increasingly extending their branding efforts, now focusing on building long-term relationships with their customers, in an effort to build their brands (Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; Eagleman, 2013; Wallace et al., 2011).

Content. This factor aligns with emerging research that indicates the potential of social media to help brands establish relationships with fans and provide branding benefits. Participants viewed content that afforded fans with a behind-the-scenes experience, as providing an incentive to follow their respective brands. This finding is important given Evans' (2010) and Simmons' (2007) suggestions that brand-building success is largely dependent on providing unique content to fans. It also speaks to previous studies that note that users' consumption is driven by the quest for unique information unattainable elsewhere (Frederick, Clavio, Burch, & Zimmerman, 2012; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Thompson et al., 2014). However, participants acknowledged there can be challenges in determining what this value-added content should be, further highlighting the need to understand fans.

Co-creation. The recognition of co-creation as another major factor builds on previous research that identifies it in relation to new and social media use (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008; Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). The current findings indicate that these brand personnel view social media users as co-creators of brand-disseminated content. Their comments reveal that they consider this may lead to deeper connections with fans, strengthen the consumer-brand relationship and enhance the consumer experience with the brand, which may ultimately lead to improved brand equity (Davis et al., 2014). Consistent with Harridge-March and Quinton (2009), the identification of this factor suggests that social media permit marketers to actively seek

consumer involvement in event and brand co-creation, which may work to make fans feel part of the brand, and reinforce brand loyalty. It is suggested that in order to build brands and relationships with fans, marketers should actively support and facilitate co-creation, allowing fans to be part of the conversation (J. McCarthy et al., 2014).

Platform uniqueness. While previous research posits the unique benefits achieved by utilising various social media sites (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011), and has highlighted technological differences of each (Bernoff & Li, 2008), this study is the first to reveal that media personnel are cognisant of platform differentials and strategically plan social media use accordingly. Participants indicated that Twitter supports real-time conversations with fans, providing opportunities to deliver time-specific content, while Facebook allows them to share richer information and content in efforts to develop deeper connections with fans. These views appear to link with Weinberg and Pehlivan's (2011) suggestion that various types of social media support different objectives. However, all participants echoed the sentiments of Thompson et al.'s (2014) acknowledgment of the need for consistency in brand image across social platforms. Undoubtedly, while each platform may serve a distinct and unique purpose, it is essential for marketers to provide a consistent voice, tone, and branding across their social media platforms or they risk damaging the brand identity and image they seek to reinforce.

Showcasing brand personality. The identification of this factor indicates that media personnel viewed social media as an important strategy to develop event brand personality. This view has not previously been presented in studies examining the perspectives of media personnel (e.g. Abeza et al., 2013; Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; Eagleman, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2014). However, it is an important factor, particularly in light of Walsh et al.'s (2013) study that found brand personality items were rated significantly higher for users of an event's Facebook page. The identification of this

factor is important for brand managers, as the use of social media to showcase brand personality could create positive brand equity leading to enhanced brand consumption through the purchase of tickets and merchandise (Ross et al., 2006). Particularly as research has shown that showcasing brand personality plays an important role in establishing stronger consumer-brand relationships (J. Aaker et al., 2004; Sung & Kim, 2010).

4.4.3 Challenges and Issues

The findings from this study, and indeed previous research, suggest that while social media appear to be ideal sites to build brands and relationships with fans, their use is not without challenges (Abeza et al., 2013; Drury, 2008; Thompson et al., 2014). Three new issues and challenges were identified by participants in the current study that have not yet been identified in research on brand management in the sporting context: meeting fan expectations, adaptability and flexibility, and synergy with offline marketing. This could be in part a result of prior studies focusing on utilising pattern-matching methods as they seek to align their findings with previous theory (e.g. Abeza et al., 2013; J. McCarthy et al., 2014).

Meeting fan expectations. As discussed by participants, this issue has potential implications for the development of consumer-brand relationships, and consumers' experience and associations with the brand. Contrary to Davis et al.'s (2014) study, participants in this study argued that fans use social media as direct communication tools, actively seeking to communicate with brands on social media around the clock. This suggests a shift in the way fans communicate with brands, which may result in altered expectations and increases in the amount of data brand personnel need to contend with. Additionally, in line with Thompson et al. (2014), participants acknowledged the challenge of providing unique, value-added content on each of their social media

platforms. It is now necessary for a brand to meet the needs of fans in order to create value, as it serves as a determinant of the consumer's relationship to the brand (Grönroos, 2004), and remains an important issue for sports marketers to manage.

Adaptability and flexibility. While this challenge is unique in comparison to prior research, it corresponds with arguments presented by Barwise and Meehan (2010) and Thompson et al. (2014), who state that social media provide challenges for potential brand development in terms of keeping abreast with the pace of innovation. Participants acknowledged that the ever-changing social media landscape (i.e., new platforms and functional changes to existing ones) was one of the key issues driving the need for strategic adaptability. In addition, participants identified several success stories that resulted from unplanned strategies and indicated that brands needed to be adaptable in order to utilise these media successfully. While this aligns with Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, and Shapiro (2012), who argue that social media requires speed and flexibility, the perceived challenge appears to be in managing the unknown, and organisational resources and support are required in order to overcome this hindrance.

Synergy and integration with other marketing efforts. Participants noted that achieving synergy was a challenging and complex task, as increased attention and usage of social media means it is often easy to view them in isolation (Kania, 2001). This sentiment parallels Barwise and Meehan (2010), who highlighted the potential for social media to damage brand development as brands become distracted by the panache of social media, which may result in a lack of strategic direction. Participants also argued that to a certain degree, these media only target a select group of consumers, indicating that not every fan or potential fan use these sites (Parker & Thomas, 2010; Tsai, 2009). They further suggested that personnel needed to be conscious of this when developing their strategies. To overcome this challenge, it is suggested that sports marketers ought to

develop an integrated strategy detailing how social media fit within the broader marketing plans, and consciously integrate them with other online and offline marketing to ensure consumer engagement and the development of a cohesive brand image (A. M. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Parsons, 2013).

4.5 Summary

This chapter investigated the value, activities and issues faced by sports event media personnel as they endeavour to utilise social media sites to build their brands and relationships with fans. By better understanding how social media are utilised by sports event brands, along with identifying perceived benefits and challenges, sports marketers and brand managers can work towards gaining or maintaining a stronger hold on incorporating social media functions strategically and appropriately.

However, while it is vital to understand such perspectives, it is also important to explore how this translates to practice. While the findings from this chapter indicate that these media personnel appear cognisant of opportunities afforded by social media, and note that they see the use of these sites as a way to build their brand and relationships with fans, ultimately fans are exposed to the end product, the actual content and interactions that take place on social media platforms themselves. Using a content analysis, the next chapter examines the branding and relationship-building strategies evident on each professional tennis events' posts to their official Facebook page and Twitter account.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

Not only are the propositions and terms of content itself part of social science...but the propositions and terms analysed are those which play certain roles in interpersonal relationships. (A. Kaplan, 1943, p. 239)

Schultz and Sheffer's (2010) study of Twitter's impact on sports journalism indicates that the perception of social media management is not congruent with an analysis of the individual's usage of actual social media management techniques. While the content itself is reflective of the processes that have led to or shaped its construction, and are consequences of media personnel's application of organisational strategies, it also reflects the "choices, conditions, constraints or processes" (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2008, p. 8) made in order to make such content available to fans. In addition, the examination of content is vital, as previous scholars highlight the importance of communication content due to its ability to affect those who view it (Krippendorf, 2004). Therefore, while insights from event personnel provide an important foundation to reveal and understand the "thinking" behind the actions, there is a need to examine the actual social media content in order to bring to light the true nature of management techniques used.

The purpose of this chapter therefore, is to explore how two specific social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, were utilised by professional tennis event brands to build their brands and relationships with fans. Specifically the objectives aimed to examine the nature and extent of strategies used (1) during each respective Grand Slam event (i.e., the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open), and (2) in the time between each respective 2013-2014 event. To achieve this, a content analysis was conducted on the posts collected from each event's Facebook and Twitter feeds during these two timeframes in accordance with four critical dimensions identified from previous research.

This study asserts that social media are appropriate sites for sports event brands to showcase brand associations and thereby manage brand perceptions, differentiate their product from others and provide an avenue to foster the development of a congruent brand image. In addition, the nature and extent of the strategies used show that rather than focusing on short-term marketing activation, these brands appear to be using social media to cultivate long-term relationships with fans and develop brand loyalty. Results also indicate strategies are somewhat dependent on the event, timeframe and specific platform illustrating unique approaches to the management of these events' social media accounts. Finally, the results of this study point to an evolution of social media use, whereby new strategies and approaches are being utilised in order to take advantage of social media as a site to build event brands and develop relationships with fans.

The chapter first provides a brief review of literature relevant to the current study, and then outlines the methodological approach of this study. Results are presented, followed by a discussion to illustrate how this study contributes, and extends the current body of knowledge relating to social media use in the context of building brands and relationships with fans.

5.1 Literature Review

The emergence of the Internet has enabled sports media personnel to provide unlimited information to fans and increase brand knowledge. Social media sites have emerged as an alternative marketing communications channel for distributing information in real-time and communicating directly with fans (Kwon & Sung, 2011; Sanderson & Kassing, 2011; Wallace et al., 2011). By disseminating diverse types of brand related information, marketers can affect consumer perceptions of their brand and potentially influence consumptive behaviours (Kwon & Sung, 2011).

Social media can be used in conjunction with other media outlets and marketing collateral to increase brand awareness and revert online traffic to their brand website. Stelzner (2010) suggests that marketers utilise social media mainly for generating exposure and increasing website-related traffic rather than for sales-related activations. This finding was supported by Wallace et al. (2011) who identify links as the most common communication tool used in their study, which resulted in fans being directed back to official websites for interaction rather than encouraging interaction on Facebook. In addition, Wallace et al. (2011) note that communication techniques and content posted to Facebook could potentially increase brand exposure and facilitate two-way interaction.

Principles in brand management are largely focused on establishing identity, positioning and marketing actions (Coyle, 2010; Richelieu & Pons, 2009). Wallace et al.'s (2011) seminal work on Facebook usage as a brand management tool in sports indicates that this platform provides sports properties with opportunities to manage brand perception and expectation, ultimately influencing fan satisfaction with the brand. Moreover, Williams and Chinn (2010) note that social media platforms allow organisations to build their brands as part of a long-term relationship marketing approach.

With increasing social media usage, many sports brands (including NSOs, leagues, teams and athletes) are implementing social media strategies to foster relationships with consumers, increase interaction and engagement, and increase brand equity (e.g. Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2012; Thompson et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2011; Wallace, Wilson, & Miloch, 2010). Bowden (2009) argues that if brands engage with consumers they create experiences that help to establish and build trust, foster consumer involvement with the brand and promote commitment. These outcomes are essential in building brands and developing consumer-brand relationships. Therefore, as sports brands, sports events must also manage their social media usage appropriately.

Previous research identifies social media as sites that allow, at least theoretically, for sports properties to develop these relationships with sports fans (Pegoraro, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Accordingly, Gladden and Funk (2002) indicated that this is vital in order to develop brand equity and foster long-term loyalty. Keller (2001a, 2001b) suggests that the consumer-brand relationship is the last step in building the equity of the brand and is therefore an important concept in enabling marketers to build their brands. For sports event brands, this is important as they seek to turn equity into the purchase of event merchandise, tickets and repeat event attendance.

In order to build such consumer-brand relationships, social media provide brands with opportunities to communicate directly with fans. These interactions help to elevate the brand to the status of relationship partner (J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995). In addition, Heaps (2009) notes that through the distribution of information, brands were able to “tell their stories better” (p. 22), ultimately connecting with fans and followers on a deeper level. Therefore, while establishing their presence on social media and engaging in more conversations, marketers ultimately try to enhance consumer-brand relationships. Kwon and Sung (2011) examined the use of specific relationship-building strategies in the context of global businesses and found that social media are a suitable channel to utilise these strategies.

In addition, research suggests that fans looking for relationships with brands seek to do so based on receiving value (Williams & Chinn, 2010), either in the form of interaction or content (Filo & Funk, 2014). Pegoraro’s (2012) examination of the WNBA indicates that relationship-building efforts, in particular those proposed by Kwon and Sung’s (2011) earlier work, are underutilised by this brand on social media. However, aligned with providing value to fans, the WNBA showcases behind-the-scenes content most frequently in an effort to build their relationships with fans. This finding was similar

to Kassing and Sanderson (2010) who examined how cyclists used Twitter during the 2009 Giro d'Italia, in which they found that racers provide a behind-the-scenes look at the race, which led to a greater connection between riders and their fans.

While this research indicates that social media, and Facebook in particular, provide certain sports brands (i.e., leagues and teams) with opportunities to utilise brand management strategies in order to manage brand perceptions (Pegoraro, 2012; Wallace et al., 2010, 2011), it remains to be seen if this is also true for professional sports events. Moreover, a review of the literature denotes a lack of empirical research in understanding sports brands' use of specific relationship-building strategies, in particular through social media (e.g. Pegoraro, 2012). More recent content analysis studies of social media focus solely on identifying whether strategies are apparent on new and social media (e.g. Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Watkins & Lewis, 2014) by examining manifest content only. These authors acknowledge the limitations of this approach noting further research into the latent content is required.

Moreover, much of the extant literature related to social media use by sports entities, whether organisational or individual have employed content analysis methodology. While this is a valid method to explore content displayed on social media platforms, many of these prior studies have used stratified random sampling, and have limited the number of posts examined by restricting the sample to a selection of the most recent posts (e.g. Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pedersen, et al., 2012; Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010), or by considering season specific content or timeframe (e.g. Hambrick & Kang, 2014). As a result, these findings, based on a very small sample, only present a partial view and limit our understanding of social media utilisation as a continual process. For example, if the collection of 20 tweets began on a game day, the sample may be heavily weighted towards game day activities, thus presenting the possibility for a

potential bias. Due to the real-time nature of Twitter (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010), and thus the potential for content to change often, it seems appropriate to examine larger samples taken from a wider timeframe, in order to provide a more complete picture of how a producer of content is using this medium.

In order to address these gaps in the literature, this study uses a content analytic method to explore the nature and extent of strategies used by professional tennis events to build their brands and relationships with fans. More specifically, it seeks to determine how communication tools, brand associations, marketing and relationship-building factors are being integrated into professional tennis event brands' posts on Facebook and Twitter. As a result, this case study provides insight into the context of professional sports events' social media management that to date has not been published in current research.

5.2 Methods

Undertaking a content analysis, this study examines particular strategies across four critical dimensions, on the respective Facebook and Twitter posts for the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open. Content analyses have been widely used to examine various forms of media and are well documented in recent sports-focused social media research (e.g. Frederick, Hambrick, & Clavio, 2014; Hambrick & Kang, 2014; Lebel & Harman, 2014; Meng et al., 2015), thus it was deemed an appropriate method for the purpose of this study.


A number of scholars within the social sciences and communication disciplines have provided specific procedures for conducting a content analysis (e.g. Lindolf & Taylor, 2002; Neuendorf, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). This study adopted Wimmer and Dominick's (2006) steps for conducting a content analysis methodology which include: defining the sample, identifying and describing what is to be analysed, developing categories to analyse and a system of quantification, training the coders

involved in the study, coding the content using the established protocol, analysing the data, and finally drawing conclusions from the results. These steps, as they relate to the current study, will be described in further detail in the following sections.

In order to confirm that the posts being examined were ‘official’, each event’s Facebook page was accessed through links from their official websites.¹⁸ The same approach was utilised to access the official Twitter pages for each event. While the Australian Open and Roland Garros both had secondary Twitter accounts (@aosos and @RolandGarrosFR respectively), these were omitted from the analysis, as they were not the primary accounts promoted by these particular events.

5.2.1 Data Collection

According to Riffe et al. (2008), there are certain methodological challenges associated with coding online media, where unlike traditional forms of media (e.g. print and broadcast) content is not largely static. Therefore, in order to ensure reliability a single static data set is required. To account for this, the NVivo 10 N-Capture, Google Chrome web-browser extension was utilised.¹⁹ This tool allows users to capture Facebook wall posts, comments and demographic data for Facebook brand pages, as well as tweets from a particular user’s timeline, and import them into NVivo 10 software as a dataset (QSR International, n.d.). This ensures a static dataset for the coding process. During the initial preparation and data collection phase of this study, this was the first known study to utilize the NVivo 10 software. However, it has since been used in a study by Frederick, Burch, and Blaszka (2013) in their examination of agenda setting on Twitter during the 2012 London Olympic Games, which provides further support for the use of this tool.

¹⁸ Implemented after the study had commenced, some well-known public figures and Pages with large followings are now verified by Facebook as having an authentic identity. A blue badge  appears next to a verified profile or Page's name.

¹⁹ Extensions are small software programs that can modify and enhance the functionality of the Chrome browser (Google, 2015).

Sample selection. All Facebook posts and tweets posted from the official accounts of each Grand Slam tennis event during the respective event periods were collected (see Table 6), resulting in 14 days of continuous event coverage. This represents a purposive, consecutive-day sample (Riffe et al., 2008), an approach that is consistent with previous studies examining media content during an event period (Burch, Eagleman, & Pedersen, 2012). All posts were gathered for the duration of each event. The data collection timeframe started from 8:00 a.m. (NZST) on the first day of each event and ended one hour after the completion of each event’s respective final, and was utilised to capture all posts throughout the entire event period. This yielded a total of 950 Facebook posts and 13,012 tweets collected across the four events. However, the inability to categorise foreign language posts accurately, saw the removal of them from the sample prior to data analysis. This approach to dealing with foreign language content is consistent with previous sports-specific Twitter research (Frederick et al., 2013). From this, the final during-event dataset included 927 Facebook posts and 12,633 tweets across all four events.

Table 6:

During-event Data Collection Period for Each Event

Event	Event data collection period
Australian Open	14 January 2013 – 27 January 2013
Roland Garros	26 May 2013 – 09 June 2013
Wimbledon	24 June 2013 – 07 July 2013
U.S. Open	26 August 2013 – 09 September 2013

In addition to capturing and analysing Twitter and Facebook posts during each event, a secondary purpose of this study was to examine the social media platforms between the respective annual events to gain insight into how brands use Twitter and Facebook outside of the event time to build their brand and relationships with fans. To do so, Riffe et al. (2008) suggest using a constructed week sample, which they define as

seven days randomly selected to represent a specific day of the week (i.e., Sunday through Saturday), ensuring that all days are represented in the sample, so that inherent differences in media content for any particular day of the week are held constant. In order to infer a year's coverage, a two-week sample was constructed, whereby 14 dates were randomly selected, using a random number generator from the remaining 351-day period for each respective event (Riffe et al., 2008) (see Appendix C). This approach has been effectively used in previous studies seeking to examine social media content over a year-long period (Wallace et al., 2011). In order to ensure comparability between the events, the same approach was employed across the four events.

Previous research notes that special days may result in specific behaviours that are not representative of typical marketing strategies (T. C. Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003) and therefore caution the inclusion of these dates. Tennis is unique in that it features a long season with much of the year dominated by leading events. Therefore, it was deemed appropriate to include days when other events were held as part of the sample, if randomly selected, as this is one of the inherent features of this sport and something each event needs to contend with. Using NVivo 10 to capture the between-event period, two-week dataset was constructed and 67 Facebook posts, and 192 tweets were collected across the four events. Once again, foreign language tweets were removed from the sample, wherein 67 Facebook posts and 187 tweets remained as the final between-event dataset across all four events. Posts were collected at 08:00 a.m. on the day following the allotted sample day, imported into NVivo, and filtered to include only those posts between 12:00 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. on the relevant day.

Unit of analysis. For this particular study, the unit of analysis was the individual Facebook and Twitter posts (or tweets) from the respective events' social media accounts,

as posted by the event. However, retweets²⁰ were also included for analysis as these are identified as a form of interaction between the brand and the original person who placed the post. In the case of the retweets, although event personnel did not originally construct the tweet, the retweet represents a conscious decision on the part of these personnel to redistribute the content to their followers, potentially exposing fans to any brand management strategies included in these tweets. Retweets have previously been included in studies examining Twitter strategies used by athletes (Burch et al., 2014; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Hull, 2014), and it was therefore deemed appropriate to include these within the sample.

In addition, due to the nature of Facebook and Twitter posts, possibilities exist for personnel to include content other than text (i.e., pictures, videos and links) within posts. In this study, any content embedded into a post and subsequently viewable on either Facebook or Twitter directly, was determined to be code-able. For example, if a picture was viewable within the Twitter post, what was viewable in the picture was coded according to the identified categories (e.g. if the photo clearly displayed the brand logo, the post was coded to the brand mark variable). However, if the picture was only viewable through a link (i.e., to Instagram), the picture content was not considered. Consistent with this approach, while the presence of links was code-able, the actual link itself was not followed, and the resulting linked content was not coded.

Coding categories. Drawing on existing research in sports branding and marketing, the content of professional tennis events' Facebook and Twitter posts were examined for the presence of brand association, marketing, and relationship-building elements. In addition, posts were also categorised according to the form of communication tool used. Categories were first developed based on previous studies (e.g.

²⁰ This occurs when an individual posts content from other Twitter users to their followers. These can be in the form of a retweet, modified tweet or quoted tweet.

Pegoraro, 2012; Wallace et al., 2010, 2011), and existing branding and marketing literature (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Kaynak et al., 2007; Kwon & Sung, 2011; Ross, 2007; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008). These categories were then piloted on another professional tennis event not used in the current study, and were modified and expanded where necessary in order to examine the nature of strategies used specifically by sports events accurately (see Appendix D for a detailed coding guide). In addition, feedback from event personnel was sought and included in the coding categories where appropriate, ensuring resulting category definitions were theoretically supported and reflective of the true nature of tennis events.

Communication type (form of communication). Scholars argue that a variety of communication types contributes to increased interaction and engagement, along with enhancing online consumption (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007; Seo & Green, 2008; Wallace et al., 2011), which suggests that the type of communication used in online communication impacts on sports fans' consumption habits (Pedersen et al., 2007). With specific reference to social media, Wallace et al. (2011) indicate that the type of communication influences the way users interact with Facebook content and note that this may enable brand managers to develop relationships with fans which could positively affect consumer behaviour (Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010). Bowden (2009) and Brodie et al. (2013) propose that cultivation and management of these long-term relationships is achieved through constant engagement with consumers. Therefore, an examination of the nature and extent of communication types used by these four tennis events gives an insight into the strategies they employ to build their brand and develop such relationships with their fans.

In the current study, forms of communication were coded as being one of the following: *picture*, *status update*, *question*, *link*, *video*, or *interaction*. The first five

options were based on the framework utilised in previous research (Wallace et al., 2011), while interaction was added to this study based on the examination of social media content and the event personnel's identification of this communication element. However, interaction was defined differently for the two independent platforms. For Facebook, interaction related to posts made by an event's account in response to comments made by users on the page (see Figure 5 for an example from the U.S. Open). In contrast, Twitter posts were coded as interaction if they were direct communication (as identified by '@' appearing before a username), retweets or modified tweets (as identified by RT or MT appearing before a username), and quoted tweets (as identified by quotations around another user's post).



Figure 5: Facebook *interaction* example post

Brand Associations. Brand associations reflect some of the most recent contributions to marketing and brand-related literature and have been investigated in a range of sporting contexts (Gladden, 2014; Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008). Extant literature posits that through experience with the brand consumers are able to obtain and develop brand associations (Gladden & Funk, 2002). The development of such brand associations allows fans to build brand awareness and knowledge, allowing them to identify with specific brands more readily, leading to higher levels of brand loyalty (Kaynak et al., 2007; Ross, 2007). This in turn results in identifiable preferences and

attitudes (Ross, 2007) and increased customer-based brand equity (Gladden, 2014; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, 2007), which is created when consumers develop “favourable, strong, and unique brand associations” with the brand (Bauer et al., 2008, p. 209). The portrayal of these unique brand associations on social media can therefore allow sports brands to cultivate a specific brand image (Wallace et al., 2011). Such brand associations with sports teams are believed to be created as a by-product of emotional involvement, often fostered in hopes of developing stronger consumer-brand relationships (J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995; Fournier, 2009; Fournier & Avery, 2011a; Gladden, Milne & Sutton, 1998). This previous research highlights the importance of brand associations and they are therefore considered an important construct to examine in this study as it relates to developing and building sports event brands.

In this study, brand association variables were operationalised as information about: the event’s main *stadium(s)* (e.g. named stadiums/courts relevant to the specific event: Rod Laver for the Australian Open and Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre for the U.S. Open), the event’s *history*, *organisational attributes* and *event characteristics*, and posts showcasing *brand marks*, *commitment*, *rivalry* and *social interactivity*. This category, and the resulting brand association variables, was informed by existing theoretical frameworks (Ross et al., 2006; Ross et al., 2008), and previous brand-related content analysis studies (Pegoraro, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011). While these elements have most often been discussed with respect to teams and leagues Gladden (2014) notes that these also extend to sports event brands.

Marketing Strategies. While previous research in a non-sports setting questions the success of marketing-related endeavours on social media (Fournier & Avery, 2011b), Underwood et al. (2001) suggest that highly identified sports fans are more likely to process marketing from the team as “personally relevant, processing it deeply, relating it

to existing brand knowledge” (p.3). This is vital to sports brands, as research suggests this also results in strengthened brand associations (Underwood et al., 2001), ultimately aiding in brand-building endeavours. Indeed, previous research notes that sports fans are unique, in that most often interest and involvement (at least in a team setting) will continue long after a game or match has finished (Funk & James, 2001). Therefore, there are opportunities to feature marketing and promotional content.

Marketing variables were coded based on elements adapted from previous research by Wallace et al. (2011) and Pegoraro (2012). The current study examined four variables related to marketing strategies that have the potential to increase fan involvement with the event. These include information related to various aspects of the event, which were defined as follows: *general information* (e.g. any information relating to the event or upcoming activities held as part of the event itself, or information related to the schedule of play), *information on where to ‘catch’ games* (e.g. on television, radio or through web-broadcasts), *player coverage* and *in-game coverage* (e.g. score updates, video replays or court coverage). In addition, posts were also inspected for the presence of sales- and promotion-related strategies including: *ticket information*, *merchandise*, *sponsors* and *contests*. Based on feedback from the event personnel, the current study also considered the ability of events’ personnel to respond to fans’ issues or questions related to the event, as this was deemed an important marketing strategy. Personnel strongly noted the relevance and importance placed on this aspect by both the event brand and their fans and as a result one further variable was added to represent *customer service*. Posts that did not contain any of these elements were coded as *none*.

Relationship building. Social media offer sports brands potential opportunities to build relationships with sports fans (Wallace et al., 2011; Williams & Chinn, 2010). In order to build such consumer-brand relationships, social media provide the ability to

communicate directly with fans. These interactions have the potential to elevate the brand to the status of relationship partner (J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995). Both Pollach (2005) and Insch (2008) note that verbs in imperative forms involve readers in any discourse and the presence of these may indicate the extent to which brands invite fans into the conversation, accordingly demonstrating a desire to build and foster a relationship with them. In addition, research proposes that fans looking for relationships with brands seek to do so based on receiving value (Williams & Chinn, 2010), either in the form of interaction or content (Filo & Funk, 2014; Williams & Chinn, 2010).

In light of this, posts were examined for the nature and extent of elements through which events were seen to be seeking to build relationships with fans. This category was adapted based on previous research by Kwon and Sung (2011) and Pegoraro (2012). Three variables were included based on the previous studies that were deemed imperative verbs asking fans for a relationship and included: *become a fan on other social media*, *follow or stay tuned* and *join us* at an event. Consistent with Pegoraro (2012), posts were also coded for the presence of *behind-the-scenes* content, identified as content not accessible from other sources (e.g. video clips or pictures from player press conferences), and *fan poll or survey*. Finally, event personnel indicated that social media provide an opportunity for fans to contribute content, and consequently an additional variable *asking for a relationship* was added. In this study, posts were also examined for the presence of events asking fans to *share content*. Posts that did not contain any of the above-mentioned strategies were once again coded as none.

Coders and Reliability. Previous research notes that the use of two or more coders is often used to strengthen reliability and decrease bias associated with one coder (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). When initially conceived, this study aimed to use two coders (i.e., the researcher and one independent coder). However, the independent coder was

unable to take part in this study in its entirety. Therefore, the researcher acted as the sole coder for this study. Previous research on branding strategies in the sporting context have utilised a sole coder (Johnston, 2014; Watkins & Lewis, 2014). It is also common for content analysis to use one, two, or more than two coders (Riffe et al., 2008). Nevertheless, to gain maximum reliability, Macnamara (2005) notes, “even when a primary researcher conducts most of the research, a reliability sub-sample coded by a second or third coder is important” (p. 10). The independent coder in this study was recruited to code a data sub-set to establish inter-coder reliability. The coder possesses a post-graduate degree in Sports Management and has worked extensively in the communication and marketing field, most recently as a social media strategist. In content analysis studies, reliability relates to the ability of the measurement to lead the similar results when repeated and is measured through the process of inter-coder reliability (Riffe et al., 2008; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The use of this approach ensures that different coders are interpreting the data in the same way.

Prior to the data coding process, the researcher provided coder training to ensure procedures and measures were familiar to the independent coder. Training involved explaining the preliminary coding instrument, consistent for both Facebook and Twitter, in detail, and then allowing the trained coder to ask questions about the coding procedure. The coding instrument and codebook included directions for coding posts and a definition of coding terms. Consistent with the approach used by Kwon and Sung (2011), following training, the coders separately coded 50 posts not included in the sample and results were then compared and discussed. Minor adjustments were refined to the instrument based on a discussion of their separate experiences. For example, social interactivity was adapted to include fans interacting at the event as well as on the Internet and general information was adapted to include any mention of event draws in one post.

Following the training session, in order to address inter-coder reliability, analysis was conducted to measure agreement between the two coders. In order to determine this, the coders separately coded 10% of the content, with representation from all four events analysed. A 10-20% subsample is considered by theorists to be suitable to evaluate coder reliability and accuracy (Neuendorf, 2002; Riffe et al., 2008; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), but also to identify disagreements or ambiguous categories (Riffe et al., 2008). It has also been used as the standard in previous social media content analysis research (e.g. Frederick, et al., 2013; Pegoraro, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Wallace et al., 2011). Two measures were used to examine the inter-coder reliability for this study. Firstly, the percentage agreement between the coders was calculated. A percent of agreement of 80% (Riffe et al., 2008) was used as the criteria for agreement on each mutually exclusive variable. The agreement between the coders in each of the measures was well within acceptable standards for content analysis (Riffe et al., 2008; see Table 7). When the coders disagreed, differences were resolved through discussion.

Secondly, it is recommended that researchers also use a second reliability measure to test for chance agreement (Riffe et al., 2008). In this study, Cohen's Kappa was used to determine consistency between the coding, and was calculated using SPSS (Version 21). As a coefficient of 0.75 is deemed acceptable in most situations (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), and has been used as an acceptable measure in previous social media research, 0.75 was used as the criteria for the inter-reliability coefficient between coders for mutually exclusive variables (i.e., content and form of communication categories). The coders achieved this with a range of 0.97 to 1.0 Kappa for these items. Thus, the ranges of Kappa and percentage agreement were deemed acceptable.

Table 7:*Inter-coder Reliability Results*

Coding Category/ Variable	Percentage (%)	Agreement	Cohen's Kappa
Item ID	98.63		0.98
Event ID	100		1
Platform ID	100		1
Time Period	100		1
Form of Communication	97.26		0.97
Brand Associations			
Brand mark	93.15		0.82
Commitment	84.93		0.64
Stadium	93.15		0.86
History	90.49		0.76
Organisational attributes	91.78		0.68
Event characteristics	89.72		0.68
Social interactivity	93.15		0.87
Rivalry	98.63		0.98
Non-Player Personnel**	76.71*		0.38*
None	94.52		0.74
Marketing Strategy			
General information	94.52		0.74
Information on where to catch games	100 96.04		1 0.75
In-game coverage	100		1
Merchandise	98.32		0.96
Player coverage	84.93		0.80
Sponsor coverage	100		1
Ticket information	95.06		0.74
Contests	58.9*		0.18*
Crisis Management**	84.93		0.61
Customer service	73.97*		0.36*
Sport coverage**	94.52		0.31*
Other**	91.58		0.72
None			
Relationship-Building			
Become a fan on other social media	95.89		0.69
Behind the scenes	98.63		0.80
Poll or survey	89.72		0.68
Follow, stay tuned	98.63		0.66
Join us	84.93		0.61
Share your content	93.15		0.82
Sign-up or register**	76.71*		0.38*
None	91.78		0.65

Note. * Below the reliability criteria. ** Removed from the coding sheet and data analysis due to low reliability scores.

Consistent with previous studies analysing branding and marketing related content on social media, it was apparent that some categories elicited multiple strategies which were coded against all applicable variables and were therefore not mutually exclusive (Wallace et al., 2011; Zhang, Sung, & Lee, 2010). For example a post could include *ticket information*, *sponsors* and *general information* (i.e., the event's draw), and thus be coded to each of these variables. Both Wallace et al. (2011) and Zhang et al. (2010) note that this results in an examination of latent content, leading to lower reliability as they rely on a level of interpretation and evaluation that naturally varies from coder to coder (Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney, & Sinha, 1999). Lower reliability values are therefore considered acceptable for such latent variables.

A Kappa level of 0.4 was used for these latent, non-mutually exclusive categorical items such as brand associations, marketing strategies and relationship building in this study (Banerjee et al., 1999; Neuendorf, 2002; Wallace et al., 2011). The coders achieved this level for most latent variables relating to branding, marketing and relationship-building strategies, representing a fair to good agreement (Banerjee et al., 1999). However, some variables (e.g. *non-player personnel*, *crisis management*, *sport coverage*, *other* and *sign-up or register*) were deemed to be below the acceptable reliability criteria. As per Neuendorf's (2002) suggestions, these latent variables were examined to determine if a revision of the definition was possible, and were subsequently eliminated from data analysis when they did not reach the accepted inter-coder reliability standard. Consistent with Wallace et al.'s (2011) study, the inter-coder reliability of these categories provided support for the inclusion of the latent variables in the examination of these event brands' social media posts. Given the purpose of this study and the desire to examine the nature of strategies used, it was deemed appropriate to evaluate these frequencies and percentages.

Traditionally coders have then proceeded to examine the remainder of the content independently once inter-coder reliability was established. However, as noted earlier, this was not possible in this study and the researcher coded the remaining posts. This approach has, been utilised in prior studies where it was not possible to divide the remaining data set between two coders (Aust & Everhart, 2007; Chen, 2008; Wortman, 2009), and it was therefore deemed a suitable method in this context.

5.2.2 Data Analysis

The purpose of the current study was to determine the nature and extent of strategies utilised by professional tennis events on social media. In order to determine this, statistical analysis was conducted on the coded data. SPSS (Version 21) was used to conduct the data analysis. Initial data analysis included the calculation of descriptive statistics. More specifically, frequencies and percentages were reported for all categories derived from the conceptual framework and previous research. This form of statistical analysis is common and appropriate in content analysis research (Riffe et al., 2008; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) and has been used in the reporting of previous sports-related social media studies (e.g. Lebel & Harman, 2014; Pegoraro, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011). Frequency statistics and cross-tabulations were performed on the data to illustrate the number of times each event used a particular strategy.

In addition to frequencies and percentages, advanced statistical analyses using analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted. The ANOVA procedure is commonly used to calculate mean differences (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), and was used to examine if statistically significant differences existed in the number of daily posts between events. Levene's Test for Equality of variances was used to examine the homogeneity of the samples (Portney & Watkins, 2009), and when Levene's test was significant, unequal variance results were reported and The Welch Statistic (Robust Test

of Equality of Means) and Games-Howell post-hoc tests were reported. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to examine the distribution of the data, and a Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance was the non-parametric test used to examine the four independent groups, when non-normal distributions were identified (Portney & Watkins, 2009).

The small sample size of posts collected during the constructed two-week between-event period prohibited generalisable comparisons. Therefore, the data from each event will be presented as a combined dataset only for this time-period.

5.3 Results

This section reveals the results of the coding process outlined in the previous section to examine the nature and extent of the strategies used by professional tennis events to build their brands and relationships with fans on social media.

5.3.1 Sample Characteristics

Table 8 presents the Facebook and Twitter post count for each professional tennis event for the two-week during and between-event periods. Overall, of the four events, the Australian Open had the largest number of both total Facebook posts ($n = 316$, 31.8% of total posts in this time period), and tweets ($n = 4419$, 35%) in the during-event period, while Roland Garros had the least amount of Facebook posts ($n = 158$, 17.0%) and the U.S. Open had the least amount of tweets ($n = 2350$, 18.6%). Concerning the between-event time-period, there were some notable observed differences among the four events. While the Australian Open had the highest number of tweets ($n = 109$, 58.3% of posts in this time-period), the U.S. Open had the highest number of Facebook posts ($n = 22$, 32.8%), and Wimbledon had the lowest number of both Facebook posts ($n = 15$, 22.4%) and tweets ($n = 17$, 9.1%). Analysis of the average number of posts per day revealed this was higher for all events in the during-event time period, than between respective events

for both Facebook (see Table 9) and Twitter (see Table 10), indicating these events post more frequently on a daily basis during the event period compared to the rest of the year.

Table 8:

Facebook and Twitter Post Count by Event and Time Period

Time Period	Event								Total	
	Australian Open		Roland Garros		Wimbledon		U.S. Open			
	FB n (%)	TW n (%)	FB n (%)	TW n (%)	FB n (%)	TW n (%)	FB n (%)	TW n (%)	FB n (%)	TW n (%)
During-Event	304 (32.8)	4419 (35)	158 (17.0)	3395 (26.9)	218 (23.5)	2469 (19.5)	247 (26.6)	2350 (18.6)	927 (100)	12,633 (100)
Between-Event	12 (17.9)	109 (58.3)	18 (26.9)	21 (11.2)	15 (22.4)	17 (9.1)	22 (32.8)	40 (21.4)	67 (100)	187 (100)

Note. FB = Facebook, TW = Twitter. The percentage is calculated from total posts within each social media site for the relevant timeframe.

Analysis was conducted to examine whether differences in the number of daily posts were statistically significant between the respective four events during either time-period. A one-way ANOVA was used to compare the number of daily posts on Twitter between the events during the event period and between the annual events. Results revealed a statistically significant difference between the number of daily posts in the during-event period for these events ($F(3, 52) = 22.953, p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated the number of daily posts for the Australian Open (315.64 ± 62.98) was significantly different from Roland Garros ($242.5 \pm 44.40, p = .004$), Wimbledon ($176.36 \pm 61.65, p = .00$) and the U.S. Open ($167.86 \pm 47.56, p = .00$). The U.S. Open did not significantly differ from the number of daily posts for Wimbledon. An ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in the number of daily posts on Twitter during the between-event time-period ($F(3, 52) = 10.715, p < .001$). The Tukey post-hoc test revealed that the number of daily posts for the Australian Open (7.78 ± 6.49) was significantly different from for Roland Garros ($1.50 \pm 1.29, p = .000$), Wimbledon

($1.21 \pm .89$, $p = .000$) and the U.S. Open (2.86 ± 1.99 , $p = .003$). No statistically significant difference existed between the other three events.

The homogeneity of Levene's test was significant ($p < .001$) in the number of daily posts on Facebook during the event period, and as such a Welch test was conducted revealing a statistically significant difference ($F(3, 52) = 20.603$, $p < .01$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Games-Howell test revealed the number of posts were significantly lower for the Australian Open ($.86 \pm .86$) when compared to Roland Garros (1.29 ± 1.38 , $p = .000$) and Wimbledon (1.07 ± 1.07 , $p = .002$). In addition, posts were significantly higher for Roland Garros than Wimbledon ($p = .036$). No significant difference was revealed between the U.S. Open ($1.57 \pm .65$) and the other three events.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed to examine the number of daily posts on Facebook for the between-event time-period due to non-normal distribution within the sample. Results revealed that no statistically significant difference existed with respect to the number of daily Facebook posts between the four events during this time period ($H(3, 56) = 5.214$, $p = .157$). Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 9 and Table 10.

In addition, brand logos were used in all four events' profile images on both Facebook and Twitter, yet the Australian Open was the only event to include this in the banner image. The other three events used the banner to include photos that displayed the event. In the information section of both social media sites, all events provided information such as event history and biographies, and both the U.S. Open and Wimbledon on Twitter and the U.S. Open on Facebook included links to terms of use. Tournament dates were included on Facebook by the Australian Open, Roland Garros and Wimbledon, but were listed on Twitter for Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open. In the website link section on each social media site, all events posted web

addresses for their official websites. While links to other social media were not utilised on Twitter, they were featured by all events on Facebook.

Table 9:

Daily Post Count for Facebook by Event and Time Period

Time Period	Events			
	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	U.S. Open
During-Event	(<i>M</i> =21.71, <i>SD</i> =3.54)	(<i>M</i> =11.29, <i>SD</i> =3.34)	(<i>M</i> =15.57, <i>SD</i> =4.40)	(<i>M</i> =17.64, <i>SD</i> =12.38)
1	14	9	8	2
2	23	13	23	27
3	19	11	13	22
4	24	12	19	28
5	21	12	23	20
6	28	12	14	12
7	21	12	13	33
8	21	21	10	29
9	23	11	15	20
10	21	7	17	37
11	20	8	13	3
12	18	9	14	0
13	25	9	17	7
14	26	12	19	7
Between-Event	(<i>M</i> =.86, <i>SD</i> =.86)	(<i>M</i> =1.29, <i>SD</i> =1.38)	(<i>M</i> =1.07, <i>SD</i> =1.07)	(<i>M</i> =1.57, <i>SD</i> =.65)
1	0	1	0	0
2	0	0	3	2
3	0	0	2	2
4	0	2	1	1
5	1	2	1	1
6	1	1	1	2
7	0	0	3	1
8	0	0	1	1
9	2	1	0	2
10	2	1	0	2
11	1	1	0	2
12	2	5	2	2
13	1	3	1	2
14	2	1	0	2

Table 10:*Daily Post Count for Twitter by Event and Time Period*

Time Period	Events			
	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	U.S. Open
During-Event	($M=315.64$, $SD=62.98$)	($M=242.50$, $SD=38.46$)	($M=176.36$, $SD=61.65$)	($M=167.86$, $SD=47.56$)
1	158	180	98	195
2	288	250	293	208
3	282	270	264	178
4	337	280	238	154
5	287	250	163	146
6	268	270	201	163
7	431	290	122	209
8	339	260	62	293
9	323	270	178	166
10	362	274	169	147
11	309	200	183	132
12	319	190	156	120
13	386	224	191	130
14	330	187	151	109
Between-Event	($M=7.78$, $SD=6.49$)	($M=1.50$, $SD=1.29$)	($M=1.21$, $SD=.89$)	($M=2.86$, $SD=1.99$)
1	0	1	0	0
2	0	0	2	1
3	5	0	3	4
4	4	2	0	1
5	1	0	1	4
6	12	1	2	5
7	6	1	2	1
8	1	0	1	3
9	8	2	1	1
10	14	2	1	2
11	9	4	0	7
12	12	3	2	3
13	17	3	1	3
14	20	2	1	5

In the following sections, results for each platform are presented separately with three key areas of focus: (1) cumulative strategy use by these four events; (2) notable observed differences in strategy use between each event;²¹ and (3) cumulative strategy use during the between-event period.

5.3.2 Form of Communication

The four events' social media posts were examined to determine the nature and extent of communication strategies utilised by professional tennis events as evidenced by

²¹ As evidenced in the during-event time period (unless indicated otherwise).

the form of communication they used. As previously mentioned, communication tools were coded as posts uploaded as a *picture*, *link*, *question*, *status update*, *video* or *interaction*. The frequencies and percentages among the communication category are presented in full in Table 11 (see page 142).

Facebook. While Facebook provides a range of communication tools, these were not utilised in equal proportions. Collectively, over half of all Facebook posts were uploaded with a *picture* as a communication tool ($n = 541$, 55.4% of total posts) during each respective event. In addition, *videos* ($n = 101$, 10.9%) and *links* ($n = 79$, 8.5%) were also used moderately, while *questions* ($n = 32$, 3.5%) and *status updates* ($n = 5$, 0.5%) were used infrequently across the four events.

For three events (i.e., Australian Open, Roland Garros and Wimbledon), *pictures* were the most frequently used form of communication in the during-event time-period. However, for the U.S. Open this was the second most utilised tool, with a higher proportion of posts categorised as *interaction* ($n = 133$, 53.8%). Part of this difference can be explained by the U.S. Open's hosting of 'Player Q&A's'²² on the official U.S. Open Facebook account; a strategy unique to this event. Roland Garros was the only other event to prominently utilise *interaction* with over one fifth ($n = 36$, 22.8%) of posts coded as this communication tool. For Roland Garros, this interaction was largely customer service-focused ($n = 30$, 83.3% of events' interaction posts). *Videos* were not used frequently by the U.S. Open ($n = 3$, 1.2%), but were used by the other three events during the event period: Australian Open ($n = 58$, 19.1%), Roland Garros, ($n = 21$, 13.3%) and Wimbledon ($n = 19$, 8.7%). Further, Roland Garros was the only event that did not utilise all forms of communication (i.e., with *questions* and *status updates* not used). In addition, it was observed that the Australian Open and Wimbledon were more likely to include a

²² For the player Q&A (question and answer), players replied directly to individual fan comments using the US Open Tennis Championship account, and thus replies were shown as from the event itself.

greater range of communication tools, proportionately more than Roland Garros and the U.S. Open.

Visual communication (e.g. *pictures* and *videos*) was used proportionately more than other forms of communication during the between-events time-period. A comparable proportion of *pictures* were used between the respective annual events ($n = 38$, 56.7%) versus during-event. However, some notable differences in the forms of communication were observed during the between-event period. Proportionately more posts included *links* ($n = 15$, 22.4%) and the proportion of *interaction* posts ($n = 6$, 9.0%) was less than half of those used during the respective events.

Twitter. In the during-event time-period, two-thirds of the four events' collective Twitter²³ posts were *interaction* ($n = 3946$, 31.2% of all during-event posts) and *status updates* ($n = 3763$, 29.8%). *Links* ($n = 2200$, 17.4%) and *pictures* ($n = 1965$, 15.6%) were used moderately, while few posts were *videos* ($n = 461$, 3.6%) or *questions* ($n = 298$, 2.4%). Further, less than a quarter of all posts included visual media (e.g. *videos* or *pictures*; $n = 2,426$, 19.2%), which indicated that Twitter was used more for text-based communication.

A range of tools are being used by these events on Twitter in order to communicate with fans during this time period and the U.S. Open used *interaction* ($n = 1299$, 55.3%) proportionately more than the other three events, with over half of all U.S. Open posts coded as such. *Interaction* was also the most frequently used communication tool for Wimbledon ($n = 744$, 30%), while *status updates* were the most frequently used form of communication for the Australian Open ($n = 1605$, 36.3%) and Roland Garros ($n = 1259$, 37.1%).

²³ As with Facebook, tweets were categorised according to the form of communication tool utilised. However, in order to accurately reflect the nature of Tweets, the interaction category differed in the examination of Twitter posts. Here, interaction comprised of replies, quoted/modified tweets and re-tweets.

Further examination revealed some interesting observations when comparing during-event and between-event time-periods. For two communication types (i.e., *interaction* and *status updates*), notable differences were evident. *Interaction* was used proportionately more in the between-event period ($n = 97$, 51.3%) than during the events ($n = 3946$, 31.2%), while the opposite was evident for *status updates* ($n = 3763$, 29.8 % of during-event posts; $n = 19$, 10.2% between-event posts). In addition, *links* ($n = 45$, 22.4%) were used moderately more, while *pictures* ($n = 22$, 11.8%) were used moderately less during the between-event time-period. This is perhaps not surprising given the nature of events to use *status updates* to provide fans with live updates and scores, which would not be required outside of the event period.

In addition to the communication tools used, each respective event's posts were analysed to determine the nature and extent of branding and relationship-building strategies evident in their posts. Table 12 (pages 141-143) provides a summary of these findings. As previously noted, posts were coded according to the multiple categories of brand association, marketing and relationship-building strategies. As it is possible that one post could contain multiple factors, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Frequencies and percentages are reported for all categories and represent the number of times these factors occur throughout the content.

Table 11:

Frequencies and Percentages of Events' Posts by Communication Tools

Form of Communication	Australian Open		Roland Garros		Wimbledon		U.S. Open		Total During ^b		Total Between ^c	
	FB	Twitter	FB	Twitter	FB	Twitter	FB	Twitter	FB	Twitter	FB	Twitter
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
<i>Picture</i>	172 (56.6)	581 (13.1)	94 (59.5)	714 (21.0)	141 (64.7)	511 (20.7)	107 (43.3)	159 (6.8)	514 (55.4)	1965 (15.6)	38 (56.7)	22 (11.8)
<i>Link</i>	43 (14.1)	532 (12.0)	7 (4.4)	783 (23.1)	27 (12.4)	557 (22.6)	2 (0.8)	328 (14.0)	79 (8.5)	2200 (17.4)	15 (22.4)	45 (24.1)
<i>Question</i>	19 (6.3)	113 (2.6)		69 (2.0)	12 (5.5)	35 (1.4)	1 (0.4)	81 (3.4)	32 (3.5)	298 (2.4)		3 (1.6)
<i>Status update</i>	2 (0.7)	1605 (36.3)		1259 (37.1)	2 (0.9)	609 (24.7)	1 (0.4)	290 (12.3)	5 (0.5)	3763 (29.8)	1 (1.5)	19 (10.2)
<i>Video</i>	58 (19.1)	195 (4.4)	21 (13.3)	60 (1.8)	19 (8.7)	13 (0.5)	3 (1.2)	193 (8.2)	101 (10.9)	461 (3.6)	7 (10.4)	1 (0.5)
<i>Interaction^a</i>	10 (3.3)	1393 (31.5)	36 (22.8)	510 (15.0)	17 (7.8)	744 (30.1)	133 (53.8)	1299 (55.3)	196 (21.1)	3946 (31.2)	6 (9.0)	97 (51.3)

Note. FB = Facebook, *f* = frequency. For ease of reading, 0 (0.0%) values have been removed from the table. The percentage is calculated from total posts within each event and timeframe.

^a Interaction on Facebook refers to posts made replying to comments left by fans. On Twitter, this includes re-tweets, replies and quoted tweets.

^b This represents the total across all events for the during-event time-period.

^c Due to low frequencies from individual events, results from the between-event time-period have been combined.

Table 12:

Frequencies and Percentages of Posts by Branding, Marketing and Relationship building Strategy

Category Factor	During												Total Between ^b			
	Australian Open			Roland Garros			Wimbledon			U.S. Open			Total During ^a		Total Between ^b	
	FB <i>f</i> (%)	Twitter <i>f</i> (%)		FB <i>f</i> (%)	Twitter <i>f</i> (%)		FB <i>f</i> (%)	Twitter <i>f</i> (%)		FB <i>f</i> (%)	Twitter <i>f</i> (%)		FB <i>f</i> (%)	Twitter <i>f</i> (%)	FB <i>f</i> (%)	Twitter <i>f</i> (%)
Brand Association																
<i>Brand mark</i>	14 (4.6)	134 (3.0)	12 (7.6)	61 (1.8)	53 (24.3)	90 (3.6)	40 (16.2)	22 (0.9)	119 (12.8)	307 (2.4)	29 (43.3)	23 (12.3)				
<i>Commitment</i>	28 (9.2)	466 (10.5)	13 (8.2)	531 (15.6)	22 (10.1)	544 (22.0)	37 (15.0)	848 (36.1)	100 (10.8)	2389 (18.9)	19 (28.4)	60 (32.1)				
<i>Stadium</i>	37 (12.2)	396 (9.0)	13 (8.2)	347 (10.2)	59 (27.1)	336 (13.6)	13 (5.3)	494 (21.0)	122 (13.2)	1573 (12.5)	9 (13.4)	12 (6.4)				
<i>History</i>	16 (5.3)	113 (2.6)	36 (22.8)	187 (5.5)	35 (16.1)	201 (8.1)	15 (6.1)	65 (2.8)	102 (11.0)	566 (4.5)	17 (25.4)	31 (16.6)				
<i>Organisational attributes</i>	21 (6.9)	190 (4.3)	6 (3.8)	24 (0.7)	5 (2.3)	34 (1.4)	9 (3.6)	43 (1.8)	41 (4.4)	291 (2.3)	15 (22.4)	5 (2.7)				
<i>Event characteristics</i>	90 (29.6)	826 (18.7)	89 (56.3)	944 (27.8)	90 (41.3)	714 (28.9)	62 (25.1)	372 (15.8)	331 (35.7)	2856 (22.6)	45 (67.2)	69 (36.9)				
<i>Social interactivity</i>	24 (7.9)	1549 (35.1)	47 (29.7)	699 (20.6)	69 (31.7)	919 (37.2)	166 (67.2)	1506 (64.1)	306 (33.0)	4673 (37.0)	24 (35.8)	127 (67.9)				
<i>Rivalry</i>		14 (0.3)		19 (0.6)	2 (0.9)	10 (0.4)	2 (0.8)	4 (0.2)	4 (0.4)	47 (0.04)	10 (14.9)	13 (7.0)				
<i>None^c</i>	155 (51.0)	1932 (43.7)	28 (17.7)	1717 (50.6)	56 (25.7)	835 (33.8)	30 (12.1)	348 (14.8)	269 (29.0)	4832 (38.2)	4 (6.0)	19 (10.2)				

(continued)

5.3.3 Brand Associations

The nature and extent of certain branding strategies integrated into professional tennis events' social media posts were examined by specifically focusing on their use of brand association elements. Over 66.8% ($n = 664$) of all event posts on Facebook included some form of brand association and this was similar to Twitter with nearly two-thirds of all posts including brand association ($n = 8020$, 62.5%). This offers evidence that both platforms allow events to display brand specific content.

Facebook. Across the events, the two most frequently used brand associations during the events were *event characteristic* ($n = 331$, 35.7% of total posts) and *social interactivity* ($n = 306$, 33.0%). *Organisational attributes* ($n = 56$, 5.6%) and *rivalry* ($n = 14$, 1.4%) were the least frequently used brand association elements, while *stadium* ($n = 122$, 13.2%), *brand mark* ($n = 119$, 12.8%), *history* ($n = 102$, 11.0%) and *commitment* ($n = 100$, 10.8%) were used moderately by these events.

The content analysis revealed some notable observed differences among the four tennis events. For three events (i.e., Wimbledon, Roland Garros and the U.S. Open), brand associations were present in nearly three-quarters of all posts, while over half of the Australian Open posts included no identifiable brand association elements ($n = 155$). However, the Australian Open posted proportionately more content related to *organisational attributes* ($n = 21$, 6.9%) than the other events. While *event characteristics* was the most frequently used brand association for three events, for the U.S. Open it was *social interactivity* and is perhaps reflective of their higher number of interactive communication posts (e.g. Player Q&A sessions). In addition, Wimbledon showcased the *stadium* ($n = 59$, 27.1%) and *brand mark* ($n = 53$, 24.3%), and Roland Garros the *event characteristics* ($n = 89$, 56.3%) and *history* ($n = 36$, 22.8%) proportionately more than the other events.

In the between-event time-period, the events actively managed brand perception with over 90% of posts ($n = 63$) coded as containing some form of brand association element. This time-period was also used to draw attention to core-value brand associations (i.e., *brand mark*, *history* and *event characteristics*), with these associations used proportionally more than during the events. *Event characteristics* ($n = 45$, 67.2%) was the most frequently used brand association in this time-period. *Rivalry* ($n = 10$, 14.9%) was used proportionately more, but this is not surprising given the prevalence of other tennis events held during the year.²⁴

Twitter. When viewed collectively, *social interactivity* ($n = 4673$, 37.0%) was the most frequently used brand association element in Twitter posts during the respective event periods. This was followed by *event characteristics* ($n = 2856$, 22.6%), *commitment* ($n = 2389$, 18.9%) and *stadium* ($n = 1573$, 12.5%). Meanwhile, *history* ($n = 566$, 4.5%), *brand mark* ($n = 307$, 2.4%), *organisational attributes* ($n = 291$, 2.3%) and *rivalry* ($n = 47$, 0.04%) were used less frequently across the four events.

The U.S. Open utilised brand associations in more than 85% of their Twitter posts ($n = 2002$) and had more posts related to *social interactivity* ($n = 1506$, 64.1%), *commitment* ($n = 848$, 36.1%) and *stadium* ($n = 494$, 21%) than the other three events. Roland Garros was the only event to use *event characteristics* ($n = 944$, 27.8%) as the most frequent strategy during this time-period. In addition, while not the most frequently used element, posts by Wimbledon were more likely to include information relating to *history* ($n = 201$, 8.1%) than those by the other events.

As was seen with Facebook, brand association elements were utilised frequently during the between-event period on Twitter, with nearly 90% of posts ($n = 168$) featuring some form of brand association. *Stadium*-related information ($n = 12$, 6.4%) was the only

²⁴ A more detailed tour calendar for the men's ATP tour is available at: <http://www.atpworldtour.com> and at: <http://wtatennis.com> for the WTA women's tour.

association included in proportionately fewer posts than during events, while the use of *organisational attributes* (2.3% and 2.7% respectively) was fairly even during both time periods. All other brand associations were used proportionately more between respective annual events, with the proportion of posts coded as *social interactivity* ($n = 127$, 67.9%) and *commitment* ($n = 60$, 32.1%) nearly double during this time-period.

5.3.4 Marketing Strategies

Another aspect of this study was to examine nature and extent of marketing strategies included in posts by the four events. Posts shared by the events were coded for various types of marketing promotions.

Facebook. Across the four events, *player coverage* ($n = 436$, 47.0% of total posts) and *general event information* ($n = 370$, 39.9%) were the most frequently utilised marketing strategies during the event period. Posts related to *in-game coverage* ($n = 98$, 10.6%), *sponsors* ($n = 80$, 8.6%) and *customer service* ($n = 72$, 7.8%) were used moderately. Few posts included *ticket information* ($n = 22$, 2.4%), *merchandise* ($n = 21$, 2.3%) and *contests* ($n = 19$, 2.0%).

The four events were comparable in the nature of marketing strategies used during the particular event periods, with Wimbledon the only event not to utilise all strategies coded (i.e., *ticket information*). There were notable observed differences between the events in the extent of certain marketing strategies used. For Wimbledon and the U.S. Open the most frequently used strategy was *general information* ($n = 114$, 52.3%; $n = 76$, 30.8%), while *player coverage* ($n = 155$, 51.0%; $n = 105$, 66.5%) was the top for the Australian Open and Roland Garros. Wimbledon provided proportionately more coverage of *event information* ($n = 114$, 52.3%) and *sponsors* ($n = 31$, 14.2%) than the other three events, while Roland Garros used *player coverage* ($n = 2663$, 78.3%) and *customer service* ($n = 35$, 22.2%) and the Australian Open used *in-game coverage* ($n = 61$, 21.1%)

proportionately more. In terms of posts categorised as ‘none’, (i.e., those indicating a lack of identifiable marketing promotion factors), some interesting findings between the events emerged. Nearly half of the U.S. Open’s posts featured no marketing promotions ($n = 111$, 44.9%), Roland Garros had the lowest proportion of posts categorised as ‘none’ ($n = 2$, 1.3%), whereas the Australian Open ($n = 54$, 17.8%) and Wimbledon ($n = 44$, 20.2%) were fairly even.

During the between-event period, *information on where to catch games* and *in-game coverage* were never used. However, given the time-relevant nature of these factors, the lack of posts in this category is not unexpected. Despite the low frequency, *merchandise* ($n = 4$, 6.0%) and *ticket information* ($n = 5$, 7.5%) were used proportionately more during this time-period compared to during the events. However, *player coverage* ($n = 30$, 44.8%) was the most frequently used strategy and *customer service* the least frequently used ($n = 2$, 3.0%)

Twitter. *Player coverage* ($n = 7228$, 57.2%) was the most frequently used marketing strategy followed by *in-game coverage* ($n = 3616$, 28.6%). *General information* ($n = 2356$, 18.6%) was used moderately, while *sponsors* ($n = 849$, 6.7%), *customer service* ($n = 595$, 4.7%), *information on where to catch games* ($n = 454$, 3.6%), *contests* ($n = 189$, 1.5%), *merchandise* ($n = 80$, 0.6%) and *ticket information* ($n = 76$, 0.6%) were used infrequently. This indicates a large proportion of content on Twitter was information- or news-based.

The four events were comparable in the range of marketing strategies used, with each one focusing on three main strategies (i.e., *player coverage*, *in-game coverage* and *general information*). Yet, there were observed differences in the extent of use for some strategies between these events. While *player coverage* was the most frequently utilised strategy for all events, *ticket information* ($n = 6$, 0.2%) was the least frequently used for

Wimbledon, with *merchandise* the least frequently used by the Australian Open ($n = 22$, 0.5%), Roland Garros ($n = 2$, 0.1%) and the U.S. Open ($n = 23$, 1.0%). Roland Garros also used *in-game coverage* ($n = 1590$, 46.8%) and the U.S. Open used *customer service* ($n = 336$, 14.3%) proportionately more than the other three events. In addition, Roland Garros had the lowest proportion of posts categorised as none ($n = 420$, 12.4%) and the U.S. Open had the most ($n = 792$, 33.7%), which indicated a lack of identifiable marketing strategies.

During the between-event period, *player coverage* ($n = 54$, 28.9%) was the most frequently coded marketing strategy, followed by *general information* ($n = 34$, 18.2%), while *sponsors* ($n = 2$, 1.1%) and *contests* ($n = 5$, 2.7%) were used infrequently. *Information on where to catch the game*, *in-game coverage* and *merchandise* were never utilised during this time period, while proportionately more posts contained *ticket information* ($n = 10$, 5.3%) and *customer service* ($n = 27$, 14.4%). In addition, Twitter posts in the between-event period were more likely to feature no marketing strategies ($n = 84$, 44.9%) compared to during the events.

5.3.5 Relationship building

Finally the nature and extent of relationship-building strategies integrated into professional tennis events' social media posts was explored by specifically focusing on their use of previously identified relationship-building elements.

Facebook. Of the previously identified relationship-building related strategies, *behind-the-scenes content* ($n = 216$, 23.3% of total during-event posts) and *fan poll or survey* ($n = 186$, 20.1%), were the most frequently used, followed by *become a fan on other social media* ($n = 69$, 7.4%). The other elements were comparable in their usage, but were used less frequently (i.e., *follow or stay tuned* ($n = 39$, 4.2%), *join us* ($n = 39$, 4.2%), and *share your content* ($n = 26$, 2.8%)). While the frequencies of some elements

were low, all relationship-building strategies were used by each event. However, nearly half of all posts included no identifiable relationship-building strategies ($n = 441, 47.6\%$).

There were some observable differences in the nature and extent of relationship-building strategies used between the events. While the usage of *behind-the-scenes* content was comparable between three events, the Australian Open used it proportionately less, and for this event unlike the other three, it was not the most frequently used. The Australian Open and Wimbledon used *fan polls or surveys* ($n = 85, 28.0\%$; $n = 51, 23.4\%$, respectively) proportionately more than the other events and posts from Wimbledon were more likely to ask fans to *follow or stay tuned* ($n = 19, 8.7\%$) and *join us* ($n = 18, 8.3\%$). In addition, notable differences were observed in the number of posts that contained no identifiable relationship-building strategies with nearly two-thirds of Roland Garros' posts ($n = 102$), nearly half of both the Australian Open ($n = 149$) and the U.S. Open posts ($n = 108$), and just over one-third of Wimbledon's ($n = 82$) posts categorised as none.

An examination of between-event posts found that *behind-the-scenes* content ($n = 25, 37.3\%$) and *fan poll or survey* ($n = 20, 29.9\%$) were the most frequently used relationship-building strategies followed by *become a fan on other social media* ($n = 6, 9\%$). However, the previously mentioned strategies were used proportionately more during this time-period. Strategies related to asking fans to *follow or stay tuned* ($n = 2, 3.0\%$), *share content* ($n = 2, 3.0\%$) and *join us* ($n = 1, 1.5\%$) were used infrequently. Fewer posts were categorised as none ($n = 24, 35.8\%$) during this time period when compared to the during-event time period, which indicated that relationship-building strategies were used proportionately more on Facebook during this time period.

Twitter. Of the relationship-building strategies examined, the most frequently used on Twitter during the events was *behind-the-scenes* ($n = 2484, 19.7\%$). The number of asking fans to *follow or stay tuned* ($n = 619, 4.9\%$), *fan poll or survey* ($n = 609, 4.8\%$),

become a fan on other social media ($n = 485, 3.8\%$), and *share your content* ($n = 379, 3.0\%$) was fairly even. Asking fans to *join us* ($n = 181, 1.4\%$) was the least frequently used strategy. The analysis also revealed that the majority of posts in the sample ($n = 8386, 66.4\%$) were coded as 'none', and therefore contained no identifiable relationship-building strategies.

The nature and extent of relationship-building strategies used by three events (i.e., the Australian Open, Roland Garros and Wimbledon) in the during-event period were comparable. This highlighted an observable difference between these three events and the U.S. Open who used *fan poll or survey* ($n = 241, 10.3\%$), *follow or stay tuned* ($n = 271, 11.5\%$) and *share your content* ($n = 131, 5.6\%$) proportionately more. Posts from the U.S. Open were also less likely to feature *behind-the-scenes* content ($n = 213, 9.1\%$) or information on *becoming a fan on other social media* ($n = 36, 1.5\%$) than the other events.

Behind-the-scenes content ($n = 38, 20.3\%$) was the most frequently used relationship-building strategy used during the between-event time-period, followed by *fan poll or survey* ($n = 29, 15.5\%$) and *become a fan on other social media* ($n = 16, 8.6\%$). Asking fans to *follow or stay tuned* ($n = 11, 5.9\%$), and *join us* ($n = 2, 1.1\%$) were used infrequently, while asking fans to *share your content* was never used. When compared to the nature and extent of strategies used in the during-event period it was observed that two strategies (i.e., asking fans to *become a fan on other social media* and *fan poll or survey*) were used proportionately more between-events on Twitter than during. In addition, proportionately fewer posts during this time-period were categorised as none ($n = 111, 59.4\%$), which indicated that relationship-building strategies were being utilised proportionately more during this time-period.

5.4 Discussion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the nature and extent of strategies used by four professional tennis events to build their brand and relationships with fans on social media. Prior research indicates that social media aids sports brands to manage brand perceptions, generate fan interactions and develop relationships with fans (Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; Pegoraro, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011), and the current study suggests Facebook and Twitter facilitate such opportunities. Results from the current study suggest that a range of branding, marketing and relationship-building strategies are being employed by four professional tennis events on social media. Both Facebook and Twitter served as sites for these tennis events to manage brand perceptions and expectations, thus potentially influencing consumer satisfaction, interaction and knowledge of the brand (Gladden, 2014; Kaynak et al., 2007; Ross, 2007), which may ultimately lead to enhanced brand loyalty and strengthened consumer-brand relationships. Three interesting findings emerged from the results of this study that are worthy of further discussion and represent key aspects of this research that extend our understanding of social media use in the sports event branding context are: Management of brand perceptions, unique management approaches and an evolution in social media use (see Figure 6).

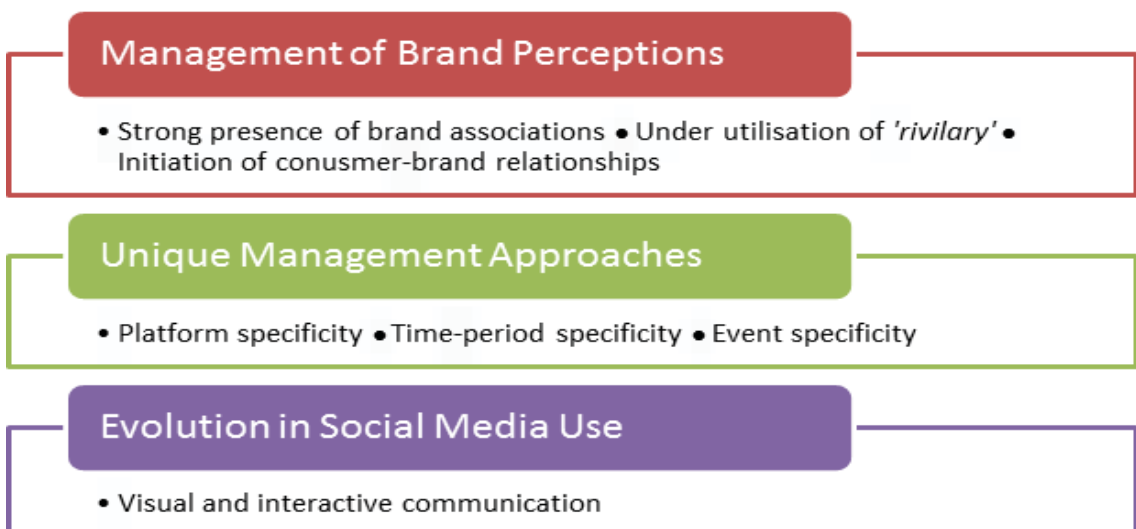


Figure 6: Key emergent themes: content analysis

5.4.1 Management of Brand Perceptions

The current study illustrates that brands showcase various brand associations on social media. The strong presence of these associations in the events' posts is important as brand-building benefits related to strategic coverage of positive brand associations include: building positive fan perceptions (Clavio & Miloch, 2009), development of loyalty in both brand preference and consumptive behaviours (Ross et al., 2008), and further product differentiation. Furthermore, these associations are vital in order to increase brand loyalty and develop long-term relationships with fans (Aggarwal, 2004; Gladden, 2014; Padgett & Mulvey, 2009). Interestingly, brand associations featured prominently in posts during the between-event time-period. Given the transient nature of sports events, brands would be wise to continue to use content featuring brand associations during this time-period to ensure fans and followers develop and build their brand knowledge outside of the event period when they are less likely to be exposed to event-related content through other media outlets.

Consistent with findings from Wallace et al. (2011), the current study found evidence of agenda-building strategies of particular brand associations among the four events examined. For example, Roland Garros and Wimbledon leveraged *history* and *event characteristics* across both Facebook and Twitter more so than the other two events. These elements are particularly relevant if brand personnel seek to help fans understand some of the unique features of these two events (e.g. tradition of wearing white at Wimbledon) and may serve to help shape the brand image and fans' social identification with the event (Underwood et al., 2001). In contrast, the U.S. Open used *commitment* more prominently than the other events, which perhaps underscores that event's desire to develop long-term relationships with their fans. Thus, social media allow events to

leverage brand associations that are most likely to yield positive brand benefits (Wallace et al., 2011).

There was one brand association that was surprisingly underutilised, particularly in light of findings from previous studies. Emphasising *rivalry* is identified in earlier work as a strategy for increasing brand associations with sports properties (Ross et al., 2006); however, it was the least frequently used strategy in this study. This finding is contrary to those reported in other social media related sports studies (i.e., Pegoraro, 2012; Wallace et al., 2011), which suggests that inclusion of this content type should perhaps be reconsidered by the tennis events under examination in this study. That said, the low use of *rivalry* in this context might also indicate that this brand association element is not as applicable or as easily expressed for events via these platforms as it is for other sports properties (i.e., leagues and teams). Therefore, the relevance of this association in relation to sports events would be worthy of further examination, in order to determine whether this finding is unique to these events, or can be generalisable to other events.

Furthermore, Facebook and Twitter have been shown to provide an opportunity for sports event brands to feature pictures and visual imagery. During the content analysis, *brand marks* and *event characteristics* featured prominently through various creative ways (e.g. pictures). Examples of such tactics include editing in-game photos into custom graphics displaying the event's brand mark and photos capturing specific event characteristics (i.e., the Queue at Wimbledon).²⁵ These unique visual strategies provide opportunities for fans to be exposed to these brand associations in novel ways, which may lead to strengthened identification of these brand-related aspects (Gladden & Funk, 2001, 2002).

²⁵ Wimbledon is one of the few major sporting events in the UK where you are able to buy premium tickets on the day of play. Therefore, if you are unable to get tickets to the Wimbledon Championships in the ballot, you can join the Queue at Wimbledon. Each day, a select number of tickets are available to those who have 'queued' (some overnight) for access to these tickets.

Relationship building is an essential part of brand management (Williams & Chinn, 2010) and building on the earlier work of Pegoraro (2012), this study demonstrates that these tennis event brands appear to be using social media as a site to initiate and potentially maintain relationships with consumers. Through the utilisation of imperative verbs, it indicates these event brands are attempting to initiate relationships with fans (Kwon & Sung, 2011). They also offer fans a glimpse of the action that would not normally be available by providing *behind-the-scenes* content. The inclusion of this unique content gives fans a unique reason to follow the brand on social media (Pegoraro, 2010, 2012; Williams & Chinn, 2010), as it is content that cannot be attained from any other means.

5.4.2 Unique Management Approaches

Results from this study also indicate that social media content and strategies for these events appear to be driven by unique management approaches. Notable differences were observed in the nature and extent of strategies used during various time-periods (e.g. during-event and between-event) and content is based on time-relevance across both social media platforms. This is not unexpected as marketing effectiveness is associated with promotional timing (T. C. Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003), and aligns with findings reported by Wallace et al. (2011). This finding is also consistent with findings from Zimmerman, Clavio, and Lim (2011), who note that such results might signal the use of agenda-setting strategies. Accordingly, tailored marketing strategies would be expected as sports event brands seek to offer time-specific products and services.

Interesting results emerged relating to the number of daily posts. The disproportionate overall frequency of coverage during each event indicates that Facebook and Twitter are being used at different rates by these events. While this finding is consistent with previous studies that indicate differences in the frequency of use by sports

leagues and athletes (Pegoraro, 2010; Wallace et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2010), the current study is the first to provide evidence of this by professional sports events. The statistically significant difference in the number of daily posts between-events provides further evidence of a different approach to the management of daily postings, which may result from differing social media management strategies supported by these events' unique organisational structure (i.e., staff, marketing plan, time and money). Given that, issues of resourcing are often touted as one of the foremost challenges associated with social media use (Abeza, 2012; Abeza et al., 2013; J. McCarthy et al., 2014), this also raises concerns regarding the frequency of posts and the management of social media accounts. As no known study has provided empirical support for an optimum number of daily posts, it is suggested that brands carefully consider the number of daily posts so as not to appear as 'spammers' (Fournier & Avery, 2011b; Laroche et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2014). This begs the question of whether, particularly on Facebook, events need to post so frequently during the event period, and would be a worthy area for future research to explore.

5.4.3 Specific Platform

Unique to this study are the observed differences in the nature and extent of strategies used on Facebook and Twitter by four professional tennis events. This leads to important implications for the use and management of social media accounts for sports events, especially in the context of building brands and relationships with fans. The findings reveal that a unique management approach should be utilised for two individual platforms, as each social media platform may be more suitable to various branding and relationship-building goals. This supports previous research that suggests that specific social media platforms may provide unique opportunities for marketers (Thompson et al., 2014; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). In particular, this study demonstrates that Facebook

may serve as a site that could be used for long-term relationship cultivation through the showcasing of event-related visual imagery and core values, more so than Twitter, which provides fans with an opportunity to experience the brand through real-time online text-based communication and interaction.

The events used Facebook to publish visual content (e.g. pictures), which provided fans with coverage of both the event and star players. The use of pictures may have additional advantages; offering brands the ability to illustrate descriptive information in visual format (Pedersen et al., 2007; Wallace et al., 2011). Indeed, this was the case as certain brand associations (i.e., *brand mark* and *event characteristics*) and marketing strategies (i.e., *sponsorship*) featured prominently in pictures. The dominant use of pictures also allowed for the sharing of more *behind-the-scenes* content, which has previously been shown to aid in the relationship-building process (Pegoraro, 2012). However, given the increased interest and popularity of other picture-sharing social media sites (Duggan & Smith, 2013), such as Instagram, it will be interesting to monitor whether pictures remain a noticeable strategy on Facebook and how it will be managed by these event brands in the future.

To the author's knowledge, studies examining specific communication forms (i.e., pictures, text) used on Twitter in the sporting context are absent from the literature, so the findings from this study are the first to offer insights on the nature and extent of forms of communication used on this platform. In contrast to Facebook, Twitter was utilised more for text-based communication, with interaction and status updates, the most frequently used forms. This underscores the real-time nature of this platform (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010), wherein constant posting of in-game coverage and information is analogous to a news ticker.

Twitter was also more reactionary, perhaps partially imposed by a 140-character limit, which thereby creates a mind-set of frequent updates or a “short burst of content” (Clavio & Kian, 2010, p. 486); highly suitable for in-game updates or quick messaging. As a result, it is suggested that Twitter is a good social media site to use when sharing brief information or engaging directly with fans. Facebook on the other hand is a more controlled environment for sports brands, where fewer posts means content is available to view more readily. Arguably, Facebook necessitates more thoughtfulness into the content being shared and acts as a site where events are able to showcase the essence of their brand; representing a surrogate website.

The acknowledgement of these points in relation to the current study reinforces previous calls that the management of social media cannot be underpinned by a one-size-fits-all approach (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Thompson et al., 2014). As social media usage and familiarity with these sites increases (Eagleman, 2013), departing from ‘cookie cutter’ approaches and striving towards niche usage is axiomatic. By doing so, brands can target their social content to best deliver on their strategic objectives.

5.4.4 Evolution in Social Media Use

The difference in the nature and extent of strategies used by the four tennis events suggests it is no longer just about platform-specific behaviour as suggested by Wallace et al. (2011). Instead, as familiarity with social media increases it may reflect a growing understanding and willingness by media personnel involved with these events to embrace social media use (Eagleman, 2013; Thompson et al., 2014). Furthermore, as Wallace et al. (2011) note in their earlier study, the media context is prone to change over time and therefore brand management “in these formats should reflect the most current and effective communication strategies” (p. 429). Results from this current study provide support for this sentiment, along with evidence of this in practice.

Visual communication via *pictures* and *videos* was the most prominent form of communication on Facebook. This finding is surprising as it greatly differs from those reported by Wallace et al. (2011), whose study of NCAA and Big 12 Athletic departments found *links* and *status updates* were the primary communication tools used. This indicates a potential shift in the way Facebook is currently used by sports brands as they seek to take advantage of opportunities afforded by other online technologies, along with increased attention to sharing of visual content. It is particularly noteworthy in light of research that notes pictures and videos can lead to unique fan involvement and interaction (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Mehdizadeh, 2010), and can enhance brand storytelling abilities leading to enhanced consumer-brand relationships (Heaps, 2009). Therefore, this represents an important finding that illustrates how social media serves as a site for events looking for unique ways to engage with fans.

In addition, in contrast to Wallace et al.'s (2011) study, the emergence of *interaction* as a prominent communication form by these events was an important finding. This is critical given that through interaction and engagement with followers, sports brands are able to build their relationships with fans (Brodie et al., 2013; Wallace et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2011). The tennis event brands utilised numerous strategies to encourage engagement and interaction with fans in an apparent attempt to build a community through social media.

Results of the current study also found that more than three quarters of posts featured identifiable marketing factors indicating that these events endeavour to make use of social media for marketing related purposes. This is surprising given prior indications that marketing is not the sole purpose of a social media account or branding strategy (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009; Williams & Chinn, 2010; Wright, Khanfar, Harrington, & Kizer, 2010). Also, although *sponsorship* was only used modestly on both

Facebook and Twitter, the events' deliberate sponsorship activity symbolises a tactical social media branding strategy.

Also unique to this study is that both Facebook and Twitter provide an opportunity for organisations to address customer service issues on an individual basis. Gladden et al. (2001) suggest that one of the means by which sports teams can enhance their relationships with fans is to seek ways to understand them and the current findings denote that these tennis events appear to be heeding this advice. Filo and Funk (2014) note that a number of organisations have Twitter accounts dedicated exclusively to customer service. This study illustrates that this practice has been adopted by these tennis events. Based on the messages they posted, and replied to, it signals an apparent effort to improve the in-game and event experience and to understand customer needs better. If used by event personnel, feedback gathered from these fans can then be used to shape future event experiences and marketing strategy while also equipping brands with valuable information about fans, which may aid in the development of consumer-brand relationships (Davenport et al., 2001; Fournier & Avery, 2011a).

5.5 Summary

This chapter examined the nature and extent of strategies used by four professional tennis events to build their brands and relationships with fans. Findings support the notion that social media provides sports events with an opportunity to develop a competitive edge by acting as a site that allows a direct communication link to fans. In doing so, it allows the event to communicate a specific brand identity, manage brand perception and provide opportunities to foster relationships with followers. The four tennis events utilised both Facebook and Twitter in a variety of ways and the results indicate that these sites are being used to further their brand image and foster long-term mutually beneficial relationships. Understanding the nature and extent of social media

strategies means that sports media personnel can develop an integrated marketing and brand management strategy enabling them to use these sites to build their brand and relationships with fans.

While it is vital to understand the strategies utilised by professional sports events on social media, it is also important to explore the fans' perspectives. If fans do not engage on these events' social media platforms, then efforts by sports media personnel are for nought. Indeed, actively engaging fans and determining and meeting their wants and needs is imperative to sustaining an event when uncontrollable factors threaten the brand image (Gladden, 2014). As such, the next chapter investigates how fans perceive these professional tennis events' social media presence.

CHAPTER SIX

FANS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE BY PROFESSIONAL TENNIS EVENTS

As more and more branding activities moved online, marketers had to realize that “brands are not always welcome in social media”, being regarded as the “uninvited crashers of the Web 2.0 party”. (Fournier & Avery, 2011b, p. 193)

Social media use as a marketing channel has increased, with both Facebook and Twitter being embraced in the sporting context. Although most users are familiar with business and marketing activities on social media, they use it primarily for fun and personal purposes (Fournier & Avery, 2011a, 2011b). As indicated by the quote that opens this chapter, brands have found themselves entering this ‘private’ space and garnering the reputation of ‘gate-crashers’ (Fournier & Avery, 2011b). This has previously seen brands’ marketing efforts being met with resistance by consumers, as they seek to hold onto a personal space free from the intrusion of marketers and advertisers.

As a result, the most effective methods for brands to use in order to encourage consumers and fans to engage and negotiate with their social media properties remain unclear. As indicated by Fournier and Avery (2011a), the personal nature of social media present unique challenges to those sports brands seeking to capitalise on the growth and popularity of these media to build their brand and relationships with fans. As Wright et al. (2010) argue, effective social media must not appear as an advertisement to the consumer, but rather as an attempt to “build a relationship *with* the consumer and establish a level of trust” (p. 77). Given previous scholars theorise that social media provide excellent channels for fostering relationships with fans (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012); there

is an urgent need to better understand how those who engage with professional sports events perceive these brands' social media presence.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to develop an understanding of how professional tennis events' fans perceive the event's online presence. To achieve this an online survey was conducted to discover sports fans' perceptions of social media use by four professional tennis events (the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open). Results indicate that fans perceive these events' usage of social media to be about three aspects: interaction, information, and brand anthropomorphism. In addition, fan responses suggest that while Facebook is the most popular site for general social media usage, these fans consider Twitter to be their most preferred platform to follow these events. Finally, fan responses illustrate two barriers that brands need to overcome in order to successfully develop and execute their social media strategy: (1) technological capabilities of the platforms, which ultimately influenced the fans motives and use; and, (2) the ability to provide value to fans. Overall, from the fans' perceptions, while social media offer opportunities for professional tennis events to build their brands, they also remain an important site to foster the development of relationships with both existing and potential fans.

This chapter first provides a brief review of literature relevant to this chapter and then outlines the methodological approach. Results are then presented, followed by a discussion to illustrate how the findings contribute, and furthermore extend the current body of knowledge relating to social media use.

6.1 Literature Review

Scholarly inquiry into management and producer-oriented perspectives of social media usage is emerging (e.g. Abeza et al., 2013; Clavio, Walsh, & Vooris, 2013; Greene et al., 2014; J. McCarthy et al., 2014) and provides valuable insights into attitudes,

motivations and challenges of social media use from those involved with the creation of both social strategy and online content. However, one of the limitations of previous studies is the lack of end-user feedback. While brand managers and marketers may perceive that their social media strategies are developed to support their brand and relationship-building endeavours, if fans' perceptions do not support this, then brands' efforts and fans' usage lack congruence. Indeed, Koll, von Wallpach, and Kreuzer (2010) argue it is not possible to build a brand successfully without knowledge of how stakeholders (in this study consumers) perceive the brand and its actions. Given resourcing is often touted as a barrier to social media engagement by sports brands (e.g. Abeza et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2014), there is a need for research to explore fan perceptions to ensure efforts are not squandered and social media are being used optimally.

In addition, much of the existing fan-oriented literature is framed within the context of uses and gratifications theory that posits that one's use of media is goal driven, with consumers of media using specific, selected channels to satisfy needs and achieve gratifications (Clavio & Kian, 2010). Uses and gratifications research relies on direct inquiry of media users regarding both their use of media, and their reasons for it (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Researchers focused on non-sports related behaviour identify various traditional motivations for online consumption (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). These motives include accessing information and technical knowledge (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Ruggiero, 2000), and communicating (Pegoraro, 2013). Building on this work, Rohm, Kaltcheva, and Milne (2013) examined brand-consumer interaction and define five primary motivations: entertainment, brand engagement (specifically identification with or connection to the brand), timeliness of information and service responses, product information, and incentives and promotions.

Research that explores sports fans and social media use from a uses and gratifications approach is rapidly emerging. Clavio and Kian's (2010) study of uses and gratifications of retired female athletes' Twitter followers found that the most salient use focused on elements relating to personal fandom and affiliation to the athlete. Further, in contrast to earlier studies (e.g. Schultz & Sheffer, 2010), social and personal elements are rated more highly than informational elements. Both Clavio and Kian (2010) and Kassing and Sanderson (2010) report that fans search for content that provides an insider-perspective while also allowing for opportunities to share information. In one of the few studies with a non-U.S. sports focus, Özsoy's (2011) examination of Turkish sports fans reported similar findings, with use of social media for sportive reasons largely driven by the desire for information, news and content that could not be found elsewhere.

Scholars also indicate that fans are driven by a desire for interaction, both with a brand (i.e., athlete, team or league) and with other participants as part of a larger fan community (Clavio & Kian, 2010). According to Clavio (2008), American collegiate message board users have a high affinity for interacting with each other in an online space. Similarly, findings from Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008), claim that interactive and content creation-based items are the most important to users of certain social media sites. As such, brands should seek to provide opportunities to foster these elements.

A number of fan-related studies examine their social media consumption. For example, as part of their seminal work on Facebook as a brand management tool, Wallace et al. (2011) examined fan engagement related to the branding and marketing constructs identified in their study. They assert that significant differences in fan interactions exist between the Big 12 and NCAA organisations in their study. Scholars have also conducted studies on professional sports teams' social media fans to identify whether distinct segments exist within these online communities. For example, recently, Bruffy et al.

(2014) conducted an online survey of New Zealand basketball fans to explore their behaviours within the context of Funk and James's (2001) Psychological Continuum Model (PCM). Their findings suggest that a large segment of fans are placed within the Attraction stage, contradicting common beliefs that it is mainly loyal and identified fans connecting with sports teams through social media. However, research on sports fan perceptions and attitudes towards social media usage is scant, with much of the fan-oriented research to date situated within the non-sporting context. The research highlights that fans are receptive to certain social media marketing endeavours and can identify various strategies that brands utilise in their online content (e.g. Rohm et al., 2013).

Researchers acknowledge the lack of fan-related research and call for further advances in this context (Bowden, 2009; Rohm et al., 2013). Furthermore, previous research focuses on using simple metrics (i.e., likes, shares, comments) as measures of social media effectiveness (e.g. Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014; Thompson et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2011). While this allows sports properties to quantify engagement with certain content, it does little to shed light on the underlying perceptions of those who follow these events. This perspective enhances sports scholars and practitioners' understandings of social media use.

Given the nature of previous research there is an apparent gap in scholarly inquiry relating to fan perceptions of social media use by sporting properties. Indeed, while emerging research emphasises the underlying motivations and gratifications sought when following and using social media, there is little research to date that seeks to establish how fans perceive a brand's social media presence. Effectively, sports brands manage their own social media and there is a need to understand how users perceive the brand's use of various social media platforms (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Hambrick et al., 2010). In order to address this current gap of scholarly inquiry, and extend our understanding of social

media use by sports fans, this chapter uses a qualitative approach to explore fans' opinions and attitudes. More specifically, the primary purpose of this chapter is to examine fans' perceptions of social media use by four professional tennis events (the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open). As a result, this chapter provides unique insights into the context of professional sports events that, to date, are not published in current research.

6.2 Methods

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study as this approach is appropriate for inquiry into areas with limited academic inquiry (Creswell, 1998). The purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of end-user perceptions relating to social media use and the following sections outline the processes for data collection and analysis.

6.2.1 Data Collection

This study utilised an online survey to explore fans' perceptions of social media usage by the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open during 2013. Online surveys have been widely used to examine various forms of media and have been used as the primary approach to gain fan feedback in previous fan-related social media inquiry (e.g. Clavio, 2011; Clavio & Kian, 2010; Clavio, Walsh, & Coyle, 2013; Vooris, Lee, & Clavio, 2014). In order to consider the perceptions of professional tennis events fans internationally, the use of telephone or mail-in surveys was deemed inappropriate and an online survey was best suited for data collection.

As with most research methods, a number of scholars provide guidelines for conducting survey research (Baker & Foy, 2008; Bryman, 2012; Oppenheim, 1992; Rowley, 2014). This current study follows Wimmer and Dominick's (2006) strategies for implementing an effective survey in regards to: construction of questions, designing the

questionnaire and pre-testing, and gathering survey data. These steps as they relate to the current study are described in further detail in the following sections.

Constructing Questions. As noted earlier, much of the literature on fan-feedback engages with a uses and gratifications theoretical framework (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Hambrick et al., 2010; Vooris et al., 2014) and more recently through the PCM (e.g. Bruffy et al., 2014). While these theoretical approaches are different to the context of this current study, and thus framework-specific questions were not relevant, these studies serve as a guide for questions related to demographics and usage, such as age, gender, location, and fan avidity.²⁶ In addition to demographic questions, information on respondents' social media usage (e.g. Clavio & Kian, 2010) was collected. This included asking respondents about their social media usage levels (i.e., time spent on social media per week), use of social media sites, and the number of sports brands they follow on social media.

Instead of using quantitative-focused questions in the survey (e.g. Likert scale), this current study used open-ended questions (Frey, 2004) in order to probe deeper into fans' perceptions of professional tennis brands' social media usage. According to Brace (2013), open-ended questions are particularly useful in marketing research that explores consumer perceptions towards a product, activity or situation. These questions allow for a more in-depth exploration of the topic (Brace, 2013; Witkemper, Blaszkka, & Chung, 2014), and a more detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), by allowing respondents to freely answer without pre-categorising or limiting their potential responses. This ensures respondents' answers are a reflection of their own perceptions rather than those of the researcher (Frey, 2004; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), which is a critical aspect of this current study. It was

²⁶ Fans self-identified as avid based on whether they “watch many games and follow-up on scores and sports news once a day.” (Wann, Friedman, McHale & Jaffe, 2003, p.931)

acknowledged the researcher could not foresee all possible answers and therefore utilisation of open-ended questions allowed the researcher to deal with this limitation (Brace, 2013; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Based on this rationale, a 21-item survey instrument was created. These items measured general social media usage (5 items), event social media usage (12 items), and demographics (4 items; see Appendix E).

Questionnaire Design. As scholars would contend, careful consideration must be given to the wording of questions, the order in which they are presented, and appropriate scales to use. Guidelines to construct questionnaires (e.g. Brace, 2013; Lietz, 2010; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) were reviewed in order to understand effective questionnaire design.

One of the critical steps in survey-led research is the development of survey questions. Indeed, many scholars assert that surveys are a complex communication process whereby shared meaning is created through genuine interaction between researchers and respondents (Foddy, 1993; S. D. Hunt, Sparkman Jr, & Wilcox, 1982). According to Brace (2013), importance must be placed on question encoding due to its prominence in the success of this communication process and it is particularly important “in order to avoid negative impact on sample quality due to non-response” (De Leeuw & Heer, 2002, p. 249). In light of this, time and effort were invested in reviewing questions for length and appropriate wording.

With respect to length, questions were carefully examined in order to ensure preciseness and unambiguity. Survey questions were also reviewed to ensure they were worded appropriately. Consideration was given to the global scope of the survey and the fact that for some participants English may not be their first language. As a result, attempts were made to make each question as clear as possible by removing any words that led to vagueness (Brislin, 1986; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Finally, questions

were amended to avoid ambiguity resulting from ‘double-barrelled’ questions containing two different concepts (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

The order of questions was also considered, as this can threaten the validity of results, influence response rates (Lietz, 2010), and minimise respondent bias (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Consistent with previous studies, as well as recommendations by Lietz (2010) and Wimmer and Dominick (2006), the survey positioned general preliminary questions before proceeding to the more specific. Questions requesting demographic information were included at the end of the survey to avoid possible negative feelings associated with divulging such information (Lietz, 2010). In accordance with Wimmer and Dominick (2006), relevant questions were grouped together and introductions preceded each section as these have been found to increase data quality (Andrews, 1984; Baker & Foy, 2008).

According to Lietz (2010), the second main area for consideration in questionnaire design relates to question responses. As this survey contained both closed and open-ended questions, differing response categories and scales were required. The response categories varied according to the respective section (i.e., general social media usage, perceptions of event social media usage, and demographics) of the questionnaire. The section containing information on general social media use consisted of items that examined the nature and frequency of respondents’ personal social media use. This section employed a mixture of multiple-choice, open-ended and 7-point Likert scale response categories. For the section containing items relating to the fans’ perceptions of social media, open-ended responses were preferred. However, logic-filtering pre-questions (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006) were utilised using “yes”, “no” or “not sure” responses, in order to present fans with the appropriate question. Finally, demographic responses were captured using a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions.

Pre-testing. Once the questions were constructed, the survey was reviewed by a panel of six experts consisting of two faculty members, two marketing and communication graduate students and two sports management professionals with experience working with social media in a sporting context. This review was conducted in order to: (1) examine face validity, (2) reduce redundant questions, and (3) evaluate overall readability and clarity (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Elements of the original survey, including the wording of some questions, were modified based on this review.

The questionnaire was then piloted on 10 people known to the researcher that follow other professional tennis events (i.e., ASB Classic and Heineken Open). These 10 people consisted of both casual and avid tennis fans, male and female, and ranged in age from 19 to 58 years old. In addition, three spoke English as a second language. For the pilot study, the ASB Classic and Heineken Open were used in place of those to be used in the main study (i.e., the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open). Once the pilot testing was complete, respondents were asked to provide their feedback on the survey instrument (i.e., questions, structure and layout). Information on the length of time taken to complete the survey was also gathered. Because of the pilot-test, minor changes were made to the wording of some introductions and placement of some questions. Once emendations were made, the survey was deemed usable for the main study.

Gathering Data. Consistent with previous studies (e.g. Clavio & Kian, 2010; Hambrick et al., 2010), the current study utilised a convenience sampling approach to access followers of each of the respective events social media accounts (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). In addition, elements of snowball sampling were utilised as initial messages posted to Twitter and Facebook were shared by other social media users. Critics of these sampling approaches note they lack random probability and results cannot be

generalised to the entire population (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). However, this current study explored the perceptions of social media followers of four particular professional tennis events and therefore findings are not extrapolated to other sports brands using social media. Therefore, this non-probability sampling approach was deemed acceptable and contextually relevant.

Previous research gathering fan feedback successfully recruited respondents via tweets from athletes and teams linking to the online survey (e.g. Clavio & Kian, 2010; Vooris et al., 2014), encouraging fans to participate. When initially conceived, the current study aimed to utilise an approach whereby each event would include posts on either their Facebook or Twitter accounts, or both. However, when event personnel were contacted and asked to participate, not all four events were willing to include posts encouraging fans to complete the survey on their social media accounts. Therefore, in order to limit the possibility of bias resulting from this, this approach was deemed unsuitable and other recruitment methods were considered.

As acknowledged earlier, prior research accessed survey respondents via various social media (e.g. Clavio & Kian, 2010; Ruibley & Hardin, 2011). Due to the potential for followers of these events to miss posts with links to the survey, because of their real-time nature, it was also deemed appropriate to collect data via web links. Therefore, the survey was made available via links on: the researcher's social media profiles, tennis related message boards and forums, and in tweets and posts made by the researcher on both Twitter and Facebook. Figure 7 is an example of a tweet posted to Twitter and Figure 8 is an example post made on the 'Men's Tennis Forum' message board. Where messages were posted to message boards and forums, permission was first sought from the relevant administrators before proceeding.



Figure 7: Recruitment tweet posted to Twitter (via @ashton99)



Figure 8: Recruitment message posted MensTennisForum.com

The survey was conducted via the online survey and data collection website Survey Monkey,²⁷ a site that allows users to design, publish and manage a web-based survey. Links to the survey were shortened through Survey Monkey to ensure message copy would meet the Twitter-imposed 140-character limit for tweets, and were meaningful for those reading the tweet. When users followed the links, they were directed to Survey Monkey, where they were presented with the survey information and a consent page. From there, respondents were able to participate in the study.

The survey was made available for six weeks around each tennis event, including the two weeks prior to the start of the relevant event, the two weeks of the event, and two weeks after the completion of the event. The dates of data collection for each event are provided in Table 13. It was determined this timeframe would provide the greatest exposure and best response rate. Multiple posts were made each week from the researcher's personal Twitter (@ashton99) and Facebook accounts. These Twitter posts were then retweeted further by another 27 users. Among those who retweeted these posts was a sports management professor, a sports communication graduate student, a social media-marketing consultant and the co-founder of a sports-focused online news site. After the initial recruitment post to respective message boards and forums,²⁸ they were continuously checked for comments and posts to the participant recruitment thread throughout the data collection period.

²⁷ <http://www.surveymonkey.com>

²⁸ In message boards and online forums, a *post* is a user-submitted message enclosed into a block containing the user's details and the date and time it was submitted. Posts are contained in threads, where they appear as blocks one after another. The first post starts the thread and posts that follow in the thread are meant to continue discussion about that post, or respond to other replies.

Table 13:

Online Survey Data Collection Period by Event

Event	Data Collection Period
Australian Open	31 December 2012 – 10 February 2013
Roland Garros	12 May 2013 – 23 June 2013
Wimbledon	10 June 2013 – 21 July 2013
U.S. Open	12 August 2013 – 23 September 2013

6.2.2 Data Analysis

To analyse the demographic information and social media usage, descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were calculated using SPSS. This form of statistical analysis is common and appropriate for this type of data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

The next aspect was to examine the open-ended question responses. To do this a thematic textual analysis was conducted. Responses to the open-ended questions were analysed using a general inductive approach, which provides a systematic procedure for analysis of qualitative data, allowing the researcher to derive concepts or themes through interpretation of the raw data (Thomas, 2006). Avoiding the use of pre-conceived categories allows for data-driven themes to emerge (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and for deeper analysis of the content. The current study adopted Thomas' (2006) steps for inductive coding which include: preparing the data, close reading of the text, creation of categories, reduction of category overlap and redundancy and creation of most important themes.

Data was exported from Survey Monkey and imported into Microsoft Word for analysis. After initial data cleaning, analysis began with a close reading of the raw text, allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of the themes and events within the text (Thomas, 2006). During this phase, short memos were utilised and formed the basis for the initial development of themes. Unlike more structured approaches (i.e., grounded

theory), the general inductive approach used in the current study did not explicitly separate the coding process into open and axial coding. Instead, responses were re-read and related data were grouped together and assigned a theme or themes (Namey et al., 2008; Thomas, 2006). Throughout this process, emerging themes were identified and developed, which continued until no new themes emerged, indicating all major themes had been identified (Thomas, 2006).

Data Loss. Before analysing the data, responses were reviewed and checked for applicability and completeness. As a result, a number of surveys were deemed unsuitable for analysis and were removed from the study. The most frequent reason for exclusion was incomplete surveys. 129 respondents opened the link to the survey, of which 108 completed the questionnaire, representing an effective response rate of 83.7%.

Although guidelines for participation in the study required respondents to be over 18 years of age, three respondents who completed the questionnaire identified themselves in the under-18 age range, and were thus excluded from analysis. The final sample consisted of 105 usable surveys. With respect to the individual events, the Australian Open and U.S. Open yielded 27 responses each, while 26 responses were received for Roland Garros and 25 for Wimbledon.

It is recognised that some scholars may question this sample size, and thus the generalizability of the findings. However, the purpose of this study was to elucidate emergent themes from a perspective that, as indicated earlier, is absent within current literature. It is for these reasons a qualitative exploratory methodology was deemed most appropriate. This approach is identified as a suitable method to utilise in areas where there is limited current knowledge (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003), and therefore this sample size was considered to be acceptable for the purposes of this study.

6.3 Results

This section reveals the results of the analysis to examine fans' perceptions of social media usage by professional tennis events.

6.3.1 Sample Characteristics

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographic variables of the respondents and are shown in Table 14. The findings indicate the majority of respondents were female ($n = 64$, 61.0%), and this was consistent among all four events. Nearly three quarters of respondents were under the age of 35 ($n = 77$, 73.3%), with ages ranging from 25-54 years. Roland Garros had the highest number of respondents 35-years of age or older ($n = 13$, 50.0%), while Wimbledon had the highest number of those aged between 25-44 years ($n = 18$, 72.0%). Respondents were from 19 different countries, with the highest numbers coming from the U.S.A. ($n = 23$, 21.9%), Australia ($n = 21$, 20.0%), the UK ($n = 16$, 15.2%) and France ($n = 10$, 9.5%).

Respondents were asked questions to understand their sports fan avidity. More than two thirds indicated they were avid fans ($n = 75$, 71.4%). The Australian Open had the highest number of respondents identified as avid sports fans ($n = 24$, 88.9%), and results were comparable for the other three events. Those who identified themselves as avid sports fans were asked to list the sports they were avid fans of. The majority of respondents considered themselves avid fans of tennis ($n = 73$, 69.5%), followed by basketball ($n = 25$, 23.8%) and football ($n = 21$, 20.0%). In addition, 19.0 percent of respondents were avid fans of *other* sports (i.e., BMX, golf, volleyball, gymnastics, NASCAR).²⁹ Australian Open respondents were fans of the widest range of sports, while Roland Garros respondents only identified themselves as avid fans within three main categories (i.e., tennis, football, and Formula One).

²⁹ Due to the low occurrences of these sports, they were combined into the '*other*' category.

Respondents were also asked questions related to their general social media usage. Results are presented in Table 15. First, respondents were asked to identify all the social media sites they use (i.e., not just those to follow the event). A majority of respondents used both Twitter ($n = 82$, 78.1%), and Facebook ($n = 69$, 65.7%). Other prominently used social media sites included YouTube ($n = 57.1$, 60%), LinkedIn ($n = 39$, 37.1%) and Instagram ($n = 34$, 32.4%). Pinterest ($n = 19$, 18.1%) and Foursquare ($n = 16$, 15.2%) were used moderately, while Google+ ($n = 10$, 9.5%) and Flickr ($n = 8$, 7.6%) were used the least. Overall, 59.0 percent ($n = 62$) of respondents identified Facebook as the social media site they used *most frequently*. However, there were observed differences among event respondents. For example, only Wimbledon and the U.S. Open respondents used Foursquare, while the U.S. Open respondents labelled Twitter as their *most frequently* used site ($n = 13$, 48.1%).

Frequency of social media use was analysed with respondents self-identifying as frequent social media users. Nearly half of all respondents used social media *several times a day* ($n = 51$), and nearly all users ($n = 101$, 96.2%) use social media at least once a day ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 0.77$). Those who used social media less frequently did so 3-5 times per week.

Finally, over half of respondents claimed to follow nine or more sports brands ($n = 58$), while a quarter follow between one and four ($n = 27$). Respondents from Wimbledon and the U.S. Open were more likely to follow 13+ sports brands on social media compared to the Australian Open and Roland Garros.

Table 14:*Demographic Information of Survey Respondents*

Category/ Characteristic	Event				Total
	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	U.S. Open	
Gender					
<i>Female</i>	17 (63.0)	16 (61.5)	15 (60.0)	16 (59.3)	64 (61.0)
<i>Male</i>	10 (37.0)	10 (38.5)	10 (40.0)	11 (40.7)	41 (39.0)
Age					
<i>18-24</i>	12 (44.4)	9 (34.6)	6 (24.0)	13 (48.1)	40 (38.1)
<i>25-34</i>	11 (40.7)	4 (15.4)	9 (36.0)	13 (48.1)	37 (35.2)
<i>35-44</i>	3 (11.1)	9 (34.6)	9 (36.0)	1(3.7)	22 (21.0)
<i>45-54</i>	1 (3.7)	4 (15.4)	1 (4.0)		6 (5.7)
Country of Residence					
<i>U.S.A.</i>	1 (3.7)	8 (30.8)	5 (20.0)	9 (33.3)	23 (21.9)
<i>Australia</i>	10 (37.0)	2 (7.7)	3 (12.0)	6 (22.2)	21 (20.0)
<i>UK</i>	2 (7.4)	4 (15.4)	6 (24.0)	4 (14.8)	16 (15.2)
<i>France</i>	2 (7.4)	4 (15.4)	2 (8.0)	2 (7.4)	10 (9.5)
<i>NZ</i>	1 (3.7)	1 (3.8)	2 (8.0)	2 (7.4)	6 (5.7)
<i>Switzerland</i>		2 (7.7)	2 (8.0)	1 (3.7)	5 (4.8)
<i>Canada</i>		2 (7.7)		2 (7.4)	4 (3.8)
<i>Germany</i>	1 (3.7)	1 (3.8)	1 (4.0)	1 (3.7)	4 (3.8)
<i>Italy</i>	1 (3.7)	1 (3.8)	1 (4.0)		3 (2.9)
<i>Ireland</i>	1 (3.7)		1 (4.0)		2 (1.9)
<i>Netherlands</i>	1 (3.7)		1 (4.0)		2 (1.9)
<i>Serbia</i>	1 (3.7)	1 (3.8)			2 (1.9)
<i>Austria</i>	1 (3.7)				1 (1.0)
<i>Egypt</i>	1 (3.7)				1 (1.0)
<i>India</i>	1 (3.7)				1 (1.0)
<i>Malaysia</i>	1 (3.7)				1 (1.0)
<i>Poland</i>	1 (3.7)				1 (1.0)
<i>Vietnam</i>	1 (3.7)				1 (1.0)
<i>Israel</i>			1 (4.0)		1 (1.0)
Avid sports fan					
<i>Yes</i>	24 (88.9)	18 (69.2)	15 (60.0)	18 (66.7)	75 (71.4)
<i>No</i>	3 (11.1)	8 (30.8)	10 (40.0)	9 (33.3)	30 (28.6)
Sports a fan of^a					
<i>Tennis</i>	24 (88.9)	18 (69.2)	13 (52.0)	18 (66.7)	73(69.5)
<i>Basketball</i>	5 (18.5)		10 (40.0)	10 (40.0)	25 (23.8)
<i>Football</i>	6 (22.2)	10 (38.5)	1 (4.0)	4 (14.8)	21 (20.0)
<i>NFL</i>	4 (14.8)		2 (8.0)	8 (29.6)	14 (13.3)
<i>Baseball</i>	1 (3.7)		2 (8.0)	6 (22.2)	9 (8.6)
<i>F1</i>	1 (3.7)	3 (11.5)	2 (8.0)	3 (11.1)	9 (8.6)
<i>Rugby</i>	6 (22.2)		1 (4.0)		7 (6.7)
<i>Cricket</i>	2 (7.4)		4 (16.0)		6 (5.7)
<i>AFL</i>	6 (22.2)				6 (5.7)
<i>Other</i>	6 (22.2)	2 (7.7)	2 (8.0)	10 (37.0)	20 (19.0)

Note. *f* = frequency. NFL = National Football League, AFL = Australian Football League, F1 = Formula One racing. For ease of reading, 0 (0.0%) values have been removed from the table.

^a Totals will not sum to 100% as multiple responses were accepted for this category.

Table 15:*Social Media Usage Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

Category/ Characteristic	Events				Total
	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	U.S. Open	
Social media usage (M = 6.19, SD = 0.77)					
Constantly	15 (55.6)	6 (23.1)	7 (28.0)	11 (40.7)	39 (37.1)
Several times a day	7 (25.9)	13 (50.0)	18 (72.0)	13 (48.1)	51 (48.6)
Once a day	4 (14.8)	5 (15.4)		3 (11.1)	11 (10.5)
3-5 times a week	1 (3.7)	3 (11.5)			4 (3.8)
Social media sites used ^a					
Facebook					
Yes	15 (55.6)	22 (84.2)	23 (90.9)	9 (33.3)	69 (65.7)
No	12 (44.4)	4 (15.8)	2 (9.1)	18 (66.6)	36 (34.3)
Twitter					
Yes	9 (31.8)	21 (78.9)	25 (100)	27 (100)	82 (78.1)
No	18 (66.7)	5 (21.1)			23 (21.9)
Other					
YouTube	3 (11.1)	19 (73.7)	20 (81.8)	18 (66.6)	60 (57.1)
LinkedIn		10 (36.8)	20 (81.8)	9 (33.3)	39 (37.1)
Instagram	1 (3.7)	4 (15.8)	11 (45.5)	18 (66.6)	34 (32.4)
Pinterest		1 (5.3)	9 (36.4)	9 (33.3)	19 (18.1)
Foursquare			7 (27.3)	9 (33.3)	16 (15.2)
Google+		3 (10.5)	7 (27.3)		10 (9.5)
Flickr		1 (5.3)	7 (27.3)		8 (7.6)
Other		3 (10.5)	2 (9.1)	9 (33.3)	14 (13.3)
Most utilised social media site					
Facebook	16 (59.3)	20 (76.9)	15 (60.0)	11 (40.7)	62 (59.0)
Twitter	5 (18.5)	4 (15.4)	10 (40.0)	13 (48.1)	32 (30.5)
YouTube	5 (18.5)	1 (3.8)		2 (7.4)	8 (7.6)
Instagram	1 (3.7)	1 (3.8)		1 (3.7)	3 (2.9)
Number of sports brands followed					
1-2	9 (33.3)	8 (30.8)	4 (16.0)	1 (3.7)	13 (12.4)
3-4	5 (18.5)	2 (7.7)		3 (11.1)	14 (13.3)
5-6	1 (3.7)		4 (16.0)	5 (18.5)	14 (13.3)
7-8	7 (25.9)	3 (11.5)		2 (7.4)	6 (5.7)
9-10	2 (7.4)	13 (50.0)	15 (60.0)	13 (48.1)	48 (45.7)
11-12	3 (11.0)				2 (1.9)
13+			2 (8.0)	3 (11.1)	8 (7.6)

Note. *f* = frequency. For ease of reading, 0 (0.0%) values have been removed from the table.

^aThis represents general, everyday usage

The following analysis presents the qualitative findings relating to fans' perceptions of the tennis events' social media usage. In general, most respondents indicated a positive overall satisfaction with each respective event's social media use. Five key concepts emerged from the fan responses: interaction (direct access), information, brand anthropomorphism, preferred platform, and barriers.

6.3.2 Interaction

Fans referred to the benefit of socialising (and companionship) with other fans, and the event itself throughout their responses. Respondents discussed this in relation to two unique dimensions: brand-to-fan, and fan-to-fan. They also mentioned this in relation to developing feelings of emotional connectedness.

Brand-to-fan. Fans implied that the tennis events use social media to encourage brand-to-fan interaction. One of the key benefits often discussed with respect to social media is that a form of direct is communication now possible between brands and their consumers. It was revealing to find fans remarking on this aspect of the events' social media use:

They try to interact with us as fans, and they put out some questions for people to respond to. They tweet their fans a lot, and not just asking questions, but answering them and replying to them. I really like that; it makes it feel like they want to have a conversation with you. (AO)

They make sure they're hot on the issues that fans are talking about and they go to those conversations and engage. It gets you talking with them, as you would with your friends. (Wimb)

...I mean it's called "social" media, but that's really, what it's about on their Facebook and Twitter. Like I see other brands just post marketing messages or whatever, but they [the U.S. Open] really do more than that. They really try to maintain relations with the fans and you can share your passion for tennis with them. (USO)

Interestingly, the above quotes also show fans expressing interaction in the context of engaging in a conversation and this highlights the potential importance of two-way interaction in the social space. It also suggests that fans themselves are now willing

to enter into and commit to exchanges with the events, which is important if the events seek to develop and build relationships with their fans.

While for the most, part fans appeared to be relatively happy with the level of interaction and social connection between themselves and these events, a small portion of respondents from the U.S. Open noted that they would like to see more interaction on the U.S. Open's Facebook and Twitter accounts: *"I think they need to have more engagement, perhaps interact with fans a bit more. Especially during the year"* (USO). As interaction is often viewed as a key tenet in the development of relationships, and a vital part of facilitating socialisation, this event is encouraged to ensure they focus on interactivity throughout the year and not just around the event-period.

Fan-to-fan. Respondents indicated that the tennis events also use social media to foster interaction and the ability to connect with other tennis fans. Several noted that following one of the events on social media enables them to interact with other tennis fans and share their collective passion for the sport:

... Another reason is that I love tennis, and I can connect with other tennis fans and discuss the sport with them. For example, I'm British and I chat to Americans, who I have never met, about the sport. Obviously not all my friends and family are particularly interested in the sport or the French Open, so I can talk with these other tennis fans on the Roland Garros Facebook page. (RG)

I follow them on Twitter and Facebook to get reactions from other fans about key moments in the tennis day – simply because my husband and friends are not tennis fans. They are not interested in tennis and Wimbledon. (Wimb)

Most respondents reported they interact with the events on social media through conversations and discussions with other fans. They noted this included commenting on questions or posts, and photos or videos of players, matches or fans, which were uploaded by the respective events. This form of socialising was characterised as fan-to-fan.

By providing an environment where fans can interact and share their experiences, these events are thought to be signalling their commitment to encouraging fans to take

part in online discussions. It also illustrates their apparent desire to stimulate engagement, which may ultimately lead to the development of co-created brand values. Some fans further expressed that by providing a space for event fans to interact with each other, regardless of their geographic location, the events facilitated the development of a virtual event-branded community:

It's not just an information dumping ground. They do try to facilitate conversations between fans. I like that they try to encourage that open conversation. (AO)

It takes you there. It forms a Wimbledon community, albeit virtual. It definitely beats watching it alone in one corner of the world. They really help encourage this which is great, as social media simulates the experience of watching it in a group. (Wimb)

Hashtags were identified by fans as one of the ways that two of the events were perceived to help facilitate the feeling of community:

I love what they [Australian Open] did a few years ago with #sleepisfortheweak. Now they support this hashtag, and we have a group of fans who start using. It feels like it's helped make a community of us international fans who are watching in different time zones. (AO)

Quite often, I watch it by myself, and I'll be watching it until like two o'clock in the morning and so it's a way to connect and interact with other supporters. They help make it social. Like this year, they started using and promoting '#usopennightshift',³⁰ and fans could use this in tweets and it felt like we were forming a sort of U.S. Open community of those following late. (USO)

In light of this, the events should continue to offer opportunities for fans to interact and engage, giving them a communal site to convey their passion for the sport. If fans willingly go to the events' social media pages to engage and interact with like-minded, passionate tennis fans the events should look to foster this, as this interaction and engagement has previously been found to be a central tenet in the formation of relationships. Fostering this view of community may also help to develop feelings of

³⁰ This is an example of a Twitter hashtag created by the US Open.

membership that have the potential to generate attachment to the brand, and ultimately lead to increased brand loyalty.

Emotional Connection. Respondents from each event spoke of how the events' use of social media evoked feelings of 'connectedness' with the event. For some, it was as simple as making them feel more involved with the event, while for others it went further and served to heighten their anticipation and excitement for the event the following year:

They've certainly made me feel more connected to the event. I mean they interact with us and provide tweets and posts that are not 'impersonal'. (RG)

I think it makes it more accessible to everyone and lets them get involved. I think it removes some of those barriers that might have been there before. (AO)

It helps to keep me more connected. Then I think you anticipate it more and look forward to it more when you see the updates. It gets me thinking; yes, the tournament is starting again soon. I have to be there! (AO)

I noticed they still posted videos on YouTube intermittently in the time since last year's tournament, which I really appreciated since it helped to remind me and get me excited about 2013 plans. (USO)

One of the challenges international events encounter is transcending geographic borders and appealing to a global audience. Social media have changed the communications landscape and offered brand managers new ways to connect directly with these previous hard-to-reach markets, affording new opportunities to build their brand and relationships with fans. As two international fans of Wimbledon noted,

I feel engaged with the event, even though I'm not actually there. I'm on the other side of the world [NZ] and yet I still feel part of it. It's really special. (Wimb)

It's like Wimbledon is happening right in your hands!!! It takes you there. It's like being there without actually being there. Watching and sharing the Wimbledon experience on social [media] is the closest it comes to being there in the stadium. A close second best! (Wimb)

Finally, other fans observed that the events' use of social media attracted and leveraged new fans, fostering an emotional connection with people that perhaps were not

so familiar with the sport of tennis, or for those who have not been to or experienced the live event before:

It gets people more involved with the event and generates new people to watch. (AO)

It brings people in. Like for me, it gives me more knowledge and I feel connected now. Like before, I didn't know much about the sport, players, or the event, and so for me, it draws people in. It brings the fans in and makes them all feel involved. They ask questions you can reply to, it makes it feel fun and relaxed and just connected with it I guess. (USO)

It's bringing in people who aren't just tennis fans, and who aren't just going to the arena for the day. It gets everybody engaged with it and it's no longer just about the sport but everything else as well. It makes it accessible to everyone. (AO)

These comments highlight the way social media have changed the landscape of sports communications, and afford brands that are willing to embrace them, opportunities to build their brands and develop relationships with fans, new and existing. By taking advantage of social media's interactive nature that allows direct access to, and with fans, the events' appear able to foster emotional connections among fans.

6.3.3 Information Source

The dimension of information source emerged as an important aspect of the tennis events' social media use. Fans noted the events used social media to distribute timely, reliable information and this was one of the key factors driving fans' decisions to initially follow, and then maintain, their connection with professional tennis events on social media. While the concept of information is in line with existing knowledge of social media usage (particularly from production-oriented viewpoints), the fan perspectives gleaned from the current study deliver unique insight. Three dimensions emerged from the fans' responses: at-event-experience, exclusivity and filter elimination.

At-event-experience. Several respondents noted that their experience at the event was often enhanced because of the events' social media activities. They indicated that the

events included information on their social media channels that allowed them to better plan their day at the tennis and ultimately meant they had a more enjoyable time:

The great updates help, especially now that I'm here. I know where everything is, how to get here and they're great at answering any questions you might have about what you can or can't bring in for example. (USO)

It's to get information pretty much. They give you the schedule; they put the practice courts up, whose going to be practising where and when, things like that, so you can plan your day out better. You know where to be and when. (AO)

The info is quite important. I was at one of the backcourts the other day waiting for Federer, and then all of a sudden someone said oh he's not going to be on this court, it's up on Twitter. It's been confirmed he's somewhere else, and so then everyone disperses. So yeah, it's a great way keep everyone informed and happy here. (AO)

Indeed, social media can be used to provide fans with event-related information; a further prompt for fans to continue following. Given the events' online audience, a balance of the content is also necessary to not cater solely for at-event followers or virtual followers. That said, it is suggested that events need to ensure that information is pertinent to those following from home while also serving those fans who may attend the event in person. This further suggests that social media can be used by the tennis event brands to build trustworthy relationships with consumers.

Exclusivity. Fans acknowledged that the events' social media platforms function as information sources to deliver content that they felt was 'exclusive', and noted this was a contributing factor in motivating them to follow the events. Respondents revealed that following the events on social media gave them opportunities to access information and content not available to them through other means:

It's about getting all that stuff you wouldn't or couldn't normally get elsewhere, like having players answer questions on Twitter, or like when they had Vika³¹ take pictures for their Instagram account. You get to see things you wouldn't see normally, it took you behind-the-scenes, inside the event. (AO)

³¹ Vika is the nickname of Belarusian professional tennis player Victoria Azarenka. She is a former world No. 1 and is currently world No. 49 as of 2 February 2015.

It's the backstories; it gives us something we don't normally get to experience. That behind-the-scenes stuff, that's been the best! (AO)

Their behind-the-scenes stuff has been really good over the past year. It gives you knowledge and access. More of that behind-the-scenes stuff is important to you as a fan. It's that background content (photos, videos or interviews etc.) that you can't get elsewhere that's really important! (USO)

Many fans spoke about the exclusive content and mentioned it in the context of visual forms of communication. Videos featured heavily in responses where fans recalled memorable experiences. For example, “things like, videos that they had on Facebook, of the players doing Karaoke in Paris” (RG), and “they posted a video of Serena arriving in Melbourne, at the airport and then in the car to her hotel. They asked her questions too. That was cool” (AO). Other examples included photos, “they posted pictures of Rafa's practice session. But not ones from where fans can see, it was somewhere else” (USO), and “the Twitter mirror was great this year, it was a great way to see player photos in their player area, when they were all relaxed” (Wimb). It is apparent that these fans have a strong affinity for exclusive information created by the events and posted to social media.

Moreover, one respondent also commented on certain exclusive content that served to heighten his/her anticipation and build desire prior to the event:

You can see stuff you don't get to see if you're not there, or you don't have access. Like Wimbledon showing you preparations for the event, the grass being laid, the lines being painted. I see that and get excited; it means Wimbledon's starting soon. (Wimb)

While most fans acknowledged this aspect with respect to the events' usage, responses from several fans from both the Australian and Roland Garros samples suggested they were looking for more incentives and exclusive content. They expressed an explicit desire to see more behind-the-scenes content. Specifically they wanted more off-court coverage, particularly in the lead-up to the respective events:

I think they need to get more inventive with their social media efforts. Do something different, perhaps with the photos, or video snippets during the year. I think that would make them stand out! (RG)

It would be neat to see and read about the changes they're making around the grounds, new courts, new facilities and the process of producing the clay, profiles of the Roland Garros staff. I think that'd be great! (RG)

I would love to see more behind-the-scenes content. Definitely more about the prep that goes on before each tournament actually begins. I think that'd be really insightful and different too. Like, each Grand Slam probably has to do different things. (AO)

Once again, access to this behind-the-scenes content would provide fans with unique insight into each event and deliver further incentives to follow. In addition, if the events listen to these fans and continue to provide content showcasing the transformation that takes place prior to the respective event, along with insights into how the venues look for the remainder of the year, they can potentially build further brand associations with fans, ones that extend beyond just the presence of star players. This is of vital importance given that it is not possible for event personnel to guarantee such players will attend, or that they will make it through early rounds and the brand image must therefore extend beyond this simple aspect.

Furthermore, in providing content considered as 'behind-the-scenes', brands demonstrate a willingness to allow fans access into previously "closed-off" or "private" spaces of the event. This can serve to enhance the fan experience and heighten fan affiliation, which may serve to foster feelings of membership. Due to the ability of social media to transcend geographic barriers (as evidenced by the locations of respondents; refer to Table 14), the events can also work to cultivate such relationships with a wider demographic, extending their brand and "membership base" beyond at-event attendees.

Filter elimination. Fans also sought information that was different to what was being distributed by other media outlets, and felt that the events offered information that was largely untarnished by spin:

Social media enables you to get information directly from the source and not just the typical American media that will try to feed you some story or whatever. You can hear from the players when the U.S. Open includes video of their press conference, and from different organisations, and from people that attend the event. I feel you get this honest account. (USO)

It's their frequency of posts, and first-hand information that's important to attract fans. That's what we're looking for, and I think they do that really well. It allows me to hear about the event and gain a new insight. (AO)

With fans viewing the events' social media posts as reliable and trusted sources of information, this can encourage positive brand associations and consumer-brand relationships.

6.3.4 Brand Anthropomorphism

Another key aspect of usage to emerge from fan responses was the events' use of social media to anthropomorphise the brand and showcase the brand's personality. Findings suggest that social media can serve as a viable site to allow event brands to develop a human persona and cultivate an online personality such that fans interact with them as they would with another human being. Social media seems to connect brands with fans in a more natural manner with the potential to nurture stronger, long-term relationships. For example, fans noted:

...it's great to see them use a certain tone of voice, and interact with fans. It makes them seem more human and it showcases their sort of personality. And I think that's good. It brings them a bit closer. It's as if you're building a connection or relationship with another person. You kind of forget they're actually a brand or whatever. (AO)

The way they use social media gives Wimbledon a personality. It might sound strange, but you get a feel for what Wimbledon is I think. It's probably not something I would have thought about before, but definitely, now I think about it, the interactions with them and the way they post, it's just like they're another human you're following. That's so different. You didn't get that before, from like a website or anything. (Wimb)

One respondent illustrates this with a specific example for Wimbledon:

I remember I think they posted a photo of a young kid in white, with a Wimbledon headband, and just captioned it like 'future Wimbledon Champion', and then there are other times where they've just posted a simple welcome tweet on Twitter. But the way they did it, it leaves you thinking it's not just a brand. You forget they

are one. It's not just a place for them to do promos or whatever; they're just being like other users.

Clearly continuing to utilise social media to develop and showcase their brand personalities is essential for the events as these can ultimately lead to strong, favourable and unique brand associations, which will aid them in brand-building endeavours. Further, given consumers' circumspection in engaging with brands that have in the past presented a more business-like approach, brands taking a more human approach and establishing a human persona are perhaps more likely to succeed in creating stronger consumer-brand relationships.

6.3.5 Platform Preference

Respondents signalled that they prefer a particular social media platform when following the tennis events (see Table 16). While fans were cognisant of the events' varied social media presence and indicated that at times they did engage with these events on numerous platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), Twitter was the most utilised across all four events.

Table 16:

Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform to Follow Events

Platform	Event				Total n (%)
	Australian Open n (%)	Roland Garros n (%)	Wimbledon n (%)	U.S. Open n (%)	
Twitter	19 (70.3)	12 (46.2)	23 (92.0)	18 (66.7)	72 (68.6)
YouTube	4 (14.8)	2 (7.7)	2 (8.0)	9 (33.3)	17 (16.2)
Facebook	4 (14.8)	10 (38.5)			14 (13.3)
Apps		2 (7.7)			2 (1.9)

This result was surprising given that respondents identified Facebook as the most popular social media platform used with respect to their general social media usage.

Granted, the literature suggests that the real-time nature of Twitter appeals to many fans, and many respondents' observations in this current study supported this assertion:

I use Twitter; it's the fastest and most frequently updated. It's always ticking over, and they're [the event] constantly providing news and updates. (AO)

Definitely Twitter. It's the most instant and reactive to what's happening. I can get what I want there – photos, news, etc. (RG)

Twitter, it's so easy to check, to get brief updates and it's easily shareable. (Wimb)

Facebook was only mentioned as the preferred platform by a small number of respondents, who indicated they only follow on Facebook to share items more easily with their friends. Other fans justified their use of Twitter by noting that Facebook is where they go to interact with friends, not brands. One fan stated, *"I use Twitter. I use Facebook for friends only, not to follow brands or famous people"* (Wimb). Understanding how and why fans use different social media platforms, and their expectations for each, is important for event brands wishing to penetrate fans' 'personal' spaces (i.e., Facebook perceived to be for 'friends only'). Based on these comments, Twitter appears to be more readily accepted by fans. However, this may be because it is perceived as less of a marketing channel, and more of an outlet for news and information.

6.3.6 Challenges

In addition to comments about the events' use of social media, respondents revealed interesting insights into their perceptions of unique challenges the four tennis events may encounter as they endeavour to utilise social media to build their brands and relationships with fans. These were categorised as value and technological capabilities of the platforms.

Providing value. This theme emerged as a barrier to social media use and its ability to provide value to fans' event experience and the events' ability to maintain a connection with fans outside of the event period (i.e., remaining 50 weeks of the year).

Respondents indicated two vital concerns that are barriers to the perceived-value they derive in following professional tennis events on social media: Competition with other media and year-round incentives.

Competition with other media. Fans acknowledged that social media do not operate in isolation from other media that provide information on the events and, as such, social media content needs to be different and unique. Several respondents noted that similar content was posted on various social media platforms as well as on the official website, leading fans to question their need to follow the events' numerous social media accounts:

I actually find their website very good, and don't look at their social media very much to be honest. The impression I have of it is, that what they put on social media is the same. It's no different really, so it's kind of like, what's the point? (RG)

Their official website is so good and has such a lot of information! Most of what's on Twitter is there too. So sometimes it's just as good to go there as follow them, but it is good when they do share opinions and reactions from players and fans [on social media]. That's what you want to see, not the stuff they already have on the website. (Wimb)

In particular, one fan of Wimbledon's social media accounts commented that they felt Wimbledon's use of Twitter was a conduit to their official website, "*they post on Twitter a lot, with headlines and so on, but I think most of their activity is to direct people to their website*" (Wimb). In this example, the event's social media were not providing the fan with any unique-value added content. In addition to the official websites, fans also specified that official event apps³² were popular ways to follow the events, providing yet another media outlet that event personnel needed to manage. Fans were discerning and knew when similar content was being cross-posted:

³² Mobile social media are available through mobile apps accessible on smart phones and tablet devices. Mobile-application downloads, which numbered 45 billion in 2012, are expected to reach 205 billion in 2015 (Inquistir, 2012). There are three forms of mobile marketing: the un-optimised Web site entered via the mobile browser, the mobile Web app where the retailer's site is redesigned for use on the mobile browser, and the native app, an application downloaded onto the phone from an app store (Magrath & McCormick, 2013).

The smartphone apps are really good too, but I think the stuff on there is quite similar. They have the same photos and links to their news articles. (Wimb)

If the events aim to leverage off mobile apps and new technologies to enhance online websites, they must be mindful to ensure not to replicate content across multiple media. If content becomes repetitive, the events risk driving fans from social media or having followers who do not engage with the content posted.

Lack of year-round incentives. Fan responses also implied that there was a lack of value in following the events outside the event period. As the tennis events occur annually for two weeks, there is only a small portion of the year where the event is given intense attention. In the 50 weeks the event is not held, they must work to generate (and hold) fans' interest. Social media provides an ideal means to achieve this. However, fans question the relevance and the need to follow these events outside of the event period:

They aren't relevant after the event has been hosted until the three weeks before the event begins every year. (AO)

I don't really pay attention to them between events. I mean, I won't unlike them I guess, but I don't really seek it out either. (AO)

I'm not really aware of anything [they do to maintain a connection]. Frankly, I don't think it's necessary! (RG)

Some fans who echoed this sentiment discussed the issue further, noting that they would consider going so far as to stop following the events during the 50 weeks the event is not held, unless the event was able to provide value-added content:

For major events, I normally follow before and during. But not so much after, just because then I'd have endless feeds of stuff. I mean I might keep it for a while and then maybe unfollow them down the line, unless they continue to have really good stuff. (AO)

Other respondents advised that they were more likely to follow the players throughout the year, along with tennis' governing bodies (i.e., ATP and WTA):

I won't stick around with this as much, because it's one of the four majors of the year. Most of the updates appear to be about the other Slams, which I follow individually. Then there are the other smaller tournaments throughout the year.

Then there are the players; I'm probably more likely to follow them. They're always doing something. (Wimb)

This reveals that professional tennis events must overcome this potential barrier and draw on novel and creative ways to provide incentives for fans to continue to 'follow' or 'like' the brand outside the event period. Some fans suggested that this could be achieved by including more regular updates of a certain type of content:

If they have new information or rare pictures to offer, I would definitely pay extra attention and follow them more regularly. (AO)

I think they should get someone to do some commentating on it, like they did a couple of years ago when they got Henri Leconte.³³ He was really interesting and I'd follow that. (RG)

These examples highlight the exclusivity aspect that fans pursue. Therefore, the events would be wise to continue to include content that delivers added value to fans during the between-event period in order to keep them following and engaged.

Technological capabilities of the platforms. Respondents also referred to various social media platforms' technical features that they felt impact on fans' use of these media. For example, certain technological and functional capabilities of Twitter make it appealing and thus may have played a contributing role in fans' identification of this as their preferred platform to follow these events. Several respondents justified their opinion by comparing platforms:

Twitter, because I like how it is quick to update, and I can refresh it easily. YouTube isn't as fast to update. So if you want up-to-date information, Twitter is the best place. (Wimb)

Twitter. It's faster than Facebook at getting up-to-date match news and scores. (USO)

In addition, fans mentioned YouTube's functional limitations that resulted in them seeking similar content elsewhere:

³³ Henri Leconte is a former French tennis professional, who now participates on the Legends' Tour.

I know you can get the videos on YouTube. The match highlights or interviews, but it's too hard to make comments and interact with other people there. And people just seem to post stupid, non-relevant things in the comments section. So, if I want to see videos I tend to go to Facebook, the videos are linked from YouTube anyway so you don't miss anything, but you can interact with other fans. (USO)

This suggests that the events must overcome challenges of providing content that co-creates value, and certain intrinsic technological capabilities that are likely to influence fans when choosing a platform to follow the events. Strategic approaches to social media management have previously only centred on offering content that appealed to fans and would engage them on various platforms.

6.4 Discussion

This chapter explored tennis event fans' perceptions of events' utilisation of social media as a site for building brands and relationships with fans. In particular, the results of this study illuminate potential uses and challenges associated with social media utilisation from the end user's perspective. The findings of the current study attempt to bridge the paucity of research on sports fans' perceptions of social media use by sports event brands. Findings indicate that social media are becoming worthy sites for brands to showcase relevant brand information, and illustrate that the essence of branding appears to have moved beyond mere mass messaging. Instead, it is now the brand's responsibility to develop and foster deeper, long-term consumer-brand relationships in order to create loyalty, trust and ultimately brand ambassadors (Fournier & Avery, 2011a). As a result, professional tennis event brands need to actively engage their fans through social media in order to build their brands and relationships with fans. Responses from fans uncovered five central themes: interaction, information source, brand anthropomorphism, preferred platform and challenges (Figure 9 illustrates these findings). These are discussed in more detail as they relate to the purpose of this study in the following section.

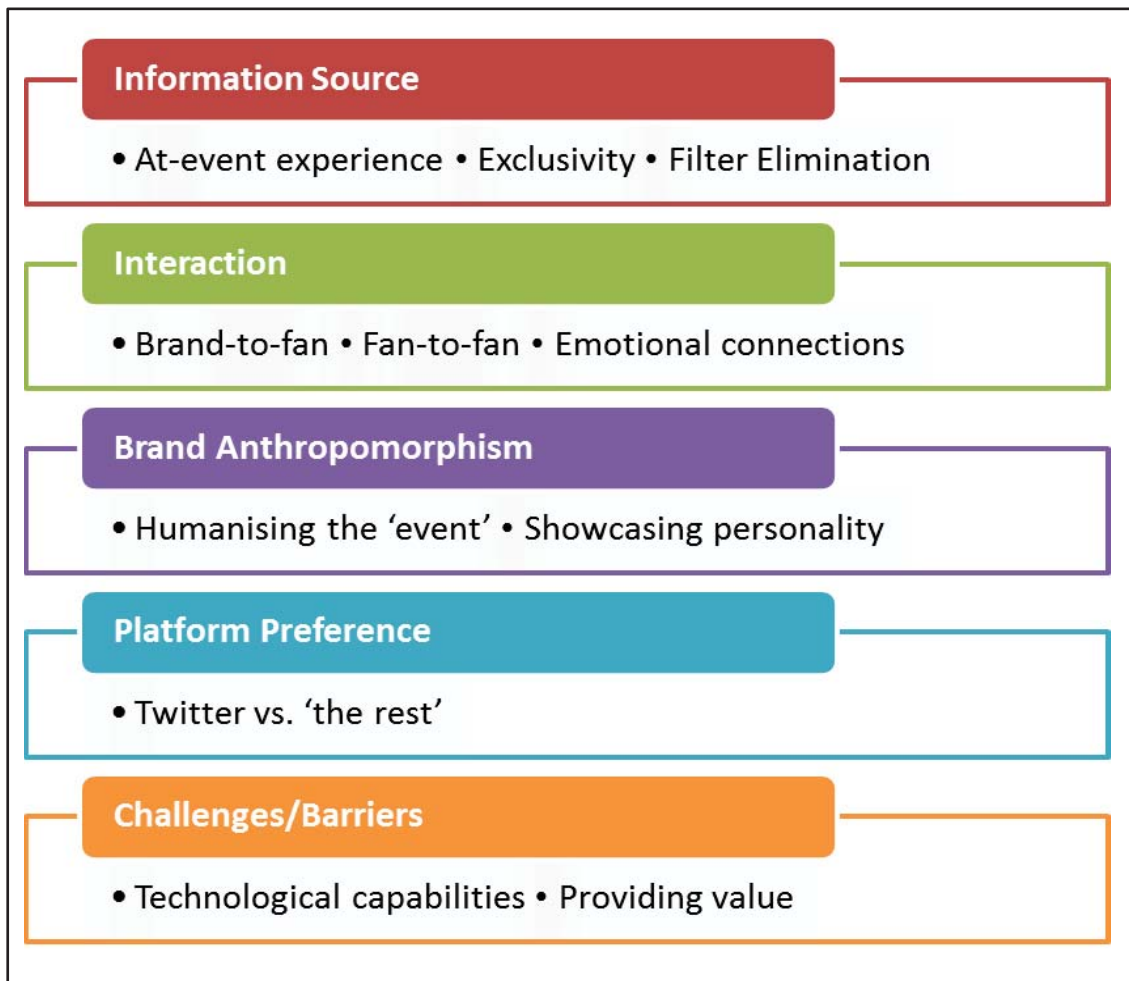


Figure 9: Fan perceptions of events' social media usage

6.4.1 Interaction

One of the central tenets of social media is the ability to enable direct connection and communication between brands and consumers. Increasingly researchers view engagement as an important construct in the development of consumer-brand relationships (Brodie et al., 2013; Rohm et al., 2013). While interaction is not a new concept within social media-related research, this study builds on the extant literature and offers insights from fans to evidence that they are willingly entering into conversations with the events on social media. The use of terminology such as conversation reveals that fans seemingly view this as a long-term approach, requiring input and commitment from both parties. Responses from fans indicate that the events are using various strategies to encourage followers to interact and engage in conversations with them. Such

conversations enable more than the mere maintenance of a relationship, rather they appear to facilitate relationship enhancement. Furthermore, by engaging with fans, the events provide the opportunity for fans to develop an emotional bond that may influence their relationship with the brand (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), and serves to highlight the increasing importance of two-way interaction in the social media space.

This study found that fans identified the events' social media use to both establish and maintain brand-to-fan conversations, and foster fan-to-fan discussions. Scholars espouse the benefits of social interactions and fostering feelings of community, encouraging brands to focus on supporting interaction among a product's consumers (Cova & Cova, 2002; Richelieu & Boulaire, 2005). This current study illustrates that this practice appears to have been adopted and well utilised by the tennis events as they seek to build their brands and relationships with fans. One of the interesting signs from the findings was fans' identification that social media use by the events helped to develop a brand-specific community among event followers. Fans viewed this positively, providing numerous examples of this in practice. Many of the examples included mention of specific hashtags (i.e., #sleepisfortheweak, and #usopennightshift) that they felt served to foster and generate feelings of community. Given the increasing prevalence of hashtags in social media, this would be a worthy area for future research in order to determine the extent to which the strategic use of hashtags may foster feelings of community among sports brand followers.

One interesting finding to emerge was fans' acknowledgement that the use of social media by the events led to the development of emotional connections. This suggests that sports fans perceive the tennis events' social media use to be about promoting closer connections between the events and the fans themselves. Perhaps more importantly is the identification that the events use social media to achieve this between

highly involved fans, and new fans who may not be familiar with the sport of tennis, or the events themselves. This represents an important finding, as the preeminent thought among scholars is that social media followers of a brand are more likely to be already highly identified fans. The reactions from respondents indicate that this may not be true and if so social media provides brands with the potential to appeal to, and form, relationships with new fans. This result coincides with recent findings by Bruffy et al., (2014) who discovered a large segment of their respondents placed within the Attraction stage of the PCM (see Funk & James, 2001), and less than 15% within the Allegiance stage.³⁴

6.4.2 Information Source

The acknowledgement of this theme is consistent with previous literature (e.g. Clavio et al., 2013), and reveals that social media serves as a channel for professional tennis events to disseminate information to fans. However, as one of the first studies to seek fan perspectives on brands' social media usage, the current study moves beyond the simple acknowledgement of these earlier findings. Findings reveal that there are three central aspects fans consider with respect to the information presented by these four events on their social media platforms. Firstly, many fans spoke of the events using social media to distribute information that enhanced their at-event attendance experience. This dimension is unique in relation to previous studies. Given the fans' acknowledgement that this created positive event-related associations, this represents an important aspect of usage by the events and may translate to enhanced brand loyalty and positive brand associations (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, 2007). With this knowledge the events should look to include more content that will aid in the at-event experience.

³⁴ Funk and James' (2001) Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) identifies four stages of relationship 'connectedness' sports fans have with sports teams. These are Awareness, Attraction, Attachment and Allegiance.

Secondly, fans identified that the events used social media to distribute information they deemed exclusive, such that it would not be possible to get elsewhere. Mangold and Faulds (2009) suggest that brands should aim to provide exclusivity to help brand-related discussions. As evidenced by fans' comments on this aspect, the events appear to be utilising this strategy in practice. While Rohm et al. (2013) previously documented exclusivity in their study of consumer-brand interactions it was as a motivator for interaction rather than an example of brand-related social media use, as revealed in this study.

Thirdly, while previous research documents that social media can provide fans with information, the identification of the filter elimination concept is a new finding to emerge within the context of this study. Though it is recognised that social media are changing the communication landscape, allowing information to flow between brands and their fans, this study extends this discussion, providing further insight into the perceived nature of social media content. Fans revealed that the events used social media to provide them with unfiltered content that was free from the 'spin' that is often prevalent in other mainstream media outlets. Deemed important by fans, acknowledgment of filter elimination serves to illustrate the discerning nature of fans' sports media consumption and their ability to identify non-genuine content. If fans begin to question the truthful nature of the content produced on social media, the events potentially jeopardise brand loyalty and relationship development if content deviates from fact (Wright et al., 2010). While fans found the events' current social media content and information tabloid-free, events would be wise to ensure they maintain this in the future.

6.4.3 Brand Anthropomorphism

Another interesting finding to emerge was the fans' acknowledgement that the events used social media to anthropomorphise their brands by showcasing brand

personalities and the portrayal of a human persona. To the researcher's knowledge, this is one of the first studies to document this finding, with respect to fan-oriented research. If sports event brands can imbue their brand with human characteristics, consumers are potentially more likely to form stronger connections with the brand (Kwon & Sung, 2011; Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2011). Given fans' acknowledgement that social media are used in ways that enable them to develop emotional connections with the events, making use of social sites to purposefully utilise brand anthropomorphism and develop brand personality is, therefore, one critical strategy available to sports marketers.

However, this current study did not examine whether the brand personality's fans identified was congruent with the brand personalities the events aimed to portray. Further, examination is required in order to ensure events are posting updates and content that aligns with the desired brand personality in consumers' minds. This would be a worthy area for future research as it has potential to affect the event's brand image and if viewed positively by fans, may lead to increased revenue generation opportunities through ticket- or merchandise-related sales (Blaszka et al., 2013).

6.4.4 Platform Preference

While the small sample sizes for each event in this current study were not large, enough to fully explore the effects of different social media platforms on perceptions and behaviour, this limitation can be addressed in future research. Although fans used a range of social media sites in their everyday life, Facebook emerged as the site they used most frequently. In contrast, Twitter emerged as the most preferred site to follow the tennis events. This finding is surprising in light of previous research indicating that brands view Facebook as the best place to connect with fans (e.g. Abeza et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2014), further highlighting the need for brands to understand their fans, and the need for continued social media research (Pegoraro, 2014).

Fans indicated that the events' Twitter use provided them with up-to-date information and engagement, suggesting that Twitter is an appropriate site for brands to use when they seek to share information or engage directly with fans. This finding is consistent with Weinberg and Pehlivan's (2011) discussion of opportunities and marketing objectives that can be met by various social media platforms, including microblogs (i.e., Twitter). However, extending their work the current study notes that Twitter's use may offer benefits beyond brand awareness and brand recall for established brands. Fans spoke of the events' social media use in the context of helping to develop an emotional connection (as discussed previously), and this was often with reference to instances of interaction on Twitter. This is important as it serves to illustrate that Twitter use may also foster deeper, more meaningful relationships with fans (Brodie et al., 2013), allowing fans to experience the brand through real-time communication (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

6.4.5 Challenges

While emergent literature notes that social media use is not without its challenges (e.g. Abeza et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2014), these prior findings are largely based on the perspectives of organisational personnel. To the researcher's knowledge, the current study is one of the first studies to identify challenges faced by events based explicitly on fan perceptions. This provides interesting insights for practitioners as they seek to utilise social media to build their brands and relationships with fans. It also offers support for the inclusion of fan feedback as part of this overall thesis, as this information is valuable to the event brands when crafting a successful social media strategy. Two distinct challenges were identified based on fan responses: providing value and technological capabilities of the platforms. The discovery of these themes serves to advance scholarly knowledge relating to social media use in the context of brand and relationship building.

Providing Value. Understanding this challenge is important, as consumers seek value in their interactions with professional tennis events online (Williams & Chinn, 2010). In order for the events' social media efforts to be successful in building their brands and relationships, fans revealed that value-added content should be posted to encourage them to follow an event's online social activities. It is the perceived value derived from online interaction that may help to foster relationships and assist in the development of brand loyalty (Williams & Chinn, 2010). One key strategy that could help to develop consumer-brand relationships with fans via social media is recognising the uniqueness of each social media platform and likewise the content displayed on each. The events should be mindful that the content provided on their social media platforms does not replicate that which fans can find elsewhere (i.e., on the official website). If fans do not see value in following and interacting with these events, and their posts, they will not be exposed to the branding and relationship-building efforts undertaken by the events, potentially inhibiting their ability to develop stronger brand knowledge and long-term relationships with fans.

Furthermore, fans remarked on the events' use of social media both during-event and between-event periods. Insights from fans reveal that the events need to provide engaging, value-added content outside of the event period or they risk losing fans during this timeframe. This challenge is perhaps more profound for events that are faced with 50-weeks of the year where fan attention and interest is often drawn elsewhere. Given fans' prior acknowledgement and previous authors noting the importance of exclusivity (e.g. Mangold and Faulds, 2009), events need to leverage content during this timeframe that will satisfy their fans' needs. Such content may include behind-the-scenes photos or videos of the grounds in preparation for the respective events, short video interviews with

key personnel, or marketing promotions only available to social media followers (i.e., perhaps merchandise discounts).

The acknowledgement of this challenge also serves to reinforce the need for brands to develop an understanding of their fans. Without this, they will be further challenged in providing content and opportunities for engagement that satisfy their fans and address their motivations for following the events.

Technological capabilities of the platforms. The identification of this factor has possible implications for fan consumption and the potential to affect the consumer-brand relationship as well as the consumer's experiences with the brand. For the event personnel who aim to leverage social media as a site to build their brands and relationships with fans, this study's findings reveal that their efforts may be fraught with issues relating to the technological and functional capabilities of the various social media platforms. Research notes that unique opportunities may be afforded to marketers through the use of specific social media platforms (Thompson et al., 2014; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). However, the current study reveals that the very nature of certain platforms provides professional tennis events with a challenge in utilising them for branding and relationship-building endeavours. While links with previous research highlight that particular challenges brands encounter include keeping current with technological changes (e.g. Barwise & Meehan, 2010; Thompson et al., 2014), this study extends this discussion by illustrating that certain intrinsic features of various platforms may both encourage and dissuade fans from using them to follow the events, regardless of the nature of the content provided.

For professional tennis events, this also presents a challenge in evaluating social media outcomes. For example, simple engagement metrics (e.g. likes, shares, favourites, retweets) may not be suitable methods to determine the success of various strategies.

Indeed, low interaction numbers may not signal disengagement, but rather indicate a by-product of technologically-related factors that impact fans' decisions to engage on the respective platform itself, therefore, not being truly indicative of their feelings towards the content the events post. Indeed, events should ensure they focus time and resources towards platforms that fans seek to utilise, thus optimising their brand- and relationship-building efforts while also evaluating their social success with metrics beyond a simple 'like'.

6.5 Summary

This chapter explored fans' perceptions of four professional tennis events. The findings show that the influence of social media as a key source of sports-related information (and consumption) continues to grow among sports fans and tennis fans in particular. While the purpose was to examine fan perceptions of social media usage by these events, results also indicate fans are willing to connect (i.e., through following and liking) and interact with professional tennis events. Given prior assertions that fans are sceptical about allowing brands into their 'personal' social space in the past (see Fournier & Avery, 2011b), for brand managers this is illuminating. However, fans may avert or absolve their connection if they perceive content to be irrelevant or too infrequent. For event brands seeking to utilise social media to foster long-term consumer-brand relationships, they must ensure social media efforts align with their fans' needs (i.e., those who currently follow them along with any potential future followers), and provide content that delivers value to them (Williams and Chinn, 2010), or they run the risk of undermining their efforts.

The qualitative approach utilised in this study provided a deeper understanding of sports fans' perceptions of social media usage by the tennis events. The use of open-ended questions allowed fan perceptions to guide responses, providing rich description and the

ability to move beyond survey research that focuses purely on pre-categorised and quantitative results. The final chapter of this thesis triangulates the findings from Chapters Four, Five, and Six to explain how social media serves as a site for four professional tennis events to build their brands and relationships with fans.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

I found myself at another sporting venue recently, and I saw all the Ivy they had around the grounds. I remembered the photos and videos I'd seen on Facebook of preparations for Centre Court and I thought, Oh Wow that's so Wimbledon! (Wimb fan)

This final chapter draws together the findings from the three previous studies (Chapters Four to Six) to address the overarching purpose of this thesis. In doing so, it provides a discussion of how social media serve as sites to build brands and relationships with fans. This chapter then considers the broader implications of this research before identifying directions for future research. The chapter concludes with consideration of some limitations, and the ongoing relevance of this research.

7.1 Social Media as a Site to Build Brands and Relationships with Fans

This study illustrates that Facebook and Twitter allow fans to interact with these events, regardless of their temporal and geographical locations, enabling opportunities to enhance consumer-brand knowledge while offering chances to provide positive brand experiences that can transcend into meaningful relationships. Utilisation of a modified circuit of culture afforded the researcher the opportunity to explore multiple-perspectives, and Figure 10 serves to illustrate the synthesis of the findings from the preceding three studies. As a result of this triangulation, it is apparent that social media aids in two key functions: (1) a facilitator of socialisation and emotional connections, and (2) a cultivator of brand image and brand experience. Two unique challenges were identified: (1) providing value and meeting fan expectations, and (2) organisational adaptability. These findings contribute to the advancement of social media's impact on traditional brand management (Keller, 1993; 1998) and consumer-brand relationship theory (Fajer & Schouten, 1995; Fournier, 1998) in the sports setting.

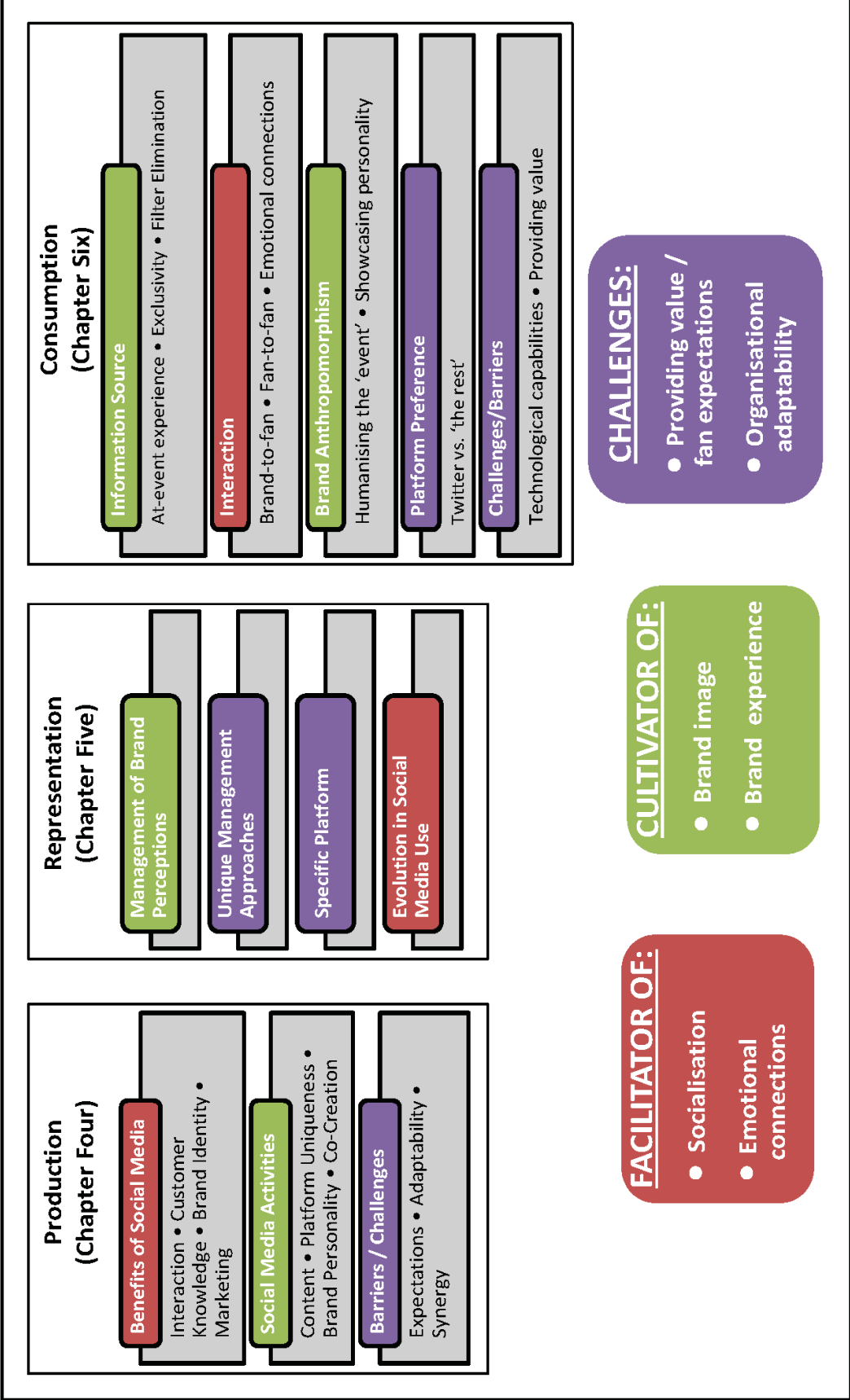


Figure 10: Synthesis of research findings (Chapters Four – Six)

7.1.1 Facilitator of Socialisation and Emotional Connections

Social media assists sport event brands with experiential brand benefits by facilitating socialisation and emotional connections. Connecting directly with fans through social media narrows the gap between brands and consumers and enables the development of consumer-brand relationships. This illustrates an evolution in the use of social media that extends past the simple act of interaction identified by Yan (2011). In this regard, it affords the events a channel to engage in more meaningful conversations, and true engagement.

Responses from both media personnel and surveyed fans illustrated that with social media, interaction between brands and consumers has evolved to a point where socialisation occurs in the form of organic and natural flowing conversation. Findings from the content analysis indicated that the events are interacting with fans directly, encouraging fans to engage in more meaningful conversations. This then allows the events to actively promote socialisation, providing them with opportunities to develop relationships with fans which mirror the friendship analogy set forth by Fajer and Schouten (1995). For these events, social media are tools that help them to build relationships that are more intimate with consumers as trusted friends and contemporaries, thus forging a new foundation for consumer-brand communication. This illustrates the potential applicability of Fournier's (1994; 1998) relationship metaphors, contradicting those who have criticised the suitability of such metaphors and terminology. Consequently, there may be value in developing a measure for Fournier's relationship-metaphors that will allow comparisons between social media followers and non-followers.

As fans appear to be receptive to the events' use of social media to facilitate socialisation, both brand-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer interactions should be

actively encouraged. By taking advantage of the high frequency of communication afforded by social media, brand managers keep current fans and potential consumers close to the brand name while also providing the opportunity to turn a casual follower into a loyal fan. Constant engagement with fans can serve to further reinforce brand associations and develop consumers' brand knowledge (Keller, 1993), offering important chances to build the brand. In order to achieve this with their global fan base, two events acknowledged they contracted personnel in opposing time zones during their event in order to have continuous conversations with fans regardless of the time of day/night. The content analysis provided evidence to support this as posts appeared throughout the night. Fan responses revealed that the use of such event specific hashtags facilitated the development of emotional connections with the events.

In addition, sports events appear able to anthropomorphise (humanise) their brand via social media. Event personnel discussed the tactic of adopting a humanistic approach to their social media strategy whereby they focus on ensuring their discourse and interactions serve to encourage fans to feel they are interacting with another person. In examining the content of the social media posts it was evident that the tennis events manifested a humanistic approach with fans acknowledging that they forgot they were talking and sharing with a brand, and thus reported feeling closer to the event, leading to the development of stronger emotional connections.

7.1.2 Cultivator of Brand Image and Brand Experience

Findings reveal there is a greater emphasis and need to welcome and cultivate fan contributions to building both the brand image and the brand experience. Social media may assist sport event brands in cultivating a coherent and consistent brand image by allowing event personnel the opportunity to present fans with content and discourse that will aid in their development of appropriate brand associations. Through social media,

events can display and explain some of the key event characteristics and brand associations that serve to differentiate event brands (i.e., wearing of white at Wimbledon). However, to achieve this content plays an important role and personnel need to be strategic in managing this aspect. The use of social media to aid brand image was evident in the content analysis with a large proportion of posts containing event-specific brand associations. The fans' ability to then translate this into strong brand associations was encapsulated in responses where they likened other sporting venues to scenes of these events that they had experienced on Facebook or Twitter, revealing that their strategic use of social media enables them to leverage these sites to cultivate their brand image.

While others challenge the value of social media use and comment on its potential to damage the very brand image they seek to perpetuate through user-generated content, the events in this thesis largely embrace this inherent aspect of social media usage. Unlike other events (i.e., Ryder Cup as described in Chapter One), the tennis events illustrate an openness to encourage users to share their own content. This is most clearly epitomised in comments from event personnel who revealed they want to give fans the ability via social media to create and mould the brand in their own eyes. This approach was thought to empower fans with a sense of ownership which may result in the development of greater emotional bonds and ultimately, stronger consumer-brand relationships.

Event media personnel also advocated for social media's ability to help cultivate a positive brand experience for their fans and followers, highlighting that people who were not at the event could feel as though they were part of it by replicating the live brand experience online. Certainly, the content provided on both Facebook and Twitter was found to provide opportunities to create quasi-virtual brand experiences, representing an online substitute for the live event. This was recognised by the fans with numerous

responses expressing sentiments that revealed that their social media experience was the closest it comes to being there.

7.1.3 Providing Value and Meeting Fan Expectations

Importantly, findings from this research illustrate that the tennis events must manage and cater to two distinct follower groups: at-event attendees and online followers, providing unique challenges associated with delivering relevant content across the events' fan base. Sports events that seek to utilise social media to build their brands and foster long-term consumer-brand relationships must align with the needs of all their fans to ensure content and interactions deliver value for their specific fan groups. If they do not, fan feedback revealed fans may avert or absolve their connection if they perceive content to be irrelevant or too infrequent. Thus, personnel for these sports events need to focus on creating content that is unique to their event but that also caters to the numerous needs of their fans, which will require careful attention to the content they present.

Unique to the sporting context is the notion of an off-season; a time where limited attention is directed to the sports property. This aspect is even more prevalent for sports events. Therefore, another challenge inherent to these sports events relates to their perceived relevance, which in the case of tennis Grand Slam events only exist for two-weeks annually (i.e., event/tournament period). The tennis events must make a concerted effort to ensure interaction and engagement is promoted and fostered throughout the remainder of the year. Despite this the content analysis and indeed fan responses indicated these events are not currently achieving this in practice, with a significant decrease in the number of brand-driven interactions and communications occurring outside of the event period. Given social media's apparent ability to aid in developing positive brand experiences that may contribute to the development of brand loyalty and consumer-brand relationships, online experiences also need to support brand experiences during non-event

times. As disengagement may be construed by fans as a sign of relationship breakdown it would be remiss of these events not to do this. This is particularly so in light of the event media personnel's assertion that social media allows them to provide year-round content and incentives for engagement upon which they can showcase content that enhances the development of positive brand associations.

Furthermore, this study highlights that brands existing in the current social media era need to understand fans in order to deliver content and engagement that meet expectations and deliver value. The ability to achieve this has implications for both social media execution and success, and also crafting the event and shaping event experiences in both live and virtual environments. In developing knowledge and understanding of fans and the benefits they seek to achieve, these events can find ways to create added value for consumers. Strategies to obtain this and overcome challenges associated with meeting fan expectations and providing value, include listening to fan conversations, asking 'hard questions' of fans in an effort to get their honest feedback, and engaging in more complex conversations (i.e., doing more than asking simple questions that result in closed-ended responses, or broadcasting one-way marketing messages). However, personnel need to be willing to accept the feedback they will receive whether it is positive or negative. If they manage to accomplish this, based on fans' feedback there is a greater likelihood of garnering fan satisfaction with their online encounter, as these conversations and interactions are perceived by fans to provide added value and facilitate the development of long-term relationships.

7.1.4 Organisational Adaptability

Sports event brands must be prepared to navigate the ever-changing landscape of social media tools efficiently or they risk losing potential strategic advantage. The need to remain up-to-date with technological advances that change the functionality of certain

social media platforms, along with advancements in the way social media are used, are imperative for sport event brands. Indeed, as findings from each of the three studies illustrate, there has been an evolution in the use of social media in both the content provided and the way various platforms are being used. Consequently, leveraging off social media to achieve branding and relationship-building goals demands a conscious effort to stay informed of technological advancements, and a willingness to adapt to any future changes. Ignorance of this approach will lead to inflexible social media strategies and missed opportunities.

In order to be successful, managers of events' social media presence and the organisation as a whole, need to support social media use to overcome challenges associated with the need to be adaptable and flexible. The identification of these challenges represents enhanced knowledge gleaned from this research. Optimising resources (time, money and people) is essential, and if practitioners acknowledge these challenges and proactively develop strategies to address these issues they may achieve strategic advantage over competitors who, whether consciously or not, ignore these factors.

In addition, as confirmed in this study there is no consistent strategy that will work for all brands and as such the successful execution of any strategy developed by events to build their brand and relationships will need to be dependent on their own unique approach. As such, the findings affirm the need for brands to figure out what they wish to achieve with their social media endeavours and choose their strategy and platform accordingly. Organisations also need to recognise the need to develop an appropriate social media marketing strategy, embedded within a broader integrated marketing communications plan that is synergistic with their other online and offline marketing

endeavours in order to protect and promote their brand, and develop relationships with fans.

7.2 Implications of the Study

The findings from this thesis significantly contribute to methodology and practice. In particular: (1) the changing nature of brand management in the social media era, (2) the modification of the circuit of culture, and (3) the duality of live-event versus online-event experience.

7.2.1 Changing Nature of Brand Management in the Social Media Era

This study provides one of the first empirical examinations into how social media assists sports event brands in brand management efforts. Findings revealed that Facebook and Twitter afford events with opportunities to facilitate socialisation and emotional connections, and cultivate brand image and experience, highlighting the potential impact of social media on brand management strategy. The evolution of social media represents an age where brands can now share their story and showcase a human persona that has the potential to challenge the traditional brand-fan dynamic. Brands can develop positive consumer-brand relationships that facilitate the removal of barriers associated with fans' distinctions regarding private spaces. In doing so, they may reap the rewards of more meaningful and deeper relationships that ultimately enhance brand loyalty.

However, the findings also demonstrate a challenge to dominant theoretical discourse based on the premise that organisations can control their brand along with brand related communications. Instead, this study provides empirical support for scholars who have noted that consumers now play an active role in the development of brands through co-creation of content, brand-mentioned communications and fan feedback that leads to the modification of the brand experience. In direct contrast to traditional marketing approaches, the tennis brands revealed they are willing to share the space with fans

themselves, to the extent that they engage with them, allow them to have a voice, and help craft the online brand experience.

That said this does not represent the events ceding complete control of their brand but rather embracing a co-created brand image, challenging traditional notions of brand management strategy and branding theory (Christodoulides, 2009). Prior to the emergence of social media the ability of fans to co-create brand identity was limited, and therefore brand management strategy was largely focused on brand-driven content. Given the importance of brand equity (Keller, 1993), it is not surprising that brands are hesitant to embrace this aspect due to fears of fans developing inconsistent brand images.

In addition, strategies represent a shift from traditional marketing-focused communications and a change in consumer-brand relationship dynamics. In doing so, the tennis events' social media use was shown to allow fans to develop emotional connections and create a sense of belonging within their social media communities that may lead to enhanced fan identification and thus increase brand loyalty (Keller, 1993; Ross, 2007). Findings indicated that this strategic use of social media might enable brands to create an authentic connection with their fans and develop social bonds that may not be easily copied by competitors, thus providing a competitive brand advantage.

This highlights the relevance of social media and their role in changing the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships, such that fans revealed they forgot they were communicating with a brand. Coupled with the identification of social media's use to anthropomorphise these brands, it signals an evolution in brand management in the social media era. Consequently, this thesis offers insight into both the need for new approaches to the practice of brand management, and the dominant theoretical branding rhetoric to reflect the notion of co-created brand image and experiences, along with the removal of certain consumer-brand relationship barriers in the social media era.

Furthermore, the identification of a new set of challenges that has the potential to inhibit the successful utilisation of social media, provide scholars with a deeper understanding of social media's impact on brand management strategy. While findings from this thesis indicate social media are worthy sites to build brands and relationships with fans, it would be remiss to suggest that there is a golden formula and claim to have all the answers. As social media, and the communication form it supports, continues to evolve so too must the strategies and tactics used by sports marketers and brand managers. Failure to do so may result in brands losing competitive advantage and fervour with sports fans.

Finally, while direct comparison of these two platforms was not originally a key focus, exploring both provided unique insights. Consequently, this thesis is one of the first studies to document both strategic and operational differences across two independent platforms within the same context. Facebook functions as a channel to assist in the development of brand image, with the prolific use of visual imagery offering further opportunities for fans to be subtly exposed to unique brand-related associations. In contrast, Twitter aids in the facilitation of real-time connections leading to opportunities to develop emotional connections and socialisation among, and between, the events and fans. While both work to help the events build their brands and relationships with fans, different approaches on each platform are utilised to achieve this. The identification of these aspects represents enhanced knowledge gleaned from this research.

7.2.2 Modification of the Circuit of Culture

This study was one of the first to employ a multi-method approach in sports-related social media research. Perhaps more significantly, though, this research utilised a multi-perspectival method which sought to overcome some of the shortfalls articulated in earlier research. This approach is widely used in cultural studies to provide insight into

the production, representation and consumption of media and cultural artefacts, and allowed for a more robust analysis of how social media assists the tennis events in their branding and relationship-building endeavours. As such, it is asserted that this approach would be a suitable basis for future research in this area in order to develop an increased understanding of both the usage and impacts of social media use.

That said, by analysing these four events through the methodological framework of the circuit of culture (du Gay et al., 1997), this thesis highlights complexities associated with production, representation and consumption of content presented on social media, by event brands seeking to build their brands and relationships with fans. Curtin and Gaither (2007) argue, “in the digital world, the roles of producer and consumer collide” (p.146), and this thesis expands on this sentiment, within the context of this case.

The fans in this study play a dual role of both consumer and producer when they are engaged in social media interaction with these event brands: they are both the target recipients and consumers of these events’ social media messaging, and also the producers of content that contributes to the online brand image of these events. Previous scholars have noted the challenges associated with managing user-generated brand related messaging in the social media era (i.e., Abeza et al., 2014; McCarthy et al., 2014), and other events such as the Ryder Cup have attempted to restrict content from fans being included on social media due to concerns about potential damage to the brand image. However, these events appear to take a different stance.

These events’ fans now serve as ‘prosumers’. While the concept and indeed the term prosumer are utilised in previous literature (see Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Taylor et al., 2002; Williams & Chinn, 2010), the findings from this thesis serve to extend this discussion. Although previous studies allude to, and conceptualise the notion of the prosumer and prosumption process, they focus on consumer empowerment and their roles

as temporary employees. Within the context of this thesis, the idea of prosumer is extended and the traditional notion of consumer and producer is challenged. As evidenced through the three studies in this thesis, the tennis events' fans contributed to the co-creation, and thus co-production, of brand messages and the resulting event product. Given that this was embraced by the four events, it represents an alteration and shift away from traditional branding and marketing whereby the brand seeks to control the brand image, through careful monitoring of brand messaging. As a result, a collapse of distinction and blurring between the practices of production and consumption is evident, indicating the need for the circuit of culture to allow for this.

7.2.3 Duality of Live-Event versus Online-Event Experience

For global sports event brands, international fans represent an important market segment. Social media's ability to transcend geographic and temporal barriers has made it possible for fans to feel like they are part of the tournament, even if they are thousands of kilometres away. Social media allow these events to cultivate a positive brand experience for their virtual fans and followers by replicating the live brand experience online. Thus, social media are shown to be sites that provide an opportunity for practitioners to create a quasi-virtual brand experience, representing an online substitute for the live event.

This particular aspect represents a unique finding and an aspect that is of particular relevance for sports event brands. However, while social media are important in aiding fans to develop brand associations and create brand experiences that may heighten fan identification, it is acknowledged with a word of caution. As the competition for sports fans' discretionary spending increases (i.e., with other sports events and other entertainment options), professional tennis events need to ensure there is still value achieved in live-attendance. Events must be mindful that they do not create a significantly

powerful online experience through social media such that fans begin to question the value of paying large sums of money to experience the event live.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

In completing this study, a number of interesting results emerged, from which a number of potential future research opportunities have arisen.

7.3.1 Co-created Brand Identity

The apparent shift to co-creation facilitated by social media, and the potential blurring of brand image and identity, necessitates further examination of social media's role in the construction of brand identity. Future studies should look to examine and compare the nature of content posted to social media by events and their fans in order to explore how an event is portrayed in social media. Such findings would illuminate whether congruent identity is being produced and promoted on social media by these two groups, and would have important implications for future brand management endeavours.

7.3.2 Modification of the Circuit of Culture

Given the prevalence, and evolution of social media, and the apparent uptake and demand for their use by event personnel and fans, they cannot be ignored (Pegoraro, 2014), and the findings of this thesis led to the acknowledgement of 'prosumers' in the context of du Gay et al's (1997) circuit of culture. Consequently, this thesis suggests that a review of the circuit of culture may be necessary in the context of social media, to account for this new 'prosumer' who is both a consumer and producer in the development of a shared and co-created brand identity. At least in the context of this thesis, it is no longer just media personnel who act as cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1979), but also the fans themselves. Therefore, future studies should consider updating and modifying the circuit of culture framework to incorporate the notion of prosumers and subsequent presumption. Loosely, this may result in the inclusion of a centralised aspect of

prosumption that recognises the moment of combined production and consumption. Additionally, subsequent studies could then look to explore the interplay between prosumption and the moments of regulation and identity.

7.3.3 Live-Event vs. Online-Event Experience

While other events have tried to discourage and even ban fans from posting user-generated content at live events, event media personnel in this thesis recognised that fans proactively share content while attending the tennis events and it was evident during the content analysis that this has become a practice they actively encourage. Further, fans themselves indicated a desire to share user-generated, event-related content while in attendance. Therefore, future studies could explore how user-generated social media content and fan engagement is encouraged as part of an at-event experience, and how this compares with an online-event experience. Such research could then suggest the extent to which event experience (i.e., at-event or online) is related to value, in terms of enhanced brand loyalty or stronger consumer-brand relationships.

7.3.4 Stakeholder-Nexus

When conducting the content analysis, it became apparent that the tennis events actively engaged with a number of stakeholders (i.e., sponsors, media personnel, players and governing bodies), and not just fans. Event personnel indicated that their use of social media were also beneficial in order to deliver sponsorship activations. Thus, it is proposed that while a dyadic-relationship may form the basis of the relational paradigm, and indeed be beneficial in developing consumer-brand relationships, the utilisation of social media may represent something more for events. In this regard, social media may represent the nexus between event stakeholders. Such research could utilise social network analysis to examine the resultant web that links these groups and consider the diffusion of event-related content and its resultant brand-related impacts. Future research should consider

exploring this nexus to determine the associative value sports events may achieve through the creation of a heightened state of synergy between such groups.

7.4 Limitations and Ongoing Relevance of Research

As with all research this thesis has its caveats. This study is limited to the sport of tennis and in particular the four specific tennis events, the selection of which is justified in Chapter Three. The aim of this research is not to generalise from the sample to a larger population, but rather provide insight about the phenomena of interest. Generalisations beyond the four events, and the two social media platforms, may be limited. In addition, French was utilised by one of the events (Roland Garros) in some of their online communications, highlighting a further challenge for brands aiming to target global audiences. However, due to the researcher's limited knowledge of the language, these posts were excluded from the study. Despite these limitations, the findings from this thesis provide a solid foundation from which future research can build on and explore sports events' use of social media as a branding and relationship-building tool in greater depth.

It is acknowledged that some may caution that in conducting research in a technological setting that is constantly evolving, there is the potential risk of it becoming outdated. However, in conducting such research, one is able to provide a foundation upon which future scholarly inquiry can be based (Varadarajan, 2003). Furthermore, the contrasting approaches to social media management by the Australian Open and Ryder Cup as recently as 2014 and 2015 (as presented in Chapter One), illustrate the need for continued and ongoing research in this field.

7.5 Concluding Statement

In summary, it is apparent that people enjoy communicating on social media about events like the Grand Slam tennis tournaments, and sharing content related to a sport they

are passionate about. Add to this the ever-increasing use of social media on mobile devices and it could be argued that social media are revolutionising the way professional sports events are watched, marketed and consumed globally. Findings reveal that the features of social media are particularly well suited to the sports event product and parallel many of the unique features of sport (Smith & Stewart, 2010). By drawing on these real-time conversations, epic late night matches, and by creating a sense of passion, emotion and noise, social media provides professional tennis events with a site that offers vast potential to make great strides in building their brands and relationships with fans.

When attending live tennis events, it is hard to miss the throng of mobile phone-toting fans documenting their experience with a mad volley of selfies, which they share almost at will on various social media platforms. Undoubtedly, the same scene plays out around the sporting world. That a storied and traditionalist institution such as Wimbledon, replete with its tournament stalwarts, banks on social media to reach and engage with fans in an effort to build their brand and relationships with them, speaks volumes about a changing of the guard in the production, representation and consumption of sports, and the need to explore this ever changing area.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Interviews



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

[Date]

Dear [Name],

PhD research exploring global sports brands in the age of social media: An invitation to participate

I am a PhD student with the School of Sport and Exercise at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. This letter is to introduce my topic of investigation and to seek your active participation within a case study project. This brief communication provides a little background to the project, a proposed project methodology, and an account of how you/your organisation could participate in the research. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Associate Professor Andrew Martin and Dr Sarah Gee, both within the School of Sport and Exercise.

Background

Social media are becoming increasingly important to sports organisations, events, athletes and marketing professionals in regards to how people experience sports and sporting events. However, research on social media based relationship marketing and brand management in sport is scant, and leading scholars in these fields have called for research to be undertaken in this area. The few studies currently exploring social media use in sports primarily focus on what athletes are tweeting on Twitter and how Facebook and Twitter offer sports brands (e.g. athletes, teams, and organisations) new media to enhance their relationships with fans. Furthermore, the majority of research has been conducted within a solely American context, centring on American sports personalities, such as Tiger Woods, the National Basketball Association, and the National Football League.

Specifically the aim of this research is to:

- (1) Explore the production and maintenance of sports brands' social media platforms by key media personnel;
 - a. (1a) investigate which strategies are employed through social media to grow awareness around sports brands and foster their online relationships with fans;
 - b. (1b) examine the barriers and challenges of using social media to strategically achieve these outcomes;
- (2) Analyse the content on sports brands' social media platforms Facebook and Twitter;
and,
- (3) Inquire into fans' perceptions in their use of sports brands' social media.

Taken together, the findings of this research will offer greater insight into the production and consumption of social media, and its application within the sporting context.

Proposed methodology

The project employs a multi-method approach including: (1) semi-structured interviews with key personnel responsible for designing social media marketing strategy as well as those who produce and maintain content on the event's social sites; (2) a critical content analysis of Facebook and Twitter data; and (3) an exploratory survey of fans and followers of the event to uncover their perceptions of the events' use of such media.

Initially, tennis has been selected as the sport of choice for this study, based on (1) the lack of current research related to this sport, and therefore the opportunity to conduct innovative research; (2) the global nature of the sport, which has significant implications for sport marketers; (3) previous experience working with a tennis organisation (Tennis NZ) and at an ATP event held in Auckland (Heineken Open). *[Event Name]* has been selected based on the identification of this event as an established brand and iconic event that is now demonstrating social media 'savviness'. On a personal level, I have been a fan of the tournament and have been fortunate enough to attend in recent years.

Research participation

If you (and/or the *[Event Name]*) are willing to participate in this project the following is an outline of the involvement that would be required:

- (1) Interviews with the social/digital media manager(s) pre-tournament;
 - a. In addition, if possible I would like to interview those involved in producing the social media content prior to/during the tournament to develop an understanding of the process undertaken by staff responsible for this tool.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged 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 Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone +646 3569099 ext. 5343, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Thank-you for taking the time to review this information. I would be greatly appreciative if we can find a way to facilitate this, which would allow me to use the *[Event Name]* as one of the events examined in my research

If you require any further information, or would like to discuss anything relating to this in person, please let me know of a suitable time, and I will contact you directly.

Yours sincerely,

Ashleigh-Jane Thompson
School of Sport and Exercise
Massey University

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Purpose: *This research aims to explore how sports ‘brands’ are using social media to build their brands and foster relationships with fans, thereby addressing some of the gaps in current research.*

Objectives: *Specifically the aim of this research is to: (1a) explore the use of social media by sports brands; (1b) investigate how these sports brands use social media to strategically build their brand and online relationships with fans; (2) examine the barriers and challenges of using social media to strategically achieve these outcomes; (3) trace the use of social media strategies; and, (4) assess the use of social media by fans and consumers. Taken together, the findings of this research will offer greater insight into the production and consumption of social media, and its application within the sporting context.*

Interviewee Background:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your background (professional experience)?
- What is your current role (if worked in other industries how does working on [Event Name] differ from others)?

Background to the ‘event brand’

- What is brand knowledge?
- Is it important to build brand knowledge? (Why/not?)
- What does the [Event Name] brand stand for?
- What makes [Event Name] and its brand unique from other events?

Social Media

- When was social media for [Event Name] first initiated (how was it set-up/by whom/what department is responsible for it)?
- Which social media platforms are currently used?
- Do you view the individual platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) as serving a different purpose, and if so how/why?
- What are the objectives in using social media platforms?
- What value does Social Media provide to the event?
- How has social media for [Event Name] been promoted?
- In terms of [Event Name] social media, what has been the biggest success?
- How do you cater for the [Event Name] global fan base?
- What has been the largest challenge for the [Event Name] in engaging social media?
- How does [Event Name] use social media to engage with their fans during the tournament?
- Between events, how do [Event Name] keep fans engaged with social media?
- What can we expect from the [Event Name] on social media in the next 6-12 months?
- How do you, as an organisation receive or measure feedback from the fans about social media?

Brand Building

- What strategic elements or strategies are required to build a brand?

- What are the main opportunities available with social media in terms of brand building?
- What are the main issues or challenges that inhibit this?
- Are there differences between platforms (Twitter/Facebook etc.; physical evidence strategy – examples)
- Where does the *[Event Name]* gain more ROI/value? (i.e., Twitter, Facebook or other)

Relationship building

- What strategic elements or strategies are required to build long-term relationships with fans? (importance of?)
 - What are the main opportunities available with social media in terms of enhancing consumer-brand relationships?
 - What are the main issues or challenges that inhibit this?
 - Are there differences between platforms (Twitter/Facebook etc.; physical evidence strategy – examples)
- Where does the *[Event Name]* gain more ROI/value? (i.e., Twitter, Facebook or other)

Appendix C: Between-Event Constructed Week Collection Dates

Day of the week	Event			
	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	U.S. Open
Sunday	24/02/2013	07/07/2013	04/08/2013	06/10/2013
Monday	11/03/2013	22/07/2013	19/08/2013	21/10/2013
Tuesday	26/03/2013	06/08/2013	03/09/2013	05/11/2013
Wednesday	24/04/2013	04/09/2013	02/10/2013	04/12/2013
Thursday	23/05/2013	03/10/2013	31/10/2013	02/01/2014
Friday	07/06/2013	18/10/2013	15/11/2013	17/01/2014
Saturday	06/07/2013	16/11/2013	14/12/2013	15/02/2014
Sunday	18/08/2013	29/12/2013	26/01/2014	30/03/2014
Monday	16/09/2013	27/01/2014	24/02/2014	28/04/2014
Tuesday	01/10/2013	11/02/2014	11/03/2014	13/05/2014
Wednesday	16/10/2013	26/02/2014	26/03/2014	28/05/2014
Thursday	14/11/2013	27/03/2014	24/04/2014	26/06/2014
Friday	13/12/2013	25/04/2014	23/05/2014	25/07/2014
Saturday	04/01/2014	17/05/2014	14/06/2014	16/08/2014

Appendix D: Expanded Description of Coding Categories and Examples

Category/ Variable	Explanation	Example post/tweet
Communication		
<i>Interaction</i>	<p>On Facebook refers to posts made replying to comments left by fans.</p> <p>On Twitter, this includes re-tweets, replies and quoted tweets. Look for the following signifiers: @twitter_username, RT, MT, “[content]”.</p>	<p><i>RT @chaitdesh: If ths[sic] is kind of tennis @AustralianOpen is going to serve up every day, the other slams have some catching up to do #ausopen</i></p>
<i>Question</i>	Any textual post that is posed as a direct question.	<i>Do you remember "Darth" Roger Federer's night outfit?</i>
<i>Picture</i>	<p>On Facebook a picture is an image uploaded that can only be accessed using Facebook. The image must allow for comments and likes, and be displayed on the Wall.</p> <p>On Twitter a picture is an image that can only be accessed using Twitter. It must be embedded and viewable in the Tweet.</p>	
<i>Video</i>	<p>On Facebook a video must be viewable on the Facebook wall.</p> <p>On Twitter a video must be viewable within the Tweet.</p>	<p><i>Video highlights from Murray v Becker here at Wimbledon</i> <i>[[FACEBOOK VIDEO]]</i></p>
<i>Link</i>	Any post that directs a user to an external webpage.	<p><i>Doubles draws are out! Men: http://t.co/DxxmZq1E8U / Women: http://t.co/6wDozvrgGP #usopen</i></p> <p><i>The men's semifinal starts at 7.30pm AEDST.</i></p>
<i>Status Update</i>	Any post that contains a textual message only (but that is not a direct question, as per <i>Question</i> variable).	

Category/ Variable	Explanation	Example post/tweet
Brand Associations		
<i>Brand mark</i>	Identifying mark such as the logo, symbols or colours.	
<i>Commitment</i>	“support, loyalty, commitment” – showing support, thanking fans,	@Christian1692C We think fans like you are amazing! #thankyou
<i>Stadium</i>	Any post that contains the place where consumers experience consumption and the area surrounding the stadium or arena in which the event is held, location.	Garden Square is the place to Beas [sic] the sun sets over Melbourne Park. #ausopen http://t.co/Ra1v6LAX
<i>History</i>	Historical thoughts regarding the event, history of success, and the history of the events’ personnel; possession of a history of winning or a certain behaviour/manner	It's #MiddleSunday, you've got time on your hands, time to study-up on #Wimbledon's history http://t.co/ImWSov1qGY
<i>Organisational attributes</i>	Attributes that characterise the organisation as a whole; loyalty to fans, management actions (i.e., gives to community, charity, goodwill).	Bid for the #ultimatetennisexperience and help former Aussie player Andrew Florent & his family http://t.co/atRDiv7t #ausopen
<i>Event characteristics</i>	Unique traits or characteristics of the event.	A reminder that people in #TheQueue will have to wait many hours. We strongly advise those intending to queue not to travel to #Wimbledon
<i>Social interaction</i>	Associating with friends and other fans; online or F2F. discussion with fans or asking, pictures of fans or group	RT @CandiceB21: @AustralianOpen Dear Lord, I can already feel the sleep deprivation! #sleepisfortheweakcrew checking in! :) #ausopen2013
<i>Rivalry</i>	Pertains to the competition among events that are known to be historical competitors.	Even on #Ashe. #Doi pulls #Kvitova into a 3rd set. Can the 2011 #Wimbledon champ escape the upset? #usopen http://t.co/WhHQ563oEe

Category/ Variable	Explanation	Example post/tweet
Marketing Factors		
<i>General information</i>	General information relating to the event (or upcoming events held as part of the event itself) can include schedule of plays, event draws.	<i>Thurs. Lenglen at 11am: Dimitrov-Pouille, Azarenka-Beck, Nadal-Klizan, Schiavone-Flipkens.</i>
<i>Information on where the 'catch' game</i>	Any post that clearly tells a fan how they can watch (or listen) to the game – can include online and television coverage.	<i>Free live streaming available on ALL devices with U.S. Open Everywhere, including web, mobile, iPad, iPhone & Android devices! http://www.usopen.org/en_US/interactive/mobile/index.html</i>
<i>In-game coverage</i>	Any post that is clearly an in-game update (i.e., score update, court coverage).	<i>.@serenawilliams bagels #Schiavone, takes the first set in 23 minutes on #Ashe.</i>
<i>Merchandise</i>	Any post that clearly tells a fan about items that can be purchased or any type of memorabilia, and information on where to purchase from..	<i>Official Wimbledon poster was designed by 8-year-old Priya Eardley. Buy your copy and other merchandise online http://t.co/tZFOY2jTPI http://t.co/i36S9s25Q5</i>
<i>Player coverage</i>	Any post that clearly provides coverage of a player(s).	<i>#Sveta's comeback from injury is going from strength to strength. #dangerousfloater #ausopen http://t.co/xEgI5qAa</i>
<i>Sponsors</i>	Any post where the sponsor is clearly identifiable (can include sponsor name/logo in a photo, @sponsor_name).	<i>As the official vehicle of the 2013 U.S. Open, Mercedes-Benz USA provides a fleet of SUV's and sedans to transport players – but those aren't the only people receiving star treatment.</i>
<i>Ticket information</i>	Any post with the word 'ticket', type of purchasing to attend the event.	<i>Evening visitors Ticket Offers for Monday 3 June ON SALE NOW - Catch the end of an exciting match or simply wander around the Grounds at dusk (at 3pm or 5pm of your choice). Book your ticket before 4pm Monday 3 June on http://rolandgarros.fftickets.com/uk/tickets/events?referer=I36RG9729VDS483</i>

Category/ Variable	Explanation	Example post/tweet
Marketing Factors <i>Contests</i>	Any post that encourages fans to participate in order to receive a reward (i.e., rewards such as merchandise or free tickets).	<i>Share your #tenniswhites #shotoftheday on our Google+ page for your chance to win! http://t.co/eHK0QqMKq3 #Wimbledon</i>
<i>Customer Service</i>	Any post that provides customer service support (i.e., responding to customer questions, resolving issues)	<i>Hi Damir, you can find information on U.S. Open travel packages, including hotels, here on our website http://bit.ly/17gin7P</i>

Variable	Explanation	Example post/tweet
<i>Relationship-building</i> <i>Become a fan on other sm</i>	Any post that encourages fans to visit other social media properties owned by the event.	<i>We've been pinning away on our new @Pinterest account. Come, join us ;-D http://t.co/kMLYKJ8z #ausopen</i>
<i>Behind-The-Scenes</i>	Any post that provides fans with content not accessible via other means.	<i>Enjoying some down time on the players' lawn with @jamie_murray #Wimbledon #TwitterMirror http://t.co/WCjXm0tbz0</i>
<i>Fan poll or survey</i>	Any post that asks fans to provide their opinion on a specific question.	<i>Favorite part of Day 1 at the #Ausopen? VOTE by hashtag #EarlyUpsets #MatchesGalore #OpeningNight #Autographs http://t.co/dJopUn5VqG</i>
<i>Follow, stay tuned</i>	Any post with the word 'follow' or 'stay tuned', or that asks fans to keep checking.	<i>If you could ask @rogerfederer ONE question, what would it be? Tag your Qs #RGfanmail and #Federer. Stay tuned for Roger's answer #RGI3</i>
<i>Join us at an event</i>	Any post with the phrase 'join us'.	<i>In Melbourne on Friday? Join us at the #AusOpen official draw, 10am, Crown Riverside. 1st time public has been able to come watch draw live.</i>
<i>Share your content</i>	Any post that asks fans to contribute their own content and share it with the event (either on the platform itself or via on another of the events' social media platforms).	<i>Share your #tenniswhites #shotoftheday on our Google+ page for your chance to win! http://t.co/eHK0QqMKq3 #Wimbledon</i>

Appendix E: Online Survey Questions

General Social Media Usage

- Do you use social media regularly (defined as 3+ per week)?
- What platforms do you use (include all that apply)?
- What one platform do you use the most?
- How many sports properties do you follow on social media?
- Do you regularly share content via social media when you attend/view live sporting events?

Event-Related Social Media Usage

- What social media platforms do you know that [Event X] is on?
- In terms of the [Event X], which social media platform(s) do you use most frequently, and why?
- How did you become aware of the [Event X] presence on various social media platforms?
- How do you think social media adds to the value of your overall experience of the [Event X]?
- Can you tell me some of the most memorable things you have seen in social media from the [Event X] in the last year and which has been the most memorable to you?
 - What are some of the memorable things the [Event X] have done on social media in the last year?
- In your opinion, how does the [Event X] appeal to fans using social media during the tournament?
- In your opinion, how does the [Event X] use social media to develop a connection with fans during the tournament?
- In your opinion, between annual events, how does the [Event X] organization keep you ‘tuned in’ through social media?
- In your opinion do you think [Event X] maintain a connection with fans between these annual tournaments and if so how?
- What would you like to see from the [Event X] in social media during the next 6-12 months?
- Based on following [Event X] on social media, what words would you use to describe this event?

- How has social media helped you form these opinions?

Demographic Information:

- What is your age? (Under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+)
- What is your gender? (M/F)
- What is your country of residence?
- Would you consider yourself an avid sports fan (defined as whether you watch many games and follow-up on scores and sports news once a day)?
 - If so, which sports are you an avid fan of?