

# The Use of Social Media in Sporting Organisations in Ireland: An Examination of Practice and Challenges in Accomplishing Organisational Objectives.

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## **Statement of Originality and Ownership of Work**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to examine current social media practice, understand the perceived utility of social media in achieving organisational goals and investigate the barriers faced by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland concerning social media use. Finally, it sought to investigate best practice recommendations in the use of social media for NGBs and LSPs.

**Methods:** This research employed two forms of data collection in a three-phase methodology. Firstly, one semi-structured interview with a key informant was used to establish best practice recommendations. An adapted online questionnaire was then circulated to Ireland's national population of NGBs (N=65) and LSPs (N=29) to investigate the usage, goals and barriers relating to the use of social media. Finally, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with NGBs (n=6) and LSPs (n=4) to give greater insight into the research questions posed.

**Findings:** The response rate for this research was 48% (n=45). Overall, NGBs and LSPs used a mixture of textual and multimedia content to engage with and educate followers on Facebook and Twitter. Two main organisational goals emerged: information dissemination and promotion. The barriers identified were a lack of organisational resources, expertise and control. Best practice recommendations were made in the areas of usage, sponsorship and resources.

**Conclusions:** For NGBs and LSPs, the perceived utility of social media lies in its ability to reach a wide audience to increase awareness of, and to promote the organisation and sport. However, it is unlikely that current practice is achieving these objectives. There is disparity between current use and best practice recommendations. This is mainly due to a lack of resources and social media expertise. It is suggested that NGBs and LSPs pool resources and upskill in order to reach best practice standards. This could result in success in areas such as communication, promotion and sponsorship.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Social Media**

In 2019, an internet minute contains one million Facebook logins, 87,500 people tweeting, 2.1 million photos shared on Snapchat, 1.4 million Tinder swipes and 4.5 million YouTube video views (Social Media Today, 2019). Social media has changed the way individuals connect with each other, share information, express themselves, and socialize with others (Lin, Fan & Chau, 2014). In turn, social media has changed the way businesses interact with current and potential consumers.

Social media is becoming more and more a part of everyday business life and understanding the business functions that social media can provide to organisations is essential (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017). Firms can more efficiently talk, listen, energize, support, and embrace their audiences and their ideas by integrating social media into their existing business tasks (Andrews & Shimp, 2017). It allows consumers to play more of an active role in the products or services that marketers create to meet their needs (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Current or potential customers can contact or be contacted by businesses through social networking sites. Through these sites, consumers have the ability to post feedback, leave reviews, share opinions and request help and support.

Similarly, the rise in social media has not gone unnoticed in the world of sport. Social media is no longer just a place to connect with friends and family; instead it is now a place for doing business, and therefore sport organisations should explore ways to integrate it into their strategic plans (Naraine and Parent, 2017). In particular, promotional marketing and information delivery have been greatly impacted by social media. Throughout the literature addressing the role of social media in sporting organisations, it has been identified as a salient promotion and communication tool that has the capacity to “build meaningful relationships through opportunities for communication, interaction, and value” (Williams and Chinn, 2010, p. 436). Sporting organisations are now presented with new opportunities and challenges offered by the social media landscape. According to Eagleman (2013), one segment of the sporting

industry who stand particularly poised to benefit from the use of social media is National Sporting Organisations. It is these specific organisations that are the focus of this research project, namely; National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport and Local Sport Partnerships (LSPs).

## **1.2 Sporting Organisations**

National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport are one of the key delivery agencies of sport in Ireland. They promote, organise and facilitate participation in sport at both recreational and competitive levels (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). There are currently 65 NGBs recognised by Sport Ireland (formerly The Irish Sports Council<sup>1</sup>) that each represent at least one different sport. These NGBs are the key delivery agencies for Sport Ireland's strategic priorities (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2018). There are two primary objectives for NGBs in Ireland; to encourage the promotion, participation, development and co-ordination of their sport nationally and to support elite athletes in achieving excellence in their sport. To be recognised as an NGB in Ireland and to receive funding from Sport Ireland, there are several criteria that must be met; the NGB in question must have its strategic priorities consistent with those of Sport Ireland. Aligning with the main priorities of Sport Ireland, funding is partially dependant on membership numbers and high performance potential.

LSPs are local agencies committed to working within communities to increase the number of opportunities for all people to take part in sport and physical activity. LSPs were initially promoted in Sport Ireland's strategy "A New Era for Sport", in 2000 after Sport Ireland noticed the importance of local recreational sport. Currently, there are 29 LSPs located across Ireland. Similar to NGBs, the role of an LSP is to provide information, education and to facilitate opportunities to get active, fostering an inclusive policy targeting all ages across the lifespan. However as their name suggests, their work focuses on local level recreational sport and physical activity development. At local level, they aim to increase participation in sport and to ensure that all resources are used in the most efficient and effective way. Each LSP has a responsibility in its local community to work in partnership with all statutory bodies and other organisations and groups with a sporting interest operating in their local area.

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<sup>1</sup> The Irish Sports Council was in operation from 1999-2015. It has now been reformed as Sport Ireland. In this paper, documents from The Irish Sports Council website will now be cited as Sport Ireland.

### **1.3 Strategic Priorities**

Both NGBs and LSPs are governed by Sport Ireland and are required to devise and follow a strategic plan corresponding to a template/format recommended by Sport Ireland. Sport Irelands strategic plan sets out what sporting organisations in Ireland should be prioritising, working on and achieving. After reviewing all Sport Ireland strategic documents presented from 2000 to date, aside from the typical tasks associated with facilitating sport experiences, two strategic goals have been evident in each plan, namely; the promotion of the sport and organisation and effective communication.

In Ireland, the realm of sports promotion and the effective communication of information is the responsibility of NGBs and LSPs. Promotion and communication are both similar, yet they do have a distinct difference. Promotion refers to any type of marketing communication that is used to inform or ‘persuade’ target audiences of the product, service or brand offered by an organisation (Tomše & Snoj, 2014). Promotion is used to increase awareness, create interest, generate sales or create brand loyalty. The definition of communication is the revealing or exchanging of information or news and, specifically, it is the means of creating a connection between people or places (Oxford University Press, 2018). While both marketing and communications can enhance demand, marketing can shape a brand and differentiate products and services from the competition (Social Media Today, 2014). In contrast, communication involves all interactions, including those that do not have a specific aim of selling or marketing a service or product.

Since 2012, Sport Ireland has incorporated new ways of achieving their priorities, such as using social media. Social media is viewed as particularly useful for promotion and communication. Furthermore, the use of web based media for promotion and communication can assist in obtaining sponsorship (Ashley and Tuten, 2015). As NGBs and LSPs rely on government funding, creating external funding channels is becoming more prominent in Irish sports strategies as specifically cited in The National Sports Policy 2018-2027 (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). Sponsorship and commercial partnerships can play a role in increasing revenue, diversifying funding streams and increasing organisational resources. For this reason, the researcher has decided to focus on social media usage under three headings: promotion; communication; and sponsorship within the context of this research study. More details on these areas are provided below.



## **1.4 Promotion**

The promotion of sports participation is generally the primary objective of NGBs and LSPs. It can have a direct effect on membership numbers and media attention, both of which are beneficial to sporting organisations. In particular, NGBs receive government funding. Part of the rationale for the funding amount will be directly associated with the number of members an NGB has. Similarly, for LSPs, the more programmes, courses, events and target markets reached, the more opportunity they will have when applying for government grants (Sport Ireland, 2017). Currently Irish NGBs and LSPs use mainly traditional methods of promotion, for example newsletters. As the majority of NGBs represent what is termed 'minority' sports, they often do not receive much mainstream media attention outside of Olympic years (Eagleman, 2013). Similarly, LSPs also seem to have limitations in terms of funding or the media attention to constantly have their message put out on these platforms. Eagleman (2013) states that such niche sporting organisations must create develop and sustain their own publicity and fan base in order to survive. To generate public awareness of the organisation and the work they do, they must attempt to use methods outside of traditional media (Eagleman, 2013).

Social media provides a new platform for these organisations that have struggled to receive much main stream media attention (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Thompson, Martin, Gee & Eagleman, 2014). Social media is also a cost effective avenue for these NGBs and LSPs that typically have a limited budget (Eagleman, 2013). Smaller international sporting organisations have noted the promotional benefits linked with the use of social media. Previous to 2010; Tennis New Zealand for example, focused their promotional effort mainly through newsletters and their website. Thompson et al. (2014) created a Facebook page for Tennis New Zealand and ran a promotional contest offering Facebook users the chance to enter a competition to win a prize. They had to like Tennis New Zealand's Facebook page and answer a tennis trivia question. Their active users went from 108 to 438 by the end of three weeks. Their visits grew from 507 to 1374. This is just one example of a small scale sporting organisation using social media to increase awareness and promote their organisation.

## **1.5 Communication**

Communications methods have evolved with the introduction of social media (Wright & Hinson, 2014). Communication is an important factor in devising, disseminating and pursuing the organisational goals for organisations. It involves informing audiences

about timely, frequent and relevant information (Billings, Butterworth & Turman, 2017). Social media communication offers them a new cost effective medium to communicate with fans of the sport and the general public. Eagleman (2013) found that NGBs in America viewed social media as a strategic communication tool utilised to develop the organisations relationship with fans and to promote the sport. In contrast to traditional media, social media can provide the opportunity for sports organisations to communicate directly with fans (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Although there has been an uptake in social media usage and communication methods within sporting organisations, there has still been limited research conducted in this area (Littlefield, 2016). Hopkins (2013) carried out a study to examine the impact of an Australian Rules Football club in New Zealand in relation to their communication through Facebook and Twitter. Previous to the study, an end of year member survey completed by 5,000 members indicated that the club was performing ‘poorly’ in the area of communication, achieving an average score of 2.5 out of 10. This led to the formation of a project team to identify a strategy for improvement in the area of communication through the social media channels of Facebook and Twitter. The goal of the project team was to start conversations with followers, to build closer relationships, to share information more effectively and provide a forum for listening to follower’s opinions. The member survey for the subsequent year indicated a rating of 8/10 in the communication category. Hopkin’s (2013) study is just one example that represents the potential of sporting organisations to communicate more effectively and efficiently with their followers.

## **1.6 Sponsorship**

With the emergence of social media has come the development of new channels for sponsorship activation (Meenaghan, McLoughlin & McCormack, 2013). Sponsors now understand the value and reach of social media and how it can provide direct marketing opportunities for their brand (Dees, 2011). Within the ‘What Sponsors Want’ report, presence on social media was ranked as the second most valuable asset for companies looking to invest in sponsorship. They also found that social media was the channel most used to leverage sponsorship (IEG, 2016). In Ireland, sponsorship and funding is a key strategic area according to a marketing and communication specialist within the Irish sporting industry. This specialist has a diverse background in the world of Irish sport working with and in partnership with both as a external sports journalist, NGBs, LSPs and Sport Ireland. In an interview with the sports marketing and communication

specialist within IEG, it was suggested that sponsorship is a relatively untapped area for Irish NGBs and LSPs. Although both types of organisations are state funded and receive a specific amount of money from the government each year, this funding is often not substantial enough to support the organisation alone. When evaluating an organisation as a potential partner, prospective sponsors are looking at the organisation's social media presence. In order for sporting organisations in Ireland to utilise their social media for sponsorship or endorsement activation, they must use it effectively to engage and connect with their followers.

### **1.7 Barriers**

Despite the noted benefits of social media mentioned, there are also perceived barriers and challenges to social media use. A lack of training and management/technical support has been highlighted as a major barrier to social media usage (Abeza, O'Reilly & Seguin, 2019; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). The cost (in relation to time) has also been cited as a major barrier to the use of social media in organisations despite the noted benefits (Antheunis, Tates & Nieboer, 2013; Michaelidou, et al., 2011). Eagleman (2013) highlighted how sporting organisations in North America perceived three main challenges of social media usage to include: maintaining message control; finding balance between too much and too little usage on their social media accounts, and monitoring fan comments. A lack of control and the allocation of resources have also been cited as a challenge faced by sporting organisations (Abeza, O'Reilly & Reid, 2013). Sanderson (2011) highlights that policy development for social media usage is a challenge in itself, but is necessary to avail of benefits and to diminish barriers/challenges faced by sporting organisations and their personnel. To overcome these perceived barriers and challenges, it is important that management and staff are provided with sufficient training to develop the skills needed to use social media (Blanchard, 2011). Policies and practices of social media usage should be set by every business organisation seeking to remove these perceived barriers and challenges and to capitalise on the benefits of social media use (Mergel, 2013).

Due to the growing popularity of social media, it could be argued that NGBs and LSPs should invest significant time and resources to increase engagement and relationships online (Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015). However, after conducting a preliminary online examination of NGBs and LSPs social media pages in Ireland, this does not appear to be the case. Despite the numerous amount of academic literature providing evidence to

support the use of social media as a viable promotion, communication and sponsorship tool (Abeza et al., 2019; Whitburn, 2018; Naraine & Parent, 2017; Achen, 2016) there is no publication provided by any of the 65 NGBs, 29 LSPs or Sport Ireland on how social media can be used for these purposes. Comparably, other studies have highlighted that those sporting organisations that do use social media currently have considerable disparity between their current social media practice and recommended best practice (Naraine & Parent, 2017). Although there is much literature supporting the use of social media as a promotion and communication tool that can be used to achieve organisational goals, there has been limited research regarding the challenges faced by sporting organisations when engaging with social media. Yet it has been noted that sports organisations are dependent on social media for communication and information delivery purposes due to its national and global importance to society (Whitburn, 2018; Thompson et al., 2014).

Furthermore, much of the focus, from both an academic and practitioner standpoint, examines the use of various forms of social media by athletes, teams and leagues (for example, O'Shea & Alonso, 2011; Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010). However only a handful of studies have been conducted on the context of social media and national sporting organisations in countries such as North America (Eagleman, 2013), Canada (Naraine & Parent, 2017), New Zealand (Thompson et al., 2014), Australia (Hopkins, 2013) and Spain exists (Garcia, 2011). In Ireland this area is yet to be explored.

Accordingly, the use of social media by sporting organisations needs to be researched in more detail. For fans, followers and participants to avail of a more favourable online experience, national sporting organisations must actively engage with social media (Thompson et al., 2014). Individual's expectations concerning communication from organisations have been alternate by popular social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. For a sporting organisation to take advantage of the opportunities associated with technological trends and to facilitate promotional and communication efforts, they must adapt a competent online presence via social media platforms (Wallace, Wilson & Miloch, 2011). Given that the NGBs and LSPs in Ireland are the key delivery agencies of policy and practice in relation to sports development, it is crucial that these agencies engage effectively with social media using best online practice to sustain and promote the development of sport. Therefore, it is essential that research is carried out to

establish how NGBs and LSPs are currently using social media to achieve their strategic goals and the barriers they face with social media usage.

To date, there has been little research conducted exploring the topic and context of NGBs and social media usage. Additionally, there is no existing research focussing on LSPs and social media usage. This research will therefore examine current social media practice by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland. The research will also investigate actual best practice recommended in relation to the use of social media for NGBs and LSPs. It will also seek to examine the use of social media in achieving organisational goals specific to Irish NGBs and LSPs. Finally, it will investigate the perceived and actual barriers faced by personnel in NGBs and LSPs in Ireland concerning social media use.

## **1.8 Chapter Two - Literature Review**

In chapter two, previously published research in the topic area will be discussed and critiqued. The initial focus of this chapter is to present specific factual evidence on social media and its impact on society, business and the sporting world. The chapter then outlines published material to explain the current structure of sport in Ireland. This is followed by a review of literature that analyses the strategic goals and opportunities that can be achieved with the help of social media. The challenges and barriers associated with the use of social media are then discussed. Best practice guidelines are acknowledged and compared and contrasted against current social media practice in sporting organisations.

## **1.9 Chapter Three - Methodology**

The Methodology chapter includes an overview and discussion on the research design and the data collection and analysis procedures used within the current research approach to investigate the outlined research objectives. The rationale to support the methodological approach is also discussed. To conclude, the merits and limitations of the methodology selected are presented.

## **1.10 Chapter Four - Presentation and Discussion of Results**

In this chapter, the key findings are outlined and discussed. Any statistically significant results which emerge from the data are also acknowledged. A discussion of the results is presented in the context of the topics examined within the literature review and the research questions posed at the beginning of this study.

### **1.11 Chapter Five - Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the research outcomes within the context of the research questions put forward. Conclusions on the key themes from the findings are outlined in accordance with their relevance to the research questions. The limitations of this research and recommendations for future research are also presented.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Academic research on social media and its role in marketing and communications in the sporting industry is expanding (Abeza et al., 2019; Whitburn, 2018; Naraine & Parent, 2017; Achen, 2016; Eagleman, 2013). To date, this research has mainly focused on the way athletes, teams and leagues present themselves on social media platforms, the engagement with fans on their platforms and their social media challenges (Naraine and Parent, 2016; Thompson, et al., 2014; Eagleman, 2013). Further related research has been conducted on how consumers respond to social media usage by specific teams and clubs (Stavros et al., 2014), and sports fans use of social media (Clavio & Walsh, 2014). To date, there has been no known study on the issues and context of social media use by Irish NGBs and LSPs.

Literature addressing the connection between social media and its use within sports organisations demonstrates that it is a viable communication and marketing tool (Hambrick, 2017; Naraine & Parent, 2017; Pedersen, Laucella, Kian & Geurin, 2016). Eagleman (2013) found that NGBs in America viewed social media as a strategic communication tool utilised to develop the organisations relationship with fans and to promote the sport. For sports entities, social media presents unique and specific advantages as they are now able to send messages and communicate directly with consumers, fans and followers; this, in turn, can help build fan/follower identification (Wallace et al., 2011). Furthermore, social media offers the opportunity for followers to experience social instead of para-social interaction with athletes, that is, communication, interest, energy and time in a reciprocal way from both sides of the relationship (Spinda & Puckette, 2018).

In Ireland, sports marketing and promotion is also now considered as a core activity within NGBs and LSPs. Due to the growing popularity of social media, it is recommended that sports organisations invest significant time and resources to increase engagement and relationships online (Filo et al., 2015). However, after conducting a preliminary online examination of the social media pages of Irish NGBs and LSPs, this



does not appear to be the case<sup>2</sup> (Appendix E and G). Despite the amount of academic literature providing evidence to support social media as a viable marketing and communication tool, there is no publication provided by any of the 65 NGBs, 29 LSPs or Sport Ireland on how social media can be used as an effective promotion and communication tool for sports organisations. Comparably, other studies have highlighted that those sporting organisations that do use social media currently have considerable disparity between their present social media practice and best practice (Naraine & Parent, 2017). Although there is much literature supporting social media as a marketing tool that can be used to achieve organisational goals, there has been limited research regarding the challenges faced by sporting organisations associated with the use of social media. Yet it has been noted that sports organisations are dependent on social media for communication and information delivery purposes due to its national and global importance to society (Thompson, et al., 2014).

Accordingly, the use of social media by sports organisations needs to be researched in more detail. For fans and participants to avail of a more favourable online experience, sporting organisations should actively engage with social media (Saari & Tuominen, 2016). Individual's expectations concerning communication from organisations have evolved due to popular social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For a sporting organisation to take advantage of the opportunities associated with technological trends and to facilitate the goals associated with sports development, they must adapt a competent online presence via social media platforms (Naraine & Parent, 2017). Given that the NGBs and LSPs in Ireland are the key delivery agencies of sport at both national and county level, it is crucial that these agencies engage with social media using best online practice to sustain and promote the development of sport. Therefore, it is essential to carry out research that establishes baseline information on current social media practice by NGBs and LSPs to achieve their strategic goals and also to investigate the issues and barriers they may face with regards to social media practice. To date there has been no research conducted focussing on the topic of social media usage by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland. This study will establish data on current practice related to the use of social media by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland. Furthermore, it will seek to investigate best practice in using social media to achieve organisational

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<sup>2</sup> As of May 2019.

objectives and goals. It is also intended to investigate the perceived and actual issues and barriers faced by personnel in NGBs and LSPs in Ireland in relation to social media.

The structure of the literature review chapter will be as follows. Firstly, information outlining the background of social media, types of social media mediums and the role of social media in the world of business will be provided in section 2.2. Following this the effect of social media on the world of sport will be discussed in section 2.3. This will lead into section 2.4 where past and current Irish sports strategies will be presented and the organisational goals of promotion, communication and sponsorship will be further examined. Barriers and challenges of effective social media usage will be reviewed in section 2.5. Lastly, in section 2.6, literature on best practice recommendations related to the use of social media will be outlined.

## **2.2 Social Media**

Social media applications are an online means of communication, collaboration, cultivation and conveyance among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities and organisations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Castronovo and Huang (2012) define social media as a medium that facilitates two-way communication whereby users are able to engage and share content, and businesses must listen and act on feedback to enhance effectiveness.

The first form of social media emerged in 1978 with the Bulletin Board System (BBS). The BBS allowed the exchange of data, including the sharing of files and creation of messages over phone lines with other users. The BBS was the beginning of modern day social networking sites. CompuServe<sup>3</sup> was made public in the 1980s, it allowed direct messaging through email and offered users access to thousands of online forums. Then in 1997, AOL Instant Messenger<sup>4</sup> was launched popularizing instant messaging. The first website then to allow profile creation with a list of friends, SixDegree.com<sup>5</sup>, was also launched in 1997 (Digital Trends, 2016). After the dot.com bubble burst in 2000,

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<sup>3</sup>CompuServe was business-oriented mainframe computer communication solution, but expanded into the public domain in the late 1980s.

<sup>4</sup>AOL Instant Messenger was an instant messaging and presence computer program that allowed registered users to communicate in real time.

<sup>5</sup>SixDegree.com was a social network service website that allowed users to list friends, family members and acquaintances both on the site and externally. Users could send messages and post bulletin board items to people in their first, second, and third degrees, and see their connection to any other user on the site.

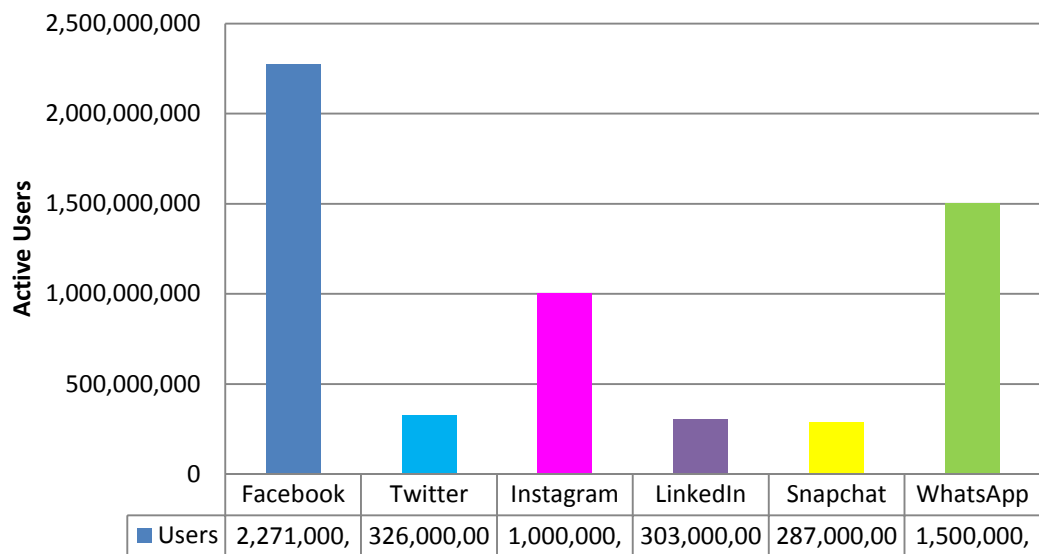
poorly conceived and poorly managed online businesses were wiped from the internet. In 2002, social networking sites really hit their stride with the development of Friendster. Its user base grew to 3 million in the first three months. At the time, about 1 in every 126 internet users had a Friendster account. A similar site was developed in 2003, known as Myspace. Myspace still exists but mostly focuses on the Asian market (Digital Trends, 2016). In 2003, LinkedIn was developed for business professionals to connect. Today LinkedIn has over 303 million users as seen in Figure 1. Facebook<sup>6</sup> followed in 2004 and in 2006 opened to the public. At present Facebook has over 2.2 billion active users. Twitter was then developed in 2006 and currently has 326 million active users. With the rise in mobile phone technologies came a change in social media networks. Firstly WhatsApp, a social messaging platform was developed in 2009. It allowed for instant messaging and today boasts over 1.5 billion users. Instagram and Snapchat were then launched in 2010 and 2011 respectively and focused on users with smartphones. Both networking sites are growing rapidly. According to Statista (2018), in 2018 there were 210 active social media networks in comparison to 86 in 1999.

The explosion of the social media phenomenon is startling and the pace at which it is growing is considerable. In 2019, the internet has approximately 4.388 billion users overall with approximately 3.484 billion active social media users as of January 2019 (Statista, 2019). This is an increase of 1.2 billion active social media users since 2017 (Statista, 2018).

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<sup>6</sup> Facebook was originally created exclusively for the students of Harvard University.

**Figure 1 - Active Users on Social Media Channels <sup>7</sup>**



(Statista, 2019).

### 2.2.1 Types of Social Media

There is a wide variety of social media platforms. Knowing which to use and for what purpose can make a big difference in any social media strategy. It is important, especially when running a social media account for an organisation that organisations are present on the site that best fits your audience and goals (Saari & Tuominen, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A brief description of some of the current platforms is outlined in Table 1:

<sup>7</sup> Active users: are those who log on at least once per month.

Table 1 - Social Media Mediums

Type	Description	Example
Social Networking Sites	These sites allow people to connect with other people who have similar interests, likes and experiences. These platforms give users the ability to create, share, and consume information across their network.	Facebook, LinkedIn
Live streaming	These platforms allow users to broadcast and watch live video from their computers or smart phones.	Facebook Live and Periscope
Virtual worlds	These sites involve a simulated environment populated by multiple users who create an avatar, independently and simultaneously explore the virtual world.	World of Warcraft
Group buying	Sites that allow users to buy and sell products or services. These sites generally allow users to also comment on and rate the product or services they have purchased.	Groupon
Blogging sites	Written content or video content (vlogging) that users can read, view, comment or share.	WordPress.
Micro-blogging sites	Sites that users can create and share information in short bursts.	Twitter
Collaboration tools	Collaborative platforms allow users to contribute articles to create sites full of vast information.	Wikipedia
Photo sharing sites	Sites where users can share and view images.	Instagram
Video sharing sites	Platforms that allow users to upload and watch videos. Most of these sites allow users to then share this content onto other types of social media	YouTube
Social news	This type of platform is used to share news or articles with the community or network. This can be achieved through other types of social networking sites; however these sites are specifically for this type of content. Users on these sites can also vote, rate or comment on the content posted.	Reddit

(Hootsuite, 2017).

### 2.2.2 Social Media and Business Organisations

In 2007, shortly after Facebook became public, there were approximately 100,000 business pages on the social media site. Since 2017, there are more than 65 million

business profiles (eConsultancy, 2017). Most big name brands are starting to notice the appeal of social media channels and many have adjusted their advertising spend accordingly (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). A survey by eConsultancy and Adobe shows that 56% of United States (US) organisations plan to increase their social media marketing budgets from 2016 to 2017<sup>8</sup>. Only 7% of those surveyed stated that they would be decreasing their social media marketing budgets (eConsultancy, 2017). In 2018, 41% of the average businesses' budget is expected to be allocated to marketing; within this 25% will be allocated to social media. By the end of 2019, it is expected that social media spending will increase to \$17.34 billion in the US alone (Hootsuite, 2017).

Edelman (2017) completed an online survey on marketing trends for Irish marketing organisations. They found that 99% of respondents see social media as being important to their organisation. The same 99% had at that time also integrated social media into their traditional activities in comparison to 82% in 2015. In 2017, 74% of these Irish companies planned to increase their social media marketing budgets, this is up from 70% in 2016 (Edelman, 2017). Social media is becoming more and more a part of everyday business life and understanding the business functions social media can provide to organisations is essential (Felix et al., 2017).

Firms can efficiently talk, listen, energize, support, and embrace their audiences and their ideas by integrating social media into their existing business tasks (Andrews & Shimp, 2017). It allows consumers to play more of an active role in the products or services that marketers create to meet their needs (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Current or potential customers can contact or be contacted by businesses through social media networking sites. Through these sites, consumers have the ability to post feedback, leave reviews, share opinions and request help and support. In the United Kingdom (UK), 92% of customers leave businesses who practice bad customer service for another business. Social media can potentially enable businesses to provide customer service support in a quick and efficient manner. Hudson, Huang, Roth, & Madden (2016) established that consumers who had a positive experience with a business through social media were more likely to recommend it to others. Parveen, Jaafar & Ainin (2015) carried out interviews with six organisations to establish the impact social media has had on their businesses. One of the biggest impacts reported was the enhanced customer

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<sup>8</sup>2016 to 2017: pay for play environment and algorithm changes.

service the organisations could offer their customers. One respondent stated that “we definitely think social media has enhanced the customer service.

There are specific benefits for customer communication through social media” (Parveen et al., 2015. p. 7). This communication is simple but can lead to better relationships between businesses and consumers. The use of social media networking sites can also lead to greater brand exposure for an organisation. Brand exposure occurs when a consumer becomes aware of a service or product through any of the five senses. A study by Gholston, Kuofie and Hakim (2016) on social media benefits for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) interviewed 25 Philadelphia based SMEs. They found that SMEs in Philadelphia were likely to benefit from increased brand exposure by utilising social media networking sites for their businesses. For example, organisations stated that social media has improved its brand positioning by increasing its visibility with customers (Parveen et al., 2015).

Traditional means of communication and marketing can now be achieved in a social media setting (Felix et al., 2017). In today’s cluttered marketplace, it is vital that corporations seek new and innovative ways to reach their target audience. Social media allows organisations to specifically target consumers based on a variety of differing factors (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). The information that social media network users provide to the hosting site can be used to target consumers with a particular age, gender, location, interest and much more. Furthermore, organisations can also retarget those who have interacted with their previous advertisements, posts and their website (SocialMediaExaminer, 2017). This gives organisations an opportunity that traditional marketing outlets cannot provide. Social media offers businesses insights into their consumers and those who view and/or directly and indirectly interact with their social media pages (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). This can help organisations in conducting market research. Parveen et al. (2015) found that organisations viewed Facebook’s analytic data as a means to find out more information about their consumers such as their age and location. Furthermore, social media networks allow for businesses to monitor certain analytics from their competitor’s pages. Some social networking sites such as Facebook allow organisations to directly compare their progress online with that of their competitors (Icha & Agwu, 2015). The use of online avenues to achieve organisational strategic goals is greater than ever (Bryson, 2018; Felix et al., 2017;

Shilbury, Westerbeek, Quick, Funk & Karg, 2014; Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek, 2013).

### **2.3 Social Media and Sporting Organisations**

The rise in social media has not gone unnoticed in sports. In line with the growing media dominated sports consumer, social media has become a vital tool for sporting organisations. Social media is no longer just a place to connect with friends and family; instead it is now a place for doing business. It could therefore be argued that sport organisations should explore ways to integrate it into their strategic plans (Pegoraro, Scott, & Burch, 2017). Dittmore & McCarthy (2014) found that social media use by sport organisations is mainly driven by two key factors: the relatively inexpensive cost of social media in comparison to traditional marketing tools and the ability to interact with millions of online users. Both of these points will be discussed in greater detail below.

Many academics have noted the cost effectiveness of social media (Whitburn, 2018; Geurin & Burch, 2017; Hambrick, Frederick & Sanderson, 2015; Eagleman, 2013; Abeza et al., 2013). For instance Eagleman (2013) examined the role of social media for NGBs in North America. Using a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology, surveys were administered to the full list of 155 NGBs recognised by the United States Olympic Committee. From this, 62 surveys were usable, a response rate of 40%. Eagleman (2013) noted that social media does not require a considerable financial investment, and the relatively low cost could be considered one of the main benefits of utilising social media as a marketing and communications tool. Interviewees within the qualitative phase of the research noted that “social media is a cheap but reliable way to communicate with followers and fans” (Eagleman, 2013, p. 493). Likewise, O’Shea & Alonso (2012) carried out research on professional sporting clubs in Australia on the opportunities and challenges of social media usage. It was found that the clubs perceived social media to be the most cost effective form of marketing, adding that it can also help deliver more specific marketing goals than traditional print, radio and television marketing.

One of the biggest advantages of social media marketing is that it is generally free to start (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Most of the large platforms do not have signup fees. However, for sporting organisations to really take full advantage of social media, the



paid advertising<sup>9</sup> options that most social media platforms provide should be considered (Freeman, Potente, Rock & McIver, 2015). Particularly since 2018, paid advertising is generally needed to reach an organisation's ideal target market. It has been estimated that without paying for advertising, organisations will only reach 6% of their followers (Neil Patel, 2018). Although paid advertising is recommended, social media can still be very effective organically once planning and consideration go into its use. Organisations must also be aware of the time and labour costs associated with the use of social media. It takes employees time to develop high quality planned content to post on an organisation's social media pages. Having a clear set strategy for what needs to be achieved is a tool to help maximise the cost effectiveness of social media (Felix et al., 2017).

For sports entities, social media presents unique and specific advantages for communicating directly with consumers, fans and followers. Social media allows fans increased access to news updates in relation to information on injuries, results, behind the scenes content that can include images, videos, and other promotional content for example, competitions, events, discounts (Gibbs, O'Reilly, & Brunette, 2014). As alluded to previously, another unique benefit of social media in the sporting world is the ability to offer followers the opportunity to experience social instead of para-social interaction with athletes (Spinda & Puckette, 2018). Hambrick et al. (2013) explore how Lance Armstrong utilized social media for image repair in 2012 when his doping allegations emerged; he was able to communicate directly with fans and followers through social media. Similarly, Spinda & Puckette (2018) examined sports fans reasons for following their favourite athletes and teams on Snapchat. They found that respondents valued the ability to learn about what athletes and teams are like away from the actual game. The findings from Hambrick et al. (2013) and Spinda & Puckette (2018) illustrate the ability of sporting organisations to communicate with individuals or specific groups of people and deliver information directly to them.

This direct and instant communication is not always necessarily positive for sporting organisations and their athletes. Sporting organisations and athletes have no direct control of the content, timing, and frequency of the conversations or information that is posted online via social media channels (Abeza, et al., 2013). A study by Litchfield, Kavanagh, Osborne & Jones (2018) sought to examine the issues of gender, race and

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<sup>9</sup> Paid advertising is any kind of advertising that you have to pay for.

identity, as enacted through social media, namely of the athlete Serena Williams during the 2015 Wimbledon Championships. Through a netnographic analysis of posts on Facebook and Twitter over a 14 day period, a total of 773 abusive comments were found. This type of content is often difficult to manage and respond to. Although there are circumstances when social media interaction has a negative impact for sports stars and organisations, the potential benefits can outweigh this if used correctly.

While sports organisations once fully relied on the traditional forms of media to deliver their messages, they now have their own form of public media as a option. A study by Sherwood, Nicholson & Marjoribanks (2017) examined the impact of sports digital and social platforms, such as websites, Twitter and Facebook, on sports journalism. They conducted 37 interviews with public relations (PR) staff in Australian sporting organisations and one targeted case study in a professional Australian Rules Football club competing in the Australian Football League (AFL). Results showed that while PR staff in Australian sports organisations still value traditional media coverage, they also believed that their own platforms were increasing in value as distribution channels. The case study of the AFL club found that the organisation selectively chose to distribute certain stories on their own platforms rather than through traditional media outlets. This suggests the rapid evolution and development of sports organisations' social and digital media platforms having the potential to alter the once symbiotic relationship between sport and media.

Manchester City are an example of a sporting organisation who have used social media to their benefit. Amidst a ranking and rating of United Kingdom (UK) football clubs use of digital marketing, Manchester City was ranked as number one (Econsultancy.com, 2014). Econsultancy.com (2013) noted that Manchester City understands its fans and knows that the content they post must be entertaining, engaging and informative. They view digital mediums as more than a marketing and communication tool. They aim to keep supporters informed, entertained and involved in the club through digital marketing. An example of this was their '#citystories' campaign. This campaign was rolled out in 2013 on Twitter and encouraged City fans to share memories and stories that have resulted from supporting City, hash tagging citystories at the end (Econsultancy.com, 2013). It was considered an effective way to engage their community whilst informing them of the history of the club. For the creation of campaigns such as #citystories and other digital marketing ventures, Manchester City

have a digital team. This team work with all areas of the club and are comprised of project managers, content producers, social media experts, photographers and video producers. This team are always looking for new methods to distribute content and use digital media to communicate its vision and brand globally (Econsultancy.com, 2013).

According to David Meerman Scott<sup>10</sup>, “Prior to the social media, organisations had only two significant choices to attract attention: buy expensive advertising or get third-party ink from the media. But the web has changed the rules” (Scott, 2015, p.2). There has been a shift in the way in which people communicate and use media. Passive broadcast media does not provide the same effects it did ten years ago. It is important to note the new opportunities available to organisations through these mediums. Social media allows organisations to reach out and engage with consumers using an unprecedented suite of tools, tactics and techniques such as the ones mentioned above that were not possible before. Unlike traditional forms of mass media marketing, social media provides a unique ability to broaden the scope of an organisation’s marketing reach and narrow its focus at the same time (Ryan, 2016). There are no longer any traditional constraints such as geography and time zones hence allowing organisations to connect with a much larger audience. It is also now possible to reach a very specific niche segment in that wider market using these digital technologies. When implemented correctly, this can be a powerful combination. For sports organisations to keep up to date with their current and potential fans, it is important that they are engaging ‘in’ and ‘through’ social media. For sports teams and organisations, it has been suggested that social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are becoming the most efficient way to communicate, promote, engage, inform and share content directly with their fans and consumers.

Eagleman, Pedersen, and Wharton (2009) found that while mainstream sports like men’s basketball and football in the United States enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with traditional mass media, it is much more difficult for other sports to generate awareness and build fan bases, and therefore they should seek channels other than mass media to achieve these goals. While numerous sport organisations stand poised to benefit from social media, most NGBs do not have budgets allowing for full utilization of traditional marketing outlets such as paid television, radio, print, internet, and outdoor advertising (Eagleman, 2013). Niche sports are often relatively under

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<sup>10</sup> David Meerman Scott is an American online marketing strategist.

resourced and therefore they generally need to create their own publicity, their own market share and fan base in order to survive (Greenhalgh, Simmons, Hambrick, & Greenwell, 2011).

### **2.3.1 National Governing Bodies of Sport**

National Governing Bodies of Sport also known as National Sports Organisations (NSO) or National Sports Federations are made up of a mixture of paid professionals and volunteers who are responsible for the administration, facilitation, promotion and development of competitive and recreational sport at national level (Sport Ireland, 2018). In Ireland there are currently 65 NGBs recognised by Sport Ireland<sup>11</sup> and each represent at least one different sport (Appendix A). These NGBs are the key delivery agencies for Sport Ireland's strategic priorities (Sport Ireland, 2018). There are two primary objectives for NGBs in Ireland; to encourage the promotion, participation, development and co-ordination of their sport nationally and to support elite athletes in achieving excellence in their sport. This will be discussed further using the SPLISS and LISPA frameworks.

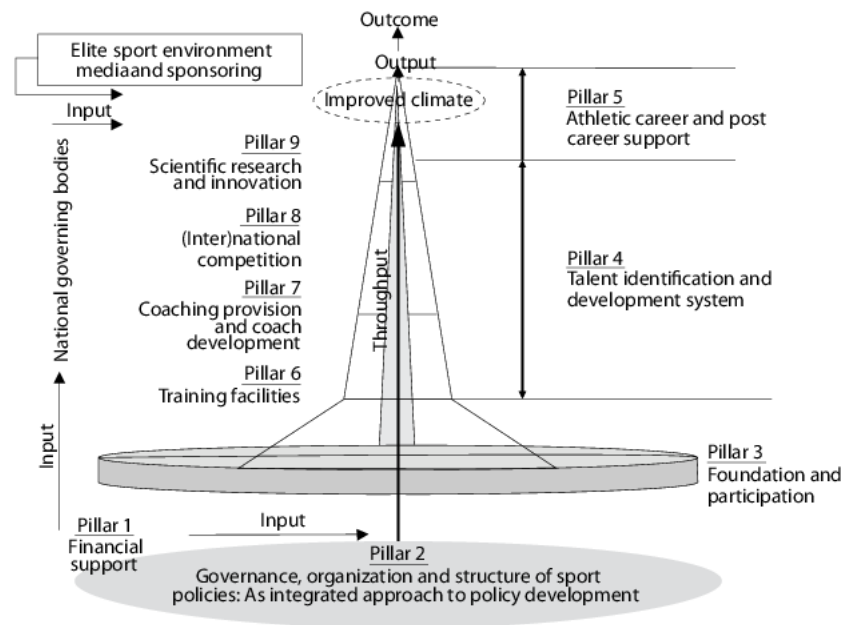
It may be argued that the main objective and primary rationale for the entire sport system is to compete with others and try and reach the highest level of performance (Robinson & Minikin, 201). Considering also that elite sport success has become one of the primary aims of national sports policy over the last 20 years, it is important to consider the role of NGBs from this aspect (Houlihan & Green, 2011). Elite sport development provides substantial investment into a small percentage of the population with the main outcome being elite sporting success (Houlihan & Green, 2011). In Ireland, individual NGBs are responsible for providing a high performance programme that can aid in the achievement of podium-competitive international performances. When looking at strategic policies for Irish NGBs, the goal of producing and developing successful international athletes is apparent. In Swim Ireland's current strategic plan, 'Performance' is one of the main five goals from 2017 until 2021. Similarly, Cricket Ireland, Athletics Ireland and Rowing Ireland all have a main goal of supporting their elite athletes to perform their best and produce Olympic and World medals (Athletic Association of Ireland, 2017). Although all of these organisations have different systems for the processes such as coach development and talent identification, many of

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<sup>11</sup> Sport Ireland is the State Agency for Sport in Ireland.

them will base their high performance structures around the ideas proposed in the internationally recognised SPLISS Models (Figure 2) (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek & Van Bottenburg, 2015; De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg and Shibli, 2006).

**Figure 2 - SPLISS Model**

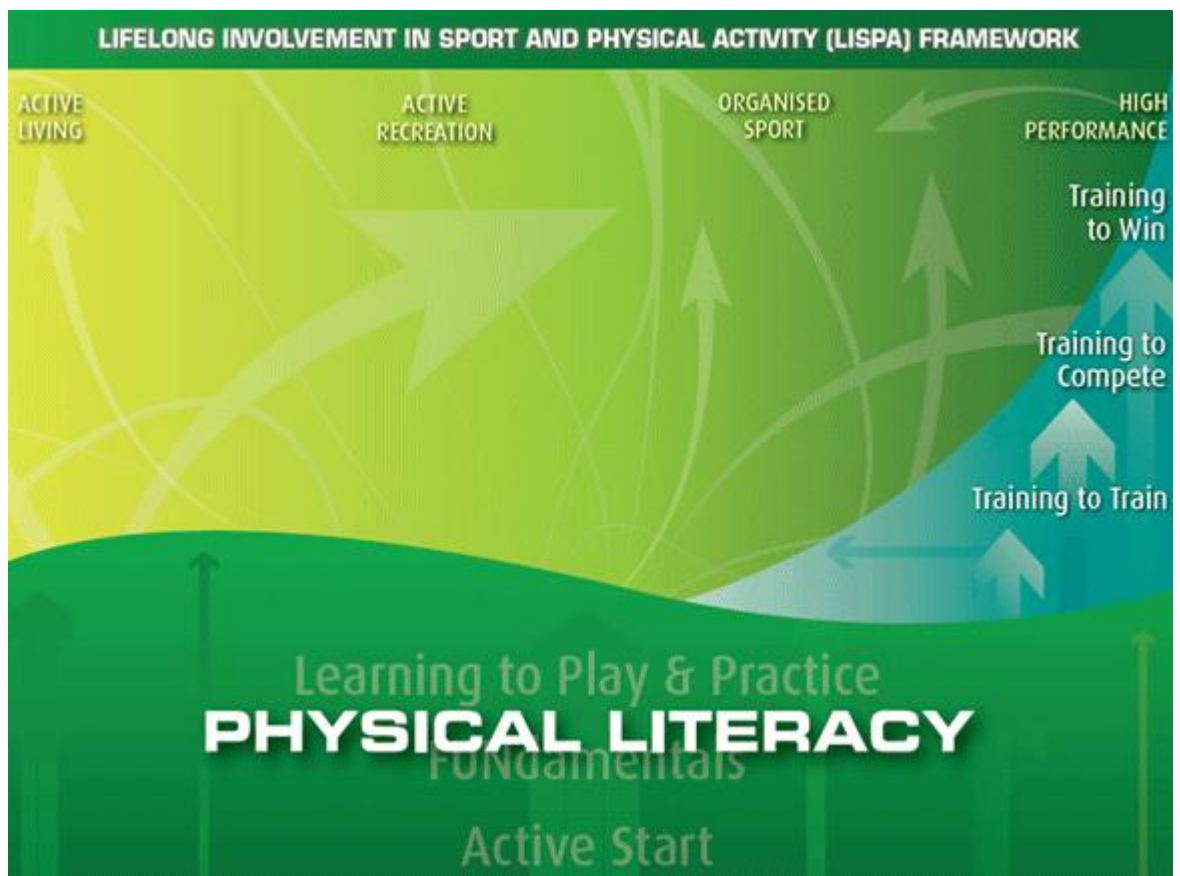


De Bosscher et al. (2006) initially developed a conceptual framework for Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success known as the ‘SPLISS model’. In this model they discuss nine key pillars that may have the potential to yield success in international sport. The fundamental pillars proposed include funding through to talent identification and development systems. Although it is impossible to create a single model for explaining international success, it has been suggested that governments and sporting organisations can use this framework to help find the most suitable combination of the nine pillars to increase their chances of Olympic success (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Pillar three is of particular importance. The rationale for pillar three is to create a deep pool of athletic talent from which a core of elite competitors can develop (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek & Van Bottenburg, 2015). This would involve NGBs focusing on ‘sport for all’ and getting as many people involved in their sport as possible. Despite the inconsistency of the relationship between sport for all and elite sport, a high percentage of athletes had their beginnings in sport for all (Zimmermann and Klein, 2018). Sport for all involves various forms of physical activity that can be either competitive or non-

competitive in nature, from spontaneous unorganised games to a minimum of regular physical activity performed (Bailey & Talbot, 2015). Although a broad sport participation base does not always necessarily result in international success, it is widely believed that it may have an impact on success via the steady supply of young talent. This leads onto the other primary focus of NGBs in Ireland, sustaining and growing their sport. The LISPA Model (Figure 3) is designed with both performance and participation orientated framework in mind.

**Figure 3 - LISPA Model**



‘LISPA’ or Life Long Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity is a participant centred framework for sports development planning (MacPhail, Lyons, Quinn, Hughes & Keane, 2010). It is based on a significant body of research in the areas of sport development and child development. The LISPA model is designed with both a performance and participation orientated framework in mind. It focuses on the needs of all individuals in communities, sports clubs and elite sport. Focusing on both participation in sport and sports performance. It also links grassroots sport and sport for all with the high-performance pathway but also recognises the complexity of the

experience each individual may have over their lifetime. This framework is used by NGBs and LSPs in their sports development, education and coaching policies.

Irish NGBs have a particular focus on the growth and development of their sport at a grassroots<sup>12</sup> level. Similar to high performance sport, the majority of NGBs in Ireland will have a participation goal as one of their main remits. In their current strategy, Athletics Ireland have a main goal of growing their membership and expanding participation in recreational events and clubs (Athletic Association of Ireland, 2017). Likewise, Rowing Ireland's current main aim is to increase recreational participation in their sport (Rowing Ireland, 2014). Growing and developing the sport is mainly spearheaded by sport development officers. Their role generally involves providing opportunities for people to try new activities and to participate at a level that is comfortable by developing facilities, programmes and breaking down barriers to participation. This is often achieved by working with and through collaboration and partnership with local authorities, schools and governing bodies, at local, national and international levels.

NGBs typically compete with one another for funding to achieve their primary objectives. In most countries and in most cases including Ireland, this funding is provided by the government. When this funding is provided, Sport Ireland is given the responsibility of allocating the resources. Sport Ireland spend approximately 60% of their funding on NGBs (Sport Ireland, 2016). The breakdown of funding for 2016, 2017 and 2018 can be found in appendix B. To be recognised as an NGB in Ireland and to receive funding from Sport Ireland, there are several criteria that must be met. One area that Sport Ireland take into consideration when allocating funding is membership statistics. Generally, the more members a NGB has, the higher the funding from Sport Ireland. Also as depicted in appendix B, the demographic of the members and or target groups of the NGB has an impact on funding. The Women in Sport grant is an additional financial resource that is allocated based on initiatives by the organisations to attract and keep females involved in their respective sports. Again, this is the responsibility of NGBs and their respective sport development officers and policy makers within each organisation. On a similar note, one of the main criteria for NGB recognition is that the core and primary objective of the organisation is promotion of the

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<sup>12</sup>Grassroots sport covers all sport disciplines practiced by non-professionals and organised on a national or local level through organisations working primarily on a non-profit basis.

sport (Sport Ireland, 2016). This goal is considered important to help increase membership numbers in turn creating that initial base of players. The responsibility for promotion rests with administrators, marketing and communication officers, policy makers and sports development officers.

As mentioned earlier, with the majority of these sports organisations representing minority sports, mainstream media attention is limited particularly outside of Olympic years (Eagleman, 2013). Moreover, due to budget constraints, these particular NGBs must find a cost effective medium for the promotion of their sport and organisation. To be successful in the promotion of the organisation, NGBs must communicate effectively with those stakeholders involved in the NGB and the general public. They must also find innovative and cost effective mediums to promote their organisation. Eagleman (2013), suggests that social media can offer NGBs and in particular niche NGBs, the opportunity to increase awareness and exposure of their sport in a cost effective manner. Niche sports are relatively on their own and therefore they generally need to create their own publicity, their own market share and fan base in order to survive (Pegoraro et al., 2017). While all sport organisations stand poised to benefit from social media, NGBs and LSPs are a particular segment of the market that could potentially benefit significantly by effectively utilising social media as a marketing and communication tool.

### **2.3.2 Local Sport Partnerships**

LSPs are local agencies committed to working within communities to increase the number of people taking part in sport and physical activity. LSPs were publicised in Sport Ireland's strategy "A New Era for Sport" in 2000 after Sport Ireland noticed the importance of local recreational sport. At first, a pilot of 12 LSPs was initiated. They were deemed successful and a gradual national roll out of LSPs began. Currently, there are 29 LSPs located across Ireland (Appendix C). The LSP staff network generally consists of co-ordinators, administrators, sport development officers and in some cases Sports Inclusion Disability Officers (SIDO). As of the most recent LSP data, 112 people are employed by LSPs across the country (Sport Ireland, 2017).

Similar to NGBs of sport, the role of an LSP is to provide information, education and to implement sports policies and practice targeting specific groups that are currently underrepresented in sport in Ireland such as older adults (Sport Ireland, 2018). As their



name suggests, their work focuses on local level recreational sport and physical activity development. At local level, they aim to increase general activity levels and participation in sport and to ensure that all resources are used in the most efficient and effective way. Data from the latest SPEAK Report (2017) shows that in 2017, 345,190 people were involved with LSPs through 949 local participation initiatives (Sport Ireland, 2017). Each LSP has a responsibility in its local community to work in partnership with all statutory bodies, organisations and groups with a sporting interest operating in their local area. With the partnership of these agencies, LSPs aim to use sport and physical activity to target a wider range of social issues with less focus on sports competition and excellence (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018).

Globally, 27.5% of adults are physically inactive (Guthold, Stevens, Riley & Bull, 2018). There is strong evidence to show that physical inactivity increases the likelihood of many adverse health conditions including major non-communicable diseases such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer (Lee, Shiroma, Lobelo, Puska, Blair, Katzmarzyk & Lancet Physical Activity Series Working Group, 2012). A study by Lee et al. (2012) examined how much non-communicable diseases could be averted if physically inactive people became active. Worldwide they found that physical inactivity causes 6% of coronary heart disease and 7% of type 2 diabetes and 10% of both breast and colon cancer. They also found that 5.3 million of the 57 million deaths that occurred worldwide in 2008 were related to physical inactivity. These high levels of inactivity are linked to the increase in levels of obesity globally (Myers, Gibbons, Finlayson and Blundell, 2017). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2017), obesity is a chronic but preventable disease that affects children and adults in both the developing and developed world. There is a positive correlation between obesity and both non-communicable diseases and mortality (NCD Risk Factor Collaboration, 2016). In addition to health implications linked to obesity, there are numerous economic impacts relating to increasing levels of obesity such as cost of medical treatment and days lost by the workforce (Ananthapavan, Peterson & Sacks, 2018). According to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (2018) it is estimated that in Ireland, the effects of physical inactivity cost €1.5 billion per year.

In light of the adverse effects of physical inactivity, the promotion of mass participation in physical activity and sport is seen as an important aspect in addressing these issues (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). In this regard, Pedras, Taylor &

Frawley (2016) state that mass participation policy has become more prominent in recent years. For example, Get Ireland Active. The new physical activity plan was released in 2016 by Healthy Ireland to increase levels of physical activity (Healthy Ireland, 2016). LSPs and NGBs are mentioned as key agencies in reducing sedentary behaviour within this plan. Similar policy can be found in the United Kingdom (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2015), Canada (Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation, 2012), Australia (Australian Sports Commission, 2015) and many more nations. Moreover, within the 2018 - 2027 National Sports Policy for Ireland, the benefits of sport and physical activity feature heavily (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). The health concerns relating to physical inactivity have acted as a catalyst in increasing governments interests in mass participation policy, rather than the intrinsic benefits of sport itself (Bloyce & Smith, 2010). Similarly, the potential of creating social capital has been cited as a benefit of sport and has been used as a rationale for sport and physical activity in policy documents.

Social capital has been defined as ‘networks, norms, relationships, values and informal sanctions that shape the quantity and cooperation within or among groups’ (Côté & Healy, 2001. p4). Building social capital requires transcending our political, social and professional identities to engage and connect with people unlike ourselves (Putnam, 2000). For this reason, sport presents an opportunity for social capital creation. Many academics have noted the contribution of sport in the formation of social capital (Whittaker & Holland-Smith, 2016; Peachey, Borland, Lobpries & Cohen, 2015; Morgan, 2013; Nicholson & Hoye, 2008). It is suggested that social capital is important as it brings together several social concepts such as social cohesion, social support and integration (Dubos, 2017). This link between sports and social capital has been used by policy makers such as LSPs and NGBs as part of a rationale for the promotion of mass participation in sports (Houlihan & Malcolm, 2015; Houlihan & Green, 2011). For example in the Get Ireland Active Activity Plan, social benefits of sport were listed alongside health as the reasons for the promotion of mass participation (Healthy Ireland, 2016). Similarly in the UK programmes such as ‘Burton Albion Community Trust (BACT) are designed to promote social inclusion (Parnell, Pringle, Widdop & Zwolinsky, 2015). More specifically, the area of inclusion is a particular focus for LSPs. In the National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027, the potential of sport for social inclusion and

integration is cited as a reason for engaging specific groups in sport such as people from ethnic minority groups (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). Despite the existence of strong theoretical claims about sport-based initiatives making a positive contribution to social capital, there is very little evidence to support these claims (Peachey et al., 2015; Tacon, 2007). It is important to note that in many sport policy documents, social capital creation is rarely examined in any great detail and instead is given a vague meaning that does not officially define sports role in its development (Coalter, 2007). Although mass participation sports policy documents tend to note social capital creation as a benefit of sport, there is very little evidence to suggest an actual correlation between the two.

To help achieve a more active community, LSPs receive funding from Sport Ireland. Sport Ireland provide three grants; core funding, programme funding<sup>13</sup> and the Women in Sport grant (Appendix D). Core funding goes towards the cost of employing staff, developing partnerships, delivering events and local initiatives. Programme funding goes to initiatives that target specific and high priority groups such as people with disabilities. The Women in Sport grant is allocated to NGBs and LSPs to aid innovative programmes designed to provide access to sport, encourage uptake and remove the barriers that prevent women taking part in sport as participants, coaches or officials. As of 2005, it is recommended that LSPs generate 50% of their own operating costs locally (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2005). According to the last SPEAK Report (2017), LSPs raised 57.7% of their total funding from local sources (Sport Ireland, 2017). The remaining 29.7% was provided by Sport Ireland and an additional 12.7% was provided for specific projects under the Dormant Accounts Scheme. This in total amounted to approximately €20 million (Sport Ireland, 2017).

Similar to NGBs, Sport Ireland (2015) specifically states that the key requirement of an LSP is to market and promote sport to all ages from youth through to older adults. Information acquired through the SPEAK Report (2017) shows that the majority of promotion to local communities came through digital channels such as websites and social media (Sport Ireland, 2017). Interestingly, information outlined in the Sport Ireland Act (2015) suggested that most of LSPs promotion was in the form of newsletters, press releases, booklets, directories, reports, as well as through translated documents. Perhaps the change within the two year gap can be related to the increasing

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<sup>13</sup> Program funding amounts could not be found for 2017 and 2018.

use of social media and the perception of social media as a cost effective promotional tool. As LSPs are usually run with few staff and funding is somewhat limited, cost and time effective mediums and means of promotion require consideration. For communication purposes current evidence suggest that they are using a combination of traditional media, online and social media as well as text-based media. This combination is vital as LSPs act as an information hub and point of contact within their diverse communities. They need to be able to communicate with a diverse range of individuals and groups from different ethnic groups through to those in disadvantaged areas.

## **2.4 Strategic Goals and Opportunities**

Both NGBs and LSPs follow a strategic plan, corresponding to a template/format recommended by Sport Ireland. This strategy is a guide for these organisations to follow. It sets out what sporting organisations in Ireland should be prioritising, working on and achieving.

In their first strategy in 2000-2002, "A New Era for Sport", one of Sport Ireland's priorities was to work with NGBs and LSPs to promote participation in sport. This promotion of participation in sport is a common theme throughout the strategies devised by the former Irish Sports Council and Sport Ireland. In their 2003-2005 strategy, it is noted that the initiative to harness Irish interest in sport lies with the 'promotion' department. In the 2009-2011 strategy, they specifically mention the use of media for promotion of sport. Then in the strategy for 2012-2014 web based media is mentioned for promotion of sport. The promotion of lifelong opportunities for sports participation, sporting organisations and sports facilities also features heavily in the National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027 (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). Along with the promotion of sport, a common theme across strategic documents for Sport Ireland is the responsibility for the organisation to make sure the benefits of sport and physical activity (PA) are fully understood by the public at large. This in turn brought to light the need to improve internal and external communication in the 2003-2005 strategy. Improving communication has been a goal of Sport Ireland in each strategy since 2005. In 2012-2014 Sport Ireland were providing courses to NGBs and LSPs on communication skills, including web based communications such as social media usage. Promotion of the work of Sport Ireland is listed as an objective to be achieved in strategic plans from 2006 onwards. More recently, marketing and branding of NGBs

were also listed as a main priority. Overall the Sport Ireland strategic priorities relate back to the Sport Ireland Act 2015, each time building on the strategic priorities of the last plan. The overall aims of Sport Ireland can be found in the Sport Ireland Act 2015 (Sport Ireland, 2015). They include; the promotion of sport, the dissemination of information and promoting the use of the sport campus. The achievement of Sport Ireland's goals rely heavily on the work of NGBs and LSPs.

After reviewing all of the Irish Sports Council/Sport Ireland's strategic documents from 2000 (Table 2), there are two emerging strategic goals that have been evident in each plan. They include the promotion of the sport and organisation, and internal and external communication. Additionally, Sport Ireland have incorporated new ways of achieving their priorities, such as recommending using web based media (Sport Ireland, 2014). Web based media featured prominently within Sport Ireland strategic plans from 2012 - 2018. Within the 2012-2014 and 2014 - 2018 strategy documents, web based media is viewed as particularly useful for promotion and communication. Furthermore, the use of web based media for promotion and communication can assist in obtaining sponsorship (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Ashley and Tuten, 2015). Sponsorship has been included as an area of focus in four out of the seven last Sport Ireland strategies. Particularly in the National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027, sponsorship is referred to multiple times with regards to NGBs, especially NGBs with high performance athletes (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). Hence, the researcher has decided to focus on social media usage under three headings: promotion; communication; and sponsorship. These areas will be discussed in greater detail.

Table 2 - Strategy Documents Contents (Promotion, Communication and Sponsorship).

Strategy Document	Promotion	Communication	Sponsorship	Web Based Media
A New Era for Sport	YES	NO	NO	NO
Sport for Life	YES	YES	NO	NO
Building Sport for Life	YES	YES	YES	NO
Building Sport for Life: The Next Phase	YES	YES	YES	NO
2012-2014 Strategy Document	YES	YES	YES	YES
Organisational Capability Building Strategy 2014-2018	YES	YES	NO	YES
National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027	YES	YES	YES	NO

#### 2.4.1 Definition and Context

It is important to define and differentiate between promotion and communication. They are both similar yet do have a distinct difference. Promotion refers to any type of marketing communication<sup>14</sup> that is used to inform or persuade target audiences of the product, service or brand offered by an organisation (Tomše & Snoj, 2014). Promotion is used to increase awareness, create interest, generate sales or create brand loyalty. The definition of communication is revealing or exchanging of information or news and specifically, it is the means of creating a connection between people or places (Oxford University Press, 2018). While both marketing and communications enhance demand, marketing shapes who you are as a brand and differentiates your products and services

<sup>14</sup>Marketing communication includes advertising, direct marketing, branding, packaging, your online presence, printed materials, PR activities, sales presentations, sponsorships, trade show appearances and more.

from the competition (Social Media Today, 2014). In contrast, communication is all interactions, including those that do not have a specific aim of selling or marketing a service or product.

### **2.4.2 Promotion**

Promotion is publicizing a product, service or organisation with the aim of increasing sales or public awareness (The Economic Times, 2016). Promotion of sport and physical activity initiatives can act as a key tool in increasing numbers within sport and physical activity (PA). The promotion of participation in sport is generally the primary objective of NGBs and LSPs, as well as the main objective of Sport Ireland (Sport Ireland, 2015); at recreational level, this is often connected to a range of non-sporting objectives such as health and social capital. The link between sport participation, health and social capital has been used by policy makers such as NGBs and LSPs as part of a rationale for the promotion of mass participation in sports (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). For example in the 2018 - 2027 National Sports Policy, both social capital and health are referred to as possible by products of sport and physical activity (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). In Ireland, each NGB is required by Sport Ireland to have a strategic plan. In this plan NGBs should have a framework to address the promotion of participation in their respective sports (Sport Ireland, 2015).

Currently a number of Irish NGBs and LSPs seem to mainly use traditional methods of promotion. These traditional methods include television, radio<sup>15</sup>, newspapers and newsletters. For organisations such as the big three (Football Association of Ireland, Irish Rugby Football Union and the Gaelic Athletic Association), these methods, particularly television and radio do aid in reaching a wide audience with promotional messages. However, the majority of NGBs represent what is termed minority sports, or those that would not receive much mainstream media attention (Naraine, 2017). Similarly, LSPs do not have the funding or the media attention to constantly have their message put out on these platforms. Naraine (2017) states that these niche sporting organisations must create develop and sustain their own publicity and fan base in order to survive. To generate public awareness of the organisation and the work they do, it is recommended that sports organisations should attempt to use methods outside of traditional media (Naraine, 2017; Eagleman, 2013).

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<sup>15</sup> Mass media outlets such as television and radio are mainly used by bigger NGBs.

Social media provides a platform for these organisations that have struggled to receive much main stream media attention (Thompson et al., 2014). Social media is also a cost effective avenue for these NGBs that typically have a limited budget (Eagleman, 2013). Brown (2003) examined the online marketing activity of sporting organisations in North America. This study used a quantitative methodology with surveys issued to 750 North American sporting organisations. Of the returned surveys, 328 were usable. This gave the study a response rate of 44%. Brown (2003) found that the primary concern of the majority of organisations was to generate awareness of their organisation and provide information about the organisation. The sample group within this study consisted of a mixture of sporting organisations from voluntary to professional, which may have had an impact on results. Although dated, the findings from Brown (2003) are still concurrent with more recent research. Naraine and Parent (2016) focused specifically on Canadian NGBs. A content analysis on tweets from eight Canadian NGBs were examined to find out about the nature of a sporting organisation's social-media activity. It was found that tweets from Canadian NGBs are generally used to promote their athletes and events. As this study only focused on the platform of Twitter, the authors suggested other platforms may be used differently by sporting organisations. In Naraine (2017) this limitation was addressed. Eight different Canadian NSOs were interviewed with an aim to understand the perceived utility of social media within the organisations. It was found that for Canadian NSOs, the use of social media as an additional outlet to promote their organisation added the most value to their organisations. Eagleman (2013) focused on all social media platforms utilised by the sporting organisations within North America. Similar to Naraine and Parent (2016) and Naraine (2017), results illustrated that the majority of NGBs used social media to increase brand awareness and to increase awareness and exposure of their sport. It was also found that the same NGBs did not use their social media accounts for traditional marketing activities such as 'ticket giveaway' competitions. Instead they were more likely to use social media to raise awareness of the organisation and sport through posting pictures and stories. Although there is an absence of research on LSPs, one study, Corthouts, Denys, Thibaut & Scheerder (2019) based in Belgium did examine local sport governing bodies (LSGBs), NGBs and commercial fitness centres social media usage. Corthouts et al. (2019) found that both NGBs and LSGBs posted promotional information, however they were less likely than commercial fitness centres to do this.



The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is an example of an Irish NGB who has noted the contribution of web based media such as social media for the promotion of their league and championships. They suggest that each county should have in place a public relations officer with the necessary skills to exploit all marketing and promotional tools, not just traditional methods of promotion and marketing (Gaelic Athletic Association, 2016). The Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) also use social media for promotion. They run various social media campaigns throughout the year. For example the ‘ShoulderToShoulder’ campaign. This campaign facilitated them in becoming the first Irish NGB with over 1 million followers across their social media platform and led to them winning the Irish Sports Federation Social Media award (Irish Rugby Football Union, 2016). Barry Cunningham, IRFU Digital Marketing Manager, said that their popularity on social media helps to promote grassroots involvement (Irish Rugby Football Union, 2016).

Although the IRFU and GAA by industry standards seem to be using social media effectively for promotion, it is unfair to compare their promotional efforts on social media to the other smaller NGBs and LSPs. The other NGBs, similar to the 29 LSPs, have a much more restricted budget and a smaller work force than the ‘big three’<sup>16</sup>. Nonetheless, this cannot be used as an excuse not to use social media or to fail to promote smaller sporting organisations.

Smaller sporting organisations have seen the promotional benefits of social media outside of Ireland, Tennis New Zealand for example. Previous to 2010, they focused their promotional effort mainly through newsletters and their website. Thompson et al. (2014) created a Facebook page for Tennis New Zealand and ran a promotional contest offering Facebook users the chance to enter a competition to win a prize. They had to like Tennis New Zealand’s Facebook page and answer a tennis trivia question. Their active users increased by 300% going from 108 to 438<sup>17</sup> by the end of three weeks. Their visits grew from 507 to 1374. This is just one example of a small sporting organisation using social media to increase awareness and promote their organisation. Despite this research, The SPEAK Report (2017) highlights that LSPs should promote their activities through combined mediums such as newsletters, booklets, directories and

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<sup>16</sup>The FAI, IRFU and GAA are commonly referred to as the ‘big three’ by persons within the sports industry in the Republic of Ireland.

<sup>17</sup> Although 438 followers would be considered a small following in some sports, this is a significant increase for such a small organisation.

their annual reports. The use of digital mediums such as social media is not mentioned for the purpose of promotion, however it is mentioned for communication which will be discussed under section 2.4.3. Unfortunately, this view on promotion is reflected in Irish NGB and LSP social media pages; a preliminary investigation indicates that overall NGBs and LSPs in Ireland do not seem to be taking full advantage of online media for promotion. This is particularly interesting as the promotion of sport is one of the main purposes of both organisations. Furthermore, social media has been used by other similar organisations in other countries as an effective tool for promotion (Naraine and Parent, 2017). Perhaps this is due to specific barriers to social media usage. The barriers that may be affecting the take up of social media will be discussed in section 2.5.

### **2.4.3 Communication**

Communication lies at the heart of the sports industry. Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals by speaking, writing, or using some other medium. Communication is an important factor in devising, disseminating and pursuing the organisational goals for organisations. It involves informing audiences about timely, frequent and relevant information (Billings et al., 2017).

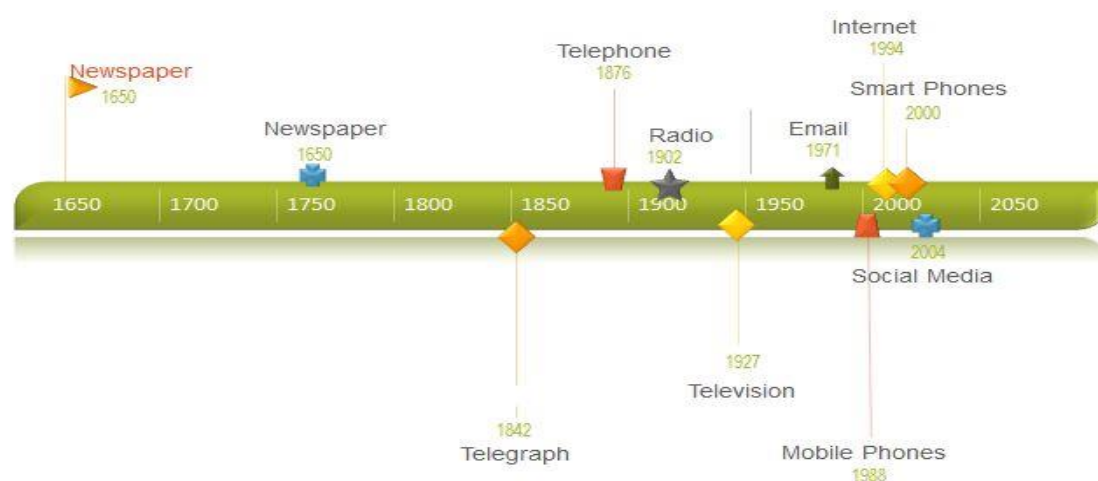
The last twenty years have seen a momentous growth in communications technology, noticeably the internet, mobile phones and social media (Figure 4). This explosion of online communities and other forms of user-generated content is influencing communication and public relation strategies for all organisations not just sporting ones (Luck & Buchanan, 2008). Wright & Hinson (2009) conducted a study on public relations organisations. They surveyed 574 organisations globally. Results showed that 73% of those organisations that participated in the study believe that social media and other emerging media has changed the way in which their clients and organisation communicate. Furthermore, the researchers carried out a twelve year longitudinal study on the changes and impacts associated with the use of social media for public relations organisations. They received a total of 4,306 useable responses throughout the twelve year study, a response rate of 12.9%. From these responses they found that the mean score<sup>18</sup> for those that agree strongly that social media and other emerging media are

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<sup>18</sup> Mean scores throughout this report are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “1” = “Strongly Disagree,” “Very Unimportant,” “Very Infrequently,” etc., and “5” = “Strongly Agree,” “Very Important,” “Very frequently,” etc.” Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the agreement, importance, frequency, etc.

changing the way public relations organisations communicate was 4.44 for the final year of the study (Wright & Hinson, 2017). The mean number for this question in 2006 was 3.27. Up until 2014<sup>19</sup>, the influence of emerging media over traditional forms of media was included as a question on the survey. Results showed that mean scores in 2014 for the question ‘social and other emerging medias influence traditional mainstream media’ were the highest they had been in the study with a mean score of 4.57 (Wright & Hinson, 2014). Moreover, mean scores for the question ‘traditional mainstream media influence on social media and other emerging media’ were the lowest (3.67) they had been throughout the study (Wright & Hinson, 2014). These results are in line with the theory that the influence of traditional media is decreasing (Wright & Hinson, 2017; Wright & Hinson, 2014). The decrease in the influence of traditional media can partly be linked to the way the internet can be used, we have entered web 2.0 where content can be created and consumed instantly.

**Figure 4 - Evolution of Communication**



(Prolog Print Media, 2014).

Web 2.0 is not a new upgraded version of web 1.0 or an evolution in technology. Instead, Web 2.0 represents the shift in how people are using technology (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger & Shapiro, 2012). Web 2.0 is about user generated content, and sharing this content, knowledge and ideas with other likeminded people wherever they are. Each additional user adds value for all users in Web 2.0 (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). For example, users from virtually any part of the world can create and share content on

<sup>19</sup> Due to changes in the new or emerging technologies since the beginning of this research in 2005, a significant number of questions have changed over the years.

particular subjects to Wikipedia pages. The flow of information is no longer just from big companies or governments down, but rather a horizontal revolution in which the flow of information is across people as well (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Previous to Web 2.0, big companies and governments were in control of content put out to the general public (Croteau & Hoynes, 2013). Now, the flow of information is no longer just from big companies or governments down, but rather a horizontal revolution in which the flow of information is across people as well (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). Communication between organisations and consumers is now multi-dimensional.

In Ireland, sporting organisations seem to still be using Web 1.0 communication methods. These methods include email and message boards as well as traditional media. As stated previously in the 2016 SPEAK Report, when discussing information dissemination, newsletters, press releases, directories, and reports are mentioned. The only form of web-based communication method listed is email. These forms of communication are mainly one way, from the organisation down to the consumer or fan. However, in the 2017 SPEAK Report, social media such as Facebook are mentioned. In the 2017 SPEAK Report, social media has been included as a communication method, and according to the report is used more by LSPs than the traditional forms of communication mentioned above. Although social media is mentioned in the report, the traditional forms still feature heavily and are referred to more often through the report.

Irish sporting organisations appear not to have evolved with the times for the most part, and many do not seem to effectively use new opportunities provided by Web 2.0. Sport Ireland and other sporting organisations have noticed the lack of effective communication within the sports industry in Ireland. Indeed, improving internal and external communication has been a goal of Sport Ireland in each strategy since 2005. In 2012-2014, Sport Ireland staff were providing courses to NGBs and LSPs on communication skills, including web based communications. Again in their 2014-2018 strategy, communication skills workshops were identified as an important resource to be provided to NGBs and LSPs. Looking further into the strategy of NGBs in Ireland, communication is a factor that requires attention and improvement. The Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) address the need for the development of proactive communication including incorporating social media at every level from grassroots to national level in their 2013-2017 strategy. Similarly, as part of the GAA's current strategy, they strive to utilise all communication platforms to effectively engage with

stakeholders internally and externally. In fact, communication is an area which the GAA note as a contributing factor to the success of other goals. These goals include; providing greater support for volunteers, to increase player and member participation and to continue to support the growth of the organisation, among others. In order to effectively communicate with the general public, it is recommended that national sporting organisations expand their communication methods (Luck & Buchanan, 2008).

Social media in particular offers a unique communication method to sporting organisations (Eagleman, 2013). Social media presents a cost effective medium that: embraces interactivity, collaboration and co-creation; one-to-many communication; integrates communication and distribution channels; provides opportunities for customisation; and delivers superior speed to the delivery of information communication and feedback (Shilbury, et al., 2014). Social media has emerged as a primary method of communication for many sports and recreation related organisations (Bayne & Cianfrone, 2013). In contrast to traditional media, social networks provide the opportunity for sports organisations to communicate directly with fans (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Hopkins (2013) carried out a study to examine the communication of an Australian Rules Football club in New Zealand's through forums such as Facebook and Twitter. Previous to the study, an end of year member survey completed by 5,000 members indicated that the club were performing 'poorly' in the area of communication, achieving a score of 2.5/10. This led to the formation of a project team to identify the improvements required in the area of communication through the social media channels of Facebook and Twitter. The goal of the project team was to start conversations with followers, to build closer relationships, to share information more effectively and provide a forum for listening to follower's opinions. The project team were in operation for a 12 month period. During this time they engaged with Facebook fans by posting a mixture of high quality content including behind the scenes photos and videos, by encouraging discussion and posting in a humorous and friendly tone. The project team also used Facebook analytic tools on a weekly basis to monitor what type of content their Facebook followers engaged with more as well as the best days and times to post. The member survey for the following year indicated a rating of 8/10 in the communication category. This was an increase of 320% from the previous year. Furthermore, throughout this year membership rose from 43,000 to 48,000 and average match day attendance figures increased from 37,940 to 40,695.

Many athletes, teams and leagues embrace social media as a way of directly talking to their fan base without the need for filtering their messages or releasing them through public relations figures (Pegoraro, 2010). This in turn has been shown to build fan/follower identification (Wallace et al., 2011). This fan/follower identification is evident in a study by Broughton (2010) where results showed that 61% of Major League Baseball (MLB) fans and 55% of National Football League (NFL) fans considered themselves greater fans of the sport since beginning to follow their favourite teams on social media sites. Naturally this type of open communication which peels back the curtain on an athlete's existence, showcasing personality layers never seen at press conferences (Johnson, 2009) is not without controversy. For every good example of social media communication there is also examples of bad practice. For instance, Stephanie Rice, Australian Olympic Swimmer posted an offensive tweet on social media site Twitter. In response to the offensive tweet, Stephanie lost her sponsorship with Jaguar. This is just one example of the importance of best practice when it comes to social media usage and communication.

Jeremy Galbraith, CEO, Europe, Middle East & Africa at Burson-Marsteller said, “sports organisations are discovering powerful new opportunities to engage directly with fans via social media. Social media will continue to become ever more influential for sports governing bodies in years to come, both for engagement with fans and stakeholders, as well as being integral to their commercial strategies” (Burson-Marsteller, 2016. p.1). Although there has been an uptake in social media usage and communication methods within sporting organisations, there has still been little research conducted in this area (Littlefield, 2016).

#### **2.4.4 Sponsorship**

“Sport sponsorship is any commercial agreement by which a sponsor contractually provides financing or other support in order to establish an association between the sponsor’s image, brands, products or property in return for rights to promote this association and/or for granting certain agreed direct or indirect benefits” (Lagae, 2005, p.13). Sponsorship has always been part of the sporting world. In fact, the ‘sponsorship explosion’ occurred in 1983 with the Los Angeles Olympic Games selling \$400 million worth of sponsorship (Grimaldi, 2014). From there, sponsorship moved into the ‘era of added value’. Finally in the 2000s with the rise in internet usage and developments in

technology, the ‘technological era’ was formed. A brief outline of sponsorship history can be seen in Figure 5.

**Figure 5 - The History of Sponsorship**

1B.C.– 1600	1631	1924– 1970	1970– 1984	1984	1990	2000
The Era of Patronage	The Advent of Advertising	The Early Pioneers	The Era of Development	The Sponsorship Explosion	The Era of Added Value	The Technological Era

(Skinner & Rukavina, 2003)

Sponsorship is more commonly associated with commercial sport. This is mainly due to the propensity to attract large audiences not only at each event, but also through the media (traditional and web-based) attached to these activities (Fill, 2013). For example Barclays sponsoring the Premier League. Furthermore, within numerous elite sports contexts, there exists a wide range of sponsorship opportunities. For example in football, organisations usually sponsor gear, players, equipment, stadiums, man of the match, among other elements (Grimaldi, 2014).

With the development of social media has come the development of new channels for sponsorship activation (Meenaghan et al., 2013). Sponsors now understand the value and reach of social media and how it can provide direct marketing opportunities for their brand (Dees, 2011). In the ‘What Sponsors Want’ report, presence on social media was ranked as the second most valuable asset for companies looking to invest in sponsorship. They also found that social media was the channel most used to leverage sponsorship (IEG, 2016). As social media has become ubiquitous, so too has the need to exploit it to increase the advertising, marketing and sponsorship potential of organisations.

Sports in particular have the ability to attract awareness and generate extensive activity from the public on social media. For example, the most tweeted day in 2018 was February 25<sup>th</sup>, the date of the closing ceremonies for the Olympics (Digital Trends, 2018). Sporting organisations, athletes, teams and leagues now have the ability through social media to showcase their attractive attributes and marketability to potential sponsors. In the United States of America (USA) many professional athletes earn most of their income from sponsorship rather than from their actual player salaries (Ribeiro, 2016). For example, tennis player Roger Federer signed a sponsorship deal with Uniqlo

worth €300 million (Sports Illustrated, 2019). Moreover, football star Cristiano Ronaldo secured his sponsors a total of \$176 million in 2016 through his social media platforms alone (Forbes, 2016).

In Ireland, sponsorship and funding is a key strategic area according to the current Marketing and Communications manager with Sport Ireland. In an interview, he states that:

“Although there is a lack of discussion on this in strategic documents from Sport Ireland, it is an important area to consider. NGBs and LSPs are State funded organisations. They receive a specific amount of money from the government each year. This funding however, is not substantial enough to support the organisation alone. Additional funding is sometimes required and sponsorship is an area in which a percentage of extra funding can be achieved”.

This view is reflected in the National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027 (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). As mentioned previously, both NGBs and LSPs in Ireland rely heavily on government funding and grants. However it is the responsibility of each organisation to find external funding streams to increase the capabilities of the organisation and to ensure its longevity. Thus, it is recommended that NGBs and LSPs consider the possibilities of sponsorship as an additional funding stream (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). Sponsorship generally is an untapped area with NGBs and LSPs, greater effort should be made to benefit from this growing market.

Cricket Ireland is a good example of an organisation that has used social media for sponsorship. During their off season, from October to March, Cricket Ireland will have no media coverage. Cricket Ireland will however be active on social media and online through that period. They are ‘adding value’ to sponsors within it. Another sponsorship strategy Cricket Ireland has undertaken during their season is live streaming matches. This use of social media is perhaps a reason why Cricket Ireland have two English sponsors, a sponsor for national academy and a 10 year sponsorship deal that is quite rare in such context. With the introduction of social media platforms such as Facebook Live and Periscope, this is now possible for any sporting organisation. It is particularly well suited for niche NGBs who do not receive much main stream media coverage outside of Olympic times. Bill Yole, social media coordinator with the Brumbies Super Rugby Franchise mentioned that they use their social media with the view of getting it sponsored in the future and that this method has been successful for them thus far



(Sharpe, Kunkel, Scott & Beaton, 2017). To do this, the Brumbies social media team plan content in advance. They have set days that specific campaigns go out, they keep potential sponsors in mind and ensure that their social media is attractive for possible investments.

When evaluating an organisation as a prospective partner, potential sponsors are looking at the social media presence of specific organisations. For example, how many followers they have, what their engagement is like, what messages they promote, what is the quality of their content. They can then use this information based on the organisations social media pages to make relevant sponsorship decisions (Dees, 2011). Sponsors need to go where the fans are most engaged (Chan-Olmsted & Wolter, 2017). In order for sporting organisations in Ireland to utilise their social media for sponsorship or endorsement activation, they must be using it effectively and engaging with their followers.

#### **2.4.5 Additional Organisational Goals to Consider**

Although this research is focusing on the organisational objectives of communication, promotion and sponsorship, there are other social media goals which may be considered useful from the perspective of NGBs and LSPs. Firstly, as NGBs and LSPs generally have few employees, volunteers make up a large percentage of the workforce in this sector. Previous studies have linked relationship building with potential volunteers as a social media opportunity (Hambrick & Svensson, 2015). Hambrick & Svensson (2015) examined the role of social media in sport for development organisations based on the continent of Africa. Participants indicated that social media is frequently the initial point of contact between the organisation and potential volunteers. Similarly, Whillans (2016) suggests using social media to increase youth participation levels in Canadian voluntary organisations. Sutton (2016) suggested that the Lions New Zealand Charity should use social media to target family members and friends of those already engaging with the charity online. This was found to be especially useful when targeting the 30 – 65 age range. Thus, it could be argued that social media can be used for both volunteer recruiting and increasing membership. These areas were not selected as the main focus of this research as they are potential returns of effective social media communication and promotion.

## **2.5 Barriers to Social Media**

### **2.5.1 Barriers**

Despite the noted benefits of social media, many organisations experience barriers to social media usage. A lack of training and management and insufficient support has been highlighted as a major barrier (Abeza et al., 2019; Michaelidou, et al., 2011). The cost (in relation to time) has also been cited as a major barrier to the use of social media in organisations (Saari & Tuominen, 2016; Antheunis, et al., 2013; Michaelidou, et al., 2011). Eagleman (2013) highlighted how sporting organisations in North America perceived the following three main challenges of social media usage as relevant; maintaining message control; finding balance between too much and too little usage on their social media accounts, and monitoring fan comments. In addition, a lack of control and the allocation of resources have also been cited as a challenge faced by sporting organisations (Naraine 2017; Abeza, et al., 2013).

### **2.5.2 Resources - Time/ Human**

Setbacks with the allocation of organisational resources have been mentioned as a barrier to effective social media by many academics (Naraine, 2017; Thompson et al., 2014; Abeza et al., 2013; Eagleman 2013). All eight Canadian sporting organisation directors interviewed in Abeza et al. (2013) stated that the main barrier to effective social media use was the securing of adequate organisational resources to allocate to social media activities. They suggested that entering social media is easy, however, to run their organisations social media channels in a professional manner appropriate resources are necessary. In particular the resource of time has been cited as a major barrier to the use of social media in organisations despite the noted benefits (Saari & Tuominen, 2016; Antheunis et al., 2013; Michaelidou et al., 2011).

NGBs have discussed the difficulty in finding time to provide updates and to respond to the inquiries received through social media (Eagleman, 2013). A study by Thompson et al. (2014) analysed the development and utilisation of a social media strategy for an NGB, Tennis New Zealand (TNZ). A mixed methodology approach was employed using a combination of content analysis and qualitative interviews with six employees of TNZ. A lack of time was found to be a major barrier to the effective use of social media for small sporting organisations (Thompson et al., 2014). Interviewees stated that

the time commitment needed to respond and engage with followers in real time, inside and outside of business hours is their main barrier to social media usage. One limitation of this study is that it focused on one organisation. It is suggested that a similar study be carried out in different geographical areas with a range of sporting organisations with diverse financial and media support (Thompson et al., 2014).

Eagleman (2013) studied the use of social media by NGBs in North America. One respondent stated that “social media is an extremely time-consuming endeavour because we truly believe in the ‘social’ aspect. We monitor the comments and respond to people. We read questions posted and we answer. We’re very interactive and that takes a lot of time” (Eagleman, 2013, p. 439). Saari & Tuominen (2016) investigated the use of social media pages and the effectiveness of social media strategies in Nordic ice hockey clubs. The teams selected for this research all used the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and they all played on the highest tier in their country (either Finland or Sweden). Semi structured interviews were conducted with the marketing and communications managers. The time consumption of running social media was mentioned as a barrier by the ice hockey clubs. Although the majority of them have a full time member of staff dedicated to social media, they still do not have the time needed to do everything they want. This research partially contradicts O’Shea and Alonso (2012) with the suggestion that social media is not as cost effective as it would initially seem; the amount of time spent on updating and running the accounts can be expensive in terms of employee salaries (Saari & Tuominen, 2016). This viewpoint is supported by Naraine (2017) who completed a study on Canadian NSOs to discover the perceptions of social media among stakeholders. Personnel from ten organisations were interviewed for this research. All ten organisations stated that the allocation of resources, in particular time, and money was the biggest challenge associated with the use of social media. Moreover, this view was coherent among both large NSOs and small NSOs. Results from Abeza, O’Reilly & Reid (2013) concur with Thompson et al. (2014), Eagleman (2013), Saari & Tuominen (2016) and Naraine (2017).

### **2.5.3 Issues with Control**

Social media consumers and users have greater power over the dissemination and consumption of information than ever before (Ryan & Jones, 2012). Unlike traditional forms of media, the timing, content and frequency of the conversations on social media

are outside the direct control of marketers (Saari & Tuominen, 2016). In addition, preferences and decisions are becoming more influenced by the comments and advice of other online community members (Brodie et al., 2013). As a result, a lack of control has been cited as a barrier faced by sporting organisations (Abeza et al., 2013). Abeza et al. (2013) interviewed directors from eight sporting organisations in North America. Seven of the eight stated that consumers are more in charge of the content of marketing messages than ever before, and managers have no direct control of the content, timing, and frequency of the conversations. Similarly, Eagleman (2013) highlighted how NGBs in North America perceived maintaining message control to be one of the three main challenges of social media usage. Furthermore, in Saari & Tuominen (2016) almost all clubs interviewed stated that a loss of control is a barrier to social media usage in their sporting organisation. The topic of negative comments, “banter” and heated discussions mentioned by the interviewees is consistent with McCarthy et al. (2014) who argue that football clubs in the United Kingdom accept that this form of behaviour is typical between football supporters. This type of behaviour is difficult to manage and respond to for sporting organisations, there is no set way to control it (Saari & Tuominen, 2016). The aspect of ‘losing control’ over information or simply not having control over how information is discussed, interpreted and disseminated by individuals and entities outside the organisation seems to be a major barrier to social media usage in the sporting world (O’Shea & Alsonso, 2012). With regards to Irish sporting organisations, there are no identifiable studies on the barriers faced by organisations using social media hence it is not known if lack of control affects NGBs and LSPs.

#### **2.5.4 Insufficient Social Media Knowledge**

The challenges of resources and control in social media can be further heightened by a lack of knowledge and/or training in social media. Thompson et al. (2014) suggests that a lack of training and knowledge of social media is particularly true in the sports industry. Thompson et al. (2014) observe that there appears to be a lack of clarity about what social media should be used for, how best to use it, and how to add value to the organisation through it. It is suggested that sporting organisations should have a tailored social media strategy to help them effectively use their social media platforms (Thompson et al., 2014). In order for social media to be successful, it is imperative that those associated with an organisation’s marketing communications have the appropriate knowledge, understanding and/or training in this emerging field (Thompson et al.,

2014). Without this, inadequate expectations and inappropriate goals/targets are likely to be set (if set at all).

A similar study was carried out on the opportunities and challenges presented by social media to sporting organisations (Abeza, O'Reilly & Seguin, 2019). However this study focuses on multiple organisations in different leagues in North America. Again, semi structured interviews were conducted with 26 managers from the four North American major leagues; National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), and Major League Baseball (MLB). It found that social media is constantly adapting and these adaptations require staff to have an understanding of the social media platform and its update. Staff must be constantly learning and teaching themselves about social media, failing to do this will affect their effectiveness and efficiency on their social media platforms (Abeza et al., 2019). Outside of North America, Abeza et al. (2013) examined the opportunities and challenges facing Canadian sporting organisations when using social media. They used a similar methodology to Thompson et al. (2014) and Abeza et al. (2019), carrying out interviews with 8 Canadian sporting organisation managers. Results indicate that there is difficulty in finding a member of staff who is fully trained or equipped to handle all of their social media due to a lack of knowledge in this area within the organisations. The finding from the above research would suggest that a lack of knowledge and training in social media is a challenge for sporting organisations. Social media knowledge and training are considered essential in order to deliver an effective social media presence. To date, the researcher could not find any research on challenges related to lack of training and/or knowledge of social media in an Irish setting.

Although there are barriers and challenges associated with social media, it is of course plausible to assume that the opportunities outweigh these challenges. Organisations should aim to use the potential of social media more effectively and efficiently as a marketing and communication tool rather than perceiving it as a hindrance or something that should be avoided. Furthermore, employing a social media strategy, or having best practice guidelines for using social media can aid in eliminating or reducing the effects of these barriers (Thompson et al., 2014).

## **2.6 Best Practice in Social Media**

In Ireland, NGBs and LSPs stand poised to benefit from social media with regards to areas such as promotion, communication and sponsorship. Most of these organisations do not have extensive budgets that allow for the full utilisation of traditional marketing outlets such as paid television and radio. Notwithstanding time commitments, social media is a relatively inexpensive avenue that these organisations can use to increase awareness, reach more people, and maintain public interest in non-Olympic years when traditional media coverage of these organisations is typically at its lowest (Eagleman, 2013). NGBs and LSPs now have the opportunity to directly communicate with their consumers/fans, to promote their organisation and their message to a wider, more specific target market, and at the same time increase the chances of sponsorship through social media (Whitburn, 2018; Eagleman, 2013).

Although there are many noted benefits of social media, many sporting organisations in Ireland for the most part do not seem to be engaging effectively in social media use (Appendix E<sup>20</sup>). Furthermore, those that do, do not seem to specifically follow best practice guidelines. For this reason, in this section, recommendations for best practice in social media for sporting organisations will be discussed. Although there seems to be a lack of social media best practice recommendations in academic literature (Abeza et al., 2019), three studies were chosen to explore in further detail. Table 3 below presents an overview of research studies that consider best practice:

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<sup>20</sup> Information gathered in December 2017.

Table 3 - Best Practice Recommendations

<b>Kucharski (2017)</b>	<b>Effing and Spil (2016)</b>	<b>Thompson et al. (2014)</b>
Specific job title and roles for those in charge of social media	Target audience	Clear understanding of how social media aligns with the organisation
Have a specific target audience	Channel choice	How and by whom the social media strategy will be managed
Have a strategy that reaches the specific audience	Goals	What their fans expect out of their social media experience
	Resources	Clear guidelines for how success will be measured
	Content activities	
	Monitoring	

### 2.6.1 Social Media Remit

Kucharski (2017) completed qualitative interviews with employees from five Division 1 Men's US Rugby teams in the Professional Rugby Organisation (PRO). The aim of the study was to make recommendations on suggested best practice for social media use and policy in professional and club-level rugby organisations. From these five interviews, it was found that job descriptions and roles aid in an organisation's overall efficacy and effectiveness both on and offline. Kucharski (2017) explains that before you even hire the person who will ultimately have the responsibility of running or controlling an organisation's social media, a set job description will reduce the time required for training. Furthermore, a job description with specific roles allows personnel to understand what needs to be accomplished and how to accomplish the task. In agreement with this, Thompson et al. (2014) states that there needs to be a person responsible for managing social media channels. Organisations may struggle to run social media in a professional manner without adequate and dedicated staffing resources (Abeza et al., 2013). For example, Bill Yole mentions how during the Brumbies Super Rugby teams competition season, social media is a seven day a week operation. On game days he needs to be at the venue four hours before the game starts to provide behind the scene information, he then provides live updates throughout the game and when the game has ended he writes pieces to be released immediately. Without a dedicated staff member the Brumbies Super Rugby team would most likely not have the social media presence, and the success it has today (Sharpe et al., 2017).

### 2.6.2 Establishing Measurable Goals

Setting measurable goals is considered a crucial step to successful social media interaction (Effing & Spil, 2016; Thompson et al., 2014). Effing and Spil (2016) conducted a study on 21 organisations and their respective social media strategies to create a framework for social media strategies. They found that there are seven key elements to successful social media usage. The study involved a systematic literature review and a comprehensive analysis of the social media strategies of the 21 organisations. One of these key elements is goal setting. These goals need to be directly related to the organisation's overall strategic goals (Gotterbarn, 2012). Effing & Spil (2016) found that organisations did not have social media goals aligned with their strategic objectives. This leads to organisations having no clear purpose for their social media and is not considered best practice.

One of the recommended ways of setting social media goals is by using the SMART strategy (Hootsuite, 2015). SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound. The SMART Strategy has been a successful goal setting strategy for a long time. It can easily be related to social media goals. Table 4 contains an example of SMART goal setting framed within the context of a social media strategy (Tuten & Solomon, 2017):

Table 4- SMART Goal Setting

Specific	I will increase my Twitter following by 100 likes by January 1 <sup>st</sup> 2018 by tweeting at least once every 24 hours and following one new page a day.
Measurable	Every month I will measure my success by evaluating how many followers I have gained or lost. From this evaluation I will readjust my actions to achieve my goal.
Attainable	This goal is challenging, but also realistic.
Relevant	This goal will help in spreading awareness of my organisation.
Time-bound	The end date for this goal is the 1 <sup>st</sup> of January 2018.

(Hootsuite, 2015).

### 2.6.3 Resources

Numerous studies on the use of social media in sporting organisations have brought forward the point of organisational capacity issues (Whitburn, 2018; Naraine and



Parent, 2017; Saari & Tuominen, 2016; Thompson et al., 2014; Abreza et al., 2013). Consequently, it has been suggested that it is best practice to consider the resources an organisation has available before creating a social media account (Thompson et al., 2014; Shaltoni & West, 2010). Moreover, Effing and Spil (2016) suggest that the success of social media activities will largely depend on the efficient use of organisational resources. Organisations need to ensure a sustainable social media presence across all their online profiles. Their ability to achieve this needs to align with the resources available to support it. These resources can be broken down into time, money and staff.

Many NGBs and LSPs in Ireland are generally small organisations. Like TNZ, they may not have the resources of time, money, or staff to provide dedicated social media personnel to maintain an organisation's online presence (Thompson et al., 2014). For this reason, it is recommended best practice that organisations consider the resources they have available and are willing to devote to social media activities. Organisations should allocate time in advance for social media activities to help ensure they are keeping up to date with their online profiles. Although this can be difficult due to the instant nature of social media, it can act as a barrier to inconsistent social media usage (Thompson et al., 2014). Furthermore, staff should know whose responsibility social media is, and in turn receive the appropriate training required. Additionally, organisations should try to generate resources via external funding streams to increase the amount of resources they have available for social media (Whitburn, 2018).

#### **2.6.4 Reaching a Target Audience**

At the end of 2018, there were 210 active social media networks globally, and this number is growing (Statista, 2018). With the demands imposed from running core business activities, there is simply not enough time to be present on all. For this reason, it is advised to be more selective when choosing which social media networks to maintain. The right channel for an organisation will mainly depend on the target group of the organisation (Effing and Spil, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie (2008) state that organisations need to decide their priority populations, to identify, isolate and know which social media channels these populations use and access. There is no point in using a social media channel that will not target the selected population. The U.S. Army are a good example of this. In 2007, they undertook an initiative to reach the Hispanic community. They decided to do this

through the social media network Univision rather than the more popular Facebook. Univision had at the time, the largest population of Hispanic users. This gave the U.S. Army greater access to their target audience than any other social media site (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Similarly, Saari & Tuominen (2016) found that Nordic Ice Hockey clubs target different audiences through different social media networks. All hockey clubs interviewed argued that Facebook is mostly for families and features more of an older generation than other social media channels; Twitter is seen as more of a discussion forum with more interaction with followers and Instagram is mainly used to target the younger fans. Saari & Tuominen (2016) suggest that knowing your target audience and the channels that are best to reach them can decrease the chance of wasted circulation. Wasted circulation occurs when the right message does not reach the right audience.

If an organisation is unsure of their target group or what social media channel they use they should do their research by looking up effective strategies used by similar organisations (WPCurve, 2016), noting what social media channels they use and which channels they receive the most engagement on. Also consideration is warranted in terms of the types of networks available, for example, micro-blogging sites and media based sites (Table 1). It is recommended to make sure that the networks selected are the ones with the greatest chance of achieving the organisation's social media objectives (Effing and Spil, 2016).

### **2.6.5 Content**

Social media encompass highly interactive platforms where users create, share and discuss user generated content. Previous literature on social media fan engagement showed that there were two main concepts essential to creating an online environment that fans respond to: (1) sharing quality and relevant content, and (2) inciting comments (Smith, 2009). A high frequency of posts, a mixture of content types (i.e., photos, videos), and creating a posting style that is open, warm, humorous and personable has been proposed to give followers quality and relevant information (Smith, 2009). Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) suggest that organisations should also aim to post content that represent different degrees of interactivity and vividness. Vividness can be described as the degree to which content stimulates the senses of a viewer. Interactivity refers to the degree in which a viewer can engage with and influence the content. For example, a video would be considered higher in vividness than a photo but a photo may be

considered higher in interactivity than a video. Content that is rated highly in vividness and interactivity should be used on social media platforms.

Organisations need to give their followers reason to interact with them (Warner et al., 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This involves more than just selling to them. The first thing organisations must do is listen to their followers to find out what they would like to talk about or be informed on and what they might find valuable, interesting and enjoyable. Thompson et al. (2014) found success from this when deciding on what type of content should be posted on the TNZ Facebook page. Via feedback received on a Facebook post asking followers what they wanted to see, TNZ followers expressed a desire for a range of different post content to be presented. Furthermore, Facebook's Insights data showed higher levels of follower engagement with the page when post content was mixed, and interaction numbers increased. Social media content should spark conversations, create discussion, encourage participation, entertain and encourage socialization (Achen, 2016). Organisations using social media as another way to mass market are wasting the potential to use social media to interact with and develop relationships with their followers (Achen, 2016). Best practice guidelines suggest that ending status with a question, adding personal comments and replying as often as possible encourages greater discussion and interaction (Smith, 2009).

Organisations should also consider what type of content they post. The type of content an organisation posts can really affect follower's perceptions. It can also make or break a successful social media strategy. For example, Thompson et al. (2014) found that behind the scenes content had higher statistics on Facebook insights such as post reach, sharing and engagement. This content was exclusive to their social media channels, giving followers an incentive to follow. Similarly, Dolan, Conduit, Fahy & Goodman (2017) proposed providing exclusive content to followers to aid in making followers feel special. Furthermore, avoiding relevant and original content is also likely to lead to customer attrition from official sites and to limit the chance for building a relationship with followers (Wallace et al., 2011). Although recommended as best practice, finding the balance between speed, creativity, and accuracy of content has been listed as a challenge to social media usage when there is no dedicated resources. Organisations must ensure that they have the capacity to provide this higher quality content. Therefore, it is suggested that organisations consider carefully the content that is presented to followers to ensure it promotes continuous engagement and conversation

and that in turn they have the resources to facilitate this (Dolan et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2014; Abeza et al., 2013).

Thompson et al. (2014) proposed a number of content strategies at the end of the study to help increase engagement with sports fans. These strategies included (1) obtaining content from local, national and international bodies, in particular any events that may be of interest; (2) showcasing special offers that certain retailers or companies have for equipment relating to the sport in question; (3) having athletes or ambassadors of the sport provide exclusive content, such as photos, training tips and blog entries; (4) feature quizzes or competitions with the option of providing prizes for the best performance; and (5) encouraging followers to send in pictures of themselves when they are participating in the sport, attending an event or doing something that may be of interest to other followers.

Organisations may consider creating a 'content calendar'. This calendar sets out when different pieces of content are to be posted on each channel (Barnes, 2014). Content calendars can help with strategies and social media campaigns. Having a content calendar for social media can save time by planning ahead. Furthermore, it can help with planning content around events that may be of particular interest to followers and helps gets organisations in the routine of posting consistently (MailChimp, 2016). A content calendar can also aid with ensuring content types and forms are varied to keep content interesting and engaging. Although a content calendar will help structure social media and ensure there is consistent posts, the nature of social media will usually involve being flexible and providing some ad hoc posts depending on unplanned news, activities or situations that may arise (Sharpe et al., 2017).

Another consideration is content frequency. Social media does not have a 'one size fits all' approach; however, there are best practice guidelines for post frequency based around follower numbers, organisational goals, engagement and consistency. For example, on Facebook if an organisation has over 10,000 followers, posting twice daily is suggested (Social Report, 2018). If there is less than 10,000 followers it is recommended that posting a maximum of once per day is ideal for Facebook (Social Report, 2018). The goals of your organisation will also be a factor in your posting frequency that is, increasing engagement versus increasing click through rates (Social Report, 2018). On Twitter, it has been recommended that posting 3-4 times per day is optimum (IBM, 2018). However, rather than focusing on post frequency, Twitters

current algorithm is more likely to give exposure to tweets that have higher levels of engagement (Social Media Today, 2018). Therefore, it is suggested that organisations post content that is of interest to their followers and engage with their followers on the platform (Social media Today, 2018). Instagram works differently to both Facebook and Twitter. On Instagram, posting frequency is not important. What is important is consistency of post frequency (Sendible Insights, 2019). If an organisation posts 20+ times per week on Instagram that is fine, as long as it is consistent. If it goes from posting 20+ times per week to posting five times per week, this will most likely generate less engagement and in turn lose followers.

#### **2.6.6 Social Media Analytics**

Once organisations set objectives, they should be monitored and evaluated throughout the year (Thompson et al., 2014). Hoffman and Fodor (2010) recommend that organisations measure and track consumer investments rather than just investments in sales and money when using social media. Consumer investments can be defined as the consumer behaviour on social media, for example page visits and mentions. As NGBs and LSPs are not for profit organisations, these types of metrics are important indicators of consumer interaction and should be monitored and evaluated. Thompson et al. (2014) suggests using standard software tools (e.g. Google Analytics, Facebook Insights). Basic analytics can still give an organisation an idea of what they are doing well and what could be improved on (Lithium, 2016). Thompson et al. (2014) found that the most important metrics for TNZ were; the quality of the content, click through rate, shares and cost per acquisition. A study on the National Basketball Association (NBA) teams digital use in North America also reiterates that social media metrics such as ‘click through rate’ and time spent on page are the key to their success and that social media offers the opportunity to develop different, but complimentary return on investment (ROI) metrics (Pfahl, 2012). Monitoring and evaluation of social media is a crucial step and may help organisations gain support to secure an appropriate budget for resources like technology tools and team personnel and in the right conditions can help prove that organisations are adding value to their activities (Lithium, 2016).

#### **2.6.7 Use Advertisements**

As mentioned earlier, paid advertising is almost essential to social media success in 2019 (Neil Patel, 2018). In the early days of social media sites such as Facebook, organisations could reach their target market by being consistent and creative. Whilst

being consistent and creative are still essential, money is also now a key ingredient (Neil Patel, 2018). According to Neil Patel (2018) on average only 6% of followers see organic posts of the organisations they follow. Facebook intentionally restricts posts that are organic, they want people to pay to reach their market. Before implementing a paid advertisement, there are also best practice guidelines to follow that relate to all the previous points under best practice. An organisation should know what they are trying to achieve through the paid advert, who they are targeting, the financial resources they have available for this and the measurements they will use to evaluate the paid advert once it is finished (Neil Patel, 2018).

These best practice guidelines may be useful to help develop successful practice in the use of social media platforms. Although NGBs and LSPs are a unique part of the sporting market, a “one size fits all” approach to social media should be avoided. Each individual NGB and LSP must understand what they want from social media and what their consumers want from social media (Thompson et al., 2014). Each organisation will have a different recipe for success. Therefore, guidelines presented are often just a basic starting point, and will have to be adjusted to work effectively within each individual organisation through constant evaluation and monitoring.

## **2.7 Conclusion and Rationale**

In Ireland, sports promotion and communication is the responsibility of the respective NGBs and LSPs. Due to the growing popularity of social media, it is recommended that NGBs and LSPs should invest significant time and resources to increase the possibility of achieving organisational goals (Filo, Lock & Karg, 2015). However, after conducting a preliminary online examination of NGBs and LSPs social media pages, this does not appear to be the case (Appendix E and G). Despite the numerous amount of academic literature providing evidence to support social media as a viable marketing tool, there is no publication provided by any of the 65 NGBs, 29 LSPs or Sport Ireland on how social media can be used for communication, promotion or sponsorship. Some Irish sporting organisations do have a social media policy with a focus on child protection and ethics, however these do not address the organisational goals that can be achieved through social media. Comparably, other studies have highlighted that those sporting organisations that do use social media currently have considerable disparity between their current social media practice and best practice (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Saari & Tuominen, 2016). Although there is much literature supporting social media as

a marketing tool that can be used to achieve organisational goals, there has been limited research regarding the challenges faced by sporting organisations associated with social media. Yet it has been noted that sports organisations are dependent on social media for communication and information delivery purposes due to its national and global importance to society (Abeza et al., 2019).

Accordingly, the use of social media by sporting organisations needs to be researched in more detail. For fans and participants to avail of a more favourable online experience, sporting organisations must actively engage with social media (Abeza et al., 2019). Individual's expectations concerning communication from organisations have been altered by popular social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. For a sporting organisation to take advantage of the opportunities associated with technological trends and to facilitate goals associated with sports development, they should adapt a competent online presence via social media platforms (Eagleman, 2013). Given that the NGBs and LSPs in Ireland are the key delivery agencies of sports development and policies, it is crucial that these agencies engage with social media using best online practice to sustain and promote the development of sport. Therefore, it is essential that research has as its primary focus how NGBs and LSPs are currently using social media to achieve their strategic goals and to further examine the barriers they face with regards to social media usage. To date, there has been no national research conducted in the area of NGBs and LSPs social media usage. This study sought to research current practice and recommended best practice in relation to the use of social media usage by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland. It also aimed to examine the use of social media platforms to achieve organisational goals. Furthermore, it attempts to evaluate the perceived and actual barriers faced by personnel in NGBs and LSPs in Ireland concerning social media use. The following chapter will now outline the methodologies employed in this research.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology



### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to collect data on current practice related to social media usage by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland and to investigate recommended best practice for social media use by organisations leading and managing sports participation and development. This research study also examined the use of social media in achieving organisational goals specific to sports development contexts. Furthermore, it evaluated the perceived and actual barriers faced by personnel in NGBs and LSPs in Ireland concerning social media use.

Within this section, the research methodology will be outlined and discussed with the intention of providing justification for the selected research approach and method. The use of a combined approach that included qualitative and quantitative research methods within this research study will be described and rationalised. The data collection and analysis processes will also be explained. Finally, the ethical considerations pertaining to the research study will be discussed.

#### **3.2 Research Aims and Questions**

##### **3.2.1 Research Aims**

This research examines current practice in relation to social media usage by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland and seeks to investigate recommended best practice relevant to the use of social media to help with achieving specific organisational goals with particular reference to promotion and communication. Furthermore, it evaluates the perceived and actual barriers faced by personnel in NGBs and LSPs in Ireland concerning social media use.

##### **3.2.2 Research Questions**

The specific research questions relevant to this study include:

1. What is current social media practice among NGBs and LSPs?
2. What organisational goals do NGBs and LSPs hope to achieve through the use of social media platforms?
3. What are the perceived and actual barriers to use of social media by NGBs and LSPs?

4. What is considered best practice in the use of social media from the perspective of a key informant?

### **3.3 Research Approach**

It was crucial that adequate and appropriate methodologies were utilised in all phases of the current research. After conducting an audit of previous related research, various methodologies were deemed suitable for use. The researcher could find no previous studies focusing on this topic based on the same population in Ireland. This led to Phase One of the research, where a key informant was interviewed in order to gain an in-depth insight into the topic and the research study population. This interview was then used to inform the adaption of a previously used research tool designed by the Council of Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) for Phase Two of this study. Phase Three involved a further ten semi structured interviews with a sub-sample of the initial population sample. The full implementation of these approaches will be outlined later on within this chapter.

#### **3.3.1 Triangulation**

This research pursued a triangulation approach and strategy with a total of two methodological tools being used within the three phases of this research. Triangulation is the combination of two or more data methods used to highlight divergent viewpoints and provide further insights into a topic (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). Academics focusing on similar topics related to social media usage within organisations have used triangulation methodology in their research (Hambrick & Svensson, 2015; Burch, Giannoulakis & Brgoch, 2016; O'Hallarn, Morehead & Pribesh, 2016; Gibbs, et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2014).

The aim of using triangulation is to decrease the deficiencies and biases that may occur from using just a single method (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It also allows the researcher to counteract the possible weaknesses of a method with the strengths of another (Sarantakos, 2012). This, in turn, helps to cultivate the knowledge received and strengthens test validity (Hussein, 2009). It has been suggested that triangulation enables the researcher to increase the depth and understanding of a study (Flick, 2006). Mertens and Hesse-Biber (2012) suggest that the use of numerous sources of information will help to both certify and improve the clarity of the research findings.

The use of triangulation provided the researcher with a great deal of flexibility in how the current research was conducted, while enabling a comprehensive data set to be gathered. Essentially, the research protocol put forward was designed to encompass the overall aim of the research study whilst facilitating a more vigorous analysis on multiple points of interest within the research.

### **3.3.2 Quantitative and Qualitative Research**

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in this research. What follows is a brief discussion on the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods, specifically the motivations for a mixed methods approach as employed in this research study.

Quantitative research is objective and the researcher is passive in the research. Conclusions in quantitative research are formed based on deductive reasoning. Measuring variables and producing figures is the main purpose of quantitative research (Creswell, 2013). This type of data can be drawn from surveys, questionnaires and experiments. In the context of this primary research, a comprehensive questionnaire was adapted and administered.

Qualitative research is gathered from direct observations in contexts such as interviews. This research is more subjective in context and allows the researcher to become more active in the research while developing a conclusion from particular instances.

According to Sarantakos (2012) quantitative and qualitative research use different assumptions about the world, hence, they use different approaches to understanding social reality. Within a quantitative approach, the objectives, design, sample, and the questions planned for the respondent are all predetermined. In contrast, a qualitative approach is more unstructured allowing flexibility in these aspects of the process (Kumar, 2014). The main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is the treatment of data, rather than the research methods (Creswell, 2014). Statistical methods are used in quantitative research to show relationships between variables. Whereas observation and written description are primarily used in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to Bazeley and Jackson (2013), qualitative data in many cases is also converted into quantitative statistics. This is achieved by coding data in a manner in which they can be statistically analysed. Quantitative and qualitative data present different characteristics and different techniques for their analysis (Hussein,

2015). Although the research process for quantitative and qualitative research is similar, the data collection methods, procedures for data processing and analysis and the style of communication of the findings differentiate both approaches (Kumar, 2014).

It has been noted that a combination of both approaches is often necessary and beneficial (Bryman & Bell, 2015). When the two study methods are combined, it is known as a mixed method research. Mixed methods research has been defined as a procedure for collecting and analysing data using a combination of elements from qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Creswell, 2014; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). When analysing both forms of research it is evident that they both have valid positive functions, yet they equally have short comings. Combining the two approaches can help overcome deficiencies of each approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, the mixed method approach enables the researcher to explore a particular topic area from a variety of perspectives, focusing on various issues, collecting different types of data, analysing this data using differing methods and interpreting results from a number of different aspects (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Research has shown that for a more validated and comprehensive methodology, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data is preferred (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2012).

While a vast amount of research supports a mixed methods approach, some researchers argue that quantitative and qualitative methodologies should not be mixed in research (Thurmond, 2001). Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark and Green (2006) suggests that quantitative and qualitative methodologies are incompatible due to their different paradigms. The quantitative paradigm is of a positivistic nature. The ontological position is that there is one truth, regardless of the researcher's perspective or belief (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Epistemologically speaking, it also assumes the researcher is separate from and not affecting the outcomes of research (Scotland, 2012). In contrast, qualitative methodologies are founded upon interpretivism and constructivism. From an ontological perspective there are multiple realities and truths subjective to ones construct of reality. Epistemologically, there is no access to reality independent of our minds (Smith, 1983). In reference to these incompatible paradigms, Morgan (2007) asserts that the methodologies cannot be combined without violating philosophical principles.

However, other researchers have maintained that they see no issues integrating the two methodologies. This cohort of academics recognise the capability of the approaches whilst also acknowledging their differences (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). They accept that such an approach is possible using a pragmatic paradigm. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggests that research methods should be mixed in ways that offer the best possible opportunity for answering research questions and that the most suitable paradigm for this is pragmatism. Pragmatism is not grounded to any one philosophy or reality, instead it focuses on the what and how of the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Data collection and analysis methods are chosen based on those which are most likely to offer the insights into the research questions, with no loyalty to one particular philosophical view. Corresponding to the research questions in this study, the researcher advocates the pragmatic paradigm. It is the researchers belief that differences in epistemological beliefs should not stop a quantitative researcher from using data collection methods typically associated with qualitative research and vice versa (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Having taken this into consideration, this research employs two forms of data collection in a three-phase methodology.

### **3.4 Research Design**

This research employed two forms of data collection in a three-phase methodology: one semi-structured interview with a key informant; a questionnaire; and ten further semi-structured interviews with six NGB representatives and four LSP representatives.

The three phases of research took place over a six-month period from November 2016 until April 2017. The first qualitative phase took place at the Sport Ireland headquarters with a key informant in both social media and sports communication and promotion. This phase was conducted to assist the researcher in the initial understanding of best practice when using social media to achieve organisational goals. The information gathered from this interview was then used to adjust the questionnaire intended for use in the quantitative phase.

The quantitative research was conducted via an online questionnaire tool Survey Monkey. This phase of research was used to get an overall view of social media practice in sporting organisations in Ireland.

The second qualitative phase of research involved interviewing ten individuals who have knowledge or experience of using social media within their respective sporting

organisation. This comprised of six interviews with personnel working in NGBs and four with individuals working in LSPs. They were selected based on their knowledge, experience and position within the organisation. This phase of research gave the researcher the opportunity to further investigate areas of interest in more depth.

### **3.5 Research Rationale**

#### **3.5.1.1 Phase One Rationale**

A semi-structured interview format was chosen for Phase One as it enabled the participant to offer spontaneous comments that gather rich data and increase the chance for a candid response (Brown, 2011). This method also allowed the researcher to probe answers further when the need arose. Although interviews do need to be tightly structured in advance, in this format they can provide a source of flexibility as they may be adjusted to meet the needs of diverse situations (Sarantakos, 2012). In addition, Sarantakos (2012) states that the potential insights gained from this flexibility are not fully achievable from other research methods such as questionnaires. Interviews enable the possibility of modifying the researcher's line of enquiry (Brown, 2011). This allowed the researcher to explore unexpected responses to examine the underlying motives in a way that other research methods do not facilitate. Furthermore, Artino Jr, La Rochelle, Dezee and Gehlbach (2014) state in their seven-step process for creating surveys and questionnaires that an initial interview should be conducted to discover how the population of interest conceptualizes the area of interest. The semi-structured interview was designed by the researcher with the key informant in mind (Appendix I). This involved taking into account his current and previous roles with sporting organisations, the research questions posed as part of this current study, and the gaps in Irish literature on the research topic. This interview was used to gain a greater understanding of the topic area from the perspective of a social media expert employed in a sporting organisation responsible for leading and coordinating sport in Ireland. It was also used to develop more specific questions for the target population sample groups in phase two.

#### **3.5.1.2 Phase Two Rationale**

A questionnaire was employed in the second phase of the research as it allowed the researcher to administer the questionnaire to the entire population in a short period of time. (Bryman, 2016). Although questionnaires do not allow the researcher to examine

answers in more detail, they do allow a great deal of flexibility (Bryman & Bell, 2015). For example, questionnaires can also be adapted or modified to enable the researcher to enquire about various topics (Bryman & Cramer, 2012). In conjunction with this, questionnaires allow less opportunity for bias or errors caused by the researcher's presence or attitudes (Denscombe, 2014). Previous research relating to social media and sporting organisations have used questionnaires in their methodology due to the benefits cited above (Hopkins, 2013; Eagleman, 2013; Stoldt & Vermillion, 2013; O'Shea & Alonso, 2012).

### **3.5.1.3 Phase Three Rationale**

Research relating to social media usage by organisations has at times relied on the use of interviews to develop an in-depth understanding of the topic (Abeza, et al., 2013; Browning & Sanderson, 2012). As mentioned earlier, interviews enable the researcher to further enquire and probe interesting and unexpected responses in order to examine the underlying motives in a way that other research methods do not facilitate (Brown, 2011). These interviews assisted the researcher in developing a greater sense of understanding of the organisational goals the sporting organisations wish to achieve through the use of social media. They also enabled the researcher to probe further into issues outlined previously in phase two and the perceived and actual opportunities and barriers associated with social media usage identified by the NGBs and LSPs.

## **3.6 Phases of Research**

Three phases of research were conducted in this methodology: one semi-structured interview with a key informant; a questionnaire distributed to a national sample of all NGBs and LSPs; and ten further semi-structured interviews with selected NGB and LSP representatives. These three phases were selected, designed and utilised to acquire as much information on this topic as possible within an Irish context and to specifically address the research aim and research questions. These separate phases of research will now be discussed accordingly and the various steps taken within each phase are described.

### **3.7 Phase One - Qualitative Research**

Phase one of the research involved designing and facilitating a qualitative interview with an individual who has extensive knowledge of sport development and social media usage.

### **3.7.1 Selecting the Participant**

As stated earlier the researcher interviewed one participant prior to the distribution of the questionnaires. The key informant was interviewed. The interviewee has work experience with multiple NGBs in Ireland and with Sport Ireland over the past fifteen years. Sport Ireland has a central role in sports governance and strategy. Sport Irelands main functions are to develop and implement strategies to increase participation in recreational sport and for the promotion, development and co-ordination and achievement of competitive sport. The key informant was purposely selected to be interviewed due to his profession, experience and knowledge in the field of social media. Previous to his current role, the key informant had roles in Marketing and Communications in numerous sporting organisations including the Federation of Irish Sport, Gymnastics Ireland and Cricket Ireland. The key informant was contacted via phone call and asked to participate in an interview. The interview was recorded using a dictaphone and subsequently transcribed and analysed manually.

### **3.7.2 Data Collection**

The interview was carried out on October 11<sup>th</sup> 2016 in the National Sports Campus, Abbotstown, Dublin 15. This location was chosen as it was the interviewee's place of work and suited him. The interview lasted 90 minutes.

## **3.8 Phase Two - Questionnaire**

Phase two of this research involved the use of an adapted version of the Council of Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) questionnaire. This questionnaire was distributed via Survey Monkey to NGBs and LSPs in Ireland to gather information on these organisations and their social media practice.

### **3.8.1 Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire that was adapted to complete this study is based on a previous research tool designed by the CASE, which examined the use of social media in business organisations. The original CASE questionnaire was selected to be adapted as its main aim was to assess the existing practice of organisations in terms of their social media usage, specifically in relation to communication and marketing. The researcher opted to adapt this questionnaire for the study to focus on a sporting organisation. Further adaptations were then made based on the information gathered from the interview with the key informant. These adaptations included; updating the social media



sites used in the questionnaire (Table 5); adding questions relating to social media strategy for communication and marketing purposes; and including questions on staff qualifications, paid advertising and more in-depth questions on evaluation. These adaptations were made as they were specifically required to comprehensively address the research questions targeting the population used in this study.

Table 5 - Description of Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform	Description
Facebook	A social network where users can post comments, share photographs and post links to news or other interesting content on the web, chat live, and watch short-form video.
Twitter	A micro blogging social network where people communicate in short messages called tweets. Tweeting is when a twitter user posts short messages on their account which can be seen by any of the user's followers.
Instagram	A media sharing social networking app made for sharing photos and videos from a smartphone.
LinkedIn	A social network for professionals that lets individuals connect with other professionals.
Google+	Google+ is a social network that builds off of a Google Account. It allows you to add curated circles for your particular interests, entertainment, news, sports, etc.
Snapchat	Media sharing and messaging platform that can only be used from a smartphone. Photos and videos essentially disappear a few seconds after they have been viewed by their recipients.
YouTube	Media sharing network that allows users to uploaded, share and watch video content.
Social Messaging Platforms	Social messaging platforms allow users to send and receive messages and media instantly. E.g. WhatsApp

(Lifewire, 2018)

The researcher created an online questionnaire using Survey Monkey. This is a platform that allows for easy functionality, flexibility and data analysis tools. Survey Monkey was chosen for the following reasons:

1. Survey Monkey offered structure to the questionnaire. For example question type and format.
2. Content was presented in a systematic way, starting from the welcome message, followed by the main questionnaire.

3. The navigation elements allowed the user to find and access information effectively and efficiently; buttons were available to browse the questionnaire, navigate from one page to another page and also to allow respondents to skip non-appropriate questions.
4. Survey Monkey supports closed-ended and open-ended questions, allows participants to skip questions when appropriate (type of question is used to determine, based on a respondent's answer where the question should jump to when the question path is response directed) and offers numerous responses such as list menu, radio buttons, checkbox and text input (Bentley, Daskalova & White, 2017).

The adapted questionnaire has five distinctive sections (Appendix J). Section one is general information, section two asks questions in relation to current social media usage, section three probes policies and best practice, section four examines organisational goals and barriers and section five investigates future opportunities. The content of these sections are described in more detail below;

**Section One:** This section of the questionnaire dealt with general information about the organisation. The questions related to position of the respondent in the organisation, number of staff, and whether social media is used or not.

**Section Two:** The aim of section two was to gather information on the organisation's current social media practice. This section included questions in relation to what type of social media is used, how long has it been used for, what type of content is posted and the frequency of posts.

**Section Three:** Section three was focused around policies and best practice in social media use. Topics questioned in this section included current social media strategy, social media trained staff, social media evaluation, advertising and policy within the organisation.

**Section Four:** This section of the questionnaire dealt with organisational goals and barriers. Questions in this section sought to explore what opportunities and barriers were experienced by sporting organisations in Ireland when using social media.

**Section Five:** The aim of this section was to gather information on future opportunities related to the use of social media within the organisation. This section

also addressed whether respondents were interested in partaking in phase three of this research study. A sample of respondents operating within specific types of organisations who selected yes for this section were then contacted for phase three.

Throughout the questionnaire, various question formats are used including the use of four, five and six point likert scale and multiple choice questions. The majority of questions were fixed-alternative questions (Sarantakos, 2012) which presented the respondent with several answers to choose from. A number of questions were open ended to elicit further information from the respondents in their own words. The full questionnaire can be found in appendix J.

### **3.8.2 Questionnaire Pilot Study**

Before phase two of this research was carried out, a pilot study was first used in order to assess whether there was any issues with the questionnaire format and respondent feedback. When the amendments were made, the questionnaire was uploaded to Survey Monkey. The questionnaire was sent to 16 local level sporting organisations<sup>21</sup>. All responses received were positive about the study; however, feedback showed that some questions were unclear. It was also noted that some electronic features of the website were not activated correctly by the researcher. From the information gathered by the pilot study the researcher was able to further adapt the questionnaire so that it was structured and phased in the most viable manner for optimum data collection. A second pilot study was subsequently implemented. The questionnaire was sent to two local level sporting organisations and two Waterford Institute of Technology staff members. After this process it was deemed ready for data collection with no further amendments required.

### **3.8.3 Selecting the Participants**

National sampling was utilised in this research. This sampling method was chosen as the numbers involved were feasible with a population consisting of all NGBs (N=65) and LSPs (N=29) in Ireland. This type of sampling allowed the researcher to potentially get an in depth insight into the issues associated with the use of social media by a cohort of sports organisations responsible for delivering national sports development goals in Ireland. Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to explore the reasons why some

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<sup>21</sup>Local level sporting organisations - Local sporting teams.

organisations do not use social media in their efforts to promote goals associated with sports development. It also facilitated the examination of the reasons behind the usage of social media by those organisations that actively engage in social media use. Finally, it provided the opportunity to explore each organisation's view on how effective their social media usage is currently and how it could be better optimised.

#### **3.8.4 Data Collection**

The 65 NGBs and 29 LSPs were initially contacted by e-mail in relation to this study (Appendix K). This e-mail contained a link to the questionnaire via Survey Monkey. Follow up calls were also made to organisations who had not completed the questionnaire two weeks after the initial invitation was made. The purpose of these follow up emails and calls was to ensure that the questionnaire had reached the person deemed most suitable to answer the questions asked. There are many reasons that can lead to an email not reaching the correct destination such as the email delivering to spam mail and a new employee email.

The completion of this questionnaire indicated consent. Questionnaire data was collected over a period of ten weeks from January 4<sup>th</sup> until March 8<sup>th</sup> 2017, from both NGBs and LSPs. The sample of the population who completed the questionnaire included 33 NGBs and 23 LSPs culminating in a total of 56 responses. Out of these 56 completed questionnaires, eleven were deemed unusable due to inadequate completion and hence, were not included in the number of questionnaires subject to analysis. The total number of questionnaires subject to analysis was 45, 29 NGBs and 16 LSPs. This was a response rate of 48%. The response rate for this research is similar to other published studies on comparable populations. Specifically, Eagleman (2013) whose response rate for her study on NGBs was 40%. Moreover, Eagleman (2013) cited that in the case of a low response rate, that future research should allow follow on interviews with NGB employees to extract more in depth and rich data from the populations. This was taken on board for the current research.

### **3.9 Phase Three - Qualitative Research**

The third phase of the research involved designing and facilitating in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals who work within national sporting organisations and have knowledge of social media usage within their respective organisations.

### 3.9.1 Selecting the Participants

Following the initial distribution of the questionnaire, in total, ten NGB and LSP representatives were selected for a follow up interview based on the outcomes of their questionnaire responses. This phase of sampling involved representatives from six NGBs and four LSPs. The ten interviewees had previously completed the questionnaire and had opted to be involved in further research in this area and were selected based on their knowledge and role within their respective organisations. Furthermore, NGBs were selected so that both team and individual sporting organisations were represented. To get a more accurate representation of the national sample, one LSP was chosen from each of the four provinces. Details on each NGB and LSP represented in the interviews can be found in Table 6. Personnel within these organisations were again contacted via email and were subsequently invited to be interviewed. The date, time and location was then finalised over the phone where verbal consent was provided.

Table 6 - Interview Participants

Type of Organisation	Remit	Team/Individual Sport or Population	Social Media Following (Facebook, Instagram & Twitter as of February 2017)
NGB 1	Ireland	Individual	2,600
NGB 2	Ireland	Individual	3,200
NGB 3	Ireland	Team	66,000
NGB 4	Ireland	Team	5,400
LSP 1	Munster	53,504	5,900
NGB 5	Ireland	Individual/Team	16,000
LSP 2	Connacht	79,934	1700
NGB 6	Ireland	Individual	2,100
LSP 3	Leinster	94,192	2500
LSP 4	Ulster	60,483	1500

### **3.9.2 Data Collection**

Interviews took place over a two month period from February 2017 until March 2017. Five of these interviews were carried out at locations suitably convenient for the interviewee, one was conducted over Skype and four via phone call. Phone calls were used in four cases due to time and transport constraints of the interviewees. When discussed, telephone interviews are often portrayed as a less attractive substitute to face-to-face interviewing (Novick, 2008). It has been suggested that the absence of visual cues via telephone results in loss of contextual and nonverbal data. Furthermore it is thought to compromise rapport, probing, and interpretation of responses. However, telephones may possibly allow respondents to feel relaxed and able to disclose sensitive information. Additionally, evidence is lacking that they produce lower quality data than face-to-face interviewing (Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury, 2013; Trier-Bieniek, 2012). The phone calls were recorded using 'Automatic Call Recorder' application with the prior permission of the interviewee. Skype was used in one interview again due to transport constraints. There are certain downfalls of using Skype for interviews such as buffering due to poor internet connection and loss of intimacy compared to traditional in-person interviews. Nonetheless, there are specific benefits of skype interviews such as interviewees feeling more comfortable as they occur in one's own private space which in turn can lead to the participant feeling 'less nervous' and 'less pressured' compared to the interview being in person (Seitz, 2016). .

### **3.10 Analysis of Data**

In implementing the outlined methodologies, an array of data was retrieved in both quantitative and qualitative formats. To analyse this information, the researcher used a variation of statistical packages and manual analysis. For quantitative information, SPSS 24 was utilised while the qualitative data was entered and processed manually. An explanation of the analysis of data for each phase of research is presented in the following paragraph.

#### **3.10.1 Quantitative Data**

For phase two, IBM SPSS 24 for Windows was used to analyse the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire. SPSS was chosen as it is the most comprehensive statistical programme available with a wide variety of statistical analysis options for social scientists (Bolarinwa, 2015). Carver and Nash (2011) state that SPSS is very user

friendly and popular among researchers as it allows for easy transportation of data from other programmes.

However, SPSS does have some disadvantages; the default graphics are poor and it is difficult to alter and improve them. It is also very expensive and its licence is not very user friendly. Lastly, the menu offerings are typically the most basic and sometimes lead to inappropriate analysis (Pallant, 2013). Every statistical package will have its advantages and disadvantages and despite its disadvantages SPSS is considered the preferred choice for the social sciences (Bolarinwa, 2015). Microsoft Excel was also used in the analysis of data to generate images and formulate graphs.

### **3.10.2 Qualitative Data**

Thematic analysis was used for phase one and three of this research as it allows the researcher to answer a variety of research questions. Thematic analysis emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording codes which then group to form themes within data (Neuendorf, 2016). Themes are patterns across the data that are associated with a specific research question and that are important to the description of a phenomenon. These themes become the categories for analysis. The current study did not set out to prove or disprove hypotheses or to test theory; instead, it sought to develop phenomenological data from which a greater understanding might be developed. As per the research questions, the aim of the qualitative phase of the study was to examine the use of social media in achieving organisational goals and to evaluate the perceived barriers faced by personnel in NGBs and LSPs in Ireland concerning social media use. The data analysis process was undertaken in accordance with the six step framework provided by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The first stage of analysis involved the transcription of each interview. The researcher aimed to have each interview transcribed within seven days of the interview taking place. The transcription process involved the researcher listening to the audio recordings whilst writing word for word what was said on an open Word document. The 11 interviews were between 28 - 104 minutes long each, amounting to 80 pages of transcribed text. Each page of transcription amounts to approximately 541 words. It is estimated that each page of transcription took one hour. The transcribing of the data aided in the familiarisation of the data. Once the interviews were all transcribed, the researcher immersed herself in the research and read and re-read each transcript. Notes

were taken and ideas for codes started to formulate. Phase two involved the production of the initial codes. Codes identify a feature of the data that is interesting or repeated throughout the transcript. It is the most basic element of the data that can be assessed. An example of a code and the data extract<sup>22</sup> relating to it can be seen in Table 7. In this phase of research, codes were inductive<sup>23</sup> or ‘data driven’ meaning that they derived entirely from the data set and not with the specific research questions in mind (Patton, 1990). Coding was done manually as the researcher did not have access to a software package such as NVivo. This involved the researcher marking the area of texts on the transcripts with highlighter and pen. All codes were then written on a separate piece of paper with the data extract(s) that represents the code written beside it. It is worth mentioning each raw data extract was coded based on the researcher’s interpretation of the comment made. Thus, the researcher cannot be fully certain that the comment from the participant had the same communicative intent as that of what the researcher understood (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Table 7 - Data Extract, With Codes Applied

<b>Data extract</b>	<b>Code</b>
Social media is the easiest way to get our message into the public without having to depend on a middle man such as the national media.	Information Dissemination  Own form of media

The next phase involved sorting all codes into potential themes and collating the raw data extracts relating to these codes into the relevant themes. This was done by merging certain codes into an overarching theme based on their relationship or similarity to one another. An example of this can be seen in the initial thematic map in Figure 6. Furthermore, sub-themes<sup>24</sup> were created in some instances where a main theme was particularly comprehensive in nature. Sub themes can be defined as ‘themes within

<sup>22</sup> Data extract is an individual coded chunk of data, which has been identified within, and extracted from the transcript.

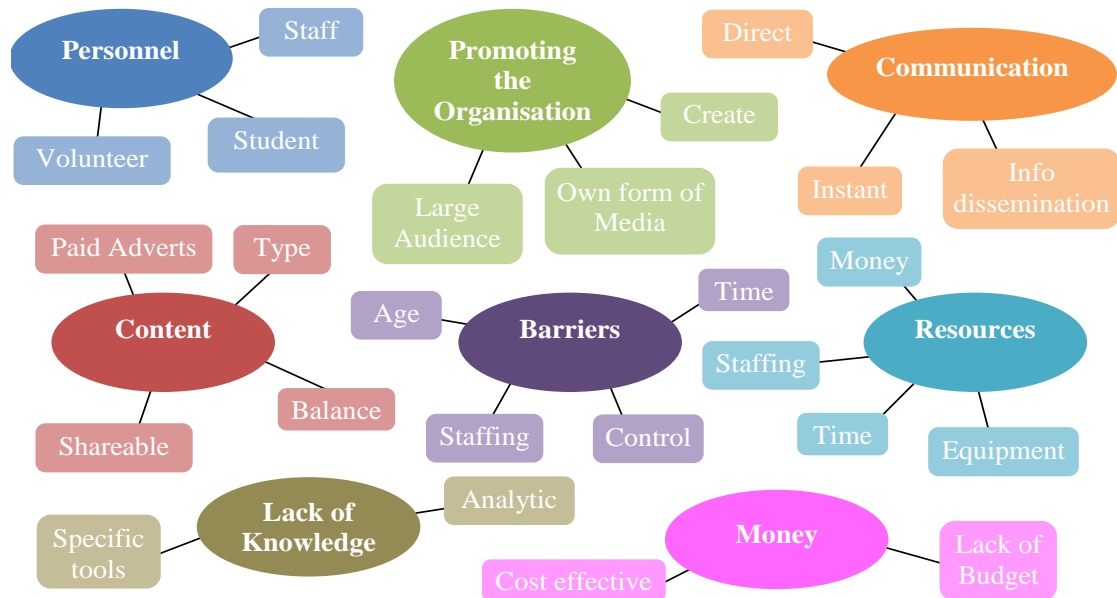
<sup>23</sup> Inductive analysis is a process of coding data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions. This means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Sub-themes are essentially themes-within-a theme. They are more significant than a code, but not significant enough to stand alone as a main theme.



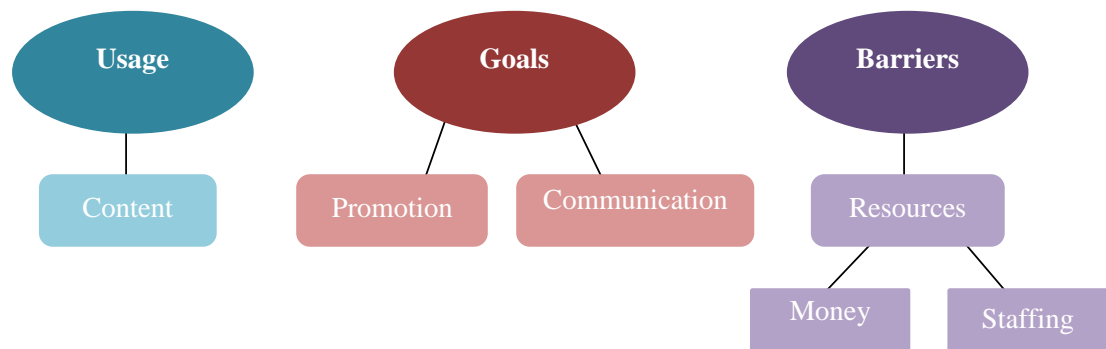
themes. They helped to give more structure to and created a hierarchy of data within each theme.

**Figure 6 - Example of Initial Thematic Map**



A review of the codes and themes makes up phase four. Firstly, the codes under each theme and the raw data extract that related to each one were reviewed to see if they form a logical and consistent pattern under the theme they were placed under (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Any codes and raw data extracts that are not coherent with the theme were removed and reworked into a different or new theme. Secondly, the themes themselves were reviewed to ensure that they give an accurate representation of the data set. This involved re-reading all transcripts again to ensure nothing has been missed or left out. An example of a refined thematic map can be found in Figure 7. In this example it is clear that certain themes have been merged and codes have been moved to the new theme that best represents each one.

**Figure 7 - Example of Refined Thematic Map**



Phase five was used to define each theme. This was done to make sure that themes do not overlap and to ensure there is a clear understanding of how each theme fits into the overall story that the researcher is telling about the data. Although inductive analysis was used early on in this research to create and develop themes, in phase five the researcher grouped each theme under the research question it related to most. This is something that is not typically done in an inductive thematic analysis, however for this study it aided in the structure of the results chapter (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The final stage of this thematic analysis was the reporting of each theme. This can be found within the results chapter of this paper.

### **3.11 Statistical Methods Utilised**

The data produced from each of the research approaches had mixed properties. A combination of parametric and non-parametric data was retrieved. Deriving from this breakdown, a combination of ordinal (non-parametric), scale (parametric) and nominal (non-parametric) variables were designated within the appropriate software packages as mentioned earlier. From these scales of measurement, numerous statistical tests were carried out on the data. Tests were selected after identifying dependant and independent variables and after testing for normal distribution. The tests of most significance were the frequency analysis, cross tabulation, chi-square tests of independence, independent sample t-test, Chi-Square Goodness of Fit and the mann-whitney U test. The purpose of each of these tests is explained below:

- **Frequency analysis:** is a descriptive statistical method that shows the number of occurrences of each response chosen by the respondents.

- **Cross tabulation:** is a joint frequency distribution of cases based on two or more categorical variables.
- **Chi-Square tests of Independence:** This test measures the association between two variables from a single population.
- **Chi-Square Goodness of Fit:** A non-parametric test that is used to find out how the observed value is significantly different from the expected value.
- **Independent Sample T-test:** compares the means of two independent groups in order to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the associated population 'means' are significantly different.
- **Mann-Whitney U:** This test is used to compare the medians from non-normal distributed samples.

The results presented have been statistically analysed using multiple statistical techniques as outlined above. For the social sciences a significance level of  $P < 0.050$  is accepted (Miller & Acton, 2009). However, in many cases the significance level found is below the  $P < 0.001$  levels. Essentially, this means that with respect to the  $P < 0.050$  level, there is a 1 in 20 chance of believing a hypothesis is correct when it is actually false. Alternately, when  $P$  is less than 0.001 there is a 1 in 1000 chance of accepting a hypothesis as correct when it is really false (Colquhoun, 2014). Thus, for this research, any  $P$  value below the .05 level is deemed as statistically significant.

While a  $P$  value can determine whether an effect exists, it will not reveal the size of the effect (Cohen, 1988). The effect size is used to help determine the magnitude of the findings. For instance, if we have data for NGBs and LSPs and notice that on average NGBs use Facebook more than LSPs, then the difference between the use of Facebook between NGBs and LSPs is known as the effect size. The greater the difference between their Facebook usage, the greater the effect size. To measure the size of the effect within this study, Cohen's  $d$  effect size was used. Cohen suggest that  $d=0.2$  represents a small effect size,  $d=0.5$  suggests a medium effect size, a large effect size is represented by  $d=0.8$  and an effect size of  $d=1.3$  is considered very large (Cohen, 1988).

### 3.12 Research Merits and Limitations

#### 3.12.1 Quantitative Research

Within the social sciences, the use of a questionnaire as a method of analysis is common (Bryman, 2016). Questionnaires may be self-designed offering the researcher a great

deal of flexibility. Furthermore they allow the researcher to query numerous topics. There are a number of benefits to using questionnaires in comparison to other research methods: Firstly large amounts of information can be collected from a large number of people in a short period of time and in a relatively cost effective way when using questionnaires (Denscombe, 2014). Secondly, questionnaires offer less opportunity for errors or bias caused by the attitudes or presence of the researcher (Denscombe, 2014). Thirdly, the results of the questionnaires can usually be quickly and easily quantified by either a researcher or through the use of a software package (Bell, 2014).

While questionnaires have their benefits and were considered the most appropriate option for Phase two of this research, it is acknowledged that like all research methods they have their limitations: One of the limitations of questionnaires is that you will never be certain whether respondents understood the questions, or whether they have taken the time to provide accurate data (Rowley, 2014). With questionnaires, there will most likely be some unanswered questions. These may arise from the respondent running out of time, not wanting to provide certain information, feeling that they do not know a fact or have an opinion, or not fully understanding the question (Rowley, 2014). The use of questionnaires also gives way for organisations to give a social desirability bias. In the case of this research study, numerous NGBs and LSPs declined to answer the questionnaire stating that it was not the public's business. While limitations have been highlighted, the researcher took precautions to curb any impact they may have on the research.

### **3.12.2 Qualitative Research**

The limitations outlined in using a questionnaire provides rationale for supporting its use with other data collection methods. In the case of this research, using semi structured interviews, the researcher could capitalise on the limitations of the questionnaire and specifically increase the validity and reliability of the data generated. Interviews generally provide more in depth insights than the information found in quantitative research. They allow the researcher to probe interesting responses, investigate the underlying motives and to modify the line of enquiry in a way that other methods do not allow. In particular, this is not possible using questionnaires. Moreover, if a respondent finds a question confusing or ambiguous, the interviewer can clarify it. Similarly, if the interviewer cannot interpret an answer from the respondent, again they can ask for this to be clarified (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2008).

Despite the noted benefits of using interviews, there are disadvantages to this research approach. Firstly, interviews generally take more time to recruit and conduct. Furthermore, transcribing interviews is more time consuming than other research methods (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The interviewer may inadvertently give respondents non-verbal as well as verbal cues about how they should respond leading to the possibility of more bias responses (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2008).

To conclude, the researcher felt that despite the noted limitations, interviews would provide a more comprehensive understanding of information, offering further depth to the phase two questionnaire. Moreover, the interviews gave the researcher the ability to probe matters further providing greater added value to information collected.

### **3.13 Ethical Clearance**

Prior to commencing this research, ethical approval was granted from Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2016. This was granted as the committee were satisfied with the management of potential issues and ethical implications noted and presented by the researcher to the committee whereby they subsequently approved WIT's participation in the research study. To obtain ethical approval from WIT, the researcher undertook a number of procedures and precautions as outlined below.

It has been highlighted that one of the main ethical considerations in any social research project is that no false, misleading or misrepresentation of information is portrayed to the respondents (Sarantakos, 2012). All potential participants received e-mails outlining information related to the study. To decrease the likelihood of any misunderstanding, subjects were sent an e-mail outlining information about the purpose of the study and any potential risks were also included. Contact details of the researcher were also included so that any further queries in relation to the study could be answered. This e-mail also dealt with the subject of confidentiality and anonymity. Bryman & Cramer (2012) highlights that confidentiality is of the utmost importance when it comes to research. In the case of this study, this involved keeping all data anonymous and stored safely and securely. The researcher and supervisors were the only people who had access to the data stored in accordance with GDPR data protection procedures. Long and Johnson (2007) note that consent must be provided where questionnaires are involved. In this study, return of completed questionnaire through Survey Monkey

indicated consent. Participants could opt out of the study before, during or after their initial participation (Silverman, 2013). Finally, it was crucial in this research project that no organisation was misrepresented. To overcome this issue, all interviewees were sent the interview transcript to review.

### **3.14 Validity**

According to Bryman (2016) and Neuman (2007) both qualitative and quantitative research needs to address the issues of validity and reliability. This research pursued a triangulation approach consisting of two different methodological tools. As stated by Olsen (2004), Flick (2006) and (Denzin, 1978), triangulation enables the researcher to increase the depth and understanding of the research topic, increase accuracy, credibility and validity. It also facilitates comparisons with other research which can aid in overcoming insufficiencies of a single method approach (Flick, 2006). Using a mixed method approach offers greater diversity and collaboration between researchers, more comprehensive findings, increased validity, more insightful understanding of the underlying phenomenon and promotion of more creative ways of collecting data (Johnson, Branscum, Hanson & Christensen, 2010).

Validity is an essential part of qualitative research (Steinke, 2004). By applying a number of measures, researchers can guarantee validity; these measures will vary according to what is being measured. They include cumulative validation, communicative validation, argumentative validation and ecological validation. Within this study, the findings in phase one are supported and compared to findings from similar studies, hence, cumulative validation can be applied. The researcher has attempted to honestly emulate the responses and data acquired; this is parallel to Morse (2015) in that the term trustworthiness may be more appropriate for use with qualitative research.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of research allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information from the population sample. This also permitted a wide range of participation and opinions to be gathered. Through using separate methods of data collection, the reliability of the research was affirmed and validated. The research aims and objectives allowed the researcher to investigate, collect and measure the attitudes, experiences and beliefs of all organisations involved. The chapter which follows outlines and discusses the findings from the study.

## Chapter 4

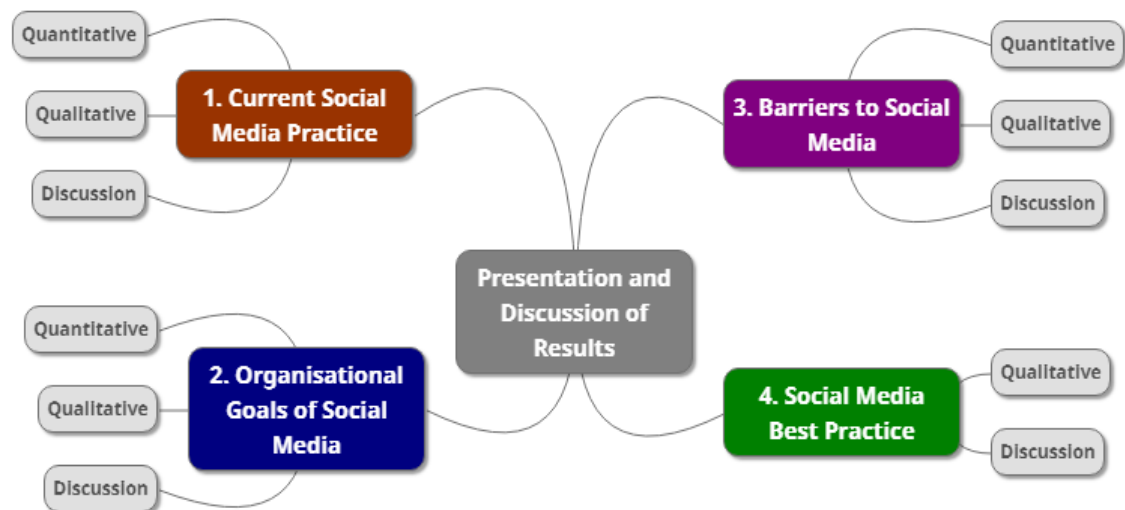
# Presentation and Discussion of Results

## 4. Presentation and Discussion of Results

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the main findings from a systematic analysis of the data collected in phase one, two and three of the research. This chapter will be structured around the research questions are outlined in section 3.2.2. Before the research questions are addressed, the general characteristics of the population will be presented and discussed. Following this, the findings relating to research question one, two and three will be outlined. The data for these research questions was gathered as part of phase two and three of this research study using both a quantitative and qualitative investigation respectively. Findings in relation to these three research questions will be answered in the following format: quantitative results, qualitative results, followed by a discussion as depicted in Figure 8.

**Figure 8 - Layout of Results Chapter**



Before the qualitative data is presented it is important to give an overview of the results from the thematic analysis described in section 3.10.2. Deriving from the qualitative interviews conducted in phase three, a total of six higher order themes describing social media practice, goals and barriers related to social media usage among LSPs and NGBs emerged. This accounts for 21 lower order themes and 207 raw data themes. Each higher order theme was categorised under the general dimension relating to the research questions. This information is illustrated in Table 8. This table will be separated as per the research question at the start of each qualitative section for clarity purposes.



Likewise, the lower order themes aligned to these higher order themes will be also be outlined.

Table 8 - Inductive Thematic Analysis of LSPs and NGBs Interviews:

<b>General Dimension:</b>	<b>Higher Order Theme:</b>	<b>Sample Comments:</b>
<b>Current Usage of Social Media</b> The current actions on social media.	<b>Content</b> Anything that organisations choose to post and share with their audience on social media platforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The best part is the sharable content.</li> <li>• Focus more on video rather than text.</li> <li>• It's trying to find the right balance of how much to post.</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational Goals related to Social Media</b> The aim of usage is to improve certain functions within the organisation. The benefits of social media for the organisation.	<b>Information Dissemination</b> A means of sending or receiving information across social media.  <b>Promotion</b> The publicising of the sport, organisation, or any associated activity as a means to increase participation or awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easiest way to get message out</li> <li>• The ability to spread our message quickly to a large audience.</li> <li>• Reaching our members instantly.</li> <li>• It is through social media exchange students contact us about playing for a club</li> <li>• It has increased awareness hugely.</li> <li>• Not depending on middle man.</li> <li>• Promoting the game.</li> </ul>
<b>Barriers to social media usage</b> Obstacles that are preventing or hindering progress in relation to the use of social media.	<b>Resources</b> The supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by the organisation in order to function effectively  <b>Lack of Expertise</b> The lack of special skills or knowledge relating to social media that is acquired by training, study, or practice.  <b>Control</b> The lack of directing influence over what can be said about the organisation on social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having one employee limits the amount of work that can get done in one day.</li> <li>• There are not enough hours in a day.</li> <li>• We are small, we must use our finances wisely.</li> <li>• Making sure we have a good enough phone or recording equipment</li> <li>• We keep track of likes and views, I don't have any training so it's just basic features.</li> <li>• I didn't know you could schedule posts.</li> <li>• When I learn something new, it seems to have changed by the time I get it down.</li> <li>• Trying to keep control is a challenge.</li> </ul>

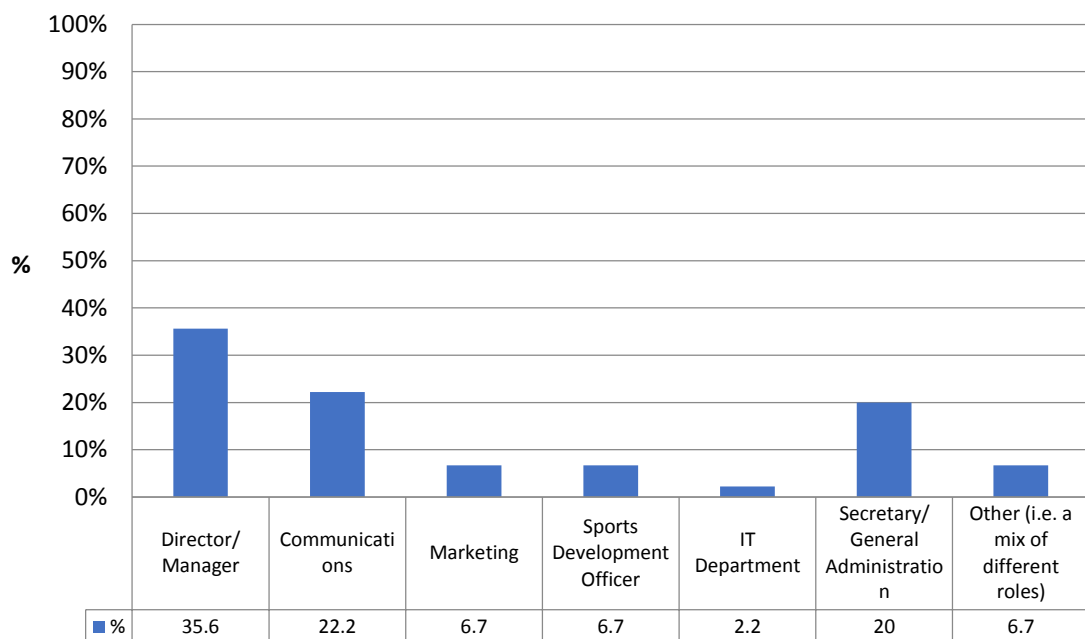
Following research question one, two and three, the data relating to research question four will be presented and discussed. The answers to research question four will be presented slightly differently to the findings from the previous research questions. It will be presented in the format of: qualitative results followed by discussion. This qualitative data was gathered in phase one of the research in the interview with the key informant. Information on the general dimensions and higher and lower order themes which emerged from the thematic analysis process will be given at the start of section 4.5.

#### 4.1.1 General Characteristics of Population

Before exploring the findings as they pertain to the research questions, general information in respect of general characteristics of the LSPs and NGBs in this study will be provided.

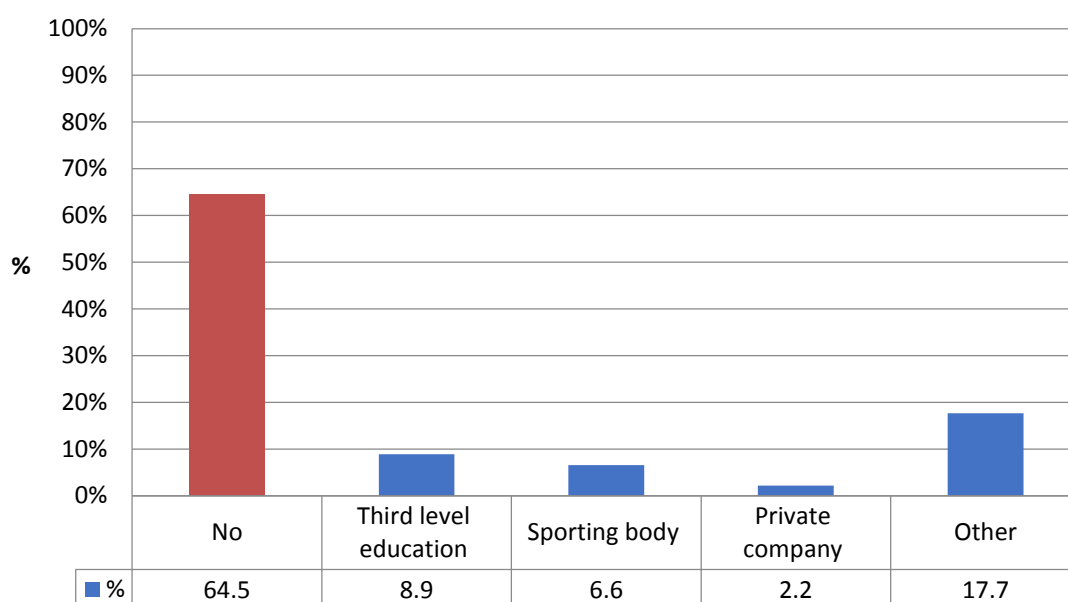
From the combined total of the 94 NGBs and LSPs in Ireland, a total of 45 organisations participated in the quantitative phase of this study resulting in a response rate of 48% (n=45). The larger majority of participants who responded were representative of the NGB sample 64% (n=29) with the remainder extracted from the LSP sample 36% (n=16). This represents a 64:36 split and hence is an adequate representation of the national NGB to LSP split which is 69:31, with N=65 NGBs and N=29 LSPs nationally.

**Figure 9 - Role of Questionnaire Respondents**



As shown in Figure 9, the most popular employee role from the survey respondents was the role of director or manager (n=16). The director or manager role was followed by communications (n=10) and general administrator role (n=9). Other roles that were mentioned include marketing officer (n=3) and sports development officer (n=3). The median number of employees in the LSP sample was 4 while the median number of employees in the NGB sample was 6. Both LSPs (2.69) and NGBs (2.58) have a similar mean number in relation to staff allocated responsibility for their social media platforms as part of their overall role. With regards to the ages of staff responsible for social media usage, the mean age for NGBs was 32.21 and for LSPs was 31.5. After conducting an independent samples t-test, no significant differences were found between the number of and age of employees within the organisations ( $P>0.050$ ).

**Figure 10 - Social Media Training**

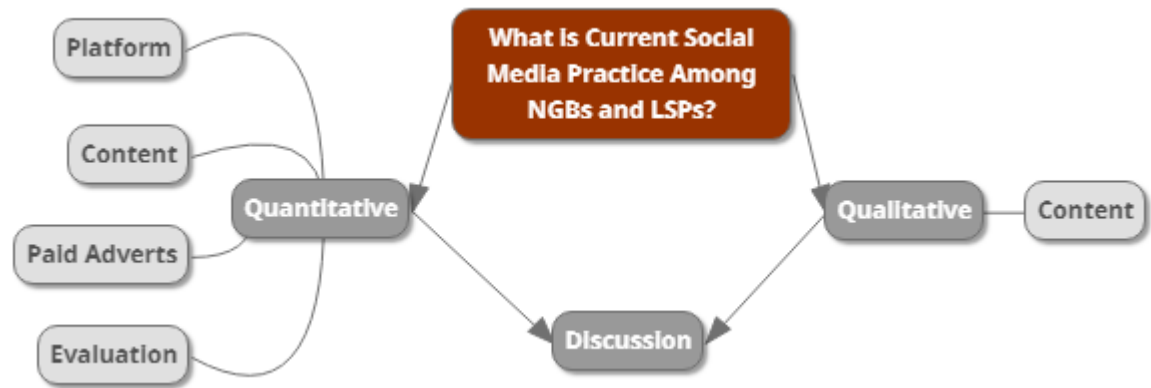


Overall only 36% (n=16) of the research sample of LSP and NGB staff that use social media are social media trained as seen in Figure 10. LSPs had a higher percentage of trained staff within their respondent sample, 44% (n=7), in comparison to NGBs with only 31% (n=9). In the present study, the majority of those that did undergo social media training received it from third level education (n=4). The remainder received training from a sporting body (n=3) or a private company (n=1) or did not comment (n=8). The findings indicate a skills deficit that could perhaps be addressed more adequately by Sport Ireland by providing a suitable option of online training for NGBs and LSPs. Currently, only 49% of the organisations sampled agree that they receive

some form of social media support from a higher authority such as Sport Ireland. This amounts to 63% (n=10) of LSPs and 41% (n=12) of NGBs.

## 4.2 What Is Current Social Media Practice Among NGBs and LSPs?

**Figure 11 - Layout of Research Question 1**



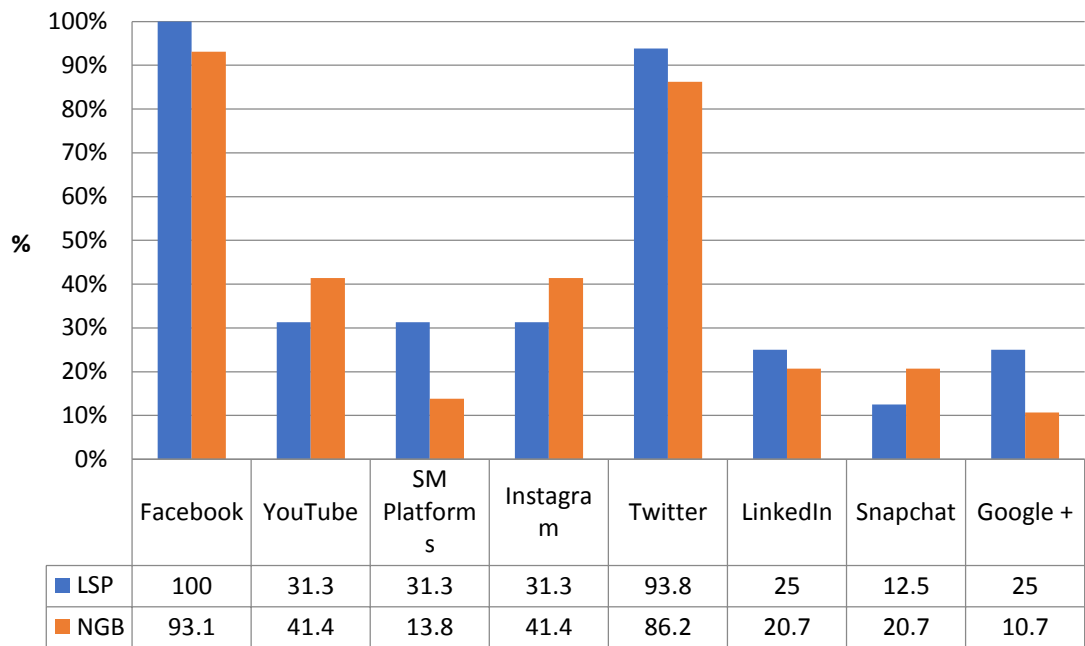
In this section, information is provided on the current social media usage including, platform usage, frequency of use and details on content posted by NGBs and LSPs in Ireland. The order of the social media sites used in the questionnaire will be outlined in order of popularity in 2019 as indicated by Statista. (2019). Thus the order will be presented in the following sequence; Facebook, YouTube, Social Messaging (SM) Platforms, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat and Google+ (Smart Insights, 2018).

### 4.2.1 Research Question One Quantitative Results

#### 4.2.1.1 Platforms

Out of the research sample of 45 sporting organisations in Ireland, a total of 98% (n=44) utilise social media. The total sample group of NGBs all used social media while a small percentage of LSPs did not (n=1).

**Figure 12 - Social Media Platform Used**



As depicted in Figure 12, there are two platforms emerging as the primary choice for NGBs and LSPs namely; Facebook and Twitter. Facebook is the most popular social media platform used by the Irish sporting organisations with 98% (n=44) of this sample group opting to use it. Facebook is closely followed by Twitter with 91% (n=41) of the organisations using it. Snapchat is the least used social media platform with only 16% (n=7) of those surveyed using it followed closely by Google+ with 20% (n=9) opting to use it. For the most part, there is little difference between platform usage in NGBs and LSPs. This is backed by statistical analysis in which no significant association was found between organisation type and social media platform (Chi-square Test of Independence,  $P > 0.050$ ).

**Figure 13 - Ease or Difficulty of Use of Social Media Platform**

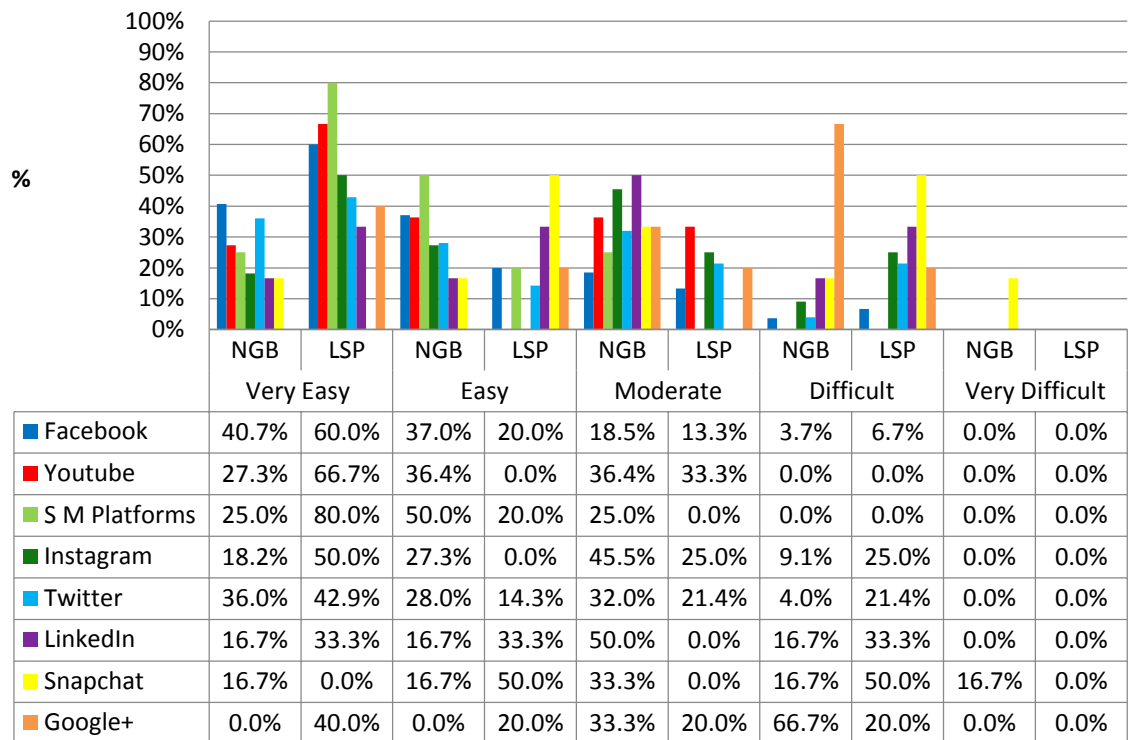


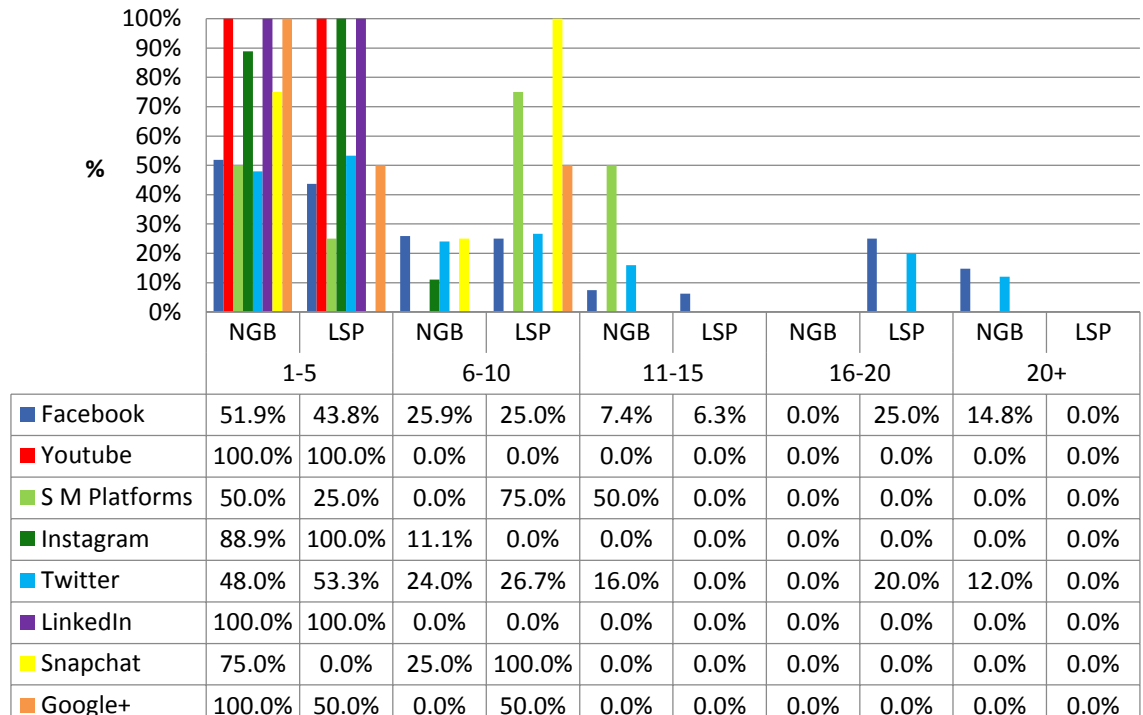
Figure 13 provides details of the perceived difficulty of use of each social media platform by NGB and LSP employees. Snapchat (17%, n=5) was the only social media platform rated as very difficult to use by NGBs. Similarly, Snapchat is seen as the most difficult platform to use by LSPs (50%, n=8). Considering that only 19% (n=3) of LSPs actually use Snapchat this may not be surprising.

A significant number of LSPs (n=10) and NGBs (n=12) found Facebook very easy to use (Chi-Square goodness of fit test,  $P=0.001$ ,  $d=1.66$ ). Provided that Facebook was the platform which 98% of the LSPs and NGBs sample population use, they are most likely more adept at using it in comparison to the other platforms in this research such as Google+ which is only utilised by 20% of the sample population group.

What is interesting from looking at Figure 13 is that no LSPs or NGBs found social messaging platforms difficult to use. In particular, 80% of LSPs selected the option 'Very Easy' for social messaging platforms which is the highest percentage out all the data collected with regards to this question. Furthermore, under the category of 'Very Easy', LSPs had a higher percentage for every social media platform included in this study with the exception of Snapchat. Perhaps these two findings could be related to the nature of LSPs. For example, they may be more likely to receive questions from

members of the public. As NGBs are generally linked with clubs, the public may be more likely to contact local clubs rather than the NGB of the sport. Although these findings are apparent from the figure, when tested for statistical differences between NGBs and LSPs, none were found (Mann Whitney U,  $P > 0.050$ ).

**Figure 14 - Frequency of Posting on Social Media Platform**

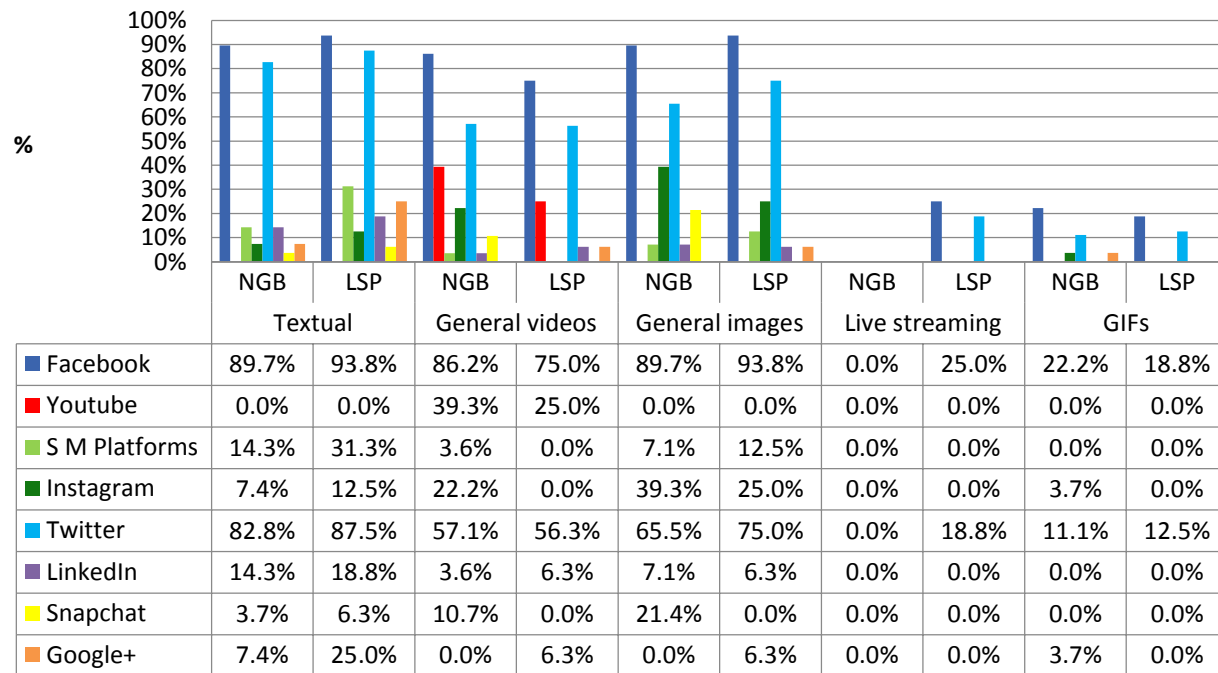


The frequency of posting on each social media platform is presented in Figure 14. Over half (52%,  $n=15$ ) of the NGB sample in the study posted on Facebook 1 - 5 times per week. No NGB in this study posted between 16 - 20 times per week on Facebook or any other platform included in this study. The social media platform that LSPs posted most frequently on was Facebook with 25% ( $n=4$ ) of LSPs posting 16-20 times per week. A smaller percentage of NGBs, 15% ( $n=4$ ) posted more than 20 times per week on Facebook.

From the figure, it is quite noticeable that both NGBs and LSPs for the most part posted on the majority of platforms in this study between 1-5 times per week. This is backed up with statistical analysis. A series of Chi-Square Goodness of Fit tests performed on this data revealed that there was a statistically significant association between posting frequency per week and social media platform; the sporting organisations in this sample were more likely to post 1-5 times per week on Facebook ( $P=0.000$ ,  $d=2.613$ ), Twitter ( $P=0.000$ ,  $d=2.841$ ) and Instagram ( $P=0.002$ ,  $d=3.175$ ).

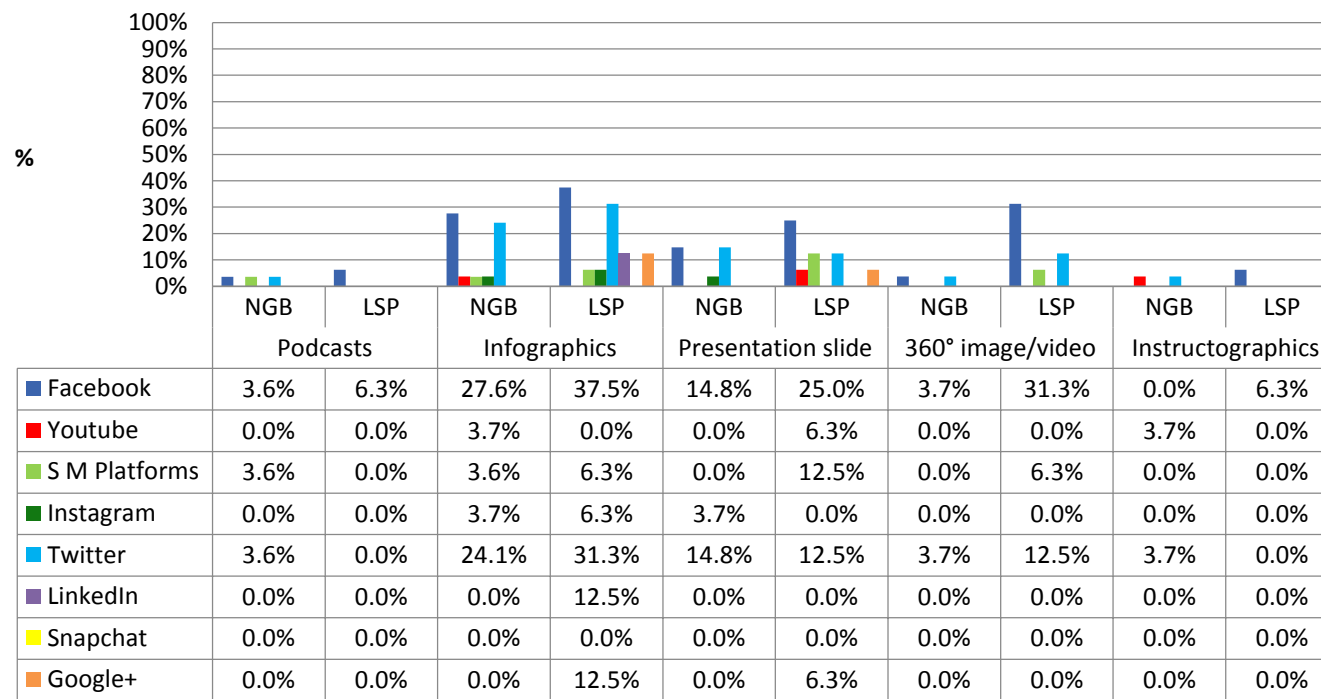
#### 4.2.1.2 Content

**Figure 15 - Format of Content on Social Media (1)**





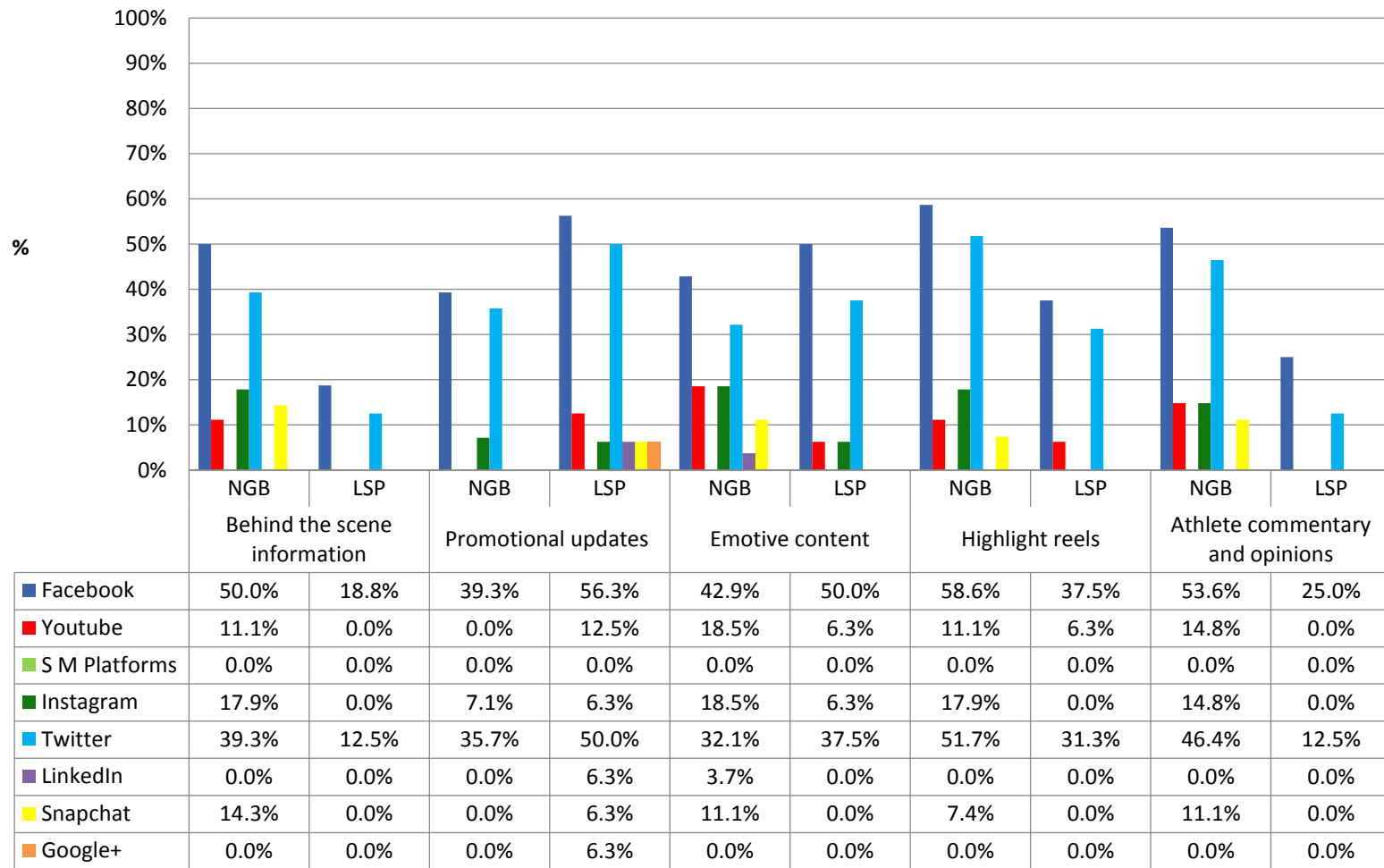
**Figure 16 - Format of Content on Social Media (2)**



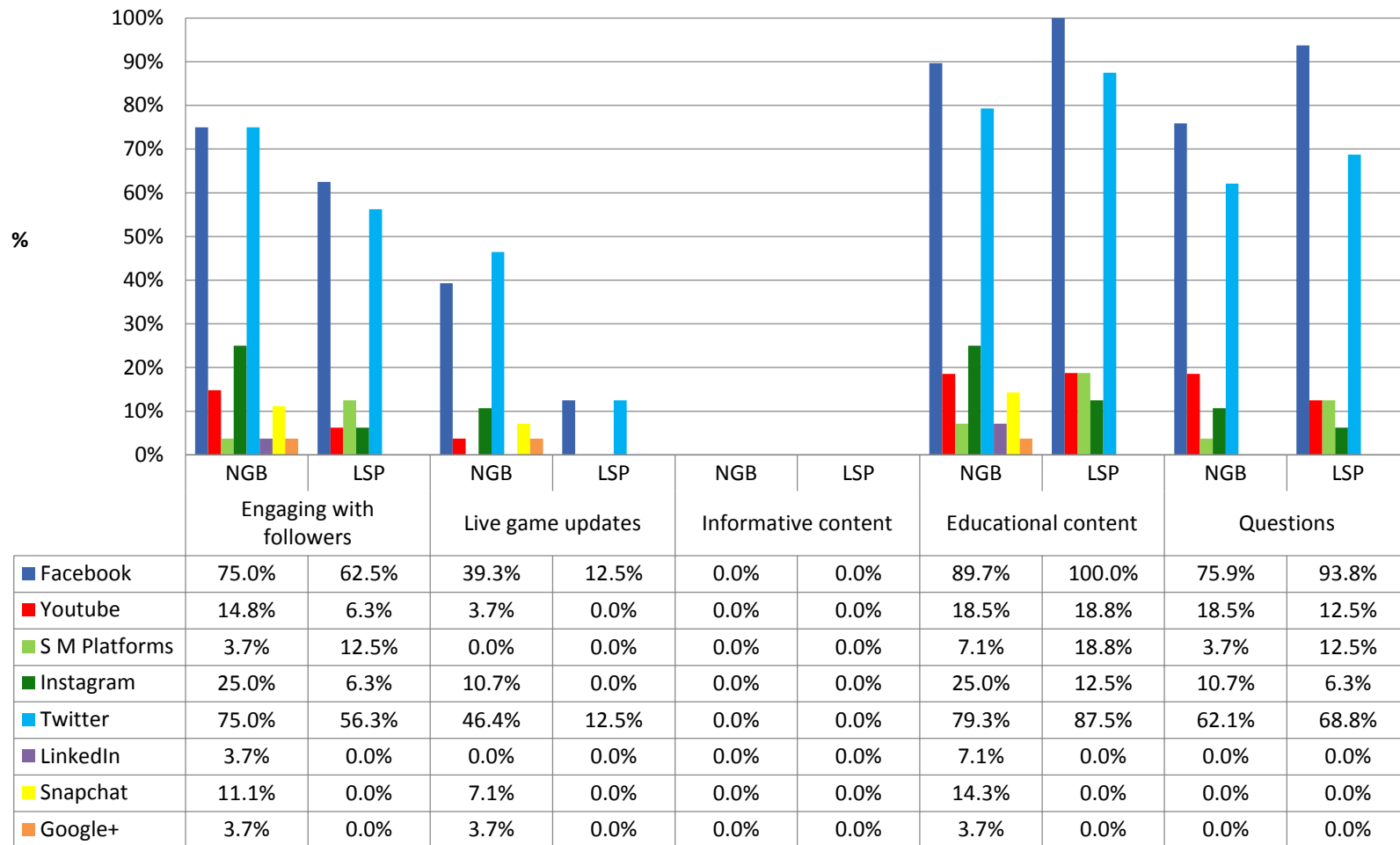
As depicted in Figure 15, textual and general images were the most common formats of content posted on Facebook with 94% of LSPs (n=15) and 90% of NGBs (n=26) posting both types of content. General video was also a popular format of content, especially on Facebook and Twitter. It is evident from Figure 15 and 16 that apart from textual, general image and general video, other formats of content were rarely used. Given the opportunity for enhanced engagement on social media channels that naturally come with some of these content formats, it is disappointing that both NGBs and LSPs are not maximising their use. Indeed, it is also a lost opportunity for presenting the work these organisations do in a more professional and visually appealing manner.

Interestingly no NGBs reported any live streaming. When comparing the LSP and NGB sample against this dependent variable, it was found that LSPs were significantly more likely to use live streaming than NGBs (Mann Whitney U,  $P=0.036$ ,  $d=6.91$ ). This could be considered interesting as NGBs represent specific sports. A percentage of these sports will have National Championships, International competitions and other competitions and events throughout their season. What is more, many of the NGBs in Ireland represent niche sports that do not receive much mainstream media coverage. Live streaming can provide coverage of an event without the need for the national media.

**Figure 17 - Type of Content Posted on Social Media (1)**



**Figure 18 - Type of Content Posted on Social Media (2)**



**Figure 19 - Type of Content Posted on Social Media (3)**

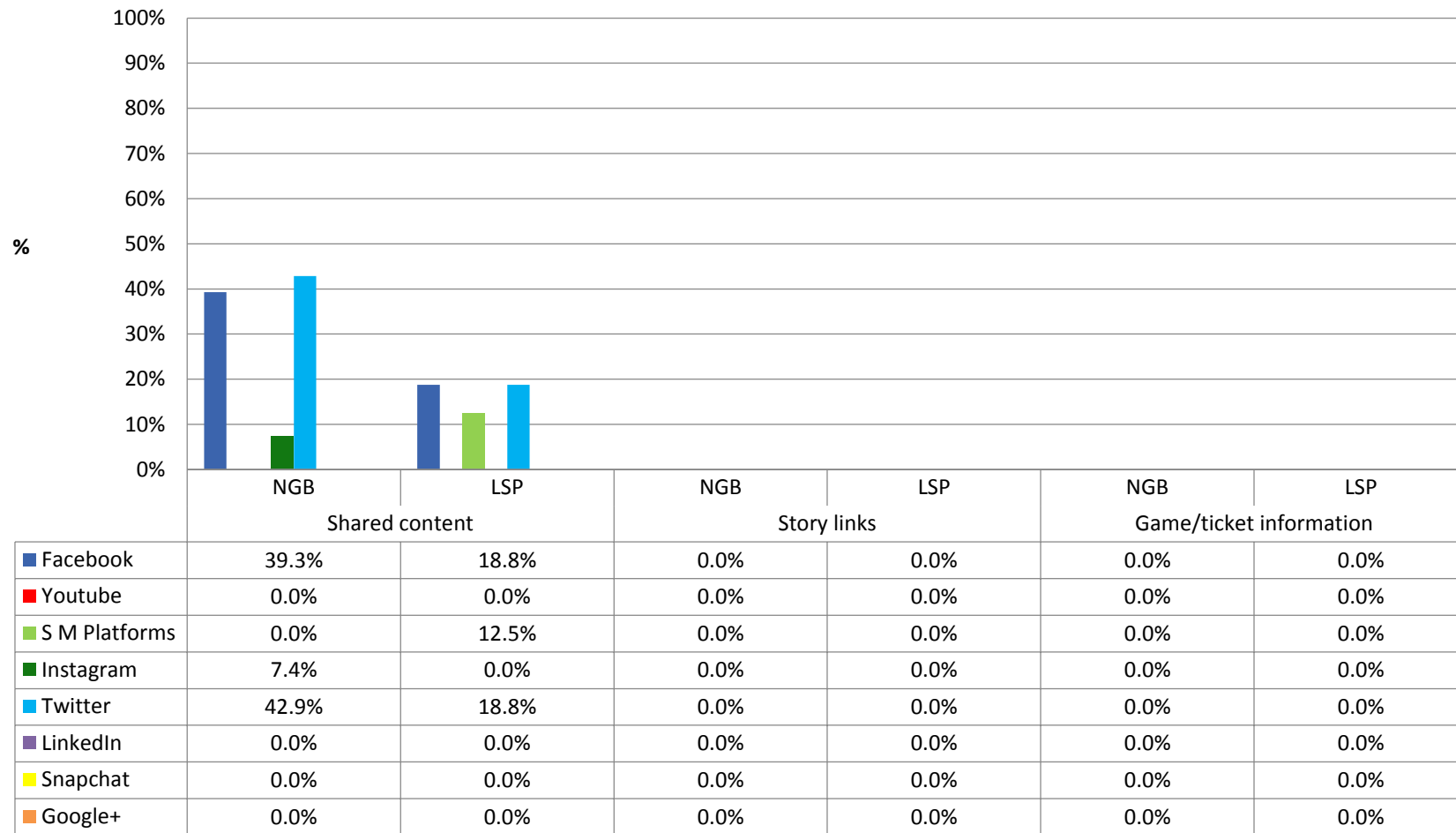
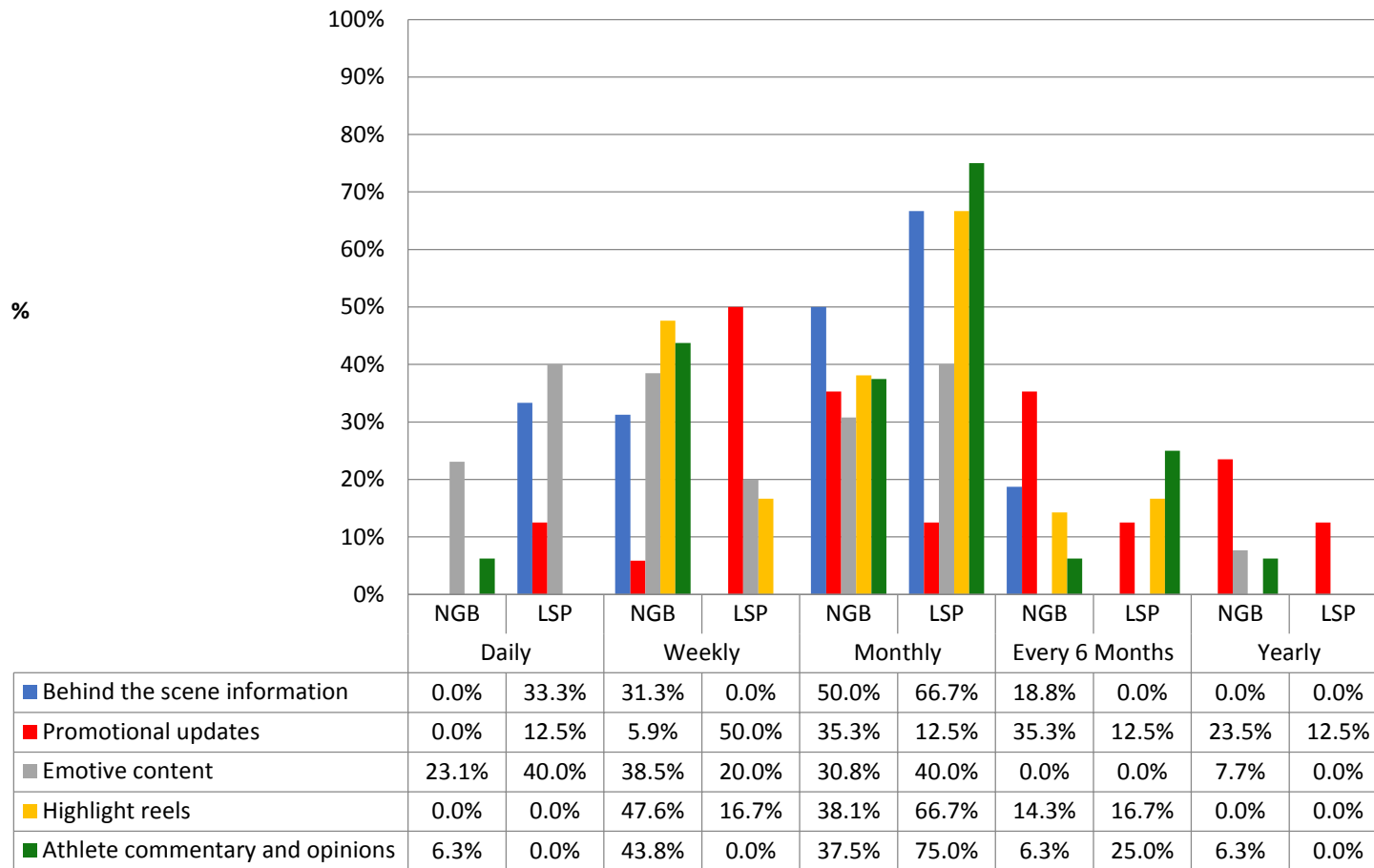


Figure 17, 18 and 19 illustrate the type of content posted on social media by NGBs and LSPs. As illustrated in Figure 18, on Facebook and Twitter, more than half of both sample groups of LSPs ( $n=10$ ,  $n=9$ ) and NGBs ( $n=22$ ,  $n=22$ ) posted content to engage with followers. The data shows that a high percentage of both sample groups used Facebook and Twitter to 'educate' followers on their sport and organisation. Not surprisingly, the biggest difference between the LSP and NGB sample groups was athlete commentary and opinions, especially on the platform Twitter. Of the NGB sample, 46% ( $n=13$ ) posted athlete commentary, in comparison to 13% ( $n=2$ ) of the LSP sample. Using a Chi-square test of independence, NGBs were significantly more likely to post athlete commentary and opinions on Facebook than LSPs ( $P=0.039$ ,  $d=0.673$ ). Similarly, NGBs were significantly more likely to post live game updates on both Facebook ( $P=0.042$ ,  $d=0.659$ ) and Twitter ( $P=0.011$ ,  $d=0.894$ ). The effect size for Twitter is large, whilst for Facebook it is medium. Behind the scenes information was significantly more likely to be posted by NGBs on both Facebook ( $P=0.024$ ,  $d=0.740$ ) and Twitter ( $P=0.036$ ,  $d=0.712$ ), though the effect size in this case was mediocre. These differences can most likely be put down to the characteristics of each organisation type; that is, NGBs generally represent a particular sport and the athletes that participate in the sport. Therefore, they will have a greater likelihood of having content on athlete commentary and opinions and live streaming. Moreover, it could be assumed that NGBs have more behind the scenes content to post than LSPs. This could include athlete training, coach's advice, competition planning and setup, etc.

Statistical significance was also found between the organisations and posting content to engage with followers on Twitter. After conducting a Chi-square test of independence, it was found that NGBs are significantly more likely to post content to engage with followers on Twitter ( $P=0.047$ ,  $d=0.669$ ). The effect size for this data is considered medium. This could be due to Twitter being a prominent platform when it comes to game updates and athlete information. Educational content is the only type of content that a higher percentage of LSPs posted more of than NGBs. On Facebook, 100% ( $n=29$ ) of LSPs and 90% ( $n=26$ ) of NGBs posted this type of content. On Twitter 88% ( $n=14$ ) of LSPs and 80% ( $n=23$ ) of NGBs posted this type of content. As LSPs aim to get more people active, posting educational content would be a way to inform people of the benefits of sport and physical activity.

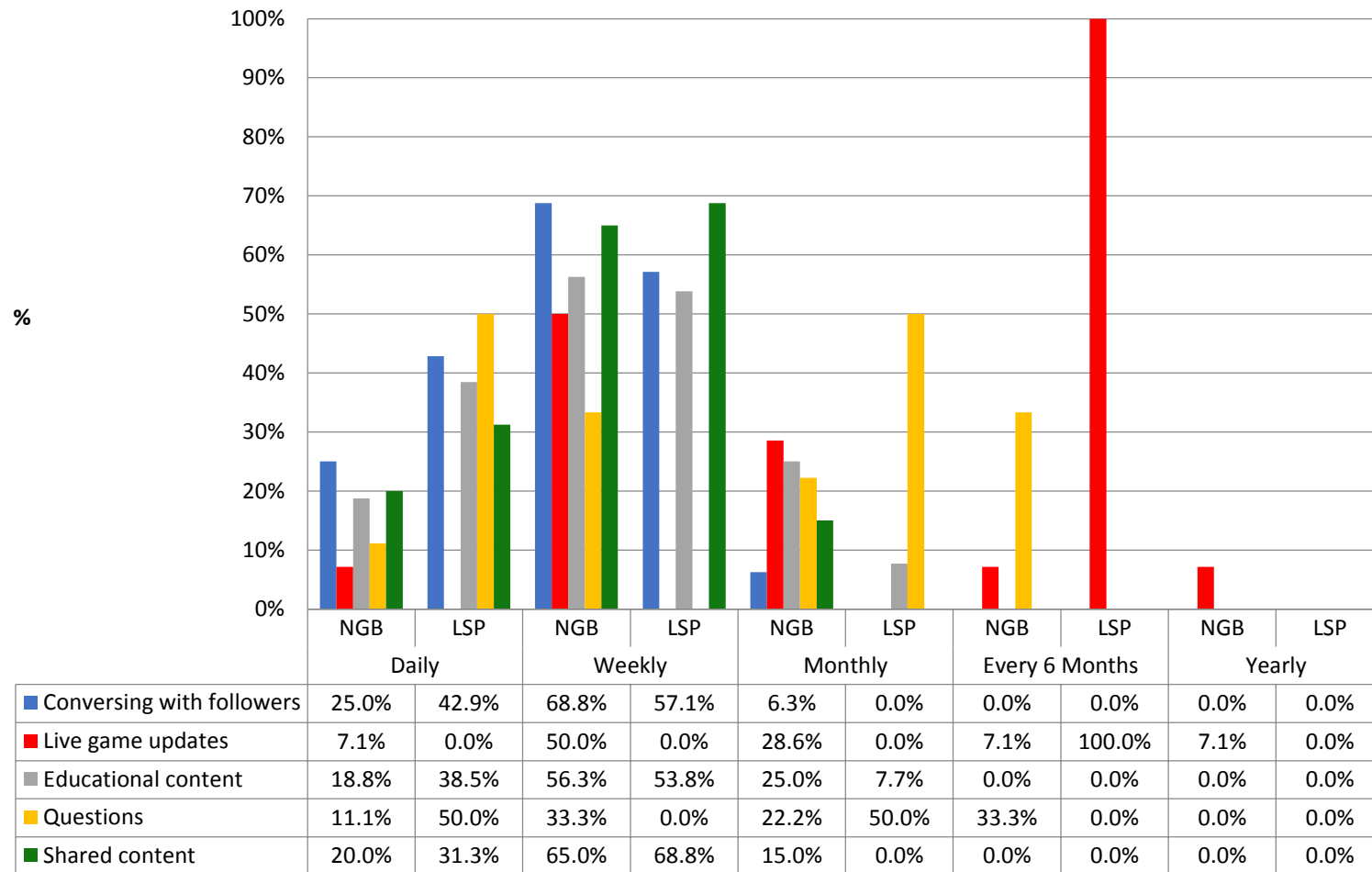
A surprising finding is that no NGB or LSP in this study used informative content on social media.

**Figure 20 - Frequency of Content Types Posted on Social Media (1)**





**Figure 21 - Frequency of Content Types Posted on Social Media (2)**

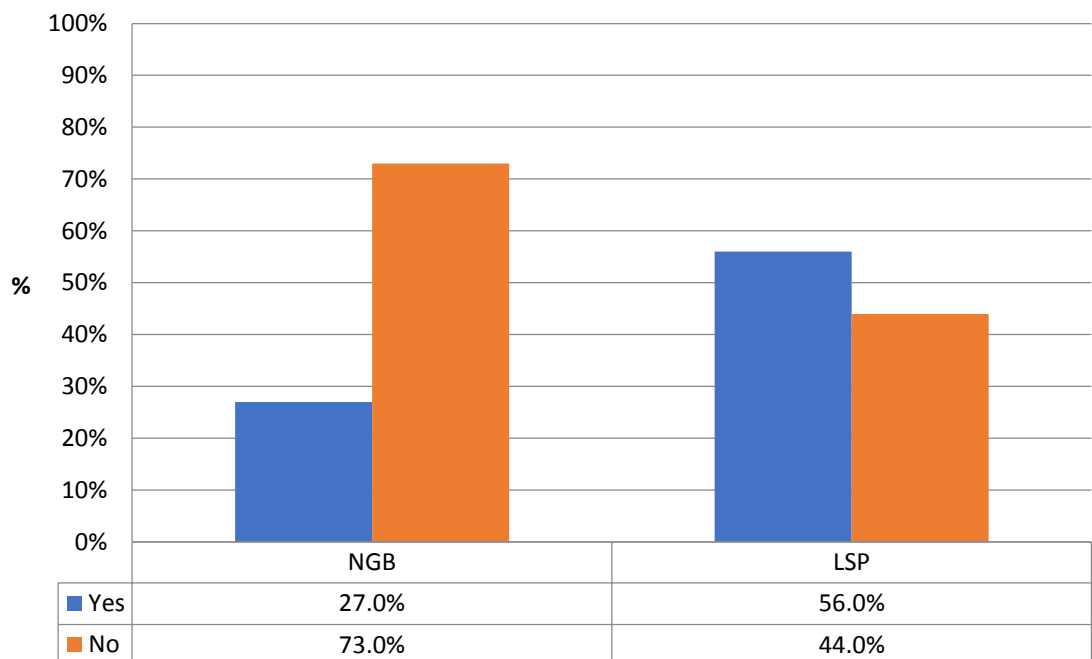


As illustrated in Figure 20 and 21, statistical analysis indicated that posting behind the scene information (Chi-Square goodness of fit test,  $P=0.024$ ,  $d=1.983$ ) and athlete commentary and opinions (Chi-Square goodness of fit test,  $P=0.007$ ,  $d=3.055$ ) were found to be most likely posted on a monthly basis by both LSPs and NGBs. The effect size for both posting behind the scene information and athlete commentary and opinions is very large. Alternatively, educational content (Chi-Square goodness of fit test,  $P=0.035$ ,  $d=1.095$ ) and shared content (Chi-Square goodness of fit test,  $P=0.000$ ,  $d=2.174$ ) were most frequently posted on a weekly basis by both the LSPs and NGBs within this sample group.

A Mann Whitney U test was performed to compare the differences between NGBs and LSPs and how often content is posted. Significance was found in relation to promotional updates; NGBs were statistically more likely to post promotional updates monthly in comparison to LSPs ( $p=0.026$ ,  $d=0.956$ ).

#### 4.2.1.3 Paid Adverts

**Figure 22 - The Use of Paid Adverts on Social Media**

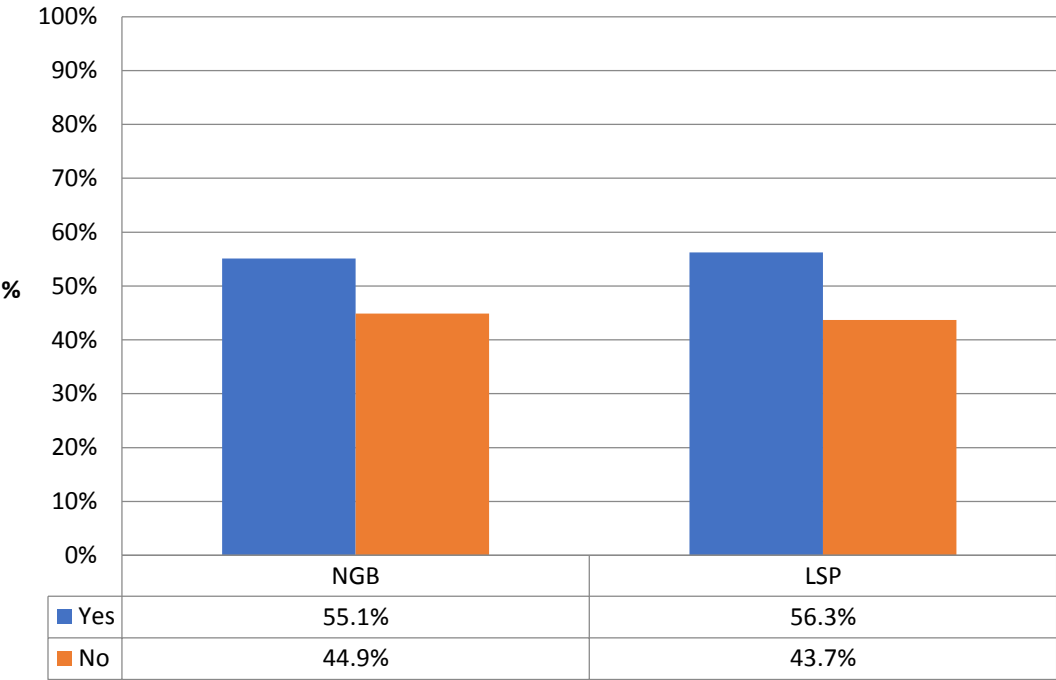


A higher percentage of LSPs (56%,  $n=9$ ) than NGBs (27%,  $n=7$ ) use paid adverts on their social media platforms (Figure 22). A chi-square test of independence was performed to determine whether there was a significant association between

organisation type and use of paid advertising; no significant association was found ( $P > 0.050$ ). For the LSPs that use paid advertising, the mean amount spent per annum was €960 with the median being €200. For NGBs both the mean and the median amount spent was €100. Perhaps the higher spend on social media by LSPs is related to the specific audiences they work with. All LSPs ( $n=16$ ) in this research used social media to target specific audiences<sup>25</sup>. As LSPs have specific populations they focus on, it is no surprise they all aim to target specific groups (Sport Ireland, 2018). This could result in a higher amount spent on segmenting content to reach a specific end user, thus the higher amount allocated to social media advertising. Furthermore, NGBs may see specific targeting as the responsibility of each individual sports club rather than the responsibility of the NGB itself.

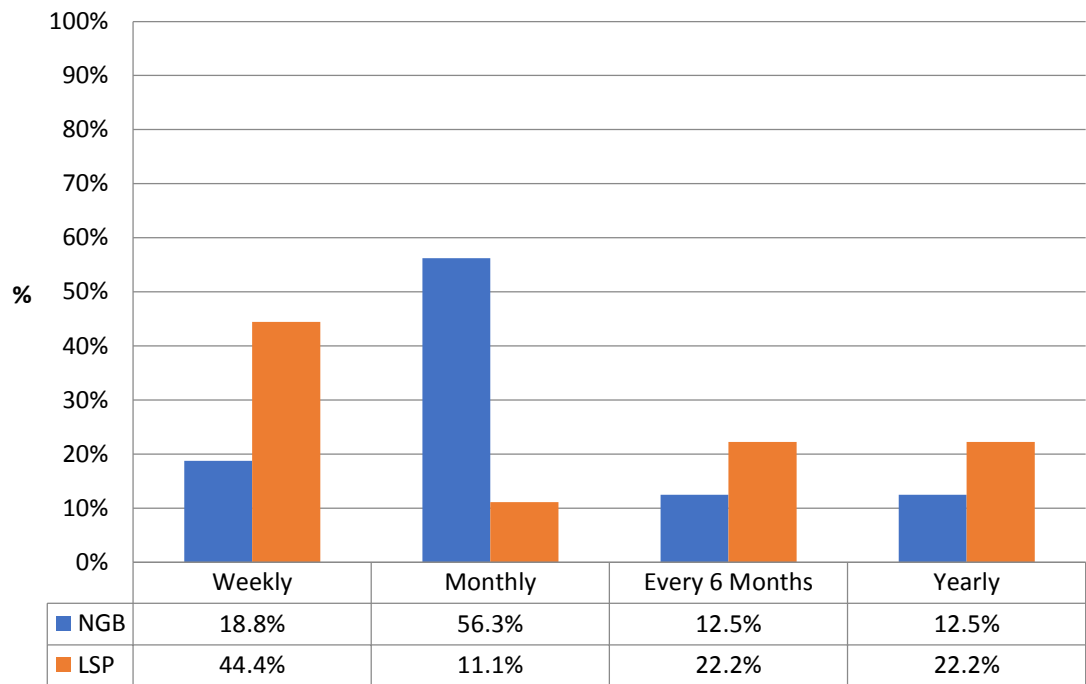
#### 4.2.1.4 Evaluation

**Figure 23 - Percentage of Organisations that Evaluate of Social Media Usage**



<sup>25</sup> Specific groups such as: people from the travelling community and older adults.

**Figure 24 - Frequency of Evaluation of Social Media Usage**



Over half of both NGBs (55%, n=16) and LSPs (56%, n=9) evaluate their social media (Figure 23). For the NGBs that do evaluate their social media, 56% (n=9) evaluate on a monthly basis. For LSPs, monthly evaluations were the least popular (n=1) and weekly evaluations were most popular (44%, n=7) as depicted in Figure 24.

**Figure 25 - Outcome Measures of Social Media Evaluation**

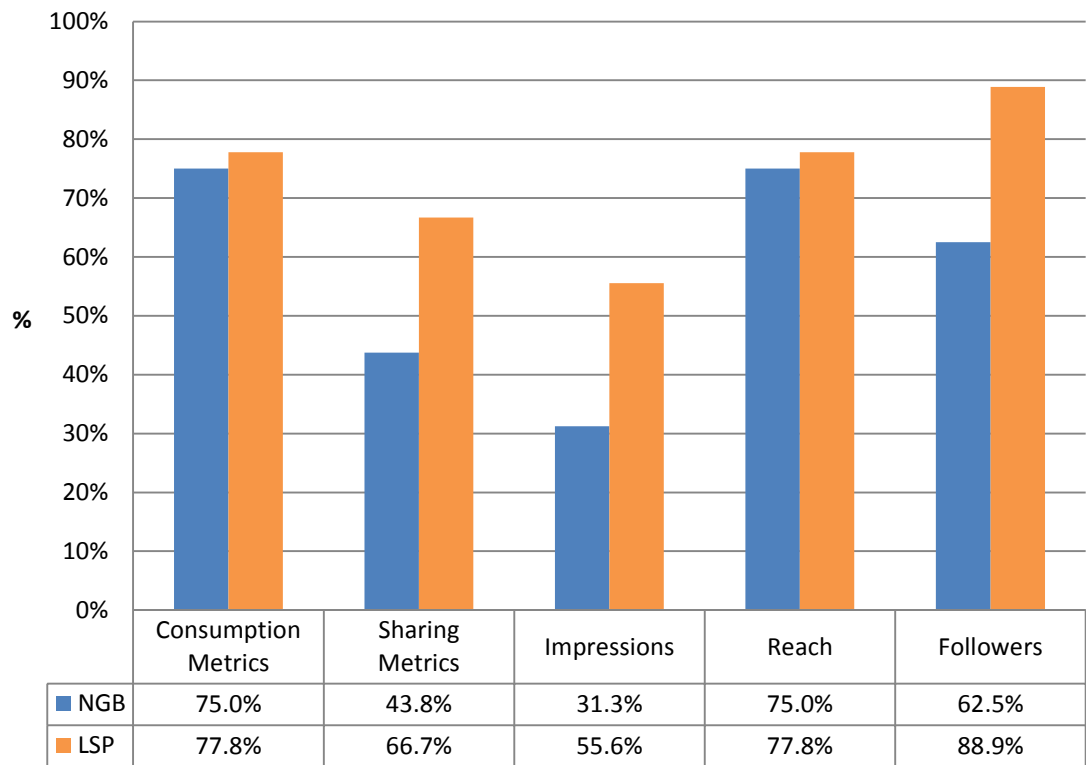


Figure 25 provides an overview of the outcomes measures used to evaluate the impact of social media. NGBs and LSPs mainly used the free analytic measures that Facebook and Twitter offer users to evaluate and monitor their social media. Followers were the most popular outcome measure that LSPs (89%, n=8) used. For NGBs consumption metrics and reach (75%, n=12) were the most popular outcome measures to evaluate. From looking at the graph, the biggest difference between NGBs and LSPs outcome measures is followers. However when tested statistically for differences, there were no significant differences found. What is interesting is that overall, LSPs had a higher percentage in each outcome measure category. Perhaps this could relate to the higher percentage of LSPs who use paid advertisements. Outcome measures would be a good indication on whether paid advertisements are successful and could be used as a rationale for putting more money into their social media advertising.

#### 4.2.2 Research Question One Qualitative Insights

Table 9 - Inductive Thematic Analysis of Current Usage of Social Media by LSPs and NGBs

General Dimension	Higher Order Theme	Sample Comment
<b>Current Usage of Social Media</b> The current actions on social media.	<b>Content</b> Anything that organisations choose to post and share with their audience on social media platforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The best part is the sharable content.</li> <li>• Focus more on video rather than text.</li> <li>• It's trying to find the right balance of how much to post.</li> </ul>

The only theme that emerged under current usage was content. Seven out of the ten employee representatives interviewed in this study brought forward the point of social media content. All interviewees who mentioned content were in agreement that the shareability<sup>26</sup> of content was a major benefit of social media. This theme was evident from quotes such as:

*“The best part of social media is the sharable content, that’s what sets it apart from traditional media”.* (NGB 2)

*“Once one person within a club shares something it blasts off. Not only do they share it through social media but they start to talk about it”.* (NGB 6)

One LSP representative mentions that they share events in the local community that may get people more active. They form relationships with local clubs, authorities and schools. This way they can hopefully get more people active, or at least make them aware of what is going on in their locality:

*“We always tell local clubs to let us know when they have a programme or something of the likes coming up and we will share it to increase awareness. We will share the likes of registration days, blitz etc, so people can turn up to them and get involved. Likewise, if we have training courses coming up we will ask them to share it and we would share theirs as well”.* (LSP 2)

<sup>26</sup> Shareability is the quality of being shareable or the likelihood of being shared.

Similar to this system of sharing local organisations events, as illustrated by the following comment two NGB representatives brought forward the point of using their athletes to get their content out:

*“There are particular athletes that if I tag them in a picture or share it, and their social sets get into, it gets viewed thousands of times. If it’s a world class athlete and everyone knows who they are, it just goes mental, the videos go mental particularly if I tag the video”.* (NGB 2)

Photo and video were the forms of content that NGB and LSP representatives deemed most successful on social media. Again, the majority of interviewees put this down to the shareability of this form of content. The ability to tag the people who are in these photos and videos gives these forms of content a bigger push as represented and illustrated by the following statement:

*“This coming weekend we have the cup competition, so there will be photos and that from the competition and as most clubs are involved, there will be a lot of sharing and tagging of these photos”.* (NGB 4)

However, one of the NGB representatives interviewed admitted that their organisation does not put much thought or planning into their social media posts. They use default content from their website; this was specifically highlighted in the following statement:

*“Throws up default posters from their website, nobody clicks into it, it’s not very interesting”.* (NGB 1)

Furthermore, another NGB mentioned that the staff member in control of their social media has no training and would sometimes forget basic Facebook functions:

*“Forget to put up a picture and sends a post out with just text so they get little to no interaction”.* (NGB 6)

Moreover, four organisations commented that they have a linked Twitter and Facebook so what is posted on either channel automatically posts to the other. One of these organisations was told that this is recommended best practice for social media:

*“We got a social media check-up last month and we were told to keep our content the same across the different platforms”.* (NGB 3)

One interviewee concedes that he wants to put up more interesting and engaging content:

*“Human interest pieces and build a weekly club/athlete story to help increase engagement”.* (NGB 1)

However, he states that time pressure makes this difficult. Similar statements had been given by multiple interviewees, especially with regards to video content. Time, staff and lack of training were listed as major barriers when it came to quality of content. These resources will be discussed in section 4.4.3.

With regards to content, two interviewees brought forward the point that they struggle to balance the amount and types of content they put out on the organisations social media pages. A representative from one particular NGB noted that the sport he works for is the representative for eleven different sports. Thus, giving equal content across their social media channels is a challenge:

*“I don’t want to overload our followers with 3 to 4 different posts coming in each day. It is just about finding the right balance, without neglecting any of the 11 sports”.* (NGB 5)

#### **4.2.3 Discussion**

The combination of the quantitative and qualitative results give an in-depth insight into NGB and LSP social media practice. Overall, Facebook and Twitter emerged as the primary social media channels used by NGBs and LSPs. These findings directly correlate with previous findings by Naraine and Parent (2017), Saari and Tuominen (2016) and Eagleman (2013). In particular, the results reflect almost identically the finding from Eagleman (2013) where both Facebook (100%) and Twitter (98.4%) were the most popular social media platforms utilised by NGBs and Google+ (9.7%) the least popular. Within the current study, there was little difference between NGB and LSP social media platform choice. This contradicts findings by Corthouts et al. (2019) who found differences in platform choices between NGBs and LSGBs, particularly between the use of Twitter. Although there was little difference between the percentages of NGBs and LSPs who use Twitter, there was difference in use when it came to content posted on Twitter by each organisation type that is concurrent with the findings of Cortouts et al. (2019). Similar to the results in this study, Naraine and Parent (2017) found that social media platforms such as Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube were listed as platforms adopted by NGBs, but infrequently used. Naraine and Parent (2017) put the disuse of these platforms down to the specific audiences sporting organisations are



trying to reach. Organisations will use the platforms which are popular with their target audience or the platform with the most users. As mentioned earlier, in Ireland, Facebook is the most popular social media platform, followed by Instagram in 2nd and Twitter in 3rd. The popularity of these platforms among Irish social media users most likely has an impact on the platforms NGBs and LSPs opt to use and opt not to use. Although Instagram was listed as the third most popular social media platform for both NGBs and LSPs, only 38% (n=17) of the survey respondents actually used Instagram in comparison to 60% of the participants in Naraine and Parent's (2017) study and all participants in Saari and Tuominen's (2016) study. This may be due to the timing of this study and account for the emerging popularity of Instagram in Ireland during that particular data collection phase in 2017. According to Statista (2017), in 2017, 32% of Irish people used Instagram. When comparing the Irish Instagram trend during that period with the Instagram trends reported in Canada (37%), Sweden (53%) and Finland (52%) it is apparent that their usage is slightly higher (Statista, 2017). Furthermore, the research sample in the current study was larger than was in the case in both Naraine and Parent (2017) (N=10) and Saari and Tuominen's (2016) (N=10) study.

It is not surprising that Facebook and Twitter were perceived as the easiest social media platforms to use. Firstly, they are the platforms that both NGBs and LSPs used the most. Secondly, from the qualitative interviews carried out on phase three, it seems that many employees are more comfortable using these platforms as they also have their own personal pages on these platforms so have become more familiar with these platforms. The findings of this study are in agreement with Naraine and Parent (2017) who established that NSOs found Facebook the easiest social media platform to use. This ease of use was put down to Facebook's ability to disseminate information quickly and efficiently. The overall general frequency of posts per week on social media was 1 - 5 times for NGBs and LSPs. Again these findings contradict the results of Corthouts et al. (2019) in which NGBs posted on average 60 times per month or twice per day. Although the results of the current study do not concur with Corthouts et al. (2019), they are closer to being in line with what they deem to be the most successful post frequency; 30 times per month or once per day. Despite this, post frequency is difficult to recommend and should depend on numerous factors such as an organisations audience, follower numbers, goals and social media platform (IBM, 2018; Social Report, 2018).

The results of the current study show that NGBs and LSPs mainly used a mixture of textual and multimedia content (photo or video) on social media. It also showed that NGBs and LSPs rarely used different forms of content. Overall these findings are in accordance with the findings reported in International studies by Thompson et al. (2014), Naraine and Parent (2017) and Corthouts et al. (2019). Again there was little difference between the format of content and organisation type. The only significant difference between the organisations was the use of live streaming. Interestingly, no NGBs reported any live streaming and LSPs were statistically more likely to use the live streaming features of social media. According to social media experts, Facebook live videos are watched three times more than general videos and gather over 135% more reach than an image (Sprout Social, 2018). It is difficult to come to a definite answer on why no NGB reported live streaming, especially as their LSP counterparts did use it to some extent. Perhaps it could be proposed that NGBs see the responsibility of live streaming as the responsibility of each individual club or athlete. Furthermore, some of their events or competitions may already have broadcasting rights attached which would affect their ability to live stream.

Both NGBs and LSPs posted content mainly to 'engage with' and 'educate followers'. In line with findings from Corthouts et al. (2019), one of the biggest differences between NGBs and LSGBs content was posting about 'elite sport'. In the current study, NGBs were statistically more likely to post content in relation to athlete commentary and opinions, live game updates, and behind the scenes information. These results are somewhat expected and encouraging. As mentioned earlier there are fundamental differences between the remit of NGBs and LSPs; NGBs represent one specific sport whilst LSPs represent sport for all and general physical activity regardless of the specific sport (Sport Ireland, 2017). This rationale is backed up by educational content being the only form of content and context in which a higher percentage of LSPs posted than NGBs. Again, it can be assumed this comes down to organisational remits. Educational content was the most popular form of content to be posted on Facebook, Twitter YouTube, social messaging platforms and Instagram for both NGBs and LSPs. Similar to the research carried out by Corthouts et al. (2019) and Eagleman (2013) NGBs and LSPs in this study posted less promotional content and instead posted more informative and entertaining content. The findings of this study support recommendations by Witkemper, Lim and Waldburger (2012) and Stavros, et al. (2014)

who suggest that social media should be used for both information and entertainment purposes, thus providing followers with both informative posts as well as amusement such as behind the scenes videos and photos.

Findings on the importance of the shareability of content are in line with results from previous academics (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Effing and Spil, 2016; Saari and Tuominen, 2016; Eagleman, 2013). NGBs and LSPs aimed to have information shared by multiple stakeholders such as clubs, organisations and athletes. This suggests that NGBs and LSPs wanted to reach as wide of an audience as possible with the information they were posting online. Fundamentally, sporting organisations use social media as an electronic version of word of mouth. This in turn aided in the dissemination of information and increasing awareness of the organisation and its programmes, courses and events. These areas will be discussed further in section 4.3.

NGBs and LSPs use of social media to target specific population groups was in line with recommendations from Department of Transport Tourism and Sport (2018). Department of Transport Tourism and Sport (2018) state that Irish sporting organisations should pay particular focus to selected population groups. According to the quantitative results, all LSPs (n=16) and 79% (n=23) of NGBs in this research aimed to reach specific population groups. Although not discussed further in the interview process, it could be presumed that due to social media user demographics, one population group to target through social media is women. Globally, a higher percent of women use social media in comparison men: no data could be found on social media demographics by gender in Ireland (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). Moreover, since completing the data collection phase of this research, a campaign targeting the exposure of women's sport has been established. The Federation of Irish Sport in partnership with NGBs, LSPs and organisations from the private sector released the '20x20 If She Can't See It She Can't Be It' campaign. This campaign is driven through social media. It aims to increase the visibility of women's sport by 20% by 2020 (20x20, 2018). The initial roll out focused on engaging with women and those involved in women's sports to make them aware of the campaign and how they can contribute. In 2019, there is less focus on targeting women; instead the campaign focuses on increasing exposure to women's sport to all age groups and genders in Ireland. It could be assumed that if the 20x20 campaign is successful, it may act as a catalyst to encourage the targeting of specific population groups with the use of social media.

With regards to paid advertising on social media, Facebook Adverts was the most popular tool. LSPs had a greater spend on paid adverts than NGBs which, as mentioned earlier is most likely linked to LSP target groups. These results are supported by Saari and Tuominen (2016) in which most clubs had a minor or non-existent marketing budget for social media. Clubs stated that the time spent constantly updating and planning social media activities was already a cost incurred by the organisation in relation to social media and that finances were better spent this way. The quantitative results from this study show that over half of both NGBs and LSPs do evaluate their social media usage. For the purpose of evaluation, all NGB and LSP representatives interviewed claim to use free tools such as Facebook Analytics and Google Analytics. Furthermore, NGBs and LSPs mainly used the free analytic measures that Facebook and Twitter offer users to evaluate and monitor their social media. None of the NGB or LSP representatives interviewed use special software to monitor their organisation's social media activity. Similar findings were reported in the study by both Saari & Tuominen (2016) and Thompson et al. (2014). Furthermore, some of the sporting organisations mentioned using third level students on placement as a resource to help with tasks related to the evaluation of social media. Similar finding were shown in research conducted by Saari & Tuominen (2016). In contrast to the finding by Saari & Tuominen (2016) none of the Irish NGBs and LSPs out sourced their evaluation and monitoring to a third party. This difference could be due to the lack of investment in social media by NGBs and LSPs. That being said, none of the big three NGBs were involved in this research. Given the resources at their disposal, it is conceivable that they do outsource some of their social media related activities.

In agreement with Naraine and Parent (2017), there seems to be a lack of knowledge about social media among NGBs and LSPs with some not understanding the basic functions of Facebook. This is not surprising considering that only 35% (n=16) of the population sample of NGBs and LSPs in this study had received some form of social media training or education. This finding is in line with data from Price, Farrington & Hall (2013). Price et al. (2013) found that NGB staff in North America, particularly in smaller organisations lacked specialist staff that were specifically trained to manage social media. Furthermore, they had small marketing budgets that did not allow for them to allocate funding for this purpose. Taylor, Doherty & McGraw (2015) propose that online training should be sought for staff as the incorrect use of social media may

damage the organisations reputation. For those representatives interviewed in this research with a knowledge and expertise of social media, it was indicated that there is a struggle to provide content that is interesting and engaging due to time pressure. Organisational resources have been mentioned as a barrier to effective social media usage in NSOs multiple times (Naraine and Parent, 2017). This will be discussed in further detail in section 4.4.3.

### 4.3 What organisational Goals do NGBs and LSPs hope to achieve through the use of social media platforms?

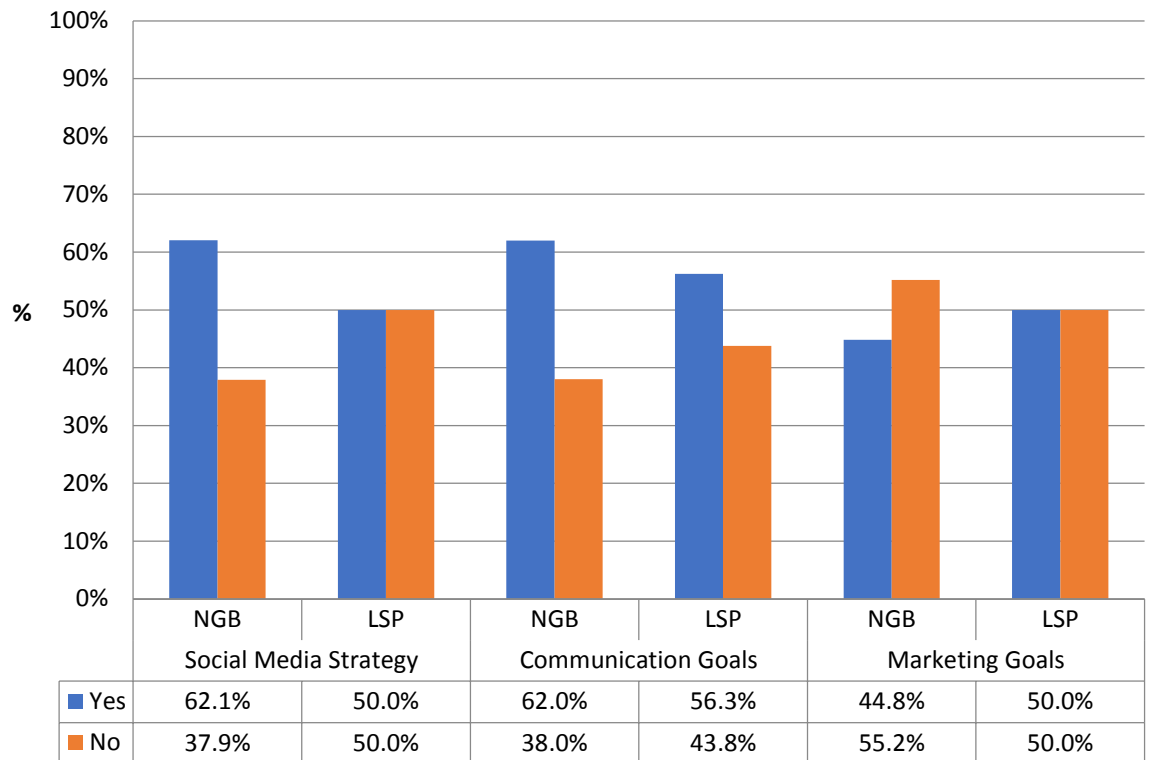
**Figure 26 - Layout of Research Question 2**



In this section, details will be provided on the strategy related to social media usage in LSPs and NGBs. Information will also be provided on their current goals associated with social media.

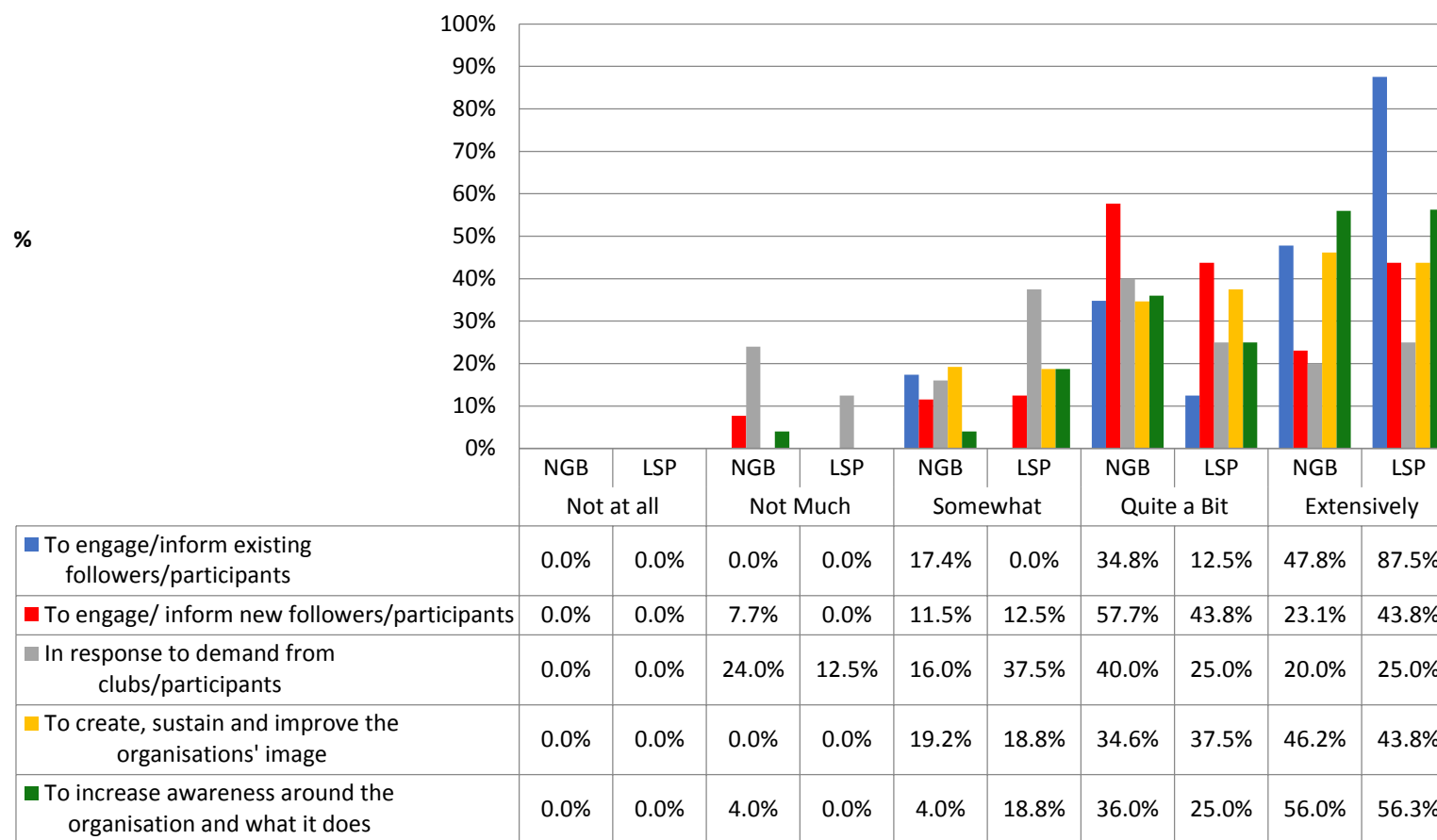
### 4.3.1 Research Question Two Quantitative Results

**Figure 27 - Social Media Strategy and Strategic Priorities**

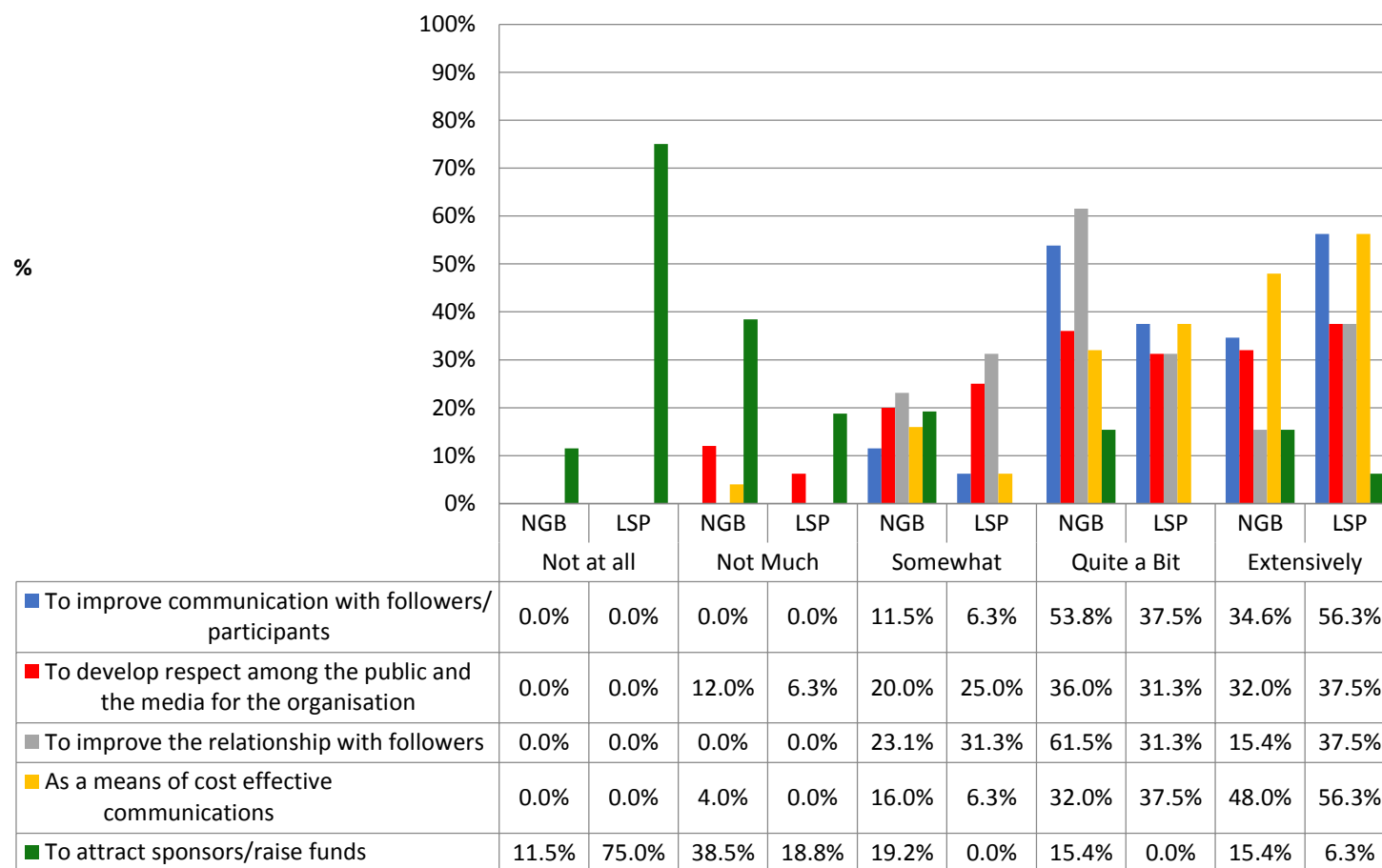


As depicted in Figure 27, half (n=8) of the LSPs within this sample group currently have a social media strategy in comparison to 38% (n=11) of the NGB respondents. A total of 62% (n=18) of the NGBs in the research sample have specific objectives for communication within their strategy in comparison to 56% (n=9) of the LSP sample. A higher percentage of the LSP respondents (50%, n=8) than the NGB sample group (45%, n=13) indicated that they have specific marketing goals for social media in their strategies. When tested for significance, no differences or associations were found.

**Figure 28 - Organisational Goals of Social Media (1)**

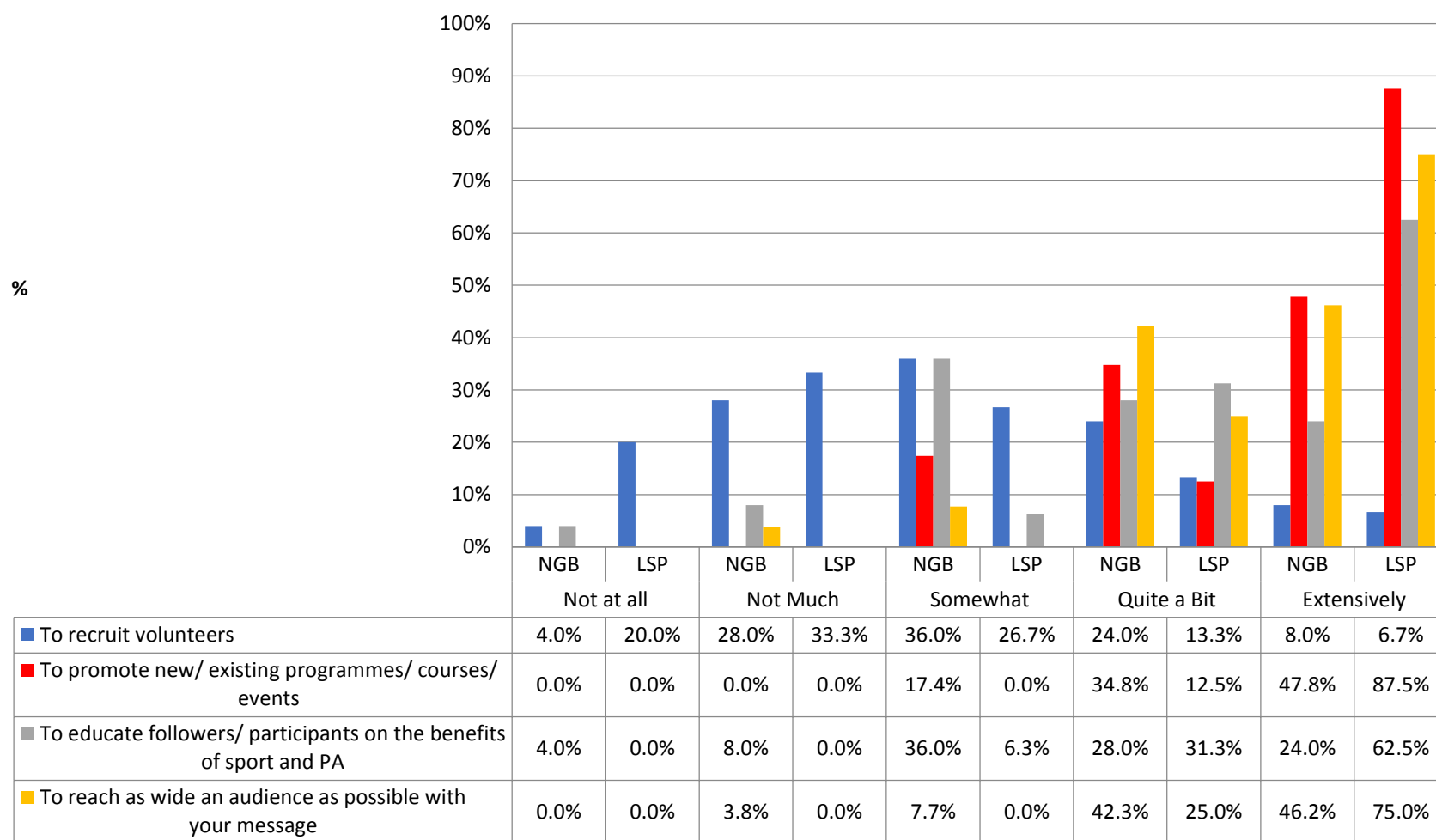


**Figure 29 - Organisational Goals of Social Media (2)**





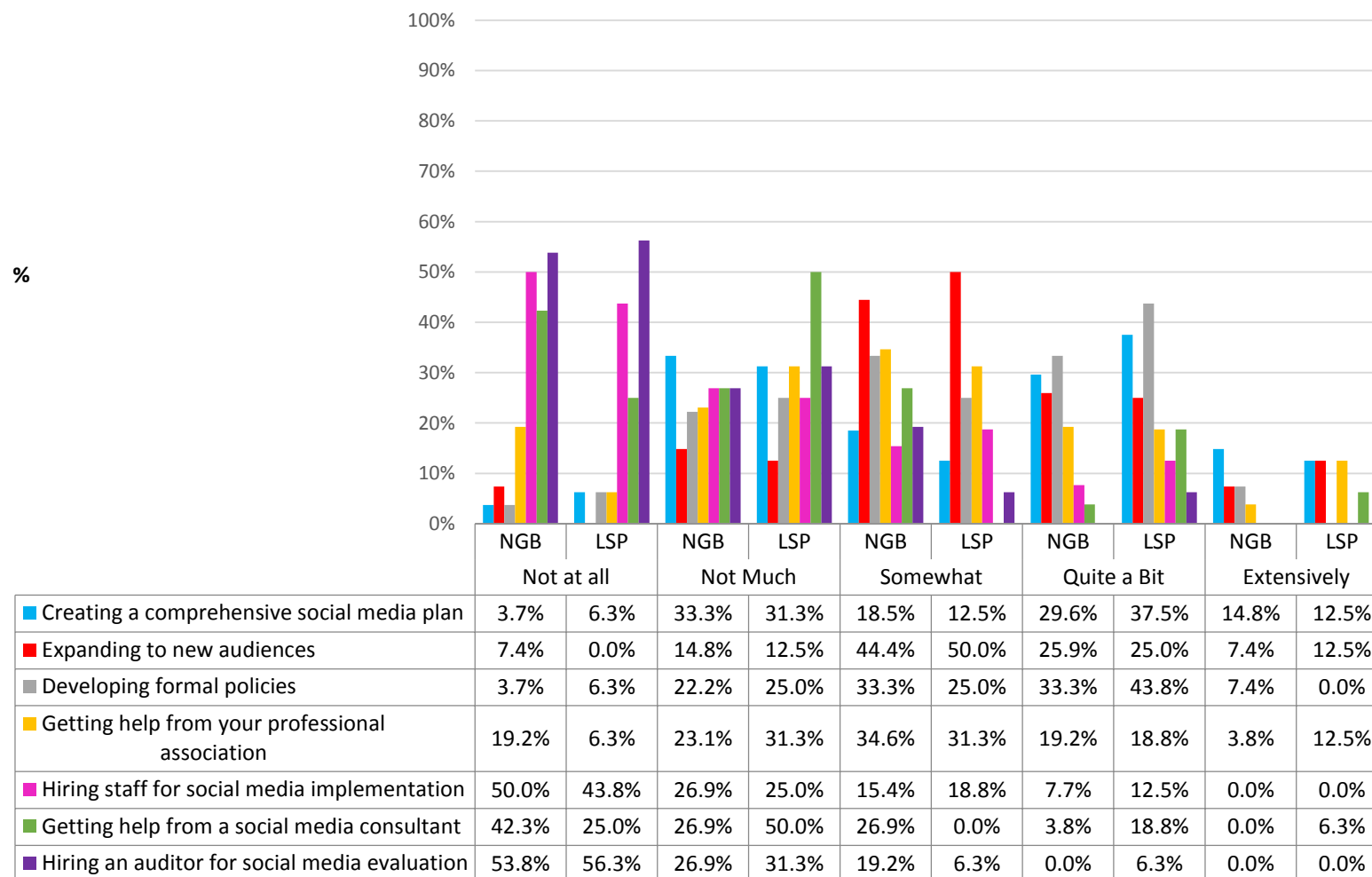
**Figure 30 - Organisational Goals of Social Media (3)**



The research revealed that the majority of the population sample of NGBs use social media extensively to engage and inform existing followers and participants of programmes, courses and events (73.9%, n=17) and to increase awareness around the organisation (56%, n=16). Social Media was also used extensively as a means of cost effective communication (48%, n=14) and to promote new and existing programmes (48%, n=14). As can be seen in Figures 28, 29 and 30, a total of 88% (n=14) of LSP respondents extensively use social media to promote new and existing programmes, courses and events followed by 75% (n=12) who used social media extensively to reach as wide of an audience as possible. From the research sample, 75% (n=12) of LSPs did not use social media at all to attract sponsorship.

Mann-Whitney U statistical analysis was carried out on the data. It was found that there is a significant difference between NGB and LSP social media goals. NGBs were more likely to use social media to attract sponsors and raise funds ( $P=0.000$ ,  $d=1.379$ ). However, LSPs were more likely to use social media to promote new and existing programmes ( $P=0.010$ ,  $d=0.752$ ) and educate followers on the benefits of sport and PA ( $P=0.003$ ,  $d=0.975$ ).

**Figure 31 - Future Organisational Plan of Social Media**



As presented in Figure 31, a high percentage of both LSPs (n=9) and NGBs (n=16) do not see hiring an auditor for social media evaluation as a future organisational plan at all. In a similar manner, 50% (n=15) of NGBs and 44% (n=7) of LSPs selected ‘not at all’ when asked the extent to which hiring staff for social media was a future organisational plan. Out of all the future plans listed in Figure 31, creating a comprehensive social media plan was the most desirable plan that had the highest support with 50% of LSPs (n=8) and 44% of NGBs (n=13) selecting the response at least ‘Quite a bit’ within the questionnaire. What is interesting is that less than half of both NGBs (33%, n=10) and LSPs (38%, n=6) specified that expanding to new audiences was either ‘quite a bit’ or ‘extensively’ a future organisational plan. Again there were very few differences between the two types of organisations.

### 4.3.2 Research Questions Two Qualitative Insights

Table 10 - Inductive Thematic Analysis of Organisational Goals Related to Social Media by LSPs and NGBs

General Dimension	Higher Order Theme	Sample Comment
<b>Organisational Goals related to Social Media</b> The aim of usage is to improve certain functions within the organisation. The benefits of social media for the organisation.	<b>Information Dissemination</b> A means of sending or receiving information across social media.  <b>Promotion</b> The publicising of the sport, organisation, or any associated activity as a means to increase participation or awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easiest way to get message out</li> <li>• The ability to spread our message quickly to a large audience.</li> <li>• Reaching our members instantly.</li> <li>• It is through social media exchange students contact us about playing for a club</li> <li>• It has increased awareness hugely.</li> <li>• Not depending on middle man.</li> <li>• Promoting the game.</li> </ul>

#### 4.3.2.1 Information Dissemination

All 10 interviewees mentioned information dissemination as being one of the main goals of using social media for each of the respective LSPs or NGBs they represented. These representatives were able to reach a wide audience with their information, quickly and easily. Social media was viewed as another outlet for the public to find out information about their organisation and sport, as emphasised in the interview extract outlined below:

*“Anyone who wants to find out information can easily access us, social media provides another outlet for that”. (LSP 3)*

*“Social media is the first place we put information whether it be about funding, grants etc. It is the quickest way for us to get information out to a large audience”. (LSP 2)*

Another interviewee acknowledged that they have gained members via information on their social media sites. They suggest social media is a new outlet for younger people in particular to find out about the sport:

*“We have gained members through social media. Especially students who come into the country for a year to study or work. They have played (name of sport) before and want to play while they are here. It is always through social media that they would contact us about playing for a club”. (NGB 4)*

Two representatives from the interviews put forward the point that the organisation uses social media to gain a greater understanding of what public opinion of the organisation is and what they want to see more of. They state that it gives them an opportunity to receive feedback that they never had before. Moreover, it keeps them up to date with issues in the sport across the country:

*“It’s a feedback mechanism we never had before though social media. This is giving us two way communications from our grassroots who are telling us what they do and don’t want. It’s allowed us to have those conversations that are vitally important for our strategic planning for the future. You also get a view of what public opinion is. I even became aware of issues around the country now because of social media. I found out about a fixture clash through social media and was able to react with that and do some reputation management that looked proactive yet it was really reactive as I just caught wind of it”. (NGB 3)*

*“They give us really important information back. Okay so we want people to do this course, they might come back to us and say why would we do this it doesn’t give us x, y, z. so often we find we are able to refocus what we are doing in the real world as its being influenced by what’s coming back to us in the digital world”. (LSP 3)*

The two way communication that social media facilitates has also aided in spreading information about the organisation, specifically for those who do not like using other forms of communication such as phoning:

*“It allows us to communicate to people who don’t directly want to ring in. For example, we get messages all the time asking about information on courses and the likes. Also some people won’t email, it is handy that if they see something that we have posted they can message us then and there about it without having to sign into their email. It also makes it a little bit more personal in some ways”. (LSP 4)*

Instant communication was discussed by two of the interviewees. They both had a similar viewpoint on the instant world of social media as summed up in the following quotation:

*“Social media is so instant, I see something happening I’m going to take the opportunity to take the photo or the video and I’m going to post it right away”. (NGB 5)*

However, this can also be a challenge for the staff of NGBs and LSPs who are in charge of social media accounts. Firstly it can lead to work having to take place out of the general 9-5 hours. It can also be a difficult task to undertake due to child safety policies:

*“When posting up pictures of children you have to have signed parental permission. Its fine, but it means you can’t post directly from an event which delays spreading a message which people want instantly”. (LSP 2)*

#### **4.3.2.2 Promotion**

As discussed by eight interviewees out of a total of ten, their social media was used to help to inform followers of the organisation’s news, courses and events and to increase awareness and exposure for the sport. These individuals expressed the benefits of social media, in particular Facebook in creating awareness of their organisation, sport and the events and courses attached. One LSP representative mentioned that she has seen an increase in course uptake:

*“I have noticed as well, our courses now are usually fully booked and I put this success down to social media”. (LSP 1)*

Correspondingly, a second LSP representative had similar experience with course uptake. She stated that she has noticed an increase in course attendance by a younger demographic. Again she perceived that social media is responsible for this:

*“It’s led to a younger uptake. I have in recent months seen more young people engaging in our courses so this could be due to social media”.*  
(LSP 4)

As most NGBs and LSPs are niche sports, they struggle to get the attention of main stream media such as television and radio, particularly outside of Olympic years. This viewpoint was shared by the majority of NGB and LSP representatives interviewed as summarised by the following statement:

*“What I do find difficult is getting the traditional media to listen as we are such a minority sport”.* (NGB 2)

The ability of social media to ‘cut out the middle man’ such as the national media was seen as one of the major draws for social media usage. Out of the 10 interviews, this was brought up six times. The below quote from an NGB representative sums up the overall tone that emerged from these six interviewees:

*“Social media is the easiest way to get our message into the public without having to depend on a middle man such as the national media”.*  
(NGB 3)

However, as stated by five of these six organisations, they cannot just depend on social media for their promotional activities. Traditional media still provides these organisations vital exposure:

*“Obviously everyone wants mainstream media coverage and it is important, but there is other ways of exposure now such as social media”.* (LSP 3)

*“I realised quite a few years ago that social media was a really good way of getting an audience, it’s not the only way all the traditional methods are very important too”.* (NGB 2)

*Rather than getting around the RTEs of the world, we still need them but now when the doors are closed we can do it”.* (NGB 3)

### **4.3.3 Discussion**

Similar to previous studies, both NGBs and LSPs are more likely to use social media as a communication tool rather than a marketing tool, although this difference is small (Corthouts et al., 2019; Naraine and Parent, 2017; Hipke and Hachtmann, 2014; Eagleman, 2013). Eagleman (2013) found that sporting organisations were more likely to use their social media to raise awareness of the organisation and its sport and less likely to use it for marketing activities such as the activation of sponsorship or to sell merchandise. Furthermore, Hipke and Hachtmann (2014) established that social media strategy within the context of collegiate athletic departments was driven by the communication departments as opposed to the marketing departments. In contrast, more than half (61.3%) of collegiate athletic departments surveyed in Dixon, Martinez & Martin (2015) stated that their organisations have a strategy in place of using social media for marketing purposes. It has been suggested that a mixed focus on both marketing and communication strategies could be integrated into the social media strategy of sporting organisations (Thompson et al., 2014). Thompson et al. (2014) specifically recommends that NGBs should incorporate and integrate social media into their communications and marketing strategies, hence suggesting that lessons can be learned on how to utilise the social media platforms more effectively.

With regards to the organisational goals of social media, the findings from this study are unique in that no other study to date has examined the organisational goals Irish NGBs and LSPs hope to achieve using social media. Based on the results, two organisational goals emerged that are worthy of further discussion: information dissemination and promotion. As indicated by NGBs and LSPs, the capability of social media to spread information to their existing followers in a quick and economical way was a primary draw of social media. All organisations within this sample group sought to educate followers about the sport and its activities, improve their communication with followers and reach as large an audience in a time effective manner. Additionally, the ability of social media to alleviate the lack of exposure these mainly niche sporting organisations receive from mainstream media was referred to as another salient function.

Both NGBs and LSPs perceived social media as a tool to promote their organisation and sport. A number of previous studies have provided evidence of similar organisations using social media for the purpose of information dissemination and promotion (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Saari & Tuominen, 2016; Hambrick and Svensson, 2015;



Eagleman, 2013). The findings of the current study confirm the position of these studies with similar activities occurring within the organisations. However, there are some differences in the findings. In contrast to Saari & Tuominen (2016), NGBs and LSPs did not use social media as a branding tool. This difference could be related to the not for profit nature of NGBs and LSPs in comparison to the professional sports teams within the research conducted in Saari & Tuominen (2016). Furthermore, Eagleman (2013) and Hambrick and Svensson (2015) suggested one of the main goals of sports organisations using social media is to build a relationship with followers. Although the use of social media to improve the relationship with followers was selected within the quantitative phase by the majority of organisations (n=35), relationship building was not listed as a primary goal of Irish NGBs or LSPs when interviewed in the qualitative phase. Conceivably, this could be a direct consequence of the largely one-way communication embraced by Irish NGBs and LSPs when communicating online.

Unfortunately, when taking the current social media practice of NGBs and LSPs into consideration, it is unlikely that they are achieving the goals mentioned above. The findings within this study imply that Irish sporting organisations are using social media channels as another medium to broadcast their message rather than to truly engage with their audience. Of course, when it comes to their goal of promotion, these 'broadcasting' style posts can be useful, however it has been suggested that being engaging towards your audience could have more beneficial results in both terms of information dissemination and promotion (Achen, 2016). What is more, NGBs and LSPs do not seem to be using social media to achieve goals that align with Sport Irelands strategic documents and with the organisational needs of not for profit sporting bodies.

Firstly, the participants in this study give the impression that they do not to use social media to attract new participants or engage with new participants to the same extent as they look to engage with existing followers. This is particularly interesting as mentioned in the review of literature, Sport Irelands strategic documents would refer to the promotion of sport as one of the main organisational remits of NGBs and LSPs. While NGBs and LSPs do use social media to promote sport and raise awareness of sport, it seems like they are mainly targeting those already involved. The quantitative results show that 48% (n=14) of NGBs and 88% (n=14) of LSPs use social media extensively with the goal of engaging and or informing existing followers of their activities. A

lower percentage of NGBs (23%, n=7) and LSPs (44%, n=7) use social media extensively with the goal of engaging and or informing existing followers of their activities. Furthermore, less than half of both NGBs and LSPs viewed expanding to new audiences as a future opportunity of social media. Likewise, using social media to reach those not already involved in the sport was not brought up in the qualitative interviews. This could be considered a missed opportunity that social media affords sporting organisations. More emphasis could be made through social media activities to engage with those not already involved in sport and the specific population groups as per Sport Ireland. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of the social media 20x20 campaign may indeed have changed NGB and LSP views on the use of social media in attracting those not already involved in sport.

Although the reliance on volunteers has been noted by NGBs and LSPs within this research, a very small percentage of the organisations within the sample group used social media as an avenue to recruit volunteers. With the NGB sample, only 30% (n=9) selected either 'quite a bit' or 'extensively' when asked about the extent to which recruiting volunteers is a goal. Similarly, 20% (n=3) of LSPs selected 'quite a bit' or 'extensively' with regards to volunteers. For an industry that is largely based on volunteerism, this is quite surprising. Especially considering similar studies have mentioned the use of social media in gaining volunteers (Hambrick and Svensson, 2015). Hambrick and Svensson (2015) found that the main goal of not for profit sporting organisations on social media was to build relationships with potential volunteers. Likewise, not for profit sporting organisations within Hambrick and Svensson (2015) used social media as a platform to raise funds in the form of donations.

In a similar fashion, Naraine (2017) suggested that Canadian NGBs should use social media as a medium to gain commercial sponsorship as funding is not guaranteed year on year. Considering that Irish NGBs and LSPs are also not guaranteed funding, Sport Ireland recommend that these sporting organisations seek external funding streams (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2005). Importantly, the latest strategy document 2018 – 2027 specifically mentions the importance of attracting commercial sponsorship and implicit with that will be the need to use social media effectively to achieve this goal. Despite the fact that four of the last five strategic documents from Sport Ireland make specific reference to sponsorship, and the fact that government funding is not guaranteed, NGBs and LSPs do not use social media with the goal of obtaining sponsorship in mind. Half

of NGBs (n=15) and 94% (n=15) of LSPs indicated a low level of social media use in this regard, choosing 'not at all' or 'not much' with the goal of attracting sponsors and raising funds. The results of the current study concur with the findings in Naraine (2017), NSOs are not using social media with the goal of attracting sponsorship in mind. This is interesting as when examining findings from professional sporting organisations' social media use; sponsorship is a predominant goal of the majority of organisations (Baena, 2016; Parganas, Anagnostopoulos & Chadwick, 2015).

The goals of attracting new participants, volunteers and sponsorship are achievable through the use of social media, as established in studies in both not for profit (Hambrick and Svensson, 2015) and professional (Baena, 2016; Parganas et al., 2015) sporting organisations. NGBs and LSPs should be aiming to achieve goals in these areas as they have been highlighted as important within Sport Irelands strategic documents. Moreover, any gains in these three areas would possibly have a direct impact on other sports development activities such as events and competitions where resources such as volunteers and sponsorship partners play a vital role. Achieving these goals would involve NGBs and LSPs becoming more audience specific with content. It may also require a certain level of knowledge when it comes to the audience tools that social networks such as Facebook afford the user. Of course, to achieve success in these areas, social media should be used in line with other forms of traditional promotion and communication methods. However, neglecting social media completely with regards to these areas could definitely be considered a missed opportunity. It may also be suggested that the lack of initiative to use social media as a tool to attract new participants, volunteers and leverage sponsorship in NGBs and LSPs relates to barriers such as a lack of resource capacity and social media expertise within these organisations.

#### 4.4 What are the perceived and actual barriers to use of social media by NGBs and LSPs?

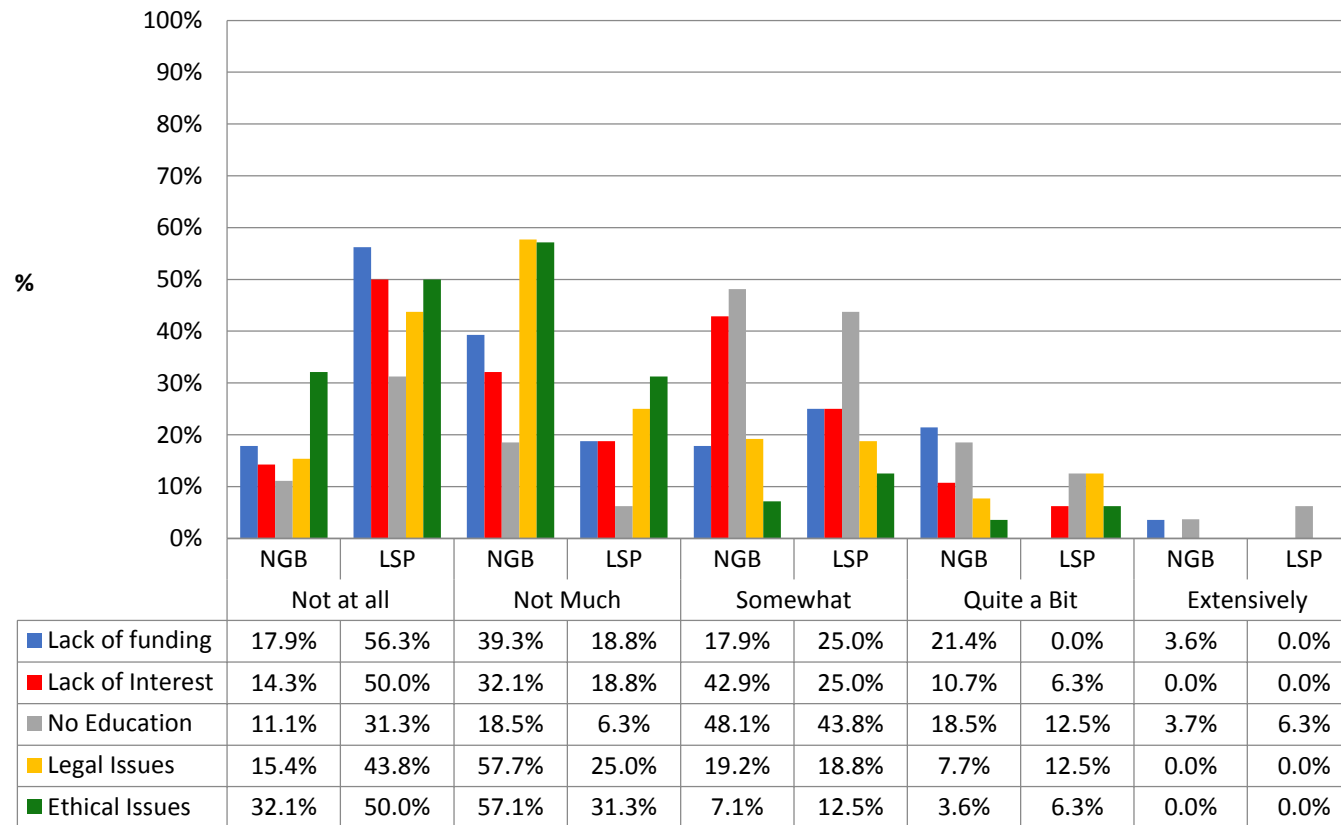
*Figure 32 - Layout of Research Question 3*



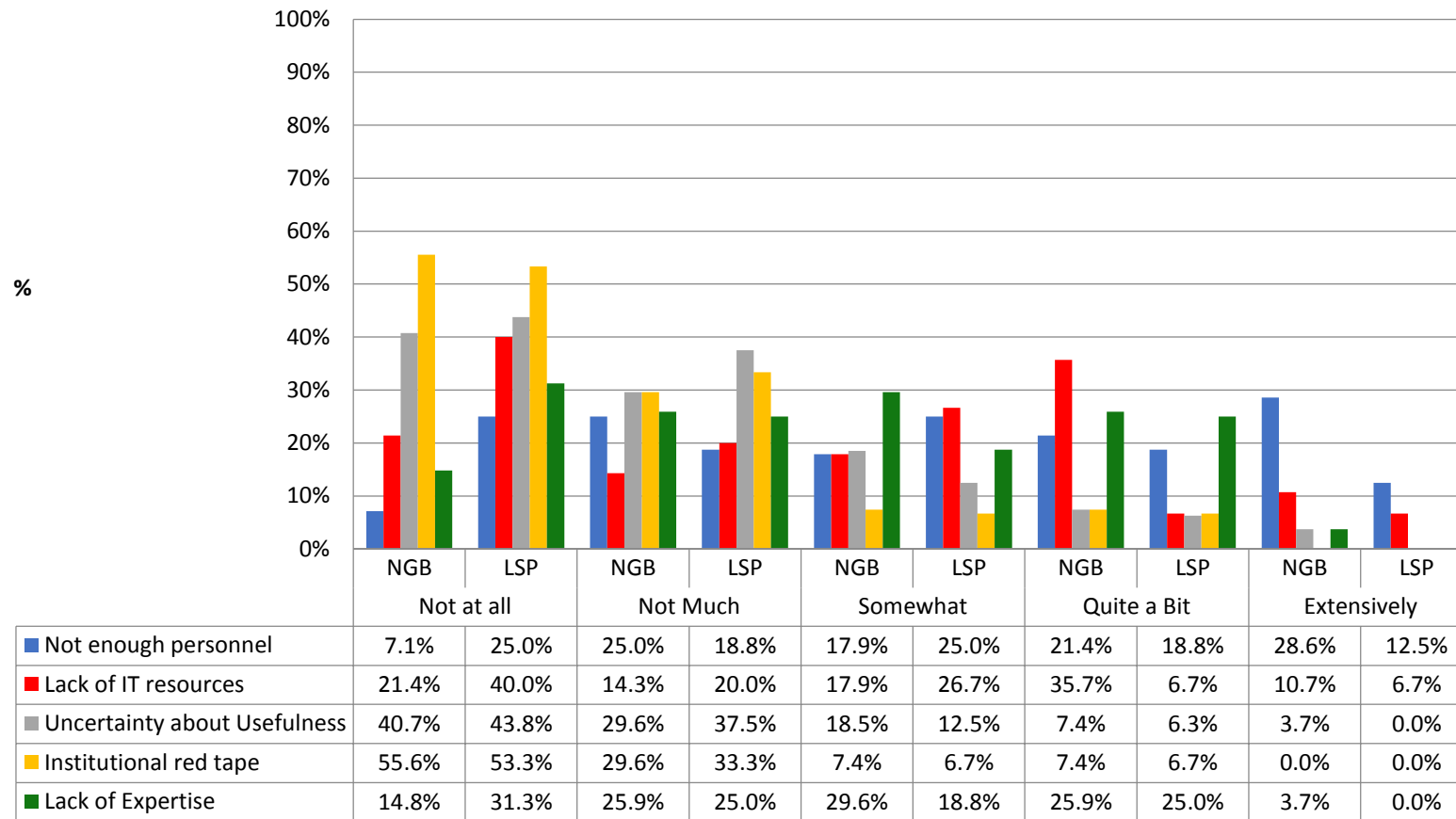
In this section, information will be provided on the perceived barriers to successful social media use. Again this section will outline the findings from the online questionnaire, followed by the results from the interviews with NGB and LSP representatives. Finally, these findings will be discussed.

#### 4.4.1 Research Question Three Quantitative Results

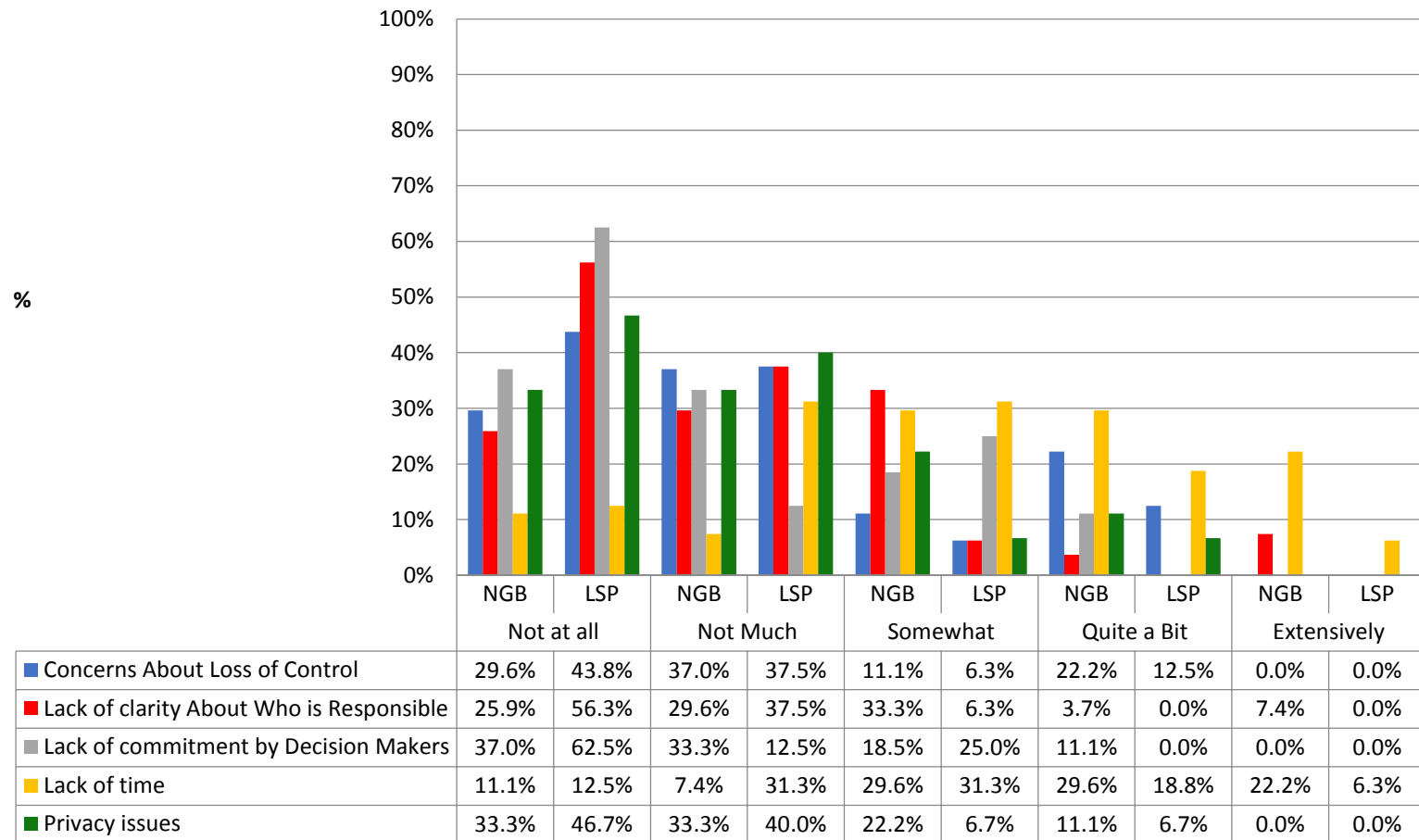
**Figure 33 - Barriers to Effective Social Media Usage (1)**



**Figure 34 - Barriers to Effective Social Media Usage (2)**



**Figure 35 - Barriers to Effective Social Media Usage (3)**



In order to review the type of barriers that LSPs and NGBs faced when using social media, in phase two of the research, it was asked from respondents to detail the extent to which specific barriers impacted on their use of social media. The response options ranged 'not at all' (value = 1) to 'extensively' (value = 5). The results of this can be found in Figures 33, 34 and 35. Results show that LSPs found not having enough personnel was the most extensive barrier to social media usage. Overall 56% (n=9) of LSPs felt that lack of personnel was somewhat a barrier to social media usage. The barrier that was least extensive for LSPs was a lack of commitment by decision makers in the organisation, with 63% (n=10) of LSPs stating this was not a barrier at all. Similar to LSPs, 29% (n=8) of NGBs found a lack of personnel to be the most extensive barrier to social media usage. Overall, 68% (n=20) of NGBs felt that lack of personnel was in some way a barrier to social media usage. Lack of time was the barrier that was most common for NGBs with 81% (n=24) stating that this affected social media usage in some way. In order to measure the difference in the extent of barriers between LSPs and NGBs, a series of Mann-Whitney U tests were performed. There are numerous significant differences in terms of the extent of barriers to social media usage, all of which are considered at least a medium size effect. Firstly, NGBs are statistically more likely to see lack of funding ( $P=0.015$ ,  $d=0.755$ ) and lack of interest from those within my organisation ( $P=0.041$ ,  $d=0.616$ ) as a barrier to social media usage. LSPs are statistically less likely to see lack of institutional clarity about who is responsible for social media ( $P=0.009$ ,  $d=0.820$ ) as a barrier to social media usage.



#### 4.4.2 Research Question Three Qualitative Insights

Table 11 - Inductive Thematic Analysis of Barriers to Social Media Usage by LSPs and NGBs

General Dimension	Higher Order Theme	Sample Comment
<b>Barriers to social media usage</b> Obstacles that are preventing or hindering progress in relation to the use of social media.	<b>Resources</b> The supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by the organisation in order to function effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having one employee limits the amount of work that can get done in one day.</li> <li>• There are not enough hours in a day.</li> <li>• We are small, we must use our finances wisely.</li> <li>• Making sure we have a good enough phone or recording equipment</li> </ul>
	<b>Lack of Expertise</b> The lack of special skills or knowledge relating to social media that is acquired by training, study, or practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We keep track of likes and views, I don't have any training so it's just basic features.</li> <li>• I didn't know you could schedule posts.</li> <li>• When I learn something new, it seems to have changed by the time I get it down.</li> </ul>
	<b>Control</b> The lack of directing influence over what can be said about the organisation on social media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying to keep control is a challenge.</li> </ul>

##### 4.4.2.1 Resources

The biggest issue to emerge with regards to the use of social media by the various interviewees for NGBs and LSPs was the lack of resources within the organisation. Resources that were brought up by representatives included personnel, time, money and equipment. Seven out of the ten interviewees made a specific reference to personnel, for example, one NGB interviewee stated:

*“Some big organisations have the ability to farm out the work they need done to a third party be it an agency or using production companies, they have a budget to put with it. However for us it's in house, it's me and one other person”.* (NGB 3)

Similarly, an LSP representative mentioned that they have one person in control of their social media, and she alone is responsible for posting about events, course, competitions, and acknowledged that the work load can be a lot for one person:

*“It is a lot to manage for one person”. (LSP 3)*

Moreover, many of the interviewees brought forward the point that they are mainly volunteer based. One NGB representative who is a volunteer stated that he has time restrictions thus cannot do as much as he ideally would like to:

*“I can’t do as much as I’d like as I am volunteering and have time restrictions”. (NGB 1)*

Other interviewees made the point that their volunteers and clubs communications officers are of an “older generation” who did not “grow up with social media” and have “little to no interest” in using it. The barrier of age came up frequently within interviews:

*“As a fully amateur sporting body run by volunteers, the biggest problem for us, is the average age of the volunteers is really quite old. To the point where they are not comfortable with social media”. (NGB 5)*

*“When you have a 68-year-old granny who is the PRO for her county it is very hard to tell her to use snapchat”. (NGB 3)*

*“Especially with our volunteers, they all have different skill sets, some with media, and some with social media and then others can’t fully use a laptop”. (NGB 6)*

Due to the lack of personnel, time also becomes a barrier. Many of the representatives stated that they “do not have enough hours in a day” especially when it comes to social media as “there is so much to do on it” and it can be “difficult to prioritise”. One NGB representative mentions that:

*“It’s approaching the time when we need a dedicated resource who concentrates on social media under the direction of my role. It’s constantly changing and if you’re not careful it will take your whole day”. (NGB 3)*

Unfortunately, it is currently not possible for this NGB to hire someone specifically for social media due to financial reasons. Finances were brought up by four representatives within phase three of the research process. They all had a similar message:

*“We don’t have the budget”. (NGB 4)*

On the same note of finances and the general inability to afford more staff, six of the ten representatives interviewed mentioned the use of third level students. These students typically work for a lower wage, if not for free through initiatives such as internships and work placements:

*“We would use students quite often. Our latest evaluation was done by a student who gave us where we stand now and recommendations and we will implement these right away and evaluate them again in a years’ time”. (NGB 3)*

As stated in the above quote, interviewees generally had the perception that students had a greater ability to use their social media pages more effectively and had a greater knowledge of social media. This is a contrasting view to the typically “older generation” volunteers discussed previously:

*“We also now have a student who would come in and give us a hand. She gives us advice and help. Social media changes so much, like snapchat I don’t know how to use it, I’m not comfortable to use it but I’m aware of how important it is. She and you probably know how these things work. Facebook live etc., people who are more in tuned to these things are very important for NGBs”. (NGB 2)*

Finally, when discussing barriers, resources, equipment and technology were also referred to multiple times throughout interviews. LSP and NGB representatives had a similar view point in relation to equipment, it was considered too expensive and too dynamic in nature. The quote below is a representation of the overall perception of the representatives:

*“With the technology as soon as you have invested the money you need, it’s starting to go out of date. In two years’ time it will be a different landscape. Two years ago I could have never imagined Facebook live and here I am using it. Especially with the development of the new outlets such as Facebook live, you now have demands for the quality of what you put out there to be good enough. You need microphones, cameras, phones. There are so many different areas, its adding expense upon expense”. (NGB 3)*

#### **4.4.2.2 Lack of Expertise**

A lack of knowledge and expertise in social media was cited by all ten interviewees. The general consensus from all ten interviewees was that they did not possess the skill set needed to truly use social media in an efficient and effective manner to help with achieving organisational goals. Some representatives had no training at all in social media:

*“I suppose the biggest challenge for us is not knowing certain things. None of us have any social media training”. (LSP 1)*

*“Neither myself or the other girl who runs our social media have any training”. (LSP 3)*

*“I only know basic Facebook, it takes me longer to go over things before I can use them”. (NGB 6)*

Representatives that did have some sort of knowledge or expertise around social media referred to being “self-taught” through using their own “personal social media accounts”:

*“Out of all of us I would have the most experience and knowledge in social media. I never received any specific training but I have also kept up to date with the latest online trends and tried to keep this organisation up to date”. (LSP 2)*

One NGB representative had a diploma in digital marketing and yet, still did not perceive himself to have the skill set or knowledge for the current social media landscape. He explains that the environment is so fast changing that once you master something it can be old news in the social media world:

*“I have a diploma in digital marketing yet I don’t know how to use snapchat or how best to use it for the organisation. There is a constant need for upskilling. It’s a problem I have not seen addressed. The only way I see is through Sport Ireland but I have not seen that yet. There isn’t an area I can go to that I have seen yet that I can go to and who can teach me how to upskill myself, to save money on going to an agency or employing someone else who we can’t afford”. (NGB 3)*

As indicated in the above quotation, LSP and NGB representatives noted the need for “constant upskilling” for employees who have access to their organisation’s social

media pages. The resources of time and finances were referred to as barriers to the upskilling of employees. Moreover, the acknowledgement of Sport Ireland in the above quote reflects the opinion of three of the ten interviewees. The remaining representatives had a conflicting opinion:

*“It’s a difficult one for sport Ireland as they work within a budget and that budget goes into various areas of sport. They don’t necessarily have to upskill the NGBs, we all have our own aims and remits when it comes to operating our sports within the country. For Sport Ireland to babysit each one of us and hold our hand through the education that we need is maybe asking a bit much of them”.* (NGB 5)

In agreement with the above quote, five participants put forward the idea that it is not Sport Ireland’s responsibility to upskill or train LSPs or NGBs. It is down to each organisation to provide these opportunities for their staff themselves.

Two of the interviewees had attended a course on social media provided by Sport Ireland. There was a mixed opinion on the effectiveness of these courses. One representative found the course beneficial:

*“I did training myself through Sport Ireland and found it a great help”.* (LSP 4)

In opposition the other representative found it be a “one size fits all approach” which was not effective for their organisational needs:

*“Unfortunately what’s issued by Sport Ireland doesn’t necessarily work for us, it’s not a one shoe fits all approach. They are expecting us to do what the IRFU can do, it’s unrealistic”.* (NGB 4)

#### **4.4.2.3 Control**

Trying to control or the lack of control associated with the use of social media was indicated as a major barrier to social media usage by six of the ten interviewees. The prevailing sentiment was captured by one participant who stated:

*“We have to be very careful of what we can allow people to write on the pages, without being too restrictive. Obviously people are allowed their opinions but we don’t want anything to be detrimental to the organisation”.* (NGB 4)

In particular, the smaller NGBs interviewed found the lack of control a particular challenge in comparison to the bigger NGBs and the LSPs. It was mentioned three times that the size of the organisation has an impact on the control that they perceive needs to be mentioned:

*“You have people making comments and you just say well if you came to the AGM you would know what is going on and why. We have a small membership, people nearly know everybody involved”.* (NGB 6)

When participants were probed on the procedure used to deal with “derogatory” comments or posts there was a general view by four of the participants that:

*“If a comment is derogatory we will delete it”.* (NGB 4)

Or

*“If there is merit in it, we will leave it there and let people decide for themselves”.* (NGB 5)

Two NGB representatives stated they have a set policy on how to deal with issues that arise online. The first explained that they used to follow a similar concept to what is illustrated above until they had to go to a tribunal in relation to conflict that took place on their social media page:

*“Any competitor that competes in (sport) must first sign and abide by a social media policy. I think we are one of the first NGBs in Ireland to have this. It’s a much more efficient way of dealing with issues that arise online. We actually got a legal professional to draft up that policy. So far our policy has worked quite well”.* (NGB 2)

On the same note, the other NGB representative commented that they have not had any issues with posts on social media; however they are aware this could happen. For this reason they have a set policy for members:

*“We do have a policy for all our clubs about language etc. on social media. Social media is free speech, people can say anything whether it be right or wrong, so it’s just trying to keep things civil”.* (NGB 1)

### **4.4.3 Discussion**

#### **4.4.3.1 Resources**

What was particularly striking from the findings was the over whelming consensus in relation to the lack of organisational resources from all organisations. All ten interviewees indicated there was a significant constraint on resources, specifically human and financial, that negatively affects their ability to be present on social media. NSOs often cite resource capacity issues when discussing their operation (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Saari & Tuominen, 2016; Thompson et al., 2014; Abreza et al., 2013). According to Naraine and Parent (2017), the lack of organisational capacity affects social media activities such as platform selection and content production. For example, within the current study many of the NGB and LSP representatives mentioned wanting to provide human interest pieces that would be engaging to their audience but indicated they simply do not have the time.

What was specifically interesting was the belief by the smaller scale organisations that if they had more resources like some of the larger scale organisations they would indeed use social media more effectively. However, interviewees from the larger organisations also felt that a lack of resources was an issue in both the current study and Naraine and Parent (2017). It has been suggested that if given additional resources, there is no guarantee that NSOs would allocate any to social media. Instead it is likely that the additional resources would go towards a higher priority organisational activity such as athlete development pathways (Naraine and Parent, 2017). It must also be mentioned that although there was a diverse mixture of organisation type and size interviewed, the largest three NGBs did not opt to take part in the qualitative phase of research. It is conceivable that the big three would indeed have access to resources that perhaps none of the remaining 63 NGBs or 29 LSPs would have. It is therefore possible that this would have an impact on how the social media is utilised, however it is an area of research that could be examined in future studies.

#### **4.4.3.2 Lack of Expertise**

The lack of organisational resources seems to be heightened by the lack of knowledge and expertise of the fundamental aspects of social media by the NGB and LSP employees within this sample group. Although this came through very strongly within the qualitative interviews, within the quantitative results this did not appear to be the case. Of the NGB sample 41% (n=12) indicated that ‘a lack of expertise’ was ‘not at all’

or 'not much' a barrier to social media usage. Similarly, 56% (n=9) of the LSP sample selected that 'lack of expertise' was 'not at all' or 'not much' a barrier to social media usage. This is one of the reasons why a mixed methodology approach was selected. Furthermore, the overwhelming consensus of those who referred to not having the correct skills in the interviews is more in line with past findings in similar studies (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Thompson et al., 2014).

Thompson et al. (2014) state that it is of utmost importance that those who are involved with an organisation's communication and or marketing processes should have as a minimum a knowledge and understanding of social media functions. There seems to be general confusion within the sports industry about how best to use social media to add value and contribute to the organisation; this is particularly true among not for profit sports (Thompson et al., 2014). Within this study, the sample of NGB and LSP employees seem to be aware that they do not have the skill set needed to truly use social media effectively to help achieve organisational goals. As many of the organisations within this study rely on one or two members of staff, these employees feel that they have no choice but to take on the role of social media without the skills necessary. Furthermore, many NGBs and LSPs appear to depend heavily on volunteers to carry out certain organisational functions. With the average volunteer being from an older age group, reports indicate that the majority seem to have no interest or skill set in the use of social media; this includes many NSO public relations officers. This finding somewhat contradicts Eagleman (2013) who found that there was no association between the age of employee and acceptance of social media usage in the workplace.

Additionally, those who do have an expertise in platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are struggling to keep up to date with trends on emerging platforms such as Instagram. Abeza et al. (2019) indicated that the reality is that employees responsible for social media will have to deal with the challenge of constant evolution and change. However, through the process of trial and error, over time employees will learn how to use the new function or platform and in turn will be able to manage change more efficiently. For Irish NGBs and LSPs, this process may not be as effective as it is among the professional sports teams interviewed in Abeza et al. (2019). According to NGB and LSP representatives within the current study, they are already under extreme time pressure; so much so that most cannot attend external training on social media when given the opportunity. Perhaps in conjunction with Taylor et al. (2015) it could be



suggested that an online guide that is accessible on and off site for NGB and LSP staff would be a more practical approach to social media training and upskilling. Nevertheless, this raises the issue of training requirements and resources. Although as mentioned by NSO representatives, Sport Ireland are not specifically responsible for training NGB and LSP staff in how to use social media to achieve organisational goals. It would however seem that it is in their best interest, and the benefit of sport that NGB and LSP staff are trained to a certain level in the way they use online platforms. As a large percentage of funding for these organisations comes directly from Sport Ireland, any misuse of an online forum such as social media could also have an impact on the reputation of Sport Ireland.

One way that NGBs and LSPs seem to have adapted to the social media landscape is by using third level students or interns. This result is similar to previous research, in which the lack of social media knowledge and expertise seems to have led to reliance by NSOs on third level students or interns (Saari & Tuominen; Heinonen, 2011). As these students are generally of a younger age group who were raised with social media, NSOs typically assume that they will have a greater knowledge and expertise of social media platforms. Although students and interns may be better equipped to use social media personally, they may not be better equipped to use it in a professional manner to achieve organisational goals. For this reason, it is still important to upskill these interns if possible. Unfortunately for now, this seems like the most realistic approach for NGBs and LSPs to take with regards to managing resources and curtail the lack of social media expertise within NGBs and LSPs.

#### **4.4.3.3 Control**

The lack of control associated with social media was presented by the majority of NGBs and LSPs as a major challenge. Again, this finding did not come across as strongly in the quantitative results with 67% (n=19) of NGBs and 81% (n=13) of LSPs selecting 'not at all' or 'not much' when asked about lack of control. The qualitative finding is coherent with previous studies by Saari & Tuominen (2016), McCarthy et al. (2014) and Eagleman (2013) who state that loss of or lack of control is one of the key challenges in using social media. NGBs within Eagleman (2013) study reported that it was difficult to monitor inappropriate comments and to determine how to deal with such comments or discussions on social media. NGBs and LSPs in the current study appear to face the same dilemma. Social media managers within the study by Abeza et al. (2019)

suggested that what is posted on an organisation's social media can be controlled by applying any one of the three basic approaches: let it go, delete it, or reply to it. This also seems to be the general consensus by Irish NGBs and LSPs. Most of them chose to either to leave the comment/ discussion or to delete the comment/discussion depending on the situation. However, in comparison to Saari & Tuominen (2016), representatives preferred to not interfere as much as possible with online comments and discussions. Due to past experiences, two NGBs have a set policy on dealing with online conflict. Perhaps this is a strategy that other NGBs and LSPs should consider to reduce the chance of any online activity having a detrimental effect or becoming a more serious issue. Within the literature on sporting organisations and social media, the researcher could not find any information on policy dealing with freedom of speech on social media.

#### **4.4.3.4 Proposed Solutions**

Overall the barriers experienced by the sample group in the current study have been cited by similar organisations in past academic literature (Naraine and Parent, 2017; Saari & Tuominen 2016; Thompson et al., 2014). Thus, it appears that these barriers are genuine. What is not apparent in past literature is how these sporting organisations can realistically overcome these barriers. Apart from the suggestion of using interns and students which, as mentioned in the qualitative results does alleviate some pressure, not many solutions have been given. Furthermore, as this is the first study of its kind involving Irish NGBs and LSPs, there is little to base specific recommendations and suggestions around. A possible solution that may reduce the impact of a lack of resources and a lack of expertise in the area of social media could be the sharing of resources. Collaboration between organisations has been referred to in the current National Sports Policy (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018, p.72).

*“We believe that fostering collaboration will require efforts on two fronts. Firstly we need to develop the abilities and skill sets within the organisations to recognise the potential benefits from making the connections with other sports bodies and external organisations”.*

Furthermore, with the development of the National Sports Campus (NSC), the possibility of sharing resources between different organisations has become more feasible, especially among the NGB sector. The NSC is home to Sport Ireland, the FAI,

the Sport Ireland Institute, the GAA Games Development Centre, Special Olympics Ireland, the National Aquatic Centre, Irish Sport HQ, among others. In particular, Irish Sport HQ accommodates the administrative headquarters of 16 NGBs and four other sporting organisations such as the Federation of Irish Sport with plans to accommodate a further number of NGBs in the near future. According to Sport Ireland (Sport Ireland, 2019), the concept behind Sport HQ is a to provide a business setting for sporting organisations with additional facilities such as meeting rooms and other additional shared services. Also as noted earlier, other sporting bodies such as the Federation of Irish sport and Paralympics Ireland are located in Sport HQ. Again, these organisations work closely in partnership with both NGBs and LSPs. Irish Sport HQ is a shared resource and it facilitates an environment of sharing resources between different organisations. With this in mind, perhaps a strategy for sharing digital expertise and resources could be developed.

Potentially, in collaboration with a number of NGBs, Sport Ireland could hire a social media specialist with knowledge of the sporting industry to act as a shared resource. Careful consideration would need to go into this and it does raise a number of issues. Firstly, NGBs are technically competitors who compete for a pool of funding and participants. While this is true, they do however all work towards achieving similar goals on behalf of Sport Ireland. For this to work, the NGBs in question would perhaps need to have opposite competition periods, a separate core audience and be flexible and willing to work in cooperation with other organisations. One of the biggest issues would be the financing of this role. As stated earlier, NGBs and LSPs are already under financial constraints. Perhaps a contribution from the NGBs and a percentage from Sport Ireland would be a feasible solution. Another issue could be the allocation of time and how it is shared. If the NGBs have different competition seasons, it would allow for the specialist to focus more heavily on the NGBs during each specific competition period. Furthermore, a set amount of hours could be allocated for each organisation. From discussions with employees in Sport HQ as part of the researcher's current day to day role, it is apparent that there are already organisations that share human resources such as administrators between organisations. Employees that work for more than one NGB usually work a split day between the organisations. The option of a shared resource may also enable a more practical approach to upskilling staff. This may enable them to learn some of the more advanced features of social networking sites. With

regards to a shared resource in LSPs, this may be more challenging to facilitate as they are based in separate locations around the country. Perhaps LSPs and local county councils could come to a similar arrangement as they work in close partnership with one another. Such a model is already in existence in certain counties.

Of course, the option of a shared resource would still require time to be spent on social media by existing employees. A shared specialist would need to have access to content and would most certainly need a calendar of activities in advance. They would also need to be aware of the goals of the organisation and know what each is trying to achieve through the use of social media. Furthermore, a social media specialist may have the expertise needed for social media but in turn may not have the knowledge of the NGBs and LSPs activities. This may not be an issue but is an area to consider. Additionally, as mentioned previously, the social media capabilities of NGBs and LSPs are not the responsibility of Sport Ireland. However, as a body that fund NGBs and LSPs, and as an organisation that have identified the need for greater collaboration in order to achieve their shared goals, investing in a shared social media resource may be beneficial.

Another possible solution is online training as suggested by Taylor et al. (2015) Although considering that the platform of YouTube already contains tutorials on social media functions, is there a need for an online guide. In the case of NGBs and LSPs, a sport specific online guide may still offer some benefits. Additionally, a tailored online workshop that gives an overview of the basic, intermediate and advanced functions of social media that sporting organisations should use could be provided. Department of Transport Tourism and Sport (2018) recognises that certain skills and expertise are not currently available within sports organisations, thus, policy addressing issues around workforce training and development is required. Consequently, Sport Ireland provides online workshops in areas such as anti-doping and child protection (Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, 2018). Therefore, it is plausible to presume the same could be done for social media. With regards to a solution for control, a policy lead approach may be sufficient. As stated by two interviewees, they have a set online conflict policy that the organisation and its members abide to. Perhaps this is a framework that other NGBs and LSPs should consider if they see lack of control as a barrier to social media use.

## 4.5 What is considered best practice in relation to the use of social media from the perspective of a key informant?

### 4.5.1 Research Question Four Qualitative Insights

This section of the chapter presents the findings from the interview with the key informant. This interview was used to gain a greater understanding of the best practice recommendations for NGBs and LSPs that use social media. There are a total of three higher order themes namely: sponsorship, usage and resources as outlined in Table 12 below.

Table 12 - Inductive Thematic Analysis of Key Informant Interview

General Dimension	Higher Order Theme	Sample Comment
<b>Best Practice</b> The procedures that are accepted or prescribed as being correct or most effective for sporting organisations on social media.	<b>Sponsorship</b> The act of supporting an event, activity, person, or organization financially or through the provision of products or services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To attract external sponsorship inwards to us.</li> <li>• The commercial side of it from a sponsorship point of view.</li> </ul>
	<b>Usage</b> The way in which social media is used.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving people the content they want to see.</li> <li>• Trying to understand who our audience really is.</li> <li>• When you run a campaign it doesn't just last for that snapshot in time, there has to be longevity to it.</li> <li>• We are seeing where the metrics are increasing in certain areas and posts and certain types of content.</li> </ul>
	<b>Resources</b> The supply of money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by the organisation in order to function effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Things like staff members are stretched, sport is understaffed, it is across the board, people are stretched the whole time. Time and knowledge too, people are covering a broad brief.</li> <li>• We're trying to educate all staff on the importance of social media as a communications platform.</li> </ul>

#### **4.5.1.1 Sponsorship**

One of the most dominant sub-themes that came across under the main theme of ‘best practice’ was sponsorship. Sponsorship was referred to eleven times in total across the interview. The key informant mentioned early on that NGB and LSP funding is not guaranteed and it is the responsibility of each NGB and LSP to secure external funding:

*“Public funding for most NGBs and LSPs counts for the vast majority of their income and that’s not guaranteed year on year so it’s up to them to diversify and build their capacities in other areas from a commercial perspective”.*

Social media offers sporting organisations the possibility of gaining sponsors. NGBs and LSPs want people to see what they are doing. They need to share their message and social media is a medium in which they can do it:

*“I think particularly social media and digital media is a way in which they can do that, it’s a way of getting their message out and adding value to sponsors”.*

With regards to NGBs, in particular high performance NGBs, there is a desire for commercial partnerships between business organisations:

*“From my experience, with sponsorship, people jump at the opportunity to be involved in high performance sport and position themselves in that space”.*

The key informant suggests that best practice with regards to sponsorship and LSPs was to use local organisations and businesses:

*“Local people who work in a local organisation that benefits the community can create great content, and content is key”.*

He gave an example of an NGB he previously worked with obtaining external investment with the assistance of social media. The organisation used the option of live streaming through Facebook to broadcast a match and obtain external investment for this.

*“TV opportunities were not forth coming so we decided to live stream our matches ourselves. We did this in collaboration with a Scottish NGB. We played a match in Ireland but we had no money to put towards it and*

*Scotland had no money to put towards it. We contacted The Daily Record to sponsor it. The Daily Record sponsored a match that was happening in Ireland, it's a Scottish national paper, but they sponsored it. They went ahead and did it and it was a success. Big numbers watched it. If you have no visibility at your events, give yourself visibility. TV is not the be all and end all anymore".*

From the key informant's past experience within an NGB that has secured a multi - million sponsorship deal, he disagrees with the statement of "little opportunity" for gaining sponsorship as an NGB or LSP. He suggests that NGBs and LSPs in Ireland may not have the ambition to seek sponsorship opportunities:

*"Sporting organisations are always crying out that they don't get enough exposure, they say sponsors don't want anything to do with them. I think it's an excuse. I think it's a pretty weak excuse. It's really just saying I don't have the ambition to seek opportunities to commercialise myself. There are opportunities there".*

He does note that NGB and LSP employees may not have the experience necessary to utilise social media for securing commercial partnerships:

*"Organisations don't necessarily have the expertise".*

The lack of social media expertise in LSPs and NGBs will be outlined in section 4.5.1.3.

#### **4.5.1.2 Usage**

Social media usage will be split into two main topics: content and evaluation. Both of these topics will be discussed below.

A sub theme brought up by the key informant under the theme of best practice was in relation to content. Content was discussed a total of nine times throughout the interview. The key informant highlights the importance of making an "emotional connection" and creating "quality content" instead of just "throwing things out there". He gives an example of the anti-doping 'Blackmark' video created by Sport Ireland (<https://bit.ly/2Z2Y9gK>). This video is "dark and sinister" but it leaves an "impact on the viewer" and gets a message across:

*"It's quite dark and it's quite an emotional video, you can picture a negative but actually its getting a really good message across. People*

*stop to look at it and its really dark and sinister looking, it's almost like a horror movie, but people know what it is about. And it works really well".*

It seems that NGBs and LSPs in Ireland are failing to make this emotional connection with their followers. Moreover, there is risk involved when it comes to putting anything up online. It is up to each individual NGB and LSP to be aware of the content they post:

*"Organisations can't just throw anything out there. As state agencies NGBs and LSPs have to be conscious of that fact as there is a risk involved when posting on social media. The more consideration that goes into social media content, the better, for both the organisation and its followers".*

The key informant recommends that it is best practice to plan social media content in advance. Using the example of a sporting organisation who contacted him regarding their content and not achieving the interaction they had hoped, he explains what thought process should be involved in social media content:

*"What are you trying to get across, who is your target, what message are you trying to get out. We sat down and had a session with it; they adjusted what they've done in the last two weeks. Even simple things have changed; the time stuff is going out to audiences".*

With sporting organisations, the key informant makes reference to the type of content sporting fans like to see: Behind the scenes information, giving access to what other forms of media cannot provide is a key part of best practice on social media:

*"I've never seen anything go as viral as players getting off a bus, behind the scene stuff, pictures of a dressing room. Make people feel like they are part of it".*

He also recommends that sporting organisations, NGBs in particular use their athletes as a voice for the organisation:

*"Us shouting about, this is what happens in a test, it's like you are shouting into a vacuum, no one cares. Whereas if Annaliese Murphy tells you what happens in a test, then it's a different story".*



With regards to LSPs, local content may be more interactive content to provide for followers. Find local stories and bring them to life:

*“Even within the local area, target media organisations within the locality. Did you know of this case study? This is really good that this happened in your area. Bring the case studies to life and show people what we are actually doing”.*

The key informant also makes a point that organisations should “*manipulate content*” in order to create a “*slightly different message*” that can be used “*over a period of time*”:

*“when running a campaign it doesn’t just last for that snapshot in time there has to be longevity too”.*

He used the example of the forthcoming SPEAK Report at that time in which information contained in the document was highlighted in different forms on content such as infographics, images and videos:

*“we will use infographics to bring the 52 page document to life. We will also highlight the interesting case studies, the human interest pieces”.*

The key informant advises that NGBs and LSPs should be aware of their audience and the platforms they are using to reach their audiences:

*“We are looking at a platform by platform basis. There are different audiences in each”.*

He makes reference to “*cross platform posting*” as an absolute non-runner when using social media. Twitter may be similar to Facebook, however the way in which they are designed to function is very different. Tools such as hashtags should not be used on Facebook, and Facebook links should not be used on Twitter:

*“One of my biggest bug bearers is cross platform posting. You see people using things like hashtags on Facebook, as far as I’m aware, it decreases your likelihood. Even though hashtags work on Facebook they see it as a cross channel post from Twitter and they kill it. Rightly so because they shouldn’t be doing it. Particularly Facebook to Twitter, you’re only seeing half a tweet, you click into it and then it asks me to log into Facebook. They are different platforms. What you’re doing on*

*Twitter is vastly different to what you're doing on Facebook. How Facebook and Twitter work are completely different too".*

The key informant suggests that it is best practice to ensure that content is platform and audience specific. By taking steps to ensure this, NGBs and LSPs will have a greater chance of engaging with their audience:

*"We used to use Twitter as a commentary string for people who didn't have visibility at matches. So a match might happen at 3am here, as I said it might be happening in the depths of northern territory in Australia, there is no visibility on it, there is no online scoring of a match. There's no TV coverage there is nothing there. We might have someone on the ground with the team who is providing updates from a match at 3am. We would never do that on Facebook because people would unfollow you for cluttering their feed".*

The key informant refers to evaluation and metrics four times throughout the interview. He suggests that evaluation is a crucial part of social media and that there seems to be a lack of this in the sporting world:

*"Its (evaluation) so valuable and there is a complete deficit in sport I think".*

*"Evaluation in the first instance is important because I don't think it's done.*

*"I think evaluation is something that doesn't happen enough when it comes to digital media as a whole.*

He states that evaluation and metrics give an insight into your audience, their likes, dislikes and general and specific demographics. Metrics can be used to see what is or is not working on social media channels. Furthermore, it should be used to plan social media activities and plans in the future:

*"Looking at your metrics, see what is working what's not working, am I just doing something for the sake of doing it?".*

*"It (metrics) does dictate how you move forward and how you adjust your strategies going forward too".*

He suggests that NGBs and LSPs should start with basic evaluations:

*“Starting with them, we said look at what you have done, this is who you have reached, this is when you posted”.*

As mentioned above, these basic evaluations give an idea of your audience, the type of content they engage with and the times they are most active. The key informant suggests that organisations go through a “*trial and error*” process to find the ideal posting times and content:

*“Why isn’t it working? What can we do? It’s trial and error. Let’s try posting one at half nine lets try posting one at half two, three in the morning, 11 at night and seeing what works”.*

*“You can track that, you can see what people are interested in”.*

The key informant had just started this process of trial and error within his organisation and already has a greater understanding of his audience and the content they engage with:

*“Already we are seeing where the metrics are increasing in certain areas and posts and certain types of content”.*

The key informant recommends that it is best practice for NGBs and LSPs to actively evaluate their social media and incorporate the findings into future social media policy and practice.

#### **4.5.1.3 Resources**

Resources, in particular staff and funding were mentioned by the key informant on multiple occasions becoming a sub theme under best practice. The key informant mentioned that staffing is a particular challenge when allocating resources for social media:

*“Most of them have one or two staff, which is a challenge”.*

*“Things like staff members are stretched, sport is understaffed, it is across the board, people are stretched the whole time”.*

He admits that even Sport Ireland, the higher authority are “*stretched for staff*” in this remit and have used “*external public relations companies*” for some of their social media campaigns, something that many LSPs and NGBs are unable to fund:

*“We do use an external PR agency when it comes to media engagements. There’s a number of reasons why we do that, staffing is one”.*

The key informant adds that the majority of NGB and LSP staff have little or “no experience” and a “deficit of knowledge” in the area of social media. He states that:

*“it’s very hard to find someone with all the skills necessary, it’s about building their capacity when they are in the role, which is a challenge”.*

*“People are covering a broad brief. You are looking at events, organising major national championships, international events, as well as looking after the marketing and promotions and communications. So it is quite a large brief and it’s very hard to find someone with all those skills.”*

However, even though the key informant recognises the lack of training and knowledge he comments that Irish sporting organisations have a tendency to rely on excuses when it comes to doing tasks they may necessarily not want to do:

*“it is the Irish way to look for excuses to why you can’t do something rather than reasons why you can do it”.*

With his own staff, he works on educating them on the use of social media and tries to develop their social media skills.

*“building their capacity when they are in the role and evolve into it”.*

*“trying to educate all staff on the importance of social media”*

*“develop an understanding of the hands on operations of social media”.*

He notes that having staff that are aware of what they are doing on social media can bring back a return on investment:

*“I think it is important to have a good understanding of even just the hands on operations, advertising and how that works. It’s very simple to do, it takes minutes but there is a deficit of knowledge there and it’s ridiculously cheap for the return you get on it”.*

He recommends that staff of LSPs and NGBs attend the Sport Ireland social media courses<sup>27</sup> when they arise and contact the Organisational Development & Change Unit for advice and feedback on best practice for social media activities for the organisation:

*“There is one (social media course) for complete beginners, one for people with a bit of experience and then one for those who are advanced. The advanced one would look at different nuts and bolts of advertising, targeting etc. Whereas the beginner would be basic, what is social media, setting up a channel, etc.”*

#### 4.5.2 Discussion

In this section, the key findings from research question four will be discussed under the headings of usage, sponsorship and resources. Figure 36 highlights the best practice recommendations that emerged from the interview with the key informant.

**Figure 36 - Recommended Best Practice**



<sup>27</sup> Sport Ireland last held a social media course in 2015.

#### 4.5.2.1 Usage

Previous literature on social media and content activities suggests that social media content should spark conversations, create discussion, encourage participation and entertain (Achen, 2016). A high frequency of posts, a mixture of content types and creating a posting style that is open, humorous and personable has been proposed to give followers quality and relevant information. The key informant set numerous guidelines for social media content, all of which are represented in previous research by Thompson et al. (2014) and Smith (2009) as depicted in Table 13.

Table 13 - Content Recommendations

Smith (2009)	Thompson et al. (2014)	Current Study
Quality content	Behind the scenes content	Plan and schedule content
Relevant content	Video clips	High quality content
Consistent frequency of posts	Exclusive content	Create and emotional connection with followers
Mixture of content types	Content from clubs focusing on club and regional events	Repackage used content
Friendly and humorous posting style	Offers and promotions	Keep content relevant to followers and platform
Ending statuses with questions	Monthly quizzes with prizes	
Reply to comments where possible	Encouraging followers to send in their photos at events etc.	
Encouraging discussion		

Firstly, it is suggested that content should be relevant to followers and to the social media platform. Behind the scenes content has been noted in particular as a form of best practice. From the quantitative results it is clear that Irish NGBs and LSPs do show behind the scenes content on their Facebook and Twitter pages, however, it is also apparent that more can be done. Despite the fact that it is difficult to judge the quality of content produced by NGBs and LSPs through the chosen research methods, qualitative data suggests that this is an area that requires improvement to reach best practice standards. Both NGB and LSP representatives stated that they do not put much thought or planning into the content they produce. It is recommended by many academics and professionals alike that high quality content should be used, it should be engaging to followers and encourage participation (Effing and Spil, 2016). On this point it is further suggested that content should be planned in advance. This can allow for consistent and

frequent posting. Naraine and Parent (2017) found the use of a content schedule allowed sporting organisation staff to plan ahead in relation to social media use around events, courses and competitions. This improved the consistency and frequency of social media posts whilst prioritising information and engaging content for followers. Furthermore, it was mentioned that some NGBs and LSPs perform cross platform posting. Despite the noted benefit of time saving from automatically posting to multiple channels at once and sharing content to a wider audience, these short term benefits do not outweigh the long term drawbacks. Previous literature on social media and best practice would strongly advise against the use of cross platform posting (Hootsuite, 2018). Platforms have different algorithms. For example, Facebook currently prioritises content that “spark conversations and meaningful interactions between people” whereas Twitter places content of accounts in which the users has the most interaction history with towards the top of their feed (Skyword, 2018). These algorithms are used to deliver users with the content they are most interested in. Each social media platform has its own specific algorithm, meaning each piece of content should be adjusted for that particular platform and its audience.

Table 14 - Evaluation Recommendations

Effing and Spil (2016)	Saari & Tuominen (2016)	Current Study
Continuous and consistent evaluation	Use third level students	Track metrics and data
Use social media as a feedback tool	Outsource work to a third party	Use social media as a feedback tool
	Measure the tangible and intangible	

In order to determine the value and success of an organisation’s social media presence, it is recommended that evaluation takes place (Effing and Spil, 2016). Information on user’s demographics and insight data give an organisation an understanding of their followers and their interactions with their social media pages (Table 14). This information can then be used to tailor content to reach a higher level of engagement and interaction (Saari & Tuominen, 2016). The findings from this study concur with previous academic literature on social media recommended practice. Within the current study, the key informant suggests that evaluation of social media is a crucial part of best practice. He suggests that NGBs and LSPs start with basic evaluations and use these evaluations on a trial and error basis to get a feel for the organisation’s audience. Similar recommendations have been given by both Effing and Spil (2016) in a non-

sports context and Saari & Tuominen (2016) in a professional sports context. Unlike Saari & Tuominen (2016), the key informant in the current study did not bring forward the point of evaluating both tangible and intangible metrics. The majority of clubs in Saari & Tuominen's (2016) study measured both game attendance and social media metrics such as reach and followers. They did this by measuring game attendance statistics with social media analytics each week. It was suggested that clubs could evaluate the effectiveness of their social media based on game attendance and social media activities. Perhaps the not for profit nature of the NGBs and the LSPs in the current study could account for the lack of tangible measurements. Also from his experience in the Irish sporting industry, the key informant is in a position to make realistic best practice recommendations for NGBs and LSPs. He has an understanding of the time and expertise that would be required to take a more in depth look at social media metrics. He does however suggest that the basic evaluations that NGBs and LSPs engage in should be used to plan future social media policy and practice. Data should be gathered from pages to be used as a road map in order to show NGBs and LSPs where to go with their social media content, audience and platform choice.

#### **4.5.2.2 Sponsorship**

Much of the research on sponsorship in sport has focused on professional sports (Thompson, Martin, Gee & Geurin, 2017; Baena, 2016; Parganas et al., 2015). To date there have been few studies that have examined sponsorship in non-professional sports. Two studies that focus on NGBs include research completed by Naraine (2017) and Eagleman (2013). No research could be found on the use of LSPs and sponsorship. Both Naraine (2017) and Eagleman (2013) indicated that social media can be used by not-for-profit sporting organisations to leverage sponsorship. However, this research indicated that these organisations currently do not see the potential for their social media to activate sponsorship. Similar results were reflected in the findings of the present study.

The key informant suggested social media can be and ideally should be used to gain sponsorship. Irish NGBs and LSPs receive the majority of their income from government funding which is not guaranteed year on year. It is the responsibility of the organisations to diversify and build their capacities in other areas from a commercial perspective as mentioned in Sport Irelands strategy document 2018 - 2027. Social media offers sporting organisations the possibility of gaining sponsors. Attaining sponsorship deals through the use of social media can in turn aid in funding the current operations



and may allow NGBs and LSPs the possibility of expanding their current capacity in the future.

In particular, the key informant suggests that NGBs with a high-performance division with successful international athletes are strategically positioned to seek sponsorship. Similar to professional sports stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Serena Williams, organisations most likely have an interest in aligning their brands with successful Irish athletes. For LSPs, the key informant recommended focusing on activating sponsorship deals with organisations within their locality. Moreover, Naraine (2017) suggests that NSOs should seek out sponsors that align with their sport. NGBs and LSPs may have access to niche groups that certain businesses may have a specific product for. A commercial partnership between an NSO and a business would provide benefits to both while also hopefully benefitting followers.

Although the key informant recommends this practice for NGBs and LSPs, concurring with Naraine (2017) and Eagleman (2013), Irish NGBs and LSPs are severely under-utilising the sponsor-related benefits and capabilities that social media can afford. Quantitative results show that all LSPs and 54% (n=16) of NGBs in this study selected 'Not Much' when surveyed about the use of social media to attract sponsors/raise funds. Perhaps this is related to the lack of social media expertise in the Irish not-for-profit sport sector.

#### **4.5.2.3 Resources**

As discussed earlier, a lack of resources was the main barrier to effective social media usage according to NGBs and LSPs in the current study. Indeed, the key informant also brought forward the point of resources in Irish sporting organisations. As mentioned previously the lack of organisational resources seems to be a global issue for NSOs with previous research from Canada, North America, New Zealand, the UK, Sweden and Finland all coming to a similar conclusion (Abeza et al., 2019; Naraine and Parent, 2017; Saari & Tuominen, 2016; Cole, 2016; McCarthy et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2014). The key informant mentions that his organisation, the higher authority for Sport in Ireland are themselves also faced with a lack of resources.

Additionally, the key informant addressed the deficit of knowledge and expertise in the area of social media among employees of Irish NGBs and LSPs. He recognises that it is extremely difficult to find someone with the all the skills necessary to take on the broad

roles within Irish sporting organisations. He recommends that NGBs and LSPs should be providing education and upskilling in this area to their staff. He refers to this process with his own staff. He also mentions that upskilling and educating employees on social media can in turn lead to a return on investment. If employees know how to use social media and some of the more advanced features, this can save time, one of the main resources NGBs and LSPs claim to lack. Although similar strategies have been suggested by academics (Abeza et al., 2019), employees in Irish NGBs and LSPs may not have a source within their organisation who they can receive sufficient training, education and guidance from when it comes to social media. For this reason, the key informant recommends that staff of LSPs and NGBs attend the Sport Ireland social media courses when they arise; unfortunately these courses have not been provided in more recent years so may require contact with Sport Ireland to request a course in 2019 and onwards. He also advises that NSOs contact the Organisational Development & Change Unit for advice and feedback on best practice for social media activities for their organisation.

#### ***4.5.2.4 Implementing Best Practice***

Taking into consideration the best practice recommendations from the key informant, the steps required to achieve best practice will be further discussed. Realistically, the current social media barriers NGBs and LSPs face must be overcome before best practice can be truly implemented. Barriers such as a lack of expertise in social media and issues with resource allocation will inevitably deter social media practice in any organisation. Hence, as a first step NGBs and LSPs should seek training and education in the use of social media and decide on what resources they can allocate to social media activities and plan accordingly. It would certainly be useful for Irish NGBs and LSPs to see an example of social media best practice in operation. Perhaps, a gradual roll out of social media support, education and guidance to a number of organisations with regards to implementing social media best practice guidelines would aid in creating a culture of best practice. Moreover, this could provide tangible evidence on the effects of social media on areas such as promotion, sponsorship and volunteerism. It would also provide similar organisations with an example of best practice in action. A roll out like this could take a similar approach to the initial LSP roll out. Overtime as organisations are greater equipped to manage social media efficiently, more

organisations could be supported. This could aid in overcoming the barriers organisations currently face with regards to following best practice.

In addition, within Irish NGBs and LSPs, there seems to be a culture of ‘tick the box exercise’<sup>28</sup>, with regards to social media. This came across in the qualitative results, especially when discussing social media content. In order for NGBs and LSPs to follow the best practice recommendations set by the key informant, employers and employees’ attitudes to social media require reform. This most likely entails a top down approach. If higher authorities within either the organisation itself or within the industry hold social media in a higher regard, this may affect the role of social media within future policy and strategy. Consequently, a higher importance may be placed on social media activities and in turn the role social media can play would perhaps be reinforced within the NGB and LSP sector.

Considering that social media is a public forum, it is interesting that no guidelines or recommendations exist for NGBs and LSPs social media use. Especially when acknowledging the potential of social media to aid in information dissemination, promotional activities and in activating commercial partnership. What is more, it was found in both the quantitative and qualitative results that NGBs and LSPs do not see the potential of social media in activating sponsorship. Perhaps again, this is due to the overall view in the Irish not for profit sports industry that social media is a monotonous exercise in which no real outcomes are expected or considered.

Albeit, what should and should not be posted online it may seem like common knowledge, however, without a real objective in mind, it should be questioned whether there is a real purpose in doing it. It is the opinion of the researcher that extra attention and diligence should go into their online activities. Social media content should be curated with consideration of the target audience, the platform and the overall objective in mind. It also must be noted that best practice recommendations should be organisation specific (Thompson et al., 2014). Hence, the recommendations by the key informant in this research are not exhaustive and are intended as a starting point for Irish NGBs and LSPs.

The best practice recommendations set out by the key informant are to a large extent pragmatic and achievable for NGBs and LSPs. What is more, the implementation of

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<sup>28</sup> A ‘tick the box exercise’ is an activity that is performed perfunctorily, more to serve a bureaucratic expediency than to accomplish any higher purpose.

these recommendations may improve overall social media use and may make it more likely for NGBs and LSPs to benefit from their social media use. Namely, it would put them in a better position to achieve their goals of information dissemination and promotion. Indeed it may also increase the possibility of achieving goals relating to other areas such as increasing participation, obtaining volunteers and activating sponsorship. However, this will not occur until the current barriers faced are overcome. A top level down change involving policy implementation and overall industry attitudes is also required for any real change in social media activities reaching best practice recommendations.

## Chapter 5

# Conclusion and Recommendations

## **5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief overview of the main aims and purpose of this research. A summary of the key findings in this research study is then presented. This is followed by the limitations of this study and recommendations for future policy and practice.

### **5.2 Research Aims and Purpose**

The aim of this research was to contribute to the understanding of current social media usage by NGBs and LSPs and recommended best practice in the use of social media to aid with achieving organisational goals. Furthermore, it aimed to evaluate the perceived and actual barriers faced by personnel in NGBs and LSPs in Ireland concerning social media use. The research questions will be outlined again for clarity purposes. They are as follows:

5. What is current social media practice among NGBs and LSPs?
6. What organisational goals do NGBs and LSPs hope to achieve through the use of social media platforms?
7. What are the perceived and actual barriers to use of social media by NGBs and LSPs?
8. What is considered best practice in the use of social media from the perspective of a key informant?

### **5.3 Summary of Key Findings**

For NGBs and LSPs, the perceived utility of social media in relation to organisational goals is embedded in the perception of social media as a platform that enables them to disseminate information to a wide audience. In addition, NGBs and LSPs view social media as a medium to promote their organisation and sport, and in turn reduce the reliance on publicity solely from traditional media outlets confirming the position of both Eagleman (2013) and Naraine and Parent (2017). With these outcomes in mind, the findings suggest that NGBs and LSPs are using social media mainly as a medium to broadcast their message, rather than engaging with their followers. Despite the fact they are using 2.0 Web technology, they are still using it in a Web 1.0 fashion. The results

indicate that this misuse or inefficient use of social media is associated with two main factors; organisational capacity and a lack of expertise and knowledge of social media.

Similar to findings by Naraine (2017) a lack of organisational resources has a considerable effect on social media usage in NSOs. The lack of resources impacts social media activities such as content creation, planning and platform selection in Irish NGBs and LSPs. The lack of human resources in particular has an impact on social media usage. The majority of organisations within the current study function with a small workforce, some with just one employee. This can lead to the responsibility for social media activities falling on someone with little to no experience in this area. Moreover, those that do have the expertise do not have the time to fully apply themselves to social media. Thus, similar to Thompson et al. (2014) employees seem to be using social media for the sake of using social media, rather than using it to actively help in achieving organisational goals.

Albeit, NGBs and LSPs see the potential of social media in creating awareness and promoting the organisation and sport, they do not seem to see the capability of social media for activating commercial sponsorship, recruiting volunteers or engaging with potential new participants. This goes against recommended best practice, specifically in relation to sponsorship as discussed by the key informant. Furthermore, external funding streams, volunteerism and engaging with new audiences are all actions which have been included in the National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027, highlighting their importance within the NGB and LSP sector (The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2018). However, there is no reference to the use of social media aiding in these areas despite support from academic literature. Moreover, considering current usage by NGBs and LSPs, it is no surprise that they do not recognise the further potential that social media can afford. Their current basic social media usage does not seem enough to achieve their basic goal of reaching a wider audience.

Currently, basic best practice content guidelines are not adhered to. Content is duplicated and shared across all social media platforms and the organisations main website. It seems that not much thought or planning goes into content posted and there is little to no engagement with followers. Posting is also not consistent. Social media is just another place to broadcast a message. Moreover, there is little evaluation done on social media activities. There are no trial and error stages to work out what followers find engaging or entertaining. Basic steps could be taken by NGBs and LSPs to improve

social media activity and interactivity. Planning content, using high quality content and evaluating engagement rates could have a direct effect on actually achieving their organisational goals. Perhaps if NGBs and LSPs did see the success of social media on increasing awareness and promotion, they could see the potential for social media as a tool to leverage sponsorship.

As NGBs and LSPs are mainly government/public funded bodies, finding alternative funding streams such as commercial partnerships is highly important for their viability. Thus, best practice recommendations suggest using social media as a means to obtain commercial sponsorships. Although this is one of the main uses of social media by professional sports teams, Irish NGBs and LSPs currently fail to see this as an option. This is most likely down to the lack of social media expertise within the organisations and their inability to recognise the potential returns of social media. As NGBs and LSPs do not appear to see the value of social media in areas outside spreading awareness and promotion, they are hesitant to allocate resources towards social media activities. Instead they allocate the responsibility of social media to an already stretched workforce, who for the most part appear to not have the specific skill set needed to manage these social media activities to a high standard.

Ideally, NGBs and LSPs should provide a separate role for social media with remit in the areas of communication, promotion and sponsorship. Realistically at present, this is not feasible for the majority of the organisations within the current study. Instead the recommendation of upskilling staff already employed by the organisation in social media could lead to benefits for the organisation. If staff could use social media at a more advanced level, it could make the use of social media more effective and efficient. Additionally, sharing resources between organisations could be a solution to the barriers highlighted in this research. Both of these options have been referenced within the current National Sports Policy. Sport Ireland note that there are issues around workforce training and development. To counteract this, online courses have been created to facilitate the upskilling of NGB and LSP employees: to date social media has not been included as an online course. It is mentioned that there is no clear and coordinated strategy for training and development, which unfortunately appears apparent when discussing the deficiency of specific skills that NGB and LSP employees generally lack. Furthermore, the strategy recognises that greater collaboration between sporting organisations is required. Implementing online training courses and resource sharing



initiatives could be a viable solution to the main barriers NGBs and LSPs face with regards to social media. Indeed, they may also allow NGBs and LSPs the opportunity to tap into potential sponsorship streams, target potential volunteers and participants. Moreover, it could aid in achieving their organisational goals of promotion and increasing awareness.

As mentioned earlier, perhaps an organisation such as Sport Ireland could step in and provide more tailored opportunities for training in social media, particularly in emerging platforms such as Instagram. Additionally, they could act as a catalyst in the sharing of a social media resource within the NGB and LSP sector. This may not only be beneficial for staff and their organisation but for the wider Irish sporting landscape.

#### **5.4 Research Limitations**

Within this research there are numerous limitations. Many of these limitations have been discussed in previous chapters. However, as this thesis is in the concluding phase, it presents an opportunity for these limitations to be reiterated:

- The lack of research surrounding the use of social media by LSPs presented difficulties when looking to analyse the results as there was minimal specific literature to refer to.
- The findings from this study are limited to a particular population; NGBs and LSPs located in Ireland. Findings are not indicative of NGBs and LSPs or equivalent organisations in countries outside of Ireland. Likewise, as the sample does not include all NGBs and LSPs in Ireland, one should be cautious in interpreting the overall findings.
- Social desirability may have been a factor in the questionnaire used in phase two of this study. This may limit the research as the respondents may have answered in a way they thought the researcher wanted (Rowley, 2014). Nevertheless, the implementation of this methodology provided a rich data set.
- The response rate to the questionnaire used in phase two of this research also serves as a limitation. Only 48% of the invited NGBs and LSPs completed the questionnaire and although a larger representative sample than that of Eagleman (2013), a higher response rate for phase two may have yielded more in-depth insights.

- Perhaps the terminology used in the questionnaire with regards to ‘informative content’ was not descriptive enough. Furthermore, the term ‘informative’ may have been too similar to the term ‘educational’ which was used in the same questionnaire section.
- The current study reported the ways in which NGBs and LSPs utilise social media from the perspective of the organisation. Conducting a content analysis of the NGBs and LSPs various social media accounts might have revealed additional information, such as the frequency of posts, the post types and the type of content being posted.
- Finally, the data for phase two and three from this research was collected in 2017. As social media experiences a fast pace of change the publishing of this thesis in 2019 could be considered a limitation. However, the content and issues addressed are still relevant today. The difference between NGB and LSP use in social media from December 2017 to May 2019 is depicted in Appendix E, F, G and H.

Despite the noted limitations of the study, the data and findings uncovered contribute to the understanding of Irish NGBs and LSPs social media usage. Furthermore, the means through which these results were found and the results themselves provide a relevant precedent for directing future studies.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations for future research are advocated.

- This study examined social media use from the organisation’s perspective. It is possible that a future study could take into account both the organisation’s and the sport consumer’s perspectives and possibly the sponsors’ perspectives as well.
- This study served as a solid foundation from which future research on social media use amongst niche sport organisations can be based. However, a content analysis of social media pages could provide greater insights into social media usage.

- This study focused on the not for profit sport sector in Ireland, which makes up only a percentage of the Irish sports landscape. Other sectors in the Irish sports landscape can be investigated. These areas include recreational fitness facilities, professional sports organisations, local sport clubs and collegiate sport.
- Although this study suggested solutions to the barriers highlighted, further research is needed to truly examine solutions.
- A case study on NGBs and or LSPs in which social media best practice guidelines are implemented could provide insights into the effects on organisational activities.
- Given the evolving nature of social media, researchers may reflect upon this change with a longitudinal approach to social media use. The results of the current study can be juxtaposed against the findings of studies in the future.

## **5.6 Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

- NGBs and LSPs should use the best practice recommendations outlined through the literature review and the lens of the key informant in this study as a guide to developing their own organisation specific best practices for social media.
- Niche sport organisations that could benefit from this study include other non-profit sport organisations and sport charities, community sport organisations, sports with smaller fan bases such as women's sports leagues and teams, and participatory sports such as road races and triathlons.
- While the findings from this study are unique to Irish based NGBs and LSPs, they can be used by other niche sport organisations both in Ireland and internationally to gain a better understanding of how similar sport organisations currently utilise social media, while also learning about other opportunities social media provides, such as the ability to leverage sponsorships, recruit volunteers and increase membership.
- Considering the fast pace changing nature of social media, national lead/ coordinating organisations such as Sport Ireland should provide annual social media toolkits or courses to aid smaller organisations such as NGBs and LSPs.
- When writing strategic documents, social media should be included as a plausible way to aid in promoting the sport and increasing awareness of the sport.

- NGBs and LSPs need to be cognisant of the demands of posting on platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat to communicate events that take place outside of typical office hours. They need to be flexible in facilitating these demands.
- Due to the overwhelming consensus that resources are stretched, NGBs and LSPs should consider the option of resource sharing between organisations.

## **5.7 Concluding Statement**

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the information on social media usage for NGBs and LSPs in Ireland. This aim was addressed via a three-phase methodology. The findings as discussed bring to light a relatively unexplored area in Irish academic literature. The conclusions taken from this study appear to suggest that Irish NGBs and LSPs do use social media to some extent to achieve organisational goals. However, they currently do not use it in line with best practice recommendations. This appears to mainly be due to insufficient resources and a lack of social media knowledge within the workforce.

It is hoped that the information contained within this thesis will help guide practice in social media in Irish NGBs and LSPs. Similarly, the relevance of this thesis to policy implementation within the not for profit sporting sector both nationally and internationally is substantial. The findings of this study fill gaps in the evidence base in Ireland. Furthermore, it provides information on several important areas such as organisational capacity and staff capability levels in the sporting sector in Ireland.

# Chapter 6

## Reference List

## 6 Reference List

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# Chapter 7

## Appendices

## 7 Appendices

### **Appendices A - National Governing Bodies of Sport in Ireland**

#### **National Governing Body**

Angling Council of Ireland  
Archery Ireland  
Athletics Ireland  
Badminton Ireland  
Basketball Ireland  
Baton Twirling Sport Association of Ireland  
Bol Chumann na hÉireann  
Bowling League of Ireland  
Canoeing Ireland  
Confederation of Golf in Ireland  
Cricket Ireland  
Croquet Association of Ireland  
Cycling Ireland  
Deaf Sports Ireland  
Fencing Ireland  
Football Association of Ireland  
GAA Handball Ireland  
Gaelic Athletic Association  
Gymnastics Ireland  
Hockey Ireland  
Horse Sport Ireland  
Horseshoe Pitchers Association of Ireland  
Ice Skating Association of Ireland  
Irish Amateur Wrestling Association  
Irish American Football Association  
Irish Athletic Boxing Association  
Irish Clay Pigeon Shooting Association  
Irish Ice Hockey Association  
Irish Judo Association  
Irish Martial Arts Commission  
Irish Olympic Handball Association

Irish Orienteering Association  
Irish Rugby Football Union  
Irish Sailing Association  
Irish Squash  
Irish Surfing Association  
Irish Taekwondo Union  
Irish Tenpin Bowling Association  
Irish Tug of War Association  
Irish Underwater Council  
Irish Waterski & Wakeboard Federation  
Irish Wheelchair Association Sport  
Karate Ireland - ONAKAI  
Ladies Gaelic Football Association  
Motor Cycling Ireland  
Motor Sport Ireland  
Mountaineering Ireland  
National Aero Club of Ireland  
National Community Games  
Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland  
Racquetball Association of Ireland  
ROI Billiards & Snooker Association  
Rowing Ireland  
Rugby League Ireland  
Special Olympics Ireland  
Speleological Union of Ireland  
Swim Ireland  
Table Tennis Ireland  
Tennis Ireland  
The Camogie Association  
Triathlon Ireland  
Trout Anglers Association of Ireland  
Vision Sports Ireland  
Volleyball Association of Ireland  
Weightlifting Ireland



## Appendices B - NGB Funding Allocations for 2017 and 2018

	Core Grant		Women In Sport		High Performance	
National Governing Body	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018
Angling Council of Ireland	10,000	10,000		4,000		
Archery Ireland	12,000	12,000				
Athletics Ireland	887,000	887,000	35,000	35,000	835,000	790,000
Badminton Ireland	320,000	320,000	40,000	40,000	130,000	130,000
Basketball Ireland	598,000	598,000	97,000	95,000		
Baton Twirling Sport Association of Ireland	14,000	16,000	2,000			
Bol Chumann na hÉireann	20,000	20,000	1,500	2,000		
Bowling League	24,000	24,000				
Canoeing Ireland	195,000	205,000			40,000	40,000
Confederation of Golf in Ireland	233,000	233,000	15,000	15,000	400,000	410,000
Cricket Ireland	355,000	355,000	20,000	20,000	160,000	160,000
Croquet Association of Ireland	5,000	5,000				
Cycling Ireland	305,000	305,000	10,000	10,000	325,000	390,000
Deaf Sports Ireland	61,000	61,000	1,500	2,000		
Fencing Ireland	27,000	27,000				
GAA Handball Ireland	90,000	90,000	8,000	8,000		
Gymnastics Ireland	230,000	230,000	46,000	46,000	100,000	120,000
Hockey Ireland	260,000	260,000	35,000	35,000	530,000	520,000
Horse Sport Ireland	775,000	755,000			530,000	530,000
Horseshoe Pitchers Association of Ireland	5,000	5,000				
Ice Skating Association of Ireland						
Irish Amateur Wrestling Association	15,000	15,000				
Irish American Football Association	23,000					
Irish Athletic Boxing Association	432,000	432,000			700,000	700,000
Irish Clay Pigeon Shooting Association	36,000	36,000			25,000	25,000
Irish Ice Hockey Association						
Irish Judo Association	70,000	70,000	4,000	6,000	45,000	45,000
Irish Martial Arts Commission	30,000	45,000				
Irish Olympic Handball Association	35,000	35,000	5,000	5,000		
Irish Orienteering Association	45,000	45,000				
Irish Rugby Football Union - Rugby Sevens					220,000	220,000
Irish Sailing Association	323,000	323,000	18,000	18,000	735,000	735,000
Irish Squash	160,000	160,000	10,000	10,000		
Irish Surfing Association	64,000	64,000	7,000	7,000		
Irish Taekwondo Union	9,000	9,000			40,000	40,000
Irish Tenpin Bowling Association	27,000	27,000				
Irish Tug of War Association	22,000	22,000	4,500	6,000		
Irish Underwater Council	60,000	60,000				
Irish Waterski & Wakeboard Federation	20,000	20,000				
Irish Wheelchair Association Sport	240,000	240,000				
Karate Ireland - ONAKAI	6,000	6,000				
Ladies Gaelic Football Association	400,000	400,000				

	Core Grant		Women In Sport		High Performance	
National Governing Body	2017	2018	2017	2018	2017	2018
Motor Cycling Ireland	24,000	48,000				
Motor Sport Ireland	137,000	137,000				
Mountaineering Ireland	193,000	193,000	8,000	8,000		
National Aero Club of Ireland		5,000				
National Community Games			20,000	20,000		
Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland	63,000	63,000				
Racquetball Association of Ireland	15,000	15,000				
ROI Billiards & Snooker Association	63,000	63,000				
Rowing Ireland	210,000	210,000	45,000	45,000	535,000	535,000
Rugby League Ireland	11,000	11,000				
Special Olympics Ireland	1,200,000	1,200,000				
Speleological Union of Ireland	10,000	10,000				
Swim Ireland	827,000	827,000	70,000	65,000	560,000	560,000
Table Tennis Ireland	107,000	107,000	25,000	25,000		
Tennis Ireland	353,000	353,000	10,000	10,000	170,000	175,000
The Camogie Association	395,000	395,000				
Triathlon Ireland	108,000	108,000	15,000	15,000	220,000	220,000
Trout Anglers Association of Ireland						
Vision Sports Ireland	35,000	35,000				
Volleyball Association of Ireland	185,000	185,000	48,000	48,000		
Weightlifting Ireland	22,000					
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,403,017</b>	<b>10,394,018</b>	<b>602,517</b>	<b>600,000</b>	<b>630,2017</b>	<b>6,347,018</b>

## Appendices C - Local Sport Partnerships and Year Established

Local Sport Partnership	Year Established
Sligo Sport & Recreation Partnership	2001
Roscommon Sports Partnership	2001
Clare Sports Partnership	2001
Donegal Sports Partnership	2001
Kildare Sports Partnership	2001
Laois Sports Partnership	2001
Fingal Sports Partnership	2001
Cork Sports Partnership	2002
Meath Sports Partnership	2002
Waterford Sports Partnership	2002
Kerry Recreation & Sports Partnership	2004
Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership	2004
Mayo Sports Partnership	2004
Westmeath Sports Partnership	2004
Carlow Sports Partnership	2006
Offaly Sports Partnership	2006
Monaghan Sports Partnership	2006
Limerick Sports Partnership	2007
Tipperary South Sports Partnership	2007
Galway Sports Partnership	2007
Cavan Sports Partnership	2008
Louth Sports Partnership	2008
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Sports Partnership	2008
South Dublin County Sports Partnership	2008
Wexford Sports Partnership	2008
Longford Sports Partnership	2008
Leitrim Sports Partnership	2008
Dublin City Sports Partnership	2008
Wicklow Sports Partnership	2008

## Appendices D - LSP Funding Allocations for 2017 and 2018

	Core Grant		Women in Sport	
Local Sports Partnership	2017	2018	2017	2018
Carlow Sports Partnership	€ 159,893.00	€ 158,664.00	€ 2,100.00	€ 2,250.00
Cavan Sports Partnership	€ 169,005.00	€ 154,812.00	€ 2,500.00	€ 2,500.00
Clare Sports Partnership	€ 232,152.00	€ 233,082.00	€ 3,750.00	€ 3,000.00
Cork Sports Partnership	€ 273,332.00	€ 339,196.00	€ 5,000.00	€ 5,000.00
Donegal Sports Partnership	€ 202,341.00	€ 248,993.00	€ 3,000.00	€ 4,000.00
Dublin City Sports Partnership	€ 229,051.00	€ 232,887.00	€ 13,500.00	€ 14,500.00
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Sports Partnership	€ 129,933.00	€ 187,367.00	-	-
Fingal Sports Partnership	€ 154,880.00	€ 158,717.00	€ 2,550.00	€ 4,000.00
Galway Sports Partnership	€ 225,960.00	€ 211,300.00	-	-
Kerry Recreation & Sports Partnership	€ 171,487.00	€ 178,127.00	€ 2,000.00	€ 2,000.00
Kildare Sports Partnership	€ 188,352.00	€ 177,478.00	€ 2,000.00	€ 2,000.00
Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership	€ 217,193.00	€ 206,778.00	€ 5,000.00	€ 5,000.00
Laois Sports Partnership	€ 211,684.00	€ 214,342.00	€ 7,500.00	€ 6,000.00
Leitrim Sports Partnership	€ 191,777.00	€ 185,794.00	€ 3,000.00	€ 3,000.00
Limerick Sports Partnership	€ 307,501.00	€ 349,926.00	€ 5,400.00	€ 5,650.00
Longford Sports Partnership	€ 152,690.00	€ 145,915.00	€ 2,000.00	€ 2,650.00
Louth Sports Partnership	€ 150,993.00	€ 133,776.00	-	-
Mayo Sports Partnership	€ 248,826.00	€ 247,151.00	€ 8,250.00	€ 8,250.00
Meath Sports Partnership	€ 228,892.00	€ 215,860.00	€ 6,350.00	€ 6,600.00
Monaghan Sports Partnership	€ 188,615.00	€ 155,799.00	-	-
Offaly Sports Partnership	€ 143,056.00	€ 175,478.00	€ 1,000.00	€ 1,700.00
Roscommon Sports Partnership	€ 127,597.00	€ 144,557.00	-	-
Sligo Sport & Recreation Partnership	€ 259,656.00	€ 257,621.00	€ 20,350.00	€ 20,350.00
South Dublin County Sports Partnership	€ 174,217.00	€ 177,711.00	€ 2,000.00	-
Tipperary Sports Partnership	€ 296,460.00	€ 296,399.00	€ 11,500.00	€ 11,500.00
Waterford Sports Partnership	€ 275,839.00	€ 277,122.00	€ 1,440.00	-
Westmeath Sports Partnership	€ 216,186.00	€ 180,268.00	-	-
Wexford Sports Partnership	€ 132,754.00	€ 156,527.00	€ 2,500.00	€ 2,500.00
Wicklow Sports Partnership	€ 147,476.00	€ 157,686.00	€ 2,310.00	€ 2,550.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 5,807,798.00</b>	<b>€ 5,959,333</b>	<b>€ 115,000.00</b>	<b>€ 115,000.00</b>

## Appendices E - NGB Regularity of Posting on Social Media Channels

December 2017

<b>NGB</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Instagram</b>
Angling Council of Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	No
Archery Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Inactive
Athletics Ireland	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Badminton Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Basketball Ireland	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Baton Twirling Sport Association of Ireland	Daily	No	No
Bol Chumann na hÉireann	No	No	No
Bowling League of Ireland	Inactive	No	No
Canoeing Ireland	Daily	Daily	Inactive
Confederation of Golf in Ireland	Daily	Daily	No
Cricket Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Croquet Association of Ireland	No	No	No
Cycling Ireland	Daily	Daily	No
Deaf Sports Ireland	Weekly	Monthly	No
Fencing Ireland	Weekly	No	No
Football Association of Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
GAA Handball Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	No
Gaelic Athletic Association	Daily	Daily	Daily
Gymnastics Ireland	Daily	Weekly	Daily
Hockey Ireland	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Horse Sport Ireland	No	No	No
Horseshoe Pitchers Association of Ireland	No	No	No
Ice Skating Association of Ireland	No	No	No
Irish Amateur Wrestling Association	Daily	No	No
Irish American Football Association	Weekly	Daily	Monthly
Irish Athletic Boxing Association	Inactive	Daily	No
Irish Clay Pigeon Shooting Association	Daily	Inactive	No
Irish Ice Hockey Association	Monthly	No	No
Irish Judo Association	No	Monthly	No
Irish Martial Arts Commission	Daily	Inactive	No
Irish Olympic Handball Association	Daily	Daily	No
Irish Orienteering Association	Weekly	Weekly	No
Irish Rugby Football Union	Daily	Daily	Daily
Irish Sailing Association	Daily	Weekly	No
Irish Squash	Daily	Daily	No
Irish Surfing Association	Daily	Weekly	No
Irish Taekwondo Union	Weekly	No	No
Irish Tenpin Bowling Association	Weekly	Monthly	No
Irish Tug of War Association	Weekly	No	No
Irish Underwater Council	No	No	No
Irish Waterski & Wakeboard Federation	Weekly	Inactive	No

Irish Wheelchair Association Sport	Daily	Daily	No
Karate Ireland - ONAKAI	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Ladies Gaelic Football Association	Daily	Daily	No
Motor Cycling Ireland	Daily	Inactive	No
Motor Sport Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Mountaineering Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
National Aero Club of Ireland	No	No	No
National Community Games	Daily	No	No
Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland	Daily	Daily	No
Racquetball Association Of Ireland	Daily	No	No
ROI Billiards & Snooker Association	Daily	No	No
Rowing Ireland	Daily	Daily	No
Rugby League Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Special Olympics Ireland	Daily	Monthly	Inactive
Speleological Union of Ireland	Inactive	Monthly	Inactive
Swim Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Table tennis Ireland	Daily	Daily	No
Tennis Ireland	Weekly	Daily	No
The Camogie Association	Daily	Daily	Daily
Triathlon Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Trout Anglers Association of Ireland	Weekly	No	No
Vision Sports Ireland	Daily	Monthly	No
Volleyball Association of Ireland	Daily	Daily	No
Weightlifting Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Inactive

## Appendices F - NGB Regularity of Posting on Social Media Channels

May 2019

NGB	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Angling Council of Ireland	Weekly	Inactive	No
Archery Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Athletics Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Badminton Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Basketball Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Baton Twirling Sport Association of Ireland	Weekly	No	No
Bol Chumann na hÉireann	Weekly	No	No
Bowling League of Ireland	No	No	No
Canoeing Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Confederation of Golf in Ireland	Weekly	No	No
Cricket Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Croquet Association of Ireland	Monthly	No	No
Cycling Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Deaf Sports Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Inactive
Fencing Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Quarterly
Football Association of Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
GAA Handball Ireland	Daily	Weekly	Inactive
Gaelic Athletic Association	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Gymnastics Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Hockey Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Horse Sport Ireland	Daily	Inactive	Inactive
Horseshoe Pitchers Association of Ireland	No	No	No
Ice Skating Association of Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly
Irish Amateur Wrestling Association	Daily	No	No
Irish American Football Association	Daily	No	No
Irish Athletic Boxing Association	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Irish Clay Pigeon Shooting Association	No	No	No
Irish Ice Hockey Association	Monthly	Weekly	Quartly
Irish Judo Association	Weekly	Daily	Monthly
Irish Martial Arts Commission	Monthly	No	No
Irish Olympic Handball Association	Weekly	Weekly	No
Irish Orienteering Association	Weekly	No	Weekly

Irish Rugby Football Union	Daily	Daily	Daily
Irish Sailing Association	Daily	Daily	Daily
Irish Squash	Weekly	Daily	No
Irish Surfing Association	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Irish Taekwondo Union	Weekly	No	Weekly
Irish Tenpin Bowling Association	Monthly	No	No
Irish Tug of War Association	Weekly	Weekly	No
Irish Underwater Council	Monthly	No	No
Irish Waterski & Wakeboard Federation	Weekly	No	No
Irish Wheelchair Association Sport	Weekly	No	Weekly
Karate Ireland - ONAKAI	Weekly	Daily	Daily
Ladies Gaelic Football Association	Daily	Daily	Daily
Motor Cycling Ireland	Daily	No	No
Motor Sport Ireland	Daily	No	Weekly
Mountaineering Ireland	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
National Aero Club of Ireland	No	No	No
National Community Games	Daily	No	No
Pitch and Putt Union of Ireland	Daily	Daily	Inactive
Racquetball Association of Ireland	Weekly	No	No
ROI Billiards & Snooker Association	No	No	No
Rowing Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Rugby League Ireland	Daily	Daily	No
Special Olympics Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Speleological Union of Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Swim Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Table Tennis Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Inactive
Tennis Ireland	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
The Camogie Association	Weekly	Daily	Weekly
Triathlon Ireland	Daily	Daily	Daily
Trout Anglers Association of Ireland	Weekly	No	No
Vision Sports Ireland	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Volleyball Association of Ireland	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Weightlifting Ireland	Weekly	Monthly	Weekly



## Appendices G - LSP Regularity of Posting on Social Media Channels

December 2017

<b>LSP</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Instagram</b>
Carlow Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
Cavan Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	No
Clare Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	No
Cork Sports Partnership	Weekly	Daily	No
Donegal Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	Inactive
Dublin City Sports Partnership	Daily	Daily	No
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Sports Partnership	Daily	Daily	No
Fingal Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	No
Galway Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Kerry Recreation & Sports Partnership	Weekly	No	No
Kildare Sports Partnership	Daily	Daily	No
Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership	Weekly	No	No
Laois Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Inactive
Leitrim Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	No
Limerick Sports Partnership	Daily	Inactive	Weekly
Longford Sports Partnership	Weekly	No	No
Louth Sports Partnership	Weekly	No	No
Mayo Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	No
Meath Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	No
Monaghan Sports Partnership	Daily	Inactive	No
Offaly Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	No
Roscommon Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	No
Sligo Sport & Recreation Partnership	Daily	Inactive	Weekly
South Dublin County Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	No
Tipperary Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
Waterford Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	No
Westmeath Sports Partnership	Weekly	Daily	No
Wexford Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Wicklow Sports Partnership	Daily	No	Inactive

**Appendices H - LSP Regularity of Posting on Social Media Channels**  
May-19

<b>LSP</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Instagram</b>
Carlow Sports Partnership	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Cavan Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	No
Clare Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	Monthly
Cork Sports Partnership	Daily	Inactive	Weekly
Donegal Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	Quarterly
Dublin City Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Sports Partnership	Daily	Daily	Inactive
Fingal Sports Partnership	Inactive	Weekly	Monthly
Galway Sports Partnership	Daily	Inactive	Daily
Kerry Recreation & Sports Partnership	Weekly	No	Inactive
Kildare Sports Partnership	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Inactive
Laois Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Annually
Leitrim Sports Partnership	Inactive	Inactive	Weekly
Limerick Sports Partnership	Daily	Inactive	Weekly
Longford Sports Partnership	Daily	No	Weekly
Louth Sports Partnership	Weekly	No	No
Mayo Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	Annually
Meath Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	No
Monaghan Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	No
Offaly Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	Monthly
Roscommon Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	Inactive
Sligo Sport & Recreation Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Inactive
South Dublin County Sports Partnership	Weekly	Weekly	Monthly
Tipperary Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
Waterford Sports Partnership	Daily	Weekly	Quarterly
Westmeath Sports Partnership	Daily	Daily	Inactive
Wexford Sports Partnership	Weekly	Inactive	Inactive
Wicklow Sports Partnership	Daily	Inactive	Weekly

## Appendices I - Key Informant Topic Guide



### **Social Media and National Governing Bodies of Sport: An Analysis of Sports Development Practice in Ireland.**

#### **Topic Guide**

- Role in Sport Ireland (SI)
- Role of communications in SI?
  - NGB's
  - LSP's
- Role of social media (SM) in SI?
  - NGB's
  - LSP's
- Does SI have a communications strategy
  - Main aims of communication strategy
- SM place within overall communication strategy?
  - Dedicated resources
  - Staff (Structure of communications team)
  - Funding (budget breakdown or % breakdown)
  - Policy (who creates policy, what is their background)
  - Practice
  - Support provided to NGB's and LSP's
  - How do SI disseminate policy and advice to NGB's/LSP's?
- Does SI have a SM strategy or policy
- SM usage
  - Main aims (communication, promotion, increase awareness)
  - Recommended policy
  - Recommended practice
  - Is it you who dictates SM policy and practice?
  - Recommended platforms
  - Most valued platforms- why?
  - Target demographics by platform
  - Evaluation (how, how often)
  - Measuring results
  - Do you know if current practice is in line with these recommendations?  
If no what are the differences? How will they be addressed?

- Organisational goals achieved or partly achieved by SI through SM use?
  - NGB's
  - LSP's
  - Is current SM practice successful in achieving goals
- Should goals in relation to SM use be mandatory for NGB's and LSP's?
  - Funding provided
  - Who if anyone checks up on their SM use
  - SI SM courses- who runs them, what form do they take, who attends the courses, is this monitored?
- Benefits and opportunities of SM use for sporting organisations
  - Achieving goals
- Challenges and barriers of SM use for sporting organisations
  - Funding
  - Expertise or lack of
  - No education in the use of SM
  - Lack of clarity about who is responsible for SM initiatives
  - Lack of time
  - Difficulty measuring ROI
  - Is there policies and guidelines/advice in place to address these issues
- Advantages or disadvantages over traditional media?
- Changes SI intend to make to current SM usage in the future?
- Should Best practice guideline be provided by SI for NGB's & LSP's?

## Appendices J - Quantitative Questionnaire

### Welcome to My Survey

Please read the following note before filling out the attached questionnaire.

This questionnaire is part of a Masters by research study. The study is researching how social media may be used to facilitate sports development goals in Ireland relevant to National Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Sports Partnerships. It will take approximately 10 - 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

Please answer all questions as honestly as you can. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher at sheena.carroll@hotmail.com. Alternatively, you can phone me on +353 85 784 8202.

All answers that you give in this questionnaire will remain confidential and will only be seen by the researcher and thesis supervisors (Dr Patrick Delaney and Ms Lynne Brennan).

Please note that completing this questionnaire is indicative of consent.

Thank you.

### Section One - General Information

1. What is the name of your organisation?

2. Which best describes your position within that organisation?

- ☐ Director/ Manager
- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Human Resources
- ☐ Marketing
- ☐ Sports Development Officer
- ☐ IT Department
- ☐ Secretary/ General Administration
- ☐ Other (i.e. a mix of different roles)

If other, please elaborate

3. Approximately how many individuals work within your organisation? (i.e. including sports development officers, administrators, etc.)

4. Does your organisation use social media (i.e Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

- ☐ No  
☐ Yes

b) If no, please indicate why this is the case

5. Is it your organisation's aim in the future to engage with social media?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

## Section Two - Current Social Media Usage

6. What type(s) of social media channels does your organisation use? Please tick the answer(s) related to you:

- ☐ Facebook  
☐ Twitter  
☐ Instagram  
☐ LinkedIn  
☐ Google+  
☐ Snapchat  
☐ Youtube  
☐ Social Messaging Platforms (i.e. Facebook messenger/ WhatsApp)

Other (please specify)

7. How long has your organisation been using the following social media outlets? (select any that apply to your organisation)

	Less than 6 months	6 months - 1 year	1 year - 3 years	3 years - 5 years	More than 5 years
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youtube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Messaging Platforms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 1 (as specified above)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 2 (as specified above)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Please indicate how easy or difficult you find social media to use for organisation use? (i.e. sharing behind the scene footage/ communicating with followers)

	Very Easy	Easy	Moderate	Difficult	Very Difficult
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youtube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Messaging Platforms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How often do you engage with each social media channel for organisational use?

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Every 6 months	Yearly
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youtube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Messaging Platforms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. What type of content does your organisation post on their social media channels? (tick all that apply)

	Text	Videos	Pictures	Live streaming (i.e. Facebook live)
Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Instagram	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Google+	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Snapchat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youtube	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Messaging Platforms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

11. What type of content does your organisation post on their social media channels? (tick all that apply)

	Behind the scene information	Promotional updates (giveaways)	Emotive content	Highlight reels (stats and facts)	Athlete commentary and opinions	Conversing with followers	Live game updates	Informative content	Educational content	Questions	Shared content	Story links	Game/ticket information
Facebook	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twitter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Instagram	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Google+	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Snapchat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youtube	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Messaging Platforms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



12. How often does your organisation post each type of content listed below:

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Every 6 Months	Yearly
Behind the scene information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promotional updates (giveaways)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotive content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Highlight reels (stats and facts)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Athlete commentary and opinions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversing with followers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Live game updates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informative content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Educational content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Questions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shared content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Story links	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Game/ticket information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Section Three - Organisational Goals and Barriers

13. To what extent does your organisation utilise social media for the following:

	Not at all	Not much	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Extensively
To engage/ inform existing followers/ participants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To engage new followers/ participants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In response to demand from clubs/participants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To create, sustain and improve the organisations' image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To increase awareness around the organisation and what it does	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To improve communication with followers/ participants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To develop respect among the public and the media for the organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To improve the relationship with followers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As a means of cost effective communications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As peer institutions utilise social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To attract sponsors/ raise funds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To recruit volunteers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To maintain control over the organisations image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To promote new/ existing programmes/ courses/ events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To educate followers/ participants on the benefits of sport	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
To reach as wide an audience as possible with your message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Due to strong support from a higher authority	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Which of the following social media sites do you consider the most useful in meeting your organisation's goals? Please tick all that apply:

	Not at all	Not much	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Extensively
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youtube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Messaging Platforms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. How would you rate the overall success of your organisation's use of its social media channels in terms of achieving its goals?

	Not at all successful	Somewhat successful	Very successful	Unsure
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youtube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Messaging Platforms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. To what degree is each issue below a barrier to the successful use of social media by your organisation:

	Not at all	Not much	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Extensively
Lack of funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of interest from those within my organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No education in the use of social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Legal issues i.e. data protection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethical issues i.e. transparency and truthfulness of posts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not enough personnel within the organisation to deploy resources to social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of IT resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uncertainty about the usefulness of social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Institutional red tape	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of expertise in how to implement it	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concerns about loss of control over content and tone of postings by others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of institutional clarity about who is responsible for social media initiatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of commitment by decision makers within the organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Privacy issues i.e. the posting of sensitive information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### Section Four - Policies and Best Practice

17. a) Does your sports organisation have a social media strategy?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ b) If no, does your organisation include social media as part of its overall communication strategy?

18. Does your organisation have specific objectives within its strategic plan to use social media as a communications tool?

☐ Yes

☐ No

19. Does your organisation have specific objectives within its strategic plan to use social media as a marketing tool?

☐ Yes

☐ No

20. Does your organisation have staff that are specifically trained in social media and how to maximize its effectiveness to help achieve organisational goals?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ If yes, from whom did they receive this training?

21. Within your organisation, how many staff are trained in social media and how to maximize its effectiveness to help achieve organisational goals?

22. Which of the following outcome measures does your organisation use to evaluate your social media initiatives? Please tick all that apply:

- ☐ Consumption metrics (i.e. page views, click through rates, etc.)
- ☐ Sharing metrics (i.e. number of shares or re-tweets)
- ☐ Channel metrics (i.e. how people ended up on your pages)
- ☐ Impressions (i.e. the number of times a post from a page is displayed)
- ☐ Reach (i.e. the number of people who received impressions)
- ☐ Followers (i.e. the amount of people who follow your channels)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

23. How often do you evaluate the social media usage of your organisation:

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Every 6 months
- ☐ Yearly
- ☐ Never

24. a) Does your organisation use paid advertisements on their social media channels?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

☐ b) If yes, approximately how much per annum is allocated for online advertisements by your organisation?

25. Does your organisation any of the following online advertising companies for their adverts?

- ☐ Google AdWords
- ☐ Infolinks
- ☐ Media Net
- ☐ BiDvertiser
- ☐ Facebook Adverts
- ☐ LinkedIn Ads
- ☐ PubMatic
- ☐ Bing Ads
- ☐ BuySell Ads
- ☐ Other (please specify)

26. Does your organisation use athletes to endorse the organisation and or the work of the organisation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

27. For the following statement, please indicate the level to which you agree/disagree:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My organisation benefits from support from a higher authority in relation to social media use for sports development goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. Does your organisation have policies and guidelines for the following issues in relation to social media:

	Not at all	Not much	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Extensively
Branding and graphics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Content management and control i.e. different types of content generation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Privacy issues i.e. the posting of sensitive information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Negative issues i.e. dealing with criticism/ inappropriate comments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethical issues i.e. transparency and truthfulness of posts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Legal issues i.e. data protection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Paid advertising i.e. Facebook ads	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### Section Five - Future Opportunities

29. To what degree is (or has) your organisation considered each of the following:

	Not at all	Not much	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Extensively
Creating a comprehensive social media plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Expanding current social media programmes to new audiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing formal policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting help from your professional association in the area of social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hiring staff for social media implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting help from a social media consultant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hiring an auditor for social media evaluation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

30. Would you be willing to do a follow up study in relation to social media use in relation to sports development?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

## Appendices K - Letter of Invitation to NGB and LSPs Online Questionnaire



To whom it may concern,

I am a post graduate research student at Waterford Institute of Technology. I am currently researching how the use of social media by National Governing Bodies of sport and Local Sport Partnerships in Ireland can facilitate communication and promotion goals and initiatives through the use of social media.

The aim of this research is to collect and compare data on the current policies and practices of NGB's and LSP's in Ireland with respect to how they utilise social media. This will be examined in relation to organisational goals and perceived and actual opportunities and barriers faced by organisations and their personnel in relation to their use of social media within sports development contexts.

I have made the questionnaire available to you via <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/G7XTS8C>. If you are interested in participating in this research, please fill out the questionnaire in the link above. The return of the completed questionnaire via Survey Monkey will indicate consent.

All information collected through this questionnaire will be viewed only by the researcher and supervisors (Dr. Patrick Delaney and Ms. Lynne Brennan). Once data has been collected, the finding will be used to help NGB's and LSP's currently striving to improve their social media strategy. However, all data provided will remain anonymous.

Should you wish to participate in this research, simply fill out the questionnaire by clicking the link above. Alternatively, if you have any questions or queries please do not hesitate to contact me at: ([email address](#)).

Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Sheena Carroll

Phone Number: (Number)

Waterford Institute of Technology.

Department of Health Sport and Exercise Science