

Twitter as a Communication Tool for Nonprofits: A Study of Sport-for-Development Organizations

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Per G. Svensson^{1,3}, Tara Q. Mahoney²,
and Marion E. Hambrick¹

Abstract

Previous research suggests sport-for-development organizations strategically aim to engage people through social media in hopes of generating increased offline support (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). Using the framework set forth by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), the purpose of this study was to explore how nonprofit organizations use Twitter to disseminate information, build engagement, and facilitate action. A content analysis of 3,233 tweets revealed a larger proportion of interactive communication, yet one-way communication was the most common function. Overall, the use of social media to facilitate action among stakeholders was scarce, but the way organizations used Twitter to provide information, interact with followers, and create a call for action varied considerably among them. Interestingly, these differences were not associated with annual revenue, organizational age, targeted social issues, or number of countries of operation. This study has important theoretical and practical implications, and provides a first look at how sport-for-development organizations use Twitter.

Keywords

sport-for-development, sport for development and peace, organizational communication, Twitter, social media

In light of the growing popularity of social media during the beginning of the 21st century, scholars have argued whether social media platforms can provide organizations dynamic opportunities to communicate directly with stakeholders using minimal

¹University of Louisville, KY, USA

²State University of New York at Cortland, USA

³Louisiana State University

Corresponding Author:

Per G. Svensson, Louisiana State University, School of Kinesiology, 112 Long Field House, Baton Rouge, LA 70803, USA.

Email: psvensson@lsu.edu

resources (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Zorn, Grant, & Henderson, 2013). These platforms are presumably appealing to nonprofit organizations considering their limited resources. The ability to cultivate and maintain relationships with stakeholders is an integral aspect of nonprofit and stakeholder management, which has also been linked to perceived organizational effectiveness (Balser & McClusky, 2005). Nonprofits depend on a broad range of stakeholders involved in the supply and distribution of resources and services (Rupp, Kern, & Helmig, 2014), with diverse interests and needs (Wellens & Jegers, 2014). Previous research suggests nonprofit leaders consider two-way communication as essential for establishing a sense of accountability and transparency in these stakeholder relationships (Ospina, Diaz, & O'Sullivan, 2002). Interestingly, however, nonprofit scholarship overwhelmingly suggests social media platforms are used primarily for organizational one-way communication (Auger, 2013; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters, Canfield, Foster, & Hardy, 2011; Waters & Jamal, 2011). This has led to concerns regarding the proposed benefits of social media for nonprofit organizations.

Recent scholarship suggests nonprofit agencies favor organizational websites over social media (i.e., Facebook) in relationship-building efforts, although Facebook was more commonly used for promoting organizational events (Waters & Feneley, 2013). Eimhjellen, Wollebæk, and Strømsnes (2014) found similar findings in a recent study of voluntary organizations in Norway. Organizational websites provide opportunities for *functional interactivity*, whereby visitors can interact with the organization (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003). This, however, is only one of two important types of interactivity. In contrast to websites, Twitter provides opportunities for *contingency interactivity*—followers interacting with the organization as both a sender and receiver (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013). Despite the lack of two-way communication by many nonprofits using social media, it is important to note the level of engagement of followers depends on the type of communication strategy used by the organization (Cho, Schweickart, & Haase, 2014; Saffer et al., 2013). Thus, findings on the use of social media by one group of nonprofits may not generalize to other organizations.

Scholars have found significant differences among types of nonprofit organizations (i.e., arts/humanities, education, health, religion, etc.) in the use of Facebook for fundraising efforts as well as the use of video files for involving Facebook followers (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Similarly, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) found only 7.8% of tweets by *Nonprofit Times*' Top 100 organizations are used to promote events. In contrast, a recent study on environmental nonprofits found more than a quarter of their tweets promoted organizational events (Kim, Chun, Kwak, & Nam, 2014). Furthermore, advocacy organizations appear to use Twitter noticeably more for information sharing than the average nonprofit agency (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

In addition, many previous studies examining nonprofit organizational usage of social media have been limited to the largest nonprofits in the United States, as scholars have used *Nonprofit Times*' Top 100 as their sampling frame (Guo & Saxton, 2014;

Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013; Waters & Feneley, 2013). Despite their findings suggesting large nonprofits appear to primarily use organizational websites rather than social media for online relationship building, Waters and Feneley (2013) noted smaller nonprofits may use the Internet differently as they may not have the resources to invest in comprehensive and professional organizational websites. This is supported by recent findings suggesting financial capacity is associated with adoption and use of organizational websites (Eimhjellen et al., 2014). In addition, Nah and Saxton (2013) also recognized their findings on the adoption and use of social media by large nonprofits may not generalize to medium or small nonprofit organizations. Therefore, Nah and Saxton called for future studies to incorporate a broader range of nonprofit organizations.

The context of the current study examines sport-for-development (SFD) organizations, meaning organizations using sport as a tool in efforts to promote social change in communities worldwide (Burnett, 2009; Kay & Spaaij, 2012). SFD organizations vary in size with annual revenues ranging from less than US\$100,000 to more than US\$50,000,000. Although many SFD organizations are characterized to have limited resources (Giulianotti, 2011; Kidd, 2008; Lindsey, 2013), organizational capacity still varies considerably among SFD nonprofits (Coalter, 2010). Recent scholarship suggests SFD organizations have adopted social media platforms to overcome some of these limitations (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). For example, staff members of action sport-based Skateistan and Surf Aid International reported strategically developing narratives to communicate through social media to potential donors, although the messages varied considerably between the two organizations (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to explore how SFD organizations use Twitter to disseminate information, build engagement, and facilitate action.

Organizational Adoption of Social Media

One type of social media that has seen increasing popularity in recent years is micro-blogging sites (e.g., Twitter and Tumblr) where users post brief messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Nonprofits are reportedly changing their communication strategies in attempts to establish organizational legitimacy among stakeholders in light of today's increased competition for resources (Zorn, Flanagan, & Shoham, 2011). Previous research, however, indicates a large inconsistency between practitioners' perceived and actual use of social media for facilitating two-way communication with stakeholders as many continue to engage primarily in one-way communication (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2011), despite the interactive nature of social media and opportunities for evoking engagement among followers (Briones et al., 2011). For example, nonprofits seldom use hashtags, retweets, and other tools available to circumvent the 140-character limitation of Twitter and engage stakeholders in dialogue (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Nonprofit organizations seeking to take advantage of the relationship-building potential of social media should actively develop interactivity as it appears to influence followers' perceptions regarding the organization and the organization-public relationship (Saffer et al., 2013).

In their study of virtual stewardship, Waters and Feneley (2013) suggested using social media platforms results in loss of control of message system and construction for nonprofits compared with their own organizational websites where they have full control. Findings from in-depth interviews with representatives of nonprofit organizations in the United Kingdom in a recent study indicated many expressed some fear of losing control due to the open and transparent nature of social media (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013). Organizational responses to these concerns varied considerably. Some nonprofits decided to tightly monitor their presence and micro-manage conversations by deleting any negative comments about the organization; others embraced the open and transparent nature of social media. Interestingly, organizations that had accepted the open nature of social media also reported greater tangible benefits from social media usage including increased volunteer recruitment and fundraisers (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013). Similarly, those nonprofits that dedicated staff and resources toward managing social media were also the organizations most often reporting tangible benefits from its organizational use of these platforms.

While many scholars have praised the upside of social media, there are some who have cautioned organizations to critically reflect on the role of these platforms for organizational purposes (e.g., Kent, 2008). Others have noted social media management can still be costly for organizations even if the accounts themselves are free (consultation, management, ongoing monitoring, etc.). In a recent qualitative inquiry, a representative of a digital marketing agency suggested one of the barriers to why nonprofits are not allocating more financial resources toward the use of social media is the false perception that social media marketing is free (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013). Similarly, Hausmann (2012) recognized the potential role of social media for German nonprofit art organizations, yet argued the mere adoption of these platforms does not result in tangible outcomes; rather, successful use of social media requires valuable content, ongoing updates, and organizational resources for managing the organizational accounts.

In sum, nonprofits have an opportunity to advance their social media usage. Recent reports indicate nonprofits both large and small are increasingly adopting social media for organizational communication with potential funders and other stakeholders. The possible opportunities of social media regardless of organizational characteristics are especially important considering the organizational challenges of many nonprofits. Researchers can aid this progression by systematically analyzing how a broad range of nonprofits communicate through social media.

Theoretical Framework

The current study used Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) research as a theoretical framework to examine how SFD organizations use Twitter as a communication tool. Their framework was one of the first published categorizations of tweets by nonprofit organizations, as the researchers analyzed Twitter usage of the top 100 largest nonprofit organizations in the United States. Their analysis yielded three overarching functions for organizational tweets: (a) Information, (b) Community, and (c) Action. Information

included tweets that shared information about the organization as well as its events and activities with followers—primarily a form of one-way communication. Community aimed to build communities on Twitter by fostering relationships and promoting interactivity, facilitating two-way communication. Action encouraged followers to take action and “do something” on behalf of the organization, including volunteering, donating, or attending an event. The results revealed that most nonprofit organizations primarily used Twitter to share information with constituents. A smaller number effectively engaged followers by interacting and building relationships with stakeholders, strengthening ties in the community, and encouraging action. The researchers proposed that the three functions (Information, Community, and Action) be used as a ladder to increase engagement among stakeholders (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

The researchers of the current study looked to further examine these functions among smaller nonprofits—focusing more specifically on SFD organizations. While previous research explored the use of Twitter among nonprofits with annual budgets of more than US\$10 million (e.g., Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013), most nonprofits have annual budgets of less than US\$500,000 (Blackwood, Roeger, & Pettijohn, 2012). Using the three functions of nonprofit organizational communication on Twitter as the framework for analysis, the study addressed a gap in the literature as to how smaller nonprofits incorporate the social media platform to counter organizational limitations, and provide information, interact with stakeholders, and create a call to action. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how SFD organizations use Twitter to disseminate information, build engagement, and facilitate action. The following research questions addressed this purpose:

Research Question 1: How are SFD organizations using Twitter?

Research Question 1a: How are SFD organizations using Twitter to disseminate information?

Research Question 1b: How are SFD organizations using Twitter to promote stakeholder engagement?

Research Question 1c: How are SFD organizations using Twitter to facilitate action?

Research Question 2: How do SFD organizations vary in their reliance on these primary Twitter functions?

Method

To achieve the purpose of this study, content analysis was used to examine organizational Twitter usage by SFD organizations. A growing number of nonsport related studies have used content analysis to examine how nonprofit organizations use Twitter to communicate (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012). Similarly, this study used content analysis to learn more about how SFD organizations use Twitter to disseminate information, build engagement with stakeholders, and facilitate action. In addition, SFD encompasses nonprofits targeting a multitude of social

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Variables.

Organizational variable	<i>M</i>	Median	<i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Age	10.5	8.0	6.4	3	29
Targeted social issues	2.3	2.0	1.5	1	7
Countries of operation	3.1	2.0	5.1	1	23
Number of tweets	751.9	350.0	926.6	10	3,190
Annual revenue	5,195,603.0	791,363.0	11,004,073.5	49345	54,710,880

issues including peace-building conflict resolution, Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) awareness and prevention, post-disaster humanitarian responses, social inclusion of persons with disabilities, and gender equality (Beutler, 2006). The current study examined how SFD organizations vary in their primary reliance on the functions of Twitter based on several organizational aspects, including targeted social issue(s) and geographical location.

Sample

The researchers collected data from organizations listed as finalists for the Beyond Sport Community Awards (2009-2012) and two sport-based social innovation competitions sponsored by Nike and Ashoka: (a) the 2007 Sport for a Better World Competition and (b) the 2009 Women in Sport Competition. These awards are some of the most prestigious in the field, and each received nomination entries from more than 300 organizations. The Beyond Sport sampling frame consisted of the five subcategories of community awards: (a) Best New Project, (b) United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Sport for Education Award, (c) Sport for Health Award, (d) Best Project for Social Inclusion, and (e) Sport for Conflict Resolution Award. There was considerable overlap in the parent organizations of the programs nominated for the awards. As such, the researchers identified 74 unique SFD organizations as the sample for this study.

To gather data on these organizations, the researchers visited each organizational website and identified 44 organizations with Twitter accounts. An additional two organizations with Twitter accounts were identified through a Google search using the name of each organization. This combined search yielded 46 organizational Twitter accounts. Eighteen of the organizations reported a country located in the Global North as their primary geographical location, and 24 organizations reported a country situated in the Global South as their host location. The most frequently mentioned targeted social issues among the sample organizations were as follows: Education ($n = 27$), Social Inclusion ($n = 21$), Children's Rights ($n = 19$), Health ($n = 17$), Peace ($n = 9$), General ($n = 8$), and Environmental ($n = 6$). These categories were standardized by Beyond Sport and did not include any specific definitions. Nonetheless, organizations could choose as many as they believed were appropriate to describe their work. Specific information about the organizations sampled can be found in Table 1.

Data Collection

The researchers collected every tweet posted by each organization since its adoption of Twitter as a communication platform. In total, the 46 SFD organizations posted 36,039 tweets. Given the large number of tweets, the researchers coded a subset of tweets, randomly selecting approximately 10% of the tweets from each organization for a sample of 3,597 tweets. All non-English tweets in the sample ($n = 364$) were excluded from analysis, yielding a total sample of 3,233 tweets. Three organizations did not have any English tweets and were removed from the data analysis for a final sample of 43 SFD organizations. The sample size was considered adequate since Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) used a final sample of 2,437 tweets. After compiling the data, the three researchers conducted a pilot study examining 364 tweets (i.e., approximately 10% of each organization's tweets in the sample) to create a codebook and increase inter-rater reliability in the full data sample. The researchers noted that some tweets could be classified into more than one category; however, they chose to categorize each tweet based on its primary function. The researchers used Cohen's kappa statistic in SPSS 20.0 to analyze inter-rater reliability. The independent coding in the pilot study resulted in a kappa value of .813. Kappa values greater than .80 are deemed "acceptable in most situations" (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002, p. 600). For the remaining differences, the researchers discussed their individual coding until 100% agreement was reached. The researchers modified the codebook based on results of the pilot study, and the revised codebook was used for the subsequent analysis.

The researchers also collected data on organizational characteristics from the member profile pages on the Beyond Sport World platform—an online community for organizations to share their work with others interested in SFD (Beyond Sport, n.d.). Information collected from the organizational profiles included host nation, targeted social issue(s), and additional nations of operation. A web search was also conducted to identify the age of each organization by reviewing organizational websites. In addition, the latest annual financial reports (Form-990 for U.S. organizations) were also collected from their websites and GuideStar to identify annual revenues.

Data Analysis

The researchers independently coded the complete set of 3,233 tweets using the typologies developed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) who examined the use of Twitter by *Nonprofit Times*' Top 100 largest nonprofit organizations. In their study, tweets were categorized into three functions: (a) Information—one-way communication messages, (b) Community—messages written to engage followers in a dialogue, and (c) Action—messages asking followers to support the organization by doing something. We modified the subcategories within Lovejoy and Saxton's three functions of communication (i.e., Information, Community, and Action) based on a review of tweets by SFD organizations analyzed during the pilot study. In their study, the Information function was divided into three subcategories, and both Community and Action were divided into four subcategories, respectively. However, we combined some categories and used a

more parsimonious two subcategories for Community and three subcategories for Action. These categories were combined as a considerable overlap emerged among some of the original subcategories during the initial coding of data.

Thus, for our study, the Information function included three subcategories: (a) general program information, (b) nonprogram related information, and (c) retweets. The Community function was subdivided into tweets focused on (a) interaction and (b) promotion of other social media platforms. The Action function consisted of messages focused on (a) promoting an event, (b) donation appeal, and (c) call for engagement. The researchers again used Cohen's kappa statistic in SPSS 20.0 to analyze inter-rater reliability for each of the coding mechanisms. The independent coding of the complete set of tweets resulted in a kappa value of .85, and was deemed acceptable because it was greater than the .80 threshold (Lombard et al., 2002). For the remaining differences, the researchers discussed their individual coding until 100% agreement was reached.

The researchers also completed a statistical analysis of the data using bivariate correlations to examine the influence of organizational age, number of tweets, number of targeted social issues, and countries of operation on the use of Twitter among the sample organizations. Bivariate correlations are often used to examine statistical association between two continuous variables (Stevens, 2009) and were used in this study to identify significant relationships among the above variables and organizational Twitter usage. In addition, the researchers completed an ANOVA to examine the influence of type of targeted social issue (i.e., Education, Children's Rights, Social Inclusion, Health, Peace, Environmental, General) and geographical location of host nation (i.e., Global North, Global South) on Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) three primary functions of Twitter (i.e., Informational, Community, and Action). ANOVA is commonly used to examine relationships between continuous independent variables and categorical dependent variables (Stevens, 2009); therefore, a series of ANOVAs were deemed appropriate to test for statistical significance among this study's variables.

Results

Research Question 1: How Are SFD Organizations Using Twitter?

The results from the independent coding indicated Information was the most prevalent function of communication via Twitter with 1,683 tweets (52.1%; Table 3). General program information ($n = 601$) and retweets ($n = 757$) represented the majority of tweets in this category compared with nonprogram related information ($n = 325$). Community was the second most prevalent function of communication with 1,410 tweets (43.6%). The majority of these tweets were focused on interaction ($n = 1,136$) rather than on promotion of other social media platforms ($n = 274$). Action was the least prevalent function of communication with 140 tweets (4.3%). The majority of these messages were focused on a call for engagement ($n = 60$) rather than on donation appeal ($n = 37$) or promoting an event ($n = 43$). Considering the variation in number

of tweets among organizations in our sample, the organizational percentage means and organizational percentage standard deviations rather than the aggregate means are reported in the following sections.

Research Question 1a: How Are SFD Organizations Using Twitter to Disseminate Information?

Information. The Information function of micro-blogging contained one-way communication messages. The primary purpose of tweets in this category was to inform rather than promote dialogue with stakeholders or explicitly ask followers to take action. Previous studies examining the three functions of organizational micro-blogging through content analysis on Twitter found between 58.6% and 68.7% of nonprofits' tweets to be informational (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Similarly, this study found 47.8% ($SD = 22.1$) of SFD nonprofits' tweets to be categorized in the Information function. We divided the information category into three subcategories of (a) general program information, (b) nonprogram related information, and (c) retweets to develop a better understanding of the type of information disseminated from the organizations to their stakeholders. We discuss each subcategory in greater detail below.

General program information ($M = 21.7, SD = 16.3$). This subcategory contained any one-way communication of information related to the program or organization, including events, news updates, and grants and funding approval. These tweets focused on what the organization or one of its programs had achieved such as participation and funding milestones as well as program or chapter expansions. Several organizations used a combination of written messages and pictures to report continuous updates from the field of operation. This visual imagery provided opportunities for organizations to circumvent the 140-character limitation of Twitter.

The Peres Center for Peace: Today the local Ambassadors team in East London are beginning a week long football school for around 40+ children . . . <http://fb.me/VTXFdfdv>

Nonprogram related information ($M = 8.9, SD = 11.9$). Any messages containing one-way communication of world news and factual information or other information not specific to the program or organization were included in this subcategory. These messages included everything from local and international news articles and reports on international development to favorite musical playlists and pictures. Many of these tweets were also related to current sport events and professional athletes such as the FIFA World Cup, African Cup of Nations, and Summer Olympic Games. A number of tweets highlighted international days of observance or commemoration:

Skateistan: Happy International Day of the Girl to all girls around the world! Love from Skateistan <http://bit.ly/Rk9X9T#dayofthegirl>

Re-tweets ($M = 17.2, SD = 16.4$). This subcategory contained any messages re-tweeted by the organization without engaging in dialogue. These tweets were often focused on a person or organization's support or involvement with a particular SFD NGO or program.

Street Games: RT @UserID: @StreetGames @UserID are proud to be with you today with Street Cheer #ukcamay have fun everyone!! #NWSGfest

Research Question 1b: How Are SFD Organizations Using Twitter to Promote Stakeholder Engagement?

Community. The second function of micro-blogging, Community, contained messages written to engage followers in a dialogue. The primary purpose of tweets in this category was to facilitate two-way communication with stakeholders and to cultivate and maintain relationships. Previous studies examining the three functions of organizational micro-blogging through content analysis on Twitter found between 19.7% and 25.8% of nonprofits' tweets to be community-based and focused on engaging in a dialogue with stakeholders (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). This study found a much higher rate of 44.2% ($SD = 23.9$) of SFD nonprofits' tweets to be categorized in the community function. We divided the community category into two subcategories of tweets focused on (a) interaction and (b) promotion of other social media platforms, discussed below.

Interaction ($M = 28.3, SD = 19.5$). Any tweets containing a Twitter handle (@UserID) including retweets with an organizational response were categorized as Interaction. This subcategory included giving thanks and recognition to stakeholders for volunteering, donating time or money, organizing an event, or mentioning the organization in a tweet. The researchers coded any tweets containing a Twitter handle other than the organization's own @UserID as interactive regardless of message content, as any tweets using a Twitter handle appear directly on the @Connect page of the user(s) mentioned. Several tweets were also focused on seeking a public reply to questions or asking specific stakeholders for their opinion:

Back on My Feet: @UserID maybe a partnership in our futures!?

Promotion of other social media platforms ($M = 15.9, SD = 22.9$). This subcategory included any messages directing followers to other social media platforms such as Facebook or websites such as blogs and videos. They also included links for people to vote for an organization or one of its programs in an online competition. A number of organizations encouraged people to engage with the nonprofit on another social media platform. Others promoted organizational blog entries by staff members or participants, or encouraged people to learn more by watching informational video clips:

Peace Players: PPI's not just on twitter. Join the conversation and check out exclusive content via our other social media and onli . . . <http://bit.ly/prR6wG>

Research Question 1c: How Are SFD Organizations Using Twitter to Facilitate Action?

Action. The third function of micro-blogging, Action, contained messages explicitly encouraging followers to do something. The primary purpose of tweets in this category was to ask followers to take action by attending an event, supporting the organization through direct or indirect donations, volunteering, or applying for a job position. Previous studies examining the three functions of organizational micro-blogging through content analysis on Twitter found between 11.6% and 15.6% of nonprofits' tweets explicitly called for followers to do something to directly or indirectly support the organization (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). This study found a lesser amount of 8.0% ($SD = 16.1$) SFD nonprofits' tweets categorized in the action function. We divided the action category into three subcategories of tweets focused on (a) promoting an event, (b) donation appeal, and (c) call for engagement, which we discuss below.

Promoting an event ($M = 3.6, SD = 15.2$). Messages explicitly promoting followers to attend or support program-related events were coded in this subcategory. These tweets contained a specific date, time, or price for participation. The types of events promoted included radio, television, and online broadcasts; informational booths at conferences and conventions; volunteer appreciation events; fundraising events; photo exhibits; and documentary movie screenings. Some organizations also promoted opportunities for people to participate in events such as the New York City Marathon on behalf of the organization or to attend grassroots programming events.

Figure Skating in Harlem: Chill at the High Line w/@FSinHarlem & @UserID 8/17 – FSH will be co-hosting the ice time in the life-size snow globe!

Donation appeal ($M = 2.0, SD = 3.9$). These tweets encouraged people to make direct donations or asked followers to indirectly support the organization by purchasing products either from the organization's own e-commerce site or from a third-party donating a percentage or set dollar amount per purchase. Some organizations also encouraged followers to support by bidding for items in online auctions, while others asked for equipment donations rather than monetary support:

Goals Haiti: Got some extra #soccer balls lying around? We'll bring them to #Haiti for you! Email us Contact@goalshaiti.org for US shipping address

Call for engagement ($M = 2.4, SD = 3.9$). This subcategory contained tweets primarily encouraging followers to take action by doing something to support the organization

directly or indirectly, including posting job announcements and requests for volunteers, lobbying, and advocacy, as well as providing hyperlinks for followers to learn more about how they could get involved with the organization or specific cause related to the program.

Bidna Capoeira: Job Offer—Capoeira Instructor in Syria. Syria is one of the safest countries in the world. The people are very... <http://fb.me/A1yAhyKa>

In sum, one-way informational communication was the function most used among the tweets analyzed. Interestingly, a noticeably large number of messages focused on building a community by engaging in two-way communication with stakeholders. The use of Twitter to facilitate action and mobilize stakeholders, however, was scarce among the organizations examined. These results provide a first look at how SFD organizations use Twitter.

Research Question 2: How Do Sport-for-Development Organizations Vary in Their Reliance on These Primary Twitter Functions?

Organizational comparisons. The researchers also completed a statistical analysis of the data to examine the influence of organizational characteristics on the use of Twitter among the sample organizations. The results of bivariate correlations indicated no significant influence of organizational age, number of targeted social issues, number of tweets, and number of countries of operations on the functions of Twitter (i.e., Informational, Community, and Action). Correlation values ranged from .001 to .268; however, no statistical significance was found, where $p < .05$ (Table 2). In addition, a series of multivariate ANOVAs were conducted to examine the influence of types of targeted social issues on organizational functions of Twitter. Findings revealed nonsignificant associations between all types of targeted social issues: Education, Wilks's Lambda = .985, $F(3, 40) = .294$, $p = .747$; Children's Rights, Wilks's Lambda = .909, $F(3, 40) = 2.012$, $p = .147$; Social Inclusion, Wilks's Lambda = .996, $F(4, 40) = .073$, $p = .930$; Health, Wilks's Lambda = .926, $F(3, 40) = 1.596$, $p = .215$; Peace, Wilks's Lambda = .911, $F(3, 40) = 1.949$, $p = .156$; Environmental, Wilks's Lambda = .999, $F(3, 40) = .010$, $p = .990$; General, Wilks's Lambda = .983, $F(3, 40) = .342$, $p = .713$; and functions of Twitter, where $p < .05$. However, a closer examination of the organizational percentage means and organizational percentage standard deviations of tweet categories highlight the considerable variation in Twitter use among SFD organizations (Table 3). A large variation in number of tweets per organization existed.

Discussion

Research on nonprofits and their use of Twitter continues to grow, but the focus remains on the largest nonprofit organizations (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012). Thus, the current study focused on a broader

Table 2. Correlations Between Functions of Twitter and Organizational Factors.

Function of twitter	Annual revenues	Number of social issues	Number of countries	Number of tweets	Organizational age	Host nation	Education	Children's rights	Social inclusion	Health	Environment	General
Informational	-0.042	-0.001	0.144	0.184	-0.002	0.023	-0.08	0.298	-0.035	-0.024	-0.014	0.085
Community	-0.172	-0.098	-0.059	-0.043	-0.116	-0.092	0.001	-0.006	-0.006	-0.158	-0.001	-0.128
Action	0.267	0.147	-0.111	-0.19	0.172	0.105	0.109	0.056	0.056	0.268	0.021	0.073

Table 3. Examples of Tweet Functions.

Category	Example	Frequency	Overall percentage	Organizational percentage M	SD
General program information	<i>The Peres Center for Peace:</i> Today the local Ambassador team in East London are beginning a week long football school for around 40+ children. . .	601	18.50	21.70	16.3
Nonprogram related information	<i>Skateistan:</i> Happy International Day of the Girl to all girls around the world! Love from Skateistan http://bit.ly/Rk9X9T#dayofthegirl	325	10.10	8.90	11.9
Re-tweets	<i>Street Games:</i> RT @UserID: @StreetGames @UserID are proud to be with you today with Street Cheer #ukcamay have fun everyone!! #NWSGfest	757	24.40	17.20%	16.4
Information sub total		1,683	52.90	47.80	22.1
Interaction	<i>Back on My Feet:</i> @UserID maybe a partnership in our futures!?	1,136	34.30	28.30	19.5
Promotion of other social media	<i>Peace Players:</i> PPI's not just on twitter. Join the conversation and check out exclusive content via our other social media and onli. . . http://bit.ly/prR6wG	274	8.50	15.90	22.9
Community sub total		1,410	42.80	44.20	23.9
Promoting event	<i>Figure Skating in Harlem:</i> Chill at the High Line w/@FSinHarlem & @UserID 8/17 – FSH will be co-hosting the ice time in the life-size snow globe!	43	1.30	3.60	15.2
Donation appeal	<i>Goals Haiti:</i> Got some extra #soccer balls lying around? We'll bring them to #Haiti for you! Email us Contact@goalshaiti.org for U.S. shipping address	37	1.10	2.00	4.4
Call for engagement	<i>Kick4Life:</i> Our team for Kilimanjaro in 2013 is coming together nicely— want to join us? Contact chris@kick4life.org	60	1.90	2.40	3.9
Action sub total		140	4.30	8.00	16.1
Total tweets		3,233	100.00	100.00	

range of nonprofits within SFD, which may use social media to mitigate organizational constraints such as poor organizational structures as well as limited partnerships and financial capacity (Kidd, 2008; Lindsey, 2013). Social media sites including micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter offer organizations opportunities to

communicate directly with stakeholders at relatively low costs (Berthon et al., 2012; Hanna et al., 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Zorn et al., 2013). While these tools might be appealing for organizations with limited financial capacity, questions may arise as to whether strategic communication with stakeholders is of importance in SFD. In their qualitative inquiry of SFD organizations using action sports as a vehicle to promote change, however, Thorpe and Rinehart (2013) found organizational leaders strategically used social media to promote action among potential donors.

One of this study's major findings was the prevalence of tweets focused on the organizational usage of Twitter to build a community by actively engaging stakeholders in dialogue. The frequency of such messages provides support for the notion that SFD organizations are trying to evoke some level of engagement among individual stakeholders (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). The number of these interactive tweets was noticeably larger than findings in previous Twitter studies of nonprofit organizations (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). These results provide further evidence of the possibility for nonprofits to engage in two-way communication to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders despite the growing competition for resources among these organizations (Briones et al., 2011; Zorn et al., 2011).

Another important finding of this study was the frequency of tweets focused on one-way communication, which emerged as the most prevalent function of communication via Twitter. This finding is consistent with previous nonsport studies examining the role and functions of communication on Twitter by nonprofits (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). The organizations frequently disseminated information to their stakeholders, and researchers have documented similar actions in previous studies examining how nonprofits communicate via other social media platforms (e.g., Waters & Lo, 2012). There are several potential explanations for the large prevalence of one-way communication. For example, this might be indicative of the increased branding and adopting of corporate communication strategies among nonprofits (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Vestergaard, 2008) or the limited resources allocated by nonprofits toward social media usage, as successful social media management requires adequate staff and expertise (Hausmann, 2012; Quinton & Fennemore, 2013).

In addition, disseminating information may be especially important in SFD to communicate an organizational story as the first step in the relationship-building process. This activity may be particularly important considering the global nature of the field and the relatively small size of these types of organizations. For example, Skateistan, recognized as one of the Top 100 NGOs in 2013 by the *Global Journal*, operates on an annual budget of less than US\$1 million (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). Its founder, Oliver Percovich, has discussed how he has always valued the ability to share information via social media to be "just as important as the [program] activities . . . because not everybody can come and see with their own two eyes what we were doing" (as cited in Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013, p. 17). Nonprofit organizations may need to first inform the public about what their organization does and why there is a need for it, prior to attempting to build a community of potential donors and volunteers and eventually mobilizing their stakeholders to take action. Although one-way communication was the most prevalent function of Twitter among the sample in the present study,

findings of previous research suggest SFD organizations aim “to evoke highly affective—yet momentary—responses among their followers, and gain financial support from governmental agencies and action-sport related companies” (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013, p. 19). Thus, albeit potentially short-term, these organizations appear to be focused on engaging followers in supporting them by taking action (e.g., monetary donation or consuming merchandise).

Therefore, a third noticeable finding of this study was the lack of tweets explicitly asking followers to take action and do something to support the organization or a related cause. The lack of action-focused messages raises questions about the underutilization of the unique features of micro-blogging. Asking followers to attend an event or sign a petition for a cause could be a valuable opportunity for these organizations to evoke engagement among a large number of followers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) refer to the term “push-push-pull” (p. 107) communication whereby users (in this case, organizations) tweet a message (push), which followers may re-tweet to share with their own social networks of followers (push), which then may motivate some people to look for additional information outside of Twitter (pull). The potential of followers spreading organizational messages is important because nonprofits are increasingly in need of organizational efficiency considering the heightened competition for resources and limited organizational capacity (Zorn et al., 2011).

Interestingly, no significant associations were found among functions of Twitter and organizational characteristics (i.e., age, host nation, number of tweets, number of targeted social issues, additional nations of operation, and type of target social issue). Overall, the findings suggest Twitter may provide opportunities to level the playing field in SFD by allowing small organizations with limited capacity to engage followers (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Nah & Saxton, 2013), as neither organizational size nor number of countries of operations was significantly associated with the functions of Twitter. At the same time, our results indicate considerable variation in the types of messages communicated among SFD organizations. These findings have several theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, an important contribution of this study is understanding the use of social media by SFD organizations to evoke engagement among their followers (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). As such, the study supports broader theories and the opportunity for two-way communication between nonprofits and their stakeholders via Twitter (Guo & Saxton, 2014, Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). The findings also indicate that multiple types of information are being disseminated by nonprofits using Twitter for one-way communication (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). The various types and functions of messages identified in this study could be utilized in theorizing communication strategies in SFD organizations. Overall, Twitter is used primarily for sharing information or engaging in interactive dialogue with followers rather than as a mobilization tool for facilitating events, donations, or calls for engagement. However, the types of informational, community, and action-focused messages vary considerably

between organizations. The lack of significant association between functions of Twitter and organizational characteristics suggests the variation in Twitter usage could be influenced by different organizational conceptualizations on the function(s) of Twitter for communication with stakeholders (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013; Saffer et al., 2013). The findings also facilitate theory building on the adoption and use of social media among nonprofits, which has predominantly been focused on large organizations (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013). Neither the number of countries of operations, organizational age, nor annual revenue was significantly associated with the use of Twitter in SFD, suggesting social media may not be associated with traditional constraints of nonprofits (Nah & Saxton, 2013).

Practical Implications

These findings also have important practical implications for SFD organizations. By designing communication strategies based on the Informational–Community–Action framework (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), and emphasizing how followers may support a program or broader cause, SFD organizations—regardless of age, targeted social issue(s), or number of countries of operations—might evoke greater individual engagement, indirectly generating increased offline funding (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013). Although the nature of social media might level the playing field among SFD organizations, the use of Twitter for organizational communication is not worthwhile unless there are strategic benefits for an organization (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). While social media platforms provide opportunities for generating dialogue and evoking engagement with stakeholders, successful use of Twitter also requires an organizational commitment of resources (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Quinton & Fennemore, 2013; Zorn et al., 2013). The unique “push-push-pull” nature of micro-blogs provides opportunities for explicit calls for engagement to be shared by followers with their respective social networks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011), but the engagement of followers depends on the organizational interactivity and communication strategies used by the nonprofit (Cho et al., 2014; Saffer et al., 2013). Therefore, nonprofit organizations (e.g., SFD agencies) should consider embracing social media in their broader communication strategies to increase their organizational capacity.

Future Directions

This study was the first to examine functions of Twitter among a broader sample of small, midsized, and large nonprofits. Future studies should consider more diverse samples of small, moderate, and large-sized organizations (e.g., arts/humanities, health, religion, etc.) to examine whether the nature of social media has freed any type of nonprofit from traditional internal and external constraints. In addition, the most popular social media platforms vary among countries. Thus, the lack of Twitter accounts or limited amount of messages by some organizations in our sample does not necessarily indicate a lack of social media adoption. Future research should examine

different types of social media platforms for developing a better understanding of the role of social media for international nonprofits. Future studies exploring why nonprofit leaders are not using social media to solicit funds or call for action could also contribute to the literature on nonprofits and social media.

It is also important to recognize social media and the framework adopted in this study were situated in a Western context. The sample for this study consisted of organizations across several continents, and ranged from low-income to high-income countries. From a critical perspective, the increased branding and consumer-driven communication strategies among nonprofit organizations using social media certainly raise some concerns (Cottle & Nolan, 2007). At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that social media as a means for promoting engagement allows people to move from awareness to action considerably faster than through traditional means of activism (Waldorf, 2012).

In support of nonprofit organizations strategically using social media to promote short-term engagement (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013), perhaps it is time to recognize and support organizations and individuals willing to actively raise awareness and voice calls for action in response to social issues (Waldorf, 2012). Future research on nonprofits should explore organizational discourses to develop a better understanding of strategies and decision making involved in communication efforts. Chouliaraki's (2011) depiction of "agonistic solidarity" (p. 373) might serve as inspiration for identifying communication strategies for nonprofits toward promoting collective action and engaging followers in dialogue about broader social issues.

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Author Biographies

Per G. Svensson is a doctoral fellow at the University of Louisville in the Department of Health and Sport Sciences. His research interests are organizational behavior in sport-for-development (SFD) and the role of sport as a tool for promoting social change.

Tara Q. Mahoney, PhD, is an assistant professor at the State University of New York at Cortland in the Department of Sport Management. Her research interests are in social media and charity sport participation.

Marion E. Hambrick, PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of Louisville in the Department of Health and Sport Sciences. His research interests are social media usage in sports and the diffusion of innovations within the sporting goods industry.