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Examining United States Professional Women's Volleyball Entities Use of Twitter for Social Media Marketing and Brand Development

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Royal Docks School of Business and Law, University of East London for the degree of International Business Management

August 2018

14,691

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School of Business and Law
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Examining United States Professional Women's Volleyball Entities Use of Twitter for Social Media Marketing and Brand Development

London, August 2018

Abstract

The usage of social media as a sport marketing medium has been on the rise over the past decade. Numerous organisations, athletes, and coaches are putting a higher degree of emphasis on reaching their fans and consumers through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, rather than more traditional mediums. Previous research has stressed consumers transition from traditional marketing media to online and more readily accessible options. A majority of studies focus on the social media marketing of mainstream professional sport, as well as household name professional athletes, but few focus on a niche sport such as professional women's volleyball.

This research aims to observe how professional volleyball organisations in the United States are choosing to market through the social media platform Twitter. Furthermore, it aims to gather an understanding of brand development practices that could equate to consumer's brand awareness. Through answering this research question, marketing and brand development implications are revealed regarding professional women's sport.

The research question is answered through the use of a qualitative content analysis of selected volleyball organisations Twitter accounts. A categorical codebook was created based on the research question of this thesis and previous literature. Data collection took place August 8th, 10th, and 12th of 2018. The first data tweets collected started on the 6th of August 2018 and were originally planned to scale back 100 tweets for each Twitter account. Once the data collection was complete, a total of 235 textual tweets were extracted for analysis. The tweets were categorised based on the codebook criteria created for this specific study. Following the categorisation marketing and brand development trends emerged. As a result, the research question was answerable.

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1.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide a background and overview for the areas to be covered and evaluated by the research. The chapter includes the background to the study followed by the research rationale. Then, the dissertation research question and related aim and research objectives are presented. Next the relationship with existing literature is discussed based on relevant industry specific literature. Finally, the structure of the dissertation will be presented and explained.

1.1 Background

Over the years, marketing has become an ever-growing aspect of business strategy. The ability for a company to identify their target market, as well as properly attend to the desires of that target market, can have a huge impact on the success of the business (Lancaster and Massingham, 2011). As technology continues to evolve, so does the way companies choose to access, interact, and engage their consumers for marketing purposes. Social media has become a widely accepted form of marketing strategy for companies over the past ten years (Filo et al., 2015). More specifically, the sport industry has utilised it as a means to connect with consumers and fans more readily (Baena, 2018; Popp et al., 2017; Sauder and Blaszkas, 2016). This revolutionary tool can help build and foster fan relationships, thus strengthen brand equity and loyalty (Baena, 2018; Parganas et al., 2017). The ability of a sport player, franchise, or league to build brand loyalty to ensure a consistent following can be crucial in times when performance is not at its peak (Ruibley and Pate, 2016). There are a variety of social media platforms that sport entities are choosing to use, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter.

The social media platform Twitter originated in 2006 and since then has become one of the more popular platforms for professional athletes and sport organisations (Filo et al., 2015). Twitter allows people and companies to connect with each other through 'tweets' that can contain a variety of

information (Twitter Website, 2018). Furthermore, active Twitter users are able to interact with posts and people or organisations through ‘Likes’, ‘Retweets’, ‘Comments’, and ‘Direct Messages’ (Twitter Website, 2018). With this in mind, the ability to market through this platform is evident and has become a target for market research (Pegoraro, 2014).

1.2 Research Rationale

Across the globe, the sport of volleyball is experiencing an increase in participation, as well as popularity amongst sports fans. Recently being named the fifth most popular sport in the world, volleyball boasts over 900 million fans worldwide with various countries hosting a number of successful men’s and women’s professional indoor volleyball leagues (Bird, 2016). Currently, the most notable nations for women’s volleyball include China, Brazil, and the United States of America. In the past three Summer Olympics, the U.S. women’s national team has won one bronze medal, along with two silvers (IOC, 2017). Although the gold has eluded the U.S. women’s national team, they are constantly competitive amongst the top teams. This is evident in their first-place finishes at the Federacion Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) inaugural Volleyball Nations League (NVL), as well as the Pan Am, as of July 2018 (Volleyball Nations League Website, 2018; USAV Website, 2018). Given the tremendous and consistent success that the U.S. women’s national team has achieved, it may come as a shock that the United States does not have a professional volleyball league for its world class athletes. The addition of a professional volleyball league in the United States would allow players the opportunity to live and train in their home country rather than play abroad for a large majority of every year. Furthermore, a professional volleyball league would likely increase the number of potential Olympic players because women would have the opportunity to more conveniently continue their volleyball careers after college. With this in mind, the research question for this study is: *how are volleyball entities most frequently attempting to engage consumers through social media to help build a brand in the United States?* By answering this question, the research will shed light

on volleyball organizations internet marketing strategies, which can be used as a foundation for future volleyball marketing and development.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research is to explore how women's volleyball is being marketed through social media in America, while gathering an understanding of volleyball brand awareness.

1. To investigate current social media marketing practices of professional women's indoor volleyball, with a focus on the United States.
2. To evaluate current United States professional sports leagues online marketing endeavours.
3. To examine aspects of brand and fan interaction for women's indoor and beach volleyball through social media.

1.4 Relationship with Existing Literature

This research will be utilising the Motivations Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC), which was established by Seo and Green (2008) to analyse how volleyball organizations are choosing to engage fan motivations through Twitter. There are multiple studies that have utilised or drawn inspiration from the MSSOC and they will be discussed in detail within the literature review chapter (Hambrick et al., 2010; Shermak, 2017; Stavros et al., 2014). Of the studies conducted the one that is most similar to this dissertation was research conducted by Hambrick et al. (2010), which analysed professional athletes use of Twitter. This study implemented content analysis and divided athlete tweets into six categories: Interactivity, Diversion, Information Sharing, Content, Promotional, and Fanship. The study revealed that professional athletes main use of Twitter was for interactivity, which is defined as the athlete's direct conversations with other followers. This study aims to utilise a similar methodology, but rather than understanding individual athletes, the research will evaluate volleyball

entities motivations for engaging consumers and fans while also gaining insight on the brand awareness of followers.

1.5 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of the following chapters:

1. **Introduction:** This chapter provides an overview of the dissertation topic, as well as background and rationale for the research industry, field of study, and main subjects that will be examined.
2. **Literature Review:** This chapter will focus on developing an understanding of the main theories, concepts, and approaches of the chosen field of study and industry.
3. **Methodology:** This section will review the research design concurrent with relevant methodological literature. The researcher will justify the research philosophy, method, data collection, and limitations of the study.
4. **Data Analysis/Discussion:** All main findings relevant to the content and context of this research are displayed, analysed, and discussed in this chapter.
5. **Conclusions:** The conclusion summarises the main points emerging from the research, the aim and objectives are revisited, relationship with existing literature is identified, and limitations of are noted.
6. **Recommendations:** This section will include and discuss directions for future academic and professional research.

2.0 Literature Review

Sports marketing has been evolving in the United States since it was utilised by the Advertising Age in 1978 (Mihai, 2013). Following its inception, there has been a plethora of academic research and discussion on the marketing 'of' sport and marketing 'through' sport, revealing the potential monetary risks and rewards of sports marketing strategy (Mason, 1999; Mihai, 2013; Mullin et al., 2014; Shank and Lyberger, 2014). This dissertation will contribute to the academic knowledge on the strategic marketing 'of' sport, but further develop the concept of brand development, specifically focusing on women's volleyball. In today's world, social media has an immense impact on sports marketing strategy and this study hopes to apply this knowledge and add information relating to women's professional sport, specifically volleyball (Baena, 2018; Kaur and Singh, 2017; Popp et al., 2017). Women's indoor volleyball is outside the realm of mainstream sport and is placed into a category known as a niche sport (Greenhalgh et al., 2011). Research relating to niche sport marketing in comparison to mainstream sport marketing will be reviewed to understand the marketing strategy differences. The study will also shed light on the difference between media marketing for male and female sport, briefly discussing gender perceptions within the sports industry (Micelotta et al., 2017). Ultimately, the study will explore the utilization of social media marketing strategy to understand how volleyball entities are attempting to build a strong sport brand with quality brand equity through the social media platform Twitter. This information hopes to provide practical knowledge that will act as foundational marketing research for volleyball entities in America that could help aid in the future development of a professional women's indoor volleyball league. This literature review will be divided into three main sections discussing brand development in sport, social media marketing and sport, and gender in sport.

2.1 Brand Development in Sport

The importance of developing a strong and distinct brand is not a new concept for businesses of all categories. Branding has been utilised for centuries, although the intended development and strengthening of a brand has evolved. Evidence of ancient branding practices show a development of consumer emotion and loyalty before the age of modern business practices and technology (Hardy et al., 2012). Ultimately, the purpose of brand development is to build consumer connections with the brand and product to therefore strengthen brand equity and loyalty (Baena, 2018; Hardy et al., 2012; Keller, 2013; Giroux et al., 2017). Brand equity is defined by the overall words and actions of its consumers, which can create or diminish value. With this in mind, brand development is equally important for the success of a sport product. Sport products can range from sport gear, memorabilia, sport teams, sport leagues or sporting events themselves (Hardy et al., 2012). Sport branding, specifically, has seen a growth in research over the years, revealing important industry elements that help to build the brand equity of teams, leagues, players, and events (Giroux et al., 2017; Greenhalgh et al., 2011; Keller, 1993; Mullin et al., 2014; Parganas et al., 2017). This section evaluates branding literature relevant to contemporary sport teams and leagues with a focus on how marketing strategy and social media have evolved.

Although sport is an inconsistent and unpredictable event for the players, coaches, officials and spectators, it still has the property of a product that is sold or bought and is usually associated with a specific entity (Mullin et al., 2014). In light of this, research discussed that the appeal of the sport product relies on the uncertainty of its outcomes because it forges an emotional atmosphere for the fans and spectators (Mason, 1999). Effective brand marketing can strongly influence the spectator's experience with the ultimate goal of transforming the consumer into an informed and involved fan. The creation of a fan is a key aspect for producing brand equity and loyalty because a sport fan is someone who intentionally follows, supports,

and loves the sport team or league (Ruibley and Pate, 2016). In addition, it is not only important to gain a fan following, but to also foster and further nurture fan relationships to ensure continued or a lifelong interaction or support.

When developing a sport brand there are six criteria that identify the important elements of a brand. These elements are as follows: memorable, meaningful, likable, transferable, adaptable and protectable (Keller, 2013). All of these factors are to be considered when developing a new brand identity. In the world of sport, brand identity is complex and relies heavily on utilising these criteria to create an atmosphere where the consumer is not only a spectator. A well-developed brand has the ability to create a feeling of interconnectedness for the fan, as stated by Whannel, "While there are clearly aesthetic pleasures in merely watching a sporting performance, the real intensity comes from identifying with an individual or team as they strive to win" (2004; pg.200). A team or league sport brands ability to build an identity that is not only enjoyable to spectate but also makes its fans feel as though they are involved in the team's success, has often corresponded to higher rates of consumer interest and interaction (Giroux et al., 2017; Irwin, 1999; Mason, 1999).

A study done by Parganas et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of an organisation's marketing management to better understand their different fan segments. In the study, the researchers built off of a research model utilised by Gladden and Funk (2001, 2002) and Bauer et al. (2008) to further discuss brand associations and how they can encourage or discourage brand development for a sport team. The study predominantly focused on two categories of brand association, brand attributes and brand benefits. First, brand attributes can be defined as the features that a consumer would characterise as a product or service (Keller, 1993; Parganas et al., 2017). Brand benefits are known as the intimate meaning and value a consumer may associate with a service or product, which can elicit satisfying motivations for consumption (Keller, 1993; Parganas et al., 2018). Aspects

that influence these brand association categories relative to a sport brand are shown in Table 2.1 The characteristics focused on in the study conducted by Parganas et al. (2017) are topics of interest for data collection in this dissertation.

Table 2.1. Characteristics of sport brands that affect brand associations

Brand association	Gladden and Funk (2001, 2002)	Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2008)	In this manuscript
Product-related attributes	Success	Team success	Team success
	–	Team performance	–
Non-product-related attributes	Star player	Star player	Star player
	Head coach	Head coach	Head coach
	Logo design	Logo and club colors	Brand mark
	Tradition	Club's history and tradition	Team's history and tradition
	–	Regional provenance	–
	–	Club's culture and values	Team's culture and values
	Management	Management	Management
	Stadium	Stadium	Stadium
	Product delivery	–	–
	–	Fans	Fans
Brand benefits	–	Sponsor or owner	Sponsor
	–	–	Event's image
	Fan identification	Fan identification	Fan identification
	Escape	Escape	Escape
	–	Emotions	Emotions
	Nostalgia	Nostalgia	Nostalgia
	–	Socializing	Socializing
	Peer group acceptance	Peer group acceptance	–
	Pride in place	Pride in place	–
	–	Entertainment	Entertainment

Table I.
Conceptualization of study constructs in comparison with existing scales

Source: Parganas et al., 2017

More specifically this study observes how brand association factors like team success, team performance, player information, coach information, team history, team culture, sponsorships, and entertainment are presented and interacted with on Twitter. This aims to reveal information on what type of media posts are receiving more fan and consumer interaction, potentially uncovering useful marketing information.

A study conducted by Ruihley and Pate (2016) performed a content analysis on a website called Lovemarks where consumers openly nominate brands to be considered for a Lovemark. A Lovemark shows admiration for a brand and is the pinnacle of what a brand would want to achieve in a customer's mind. The study analysed Lovemarks that were specific to sport brands to gather an understanding of what fans associated with the brand to gain information on what drives fans extreme loyalty to sport entities. The number one factor

for long-term following involved the mystery of sport, which is driven by emotional attachments to successful performances by athletes, teams, and organisations. In this study Ruihley and Pate (2016) argued that performance spanned beyond wins and losses, including factors that made the fans want to be involved because of individual experiences. They argue that emotional experiences can be brought about by successful storytelling from athletes or coaches within the organisation, fostering the consumers undying loyalty. Although storytelling can attract consumers, performance is what maintains and legitimises respect (Ruihley and Pate, 2016). Through this dissertation, the research observes how volleyball entities might be implementing these strategies to attract customers through Twitter marketing. The next section discusses social media marketing and how the sports world has widely adopted social media as a marketing strategy.

2.2 Social Media Marketing in Sport

Marketing plays a massive role in the development of a brand and recent studies have focused a lot of energy on determining innovative marketing strategies to further enhance brand equity (Hardy et al., 2012; Keller, 2013; Mullin et al., 2014). A widely discussed and studied marketing tactic involves the usage of social media as a means for strengthening fan and spectator satisfaction and loyalty (Baena, 2018; Filo et al., 2015; Parganas et al., 2017; Popp et al., 2017). Social media has become widely used due to its popularity amongst consumers and its ability to seamlessly connect the world to information (Kaur and Singh, 2017). Furthermore, social media provides fans and spectators with the ability to interact with their favourite sport teams, leagues and athletes on a day to day basis. This ease of access to customers has greatly increased organisations abilities to implement effective personalised, experiential, relationship and permission marketing strategies (Keller, 2013; Williams and Chinn, 2010). Studies have shown that these influential marketing tactics have shown increased brand equity and fan loyalty to a variety of sport league and team brands (Baena, 2018; Irwin, 1999; Popp et al., 2017). A majority of these studies strongly focused on

social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to collect data on fan interaction through followers, 'Likes', 'Comments' and 'Reposts' (Hambrick et al, 2010; Filo et al., 2015; Sauder and Blaszk, 2016; Stavros et al., 2014; Shermak, 2016). Some studies were attempting to gauge if increases in fan interaction with team or league social media platforms correlated with increased ticket sales (Popp et al., 2017). Although research was inconclusive in correlating increases in followers to increases in ticket sales, there has been important work noting the influence of social media on fan satisfaction (Baena, 2018; Parganas et al., 2018; Popp et al., 2017). This research will seek to observe volleyball entities utilisation of social media platforms, specifically Twitter.

To be able to understand why fans interact on social media it is important to comprehend motivations for sport consumption. Seo and Green's (2008) research developed a model that scales motivations for online sport consumption. The model is called the Motivations Scale for Sport Online Consumption (MSSOC). In light of the fact that Twitter is an online media source that is available to fans and consumers alike, this scale will help associate the type of posts fans will likely interact with. Seo and Green (2008) developed their work from previous research, utilising qualitative and quantitative research to determine categories for online sport motivations. Ultimately, they categorised fan motivations as Fanship, Technical Sport Knowledge, Escape, Economic, Information, Personal Communication, Pass-Time, and Content. Categories from the MSSOC will be utilised in this study to analyse how American volleyball organisations are choosing to engage their consumers through Twitter. The observational and exploratory nature of the research objectives presented for this study place the categories of Fanship, Escape, and Pass-Time out of reach because these categories would require data collection from consumers directly. One objective will be to determine how much and what type of fan interactions volleyball entities are receiving in relation to the type of media they are sharing.

Many other studies have utilised the model created by Seo and Green (2008) as a method for identifying fan motivations online. Some of these studies have focused on professional athlete utilisations of Twitter (Hambrick et al., 2010), newspaper sport beat reporter's engagement on Twitter (Shermak, 2016), and National Basketball Association (NBA) off-season fan engagement on Facebook (Stavros et al., 2014). Building from this research, this study implements common strategies, mainly the usage of MSSOC, to see what types of posts from volleyball entities are receiving the most fan interaction. The next section will introduce Twitter as a social media platform.

2.2.1 Twitter

The social media platform Twitter was created in 2006 and since then has become a widely used platform for communication across a broad range of industries (Twitter Website, 2018). Twitter allows people and organizations to freely post textual and non-textual information and content for followers to view and engage. Twitter consumers are able to interact with tweets in three ways, 'Likes', 'Retweets', and 'Comments' (Twitter Website, 2018). Due to Twitter's interactive nature, the platform has become a popular tool for researchers to gathering information on communication, marketing, and interaction of athletes, leagues, teams, and coaches (Hambrick et al., 2010; Saunder and Blaszk, 2016; Popp et al., 2017). This study will take advantage of Twitter's interactive nature to gather data on volleyball organisation's ability to engage fans through the social media platform. Previous research on Twitter has rarely focused on the sport of volleyball, which could be due to the lack of a professional league within the United States and its reputation as a predominantly female sport. The next section will discuss the nature of volleyball as a sport product and its marketing implications.

2.2.2 Marketing of Niche Sports

Due to the diversity of sport products, research has been conducted to clarify the difference between a mainstream sport product and a niche sport product and the potential differences in their marketing strategies (Rosner

and Shropshire, 2004; Greenhalgh et al., 2011; Greenwell et al., 2013). This research will be focusing on qualities related to niche sport leagues and how to strategically market them.

The category of niche sports is difficult to apply a simple and concise definition. Rosner and Shropshire (2004) showed and identified four different categories that sports could fall under to be considered a niche sport in the United States. The first category is minor league sports that do not represent the elite level of competition, such as Minor League Baseball (MiLB) or the National Basketball Association's G-League which is a development league. The next category includes the emerging sports that are at their highest level of competition, but do not receive the same media coverage or spectatorship as the mainstream sport options. Examples of sports in this category include Major League Soccer (MLS) and the Association of Volleyball Professionals (AVP). The third category includes indoor alternatives to predominately outdoor sporting events. Finally, the last category comprises of gender specific leagues for female athletes, such as the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). This categorization helps to identify the variety of differences in the niche sport market. Based on these categories a professional women's volleyball league will fall under the second and fourth classifications. Applying the information presented by Rosner and Shropshire (2004), this research acknowledges these ideologies when analysing the product that women's indoor volleyball provides and will seek to understand the current marketing and promotional strategy that volleyball organisations are implementing.

According to Greenhalgh et al. (2011), spectator and fan motivations are influenced by a variety of differentiation factors. The research revealed characteristics pertaining to individual or team sports, aggressive sports against non-aggressive and stylistic sports opposed to non-stylistic sports. The three main factors that were important for the success of niche sports according to consumers were accessibility, affordability and player

similarities (Greenwell et al., 2013). The factor of player similarities is the consumers perception that the athletes are more relatable and like themselves, or people that the spectator knows. Furthermore, women's sports were found to attract spectators and fans because they provide opportunity for women, they yield female role models and supply wholesome family entertainment at an affordable price (Funk et al., 2003). This dissertation analyses these aspects relevant to its implications for professional indoor volleyball and how volleyball is being marketed in the United States. The research also focuses on the social media marketing strategy of the AVP, a pro beach volleyball tour in the United States, because of its success as a niche sport and its relative similarity to indoor volleyball and frequency of athletes participating on both (Voepel, 2010).

2.4 Gender in Sport

Gender equality movements are making strides in a majority of U.S. industries, but the sports industry is still struggling to break norms pertaining to the importance of masculinity. Noted by previous research is the concept that Western culture portrays the embodiment of masculinity, which can allow for the clash of the ideal feminine body type and that of a female athlete (Krane et al., 2004). Research has also focused on the media's overarching lack of coverage of female sport and also noted that when it does receive recognition it is often in a demeaning or sexualised manner (Cooky et al., 2013; Trolan, 2013). Furthermore, Trolan (2013) pointed out that although there are claims that female sport is now considered equal, there is still an obsession with the look of the female athlete rather than their athletic skills. The social inability to let go of these gender stereotypes could be the reason why female leagues have struggled to survive and thrive unless they are linked to a "dominate" male league, such as the Women's National Basketball League (WNBA) or the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL). A study done by Daniels (2012) revealed important information about the positive effects of presenting girls and women with images of performance athletes rather than sexualised athletes. The responses to the performance athletes contained more comments about breaking stereotypes,

role model descriptions and inspirational statements. In conclusion, the girls and women that participated in this study felt more motivated to be active, as well as had a greater appreciation for sport, thus considering themselves a sport fan. Conversely, sexualised images of female athletes did not receive this type of commentary. Female organisations that have been able to channel quality and positive atmospheres and coverage of their sport have experienced fan identification values such as gender empowerment, diversity, and inclusion, thus strengthening their brand equity (Guest and Luijten, 2017). This information is useful for a marketing team to better understand their target market and understand how gender stereotypes can affect the marketing of their product.

2.4.1 The Sport of Volleyball

There is not a large amount of literature written on the sport of volleyball and marketing strategies for such a sport. This could be due in part to the lack of a professional league within the United States. The literature that does exist is mainly focused on collegiate volleyball, failed professional volleyball leagues, or gender in sport implications (Micelotta et al., 2017; Popp et al., 2017; Zapalac et al., 2010). Although this may be true the sport of volleyball is an interesting case when observing marketing strategy, branding, and gender perceptions when the sport is followed from its origins to its current status. In 1985, William G. Morgan was credited for creating the game of volleyball (IOC, 2018). Upon the sports creation, there were actually two new team sports on the scene that both involved hitting or throwing a ball over a net from one side of the court to the other, with the goal of striking the ball to the floor on the other team's side. While Morgan's version of the game was created for businessmen at a Massachusetts YMCA, a woman named Clara Baer had invented her version of the game for college women at a university in New Orleans. Both of the games grew quickly outside of their initial markets and were promoted by professional journals and conferences. Unfortunately, one of the games became obsolete after three decades and the other developed into an Olympic sport, with two popular versions (Hardy et al., 2012; IOC, 2018). Research discussed that the

names of the sport played a part in their brand identity. That being said, Morgan's Volleyball supposedly sounded more appealing than Baer's Newcomb ball (Hardy et al., 2012).

Although some branding literature will argue that the reason for the failure of Baer's version was in the name, Newcomb ball also faced other challenges that arguably still affect the brand equity of modern day volleyball (Hardy et al., 2012). Paul (1996) was a historian who suggested that Morgan could have simply and effectively modified Baer's Newcomb ball, proceeding to win the market due to gender bias. Common women of that time were still in the early stages of feminism, attempting to break the gender mould. According to Paul (1996), there was a plethora of books and articles written by physicians, moralists, and other researchers arguing a women's basic weakness and frailty, emphasising the dangers of participating in aggressive sports. This ideology caused the creation of different rules, equipment, and styles of play for a variety of sports that could be associated with the different genders. In turn, this potentially created a perceptual differentiation between what was thought of as the "real" brand and the "other" brand (Hardy et al., 2012). This idea is also supported by Winner (2009) who explained that men are known for representing the norm, or "real" brand, while women represent the "other". Luckily for volleyball the slight changes in equipment, the net is lower for the women, but maintenance of the same rules has allowed the women's game to still seem competitive, high level, and as, if not more, exciting than the male counterpart. An example where a female sport may have benefited from a slightly modified equipment change is women's basketball, where if the hoop was lowered a few inches the sport would potentially allow for more aggressive plays at the basket.

Today women's volleyball is perceived as one of the only predominantly women's sports in the world. Men's volleyball is still a popular niche sport, but when a consumer hears the term volleyball their first thought is usually women's volleyball (Micelotta et al., 2017). The general preference of women's volleyball in comparison to men's volleyball can be seen at the

collegiate level where there are 334 NCAA Division I indoor women's programs and only 59 NCAA men's indoor programs across all divisions (NCAA Website, 2018). Unfortunately, given the amount of popularity of women's volleyball at the collegiate level, there have been four documented attempts at creating a professional indoor women's volleyball league in the United States that have eventually failed due to the lack of sponsors and revenue (Micelotta et al., 2017). Without a professional American indoor sport league to study, the research must rely on the volleyball organisations that do exist and are not associated with college volleyball. Most volleyball organisations market for both the women's and men's versions of the sport, therefore this situation presents a unique opportunity for the study to compare how women's volleyball is being marketed directly next to the men's through the social media platform Twitter. According to previous literature, social media allows for more control over the content that is being presented to fans and consumers, which can potentially allow for more representation of women in sport (Bruce, 2015; Thorpe et al., 2017). This research hopes to build off of previous studies regarding gender roles in sports and observe how social media has potentially allowed for more control over how women's sports are being marketed.

2.5 Summary

This chapter focused on reviewing the previous literature to properly lay context to the intended research of this study. Literature of focus pertained to brand development for the insurance of brand equity and loyalty within the sport industry. Brand awareness factors, as well as fan loyalty trends were discussed. In addition, literature focused on social media marketing was reviewed to provide context to the ever-growing marketing strategy. The social media platform, Twitter, was of large focus within the previous literature because of its interactive nature. Twitter will be utilized within this study to gather data on the marketing of a female sport product, which according to the previous literature is categorised as a niche sport. Women's sports are not only considered a niche sport product but they have also faced a variety of shortcomings when it comes to media representation,

sexualisation, and legitimacy. Previous literature discussed challenges faced by a number of professional women's sports and revealed opportunities for future sport research. Building off of previous literature this dissertation aims to observe how professional level women's volleyball is being marketed through social media within the United States. This information will also identify brand awareness of volleyball entities through online consumer engagement trends. The next chapter will present the research methodology.

3.0 Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore how the sport of volleyball is being marketed through social media in America. Previous sport marketing research used a wide variety of research methods to gather information on their specific topic. This chapter will explain and determine the research methodology behind this study. The methodology is based on the previously stated research question: *how are volleyball entities most frequently attempting to engage consumers through social media to help build a brand in the United States?* This chapter will first revisit the research objectives and their purpose for answering the research question. Next the research design will review research philosophy, approach, methods, sampling criteria, and data analysis concurrent with methodological literature to explain and reinforce the chosen design. Finally, limitations and challenges of the chosen research will also be discussed.

3.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research was derived from the research question and is to explore how volleyball is being marketed and engaged with through social media in America.

1. To investigate current social media marketing practices of professional women's indoor volleyball, with a focus on the United States.
2. To evaluate differences in social media marketing of women's and men's indoor and beach volleyball in America.
3. To examine aspects of brand and fan interaction for women's indoor and beach volleyball in the United States.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

There are generally two research philosophies that are widely discussed when determining research design: positivism and interpretivism (Blumberg et al., 2014). These philosophies are defined by the researchers view of the world and will act as the starting point for understanding how the data will be collected and analysed (Saunders et al., 2015). Positivism is known for being involved with observable phenomenon that can be conducted in objective and perception-free ways (Blumberg et al., 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Bryman and Bell, 1989). Research undertaking the positivist philosophy is frequently associated with ideologies similar to that of a natural scientist. This is evident in the positivist researchers aim to analyse the world based on simplistic principles so that law-like theories can be generated, much like a natural scientist does (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015). On the other hand, the interpretivist philosophy assumes social science and natural science need to be approached differently. This philosophy believes that it is not possible to view the world in an objective way and that human intention heavily influences meaning in the world (Blumberg et al., 2014). This philosophy results in the subjective and the potentially biased position of the researcher by attempting to interpret how people view the world (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

This research is exploring usage of social media as a sport marketing tool for brand development, pertaining to women's volleyball. To investigate this the study employs an interpretivist philosophy. Based on the description of interpretivism above, this type of research allows the researcher to get acquainted with a specific phenomenon and gain knowledge that could formulate a platform for future research (Hillebrand and Berg, 2000). This research permits the qualitative analysis of how volleyball organizations utilise social media as a marketing tactic. The epistemology of this type of study involves the researcher's perceptions on the collected data to aid in the development of practical and theoretical implications. The main

disadvantages of this type of research lie in the subjective characteristic of the approach, potentially allowing for researcher bias (Saunders et al., 2015). This can have an effect on the generalisability, as well as reliability and representativeness (Bryman and Bell, 2015). On the other hand, this type of research allows for more intensive studies with rich data that is not only descriptive but explores phenomenon beyond law-like assumptions (Saunders et al., 2015).

3.2.2 Research Approach

After determining the proper research philosophy, the researcher must next determine the research approach. In business research, two of the most widely accepted data approaches are deductive and inductive (Bryman and Bell, 2015). These approaches have an effect on the conduction, evaluation, and analysis of the research study. The deductive research approach is associated with the relationship between theory and the research being conducted. On the other hand, inductive research involves the development of theory by data driven means, typically using the grounded theory approach (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Seeing that this study does not aim to develop new theory, but rather to collect and analyse data whilst comparing it with the existing literature, this study implements a deductive approach. Previous research on sport marketing through social media has taken on a variety of approaches, but for the means of collecting and analysing secondary data a deductive approach best fits the research. In addition, the deductive approach is frequently associated with qualitative research, but it also has the ability to be applied to quantitative or mixed method research strategies (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

3.2.3 Research Strategy

When determining a research strategy, the researcher has a choice between qualitative, quantitative or a mixed method, which is a combination of both. The difference between qualitative and quantitative research can be confined in the literature as statistical or non-statistical data (Collis and Hussey, 2014). This differentiation may be too simplistic when choosing between the

strategies, therefore utilising the research philosophy and approach can aid in the decision making (Saunders et al., 2014). Through the interpretivist paradigm and deductive approach, qualitative data collection is the best fit to reach the objectives of this research. Bryman and Bell (2015) discuss the qualitative links to interpretivism, as well as the deductive approaches ability to compliment this research strategy, which reinforce the usage of the strategy. Qualitative data can provide research with rich knowledge and understanding that may not be evident from quantitative data collection. Although the data being collected will be qualitative in nature, a mixed method strategy will be applied to quantify certain aspects of the textual data. The data analysis strategy and categorical coding for the quantification of the textual data will be discussed further in the data analysis subsection of this chapter (3.2.6 Data Analysis; pg. 23). A mixed method approach is preferred for undertaking the issue of converting qualitative data into quantitative because it can allow for the fusion of the two data types, enhancing the ability to analyse the two aspects together rather than parallel of each other (Williams and Shepherd, 2017). As stated by Sandelowski et al. (2009, pg.211), this form of mixed method “enables the fusion or merger of data sets, not merely their juxtaposition with each other or parallel use”. The use of qualitative research allows for in depth research into a certain topic, exploring more information pertaining to how or why (Williams and Shepherd, 2016). This type of research aligns well with the research question and objectives because it helps shed light on the social media marketing strategies being utilised, as well as reveal brand awareness.

3.2.4 Data Collection Methods

When choosing to collect data for research there are two methods to choose from, primary and secondary data collection (Blumberg et al., 2014). Primary data is information collected by a researcher that does not already exist within the literature and usually entails some form of human interaction or observation (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Examples of primary data collection methods include interviews, focus groups, surveys, or human observation. This type of research can contribute a great deal of new knowledge and

allows for exploration into not heavily researched topics. Conversely, secondary data collection is a method by which the researcher utilises previous research or statistical data for different research than its original purpose (Collis and Hussey, 2014). This form of research can entail collecting data from previous research, business reports, government agencies, and online platforms.

Based on the descriptions of the two research methods above, data for this study is sourced via secondary data collection. The studies research technique will be desktop research because it is complementary to the secondary research method. This method for data collection is known for being less costly based on time and resources, allowing for a greater sample size in comparison to primary research given the time constraints of this project. As reviewed in the research strategy subsection, this study collects qualitative data, therefore it expands the traditional focal point of secondary data from numerical data to supplementary material (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Secondary data collection through the social media platform Twitter, as well as archival records and sources will help develop the expansion from strictly numerical data. Qualitative data will be collected from the social media account Twitter. The data collection methodology aligns well with the research objectives because it allows for observation research into secondary data sources, which will establish current social media marketing strategies of the volleyball entities, as well as develop an understanding of brand awareness of volleyball organisations.

3.2.5 Sampling Criteria

Sampling criteria will be set for the selection of appropriate secondary data that is relevant to this study. Analysis data must meet three guidelines:

1. Qualitative data is drawn from Twitter, a social media source
2. The volleyball entities to be studied must represent an official organization, excluding individuals or advertising accounts, and consistently engage on Twitter

3. Secondary sources can include official websites, media interviews, news articles and blogs that were posted between 2013 and 2018

These criteria are the foundation of data collection for the data analysis. Following these criteria, two volleyball entities were chosen for the study: USA Volleyball (USAV) and the AVP. USA Volleyball is the governing body of all indoor volleyball within the United States, overseeing the U.S. women's and men's national teams, as well as volleyball contests and tournaments at the amateur level (USAV Website, 2018). Therefore, their Twitter account should contain information regarding a wide variety of volleyball content including implications towards their marketing strategy through social media. It is important to note that if a league were to be developed in the United States it would likely be organized and managed by USAV because of its status as the nation's volleyball governing body. In other countries, it is common that their governing body manages the professional league (Bravo, 2016; Brazilian Volleyball Confederation Website, 2018; China Volleyball Association Website, 2018).

Due to the lack of a women's indoor league to specifically analyse, this study focused on the AVP because of beach volleyballs relative similarity and general association with its indoor counterpart. As discussed in the literature review, both indoor and beach volleyball fall under the category of a niche sport product, therefore their marketing strategies may contain commonalities (Rosner and Shropshire, 2004). The AVP is the longest operating professional beach volleyball tour in the world and their Twitter account should contain a plethora of content, specifically with marketing implications (AVP Website, 2018). Both of these volleyball entities post data on the female and male versions of the sport, providing the research a unique opportunity to research any differences in marketing between genders. Table 3.1 displays the two accounts Twitter information, proving their frequent activity making them relevant sources for the study.

Table 3.1. *Volleyball organizations included in study*

Organization	Twitter Followers (as of 06/08/18)	Number of Tweets (as of 06/08/18)
USA Volleyball	223K	26.1K
The AVP	36.5K	31K

Sources: AVP Twitter, 2018; USAV Twitter, 2018

3.2.6 Data Analysis

The data analysis technique of this research will be a qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is defined as a systematic, quantitative approach to interpreting the content or meaning of communicative data (Allen, 2017). Although content analysis is often associated with quantitative data, the method has evolved from a counting game to a more interpretive approach to research, allowing for the investigation of qualitative data (Graneheim et al., 2014). Content analysis also provides researchers the ability to gain insight and understanding, while acquiring practical information about a phenomenon (Krippendorff, 2012). Through qualitative content analysis the research will be able to explore the usage of social media for marketing purposes and then utilise existing knowledge to infer meaning (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). This will be achieved through comparison with previous research and data. Other strengths of content analysis are that it can be objective, systematic and generalizable (Hardy and Bryman, 2004). Codes are set to determine how information will be separated into categories, with the intention of revealing themes within the datasets.

Pre-existing categorical codes developed by Seo and Green (2008) were used for the content analysis in this study. The original categories present by Seo and Green (2008) include Information, Entertainment, Interpersonal Communication, Economic, Technical Knowledge, Content, Fanship, Pass-time, and Escape. This research is strictly focusing on how volleyball entities are choosing to engage their consumers through motivational categories,

therefore Fanship, Pass-Time, and Escape will not be analysed because that would require primary information from the consumer. The definitions of each category as defined by Seo and Green (2008) will be explained concurrent with the modified definitions for the utilization in this study.

- *Information* is defined by Seo and Green (2008) as, “Motive to get a large volume of sport information and to learn about things happening in the sport world” (p.86). The definition for this study is, “The Motivation to use Twitter to gain a large volume of sport specific information (statistics, event observations, results, etc.) and to learn about things happening in the sport world”.
- *Entertainment* is defined as, “Motive to enjoy sports and have fun through use of teams Websites” (Seo and Green, 2008; p.86). The adapted definition for this study is, “Motive to enjoy sports and have fun through the use of organizations Twitter accounts”.
- *Interpersonal Communication* definition is, “Motive to share experiences and knowledge with other fans in terms of sports” (Seo and Green, 2008; p. 86). For use in this study it is defined as, “Motivations to share sport experience and knowledge with other fans by using Twitter”.
- *Economic* is defined by Seo and Green (2008) as, “Motive to get promotional incentives that a team provides” (p. 86). For this study it is defined as, “The motive to get promotional incentives that a team provides through Twitter”.
- *Technical Knowledge*: “Motive to learn more specific knowledge of rules and skills Websites offer” (Seo and Green, 2008; p. 86). For use in this study the definition is, “Motive to gain more specific knowledge of rules and skills through Twitter”.
- *Content* is defined as, “Motive to see photos and download media” (Seo and Green, 2008; p.86). For this study, “Motive to see photos, videos, and download media through Twitter”.

As part of the data collection an additional category termed, Gender, was added, differentiating what gender was represented in the post. In some cases, both male and female were represented, therefore the data was classified as 'both'. Contrarily, there were a few posts that did not contain gender implications so they were classified as 'did not disclose'. The number of 'Likes' and 'Retweets' on each tweet will be collected to gain information on which posts or categories are receiving the most engagement. Readers may refer to Appendix 1 for the official codebook that is utilised in this study. Data from the Twitter accounts was entered directly into Excel so that proper averages and percentages could be calculated. This strategy was performed to reduce calculation errors that could occur when computing by hand. Once the data was fully collected and computed, the data was analysed to look for overarching trends within the data set.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

Succeeding the explanation of the research methodology, limitations of the research must be addressed. With a qualitative research strategy, there is a degree of researcher involvement when perceiving and analysing the data. Much like the limitations involved with the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative research can be subjective, non-generalizable, and biased (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Although these limitations are a factor, qualitative research allows for in depth research into a certain topic, exploring more information pertaining to how or why (Williams and Shepherd, 2016). This type of research aligns well with the research question and objectives because it will help shed light on the social media marketing strategies being utilised.

The utilisation of secondary data collection will allow for easier access to a larger, more extensive, and more reliable sample of data that is less costly based on time (Saunders et al., 2015). Due to the limiting time-frame provided and the nature of the project being a master's thesis, secondary data allows for the most intensive sample for timely completion. On the other hand, one of the limitations of secondary data collection pertains to

the difficulty of sorting through all of the potential sources and determining what is a quality source that aligns with the research (Williams and Shepherd, 2016). A sampling criteria and a codebook were created to help alleviate these limitations.

Limitations to a content analysis can relate to reliability (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2012). Due to time variables, only one coder analysed the data therefore, issues with reliability lie in human errors when recording, categorising, or scaling text. Qualitative content analysis can also have limitations when referring to trustworthiness. A technique for indicating credibility or internal uniformity thus strengthening trustworthiness is by using supportive textual evidence that is consistent with the interpretation (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Although these limitations exist, content analysis is frequently utilised in sport-based examinations extracting data from internet sources (Hambrick et al, 2010; Ruibley and Pate, 2016; Stavros et al., 2014).

4.0 Data Analysis

The literature review chapter encapsulates the current knowledge of social media marketing for brand development and reveals information specific to marketing women's volleyball. Following the literature review the research methodology was explained in detail. This chapter will focus on the data analysis, findings, and discussion. Data was collected from the USA Volleyball (USAV) and AVP official Twitter accounts on the 8th, 10th, and 12th of August 2018. The first data tweets collected started on the 6th of August 2018 and were originally planned to be scaled back 100 tweets for each account. A total of 126 tweets were collected from the official USA Volleyball account from 13th of July 2018 to the 6th of August 2018, where 109 tweets were collected from the official AVP account from the 29th of July 2018 to the 6th of August 2018. In total 235 tweets were collected (USAV Twitter Account, 2018; AVP Twitter Account, 2018). The data collection exceeded the original 100 tweet allocation because on the date of the 100th tweet the researcher continued data collection until the day was complete. This chapter focuses on the content analysis of the tweets explained above as well as develops and discusses the findings.

4.1 Results

The research question for this study was concerned with how U.S. volleyball organizations are utilising social media as a marketing tool to build brand equity and appeal to their consumers. To investigate this question, the MSSOC by Seo and Green (2008) was used to examine how USA Volleyball and the AVP were engaging fan motivations through the social media platform, Twitter. In addition, a Gender category was added to observe how women's volleyball was being presented next to the men's version of the game. Engagement is calculated through the number of 'Likes' and 'Retweets' a post received. 'Comments' were also qualitatively analysed on the most engaged posts, as well as any posts that focused on the U.S. women's or men's national team. These comments were analysed to identify

any fan perceptions, perceived brand awareness, or brand identification (Ruihley and Pate, 2016; Stavros et al., 2014).

4.1.1 Content Analysis

The sampling criteria and content analysis categories and codes were thoroughly identified within the methodology chapter of this dissertation. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the categorical descriptions and coding information that is utilised within the results section. Moving forward the results from the content analysis will be presented and then discussed concurrent with the existing literature within the discussion section. The qualitative data used in the content analysis was collected and then quantified to find trends within the organisations Twitter usage. The statistical data will be presented, as well as examples of the major qualitative underpinnings and findings.

4.1.2 Findings on Twitter Usage

The tweets were analysed and placed into specific categories based on textual or non-textual substance to gather an understanding of how USA Volleyball and the AVP are choosing to engage their Twitter followers. Tweets were analysed (N = 235) and had the ability to be coded as more than one category if the proper characteristics were present. Of the tweets that contained one or more category, Content was the most frequently utilised (N = 154; 66%), closely followed by Information (N = 153; 65%), Interpersonal Communication (N = 135; 57%), Economic (N = 88; 37%), Technical Knowledge (N = 81; 34%), and Entertainment (N = 17; 7%; Table 4.1). There were also 16 Tweets out of the 235 that only contained one category. Of these tweets 10 were Content (4.25%), 4 were Information (1.75%), and 2 were Interpersonal Communication (0.85%; Table 4.2).

Table 4.1. Tweets That Contain One or More Motivation Category.

Category	Number of Tweets	Percent of Tweets
Content	154	66%
Information	153	65%
Interpersonal Communication	135	57%
Economic	88	37%
Technical Knowledge	81	34%
Entertainment	17	7%

*Sample Size (N = 235)***Table 4.2. Tweets That Contain Only One Motivation Category.**

Category	Number of Tweets	Percent of Tweets
Content	10	4.25%
Information	4	1.70%
Interpersonal Communication	2	0.85%
Economic	0	0.00%
Technical Knowledge	0	0.00%
Entertainment	0	0.00%

*Sample Size (N = 235)***4.1.2.1 USA Volleyball Twitter Usage**

The USA Volleyball and AVP Twitter accounts analysed were chosen because of their ability to represent the sport of volleyball at a professional level in America. Although the accounts both pertain to volleyball, their purpose is slightly different. The main difference is USA Volleyball's role as the governing body of all amateur volleyball in the U.S., while the AVP is an organisation that represents a professional beach volleyball tour. When interpreting the data, the differences between these accounts became apparent due to differences in the number of followers and the frequency of the categorical posts the accounts were choosing to share to reach their goals.

From the USA Volleyball Official Twitter account 126 tweets were collected and analysed for motivation factors, gender, and engagement. The 126 tweets represented 53% of the total sample. Of these tweets, the most utilised motivation category was Content (N = 118; 93%), followed by Information (N = 74; 58%), Economic (N = 62; 49%), Interpersonal Communication (N = 41; 33%), Technical Knowledge (N = 13; 10%), and Entertainment (N = 10; 8.0%; Table 4.3). Additionally, there were only 9 posts from the USAV that contained only one motivation factor, of which all of them were Content based. As for the gender makeup of the USAV posts, 81 were female, 36 were male, 6 were both, and 3 did not disclose.

Table 4.3. USAV Tweets That Contain One or More Motivation Category.

Category	Number of Tweets	Percent of Tweets
Content	118	93%
Information	74	58%
Economic	62	49%
Interpersonal Communication	41	33%
Technical Knowledge	13	10%
Entertainment	10	8.0%

Sample Size (N = 126)

4.1.2.2 AVP Twitter Usage

The AVP Twitter account was observed and data was collected from 109 tweets. The category utilization by the AVP was Interpersonal Communication (N = 94; 86%), Information (N = 79; 72%), Technical Knowledge (N = 68; 62%), Content (N = 36; 33%), Economic (N = 26; 24%), and Entertainment (N = 7; 6.0%; Table 4.4). Gender composition consisted of 51 female posts, 46 male posts, 9 both, and 3 did not disclose, therefore the AVP was relatively balanced in their gender posts.

Table 4.4. AVP Tweets That Contain One or More Motivation Category.

Category	Number of Tweets	Percent of Tweets
Interpersonal Communication	94	86%
Information	79	72%
Technical Knowledge	68	62%
Content	36	33%
Economic	26	24%
Entertainment	7	6.0%

Sample Size (N = 109)

4.1.2.3 Category Engagement

After determining the general frequency of the different categories, the tweets were then analysed for engagement. Engagement was quantified by the number of 'Likes' and 'Retweets' a certain post received. Posts were also qualitatively scanned for brand awareness factors, but those aspects will be presented and discussed later in this chapter. As for the 'Likes' and 'Retweets', categories were classified in two different ways: posts containing one or more motivation category and posts containing only one motivation category. The reason for this differentiation was to identify any categories that were used independently or always with another category. Furthermore, this separation could reveal any categories that drew a lot of interaction independent of other categories. When observing the entire sample size, the average number of 'Likes' per post was 92.74 and the average number of 'Retweets' was 13.04. The average 'Likes' and 'Retweets' of the categories were calculated in Excel and the analysis found that for the tweets containing one or more motivation category, Entertainment factors received the most engagement and were 220.2% positively departed from the sample average (Entertainment Average Likes = 204; Entertainment Average Retweets = 41.76; Table 4.5). As stated earlier, the Entertainment category was the least utilised by the volleyball organizations, therefore this category might be more susceptible to a data skew. The next two highest categories for

engagement were Content (Average Likes = 137.1; Average Retweets = 19.39) and Economic (Average Likes = 121.3; Average Retweets = 17.56). The category with the least amount of engagement was Technical Knowledge (Average Likes = 38; Average Retweets = 6.05). Data on engagement of all categories is presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. *Average Likes and Retweets of Posts Containing One or More Motivation Categories*

Motivation Code	Average Likes	Departure of Likes vs. Average Sample Size Likes	Average Retweets	Departure of Retweets vs. Average Sample Size Retweets
ENT	204.0	119.9%	41.76	220.2%
CON	137.1	47.83%	19.39	48.69%
ECON	121.3	30.80%	17.56	34.66%
IC	80.87	-12.80%	13.02	-0.153%
INFO	77.19	-16.77%	9.56	-26.69%
TK	38.00	-59.03%	6.05	-53.60%

Sample Size (N = 235), Average Sample Likes (92.74), Average Sample Retweets (13.04)
Note: Motivation Code to Motivation Category conversion. ENT = Entertainment; CON = Content; ECON = Economic; IC = Interpersonal Communication; INFO = Information; TK = Technical Knowledge

Engagement was also calculated for posts that contained only one motivation factor. The most engaged category with this specification was Content with an average of 137.1 'Likes' and 21.4 'Retweets' per post. The next category was Information with an average of 12.25 'Likes' (-86.79% departure from the sample average) and 1.25 'Retweets' (-90.41% departure from the average). Under this specification there were no tweets containing only Economic, Technical Knowledge, or Entertainment categories (Table 4.6).

4.1.3 Findings on Gender Marketing

Tweets were analysed to categorise whether the tweet was gender specific. Of the 235 coded tweets, 56% of them (132) contained female only

characteristics, 35% (82) entailed male only traits, 6% (15) involved both, while 3% (6) contained no gender information (Table 4.7). These tweets were also observed to gather information on interactivity based on 'Likes' and 'Retweets'. The female category was the only category to surpass the average number of 'Likes' and 'Retweets' (Likes = 110.59; Retweets = 14.62) compared to the overall sample sizes average 'Likes' and 'Retweets' (Likes = 92.74; Retweets = 13.04; Table 4.8). The Gender category, neither, was the second highest of the 'Like' and 'Retweet' averages (Likes = 83.16; Retweet = 14.33).

Table 4.6. *Average Likes and Retweets of Posts Containing Only One Motivation Category.*

Motivation Code	Average Likes	Departure of Likes vs. Average Sample Size Likes	Average Retweets	Departure of Retweets vs. Average Sample Size Retweets
CON	139.8	50.89%	21.4	64.11%
INFO	12.25	-86.79%	1.25	-90.41%
IC	4.00	-95.69%	1	-92.33%
ECON	0.00	-100.0%	0.00	-100.0%
TK	0.00	-100.0%	0.00	-100.0%
ENT	0.00	-100.0%	0.00	-100.0%

Sample Size (N = 235), Average Sample Likes (92.74), Average Sample Retweets (13.04)
 Note: Motivation Code to Motivation Category conversion. ENT = Entertainment; CON = Content; ECON = Economic; IC = Interpersonal Communication; INFO = Information; TK = Technical Knowledge

Table 4.7. *Gender Assumptions of All Posted Tweets.*

Category	Number of Tweets	Percent of Tweets
Gender (Female)	132	56%
Gender (Male)	82	35%
Gender (Both)	15	6%
Gender (Did Not Disclose)	6	3%

Sample Size (N = 235)

Table 4.8. Average Likes and Retweets Based on Gender.

Gender Category	Average Likes	Departure of Likes vs. Average Sample Size Likes	Average Retweets	Departure of Retweets vs. Average Sample Size Retweets
Female	110.59	19.25%	14.62	12.11%
Did Not Disclose	83.16	-10.33%	14.33	9.89%
Male	73.48	-20.77%	11.69	-10.35%
Both	44.8	-51.69%	6	-53.99%

Sample Size (N = 235), Average Sample Likes (92.74), Average Sample Retweets (13.04)

The male and female gender specific tweets were also analysed to observe any differences in category distribution between the posts (Table 4.9; Table 4.10). The most notable difference when looking at the category distribution is the entertainment category. Although tweets with female orientation almost doubled that of ones with male, there were four times more male tweets categorised as entertainment in comparison to that of the women.

Table 4.9. Distribution of Categories Based on Female Oriented Posts

Category	Number of Tweets	Percent of Tweets
Information	95	72%
Content	86	65%
Interpersonal Communication	76	57%
Technical Knowledge	50	38%
Economic	49	37%
Entertainment	3	2.3%

Female Oriented Posts (N = 132)

Table 4.10. *Distribution of Categories on Male Oriented Posts*

Category	Number of Tweets	Percent of Tweets
Information	54	66%
Content	50	61%
Interpersonal Communication	48	59%
Technical Knowledge	30	37%
Economic	29	35%
Entertainment	12	15%

Male Oriented Posts (N = 82)

4.2 Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore Twitter marketing by volleyball entities in America. Previous literature focused on how marketing through social media can aid in brand development of sport organisations. This study applied the MSSOC created by Seo and Green (2008), which helped to assess how volleyball organisations are engaging their volleyball focused Twitter community. The study aims to provide useful marketing information for current and future volleyball entities, when utilising Twitter or social media for customer engagement.

4.2.1 Twitter Usage

4.2.1.1 USA Volleyball vs AVP Usage

The official Twitter Accounts of USA Volleyball and the AVP were chosen to exemplify how professional level volleyball is marketed through social media in America. These are two United States based organisations, but they operate differently. USA Volleyball is the governing body for volleyball in America, therefore they oversee all competition for volleyball at the amateur level. With that in mind, the USA Volleyball account had more followers than the AVP account. As stated in the methodology section, the AVP is the longest serving professional beach volleyball tour in the United States. While the AVP does not represent indoor volleyball, the relative similarity and

frequency of indoor volleyball players transitioning from one to the other, or participating in both is common (AVP Website, 2018; Voepel, 2010). This made the AVP the best representation for the type of Twitter usage and interaction an indoor league might receive if they had a league of their own. Thus, it is important to discuss the differences the two Twitter accounts experienced within their social media marketing and brand awareness.

The USA Volleyball Official Twitter account represented the marketing of indoor volleyball and the women's national team. As displayed in the results section (Table 4.1) the USA Volleyball account used Content motivations most frequently. This type of Twitter behaviour is supported by previous literature pertaining to older forms of media usage, as well as social media usage. Content was defined in this study as any non-textual object within or attached to a tweet, including videos, photos, and links to other sources. Previous literature has emphasised the importance of using content, whether it be picture, video, or links to other content for the engagement of consumers (Hambrick et al., 2010; Hardy et al., 2012; Parganas et al., 2017). This behaviour by USA Volleyball is supported by the amount of engagement these posts were receiving because not only were they the most prevalent, but they were also the second most engaged (Table 4.3; Table 4.4). While the USAV seems to be successfully implementing content in their social media marketing, they may be missing opportunities for more engagement within the Entertainment category. This category was defined as the usage of light-hearted or occasionally funny textual and non-textual posts. Previous research has stressed that fan motivations for brand associations can be connected to their desire for entertainment, which can be manifested in many forms (Keller, 2013, Parganas et al., 2017; Ruihley and Pate, 2016; Stavros et al., 2014). With that in mind, both the USAV and the AVP seldom attempted to engage consumers through the Entertainment category (N = 17; 7%). The two most engaged tweets from the sample included the Entertainment category and will be discussed in more detail later in this section. Ultimately, the two volleyball entities may be missing out on

chances for engagement and more importantly brand awareness and association.

As for the Twitter account of the AVP, there were some differences in category trends when compared to the USAV. The AVP's most exploited category was Interpersonal Communication, followed by Information, and then Technical Knowledge (Table 4.2). This difference in the categorical make-up of the accounts posts could be due to the difference in their operational goals. The AVP represents a professional beach volleyball tour, whereas the USAV represents the governing body of volleyball in America, therefore the two institutions might have differences in the news they seek to provide their fans. For example, a large majority of the AVP's posts were live stats and updates from tournament matches that were occurring. On the 29th of July 2018, the AVP was hosting the championship matches for their tournament being hosted in Hermosa Beach. On this date, there were a plethora of informational, interactive, and technical based tweets. For example, "#AVP2018 Hermosa, M Finals Set 3: We are in the freeze. Back-to-back blocks for @LordBrunner! Allen/Doherty & Brunner/Hyden tied at 14-14" (AVP A, 2018), "#AVP2018 Hermosa, W Finals Set 3: We are in the freeze. Good rally with @summernoelross getting a touch on the block and forcing an error from April. Hughes/S. Ross up 15-14 vs Klineman/A. Ross" (AVP B, 2018). Tweets of this nature were also found to be a trend amongst other sports leagues, athletes, and news reporters that employ Twitter as a means for reaching fans (Hambrick et al., 2010; Sauder and Blaszk, 2016; Shermak, 2016). The way that the AVP utilizes Twitter is more likely a better representation of how a professional women's indoor league would seek to use a social media platform for fan interactions.

4.2.1.2 Tweets with the Most Interaction

The two most notable tweets based on the amount of engagement received were both produced by the USA Volleyball Twitter account. The fact that the USA Volleyball account had a greater number of followers could attest for their dominance when considering engagement. The overall most interacted

with post was male oriented and displayed a twenty-nine second highlight video from a U.S. Men's National Team match (USAV A, 2018). The video shows a great act of athleticism from the players on the Men's National Team, but puts a specific focus on the team's setter, Micah Christenson, for making a smart and athletic block outside of his position. The tweet was coded to contain Entertainment, Interpersonal Communication, Technical Knowledge, and Content. The textual content of the tweet is displayed in Figure 4.1. This tweet received 1,100 'Likes', as well as 250 'Retweets' and 7 'comments'.

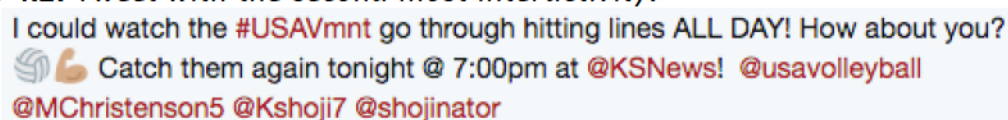
Figure 4.1. *Tweet containing the most interactivity.*



Source: USAV A., 2018

The next most interacted with post was not produced by the USA Volleyball Twitter account but actually 'Retweeted' by U.S.A. Volleyball (Anon 1, 2018). The tweet is another post pertaining to the U.S. Men's National Team but this time it is an extremely quick five second highlight reel from the men's team warm up. The video shows the brawn and natural athleticism of the players. The textual context of the tweet is displayed in Figure 4.2. This tweet was coded for Entertainment, Interpersonal Communication, Economic, and Content. This tweet received 1,000 'Likes', 260 'Retweets', and 3 'comments'.

Figure 4.2. *Tweet with the second most interactivity.*



Source: Anon 1, 2018

Although these tweets received a high amount of engagement, this type of post was not as frequently posted. These two posts could also be a point of explanation for the high amount of interactivity associated with the

Entertainment category. Of the 17 posts containing Entertainment criteria these two combined for 2,100 'Likes' and 510 'Retweets'. In addition, it is important to note that both of the tweets with the most interaction pertained to male oriented posts. When compared to previous research on social media motivations, these posts successfully implemented what are thought of as the most highly engaged motivation factors (Baena, 2018; Starvos et al., 2014; Ruihley and Pate, 2016).

There were 21% more posts that entailed female characteristics and yet the female post with the highest amount of interactivity received 652 'Likes', 86 'Retweets', and 7 'comments'. The post was coded for Economic and Content characteristics. The content included was a twenty-five second slow motion highlight play, exemplifying the athleticism of the women's national team (USAV B, 2018). The textual content of the post is shown in Figure 4.3. Although this post displays great athletic ability and also advertises for an upcoming scrimmage, the tweet may not have received the same amount of interaction due to the missing Entertainment and Interpersonal Communication categories (Baena, 2018).

Figure 4.3. *Textual content of the female oriented tweet with the highest interactivity.*



Source: USAV B., 2018

Ultimately, the women averaged more 'Likes' and 'Retweets' on posts in comparison to the posts portraying the men. Furthermore, if the two most interacted with posts were removed from the data set then the gap between the average 'Likes' and 'Retweets' for the men and women would be even greater.

4.2.1.3 “We need more volleyball coverage!”

A common trend that appeared when analysing the comments on posts from USA Volleyball, especially pertaining to the women’s and men’s national teams, was the frequency of fans and followers alluding to the need for more volleyball coverage or requesting ways in which they could watch the matches on T.V. or online. Some examples include: “Is there a site to watch the final?” (Anon 2, 2018), “Sure wish we super fans could watch the games on tv...Yay @usavolleyball! You are amazing!” (Anon 3, 2018), “We need more volleyball coverage!” (Anon 4, 2018), and “Where can we watch the match???” (Anon 5, 2018). Tweets of this nature imply that the USA Volleyball account could potentially do better job of informing fans how to access matches online, but also the sport of volleyball may be experiencing issues finding T.V. and online streaming coverage. Despite the fact that social media provides certain organizations and groups more control over what is posted and how often it is posted, there is still not an abundance of control over the type of coverage they receive on television or online streaming networks (Cooky et al., 2013). More importantly a study done by Cooky et al. (2013) observed the amount of coverage women’s sport was receiving, as well as the type of coverage, and found that coverage of female sport was on the decline. A majority of T.V. coverage put a large focus on men’s basketball, football, and baseball. The comments asking and requesting for more media coverage in this study are supported by the previous research pertaining to sport coverage (Cooky et al., 2013). On the other hand, women’s volleyball does not have an official professional volleyball league that can be followed by the media consistently, but the women’s and men’s national teams frequently take part in tournaments in the summer months such as the Volleyball Nations League and the Pan Am (USAV Website, 2018).

4.2.1.4 “Even though they lost, it was still a lot of fun.”

Signs and trends of brand equity and loyalty became apparent within the comments left by the Twitter followers of these two organisations. These

types of comments show commitment and loyalty to volleyball entities, which is of the utmost importance when considering the strength of the volleyball brand. One tweet stood out as containing signs of strong loyalty that include emotional attachments that span beyond victories and losses, but also include the individual experiences of the fans (Ruihley and Pate, 2016). This can be seen in the following comment, “Even though they lost, it was still a lot of fun. Thanks for the opportunity. We were very impressed with both teams” (Anon 6, 2018). This tweet may seem to be less enthusiastic in comparison to tweets such as one after a women’s national Team victory, “Omg! Wow!! You did it!! Fantabulous!! So excited!! Magical Warriors!!” (Anon 7, 2018). On the contrary, the comment posted by Anon 6 (2018) shows their satisfaction and exemplifies a positive experience even though the team did not come out victorious. With this in mind, USA Volleyball has found a way to foster a quality experience for their fans whether that be through the atmosphere at the event or their ability to facilitate relationship building through online sources.

The AVP also experienced comments depicting brand awareness. One comment stood out in particular and is as follows, “I’m a die-hard “avp” beach volleyball fan. Chicago is the place I go to attend it. My favorite players: Sara Hughes, Summer Ross, Jen Gysin, Lara Dykstra”, (Anon 8, 2018). The language “die-hard” used by the fan in this post shows their love for the tour as well as the list of their favourite players shows their awareness of the frequent participants. This type of language is supported by the previous literature as brand association and brand awareness factors (Ruihley and Pate, 2016; Stavros et al., 2014).

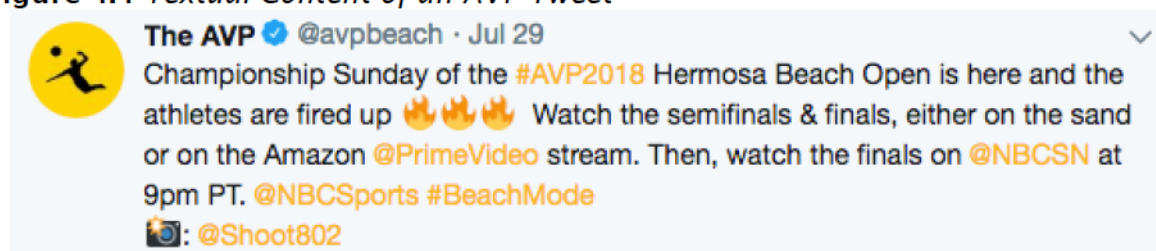
4.2.2 Gender Marketing

4.2.2.1 Engagement Based on Gender

This research found that the social media accounts studied had a tendency to post more frequently about women’s volleyball action as opposed to the men (Table 4.7). This phenomenon goes against what a majority of previous

literature would have assumed when discussing the marketing of a female sport with that of the male counterpart because typically female sport has experienced issues with the media when it comes to the representation (Cooky et al., 2015; Sauder and Blaszkas, 2016; Trolan, 2013). Social media has allowed for women's sport to have more control over the content that is marketed pertaining to their sport. Although there is more control over what is posted, there are still opportunities for people to perceive the posts in their own way. This can be seen when observing the second most engaged post by the AVP. The post gathered 123 'Likes', 9 'Retweets', and 3 'Comments'. The post contains a photo of two female professional beach volleyball players celebrating a victory. The post was coded for Interpersonal Communication, Economic, and Content and the text of the post are included in Figure 4.4. Not only did this tweet receive high amounts of interactivity for the AVP account, but it also received notable qualitative information pertaining to gender perceptions in sport.

Figure 4.4 *Textual Content of an AVP Tweet*



Source: AVP C., 2018

The following subsections will discuss the comments left on this post and their relevance concurrent with previous literature.

4.2.2.2 *"Is the one facing the camera a guy?"*

A few notable comments were left on the post discussed in Figure 4.4 and will be discussed. The photo in this post showed the athletic build, intense mentality, and stereotypical uniform of a beach volleyball player, which consists of a conservative two-piece bathing suit and athletic sunglasses. This photo portrays powerful females excelling at their sport. A comment was left on this post stating, "Is the one facing the camera a guy?" (Anon 9,

2018). This comment exemplifies issues facing gender stereotypes, specifically pertaining to women in sport. Societies ideas on how women's bodies should look often differ from that of an athletic body type (Krane et al., 2004). Although it is thought that women have come a long way in the way that they are presented as athletes through the media, comments like this pose the question of whether consumer perceptions have actually evolved. The gender of the commenter in this study is not distinguishable through observation, thus assumptions cannot be made about the origins of the commenters perceptions based on gender. A study done by Daniels (2012) revealed the importance of presenting strong and powerful photos of female performance athletes to young girls and women rather than sexualised ones. The study found that the girls and women identified more positively with the non-sexualised women and even thought of them as role models. With that in mind, if the comment was left by a female then it contradicts the findings of Daniels (2012). The study conducted by Daniels (2012) solely focused on perceptions from young girls and women, therefore it cannot make implications for male viewpoints or motivations.

4.2.2.3 "These women should put on more clothes. The children are watching!"

Another comment was left on the same post presented in Figure 4.4. Although there were multiple pictures and videos collected in this content analysis that portrayed the male and female athletes involved in the AVP dressed in bathing suits, this was the only post that received a comment addressing the athletes attire. The comment that was left was as follows, "These women should put on more clothes. The children are watching!" (Anon 10, 2018). Comments like this raise the question on whether the person commenting felt the athletes were dressed inappropriately because they were women or if they feel that all beach volleyball players, women and men alike, should be wearing more conservative uniforms. Consumer mind-sets on female athletes is heavily researched and there are many studies that discuss how females can be judged more based on their attire rather than their athletic ability (Bruce, 2015; Thorpe et al., 2017; Trolan, 2013). On the

other hand, studies have suggested that the way women are perceived in sport has been evolving and becoming less sexualised, but the comment left by Anon 10 (2018) suggests otherwise (Bruce, 2015).

4.3 Summary

The goal of this research was to gather an understanding of how United States volleyball organisations are employing social media to engage fans. This study focused specifically on how USA Volleyball and the AVP utilise Twitter. The MSSOC created by Seo and Green (2008) was implemented and revealed that the motivation category, Content, was the most used by the volleyball establishments. Not only was this motivation category used most frequently, but it also received the most engagement. In addition to gathering categorical data based on fan motivations as presented by Seo and Green (2008), this study also aimed to observe differences in the amount and type of marketing between the female and male versions of the sport. The study found that volleyball institutions more frequently post pertaining to the women's version of the game, which goes against what previous research on sport marketing and gender stereotypes would assume (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2013; Daniels, 2012). Moreover, posts pertaining to women's volleyball received more interactivity than that of the men. Finally, comments on highly interacted posts and posts containing material on the U.S. women's or men's national teams were observed for brand awareness or brand perception tendencies. Comments revealed a great amount of support for team success and even failure at times, which shows high levels of sport brand equity. Most notably, there were a number of comments voicing concerns for the lack of volleyball coverage, whether it be on T.V. or online. On the other hand, certain negative topics arose when observing how women are sexualised in the sport world.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter of this dissertation provides a summary for how the research pursued the research question, aim, and objectives, as well as critical review of the research findings. While previous literature on sports marketing and brand development were reviewed this research aimed to contribute to that literature to develop an understanding of the sport marketing and brand awareness of women's volleyball in the United States.

5.1 Research Methodology

The study aimed to explore how volleyball is being marketed through social media in the United States, in turn revealing the brand awareness of followers. The research was rooted in an interpretivist paradigm with a deductive approach and a qualitative research strategy through secondary data collection methods. Two United States volleyball organisations were selected to represent professional volleyball in America, USA Volleyball and the AVP, based on their high status as volleyball entities and their usage of Twitter (AVP Website, 2018; USAV Website, 2018; Table 3.1). A qualitative content analysis was conducted to explore the Twitter activity of USA Volleyball and the AVP between the months of July and August 2018. During that time period 235 tweets were collected for interpretation. Tweets were analysed using aspects of the Motivation Scale for Online Sport Consumption (MSSOC) that was produced by Seo and Green (2008) to understand consumer motivations for online consumption. Along with categorizing the data into the MSSOC scale categories of Information, Entertainment, Interpersonal Communication, Economic, and Content, the added category of Gender was included. Gender was added to help determine how women's volleyball is being marketed next to its male counterpart. The number of 'Likes' and 'Retweets' of each post were collected to gather information on fan engagement with particular posts. Furthermore, comments on categorically identified posts left by followers and fans were inspected to identify brand awareness factors, such as expressed love, excitement,

frustration, or undisputed following (Ruihley and Pate, 2016; Parganas et al., 2017).

5.2 Research Findings

The research methodology's ability to cultivate findings that followed the stated aim and objective of the study are presented below. The study collected 235 tweets between the months of July and August 2018 to be analysed for commonalities in the marketing strategy of USA Volleyball and the AVP. Data collection through content analysis was able to quantify aspects of the qualitative data aiding in the ability to discover trends within the data set. The categories utilised for quantification were Information, Entertainment, Interpersonal Communication, Economic, Technical Knowledge, Content, and Gender Implications. These categories, aside from Gender, were adapted from Seo and Green's (2008) MSSOC, which identifies motivations for fan interaction. Categories are explained in Appendix 1 and were chosen to represent how USA Volleyball and the AVP were choosing to engage their fans. Not only was the content analysis seeking to gain information on marketing strategy, but also to gain knowledge on potential brand awareness of Twitter followers. Of the 235 tweets that were analysed, comments on these tweets were observed to identify brand awareness factors such as personal association, emotional attachment, or desire to attend or view an event (Parganas et al., 2017; Ruihley and Pate, 2016; Stavros et al., 2014).

The first objectives for this study were focused on investigating and evaluating the social media marketing endeavours of indoor volleyball, as well as professional sports league. The AVP was selected to represent a professional sports league. These objectives were fulfilled through the categorical content analysis. For the categorical analysis of the data, Content was the most utilised category in the data set (Table 4.1, pg. 30). In addition to Content being the most employed, it was also the second most engaged. Therefore, the found usage of posts containing content was supported by the fan engagement discovered in the study, as well as previous marketing

research as a strategy for fan engagement and brand awareness (Hambrick et al., 2010; Hardy et al., 2012; Parganas et al., 2017). Although Content was the most utilised category overall, the Twitter account of the AVP used Content fourth, ranking behind Interpersonal Communication, Information, and Technical Knowledge (Table 4.4, pg. 32). The AVP operates a professional beach volleyball tour in the United States, while USA Volleyball is the governing body for amateur volleyball in U.S., as well as hosts the U.S. Women's and Men's national teams. These operational differences potentially lay context to their differences in Twitter posts (Hambrick et al., 2010; Sauder and Blaszk, 2016; Shermak, 2016).

Aside from the categories introduced by Seo and Green (2008) the category of Gender was added to this study. The objectives of the dissertation placed an emphasis on women's volleyball, therefore to fulfil this aspect of the objectives gender influences were considered. Previous research pertaining to sport and gender implications frequently discussed the underrepresentation and sexualisation of women in sport industry (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2015; Daniels, 2012; Micelotta et al., 2017; Sauder and Blaszk, 2016; Trolan, 2013). Contrary to previous research, this study found that USA Volleyball and the AVP posted more female oriented posts than that of male (Table 4.7, pg. 34). In addition, female posts received more engagement through 'Likes' and 'Retweets' than that of male posts (Table 4.8, pg. 35). Thus, the sport of volleyball may present a unique opportunity for women's sport to break the gender mould (Micelotta et al., 2014).

The third and final objective of the research pertained to brand and fan interaction with the social media marketing practices that volleyball institutions were implementing. The general brand awareness of followers was observed through comments on the collected posts. Most notable were those of fan support and desire to view events. Multiple posts from USA Volleyball had comments pertaining to lack of coverage and desire watch. On the other hand, the AVP had no comments pertaining to viewers inability to stream the events, but the league has a set partnership with Amazon Prime

to stream the tournament matches, which creates consistency in coverage location (AVP Website, 2018). There were also comments that displayed fan enjoyment and support in times of success and most importantly failure (Anon 6, 2018; Anon 7, 2018). As discussed by previous literature, a fans desire to follow and associate with a team or player in times of low performance exemplify the high brand loyalty and equity (Ruihley and Pate, 2016; Parganas et al., 2017; Stavros et al., 2014).

5.3 Recommendations

Following the overall research findings, this section aims to provide recommendations for social media marketing and brand awareness, as well as directions for future research.

The findings revealed that Content was the overall most utilised category by the volleyball organisations. The AVP did not post content as frequently as USA Volleyball, but when Content was present it was the most engaged by followers. The notion that the inclusion of content increases interactivity was also supported by previous literature (Hambrick et al., 2010; Hardy et al., 2012; Parganas et al., 2017; Popp et al., 2016). With that in mind, the AVP should consider increasing content usage in their social media strategy. Future research on this topic could focus on the type of content fans interact with the most, whether it be pictures, videos, or links to other content. Furthermore, volleyball market researchers can develop a more in depth understanding of what fans are looking for in online content posted by organisations through primary research methods such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, or surveys.

Based on the findings, there are certain aspects of the social media marketing strategies that could be adapted to enhance fan experiences and connections with the volleyball brands. One of the most notable findings addresses the issue faced by USA Volleyball followers and their inability to connect with T.V. or online coverage of matches (4.2.1.3 “We need more volleyball coverage!”, pg. 41). If USA Volleyball does have a means of

connecting fans to a livestream of the women's and men's national team events, then more emphasis on this opportunity needs to be present in their posts. If they do not, it is in USA Volleyball's interest to further research the demand for livestream connections to matches or move forward and develop a means to stream events. A partnership with an online streaming network would aid in fan familiarity and awareness of where to find matches. The AVP has successfully done this with Amazon Prime and did not experience any issues with fan ignorance to matches within the analysis (AVP Website, 2018).

In addition to the future research suggestions above, there is also possibility to replicate this research with a larger sample over a longer period of time, potentially including other volleyball entities along with the professional athletes and coaches. Research of this magnitude would create more longitudinal data. This would be beneficial when observing how women's volleyball is being marketed next to the men's and how it has developed over time. It could also be interesting if the research in this dissertation were to be replicated and analysed with additional subcategories furthering the interpretation of the qualitative data to find more trends that are specific. One example of new subcategories could relate to Content being divided into Photo, Video, and Link categories. This would have the ability to reveal whether certain Content forms are producing more interest in the consumers mind. Finally, future researchers could also observe volleyball organisations usage of other social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. These platforms may include valuable marketing and brand awareness factors that expand beyond Twitter. Needless to say, there are a wide variety of future research opportunities regarding social media marketing and brand awareness for the sport of volleyball and other niche sports like it.

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7.0 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1

Code Book

For the data collection of this study a code book has been created for the separation of Tweets into proper categories. A tweet can qualify for multiple categories if it meets the criteria. Hypothetical examples of each will be included. The data should be collected into an Excel sheet using 1 for “identifiable” or 0 for “not identifiable”. The one exception is the gender category, which will be identified as W for “women”, M for “men”, B for “both”, and DND for “did not disclose”.

1. Information (INFO)

- a. Description: Any information that could be observed or stated by a physical audience at a particular event. This information will pertain to statistics, game results, opinion statements, or non-athletic anomaly. Furthermore, it could include information on an unrelated sporting event.
- b. Examples: “Misty May serves the ace for match point!”; “A huge block by Kerri Walsh gives Walsh her 8th block of the tournament”; “The U.S.A. women’s national team won their 5th consecutive match in the NVL tournament”; “The kids serving competition in between sets was absolutely hysterical!”

2. Entertainment (ENT)

- a. Description: Match or non-match communication that is vivacious or comical. Posts of this nature seem to be trying to appeal to followers through a light-hearted and fun persona.
- b. Examples: “BLOCK PARTY! The women’s national team has been a brick wall at the net, averaging 2 blocks a set!”

3. Interpersonal Communication (IC)

- a. Description: This includes any tweets that contains a mention or replies to another tweet.

- b. Examples: “@Aprilrossbeach has done it again! What an amazing play!”; “Thank you @volleyfan your support is amazing!”

4. Economic (ECON)

- a. Description: Tweets that present opportunities for purchasing or promotions. These could range from sponsor advertisements to promoting a match or tournament.
- b. Examples: “Tune in to watch the championship match on ESPNLive”; “Hurry to the @adidas store to receive 20% off on all women’s apparel”; “Come out to the tournament, the first 100 fans get a T-shirt and kids get in free!”

5. Technical Knowledge (TK)

- a. Description: Includes tweets that discuss strategy, skills, or rules that are specific to the sport.
- b. Examples: “Misty May lays out for the dig and converts to a kill”; “The USA women’s national team’s middle blocker was called for a net violation.”

6. Content (CON)

- a. Description: Tweets that contain content that is not textual, comprising photos, videos, and links.
- b. Examples: “Highlights from the tournament can be viewed here [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)”

7. Gender (G)

- a. Description: Any tweet that contains either or both male and female implications.
- b. Example: “The women’s championship final is tonight at 8!”; “Matt Anderson helped lead the USA men’s national team to a bronze medal”