

# **Relationship marketing in 140 characters or less: The case of community trusts in English football**

## **Introduction**

Modern-day technology has been a key contributor to the ways in which people convey, perceive and receive all forms of information. Social media, particularly micro-blogging applications such as Twitter, has provided users with new ways to communicate with each other, and information is now exchanged between billions of people on a daily basis. As a consequence, social media provides organisations with new directions and benefits in relationship marketing (Griffiths, 2008; Haverstein, 2008), offering them a unique environment in which to create brand communities (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), conduct marketing research (Kozinets, 2002), carry out strategic communication campaigns (Waters & Jamal, 2011), or even achieve behavioural change (O’Reilly et al., 2012). Consequently, the growing prominence of social media – not least in the context of sport organisations – has led to calls from sport business and management researchers for further research (Chadwick, 2012; Sanderson, 2011). Indeed, recent studies have examined consumer responses to sport-related social media (e.g., Mahan, 2011); methods that team sport organisations utilise to engage fans (e.g., Ioakimidis, 2010; Waters et al., 2011); the degree of activity and interactivity of social media uses in sport (Witkemper, Blaszk, & Chung, 2014); and the motivations and gratification of social media users in relation to their favourite teams (Gibbs et al., 2014; Stavros et al., 2014; Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012).

Notwithstanding this proliferation of scholarly activity on social media in the sporting context, Filo, Lock and Karg’s (2014) review revealed that the majority of this literature not only derives from a North American perspective, but it also falls short of an explicit examination of non-profit sport organisations. The limited body of studies on non-profit sport

organisations' social media use focus almost exclusively on the adoption and prevalence of social media by national sport organisations with a view to examining relationship building (e.g., Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014), promoting their respective sports (e.g., Coche, 2014) or increasing participation through engagement and persuasion (e.g., Campos, Anagnostopoulos, & Chadwick, 2013). Such scarcity of studies on non-profit organisations is rather surprising when one considers that these organisations "are increasingly engaging social media in an effort to understand the needs of and efficiently communicate their programs and services with stakeholders" (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014, p. 128).

This shortage of studies on social media is particularly noticeable for a specific type of non-profit organisation, namely charitable community foundations (or trusts).<sup>1</sup> These organisations are now becoming the dominant delivery agents for the corporate social responsibility agendas of team sport organisations (Anagnostopoulos, Byers, & Shilbury, 2014; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Walters & Chadwick, 2009). However, scholars have yet to examine the messages sent by community trusts on social media, despite such messages, in the form of 'statuses' and 'updates', being the primary dynamic feature of social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook (Guo & Saxton, 2014). As a result, we know little about the actual information content of community trusts' social media presence – which goes beyond mere static profile information – and thus a closer examination of the social media use by these particular types of organisation becomes a timely and reasoned inquiry.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to assess how community trusts in the English football industry are using the micro-blogging application of Twitter to inform, build relationships and, ideally, engage with various stakeholder groups. Our reasoning corresponds to that of Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), who recognised that online non-profit/stakeholder interactions have become increasingly ubiquitous, multifaceted, and critical to organisational performance. The organisations in question are financially interdependent

entities, peculiarly funded and vulnerable to political change (Bingham & Walters, 2013), and also require volunteer involvement for sound operation. Therefore, a better understanding of how these organisations use Twitter may serve as a springboard for managerial recommendations that could help them overcome organisational challenges, potentially diversify their funding portfolios, and ultimately optimise their performance. The current study represents a focused endeavour in this direction.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Centred on relationship marketing, this introduction is followed by an overview of the literature on social media, with a focus on works that relate specifically to Twitter. The next section provides a detailed account of the research employed in the study. We then present and discuss the findings of this work; in so doing, we present a tentative dual typology, which delineates a new perspective in understanding not only the way community trusts utilise Twitter, but also the integration of such communication with the ‘parent’ football clubs. The article concludes by discussing the study’s theoretical contributions as well as its managerial implications, while offering potential avenues for future research.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Relationship Marketing***

Relationship marketing (RM) rose to prominence during the 1990s as marketing practitioners became increasingly concerned with cultivating long-term relational exchanges with consumers. RM considers each individual exchange as part of an ongoing relationship in which both parties benefit from a continuous association and the development of consumer loyalty. This approach represented a major directional change, in terms of both marketing theory and practice (Andreasen, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Raphael & Raphael, 1995), and is a genuine paradigm shift (Gronroos, 1994; Kotler, 1991) away from purely transactional marketing exchanges. A transactional approach to marketing is considered to be

much narrower and less focused on understanding either the historical exchanges between parties, or future exchange opportunities (Bell et al., 2005).

From a managerial perspective, the importance of RM is now widely acknowledged (Vincent & Webster, 2013). Interaction through personal contacts and relationships can result in organisational benefits such as improved awareness of consumers and their needs, and overall gains in performance (Amonini et al., 2010). This is particularly the case in non-profit organisations (NPOs), where RM can help shape a clear long-term strategy (Conway & Whitelock, 2007). However, there are contrasting views on the application of RM to the operation of NPOs. On one hand, the importance of building quality-focused relationships has been stressed as being central to a NPO's marketing strategy (Shabbir et al., 2007). Conversely, others have warned that investing in relationships is costly and may not provide the intended benefits (Reinartz & Kumar, 2000; Payne & Holt, 2001).

Nevertheless, NPOs have become increasingly proactive in terms of embracing RM (Groza et al., 2012), which is of particular relevance when considering the ways in which NPOs may approach the challenges that they currently face, such as financial constraints, political pressure, and increased competition (O'Reilly & Brunette, 2013). One such way for NPOs to further engaging with RM practices is through social media (Guo & Saxton, 2014).

### ***Social media***

The use of social media as a medium to communicate with and engage others has increased dramatically over the last decade (Wallace et al., 2011). With 73 per cent of all online adults using social media as of September 2013 (Brenner, 2013), more people now communicate via social media than by email (Pronschinke et al., 2012).

Social media permits a two-way level of interaction that older forms of communication, such as newsletters (Walker, Kent, & Vincent, 2010), do not allow. Social media is not necessarily a new form of marketing for organisations per se, but provides a

convenient platform through which consumers can choose to participate in the process (Pronschinke et al., 2012). To date, users have typically engaged with social media for reasons such as communicating with friends, sharing information, accessing news and entertainment, and interacting with organisations (Newman et al., 2013).

Evidently, all organisations participating in social media activity have the potential to facilitate user interaction. It has been asserted that true value of interaction arises from co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), where the organisation and consumer are intimately involved in jointly creating value that is unique to the consumer and sustainable to the firm (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Stelzner (2011) identified that the major objectives for an organisation engaging in user interaction are: (a) generating awareness and exposure of its product or service offering; (b) driving traffic to its website; (c) improving its market research capabilities; and (d) enhancing the overall user experience. The social medium that –to various degrees of explicitness – can satisfy all four abovementioned objectives is Twitter.

### ***Twitter***

Twitter is a micro-blogging site that enables its members to send and read other users' messages – known as 'tweets', which are a maximum of 140 characters in length – in real time (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012). A user's tweets appear and can be viewed by 'followers', who are able to reply by providing feedback or re-broadcasting ('retweeting') the original message to their own followers (Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). According to Twitter's co-founder Evan Williams, Twitter's target is the 'base of the pyramid', striving to give a voice to those 'most disadvantaged and marginalised' (Coche, 2014). Evidence of this 'voice' is often seen during breaking coverage of major news events, where the mainstream media commonly use the tweets of victims or witnesses to inform their own output.

Twitter also provides a platform for high-profile figures to connect with followers. Athletes, coaches and broadcasters all maintain a Twitter presence (Browning & Sanderson, 2012), allowing fans to access news and updates directly from their source. To date, scholars have explored themes such as how Twitter is used by athletes (Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegorano 2010), characteristics of athletes' Twitter followers (Clavio & Kian, 2010), and the influence of Twitter on the sports media (Hutchins, 2011, Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012). This accessibility to teams and players is a significant precursor to the development of team identification (Sutton et al., 1997), which can increase fan loyalty. However, inappropriate or offensive tweets can generate considerable media attention and have an adverse effect on a person or organisation (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Several recent examples have been seen in English football, such as the instance of the former Sunderland FC player James McClean, who was banned from Twitter by his club for a series of controversial political tweets (BBC, 2013).

At the organisational level, sports teams are also increasingly taking advantage of Twitter's popularity and are integrating Twitter into their marketing campaigns (Browning & Sanderson, 2012). Indeed, the viability of Twitter as a RM tool can be examined using specific motivation and constraint factors that impact 'Sport Twitter Consumption' in regard to following athletes, using four measures of motivation: 'information', 'entertainment', 'passing time' and 'fanship' (Witkemper et al., 2012). These four motivations could be utilised in a more organised manner to move from basic interactions and episodes to sequences and relationships.

Whilst acknowledging that social media can help to launch products and strengthen existing brands, Pronschinske et al. (2012) also commented on the lack of empirical research into how social network strategies influence user participation, and how little is known about how sports organisations use social media to foster relationships and drive consumers' and

participants engagement. As such, the present study further advances the academic literature on the utilisation of social media for RM purposes, focusing on the role of Twitter in supporting the communication strategies of community trusts in English football, and how this is done.

As mentioned, there has been little research into the theme of organisational-level social media utilisation, particularly within a sports context. Whilst this utilisation is clearly happening in practice, recent empirical studies (e.g., Coche, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) have highlighted the pressing need for relevant data and analytical frameworks that can help practitioners to further understand how organisations can best harness the vast potential of microblogging to engage the public.

## **Method**

In order to assess the content manifested on the community trusts' Twitter accounts, we employed a qualitative approach, initially through inductive, and subsequently through deductive reasoning. The following sections offer a brief account of (a) the research context, (b) how data was collected, and (c) how tweets were analysed and categorised.

### ***Research context***

The nature of the link between businesses and their wider communities has long been debated (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010). The subject of this debate is now generally referred to as 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR), a notion that represents the way in which companies attempt to add value to the wider community, whilst aiming to ensure that adverse consequences of their actions are kept to a minimum (McWilliams, Siegel, & Wright, 2006). English football clubs are considered to be the most commercialised in Europe (Deloitte, 2014) and the ones that, by and large, exist in a climate of ever-increasing brand exposure and visibility (Walters & Hamil, 2013). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that these organisations also operate in one of the most established CSR networks on the continent

(Hovemann, Breitbarth, & Walzel., 2011; Walters & Tacon, 2011). Indeed, the increasing importance being placed on CSR as a commercial tool (Campbell & Slack, 2008) has resulted in the growth in the number of and the profile of community trusts in both the European (Kolyperas & Anagnostopoulos, 2014; Panton & Walters, 2014) and the United States (Sparvero & Kent, 2014) contexts. However, these organisations remain relatively unexplored, as research has not kept pace with the speed of their development (Andrés-Alonso et al., 2010). Moreover, empirical studies in this context have largely been confined to examining the different kinds of trusts (Ostrower, 2006), whereas the utilisation of social media, including Twitter, has not attracted empirical attention from the sport management scholarly community. To this end, English community trusts from the top two leagues (the Premier League and the Championship, which consist of 20 and 24 football clubs, respectively) were selected as the context of the present study.

### ***Data collection and sampling procedure***

Data was collected by two research students who worked alongside the lead author and focused on collating two sets of data: organisational-level and message-level data. The analysis and categorisation (see next section) was then reviewed, confirmed, and in some cases revised by all three authors.

At the organisational level, the primary purpose of the data collection was to establish which community trust from both leagues had a presence on Twitter. This was done via a review of each football club's website and via on the social networking site itself. As of March 2014, 14 (70 per cent) community trusts with Premier League status and 18 (75 per cent) of clubs with Championship status had a Twitter account. More detailed data was then collected bi-monthly on the community trusts that had a presence over a period of three months, from 3 December 2013 until 2 March 2014, which tracked the number of "Followers" these community trusts had on Twitter (see Table 2 in section 4). Although the



collection of data at the organisational level was basic and descriptive, it was also a useful exercise, for both a theoretical reason and a practical reason. From a theoretical perspective, little was previously known about the penetration of social media, and specifically Twitter, into these particular types of non-profit organisations. In practical terms, data collection at this level was essential in order for the authors to proceed to the next level of analysis.

Message-level analysis was carried out by focusing upon the four communicative tools of Twitter, namely: direct messages and user mentions; retweets; hyperlinks, and hashtags. By attempting to analyse the number and frequency of the four communicative tools that Twitter allows people to use within a tweet, the authors would be able to establish how these community trusts are using this particular medium.

Between February and March, 2014, the 14 community trusts associated with Premier League clubs and the 18 associated with Championship sent a total of 915 and 1,557 tweets, respectively. A substantial amount of data was collected, which included approximately 16,500 and 28,000 words of tweets for Premier League and Championship community trusts, respectively, across a total of 114 pages. To avoid “data asphyxiation” (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 281), the data was restricted to a smaller value of 500 tweets. To randomly select 500 tweets from the original 2,472, the MATLAB mathematical programme was used. To calculate and identify the tweets that would be included within the sample, a range of equations were entered into MATLAB. During the process, the page number would chronologically increase by one, starting from page 1 and finishing at page 114. Subsequently, providing that each individual page averaged 21 tweets, a random sample from each page was taken. Once calculated, the page number would be combined with each tweet number, randomly selected from each page. As a result, approximately 4.38 tweets across 114 pages were selected for the sample.

### ***Data analysis and categorisation***

Content analysis was employed to categorise and analyse the tweets. The content analysis technique is defined as “any qualitative and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). As mentioned, all tweets from the sample were initially analysed in an inductive manner. During this process, the research team identified that the meaning of the tweets ranged from a mere reporting of facts and figures, through calls for engagement, through to appeals for action to be taken by, and amongst, the various key stakeholders of the examined community trusts. When the authors reviewed the literature again, the framework proposed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) seemed to be relevant to these aspects of the collated data. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) introduced three forms of communication –*information*, *community* and *action* – that made it possible to categorise each sampled tweet based on the function of each message conveyed, and thereby the organisations’ intentions for communicating. Each form is discussed more specifically below.

- *Information* – can be considered as the ‘basic’ function of Twitter. Messages contain information of potential interest to followers about the activities of organisations, such as updates, events, facts and other news of relevance to stakeholders.
- *Community* – messages that attempt to build relationships and facilitate the creation of an online community via interaction, two-way dialogue and conversing with users, often via acknowledgement of tweets or employing ‘bonding’ language.
- *Action* – messages that promote a specific initiative and/or programme, with the aim of inducing some form of action from an individual or mobilised group of individuals, which is of benefit to the organisation. Such desired action may include giving donations, joining an event or making a purchase.

By adopting Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) framework, and through deductive reasoning, we created a final code book including tweets for each of the adopted framework categories. Table 1 below offers some exemplar tweets together with the weighting/frequency placed upon the three main categories from the coded data set.

Categorisation and exemplar tweets sent by the community trusts of the English football clubs						
Category	Premier League Community Trusts – Examples	PL Frequency coded	Championship Community Trusts - Examples	Ch'ship Frequency coded	Total Frequency	Total (%)
<b>Information</b>	<i>Arsenal FC:</i> Budapest will take part in the 'Be a Gunner. Be a Runner' charity event on April 5. Details to be revealed soon. Pic.twitter.com/LXP1W64GP3	<b>183</b>	<i>AFC Bournemouth:</i> Minikickers tomorrow morning at the Goldsands Stadium for boys and girls in Years 2-4. The session runs from 10-11am and costs £2.50 #afcb	<b>213</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>39.6 %</b>
	<i>Cardiff City FC:</i> Half term is fast approaching and so are our SOCCER SCHOOLS >>> <a href="http://cardiffcityfoundation.co.uk/index.php?route=product/category...">http://cardiffcityfoundation.co.uk/index.php?route=product/category...</a> #CardiffCity #women #disability		<i>Birmingham City FC:</i> Good luck to Kevan Broadhurst and his U19 Football Development Squad who play local rivals @SBiTC_CCFC in the PLFL National League Cup today			
	<i>Hull City FC:</i> Ncs here we come @tigerstrust #ncs		<i>Derby County FC:</i> This is a reminder that the Shooters session tomorrow night 6-7pm at the Steve Bloomer Racecourse pitch is CANCELLED.			
	<i>Newcastle United FC:</i> Ex-Magpie Brian Kilcline helped pick #NUFC's representative in the #PLenterprise Challenge <a href="http://bit.ly/NUFCplec">http://bit.ly/NUFCplec</a> pic.twitter.com/UW2RjyuQgu		<i>Nottingham Forest FC:</i> Here is the draw for the #WFACup draw... <a href="http://youtu.be/mliq0LZ67Vc">http://youtu.be/mliq0LZ67Vc</a> Thanks to @NFFC_Community			
	<i>Tottenham Hotspur FC:</i> It's a cold morning but our cerebral palsy football team are out training pic.twitter.com/A0IHtcthaT		<i>Yeovil Town FC:</i> We unfortunately have no phone, but can be contacted via e-mail. However our voicemail for our 706671 tel number will list our mobile numbers.			
	<i>Southampton FC:</i> 50/50 Lotto Results: 1 <sup>st</sup> Prize = £250 – 112489, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Prize = £100 – 143469, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Prize = £75 – 107396. Thanks to all who played #COYR		<i>Brighton and Hove Albion FC:</i> Want to lose weight and get fit? We have 2 Free 10-week courses for Arun residents starting soon. Tweet @AITCHealth 4 info. #BHAFC #AITC			
	<i>Manchester United FC:</i> Happy birthday, Old Trafford. The Theatre of Dreams opened its doors for the first time on this day in 1910. #mufc pic.twitter.com/Gyh9r1bkvm		<i>Birmingham City FC:</i> Good luck to Martin O'Connor and his U19 Football Development Squad who play Chelsea in the PLFL National League Cup at home today			
	<i>Manchester City FC:</i> Back at the @citctweets complex today for the second round of the regional competitions pic.twitter.com/wxRNk4HI2q		<i>AFC Bournemouth:</i> GIRLS CUP UPDATE: The girls have won their second game of the day against Gillingham, 1-0 #afcb			
	<i>West Bromwich Albion FC:</i> Recruitment day with @WBAFoundation on Thursday! #Buzzing ☺		<i>Charlton Athletic FC:</i> They are on...@LawsonOfficial raising money for @CapitalHACC and @CAFCTrust pic.twitter.com/nyhdVo74rk			
	<i>Norwich City FC:</i> Harleston Primary School have also qualified to play in the CSF Schools Cup Champions Day next Friday, good luck. pic.twitter.com/lrXzMvgdBU		<i>Doncaster Rovers FC:</i> Great year of achievements for @DRFC_Foundation as it sees 73,000 participant visits over 12-months <a href="http://www.ontrackpr.co.uk/news/2014/2/rovers-community-foundation-celebrates-success...@drfc_official">http://www.ontrackpr.co.uk/news/2014/2/rovers-community-foundation-celebrates-success...@drfc_official</a>			

EURAM 2015: Managing Sport

<b>Community</b>	<i>Tottenham Hotspur FC</i> : Would your school like to play for Spurs at the Etihad stadium? #THFC pic.twitter.com/shmLLUejBU	<b>287</b>	<i>Huddersfield Town FC</i> : @bidtech Good Morning and Thank you for your follow today!	<b>272</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>55.9</b> %
	<i>Cardiff City FC</i> : Special thank you to @JDotHutton and all @CardiffCityFITC for coordinating another great event with @ndeducation @HouseofSportCDF # partners		<i>Huddersfield Town FC</i> : Thanks to @Royds_Hall staff & pupils and mentors from @htaftcdotcom for visiting today. Hope you enjoyed your tour! pic.twitter.com/c1strxk3nn			
	<i>Crystal Palace FC</i> : Thank you @joelward20 for coming down to @CPFC_Foundation Fitter Fans session last night #OneClubOneCommunity #cpfc pic.twitter.com/O7m6y2xVfB		<i>QPR FC</i> : Just landed in Mumbai looking forward to meeting up with the staff from @the_fcsa and coaches from fellow alliance club Bayer 04 Leverkusen			
	<i>Liverpool FC</i> : Thanks to @SkySportsNews who filmed at our @LFCFoundation Football College yesterday to find out about the College's @dallascup squad.		<i>Huddersfield Town FC</i> : @fernoukldt we can only make the massive difference in our community all thanks to generous supporters like you! #charityatheart			
	<i>Newcastle United FC</i> : @ConsettAFC our pleasure!		<i>Watford FC</i> : How can you make a difference? Get on board with the #NCS team. Plan a social action project. Here's to change <a href="http://bit.ly/1btKXFi">http://bit.ly/1btKXFi</a>			
	<i>Southampton FC</i> : Great to see @Sam9allagher & @sammqueen123 come and visit the kids at Henry Beaufort School today. #FutureSaints pic.twitter.com/3vENeLj85I		<i>Blackpool FC</i> : Congratulations to the lads of @BFC1887 Futsal group winning the @BFC_CTrust @premierleague Enterprise Challenge #goodluck			
	<i>Manchester United FC</i> : Great trustees meeting of @MU_Foundation with @TomBloxhamMBE & @cbb1959 brilliant work being done by @dawnbracegirdle with @StreetReds_MU		<i>Yeovil Town FC</i> : Tomorrow we welcome pupils from Martock, Wyke and Trent Primary Schools as well as participants of our Development Centres. #255 #ytfc			
	<i>Manchester City FC</i> : Hit 'Like' if you think Manchester City FC are going to win tonight against FC Barcelona #ComeOnCity		<i>Huddersfield Town FC</i> : Can you help with @uniformexchang #wishlist: immediate storage, size of a triple garage, dry & ground floor with limited access for requests			
	<i>Sunderland AFC</i> : Thanks to Seaburn Dean, Easington Lane, Mill Hill and Bernard Gilpin Primary Schools – all registered for Red and White City #daretodream		<i>Watford FC</i> : @NCSFLT @mega_mog @glennocconnell1 welcome aboard! If you fancy being a part of something phenomenal register @ <a href="http://www.ncsflt.co.uk">http://www.ncsflt.co.uk</a>			
	<i>Stoke City FC</i> : @jamesbertram4 @Stoke_2_Glasgow @KnotFM @cosnakickbo @StokeCity_CT @CoopersBar Well done to all involved. #EveryLittleHelps		<i>Bolton Wanderers FC</i> : Thank you to @OfficialBWCT and @OfficialBWFC for yesterdays community fixture in partnership with @boltonathome .... pic.twitter.com/8kiSJK7Lh3			

EURAM 2015: Managing Sport

<b>Action</b>	<i>Tottenham Hotspur FC:</i> Fancy playing for #Spurs at WHL to raise valuable funds for the @SpursFoundation? Book your @FootballAid place here <a href="http://bit.ly/Mym0PC">http://bit.ly/Mym0PC</a>	<b>30</b>	<i>Middlesbrough FC:</i> ow.ly/tOwTk Please bring an extra 50p to the match on Saturday and help Boro's official charity #MFCFoundation	<b>15</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>4.5 %</b>
	<i>Sunderland AFC:</i> Book now for @SAFCFoL Girls Only Courses... 14 <sup>th</sup> and 15 <sup>th</sup> April at @goalssunderland 1091 551 5191! #GirlsFootball		<i>Millwall FC:</i> Sign up to be a Millwall Business Member & you will be entitled to exclusive benefits! email for more info <a href="mailto:hospitalitysales@millwallplc.com">hospitalitysales@millwallplc.com</a>			
	<i>West Bromwich Albion FC:</i> Booking now open for our charity race night on Friday 4 <sup>th</sup> April at The Hawthorns. Book now at <a href="http://tinyurl.com/nw5jrek">http://tinyurl.com/nw5jrek</a> <a href="http://pic.twitter.com/OPM0bkyuC">pic.twitter.com/OPM0bkyuC</a>		<i>QPR FC:</i> COULD YOU BE THE NEXT ROB GREEN? Sign up to @QPRtrust's new goalkeeping sessions! <a href="http://bit.ly/1f1bffV">http://bit.ly/1f1bffV</a> #QPR <a href="http://pic.twitter.com/cwQIoGn1XX">pic.twitter.com/cwQIoGn1XX</a>			
	<i>West Bromwich Albion FC:</i> Want to raise funds for your club as you shop online? Sign up to Club Cashback <a href="http://www.clubwebsite.co.uk/news/2013/11/28/grassroots-clubs-celebrate-club-cashback-scheme/...">http://www.clubwebsite.co.uk/news/2013/11/28/grassroots-clubs-celebrate-club-cashback-scheme/...</a> our partnership with @clubwebsite		<i>AFC Bournemouth:</i> The Bournemouth Mile, 23rd March, part of Sport Relief 2014. Have you signed up yet? <a href="http://www.afcbst.co.uk/sport-relief-2014/">http://www.afcbst.co.uk/sport-relief-2014/</a> ... #afcb			
	<i>Norwich City FC:</i> Hurry hurry! Save £9 on weekly kids' coaching by booking online before Monday: <a href="http://ow.ly/umo4v">http://ow.ly/umo4v</a>		<i>QPR FC:</i> Please can you sponsor me. Virgin moneygiving. Tiger feet 5 <a href="http://pic.twitter.com/pHsS3V3VNI">pic.twitter.com/pHsS3V3VNI</a>			
	<i>Norwich City FC:</i> Welcome @OldCattonJFC, you're in the Canary Cup for U13-U16 boys! 11-a-side fun this May. Enter your team, now! <a href="http://norw.ch/CanaryCup">http://norw.ch/CanaryCup</a>		<i>Sheffield Wednesday FC:</i> Some more application forms have been handed in from yewlands for NCS... There are not many places left now! Get your form in fast! #ncs			
	<i>Cardiff City FC:</i> LAST CHANCE!!! Book here for CARDIFF HALF TERM SOCCER SCHOOLS for the Thursday and Friday – SPACES LIMITED! >>> <a href="http://cardiffcityfoundation.co.uk/index.php?route=product/category...">http://cardiffcityfoundation.co.uk/index.php?route=product/category...</a>		<i>Huddersfield Town FC:</i> Become a kick off #supporter and give just £100 a month. This gives a nutritious #breakfast to approx. 200 children <a href="http://bit.ly/1mzr6t7">http://bit.ly/1mzr6t7</a>			
	<i>Cardiff City FC:</i> St Davids Day run complete. It's still not too late to donate: <a href="http://www.justgiving.com/cardiffcityfc">@CardiffCityFITC</a> <a href="http://pic.twitter.com/GPtoynICgt">pic.twitter.com/GPtoynICgt</a>		<i>QPR FC:</i> I've just donated a few quid for @QPRtrust's Tiger Feet 5 walk ahead of #CHAvQPR. Donate anything you can ... <a href="http://bit.ly/1hiMVcp">http://bit.ly/1hiMVcp</a>			
	<i>Crystal Palace FC:</i> You can now book onto our @CPFC_Foundation @Official_CPFC Football Camp! 14-17 April 10-3pm £42 4 days or £12 per day! Call 020 8461 9200!		<i>Millwall FC:</i> Did you take part in the blogathon for #TimetoTalk Day by writing a blog? Tell us how it went in this short survey: <a href="http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/talkdaysurvey">http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/talkdaysurvey</a>			
	<i>Tottenham Hotspur FC:</i> Calling all volunteers! We'll be at @SpursOfficial Sun 16 <sup>th</sup> March & Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> April – Need your help giving out campaign info! Pls get in touch		<i>Blackburn Rovers FC:</i> Easter Activity Camp for boys and girls aged 5-11! To book a place call Jen Calvert on 01254 296256 @OneRovers <a href="http://pic.twitter.com/B1cST7GobV">pic.twitter.com/B1cST7GobV</a>			

## **Findings and Discussion**

The study produced three main findings. Firstly, our organisational level analysis establishes which community trusts from the Premier League and Championship have a current presence on Twitter, and how this proportion has evolved during the course of the sampled timeframe. This is followed by a message-level examination of the content of tweets issued by the trusts, in terms of both the type of Twitter communication tools employed and the categorisation of tweets based on Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) framework. Finally, we propose a typology of Community Trusts' Twitter strategy.

### ***Organisational Level***

As discussed, there has been little research into the theme of organisational-level social media utilisation within sport. The likes of Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) and Coche (2014) have indicated the need for both data and analytical frameworks that can further advance the knowledge of how organisations can best channel the vast capability of microblogging to engage stakeholders.

At an organisational level, the present analysis focuses on the percentage by which the number of Twitter followers each trust has increased over the duration of the three-month sample timeframe period. Table 2 indicates the total increase in Twitter followers of the trusts during this time.

**Table 2:** Total increase in Twitter followers over a 3 month period (03/12/13 to 02/03/14) (n=14 Premier League trusts and 18 Championship trusts with a Twitter presence)

Premier League Club Community Trusts followers				Championship Club Community Trusts followers			
Club	T1 (3/12/2013)	T2 (2/3/14)	% Increase	Club	T1 (3/12/2013)	T2 (2/3/14)	% Increase
Arsenal	11,573	12,586	+8.05%	AFC Bournemouth	1,503	1,580	+4.87%
Cardiff City	2,392	2,708	+11.67%	Barnsley	26	49	+46.94%
Crystal Palace	1,570	1,775	+11.55%	Birmingham City	1,230	1,306	+5.82%
Hull City	386	506	+23.72%	Blackburn Rovers	862	1,110	+22.34%
Liverpool	19,004	19,905	+4.53%	Blackpool	562	641	+12.32%
Manchester City	6,148	6,834	+10.04%	Bolton Wanderers	65	150	+56.67%
Manchester United	30,757	41,184	+25.32%	Brighton & Hove Albion	1,831	1,910	+4.14%
Newcastle United	3,367	3,757	+10.38%	Charlton Athletic	1,072	1,200	+10.67%
Norwich City	3,337	3,472	+3.89%	Derby County	915	1,084	+15.59%
Southampton	4,279	4,719	+9.32%	Doncaster Rovers	1,588	1,760	+9.77%
Stoke City	1,981	2,308	+14.17%	Huddersfield Town	2,513	2,670	+5.88%
Sunderland	2,438	3,013	+19.08%	Middlesbrough	1,296	1,462	+11.35%
Tottenham Hotspur	153	1,419	+89.22%	Millwall	1,767	2,024	+12.70%
West Bromwich Albion	1,765	2,162	+18.36%	Nottingham Forest	2,123	2,512	+15.49%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>89,150</b>	<b>106,348</b>	<b>+19.29%</b>	Queens Park Rangers	2,625	2,861	+8.25%
				Sheffield Wednesday	274	336	+18.45%
				Watford	1,083	1,146	+5.50%
				Yeovil Town	560	594	+5.72%
				<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,895</b>	<b>24,395</b>	<b>+11.4%</b>

The total increase in followers for all community sports trusts from Premier League clubs over the three-month period was 17,198 (19.29 per cent), which is approximately six times greater than the total increase of 2500 followers that all Championship clubs managed (11.4 per cent). The number of followers per club is generally higher for community sports trusts from clubs within the Premier League. This does not necessarily mean that these trusts are more active in engaging with their online community, and could be simply due to the fact that



their associated football clubs have a larger fan base and have utilised a Twitter account for a longer period than those from the Championship. However, there are some interesting observations to be made. For instance, the community trust of Liverpool FC, one of the largest and most well-supported clubs in the country, saw growth of only 4.53 per cent (901 followers), whereas the trusts of Derby County and Nottingham Forest, clubs that are firmly established in the second-tier of English football, grew by almost four times as much (approximately 16 per cent), albeit from a much smaller base. Most of the major clubs appear to have adopted an integrated social media strategy whereby the communication related both to the club and the trust can be sourced back to the official club website. For example, Liverpool FC's trust has a standalone website (<http://foundation.liverpoolfc.com>), which can also be accessed via a link on the homepage of the club's official site (<http://www.liverpoolfc.com/>). However, the trust also has a Twitter presence (@LFCFoundation) that is separate from that of the Club (@LFC), which could be said to contradict an integrated social media strategy.

It may also be possible to take learnings from the likes of Derby County and Nottingham Forest. A growing number of factors are contributing to the choice of NPOs to adopt closer stakeholder relationships and contemporary marketing practices (Knox & Gruar, 2007). These include controlling their own financial destiny (Dee, 1998), realising the value of cause-related alliances with businesses (Porter & Kramer, 2002; Knox et al., 2005), and the vision and willingness to pay for professional leadership that understands the value of stakeholder marketing strategies (Drucker, 1989).

Table 2 also highlights that some charitable trusts are still in their infancy in terms of owning a Twitter presence. For example, the trusts of Hull City FC, Barnsley FC, Blackpool FC, Bolton Wanderers FC, Sheffield Wednesday FC and Yeovil Town FC all still have fewer than 1000 followers, which is very low compared to the other community trusts. It is

particularly important that these trusts to give consideration to the penetration of Twitter. RM is widely acknowledged as an important management tool (Vincent & Webster, 2013) and interaction through personal contacts and relationships can result in overall gains in organisational performance (Amonini et al., 2010).

It is also important to re-iterate that whilst all community trusts associated with a Premier League football club have a social media presence (located on alternative platforms such as Facebook), these figures are calculated from the trusts of 18 Championship football clubs and 14 Premier League clubs that had a Twitter presence at the time of data collection.

***Message Level***

Having established which community trusts have a presence upon Twitter, it is important to understand how these organisations use such a presence. Our message-level analysis of communication on Twitter is twofold. We started by examining the content of the sample tweets sent from the community trusts of Premier League and Championship football clubs over a one-month period, via the type of Twitter microblogging communication tool utilised. We then categorised and discussed these tweets based on their organisational function, as put forward by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012).

***4.2.1 Types of Twitter communication tools***

**Table 3:** Community trusts’ use of Twitter communication tools (n = 1000 tweets)

Communication Tool	Count of occasions used within a tweet – PL Community Trusts	Count of occasions used within a tweet – Championship Community Trusts	Total	%
Direct Message/User Mention	381	212	593	59.3
Retweet	220	185	405	40.5
Hyperlink	157	146	303	30.3
Hashtag	241	171	412	41.2

Table 3 provides an insight into how Twitter’s four main communicative tools are employed by community trusts and, importantly, how often these tools are utilised.

Direct messages or user mentions are very similar and are signalled by the use of the '@' symbol directed at other users. Both involve the inclusion of a follower's or group of followers' Twitter usernames in the '@[username]' format. An example of a direct message can be seen in this tweet;

*'@TheGovernor99 we will post all of the Easter football courses onto our website on Monday.'* (Crystal Palace FC foundation)

A user mention involves a process of 'tagging' users within a message, which allows for the sender of a tweet to both interact with and acknowledge other users at the same time. This can be seen in the below tweet from the community trust of Newcastle United FC:

*'Fantastic United for Employment lunch with @gallifordtryplc @WatesGroup @gentoogroup @Barclays @GreggstheBakers @KeepmoatHomes @entforum.'* (Newcastle United FC foundation)

A majority of tweets (59.3 per cent) posted by community trusts included a direct message or mention, which is by the far the most prevalent type of communication tool utilised. This form of direct contact offers the potential for two-way interaction via an exchange of messages between the community trust and a follower, or group of followers, which means it is apparent that the majority of converse for community trusts takes place in this way.

A retweet is the process of sharing another user's original tweet and acknowledging its origin, which is made apparent by the display of the text generated by Twitter – 'Retweeted by [username]' – and can also be re-enforced by the re-tweeter using the language 'RT@[username]' in the retweet itself. An example can be seen here:

*'RT@ Southampton FC# SaintsFC fans, can you help support the @Foundation\_SFC...Every £ counts. 158miles to #Avfc! [https://justgiving.com/LewisBigBikeChallenge/...](https://justgiving.com/LewisBigBikeChallenge/)'*  
(Southampton FC foundation)

Retweets were included in 40.5 per cent of the sampled tweets. Guo and Saxton (2014) suggest that such a result is due to the fact that retweets can serve a variety of functions; most importantly, they are a means of dissembling information generated elsewhere that an organisation believes is important or relevant to its user community. The process of the community trust sharing and circulating relevant information that is perceived to be of significant value, from the original source to other users, creates an opportunity for new connections to be formed, as each retweet is exposed to followers of the trust who may not necessarily be followers of the original tweet. Hence, the wider network of the community trust will grow, which makes it more likely that the benefits of engaging in wider stakeholder marketing practices will be felt (Day & Montgomery, 1999; Webster, 1978). In addition, the act of re-tweeting content generated by another user is a form of endorsement and is likely to add further credibility, which has the potential to further strengthen the online brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

The sharing of URL hyperlinks allows for the 140-character limit on tweets to be maximised by providing a direct link to a specific web page. This is particularly useful for community trusts when sharing more detailed information, photos and videos with their online user community. The sharing of hyperlinks took place in 30.3 per cent of tweets produced by the community trusts. For instance, this link tweeted by the Norwich City Community Sports Foundation allowed a video containing additional content to be shared with followers:

*'Hey @Bradley4Johnson, did you see your MOTD Kickabout appearance at our Soccer School? [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5jEvRLkD3w&feature=youtu.be.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5jEvRLkD3w&feature=youtu.be)'* (Norwich City FC foundation)

The use of the hashtag (#) symbol enables users to generate their own discussion topics amongst the virtual community, in the format '#[topic term]' and lends itself to being

searchable, which can cause popular topics to ‘trend’ (Twitter, 2014). In the present study, 41.2 per cent of tweets from community trusts incorporated a hashtag; an example is as follows:

*‘I am genuinely convinced I met the next Adam Lallana today! #tekkers.’* (West Bromwich Albion FC foundation)

The prolific usage of hashtags serves to promote active participation from followers, by allowing for new trends to be user-generated, and creating the opportunity for a popular topic to grow rapidly in prominence, which can add to that topic’s potential to be virally marketed. Moreover, some clubs were consistent in including a regular hashtag into their tweets. An example is AFC Bournemouth, which often concluded its tweets with the hashtag ‘#afcb’, which re-enforces the identity of the community trust’s parent club and forges synergies with the community trust. Of course, the fluid nature of Twitter allows for a combination of tools to be employed in a single tweet. As a result, we see considerable overlap between the types of tools utilised.

### ***Functions of organisational microblogging***

Having seen which types of communication tool have been most heavily utilised by football community trusts, we now shift our focus to the functions of the messages communicated by these organisations. To determine the category into which each tweet is placed, the content must match one of the criteria of three major groupings featured in Table 1: *Information*, *Community* and *Action* (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). We now analyse these functions before proposing a typology of charitable organisations.

***Information.*** The information function includes tweets featuring relevant information about the club’s activity, such as news reports and highlights from events, which has been shared

with stakeholders. Importantly, this category of tweet is exclusively a one-way form of interaction, from the organisation to its followers. As shown in Table 1, 396 tweets from our sample can be classed as information-based tweets, representing over one-third of the community trusts' monthly Twitter activity.

The example provided below evidently includes information related to an event; for example:

*'This is a reminder that the Shooters session tomorrow night 6-7pm at the Steve Bloomer Racecourse pitch is CANCELLED.'* (Derby County FC foundation)

This type of tweet is a basic, closed statement that is merely intended to inform and not to create interaction. Other information tweets can impart more detail, and also integrate the parent club into the message, such as the following example:

*'Great year of achievements for @DRFC\_Foundation as it sees 73,000 participant visits over 12-months [http://www.ontrackpr.co.uk/news/2014/2/rovers-community-foundation-celebrates-success...@drfc\\_official](http://www.ontrackpr.co.uk/news/2014/2/rovers-community-foundation-celebrates-success...@drfc_official).'* (Doncaster Rovers FC foundation)

Although this tweet still falls into the 'information' category, it has also included a user mention of the football club itself, which forges a stronger link between club and community trust, and is likely to broadcast to a wider range of stakeholders as a result.

Although the information function is relatively generic, tweets within this category still serve an important purpose as a base upon which more complex functions such as dialogue and mobilisation (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) can be built.

**Community.** Community-based tweets are designed to build relationships with followers in order to facilitate the development of an online community. There are essentially two elements to this relationship development: creating dialogue and community building (Lovejoy & Saxton 2012). Tweets that encourage dialogue fulfil the purpose of relationship

building, whilst those tweets whose main purpose is to promote a sense of community strengthen links to an online community.

The following is an example of a tweet that is engendered to create a dialogue between community trust and follower:

*'Would your school like to play for Spurs at the Etihad stadium? #THFC pic.twitter.com/shmLLUejBU.'* (Tottenham Hotspur FC Foundation)

By asking a question in this style, the trust is attempting to elicit a positive response from followers, which will supposedly generate a 'buzz' from the expected responses.

Interestingly, as with the information function, the club itself can play a prominent role within community function tweets. As the example below from the Bolton Wanderers community trust shows, the club (@OfficialBWCT) is featured. The charitable trust has linked its Twitter activity with that of the club itself:

*'Thank you to @OfficialBWCT and @OfficialBWFC for yesterdays community fixture in partnership with @boltonathome .... pic.twitter.com/8kiSJK7Lh3.'* (Bolton Wanderers FC Community Trust)

This implies that some trusts seem to be implementing an integrated approach, but others have not done so at all.

**Action.** The role of the action function is to induce followers to 'do' something that will benefit the organisation; as such, these could be considered the most palpable of the functions, and perhaps the most crucial. Ultimately, by successfully mobilising stakeholders into taking the appropriate action, organisations are able to fulfil their own success criteria and achieve their objectives. The example tweet below not only provides information, but includes an explicit instruction to 'book here':

*'LAST CHANCE!!! Book here for CardiffFC @HouseofSportCDF for our 2<sup>nd</sup> event of the season click on link for report <http://bit.ly/1begJsa> @CardiffCityFITC.'* (Cardiff City FC foundation).

The next example takes the 'call to action' a step further, with the emphasis placed on signing up to be a business member of the football club, with the club itself assimilated into the tweet:

*'Sign up to be a Millwall Business Member & you will be entitled to exclusive benefits! email for more info [hospitalitysales@millwallplc.com](mailto:hospitalitysales@millwallplc.com).'* (Millwall FC foundation)

Recruiting resources is another important action, and Tottenham Hotspur's community trust draws on a link to its parent club to seek help distributing information as part of its campaign:

*'Calling all volunteers! We'll be at @SpursOfficial Sun 16th March & Sat 19th April – Need your help giving out campaign info! Pls get in touch.'* (Tottenham Hotspur FC foundation)

However, despite some strong action-function activity taking place, only 45 (4.5 percent) of the sample tweets from our football community trusts can be classed within this category. This is interesting, and when added to the findings of Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), who found that just 15.6 percent of tweets sent by selected US NPOs were of the action function variety, suggests that NPOs within the football industry have been slower to adopt a more action-based approach than NPOs within other industries. There is still much work to be done for community trusts within English football.

### ***Relationship marketing through Twitter in English football: A proposed dual typology***

Based on how Twitter is used by the examined community trusts in English football at both the organisational-level and message-level of analysis, the present study puts forward three (plus one) distinct roles (or types) for these trusts in their interactions with a wide (or otherwise) range of stakeholder groups: the *unlinked*, the *informants*, the *connectors*, and the *co-creators* (see Figure 1). Although we build on Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) work, the



categorisation presented in the current study essentially has a dual perspective. First, it aims to provisionally illustrate that the community trusts – in fact, those ones that do have an account – can use Twitter for merely informing a wide range of stakeholders, engaging with certain stakeholder groups, or even mobilising a diverse pool of stakeholders.

Second, what becomes apparent (with varying degrees of explicitness and frequency) while analysing the underlying messages of the tweets sent by the community trusts is the connection these organisations have with their ‘parent’ football clubs. Indeed, as recent literature on CSR in sport has shown, community trusts have now become the delivery mechanisms for the team sport organisations’ CSR agendas (Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013; Sparvero & Kent, 2014; Walters & Panton, 2014). Such institutionalised relationships are peculiar since, apart from some additional key stakeholders (such as the leagues, sponsors and public agencies) that control and/or facilitate funding allocation, the community trusts largely depend on their parent football clubs for communication-related matters, such as resource allocation, expertise or even content to share with fans and programme participants (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014). This all has a bearing on the overall operational activities of the community trusts in question; not least, of course, those activities that are communicated through Twitter. Therefore, these types also reflect the degree of Twitter integration between the community trusts and the parent football clubs and address differences in communication cultures, institutionalisation of collaboration and organisational boundaries (Kolyperas & Anagnostopoulos, 2014). Below, we briefly explain what each type of community trust entails and is characterised by.

- **Unlinked.** This type of community trust may either have no social media presence at all or may use forms of social media other than Twitter (such as Facebook). With regard to Twitter in particular, therefore, these organisations neither communicate with their stakeholders nor have a communication relationship with the football club.

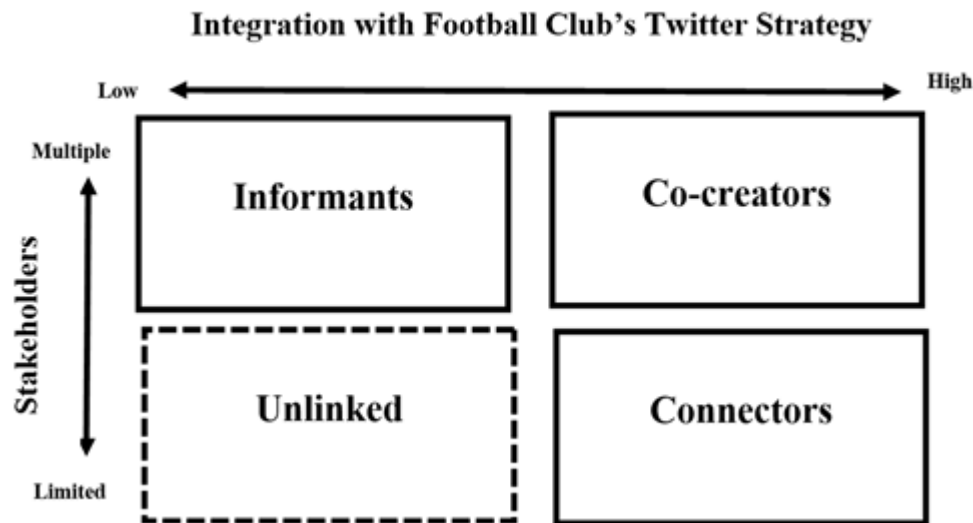
However, *unlinked* types can either quickly or progressively take any of the other three forms should the trust's management decide to invest resources into this particular social medium.

- **Informants.** This type of community trust is regarded as the one that uses Twitter simply to communicate the activities, initiatives and/or existing programs that have occurred or are about to occur. The messages reach all 'followers' and, depending on the type (for example, community programme participants, current sponsors, public agencies, etc.) and the number of followers, information is potentially shared amongst multiple stakeholders. Despite the potential to reach a wide range of stakeholder groups, the *informants'* integration with the 'parent' football club's social media strategy, and for that matter Twitter utilisation, is relatively low. In this case, the outcomes of such communication activity often do not reflect the relationship that these two organisations may have, nor are they officially mapped into either the communications strategy of the community trust or of the football club.
- **Connectors.** This type of community trust is the one that uses Twitter in order to establish relationships with various stakeholders with a view to promoting its activities, attracting additional support (such as funding from existing sponsors, public agencies, and/or other non-profit organisations), and offering the opportunity to 'hear' what these stakeholders have to say about the trust's operational portfolio. Although the *connectors* get closer to the fundamentals of relationship marketing, this type of community trusts achieve this purpose within a limited number of stakeholders. This is largely reflected by the fact that only certain followers engage in this kind of dialogic interaction. However, *connectors* demonstrate a much better integration with the football club's Twitter strategy, which is typically accompanied by a more streamlined approach through which the community trust not only shares content

about the club's activities with its followers, but also incorporates club's news into its already established online community that concerns CSR-related matters.

- **Co-creators.** This type of community trust employs a Twitter communication strategy that has the power to mobilise followers into becoming involved in its activities, in the form of further promoting the initiatives, participating in events, or even volunteering to support the trust's programmes. Here, tweets are communicated in such a way that can reach multiple stakeholders and thereby tap the full potential of the medium. Moreover, these trusts have a single 'voice' through an integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategy with the football club that incorporates Twitter. Therefore, *co-creators* have the potential to reach multiple stakeholder groups and, by doing so, have a greater opportunity to optimise business and social benefits. However, this type of community trust assumes the existence of inter-organisational human resources that work together and, through specific measurements, evaluate the effectiveness of the Twitter for the community trust and the football club alike.

However, it should be noted that the typology proposed herein does not intend to see these roles that community trusts may have through their Twitter-based communication as stable and fixed undertakings. Instead, subject to strategic communication and marketing shift (not least to different leadership) these organisations may find themselves moving across the four proposed types. Moreover, we believe that these different types should not be viewed as either a continuum or a hierarchy; rather, as Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) pointed out, 'the more appropriate [social media communication] strategy may instead be the one that reflects the mission of the organization' (p. 349).

**Figure 1:** RM through Twitter in football community trusts: A proposed dual typology

## Concluding notes

The main purpose of this article has been to add to our knowledge by ascertaining how community trusts in the English football industry are using the micro-blogging application of Twitter to inform, build relationships with and, ideally, engage with various stakeholder groups. This is the first known study to analyse the content of football community trusts' Twitter updates and classify the organisational uses of tweets. We therefore advance the literature in a critical area of social media – relationship marketing – as well as organisational communication and provide stimulus for further study. Based on our findings, we can propose a number of implications for theory and practice. We address each of these in the sections below, before discussing the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

### *Implications for theory and practice*

The work reported here contributes to the literature on relationship marketing in general, and on social media in particular, by extending the understanding of how 'key delivery agents' for the CSR of team sport organisations utilise Twitter. More specifically, although the existing theoretical and empirical studies on social media offer highly valuable accounts

either from an outside-in perspective (that is, understanding fans' interactions with social media (see, for example, Clavio & Kian, 2010; Gibbs et al., 2014; Stavros et al., 2014) or the methods used by (e.g., Ioakimidis, 2010; Waters et al., 2011) team sport organisations of utilising social media), with the exemption of Witkemper et al.' (2014) work, this literature falls short of categorising the actual content of the communication in question. Furthermore, the proposed dual framework that classifies these idiosyncratic non-profit organisations adds to the growing literature that examines the CSR practice in the context of team sport organisations (Paramio-Salcines, Babiak, & Walters, 2013). Indeed, by broadly drawing on the notion of CSR in this particular organisational field, the sport management scholarly community is now equipped with a possible platform to step in and advance stakeholder relationship marketing through the management of Twitter.

Moreover, the findings of the present study also have useful implications for sport practitioners. First of all, given that these community trusts are becoming increasingly popular among Twitter users, any type from the proposed framework (apart from the *unlinked*, obviously) should now start considering the allocation of additional resources that will further facilitate the communication process and reap greater social and/or business benefits from it. This point, which Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) underlined in their study on national sport organisations in Canada, emphasises the need for a careful and well thought-out social media strategy that is based on clearly identified objectives before entering these online communities. In addition, the second perspective of the proposed framework – that is, the one that concerns the integration of Twitter with the parent football club's social media communication strategy – brings to the fore the need for a closer collaboration between the two organisations; this undertaking may be challenging given the often dysfunctional relationship between the two (Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013).

***Limitations and future research directions***

The present study has certain limitations. For starters, one should be mindful of any attempts for generalisation since the contextual characteristics of English football (for example, the highly institutionalised forms of CSR delivery through these community trusts) may not be applicable to other national contexts. Therefore, this type of context-specific undertaking must be regarded and treated accordingly. Furthermore, data collection was undertaken over a certain period of time (over one month in early 2014), which means that it only provides a snapshot of that specific period. Thus, this methodological detail should leave the reader to interpret the study's findings vis-à-vis the rapidly accelerating pace of Web 2.0 in general, and social media developments in particular. Last but not least, although the present study followed the functional areas proposed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), their framework was used just as that: a framework. Similarly to what Auger (2014) encountered by utilising the abovementioned framework, we also find difficulties in neatly locating tweets into just one category, since the purpose of the tweets was often ambiguously mixed amongst the three functional areas in our study too, thereby rendering the categories not sufficiently discrete.

Despite the inevitable limitations of this paper, there are opportunities to take the findings of this study further. First, given that the proposed typology is the result of a tweet-level analysis, future research could identify those community trusts in English football that fall into each type by analysing not only the tweets but also the sources from which these messages are communicated. Another direction for future research would be a longitudinal and more in-depth study that examines how these community trusts use the Twitter during specific periods in time (for example, during the Christmas holiday period, when much fundraising occurs, or during the transfer period, when fans are particularly interested in the club's potential new signings and the like). Such an approach would make it possible to capture more contextual details about the three functional areas (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012),

thereby moving beyond a mere description and explaining the ‘whys’ behind specific Twitter content.

All in all, this empirical exploratory paper should be regarded as a further step towards the process of understanding the utilisation of Twitter by community trusts, although it is of course limited by both its purposive sampling and constrained scope. However, we envisage that the context-specific insights offered here will not only reinforce recent studies in the general non-profit management literature that look at stakeholder relationship marketing through social media, and Twitter in particular (e.g., Auger, 2014; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Saxton & Guo, 2014; Waters & Jamal, 2011), but also provide a much-needed access point into the matter for the sport-scholarly community as a whole.

## References

- Abeza, G. & O'Reilly, N. (2014). Social Media Platforms' Use in Building Stakeholder Relationships, *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 6(3), pp.103-126.
- Anheier, K. & Daly, S. (2007). Philanthropic foundations in modern society. In K. Anheier & S. Daly (Eds.), *The politics of foundations. A comparative study* (pp. 3–26). London: Routledge.
- Anagnostopoulos, C., Byers, T., & Shilbury, D. (2014). Corporate social responsibility in professional team sport organisations: towards a theory of decision-making. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 14(3), pp. 259-281.
- Anagnostopoulos, C. & Shilbury, D. (2013). Implementing corporate social responsibility in English football – towards multi-theoretical integration. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 3(4), pp.268-284.
- Amonini, C., McColl-Kennedy, J.R., Soutar, G.N. and Sweeney, J.C. (2010). How professional service firms compete in the market: an exploratory study, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(1), pp. 28-55.
- Andreasen, A.R. (1994). Social Marketing: definition and domain. *Journal of Marketing and Public Policy*, 13(1), pp.108-114.
- Andrés-Alonso, P., Azofra-Palenzuela, A. & Romero-Merino, E. (2010). Beyond the disciplinary role of governance: How boards add value to Spanish foundations. *British Journal of Management*, 21(1), pp.100-114.
- Auger, G. A. (2014). Rhetorical framing: examining the message structure of nonprofit organizations on Twitter. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 19, pp. 239-249.
- Babiak, K., & Wolfe, R. (2009). Determinants of corporate social responsibility in professional sport: Internal and external factors. *Journal of Sport Management*, 23(6), 717-742.
- BBC (2013) 'James McClean closes Twitter account after Wolfe Tones song row' [online] Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-21600688> > last accessed 14<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

- Bell, S.J., Auh, S. and Smalley, K. (2005). Customer relationship dynamics: service quality and customer loyalty in the context of varying levels of customer expertise and switching costs, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 33(2), pp. 169-183.
- Bingham, T., & Walters, G. (2013). Financial sustainability within UK charities: Community sport trusts and corporate social responsibility partnerships. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 24(3), 606-629.
- Brenner, J. (2013). Pew internet: Social networking [online]. Available at <http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/March/Pew-Internet-Social-Networking-full-detail.aspx> > last accessed 14 August 2014.
- Browning, B. & Sanderson, J. (2012). The Positives and Negatives of Twitter: Exploring How Student –Athletes Use Twitter and Respond to Critical Tweets. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 5, pp.503-521.
- Campbell, D. & Slack, R. (2008). Corporate ‘philanthropy strategy’ and ‘strategic philanthropy’: Some insights from voluntary disclosures in annual reports. *Business and Society*, 47, 187–212.
- Chadwick, S. (2012) (Social) media comment: sport’s next great frontier? *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 2(2), 90-91.
- Clavio, G. & Kian, T.M. (2010). Uses and gratifications of a retired female athlete’s Twitter followers. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3(4), pp.485-500.
- Coche, R. (2014) Promoting women’s soccer through social media: how the US federation used Twitter for the 2011 World Cup. *Soccer & Society*.
- Conway, T. & Whitelock, J. (2007). Relationship marketing in the subsidised arts: the key to a strategic marketing focus? *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(1/2), pp.199-222.
- Day, G. S. & Montgomery, D.B. (1999). Charting New Directions for Marketing, *Journal of Marketing* 63 (Special Issue), pp.3–13.
- Dee, J. G. (1998). Enterprising Nonprofits, *Harvard Business Review* 76(1), pp.54–66.
- Drucker, P.F. (1989). What Business can Learn from Nonprofits, *Harvard Business Review* 67(4), pp.88–93.
- Gibbs, C., O’Reilly, N., & Brunette, M. (2014). Professional team sport and Twitter: Gratifications sought and obtained by followers. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 7, pp. 188–213.
- Griffiths, J. (2008). Web 2.0 is not about technology: It’s about human relationships. *Market Leader*, Spring, 41–45.
- Gronroos, C. (1994). Quo vadis, marketing? Toward a relationship marketing paradigm, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 10(5), pp. 347-360.
- Groza, M.D., Cobbs, J. & Schaefer, T. (2012). Managing a sponsored brand: The importance of sponsorship portfolio congruence. *International Journal of Advertising*, 31(1), pp.63-84.
- Guo C, Saxton GD. 2014. Tweeting social change: How social media are changing nonprofit advocacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(1), pp. 57–79.
- Hambrick, M.E., Simmons, J.M., Greenhalgh, G.P. & Greenwell, T.C. (2010). Understanding professional athletes’ use of Twitter: A content analysis of athlete tweets. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 4, pp.454-471.
- Haverstein, H. (2008). Companies are looking for new ways to measure Web 2.0. *Computerworld*, 42(45), pp. 14–15.
- Herlin, H. & Pedersen, J. (2013). Corporate foundations: Catalysts for NGO – Business partnerships? *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 50, pp.58–90.
- Hovemann, G., Breitbarth, T. & Walzel, S. (2011), Beyond sponsorship? Corporate social responsibility in English, German and Swiss top national league football clubs. *Journal of Sponsorship*, 4(4), pp. 338-352.



- Hutchins, B. (2011). The acceleration of sport media culture. *Information Communication and Society*, 14, pp.237-257.
- Ioakimidis, M. (2010). Online marketing of professional sport clubs: Engaging fans on a new playing field. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship*, 12, 271–282.
- Kassing, J.W. & Sanderson, J. (2010). Tweeting through the Giro: A case study of fan-athlete interaction on Twitter. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3, pp.113-128.
- Knox, S., Maklan, S. and French, P. (2005). Corporate Social Responsibility: Exploring Stakeholder Relationships and Programme Reporting across Leading FTSE Companies, *Journal of Business Ethics* 61, pp.7–28.
- Knox, S. & Gruar, C. (2007). The Application of Stakeholder Theory to Relationship Marketing Strategy Development in a Non-profit Organization. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 75, pp.115-135).
- Kolyperas, D., & Anagnostopoulos, C. (2014). Revisiting the relationship between charitable foundations and founding companies: A CSR analogy approach and a proposed typology. Paper presented at *European Academy of Management Conference*, Valencia (Spain) 4-7 June.
- Kotler, P. (1991). Presentation at the Trustees Meeting of the Marketing Science Institute, November 1990, Boston, MA.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72.
- Lindgreen, A. & Swaen, V. (2010). Corporate social responsibility. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12(1), pp.1–7.
- Lovejoy, K. & Saxton, G.D. (2012). Information, Community and Action: How Nonprofit Organisations Use Social Media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17, pp.337-353.
- Mahan, J.E. (2011). Examining the predictors of consumer response to sport marketing via digital social media. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 9, pp. 254–267.
- McWilliams, A., Siegel, S. & Wright, M. (2006). Corporate social responsibility: Strategic implications. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(1), pp.1–18.
- Mellor, G. (2008). The ‘Janus-faced sport’: English football, community and the legacy of the ‘third way’. *Soccer & Society*, 9(3), pp. 313-324.
- Morgan, R.M. & Hunt, S.D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), pp.20-38.
- Muniz, A. M., & O’Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), pp. 412-432.
- Newman, T., Peck, J. & Harris, C. (2013). *Social Media in Sport Marketing*, Holcomb Hathaway, Scottsdale.
- O’Reilly, N., Berger, I., Hernandez, T., Parent, M., Sequin, B. (2012). Understanding adolescent sport participation through online social media. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 2(1), 69-81.
- O’Reilly, N. & Brunette, M. (2013). *Public-private partnerships in physical activity and sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Ostrower, F. (2006). Foundation approaches to effectiveness: A typology. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 35, 510–516.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paramio-Salcines, J.L., Babiak, K., & Walters, G. (2013). *Routledge handbook of sport and corporate social responsibility*. London: Routledge.
- Payne, A. & Holt, S. (2001). Diagnosing customer value: integrating the value process and relationship marketing. *British Journal of Management*, 12(2), pp.159 – 82.

- Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). *The future of competition: Co-creating unique value with customers*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Pegorano, A. (2010). Look who's talking – Athletes on Twitter: A case study. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3, pp.501-514.
- Porter, M. & Kramer, M. (2002). The Competitive Advantage of Corporate Philanthropy, *Harvard Business Review* 80(12), pp.57–68.
- Pronschinke, M., Groza, M.D. & Walker, M. (2012). Attracting Facebook 'fans': The Importance of Authenticity and Engagement as a Social Networking Strategy for Professional Sports Teams. *Sports Marketing Quarterly*, 21, pp.221-231.
- Raphael, M. & Raphael, N. (1995). *Up the Loyalty Ladder: Turning Sometime Customers into Full-time Advocates of your Business*; Harper Business, New York.
- Reinartz, W.J. & Kumar, V. (2000). On the Profitability of Long-Life Customers in a Noncontractual Setting: An Empirical Investigation and Implications for Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 64(4), pp.17 – 35.
- Sanderson, J. (2011). To Tweet or not to Tweet: exploring Division 1 athletic departments' social-media policies. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 4, pp. 492-515.
- Sanderson, J. & Hambrick, M.E. (2012). Covering the scandal in 140 characters: A case study of Twitter's role in coverage of the Penn state saga. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 5, pp.384-402.
- Saxton, G. D., & Guo, C. (2014). Online stakeholder targeting and the acquisition of social media capital. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 19, pp. 286-300.
- Shabbir, H., Palihawadana, D. & Thwaites, D. (2007). Determining the antecedents and consequences of donor-perceived relationship quality – a dimensional qualitative research approach. *Psychology and Marketing*, 24(3), pp. 271-93.
- Sparvero, E., & Kent, A. (2014). Sport team nonprofit organisations: Are sports doing well at "Doing Good"?. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 6(4), pp. 98-116.
- Stavros, C., Meng, M.D., Westberg, K. & Farrelly, F. (2014). Understanding fan motivation for interacting on social media. *Sport Management Review*, 17, pp.455-469.
- Stelzner, M. (2011). 2011 Social Media Marketing Industry Report [online]. Available at <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/social-media-marketing-industry-report-2011/> last accessed 14 August 2014.
- Sutton, W.A., McDonald, M.A., Milne, G.R., & Cimperman, J. (1997). Creating and fostering fan identification in professional sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 6, pp.15-22.
- Taylor, N. (2004). "Giving something back: can football clubs and their communities co-exist?" in Wagg, S. (Ed.), *British Football and Social Exclusion*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 47-66.
- Twitter, (2014). 'FAQs about Trends on Twitter' [online] Available at <https://support.twitter.com/articles/101125-faqs-about-trends-on-twitter> >last accessed 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), pp. 1-17.
- Vincent, N.A. & Webster, C.M. (2013). Exploring relationship marketing in membership associations. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(10), pp.1622-1640.
- Walker, M., Kent, A., & Vincent, J. (2010). Communicating socially responsible initiatives: An analysis of US professional teams. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 19(4), 187–195.
- Wallace, L., Wilson, J., & Miloch, K. (2011). Sporting Facebook: A content analysis of NCAA organizational sport pages and Big 12 Conference Athletic Department pages. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 4, pp.422-444.
- Walters, G. (2009). Corporate social responsibility through sport: the community sports trust model as a CSR delivery agency. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 35, pp. 81-94.

- Walters, G. & Chadwick, S. (2009). Corporate citizenship in football: delivering strategic benefits through stakeholder engagement. *Management Decision*, 47(1), pp.51-66.
- Walters, G. and Tacon, R. (2011). Corporate social responsibility in European football. *Birkbeck Sport Business Centre Research Paper*, 4(1), pp.1-101.
- Walters, G., & Hamil, S. (2013). The contests of power and influence over the regulatory space within the English professional football industry, 1980-2012. *Business History*, 55(5), pp. 740-767.
- Walters, G. Panton, M. (2014). Corporate social responsibility in professional football. *Soccer & Society*, 15(6), pp. 828-846.
- Waters, R.D., & Jamal, J.Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review*, 37(3), 321-324.
- Waters, R.D., Burke, K.A., Jackson, Z.H., & Buning, J.D. (2011). Using stewardship to cultivate fandom online: Comparing how National Football League teams use their websites and Facebook to engage their fans. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 4, 163–177.
- Webster, F. E. (1978). Management Science in Industrial Marketing, *Journal of Marketing*, 42, pp.21–27.
- Witkemper, C., Hoon Lim, C. & Waldburger, A. (2012). Social Media and Sports Marketing: Examining the Motivations and Constraints of Twitter Users. *Sports Marketing Quarterly*, 21, pp.170-183.
- Witkemper, C., Blaszkka, M., & Chung, J. (2014). Establishing a typology of social media uses in the sport industry: A multidimensional scaling study. *Communication & Sport*, pp. 1-21- Published online before print August 1, doi: 10.1177/2167479514544951

---

<sup>1</sup> In this study, the words 'foundation' and 'trust' are used interchangeably, although preference is given to the latter. The Charity Commission for England & Wales states on its website that 'all charitable foundations are trusts - that is, they are managed by trustees who may or may not be supported by paid staff. Foundations do not, therefore, have a distinct legal identity or constitution and are subject to the same public benefit tests, governance and accounting requirements, and Charity Commission regulation as all other charities. They derive their income from an endowment of land or invested capital. Not all foundations make grants; some use their income to finance charitable activity of their own. This means that the difference between the terms "foundation", "trust" and "charity" in the UK is semantic only; charities whose principal activity is grant-making are usually called "charitable trusts" or "charitable foundations", in preference to "charities"' (www.charity-commission.gov.uk).