Social Media Scholarship in Sport Management Research: A Critical Review

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This work critically assesses the history and current state of social media scholarship in sport management research. Methodologically, the study is based on a comprehensive census review of the current body of literature in the area of social media. The review identifies 123 social media articles in sport management research that were mined from a cross-disciplinary examination of 29 scholarly journals from January 2008 (earliest found) to June 2014. The work identifies the topic areas, the platforms, the theories, and the research methods that have received the (most/least) attention of the social media research community, and provides suggestions for future research.

In today’s fast-paced technologically driven world, social media platforms are rapidly and constantly evolving in their scope and extent of use, significantly affecting everyday lives of people across the globe (Rowe & Hutchins, 2014). This transformation is noticeable in the global sporting culture, where the scope, penetration, and magnitude of social media reach has been tremendous (Pedersen, 2014). Although the development of social media is still unfolding, its popularity and acceptance by athletes, coaches, managers, teams, leagues, fans, events, and sport governing bodies is widespread (Hutchins, 2014). In light of its growing complexity and increasing omnipresence, social and behavioral scientists are intrigued by the dynamics of the interrelationship between sport and social media (Hutchins, 2014; Pedersen, 2014). Though the scholarship is still relatively recent (Billings & Hardin, 2014), scholars are examining social media in various sport settings and gaining insights into its manifestations, characteristics, usage trends, and so on. Indeed, a range of research topics associated with social media have been investigated in diverse fields of sport management research (Pedersen, 2013), including sport communication, sport events management, sport marketing, sport law, and sport governance.

While published research is growing significantly (Pedersen, 2014), there is a lack of formal articulation and an absence of empirical evidence on the current state and historical evolution of the social media scholarship in sport management research. Hence, this study attempted to fill the gap by examining the body of knowledge (i.e., research areas, theories, and methods) and historical trends (i.e., chronological changes in research focus/interest) of the social media scholarship in sport management research. The following four research questions guided this study: (i) what social media topic areas have received attention in sport management research?; (ii) which social media platforms have received the (most/least) attention in sport management research?; (iii) what theories have been used, advanced, and developed in social media scholarship in sport management research?; and (iv) what is the prevalence and the nature of research methods employed in social media scholarship in sport management research?

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In conducting a comprehensive critical self-examination of the current state and historical evolution of a scholarship, a research community is able to document and identify research advancements (Abeza, O’Reilly, & Nadeau, 2014), gain insight into what the research community has, and has not, studied (Costa, 2005), and reveal strengths and areas in need of improvements (Pitts, 2001). Such self-reflective studies have the benefits of clarifying assumptions (Chalip, 2006; Costa, 2005), informing journal editors about increasing attention to areas with little or no research coverage, and guiding scholars in locating research (Abeza et al., 2014). In that way, these studies contribute to shaping future directions for the scholarship, thus playing a part in the advancement of scholarly inquiry (Chalip, 2006; Costa, 2005).

Background and Overview of the Literature

Social media takes many different forms, and popular examples include social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and Tumblr; content-sharing sites such as YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest, and Instagram; and blogs. The term social media means various things to different people (McNary & Hardin, 2013). As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explained, there is a limited understanding of what the term precisely means; the term still has no universally agreed-upon academic definition (Abeza, O’Reilly, & Reid, 2013). Nevertheless, most definitions can be encompassed under the definition provided by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010): “A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61).

The term Web 2.0 is also used interchangeably with the term social media in most literature (Askool & Nakata, 2011), although the two are not entirely the same. The term Web 2.0 refers to the technologies used to enable and facilitate online platforms on which collaborative and user-friendly social media communications occur. The five major types of Web 2.0 technologies are blogs, social networks, content communities, forums and bulletin boards, and content aggregators (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). Web 2.0 is considered a derivative of the original Web (i.e., Internet websites, Web 1.0), which largely carries a one-way message supplied by publishers on a static page (Drury, 2008). Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of Internet-based applications (Miller & Lammas, 2010), reflecting the fact that users are not passive viewers anymore, and content is no longer generated only by an individual publisher. Instead, users engage in participatory and collaborative content generation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In Web 2.0, social media users are all involved in sharing, linking, collaborating, and producing online content using text, photo, audio, and video (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Yet, for many, the term Web 2.0 is a catchall term for a few well-known sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter. For others (e.g., Constantinides & Fountain, 2008), the definition is broader and includes Web 2.0-enabled blogs, and for a few others still (e.g., Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 2012), it includes collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia) and gaming applications (e.g., World of Warcraft).

A related term that requires clarification is new media, a catchall phrase used for a range of applications from the Internet and e-commerce to the Blogosphere, video games, and virtual reality (Leonard, 2009). It is commonly used in relation to “old” media forms (e.g., print newspapers and magazines), and includes streaming audio and video, e-mail and chat rooms, DVD and CD-ROM, and integration of digital data with the telephone (e.g., mobile phone, Internet, digital cameras) (Lievrouw, 2014). New media is broader than social media, and social media is one segment of the new media. In this work, social media is considered to be a part of the social aspects of Web 2.0 applications including, but not limited to, users’ participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness.

Social Media Scholarship in Sport Management Research

The field of sport management captures a variety of subdisciplines and is studied in a wide variety of contexts (Doherty, 2013; Pitts, 2001). The field includes subdisciplines such as sport marketing, finance, legal aspects, governance, communication, organizational behavior and theory, sport for development, tourism, facility management, and event management (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011; Doherty, 2013; Pitts, 2001). Social media is, by nature, a communication platform, and the preponderance of studies on the topic have been conducted within the subdisciplines of sport communication (e.g., Emmons & Butler, 2013; Sanders, 2013) and sport marketing (e.g., Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, & Blaszka, 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010). However, the study of the dynamic interrelationship between sport and social media has a cross-disciplinary nature (Pedersen, 2013), and is studied through the lens of and in the context of the different subdisciplines of sport management, such as sport law (e.g., Cornish & Larkin, 2014; Wendt & Young, 2011), sport governance (e.g., Van Namen, 2011), organizational management (e.g., Alonso & O’Shea, 2012b), sport, race and gender (e.g., Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Cleland, 2013), and sport event management (e.g., McGillivray, 2014).

Therefore, taking into consideration the multidisciplinary nature of the field of sport management (Costa, 2005; Doherty, 2013) and the dynamic interrelationship between sport and social media (Hutchins, 2014; Pedersen, 2014), a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) was constructed. The framework outlines the “big picture” of the social media scholarship in sport management research by connecting and compartmentalizing the interrelationships among the different segments, contexts, and areas of sport management research. It is believed that the
framework helps to chart the historical trends, navigate the body of knowledge of social media scholarship, and overall, helps to comprehend the scholarship in a more simplified manner. As depicted in the framework, the study of the dynamic interrelationship between sport and social media has a cross-disciplinary nature where the useowners (e.g., athletes, teams, league, journalists) communicate content (i.e., text, audio, video, and pictures) to achieve their individual objectives by connecting to audiences/social media users (e.g., fans and individual users—friends and followers) on various Web 2.0 platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), and vice versa. We use the term useowner to differentiate a corporation that owns the social media platform (e.g., Twitter Inc.) from the owner of a social media site who has control of its use (e.g., @KingJames, LeBron James’ Twitter account).

This interrelationship has an overarching societal, cultural, economic, political, and technological impact on today’s society and, in the case of our area of study, the contemporary sport industry. Hence, the parts, reach, scope, and landscape of the study of social media can be visualized—and by extension, its scholarship can be examined—through the lenses of its segments (i.e., useowners, content, prosumers), contexts (i.e., social, political, economic, political, technological aspects), and field of studies (e.g., sport communication, sport marketing, sport events management, sport governance, sport law). Guided by this conceptual framework, we sought to produce empirical evidence on the trends and state of the body of knowledge of the social media scholarship in sport management research.

**Method**

**Data Collection**

A cross-disciplinary census review of the social media academic literature published in sport management journals from 2008 (the earliest found) to June 2014 was conducted. Five sport-related online search databases were used, including Academic Search (Ebsco Publishing), Google Scholar, Scopus (Elsevier), SportDiscus (SIRC), and Web of Science (Thomson Reuters). The search for journal articles was based on 12 keyword descriptors:

![Figure 1](link) — A guiding framework in examining the social media (SM) scholarship in sport management research.
social media, Web 2.0, new media, online, internet, social network sites, Facebook, Twitter, 140 characters, Blog, YouTube, and message boards. The keywords were identified through brainstorming and a concept map, and the use of truncation variant words. Synonyms (e.g., new media, digital media), plural/singular forms (e.g., social network, social networks), spelling variations (e.g., blog, Weblog), and acronyms (e.g., SM for “social media”) were used. The databases were queried for the keywords in the title, abstract and the keyword list. In addition, a search was conducted on 30 select journals in sport management as identified by Andrew et al. (2011). In total, 123 social media articles were identified, of which 96 were empirical research papers (this count excludes interviews) sourced from 29 journals. We also excluded commentaries except for two landmark commentaries that have influenced the scholarship (based on the number of citations they received in successive articles): Leonard (2009) and Williams and Chinn (2010).

While other publications provide a great deal of information (e.g., practitioner publications and reports, textbooks and edited volumes, master’s and doctoral dissertations, conference papers), they were not selected for inclusion, as only peer-reviewed academic journals were considered. Scholarly journals are believed to be the prime locations where knowledge is constantly updated, tested, and challenged (Mumby & Stohl, 1996), and collectively stored and disseminated (Rooney, McKenna, & Barker, 2011).

**Data Analysis**

Two researchers/coders independently carried out the classification of the identified research streams, research methods, platforms, and theories of the 96 empirical research articles. A codebook and definitions were developed to help guide the process and a pilot undertaken. Both an inductive approach (in coding the research streams) and a deductive approach (in coding the platforms, theories, and methods) were used.

**Inductive Approach.** The two coders conducted an independent pilot coding on 18 randomly selected sample articles, three from each of six author-selected topic areas in social media and sport management, namely, crisis communication, legal issues, tool of marketing, consumer behavior, social issues, and journalism. The emergent streams from the pilot were compared, and differences were discussed until an agreement was reached and an adjustment made. Next, the two coders independently read through the full length of each of the 96 articles and conducted the classification of the identified research streams. In the coding process, the topics addressed in the research streams are interrelated and some of the articles, at times, address several topics, meaning that they may fall into two or more of the research streams. Given this and per Cornwall and Maignan (1998), the two coders discussed their coding and the articles were assigned to a stream based on their main emphasis or principal contribution. Upon completion of the coding, one coder identified 16 streams and the other one 11 streams, which were later discussed and agreed upon to be grouped as streams and substreams (e.g., the stream = defining constructs; substreams = dimensions of use, constructs of acceptance, platforms attribute). The two researchers’ agreement scores ranged from 87% to 91% on the six research streams.

**Deductive Approach.** The coding sheet for the platforms, theories, and methods was developed through a deductive process by first identifying a working definition for each item. For example, the codebook used for the method section was developed by identifying the commonly used definitions of qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods and multimethods from the work of Creswell (2014). Two independent coders conducted a pilot test of the reliability of the coding sheet. An intercoder reliability analysis using the kappa statistic was performed (per Neuendorf, 2002) that determined consistency among raters on each of platforms (κ = .807), theories (κ = .846), and methods (κ = .943). These scores indicate an acceptable level of intercoder reliability (i.e., coefficients of .80 or greater (see Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002)). The final classifications were reviewed by two additional researchers/coders and revised accordingly.

**Results**

**Topic Areas Covered in Social Media Scholarship in Sport Management Research**

The 96 articles gathered were grouped into one of six emergent streams of research (see Figure 2), representing the topics most commonly addressed in the related literature. Some of the streams are relatively developed with a considerable body of knowledge, whereas others consist of only a few studies. The streams include nature of social media, defining constructs, social media sites as tools, legal and ethical considerations, industry applications, and issues and impacts. They are based on the findings reported in these studies. Appendix Table 1 lists the 96 articles by research streams. An analysis of the different contextual settings where the social media articles are found reveals that papers were related to sport organizations (30.2%), sport consumers (29.1%), athletes (19.8%), and journalism/media (18.8%).

As Table 1 indicates, publication of research on social media in sport management started in 2008 and began to increase in 2010, continuing ever since. The proportion of research work with respect to the understanding of the nature of social media increased during the first four years of the scholarship and then started steadily declining over the past two years, which is believed to be a natural development in the life cycle of new and emerging scholarships (Hardin, 2014).
The Nature of Social Media. Given the relative newness of research on social media, the majority of the literature sought to gain an understanding of (i) the use of social media, (ii) users and their characteristics, and (iii) adoption of the platforms. As can be seen in Table 1, 11 of the 15 published works during the early age of the scholarship—2008 to 2010—were conducted to gain an understanding of the nature of social media. This continued until June 2014, as this research stream accounts for over one-third (37.5%) of the literature published.
Understanding the Use of Social Media. A number of articles explored and described social media as a new communication medium by focusing on a specific user group or context. For example, Hambrick and Mahoney (2011) examined how professional athletes used Twitter for promotional purposes. Similar studies sought to understand how social media has been used by fans (Sanderson, 2013), student-athletes (Browning & Sanderson, 2012), professional athletes (Hambrick, Frederick, & Sanderson, 2013; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010), and sport organizations (Zimmerman, Clavio, & Lim, 2011), as well as in areas such as marketing (Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012), public relations (Stoldt & Vermillion, 2013), and journalism (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010).

Characteristics of Social Media Users. These papers seek to gain an understanding of social media and examine user characteristics. For example, one group of scholars (Clavio, 2008; Clavio, Burch, & Frederick, 2012; Clavio & Kian, 2010) investigated the characteristics of users and usage profiles of social media, examining user characteristics, their demography, and their usage profile.

Adoption of Social Media Platforms. These researchers investigate the preference for and acceptance of social media platforms. O’Shea and Alonso (2011) examined the ways in which three professional clubs are leveraging traditional marketing approaches while adapting to social media to an increasingly media-driven consumer base. Similarly, Kassing and Sanderson (2010) examined how fans experienced a major sporting event through the content shared by cyclists using Twitter.

Defining Constructs. In this research stream, the underlying constructs of users’ motivation, behavior, attitude, and gratification in using social media were investigated. In addition, useowners’ objectives in adopting social media were examined. Most articles in this stream addressed (i) the reasons why users are using social media, and (ii) the constructs of acceptance of social media. As can be seen in Table 1, this stream of research is ranked third (13.5%) in terms of research attention.

Dimensions of Use. Researchers attempted to identify the reasons why (e.g., the motivations, behavior, and attitude) audiences are using social media platforms. For example, Frederick, Clavio, Burch, and Zimmerman (2012) examined fans’ uses and gratification on a mixed-martial-arts blog, and found six dimensions of gratification: evaluation, community, information gathering, knowledge demonstration, argumentation, and diversion. Similarly, Clavio and Walsh (2013) examined college sport fans’ dimensions of gratification for social media use. In a related study, Stavros, Meng, Westberg, and Farrell (2014) explored the motivations underpinning the desire of fans to communicate on the Facebook sites of several NBA teams. Other researchers have studied the dimensions of use in a different context. For example, McCarthy (2014) studied the motivations, behaviors, and media attitudes of fan sports bloggers.

Constructs of Acceptance and Platforms Attributes. Several researchers have attempted to investigate the constructs for the acceptance of social media. For example, Mahan (2011) examined predictors of consumer preferences for social media and Pronschinske, Groza, and Walker (2012) examined the Facebook attributes that attract the most fans based on four professional teams. Witkemper, Lim, and Waldburger (2012) examined the motives and constraints that influence individuals’ adoption of Twitter as a medium to follow their favorite athletes.

Social Media as a Tool. Under this research stream, the use and services of social media as communication platforms and marketing tools were examined. This stream accounts for the second largest portion (24%) of the social media scholarship (see Table 1).

Social Media as a Communication Tool. Various sociocultural discussions are communicated through social media, and these have been examined by a number of studies. Topics explored include fandom and advocacy for women’s sports in blog posts (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012), crisis communication on Twitter (Brown & Billings, 2013; Brown, Brown, & Billings, 2013), portrayal of women in sports blogs (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011), fans’ views on racism on message boards (Cleland, 2013), professional athletes’ self-presentation on Twitter (Lebel & Danylcuk, 2012), framing self on Twitter (Coche, 2014), and fans’ creation and maintenance of social capital on Facebook (Phua, 2012).

Social Media as a Marketing Tool. Other studies examined sport organizations’ use of social media as a marketing communication tool. Examples include Eagleman’s (2013) investigation of national sport organizations’ use of social media as a marketing communication tool, and Dittmore, McCarthy, McEvoy, and Clavio’s (2013) examination of intercollegiate athletic administrators’ perceived utility of Twitter as a form of marketing or communication. Other examples include Hambrick and Kang’s (2014) exploration of professional sports organizations’ use of Pinterest as a communications and relationship-marketing tool, and Wallace, Wilson, and Miloch’s (2011) examination of college sport organizations’ use of Facebook for marketing and communications.

Legal and Ethical Considerations. Under the fourth-largest research stream, various legal and ethical issues associated with social media use and its implications were investigated. Although only a few articles addressed legal and ethical issues, two distinct categories can be identified: (i) legal considerations in using social media, and (ii) student-athletes and social media use policies. This research stream covers 8.3% of the published work.
**Legal Considerations in Using Social Media.** Studies that discussed the legal issues related to social media covered topics such as potential legal issues related to social media use (Cornish & Larkin, 2014; Wendt & Young, 2011), and athletes’ product endorsement on social media (Brisson, Baker, & Byon, 2013; McKelvey & Masteralexis, 2013).

**Student-Athletes and Social Media Use Policies.** Under this category, researchers (Sanderson, 2011; Sanderson & Browning, 2013) examined the messages that student-athletes receive from athletic department officials and coaches about social media use. Van Namen (2011) explored the need for coaches, athletic departments, and university administrators to monitor and regulate student-athletes’ use of social media without facing potential legal exposure for infringement of constitutionally protected free speech rights. The studies provided insight into social media use policy in college sport.

**Industry Applications.** Although many sport organizations have embraced social media platforms with the aim of delivering their products and services competitively, a small proportion of the published research (7.3%), as noted in Table 1, is about the industry application of social media. These seven studies are grouped into one subcategory: social media marketing strategy.

**Social Media Marketing Strategy.** The strategic use of social media and its integration into an overall communication strategy have been addressed by authors such as Armstrong, Delia, and Giardina (2014), who analyzed the social media marketing strategies of the Los Angeles Kings; Boehmer and Lacy (2014), who investigated the implementation of an interactive social-customer relationship-management strategy on Facebook; and Bayne and Cianfrone (2013), who examined social media marketing effectiveness on college students in a campus recreation setting. Further, Miranda, Chamorro, Rubio, and Rodriguez (2014) employed the Facebook Assessment Index to compare, assess, and rank Facebook sites of top European and North American professional teams.

**Issues and Impacts.** Articles under this research stream considered the impacts and issues related to social media use and their implications, such as impact on sport brand and journalism practice, and the opportunities, constraints, and challenges of social media as a communication and marketing tool. This research stream accounts for 9.4% of the scholarship and the studies are classified as (i) impact of social media use on journalism practice and (ii) issues and impacts of social media in marketing practices.

**Impact of Social Media on Journalism Practice.** In the topic area of journalism practice, Gibbs and Haynes (2013) attempted to explain how the practices and norms related to the role of sport media relations are changing as a result of Twitter. McEnnis (2013) examined what citizen journalism on Twitter has meant for the professional identity and working practices of British sport journalists, and Reed and Hansen (2013) examined how American sport journalists’ (particularly those who cover elite sports) perception of gatekeeping has changed since they began using social media for news-gathering purposes. Schultz and Sheffer (2010) assessed what changes Twitter has caused in journalism news work.

**Issues and Impacts of Social Media in Marketing Practices.** A small number of researchers addressed the impact and issues of social media on the practice of marketing. For example, Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, and Blaszka (2013) studied the impact of social media use on sport brands, and O’Shea and Alonso (2013) examined how an Australian professional sports organization addressed the potentials and constraints of social media usage, while Abeza et al. (2013) explored the use, opportunities, and challenges of social media in meeting relationship marketing goals.

**Contribution of Research Papers by Academic Journals**

Of the 29 journals that featured the 96 articles, only 2 journals (International Journal of Sport Communication [IJSC] and Sociology of Sport Journal) published social media research papers in sport management in the period 2008–2010. In 2011, 9 other journals joined them, and, since, both the number of journals publishing social media articles and the number of published social media research papers have increased. A significant increase in the number of journals from 2010 (10 journals) to 2013 (18 journals) was observed. Table 2 reveals that 80.2% of the articles are published by 10 of the 29 journals, led by IJSC (40.6%). Further, Communication & Sport published 8 social media articles in just over a year of its existence. The other three journals that published social media articles relatively frequently include International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing (7), Journal of Sports Media (6), and Sport Marketing Quarterly (5).

As reported in Table 2, social media publication in sport management research has a short history that is characterized by a rapidly increasing body of literature.

**Platforms That Received the (Most/Least) Attention in the Research Community**

The social media platform that received the most attention is Twitter (41.7%), followed by Facebook (12.5%), and Blogs (10.4%). These three platforms take the main share (64.6%) of the social media sport management research. Studies that covered a combination of Facebook and Twitter, a combination of other platforms, or social media in general account for 28.12% of the published works. Other platforms that received scholars’ attention include message boards (3 articles), YouTube (2 articles),
Table 2 Distribution of Research Papers by Journal and Period

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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Journal of Sport &amp; Social Issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Leisure Studies</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Mass Communication and Society</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Public Relations Review</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Qualitative Research Reports in Comm.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Recreational Sports Journal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Soccer &amp; Society</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Virginia Sports and Entertainment Law Journal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total | 3 | 3 | 9 | 18 | 19 | 31 | 13 | 96 |

This is a reference to the table on page 608 of the article by Abeza et al. in JSM Vol. 29, No. 6, 2015.

Pinterest (1 article), and Weibo (1 article). When an article looked at two or more platforms together, such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn (see Cornish and Larkin, 2014), the article is classified under the umbrella name social media.

Theories in Social Media Scholarship in Sport Management Research

The article review identified 26 theories and theoretical models used or referenced in 52 of the 96 articles originating from a variety of disciplines such as sociology, marketing, psychology, information technology, mass media, and crisis communication (see Appendix Table 2). Uses and gratifications, and relationship marketing theories are the most cited theories (being used in 10 and 7 studies, respectively). Parasocial interaction and agenda setting have been used in four studies, while media framing, social identity theories, and image/reputation repair typology were each used in three studies. The theory of self-presentation, the technology acceptance model, and gatekeeping theory have each been used in two social media studies each. The remaining 15 theories and models have each been used once.
The 52 studies that made reference to the 26 identified theories were classified into Bryant and Miron’s (2004) 11 groupings of theory utilization: (i) mere references, (ii) using as theoretical framework, (iii) comparison of two or more theories, (iv) critique of a theory or of theories, (v) proposing a theory, (vi) supporting a theory, (vii) testing a new theory, (viii) integrating theories, (ix) expanding a theory, (x) new application, and (xi) praising of a theory or of theories. The classification is presented as Table 3, which reports that 69.8% used their theories as a framework for the study and 9.4% of the articles expanded the theories or models referenced. Other uses of theory reported are mere references to the theories (7.5%), supporting theories (3.8%), and new application of theories into social media studies (3.8%). Integration of theories also accounted for 3.8% (e.g., Frederick, Lim, et al. [2012] integrated/combined uses and gratification and parasocial interaction in their study), and discussion of a theory/praising (e.g., Williams and Chinn [2010]: relationship marketing) accounted for 1.9%. Those aspects typically considered to be the primary components of theory construction (Bryant & Miron, 2004), such as proposing a theory, testing a new theory, critique of a theory, and comparison of theories are absent in social media scholarship in sport management research.

### Research Methods in Social Media Scholarship in Sport Management Research

#### Research and Data-Gathering Methods.

The proportion of the research methodologies/methods used in social media articles in sport management research is presented in Table 4. The table reports that the quantitative method (51.1%) is the most used method in social media scholarship, followed by qualitative methods (43.2%). Over the 6.5-year period analyzed, the use of qualitative methods is increasing. The use of both mixed- and multimethod research approaches is limited. Table 5 reports on the data collection methods in social media sport management research, where content analyses (50.5%) and surveys (29.7%) far exceeded any other method of data gathering during the 6.5-year period analyzed. Interviews ranked third (16.5%) followed by experimental methods (2.2%). Field notes were used in only one study.

#### Discussion and Directions for Future Research

Social media has attracted significant sport management research interest since 2008, a trend consistent with the popularity of social media platforms in the sport industry. While the reviewed articles provided insights into the features, use, benefits, opportunities, impacts, and challenges of social media, this study finds that there are broad areas in need of attention. The results can be summarized as follows: (a) the social media literature provides a solid foundation for an understanding of social media in sport management research, (b) a significant concentration of the sport management research is on the topic of two social media platforms—Twitter and Facebook, (c) the

### Table 3 References to Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilization of Theories</th>
<th>No. of Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical framework for the study</td>
<td>(36) 69.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding a theory</td>
<td>(5) 9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mere references</td>
<td>(4) 7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting a theory</td>
<td>(2) 3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New application</td>
<td>(2) 3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating/combining theories</td>
<td>(2) 3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praising/detail discussion</td>
<td>(1) 1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposing a theory</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing a new theory</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison of two or more theories</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of a theory or of theories</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(52) 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4 Research Methods in Social Media Scholarship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(45) 51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(38) 43.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimethod</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(3) 3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Method</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(2) 2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Publications in 2014 are only to June 2014 (i.e., 6 months).

*The total number is less than the 96 articles reviewed because some articles in fields like law and sociology publish more of analytical/descriptive papers and did not employ a specific traditional research method.
utilization of theories is still in the early stages, (d) there
is a limited scope and range in the research methods
adopted and data collection instruments employed, and
(e) there is a lack of a framework that provides a sum-
mary of the current literature and provides direction for
future research.

In summary, the relative newness of the social media
scholarship in sport management is observed in the trends
of emerging research streams, in the application of refer-
cenced theories, and in the scope of the research methods
employed. This “state” is in line with the logical steps in
the life cycle of an emerging area of scholarship (Hardin,
2014). Importantly, this stage of the scholarship and its
associated developmental reality should not be seen as
disadvantages. In fact, to the contrary, once the research
community becomes aware of the state of the scholar-
ship and is provided with a framework, it will be in a
position to take the next step(s) toward developing more
sophisticated research questions, covering broader topics,
advancing the utilization of theories, and expanding the
research methods employed. Specifically, the literature
produced to date provides the starting point toward the
continued development of the field (see Hardin, 2014),
and provides the future research directions. Further, the
reported lack of social media research among scholars
in key areas of sport management—such as finance,
governance, organizational behavior, development, tour-
ism, facility management, and event management—is a
deterrent to the growth of research in the area. This must
be addressed in sport management doctoral programs in
these areas, with students being provided with the tools
necessary to conduct social media research in finance,
event management and the other identified areas.

Results support that the overall impact and signif-
icance of social media in the contemporary sport
industry has remained unexplored in a number of the
subdisciplines of sport management. In particular, the
focus has been on sport marketing and sport commu-
nications. Intuitively, this is expected given the roots
of social media as a communication form that marketers
can easily incorporate into their activities. Thus, for the
field to move forward, the onus falls to the marketing and
communications scholars to build theory, expand empiri-
cal analyses, and provide strong frameworks for the sport
management scholars in the other subdisciplines. Since
social media is, by nature, a communication platform,
the focus on sport marketing and communication to date
makes sense. However, the study of the dynamic inter-
relationship between sport and social media has a cross-
disciplinary nature and with the body of literature to date, attention to the other subdisciplines
of sport management is needed. As can be seen from the
driving research streams, the studies produced to date in
three of the subfields of sport management have already
laid substantial foundation for future advancements.
These include sport marketing, sport communication
and sport law. In sport law, for instance, various legal
issues that arise from uses and misuses of social media
have been explored in the work of Brison et al. (2013),
McKelvey and Masteralexis, (2013), Cornish and Larkin
and Sanderson (2011).

In the topic area of crisis communication, the works
of Sanderson (2013), Hambrick et al. (2013), Brown
et al. (2013), and Brown and Billings (2013) serve as
groundwork for future studies. In the three subdisciplines
themselves, however, a number of research opportunities
await research attention. In sport marketing, for example,
there exists limited research on the impact, role, and
significance of social media as a platform for advertis-
ing, sales, direct marketing, sponsorship, branding, and
ambush marketing. In sponsorship, for instance, social
media has a natural appeal as an activation tool for both
the sponsor and the sponsee. Resulting from its instant
global reach, ease of networking, and ease of collabora-
tion, social media has become a powerful marketing tool

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Table 5 Proportions of Data-Gathering Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Gathering Method</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014a</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Analysisb</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(46) 50.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey/Questionnaire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3c</td>
<td>(27) 29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1c</td>
<td>(15) 16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(2) 2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation/Field Notes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1) 1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21b</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13c</td>
<td>91c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aPublications in 2014 are only until June 2014 (i.e., 6 months).
bContent analysis: quantitative content analysis = 18; qualitative content analysis = 25 (content analysis = 13, thematic analysis = 5, textual analysis = 3, discourse analysis = 2, social network analysis = 2). Note: Whereas content analysis is an analytical approach in research methods, here it is used to refer to a secondary source data that was gathered from social media sites and analyzed to produce themes or quantitative data. Content is also considered to include text, photo, and video. Therefore, for the purpose of this work, analytical approaches such as textual analysis, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis are grouped under content analysis.

cIt should have been reported as 88. However, as the summary in Table 4 indicates, one mixed method study (i.e., Gibbs, O’Reilly, & Brunette, 2014) used three methods (interviews, content analysis, and survey).
(Kotler, 2011), particularly for those seeking to market in multiple countries. Therefore, investigating how sponsors and sponsees are reacting to the ever-changing nature of sporting landscapes resulting from social media will inform both scholars and practitioners.

In the very early days of the social media scholarship, Leonard (2009) argued that there was a need:

\[\ldots\] to react to the ever changing nature of sporting landscapes resulting from innovation and technological changes, not simply categorizing metamorphosis as indicative of the new media era of sport but reflecting on the impact and significance of these transformations. (p. 12)

This recommendation is still very relevant today, and research needs to keep pace with these changes. Indeed, as opposed to the current approach that considers all audiences/users of social media as identical, future research should progress to identify, differentiate, and take into account differences in the behavior of social media users and their level of involvement. Today's social media users dedicate substantial time to producing and consuming multimedia content, and are found to be the foremost players in all categories of Web 2.0 applications. This is why the terms prosumer and user-generated content are often used to underline the fact that today's users are not only consumers, but also the prime content contributors. These users exhibit different levels of commitment and participation on social media platforms, ranging from passive visitor to committed contributor.

Various researchers (e.g., Harridge-March & Quinton, 2009; Kozinets, 2006; Riegner, 2007) have attempted to develop different classifications of social media users. For example, Harridge-March and Quinton (2009) proposed that social media users could be classified by their level of involvement, namely as lurkers, newbies/tourists, minglers, and evangelists/devotees. In a similar manner, audiences (i.e., friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter) of a social media site are not all necessarily supporters of the useowners/social media site owners, and not all offline fans of a useowner are necessarily users of social media (Abeza et al., 2013). For these reasons, future studies need to factor in the differences in behavior exhibited by social media users and differences by that users' level of involvement should be accounted for. In particular, influential users should be given specific research attention. Related exemplary studies in this area include Clavio and Walsh (2013) and Stavros et al. (2014).

With respect to the results reported on platforms, while it can be justified why the majority of research focused on Twitter and Facebook, research on the other platforms will serve to inform both scholars and practitioners. In this regard, the studies on YouTube (Mahoney, Hambrick, Svensson, & Zimmerman, 2013; Zimmerman et al., 2011), Pinterest (Hambrick & Kang, 2014) and Weibo (Liu & Berkowitz, 2013) are exemplary. A number of researchers (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pedersen, & Burch, 2014; Pronschinske et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2013; Witkemper et al., 2012) recommend research be conducted across multiple platforms.

Concerning theories, the majority of research (75%) use theories specifically as a tool to frame their studies. Although theory development helps a scholarship build its identity and increase its self-reliance (Abeza et al., 2014), there is a dearth in studies that propose a theory, test a new theory, critique a theory, or compare different theories. This requires research attention as very few studies were found that support existing theories, apply theories from other areas of study in social media setting, and integrate different theories. Although proposing, testing, critiquing and comparing theories is not common in an emerging area of scholarship, results suggest that this is now a challenge for the social media research community, as the scholarship continues to advance. Hence, sport management researchers in social media are encouraged to compare, critique, integrate theories, test and apply theories from other fields into the context of social media, and begin developing new theories. Moreover, as Slack (1998) stated, scholars not only need to use existing theories to study sport but also to use sport to test and extend existing theories.

And finally, with regards to research methods, a small range of data collection methods are being used in social media scholarship in sport management research: content analysis, online surveys, and interviews. Results on research methods employed in social media sport management studies differ from what are known to be the most common sources of data collection in qualitative research (i.e., document and archival analysis, direct and participant observation, focus groups, interviews) (Yin, 2014) and in quantitative research (i.e., experiments, questionnaires) (Creswell, 2014). Thus, a more diverse set of methods is encouraged.

While a thematic analysis of various sports stakeholders’ social media use has value, and while such studies have importance and, therefore, should be pursued (Sanderson, 2014), the size of samples and number of cases are areas that should be improved. For instance, some of the interviews were based on single cases, when multiple cases could have been employed. In fact, contrary to much of the existing literature, a single case or unit of analysis should only be justifiable when the case (e.g., an athlete, an organization, a coach, an incident) is either a representative, critical, extreme or unique, or when it is typical or revelatory (Yin, 2014). This recommendation is supported by previous authors (e.g., Alonso & O’Shea, 2012b, Hambrick & Sanderson, 2013) who contend that researchers would be well served to consider multiple cases in their sampling.

In addition, as Pedersen (2014) stated, scholars should address some of the research questions using relatively challenging methods such as ethnography and experimental study (when appropriate). It is also pertinent (and recommended) for scholars to consider longitudinal studies. In this regard, after noting the shifting nature of social media, a number of authors (see Hambrick & Mahoney,
2011; Mahan, Seo, Jordan, & Funk, 2014; Prongsingke et al. 2012; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Stoldt & Vermillion, 2013) have suggested that a longitudinal study be conducted over time to gain a deeper understanding as to whether various stakeholders in the sport industry (e.g., celebrity athletes, sport organizations, sport consumers, journalists) can develop increasingly sophisticated ways to use social media. Further, it is worth noting that advances in data mining and analytics software programs have made possible the ability to sort, retrieve, collect, compile and analyze a vast volume of data in a shorter period of time. There are number of software programs that can be used for data gathering (e.g., NCapture, DiscoverText, SiteSucker, Netlytic) and as content analysis tools (e.g., Leximancer, NVivo). These software programs enable scholars to address the problem of analyzing a small number of content, and to enhance intercoder reliability (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). Critical reviews similar to the one at hand are encouraged on a periodical basis, and it is hoped that future work will address and take into consideration those recommendations.

Finally, although this research set out to provide a thorough, critical review of the available literature on social media in sport management research, the study has limitations. First, the topics addressed in the research are limited to those discussed in the literature and do not necessarily include all facets of social media that warrant scholarly inquiry. For example, as noted, sponsorship activation is an area where research on social media would be of high value. Second, only literature accessible through electronic databases is considered, where some articles may have been missed in the keyword search.

References


## Appendix

### Appendix Table 1  Overview and Distribution of the Social Media Literature by Research Streams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Corresponding Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Nature of Social Media</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding use of social media</td>
<td>Blaszka, Burch, Frederick, Clavio, &amp; Walsh (2012); Browning &amp; Sanderson (2012); Clavio (2008); Clavio (2011); Clavio &amp; Kian (2010); Clavio, Burch, &amp; Frederick (2012); Clavio, Walsh &amp; Vooris (2013); Deprez, Mechant, &amp; Hoebeke, (2013); Frederick, Lim, Clavio, &amp; Walsh (2012); Frederick, Lim, Clavio, Pedersen, &amp; Burch (2014); Hambrick, Frederick, &amp; Sanderson (2013); Hambrick &amp; Mahoney (2011); Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, &amp; Greenwell, (2010); Havard, Eddy, Reams, Stewart, &amp; Ahmad (2012); Hull (2014); Hutchins (2011); Kassing &amp; Sanderson (2010); Kian, Burden, Shaw (2011); Leonard (2009); Liu, Z., &amp; Berkowitz, D. (2013); O’Shea &amp; Alonso (2011); Pegoraro &amp; Jinnah (2012); Reed (2011); Ruihley &amp; Hardin (2011); Sanderson (2008); Sanderson (2009); Sanderson (2010); Sanderson (2013); Sanderson &amp; Hambrick (2012); Sheffer &amp; Schultz (2010); Smith &amp; Smith (2012); Stoldt &amp; Vermillion, (2013); Williams &amp; Chinn (2010); Zimmerman, Clavio, &amp; Lim (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Characteristics of social media users</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adoption of social media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining Constructs</strong></td>
<td>Clavio &amp; Walsh (2013); Cunningham &amp; Bright (2012); Frederick, Clavio, Burch, &amp; Zimmerman (2012); Gibbs, O’Reilly &amp; Brunette (2014); Hull &amp; Lewis (2014); Kwak, Kim, &amp; Zimmerman (2010); Mahan (2011); Mahan, Seo, Jordan, &amp; Funk (2014); McCarthy, B. (2014); Promschinske, Groza, &amp; Walker (2012); Stavros, Meng, Westberg, &amp; Farrellly (2013); Wang (2013); Witkemper, Lim, &amp; Waldburger (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dimensions of use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Constructs of acceptance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Platforms attribute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tools/Platform/Services, social media as</strong></td>
<td>Alonso &amp; O’Shea (2012a); Antunovic &amp; Hardin (2012); Brown &amp; Billings (2013); Brown, Brown, &amp; Billings (2013); Burch, Frederick, Zimmerman, &amp; Clavio (2011); Clavio &amp; Eagleman (2011); Cleland (2013); Coche (2014); Dittmore, McCarthy, McEvoy, &amp; Clavio (2013); Eagleman (2013); Frederick, Burch, &amp; Blaszka (2013); Hambrick (2012); Hambrick &amp; Kang (2014); Hambrick &amp; Sanderson (2013); Hopkins (2013); Lebel &amp; Danylchuk (2012); Mahoney, Hambrick, Svensson, &amp; Zimmerman (2013); McGillivray (2014); Normal (2012); Phua (2012); Wallace, Wilson &amp; Miloch (2011); Waters, Burke, Jackson, &amp; Buning (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marketing communication tool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication tool for fans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal and Ethical Considerations</strong></td>
<td>Brison, Baker &amp; Byron (2013); Cornish &amp; Larkin (2014); McKelvey &amp; Masteralexis (2011); McKelvey &amp; Masteralexis, (2013); Sanderson (2011); Sanderson &amp; Browning, (2013); Van Namen (2011); Wendt &amp; Young (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Legal issues in using social media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social media policies in student-athletes use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Applications</strong></td>
<td>Alonso &amp; O’Shea (2012b); Armstrong, Delia, &amp; Giardina (2014); Bayne &amp; Cianfrone (2013); Boehmer &amp; Lacy (2014); Dittmore, Stoldt, &amp; Greenwell (2008); Miranda, Chamorro, Rubio, &amp; Rodríguez (2014); Price, Farrington, &amp; Hall (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social media marketing strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issues and Impacts</strong></td>
<td>Abeza, O’Reilly, &amp; Reid (2013); Emmons &amp; Butler (2013); Gibbs &amp; Haynes (2013); McMannis (2013); O’Shea &amp; Alonso (2013); Reed (2013); Reed &amp; Hansen (2013); Schultz &amp; Sheffer (2010); Walsh, Clavio, Lovell, &amp; Blaszka (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impact of social media on journalism practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impact of social media on marketing practice</td>
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<td>No.</td>
<td>Theories and Models</td>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Uses and gratifications</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Relationship-marketing theory/approach</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Social identity theory</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Technology acceptance model (TAM)</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Gatekeeping theory</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Integrative model of behavioral prediction and attitude functions</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>One-way and two-way models of communication</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Stewardship</td>
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<td>Communication privacy management theory</td>
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<td>Feminist theory</td>
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<td>Theory of planned behavior</td>
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<td>Homophily</td>
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<td>Technological determinism</td>
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