

Chapter 5: Discussion	111
5.1. Introduction	111
5.2 Sport public relations practitioners in national sport organisations: An overview	111
5.3 The dominant use of sport public relations: Growing sport participation.....	113
5.4 A focus on one-way communication to benefit the organisation.....	116
5.5 Public relations activities in national sport organisations	119
5.6 The strategic use of sport public relations.....	124
5.7 Summary	133
Chapter 6: Conclusions	135
6.1 Overview of research findings	135
6.2 Limitations and recommendations	138
Bibliography.....	140
Appendix A: Ethics Approval for Interviews	151
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	152
Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet.....	153
Appendix D: Example of Master List of Codes for Interview Question Five	155
Appendix E: Example of Coded Data Extracts for ‘Social and Digital Media Management’	156

Table 1 (Continued)

Regional	Regional council	Fitness centres,	Regional Sport Organisations (RSOs): North Harbour Rugby, Wellington Hockey, Netball South
Local	Local council	Indoor sports facilities, sports grounds (rugby pitches)	Sports clubs: Silverdale Rugby Club, Birkenhead Football Club, Hibiscus Dairy Flat Hockey Club

The government sector in New Zealand includes key organisations such as Sport New Zealand (Sport NZ), a Crown entity that governs sport and recreation in New Zealand (New Zealand Government, 2018). Sport NZ provides funding and develops sport policy (Sport New Zealand, 2018). Additionally, Sport NZ has established a high performance division known as High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ). This division is responsible for the country’s elite sport, providing financial and human resource and developing sport policy (High Performance Sport New Zealand, 2018).

In the New Zealand professional sector, sport organisations include clothing companies such as Rebel Sport, privately-owned professional rugby league clubs such as the Vodafone Warriors and commercial pay television providers such as SKY TV. Many organisations in this sector provide funding to New Zealand sport through sponsorships. One such example includes Adidas’ sponsorship of New Zealand Rugby, estimated to earn the rugby organisation NZ \$10 million per year (“Rugby: Brand All Blacks finally cashes in”, 2017).

The not-for-profit sector in New Zealand comprises national sport organisations (NSOs), regional sport organisations (RSOs) and sports clubs. This research study focuses on the not-for-profit sector, given that the 12 sport organisations represented are

national sport organisations. At the time of this study, Sport NZ recognises 95 official sports in New Zealand (Sport New Zealand, n.d.). All of these sports require governance and development at a national level. The organisations responsible for sport governance at national level in New Zealand are NSOs. Simply defined, NSOs are responsible for the overall administration and development of their sport (Walker & Leberman, 2012). Examples of NSOs in New Zealand are New Zealand Cricket, Canoe Racing New Zealand, Hockey New Zealand, New Zealand Football, New Zealand Rugby and Rowing New Zealand.

To administer and expand their sport, NSOs are required to develop high performance and community sport plans, sustain and grow the sport, including the provision of opportunities to participate and improvement of facilities (Walker & Leberman, 2012). For example, New Zealand Rugby is recognised as the governing body of rugby in New Zealand and manages over 500 clubs and 156,000 rugby players (New Zealand Rugby, 2018a). To achieve its mission of growing, supporting and promoting rugby, the organisation works with 26 RSOs, known as Provincial Unions, which are responsible for providing support to clubs and schools in their region (New Zealand Rugby, 2018b).

Some NSOs, such as Netball New Zealand, New Zealand Cricket and New Zealand Rugby, are also responsible for working with semi-professional and professional teams and franchises that compete in leagues and competitions. Examples include New Zealand Cricket's domestic competition; the Plunket Shield and New Zealand Rugby's domestic women's competition; the Farah Palmer Cup.

The literature review (see 2.3) recognises the ability for public relations to assist sport organisations in managing positive relationships with publics. The practice of effective public relations is considered to be important to NSOs in achieving their

perspective to current sport public relations literature, which is restricted predominantly to North American and United Kingdom settings. Thirdly, this study presents the benefits of public relations to sport organisations, including using the function in a strategic manner rather than merely as a means of communicating organisational messages to publics. Lastly, this study offers a perspective on sport public relations practitioners in New Zealand, whose role until now has been dominated by the sports information role in United States college sport. The study identifies that sport public relations practitioners in New Zealand predominantly occupy the technician role, although there are opportunities to utilise the public relations manager role. The study also finds the existence of a female-dominated New Zealand sport public relations industry.

1.3 Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis incorporates six chapters. This opening chapter provides context to the New Zealand sport industry, with an emphasis on delineating NSOs and identifying the crucial role they play in the country's sporting landscape. The remainder of the introductory chapter gives an overview of the need for this study, as well as the purpose and scope of the research.

The second chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the existing sport public relations literature and identifies unexplored facets that warrant further scholarly research. The chapter first provides an overview of sport, justifies the need for public relations in sport and subsequently, discusses sport public relations practitioners and the roles they play in sport organisations.

Chapter three presents the methodology that guides this research study, including the use of semi-structured interviews and the process of thematic analysis to develop the research findings.

Chapter four presents the thematic analysis of the research findings and is structured according to the 10 questions asked of research participants.

The fifth chapter interprets the research findings and discusses the meaning and significance of the results from this study.

The final chapter identifies the limitations of the research study, makes recommendation for future research on the topic of sport public relations and provides a summary of the study.

The present research study provides a strong foundation for future research to explore sport public relations in New Zealand in greater depth.

bodies were formed and equipment was developed, the latter of which allowed for easier and greater participation (Madigan & Delaney, 2009). Fast-growing populations across the world, particularly in Britain and the United States, provided the opportunity for competition between rival cities, regions and countries (McComb, 2004). This development in turn created a spectacle for fans, funded athletes to become professional and stadiums to be built (McComb, 2004). During this time, the first international rugby match occurred between Scotland and England in 1871, the modern Olympics were re-established in 1896 and international competition was common by the 1900s (Thomson & Jackson, 2016).

2.2.3 The development of alternative sports

Whilst modern sports are popular amongst the general population, they are considered to be specialised, rule-bound and restrictive in the eyes of many young people (Coakley, 2009; Madigan & Delaney, 2009). This has led to a rise in alternative or extreme sports, including frisbee, skateboarding, 'bike motocross' (BMX) and events such as the X Games, an annual extreme sports event (Coakley, 2009; Madigan & Delaney, 2009). Electronic sports, known as E-sports, are challenging the traditional assumptions that sport should exert physical activity and participants are now commonly considered to be athletes (Heere, 2018; "U.S. Now Recognizes eSports", 2013). It is estimated that by 2020 E-sports will be a US\$1.5 billion industry with a global audience of over 550 million ("Competitive video gaming", 2017). In 2017, the National Basketball Association (NBA) announced it would begin its own basketball E-sports league ("NBA, Take-Two Interactive Software partnering on NBA 2K esports league", 2017).

2.2.4 The sport industry and sport organisations

As sport has become increasingly popular in societies, the sport industry has also seen increasingly rapid growth, spurred on by globalisation, sport broadcasting and the

commercialisation of sport as an industry (Hoye, Smith, & Nicholson, 2018). The sport industry is now described as vast in scale and scope and providing a singular definition and description of it proves difficult (Pedersen, 2013). Nowadays the sport industry can be viewed as forming three independent, yet related, parts: public sector, not-for-profit sector and professional sector (Hoye et al., 2018).

The public sector includes national and regional government services which provide funding to other sectors and create and implement policies (Hoye et al., 2018).

The not-for-profit sector comprises community sport clubs, national sport governing bodies, including NSOs in New Zealand which are outlined in chapter one, and international sport governing bodies which, amongst other things, provide opportunities to play sport and increase sport participation (Hoye et al., 2018).

The large and varied professional sector consists of professional competitions and teams, such as Major League Baseball and the New York Yankees in the United States, commercial sport organisations such as Nike and Adidas and media organisations such as Fox Sports (Hoye et al., 2018). Chapter one outlines some of the professional sport organisations that operate in the New Zealand professional sport sector.

2.2.5 Sport as big business

The three sectors of the sport industry employ millions of people directly in professional and amateur sport organisations, as well as indirectly in other industries such as the media, education, retail and events (Hoye & Parent, 2016). In New Zealand, the sport and recreation industry is accredited with contributing NZ\$4.9 billion to the country's gross domestic product annually and providing more than 50,000 jobs (Sport New Zealand, 2018). In England, the sport industry accounts for 400,000 jobs and adds a gross value of £20.3 billion to the nation's economy (Sport England, 2013).

encompasses all the processes through which sport organisations can create and develop long-term mutually beneficial relationships with a range of publics” (p. 175). The emphasis on developing relationships with publics is again stated by Stoldt et al. (2012) who identify it as “a managerial communication-based function designed to identify a sport organisation’s key publics, evaluate its relationships with those publics, and foster desirable relationships between the sport organisation and those publics” (p. 2).

Sport is now considered to be a multi-dimensional industry and sport public relations professionals and sport organisations are required to understand, manage, build and maintain relationships with their publics in order to be successful (Hopwood, Skinner, & Kitchin, 2010; L’Etang, 2006, 2013a; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014; Pratt, 2013; Summers & Morgan, 2008).

Sport organisations across all three sectors of the industry interact with a diverse network of publics, including international and national sporting bodies, media, sponsors, government and community organisations (Hoye et al., 2018). Public relations goals for sport organisations were identified by Stoldt, Miller and Vermillion (2009) as being varied and broad across 30 sport public relations practitioners working in various United States sport organisations. Public relations benefits to these sport organisations included revenue generation, ticket sales, raising awareness, developing a positive image, generating publicity, building relationships with fans and working with other organisational departments to develop strategies and manage issues (Stoldt et. al., 2009).

Boyle and Haynes (2006) analysed professional English soccer and argued that public relations has not historically been seen as a priority, explaining that public relations practitioners were only introduced as recently as 1999. In English soccer it is argued that the need to maintain fan loyalty, whilst also managing global sporting

brands and communicating to a wide range of publics, now requires public relations more than ever before (Boyle & Haynes, 2006).

While it is argued that public relations is becoming more important to sport organisations (Boyle & Haynes, 2006; Hopwood, 2010; Hoye et al., 2018; Stoldt et al., 2012), there is relatively limited scholarly understanding of the use of public relations and its functions in sport. A review of the existing literature identifies that the majority of studies continue to explore sport public relations practices in the United States and United Kingdom, particularly in professional sporting contexts (Coombs & Osborne, 2012; Huberty, Kellison, & Mondello, 2016; L'Etang, 2006). Consequently, there is insufficient knowledge of other contexts.

The recognition that sport is a socially constructed phenomenon (see 2.2.1) suggests that it varies according to different social settings, thus impacting the practice of public relations. It may be argued that the New Zealand sport industry differs greatly from its United States and United Kingdom counterparts. For instance, New Zealand sport has a strong foundation built on amateurism and the notion of playing for pleasure (Hindson, 2006; Ryan, 2007), as opposed to the United States where it appears to revolve around financial gain. Many of the national sporting organisations (NSOs), the governing bodies of sport in New Zealand, operate as 'not-for-profits', concentrating on the provision of products and services to members and operating with both volunteer and employed staff (Hayes, 2006). Therefore, a focus of New Zealand NSOs is not on generating profit and revenue, which may alter the approach taken when implementing public relations.

This notion of participation in sport in New Zealand differs greatly from North American culture where sport is seen as entertainment and a reward for hard work (Madigan & Delaney, 2009). The North American sport industry is vast in scale: Forbes

2.3.1 The importance and focus of media relations and publicity

2.3.1.1 Benefits of media relations and publicity to sport organisations

Literature that exists in the field of sport public relations generally agrees that media relations, a specialised public relations function, is the most important and common form of public relations practised in a sporting context (Nicholson, Kerr, & Sherwood, 2015; Stoldt et al., 2012). Media relations is defined as the development of relationships with media organisations in an effort to generate positive media coverage for the organisation (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Mersham et al., 2009). Implementing media relations should be done with the notion that it enhances the organisation's reputation and promotes its mission (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

Sport receives significant amounts of coverage in the media (Pedersen, Laucella, Kian, & Geurin, 2017) and professional and amateur sport have become reliant on the media for both publicity and promotion (Nicholson & Sherwood, 2016). Publicity is defined as an important communication method used in public relations to generate news coverage in the mass media, commonly in newspapers, television, radio and magazines (Hallahan, 2013; Smith & Stewart, 2015). Promotion is seen as the process by which messages are communicated to the target market to encourage them to purchase a product or gain favour with the organisation (Health, 2013; Stoldt et al., 2012). In a sport setting, media relations is used to ensure regular positive presence in the media, to promote new sporting products and services and to assist athletes to enhance their reputations (Stoldt et al., 2012).

The limited research that analyses the role of media relations in a sporting setting highlights the use of the function as a means to communicate positive messages to publics to influence their opinion (Fortunato, 2000; Huberty et al., 2016). Research conducted by Fortunato (2000) analysed the implementation of a media relations

The findings of Fortunato (2000) and Huberty et al (2016) suggest that sport organisations rely heavily on the media to influence how publics view the organisation. Whilst it does appear to be an effective approach, the focus by organisations on setting the agenda does appear to lack consideration for the views of publics in the communications process. Thus, sport organisations appear to be primarily concerned with shaping public opinion, rather than also receiving feedback and engaging with publics.

2.3.1.2 Public relations and marketing communications

Public relations and the generation of publicity and promotion have an important role to play in the marketing function of a sport organisation. Commonly it appears that sport management and sport marketing texts focus on defining public relations as part of what is known as the ‘marketing mix’ (Bruton, 2016; Schwarz & Hunter, 2008; Shilbury, Quick, & Westerbeek, 1998; Smith & Stewart, 2015). The term ‘sport marketing’ refers to the generation of activities by the organisation to meet the needs of consumers through an exchange process (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). In its simplest form, the marketing mix is considered to be a range of activities which are implemented together to create a promotional strategy for a product or service (Smith & Stewart, 2015; Wale & Phoenix, 2009). The marketing mix commonly features four main elements: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and promotion (Smith & Stewart, 2015; Wale & Phoenix, 2009). The importance placed on public relations in the promotional process implies a role for the public relations function known as marketing communication.

Marketing communication applies a short-term approach, focusing on products and services, and seeks to create an exchange process between the organisation and consumer (Smith, 2017). In this regard, marketing communication can commonly use events, media relations and publicity to achieve its goals (Smith, 2017). For example,

news items and grow the image of athletes and sport organisations, which in turn produced revenue through ticket and merchandise sales (Favorito, 2007; Nichols, 2002).

The priorities of these press agents have been identified as generating publicity, providing services to the media, working with coaches and athletes, developing media guides and content generation for new and social media (Stoldt, 2013). From a New Zealand perspective, sport experienced professionalism in the 1990s, much later than the United States, but it has also seen a need for public relations professionals to assist in managing the media and facilitating news stories (McGregor & Harvey, 1999). However, empirical data pertaining to New Zealand sport public relations professionals does not appear to exist.

2.3.1.5 Criticism of an apparent over-reliance on media relations in sport

Scholars argue that, whilst media relations and generating positive media coverage remain components of public relations, the discipline consists of more than this single function (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Sport public relations scholars concur and suggest that sport managers consider other important functions of public relations, such as crisis management, issues management and government relations (Blakey, 2011; Stoldt et al., 2012). Additionally, by focusing on the media, Stoldt et al. (2009) question whether sport public relations practitioners are ignoring the needs of key publics. Public relations is considered to be more than media relations alone and deals with a much broader range of functions to manage the multitude of publics involved in an organisation (Coombs and Holladay, 2010).

Sport has been identified by scholars as predominantly focusing on the two communication models known as 'press agency' and 'public information' (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Pedersen et al., 2017). The 'press agency' model involves the communication of information from the organisation to the publics specifically to seek

communication methods that encourage open communication, designed to achieve mutual understanding and long-term relationships (Grunig, 2006; Wilcox et al., 2013). It can be argued that such an approach is particularly important in the sport industry given that fans are deemed to be distinctive from other businesses and their customers because of their high sense of loyalty, and sometimes irrational commitment, to their teams (Hoye et al., 2018; Smith & Stewart, 2015).

Research that focuses on sport organisations and two-way communication suggests the latter can be used to build relationships successfully with publics. Coombs and Osborne (2012) applied a case-study approach to evaluate the use of public relations in the change of ownership of English football club, Aston Villa. The authors highlight the use of two-way communication to build relationships with key publics who would be affected by the changes. Specifically, senior executives attended events to listen to fans and communicated with them online, hosted community events, as well as meeting with the club's fans (Coombs & Osborne, 2012). However, the implementation by Aston Villa was not part of a public relations strategy and scholarly research that specifically analyses a planned public relations approach by a sport organisation would be worthwhile.

2.3.2 The impact and use of social media by sport organisations

Whilst existing literature highlights media relations as the dominant public relations function in sport, it does appear to be shifting. The introduction and development of digital and social media are redefining sport broadcasting and the way in which sport organisations operate. The development of social media and digital media reflects the notion of Web 2.0, which refers to the ability for people to create and share content, as well as to join with others to create content (Coombs, 2012). Social media is defined as “interactive media technologies that allow consumers to create and

disseminate their own content, connect with media outlets and other network users, and voice their opinions on any number of topics” (Sheffer & Schultz, 2013, p. 210). Social media platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. According to Pew Research Center (2018), 89 percent of Americans use the internet and 69 percent use a social media platform. These figures are consistent with New Zealand percentages: 88 percent of the population use the internet and social media (Nielsen, 2016).

The internet and social media now provide sport organisations with the ability to reach fans directly and vice versa, thus changing the way sport is delivered to fans (Dittmore, 2013; Nicholson & Sherwood, 2016; Sage, 2010). It is now common to find sport organisations operating at least one social media account, a feature which is growing in prevalence in United States college sport (Sanderson, Barnes, Williamson, & Kian, 2016). This uptake of social media by sport organisations now sees many sports teams feature as some of the most popular social media pages online (Nicholson & Sherwood, 2016). For example, soccer club, Barcelona, is the most popular sport team on social media, with 100 million Facebook fans, and the U.S. National Football League’s 32 teams have a total of 141 million followers across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (“Top Sports Team On Social Media”, 2016).

The uptake in social media platforms has resulted in many of these sport organisations now producing their own content as they no longer need the media to promote and communicate it for them. A further key positive for the use of social media is the ability for organisations to reach their audiences directly, without the need to utilise the media to do so (Kent, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012). Likewise, athletes are now able to communicate with fans without the use of the media and it is argued that the popularity of social media is aided because it has the facility for fans to access and interact with athletes on these mediums (Sanderson et al., 2016). When Scherer and Jackson (2008) analysed New Zealand Rugby’s website AllBlacks.com, they found that

the production of in-house content such as news articles, images and video was a valuable tool to achieve organisational goals.

The transition to social media and online mediums may imply a reduction in the need for the generation of publicity through traditional forms of media, although research does not appear to exist which supports this claim. This concept is explained by Pedersen et al. (2017):

In the sport industry this collaboration with publics has traditionally occurred through the media, but as the industry has grown, so too has the need for more sophisticated methods of communicating with the public and shaping public perception in a manner that is favourable to the franchise. (p. 255)

Given the dominance of media relations, as outlined in section 2.3.1 of this review, research would provide valuable insight into the application of social and digital media in sport organisations.

It is also argued that social media has changed the way communication occurs; specifically, it no longer involves the organisation communicating to vast numbers of publics (Lattimore, et al., 2012). Public relations scholars argue that social media has reduced the level of control organisations have over the communication of messages (Broom & Sha, 2013; Coombs, 2012). Social media users interact with other users, create their own content and are “accustomed to being in control” (Coombs, 2012, p. 25). In other words, “anyone may become a journalist” and provide commentary about organisations, with information now readily and freely available to all (Grunig, 2009, p. 4).

Within this context, it is clear that public relations research into a sport organisation’s use of social media is needed and, to some extent, is overdue. Social media is an increasingly important function of sport public relations and is one of the key responsibilities given to college sport communicators (Favorito, 2007; Ruibley,

organisations during times of crisis (Bruce & Tini, 2008; Nicholson et al., 2015). A crisis can be defined as unexpected events which negatively impact the organisation's performance and damage its relationships with its publics (Coombs, 2012). Crises pose a risk to an organisation's reputation (Coombs, 2006; Kiambi & Shafer, 2016) and this impact is no different with sport organisations, whose profitability, image and reputation are all at stake (Billings, Butterworth, & Turman, 2012).

As with sport organisations, so athletes also are susceptible to crises. Given the global industry sport has become, an athlete's image is of critical importance and value, resulting in it becoming an important component of sport public relations (Brazeal, 2008; Smart, 2005). Athletes are frequently caught in controversies, impacting upon the sport organisation's reputation, image and financial stability (Nicholson et al., 2015). The increasing scholarly attention to the crisis management of North American sporting stars highlights the importance of managing athletes in times of crisis (Brazeal, 2008; Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011). However, research that analyses athletes and crises appears to do so only from a North American viewpoint.

The involvement of public relations in crisis management is considered to be a process of limiting the damage caused by the crisis, rebuilding relationships with publics and repairing the organisation's image (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2001). Specifically, public relations practitioners are often responsible for the development of the crisis plan, training spokespersons, performing spokesperson duties and implementing media relations (Coombs, 2012). The introduction of public relations in United States college athletics is viewed as an important component of preventing and reacting to a crisis:

Public relations (PR) is becoming increasingly important in college athletics as the frequency and severity of controversy, legal issues, and crises heighten. With many stakeholders concerned about college athletic programs, coupled with an increased media presence and skyrocketing budgets, it is imperative that athletic

issues management generates a significant amount of the work required of public relations because issues connect the organisation to its publics (Stoldt et al., 2012).

Whilst issues management is an increasingly important area of public relations (Lattimore et al., 2012), sport public relations research regarding the topic appears to be limited. Kitchin and Purcell (2017) identified that sport public relations practitioners in Northern Ireland focused on recognising and monitoring when an issue reached a ‘tipping point’ between issue and crisis. However, the research focuses predominantly on crisis communication and the organisational responses and planning (Kitchin & Purcell, 2017). Further research to determine how, or indeed if, sport organisations perform this crucial public relations function is therefore needed.

2.3.6 The strength of a good reputation

It is apparent that the success of modern sport organisations relies on their creating and maintaining a positive reputation with publics (Pedersen et al., 2017). Reputation can be defined as the impression publics have of an organisation over a long period of time (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Smith, 2017). A positive reputation can assist the organisation to create positive relationships with key publics, attract additional customers and investors and generate positive media coverage (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Gregory, 2010; Mersham et al., 2009; Radic, 2013). Additionally, as previously outlined, sport organisations are susceptible to crises. A positive reputation is seen as important to re-building trust with publics (Mersham et al., 2009).

Public relations is essential to an organisation’s efforts to change the perception of publics and create a positive organisational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). In essence, the public relations function known as reputation management involves positively influencing key publics’ attitudes and beliefs (Radic, 2013). Reputation management requires constant research to understand how publics currently perceive

websites, events and speeches (Broom & Sha, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2013).

On the other hand, public relations managers are focused on providing solutions to organisational problems, advising senior organisational managers and undertaking more strategic tasks, such as issues management and environmental scanning (Broom & Sha, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012; Mersham et al., 2009; Wilcox et al., 2013). Public relations practitioners in the manager role are usually part of the organisation's overall management (Broom & Sha, 2013), which allows them to participate in decision-making, provide advice to those in management and bring about organisational change as a result (Dozier & Broom, 2006; Gregory, 2010; Mersham et al., 2009). By being part of management and undertaking environmental scanning, public relations practitioners are able to bring the perspective of the organisation's publics to management, which in turn assists in the shaping of organisational decisions (Dozier & Broom, 2006; Gregory, 2010; Grunig, 2006; Grunig et al., 2006; Mersham et al., 2009). However, if an organisation does not allow the public relations practitioner to be part of what is known as the 'dominant coalition', namely the organisation's leadership, then the practitioner is not able to carry out these strategic and important tasks (Gregory, 2010).

Research into practitioner roles in a sporting context has highlighted that a large amount of the existing sport public relations literature is assigned to a North American sport communication occupation known as 'sports information' or 'sports direction' (Brown & Isaacson, 2017; L'Etang, 2013a, 2015). Whilst scholarly work is ongoing, sports information remains an under-researched area of the field (Brown & Isaacson, 2017; Isaacson, 2010; Pratt, 2013). Sports information practitioners, also known as Sports Information Directors (SIDs), are responsible for the communication of information about college athletics teams, including facts and figures, and the

notion that an increase in an organisation's publics, as well as a constant changing of key publics, coincided with an increase in the likelihood that the public relations practitioner performed the managerial role. This premise is supported by Ruihley and Fall's (2009) research, the authors noting an increase in the number of key publics involved in college sport, including students, corporate sponsors, media and merchandisers.

Importantly, Ruihley and Fall (2009) found that public relations practitioners had moved away from a solely technical role to one which has become more managerial. The research found that Athletic Directors perceived the public relations practitioner as performing the role known as 'problem-solving process facilitator', followed by 'technician', 'expert prescriber' and 'communication facilitator' (Ruihley & Fall, 2009). Public relations theory identifies that the manager role can be segmented into three further roles (Broom & Sha, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012). Firstly, the 'expert prescriber' role is seen as the senior public relations practitioner and responsible for the identification of problems and subsequent development and leadership of solutions to solve problems (Broom & Sha, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012). Secondly, the 'communication facilitator' role listens to publics to ensure two-way communication is occurring with them and then provides management with information on which to make decisions (Broom & Sha, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012). Lastly, the 'problem-solving facilitator' role works with management to identify and solve organisational problems and issues (Broom & Sha, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012).

According to Ruihley and Fall (2009), the current college sport climate of increased fan expectations, constant news coverage by traditional media and the internet, now requires a public relations practitioner to undertake the role of a problem-solving facilitator, given that issues can quickly arise in this environment. By having a position in management, public relations practitioners can provide communications

(1998) noted that females accounted for 22 percent of the sports information profession and conducted interviews with five women involved in sports information to determine some of the barriers to entry into the profession. Results identified the limited turnover, demands of the profession, including long hours and low pay, and a strong culture of male dominance as reasons for low female numbers (Neupauer, 1998).

Benchmarking research conducted by Hardin and McClung (2002) focused on the 136 schools participating in Division I-AA and Division I-A football in the United States, garnering 83 responses. Again, the research found the profession to be male-dominated with 89.2 percent of respondents identifying as male. This finding is in stark contrast to a survey conducted by Aldoory and Toth (2002), the same year as Hardin and McClung (2002), which found that women occupied 70 percent of roles in the public relations industry.

It appears that research into the demographics, specifically gender, of sport public relations practitioners is restricted to sports information research in the United States. It is recommended that research is undertaken in other sport industries, including outside the United States, to determine whether sport public relations is unique within the wider public relations industry in having a male-dominated workforce.

2.5 Summary and Research Question

The literature review has highlighted sport public relations as a significantly under-researched area of public relations. Existing research has been conducted mainly in a North American or United Kingdom setting and little is known about how sport public relations is practised in other countries, such as New Zealand. It stands to reason that sport differs greatly in diverse societies, which in turn may impact upon the way in which public relations is practised.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter discusses the research design and process undertaken to answer the research question, as determined by the literature review. A qualitative research method was selected, involving semi-structured interviews with 12 research participants selected from New Zealand NSOs.

Firstly, the chapter presents the research aim and research question for this study. Secondly, it offers a detailed overview of the paradigm which guides this research study and thirdly, a justification and explanation of the qualitative approach to this research study, including the processes in place to ensure a reliable, credible research study is produced. The fourth section then discusses the choice of in-depth interviews, specifically the use of semi-structured interviews, as the research method of choice. There then follows an overview of the process undertaken to select research participants. The final section provides a detailed account of the data analysis process, specifically the use of thematic analysis to develop the research findings.

3.2 Research aim

The aim of this research is to provide an overview of the current state of public relations activity in New Zealand NSOs.

In order to achieve the aim, the following research question will be answered: ‘What is the current state of public relations activity in New Zealand national sport organisations?’

3.3 Research paradigm

A research paradigm has been identified by Chalmers (1990) as being “made up of the general theoretical assumptions and laws, and techniques for their application that the members of a particular science community adopt” (p. 90). As such, a paradigm is a

belief system or world-view which guides research and practice in a particular field (Willis, 2007; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Whilst many research paradigms exist, such as 'action research' and 'historical research', the three paradigms most commonly used by researchers when analysing the world are: 'critical research', 'positivism' and 'interpretivism' (Higgs, 1997; Willis, 2007; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Critical research challenges beliefs and conventional norms and is focused on revealing hidden agendas, power imbalances and inequalities (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Unlike positivism and interpretivism, critical research assumes that knowledge is not discovered or understood; it is learned through critical debate (Higgs, 1997). The positivist paradigm is focused on cause-effect relationships (Higgs, 1997) whereby laws, rules and theories are discovered and then applied to people and phenomena to discover patterns, regularities and predict and explain behaviour (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

The present research study involves an exploratory analysis of sport public relations in New Zealand NSOs, an unknown area of scholarly research. To provide an understanding of the discipline it was deemed important to delve into the understandings and meanings created by those working as public relations practitioners in NSOs. From these practitioner experiences it is argued that an understanding can be formed as to how public relations is practised. The paradigm which best serves this approach is an interpretivist one. This paradigm is subjective and seeks to understand the social reality created by people, taking into account the meanings, motives, intentions and context of the situation (Blaikie, 2000; Higgs, 1997). Interpretive researchers believe that there is no single reality and each individual creates their own reality (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Therefore, it is by uncovering and interpreting these individual realities that knowledge can be determined (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman, 2016). In order to do this, interpretive researchers focus on understanding human action

and the meanings and motives people use to direct their behaviour (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman, 2016).

Whilst positivist researchers seek to establish general laws and apply explanations across many settings, interpretive researchers seek to explain unique situations and, in order to achieve this outcome successfully, commonly select qualitative research methods such as interviews and ethnography (Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Higgs, 1997; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

3.4 Qualitative research approach

Research methods are commonly divided into two main streams: qualitative and quantitative. Whilst both qualitative and quantitative research are focused on the individual's viewpoint, the method by which data is collected is vastly different (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research commonly focuses on words, meanings and producing descriptions of social actors, rather than measurement, numbers and statistical data (Blaikie, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative researchers believe that, by getting close to the social actor's perspective, through the adoption of subjective research approaches such as interviews and observation, a true representation of the individual's point of view can be understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Consequently, Blaikie (2009) argues, "without a period of immersion in a social world, no adequate understanding of it can be achieved" (p. 214).

In order to immerse themselves in the natural settings of the social actor, qualitative researchers commonly adopt research methods such as interviews, participant observation and focus groups (Blaikie 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These research methods allow the researcher to spend extended time in the social actor's world, providing the opportunity to draw close to the meanings and interpretations of the social actor (Blaikie, 2009). For this research, adopting a

researcher (Dawson, 2013; Gorman et al., 2005). Convenience sampling receives a level of caution from scholars because of the introduction of bias by the researcher in the selection of the sample (Aurini et al., 2016; Gorman et al., 2005). However, the researcher was aware of the levels of bias involved in the implementation of convenience sampling and selected participants were those with a strictly professional relationship with the researcher. Furthermore, participants were required to meet the purposive sampling criteria to qualify for an interview. These professional relationships were seen as a positive by the researcher as they provided an existing level of relationship. Rapport-building is seen as important in ensuring participants feel comfortable enough to provide rich and valuable responses to the interviewer (Aurini et al., 2016; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Therefore, it is expected that these relationships enhanced the ability of the researcher to garner data which answers the research question.

3.6.3 Sample size

It is crucial that the sample size is small enough to produce the rich information required in the analysis of qualitative research, whilst also ensuring that a diverse range of members of the sample population is represented (Aurini et al., 2016).

Given that this research study forms part of the completion of a university thesis, it is constrained both by time and length. However, these constraints do not impact appreciably on the research. Dawson (2013) argues that, for researchers to make generalisations about the population, the sample size needs to be as large as possible within the constraints of the research. In light of this, the final sample size of 12 NSOs equates to 13 percent of the total NSOs available to study in New Zealand. It is argued that this number of participants provides abundant information for analysis.

also included the provision of the information sheet and interview questions, signing of the consent form and further explanation of the research and interview process.

A Dictaphone was used to record the interviews and notes were taken. The flow of the interview followed the pre-ordered interview questions and, where required, further questions were asked. Every effort was made during the interview to make notes on issues or topics which required further clarification. As per the recommendations by scholars, summaries of the interviewees' answers were provided to them during the interview process to ensure that understanding was developed and that no additional information was required (Aurini et al., 2016; Dawson, 2013).

3.6.5 Developing a reliable and credible research study

The concept of reliability in qualitative research considers whether the research process has been conducted in a way which ensures accuracy and consistency in the results being produced (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Dawson, 2013; Daymon & Holloway, 2011). This methodology chapter in itself provides an overview of the measures taken to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the study being conducted. In order to ensure a reliable account of the research participants' social world, this study undertakes a number of important steps.

Firstly, the data collection phase (see 3.6.4) involved ensuring that all interviewees were comfortable in the interview environment and that they were provided with adequate opportunities to clarify their responses. Through the university 'participant consent form' all interviewees were given the opportunity to receive a copy of the interview transcript to ensure their satisfaction and the accuracy of their account.

Secondly, the data analysis phase (see 3.7) of developing the research findings placed special care on ensuring that interviews were transcribed accurately and according to the context they were given by the research participant. This process also

involved reading through interviewee transcripts numerous times to ensure a credible and reliable account of the responses. Throughout the thematic analysis process, themes were analysed and re-analysed to ensure that they reflected the responses given by participants, as per the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Lastly, the presentation of the findings (see chapter four) is a critical part in the research process in that it convinces the reader that the results are reliable and valid (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An important part of this process is ensuring that data extracts from research participants provide an understanding of the theme being discussed (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The concept of external reliability is explained by Bryman and Bell (2011) as the ability for the study to be replicated. However, it is argued that social settings are difficult to simulate, making it hard to re-enact the exact environment the first study was conducted in (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, it is believed that more than one account of the social world is possible (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The present study and its scope only seek to provide an account of the New Zealand sport public relations industry. Therefore, the methodology has been designed to take this aim into consideration, making it difficult to replicate in another social setting. However, it would be possible to apply the research study's interview questions, for example 'What are the goals of public relation?', to a different setting and compare and contrast the answers given.

Importantly, Bryman and Bell (2011) also discuss the importance of the researcher ensuring that their study produces results which are credible and trustworthy. If the belief is that it is possible for qualitative research to produce a number of different accounts then it is paramount that the researcher ensures that the results are satisfactory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The research process outlined in this methodology chapter

presents a thorough and rigorous process by which the data will be gathered, analysed and presented. It is the belief that following best practice provide a credible, accurate account of the current state of sport public relations in New Zealand. Additionally, it is argued that, having worked as a sport public relations practitioner in New Zealand, the researcher of this study is able to bring an added understanding of the social world being investigated.

3.7 Data analysis

3.7.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a data analysis method which seeks to identify, analyse and report themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). According to Gibson and Brown (2009), thematic analysis has three aims: “The examination of commonalities, the examination of differences and the examination of relationships.” (p. 128). The most common form of thematic analysis is the analysis of transcribed verbal data such as interviews and speeches, or textual data such as newspapers, and the subsequent identification of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Dawson, 2013; Howitt & Cramer, 2008).

In order to answer the research question, each of the 10 interview questions asked of research participants sought to analyse a specific area of public relations. For example, question two asked about the goals of the public relations function and question five sought to determine the key public relations activities undertaken. As a result, it was decided that thematic analysis would allow for each interview question to be analysed for key themes. Section 3.7 provides an overview of how each interview question was analysed to determine the key themes emerging in each interview question.

3.7.2 Theme criteria and selection

A theme can be defined as “a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organises possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). Commonly, themes are expected to allow for comparisons with similarly coded data in both the data item and data set (Gibson & Brown, 2009). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that, ultimately, a theme is determined by whether it “captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (p. 10).

It is also considered imperative that researchers identify the type of analysis they want to implement (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research seeks to provide rich descriptions of the data set to explain the current state of public relations activity in New Zealand NSOs. Whilst the identification of patterned themes is important, themes that appear sparsely in the data may equally contribute to the achievement of the overall research aim (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this research, the most important criterion for the selection of a theme was the researcher’s belief that it would allow for the achievement of the overall research aim. Therefore, themes were selected due to their recurrence throughout the data item (considered to be each of the 10 interview questions), as well as for their ability to provide contributions to the research aim.

3.7.3 Inductive thematic analysis and latent and semantic themes

Thematic analysis searches and identifies themes in two ways: either inductively from data or deductively from theory or previous research (Boyatzis, 1998). Howitt and Cramer (2008) define this as either the “data led approach or theory led approach” (p. 343). An inductive approach involves the researcher allowing for the themes and codes to develop from the data itself, whereas a deductive approach involves the researcher evaluating data against pre-determined theories and assumptions (Braun & Clarke,

2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2008; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). This research study follows an inductive approach, allowing the themes and codes to be generated through a careful thematic analysis of the data itself.

Once the type of thematic analysis has been decided, the “level at which themes are to be identified” can be determined (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Thematic analysis is used by researchers either to analyse semantic meanings in data, focusing on the words used by the participants, or to analyse the latent meanings that underpin the responses given by participants (Boyatzis, 1998; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Thematic analysis is used to provide descriptions and summaries of the data (in this case the participants’ responses), or it can be used to interpret the data to search for underlying meanings. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that, typically, thematic analysis focuses exclusively on either a semantic or latent level. Given that the research question and aim is to provide an explanation of the current state of public relations activity in New Zealand NSOs, there will be some instances where semantic analysis is required. Examples of this include job tasks of staff. However, this research will predominantly analyse latent meanings in the data with the aim of providing explanations to the underlying meanings impacting on a participant’s responses.

3.7.4 Thematic analysis process

Many scholars and authors argue that there is no single approach to conducting thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2008). Consequently, the method and implementation of thematic analysis carried out by researchers varies greatly (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) have developed a six-step process of thematic analysis, which has since been supported and utilised by other researchers (Howitt & Cramer, 2008; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). This

original responses and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Natural fillers used by participants such as “err” and “umm” were excluded, as well as responses or conversations which were irrelevant to the interview question. The data was read several times to ensure familiarity and the early identification of patterns and themes. Interviews were listened to a second time to ensure that the transcriptions were accurately represented and again for a third time if any changes were made.

Each of the 12 transcripts was systematically coded, line-by-line and question by question, to identify interesting aspects and potential themes which may answer the research question and achieve the research aim. Through a systematic process of working through each data item, new codes were considered against existing codes (by referring back to a code list) to determine whether the pre-existing code successfully captured the meaning of the data (Lyons & Coyle, 2016).

Codes were applied to a right-hand column next to the data and included words, phrases and short sentences. Attention was paid to ensuring that codes maintained the original meanings provided by the participant. After the initial coding phase of each transcript, a second and third review were conducted to allow for further insights to be developed (Lyons & Coyle, 2016).

Each transcribed research question from the 12 interviews contained its own master list of codes to ensure the list was manageable. Appendix D provides an example of a master list of codes for interview question five. Patterns between each of the 10 interview questions across the 12 transcripts were identified through the search for similar words, phrases or interpretations by the researcher. Howitt and Cramer (2008) discuss this phase of the identification of themes as a “coding of codings” (p. 345). In this phase, themes are developed from the analysis of similar codes and the sorting of these codes into broader overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A hierarchy of

importance for themes was determined by whether the theme answered the research question, how often it appeared in data items and across the data set and whether the theme could be organised with other themes to create a single overarching theme.

Potential themes were then reviewed against the coded data to determine whether the data formed a pattern and theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). If the codes did not collectively form a pattern, or fit the theme, they were then re-analysed to determine a new theme, moved to another theme or discarded. Additionally, each theme was reviewed against the original data to ensure it supported the determination of that theme (Howitt & Cramer, 2008). This process ensured that interpretations of the data were well supported, the data itself was well represented and the themes answered the research question and helped to provide a rich description of the data. This review stage was undertaken numerous times to ensure that codes collectively formed patterns and themes and additionally, themes reflected patterns across the entire data set.

Appendix E provides an example of coded data extracts for ‘social and digital management’ which forms part of the ‘key public relations activities’ theme presented in the findings chapter (see 4.7).

3.8 Summary

This methodology chapter has discussed the detailed process involved in gathering data from New Zealand NSOs to answer the research question of this study. It is concluded that a qualitative method, specifically the use of in-depth interviews, is the appropriate method of choice to allow those working in New Zealand NSOs to provide rich descriptions and accounts of the work that they undertake in their roles. Specifically, a qualitative research approach will allow the researcher to delve into the individual’s personal accounts and perspectives on sport public relations and the work they undertake. Subsequently, thematic analysis has been selected as the data analysis

method of choice to provide research findings. Thematic analysis of the interviewees' accounts will focus on providing a detailed overview of the current state of sport public relations in New Zealand and answer the research question. The following chapter four will discuss the research findings based on the process of thematic analysis.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings chapter presents the results from the semi-structured interviews with 12 sport public relations practitioners (see section 3.6) from 12 New Zealand national sport organisations (NSOs). In order to protect the identities of both the NSO and the public relations practitioners involved in this study, research participants are referred to as ‘P’ and then their participant number. For example, Participant 1: P1 and Participant 2: P2.

During the interview process a total of 10 semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B) was asked of participants and a thematic analysis was then conducted. Each interview was transcribed and coded and then all 12 interviews were analysed to identify dominant themes appearing in each research question. The following findings section provides firstly, an overview of research participants and their NSOs and secondly, presents the findings to the 10 research questions, as well as identifying the number of participants who discussed each of the themes in those questions.

Overall the aim of the findings section is to provide the qualitative data to answer this study’s research question: ‘What is the current state of public relations activity in New Zealand national sport organisations?’.

4.2 Overview of research participants

4.2.1 Gender of research participants

Eight of the 12 research participants (67%) identified themselves as female and so represent the majority of sport public relations practitioners in this research, with the remaining four participants identified as male. Figure 1 on page 69 presents the gender of research participants.

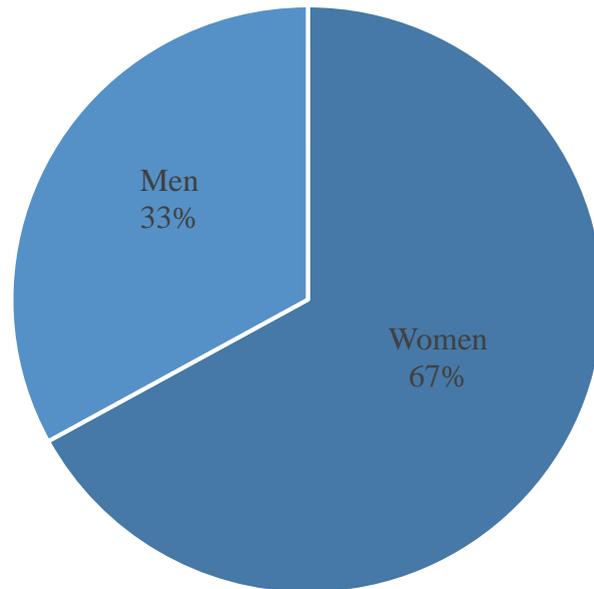


Figure 1. Gender of Research Participants

4.2.2 Age of research participants

The age of participants in this research study ranged between 18 and 54 years.

Respondents' ages conceivably suggest a young demographic of sport public relations practitioners, with the majority under the age of 45 years. Five participants were aged between 25 - 34 years (42%), four were between 35 - 44 years (33%), two between 45 - 54 years (17%) and one was in the age range 18 - 24 years (8%). Figure 2 on page 70 provides an overview of the age of research participants.

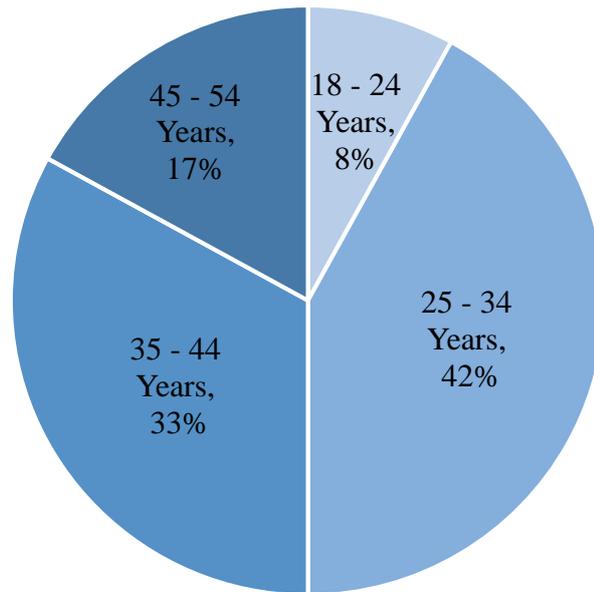


Figure 2. *Age of Research Participants*

4.2.3 Job titles of research participants

Notably, 11 of the 12 participants used the word ‘communication’ in their titles and none included the term ‘public relations’. Five of the 12 participants had job titles focused solely on communication, a further five were also responsible for the marketing function, one participant had responsibility for event management and one participant was employed to manage the entire NSO. The ‘overview of participants’ in Table 3 on page 71 (see 4.2.6) provides the job titles of participants.

4.2.4 Reporting lines and senior manager status of research participants

Reporting lines of participants ranged across five organisation employees: the organisation’s chief executive (5 participants), commercial manager (3 participants), event manager (2 participants), head of operations (1 participant) and one participant operating as the organisation’s sole employee.

Of the 12 participants, five described themselves as “senior managers” of the organisation, four of these being female. Four senior managers reported directly to the chief executive and, although another research participant reported to a senior manager, they also spent considerable time working closely with the chief executive. P11 was the only participant responsible for all organisational activities and was regarded as a senior manager of their NSO.

4.2.5 Overview of research participants’ sport organisations

The NSOs included in this research study cover a variety of different sports, including some represented at the Olympic Games, popular field and aquatic sports and one extreme sport. These 12 NSOs focused on delivering community sport to those wishing to participate, as well as the development and performance of their elite athletes.

Only P4 and P12 worked for organisations which operated in the ‘professional sector’ of sport and their NSOs managed more than one professional team and competition. Whilst all of the NSOs managed events and generated revenue from spectators, P4 and P12 operated large stadiums and engaged in negotiations with media organisations to broadcast the sport. Accordingly, these two NSOs received higher levels of media interest and managed paying audiences and athletes. Whilst the remaining 10 NSOs employed one public relations practitioner, P4 employed four and P12 employed 11.

4.2.6 Overview of research participants

Table 3. *Overview of Research Participants*

Participant	Gender	Age	Job title	Employment status	Reporting line	Senior organisation manager	Employees in NSO	Public relations employees
P1	Male	45-54	Communications Manager	Part Time	CEO	No	3	1
P2	Female	25-34	Marketing & Communications Advisor	Full Time	Commercial Manager / CEO	No	10 - 15	1
P3	Male	35-44	Senior Advisor, Communications	Full Time	CEO	No	120	1
P4	Female	35-44	Marketing & Communications Manager	Full Time	CEO	Yes	20 - 25	4
P5	Female	35-44	Communications Manager	Full Time	Commercial Manager / CEO	No	10 - 15	1
P6	Female	25-34	Marketing & Communications Manager	Full Time	CEO	Yes	10 - 15	1

Table 3 (Continued)

P7	Male	35-44	Communications & Events Manager	Full Time	CEO	Yes	3	1
P8	Female	25-34	Communications & Marketing Officer	Full Time	Events Manager	No	10 - 15	1
P9	Female	25-34	Marketing & Communications Manager	Full Time	Commercial Manager	No	10 - 15	1
P10	Male	18-24	Communications Assistant	Full Time	Events Manager	No	5	1
P11	Female	25-34	General Manager	Part Time	N/A	Yes	1	1
P12	Female	45-54	General Manager of Communications	Full Time	Chief Operating Officer / CEO	Yes	150	11

4.3 Research participants' understanding of public relations

Section 4.3 presents the research participants' understanding of public relations and is based on the findings from question one of the semi-structured interviews, which asked: 'What is your understanding of public relations?'. Responses from many of the participants included more than one key component to their understanding of public relations. The research findings can be divided into five main themes: communicate key organisational messages to publics (8 responses), generate publicity (5 responses), manage and improve the organisation's reputation (4 responses), manage, use and build relationships with publics (3 responses) and lastly, public relations as a strategic communication process (3 responses).

4.3.1 Communicate key organisational messages and information to publics

The understanding that public relations is a function which allows the organisation to communicate key organisational messages to publics was the dominant theme that emerged from question one of the data collection. Eight research participants viewed public relations as involving the communication of key organisational messages to publics. As an example, P6 stated that public relations is "effective communication between an organisation and its stakeholders, or its audiences, to get messages across".

The responses of the eight participants focused on the belief that public relations and the communication of key messages to publics should achieve organisational goals. Participants' responses included: "For us it's just about using our relationships, our work with the media, events and all of our fundraising strategies so we can get our key messages out to the public that we want to" (P5). The belief that public relations is a function that benefits the organisation was further articulated by P10, who felt public relations was "just communicating with your public within your sports organisation, like on behalf of the organisation, in a way which is beneficial to the organisation".

4.3.2 Generate publicity

The understanding that public relations involved generating publicity about the sport organisation was presented by five participants. For four of those participants, public relations involved working with the media to generate publicity about the NSO and its sport. The fifth participant solely focused on publicity in their definition:

I think it's about making other people famous. Other people, or your brand, or your company. It's publicising in every way. And in [sport] we get incredible role models that we can actually get out there and actually push their profiles and put them out there and publicise them to the world. (P4)

4.3.3 Manage and improve the organisation's reputation

Managing and improving the reputation of an organisation was articulated as part of four participants' understanding of public relations. For two of those participants, reputation was the central feature. P3 defined public relations as "a strategic communication process that protects, enhances and builds corporate reputation and that can be through traditional media, social media and creating their own content". P12 provided the second reputation-specific definition of public relations, viewing it as a function that considers how the organisation's reputation is managed internally and externally.

4.3.4 Manage, use and build relationships with publics

Three participants understood public relations as a way to manage, use and build relationships with publics. P2 and P9 viewed public relations as a way to ensure that the NSO maintains its positive relationships with publics, including analysing organisational decisions which affect those relationships. Contrastingly, P5 shared the view that the NSO should use its relationships with publics to its benefit. P5 explained: "It's just about using our relationships, our work with the media, events and all of our fundraising strategies so we can get our key messages out to the public that we want to".

4.3.5 Strategic communication process

The final theme in the findings from question one was the understanding by three participants that public relations is “strategic communication”. P3 viewed it as a “strategic communication process that protects, enhances and builds corporate reputation”. Similarly, P8 explained their understanding as “strategic communication and actions that we take around our communications to help us achieve our goals and maintaining our positive reputation in the public eye and with our members”. P9 expressed the notion that viewing public relations in this way in turn allowed the NSO to respond well during unexpected events and times of change. P9 explained:

It’s a strategic communications process. If we use the word ‘management’ it comes across as all under control. Especially in the sporting environment, it’s massively dynamic and we rely heavily on funding. If we have ‘ten k’ here and suddenly it gets taken it’s like ‘oh how do we deal with that?’ It can be quite a reactive response and so I think when you call it a process and you encourage that type of culture in your team you’ll have a better response to that.

Table 4 below presents the five key themes identified from the research participants’ understanding of public relations, as well as the number of participants who responded to each theme.

Table 4. *Research Participants’ Understanding of Public Relations*

Research participants’ understanding of public relations	Number of participants who responded
Communicate organisational messages to publics	8
Generate publicity	5
Manage and improve the organisation’s reputation	4
Manage, use and build relationships with publics	3
Strategic communication process	3

4.4 Main goals for the use of public relations

Section 4.4 presents the main goals for the public relations function in New Zealand NSOs and was derived from the second semi-structured interview question which asked participants: ‘What do you consider to be your main goals for communications or public relations?’. Goals for public relations in NSOs were varied and most participants provided multiple answers to the interview question. The responses given by the 12 research participants can be divided into seven goals for public relations: inform the NSO’s publics (5 responses), increase sport participation (5 responses), promote NSO events and sport offerings (4 responses), generate publicity (3 responses), manage the organisation’s reputation (2 responses), sponsorship acquisition (2 responses) and build relationships with publics (2 responses).

4.4.1 Provide information to publics

Five research participants discussed the importance of ensuring that their members and those participating in the sport are kept informed. The general feeling was that news and information, such as event times and sporting fixtures and results, are critically important to those people who participate in the NSO’s sport. P7, whose NSO is predominantly focused on delivering events for sport participation, explicitly stated that the main goal of the public relations functions was to “get information out”. Interestingly, P7 acknowledged that providing information to publics has changed from using ‘third parties’ (the media), to using the organisation’s own communications channels. This change does not appear to be unique to P7’s situation, with NSOs now appearing to rely on the use of their own communications channels to communicate with publics. P7 described this development:

We used to have to rely on media and especially at the start our website was pretty static. Now it’s sort of shifting where you’ve got your own vehicle via all our digital platforms and a big enough following across that to get our own content out.

4.4.2 Increase sport participation

Five research participants also stated that increasing the number of those participating in the sport was a main goal of the public relations function. These five participants identified using public relations in a variety of different ways to expand sport participation. For example, P2 and P6 believed that the public relations function must communicate information with sport participants to keep them satisfied, informed and involved with the sport. P2 commented further: “We need to make sure that we’re having something for everyone and communicating with them regularly, updating them with the information that they need”.

Alternatively, P4 discussed using public relations as a way of ‘activating’ and publicising sport participation initiatives, programmes and events. Examples of these included community events that encouraged young children to participate in the sport.

P6 provided an alternative reason for generating positive publicity and believed that the success of the NSO’s elite athletes assisted in the promotion of the sport and subsequent increases in participation numbers.

A further use of public relations to increase sport participation was suggested by P8 and P11 who maintained that the function should be focused on generating a positive image of the NSO as a means of attracting people to the sport. P11 recognised that current stereotypes about the NSO’s sport limit the number of those who participate:

For us it is definitely to show our value as a sport. We have a lot of stereotypes - so to break them down and just to push our value proposition and that we’re an inclusive sport and that’s not true what you heard and things like that. That would be my main goal. (P11)

4.4.3 Promote events

Three research participants responded that a main goal of the public relations function at their NSO involved promoting events and attracting spectators. Many of the

NSOs involved in this research study are responsible for managing events and competitions, either for sport participants or for spectators to attend. Interestingly, P2 who was responsible for both the marketing and communications function at their NSO, commented that owing to financial constraints, the communications function was used instead of the marketing function to promote events. P2 utilised the NSO's communications mediums to promote events, including email newsletters, social media and a website.

4.4.4 Generate positive publicity

Generating publicity was recognised by three participants as being a main goal of the public relations function. P4's NSO managed a professional competition and media coverage of the sport and its teams was important. Consequently, P4 discussed the need for the public relations function to ensure that the NSO had "ongoing media coverage" to generate publicity for the competition and ensure that the NSO's brand was visible to current and potential sponsors.

The remaining two participants also discussed the importance of generating publicity. P6 generated publicity by sharing success stories in regard to the NSO's elite athletes. Similarly, P7 responded that they spend time providing local media with content, images and results from events and competitions, which in turn publicises the sport and the successes of those competing.

4.4.5 Manage the organisation's reputation

Improving the reputation of the organisation was a key goal of the public relations function for two research participants. P3 simply provided the response that everything public relations does should improve the reputation and image of the NSO.

For P12, managing and improving the reputation of the NSO was the single goal of the public relations function. P12 represented the largest NSO in this research study,

with over 100 employees, global sponsors, high-profile athletes and a significant sporting brand. P12 viewed public relations as a “bank account”, using positive stories and building confidence with publics to fall back on in times of crises or dissatisfaction amongst publics. P12’s NSO encounters issues and crises amongst clubs, professional players and teams more regularly than other NSOs in this research study and its global reputation is attractive to sponsors and commercial partners. Therefore, the protection, management and improvement of the reputation of P12’s NSO are critical.

4.4.6 Sponsorship acquisition

Two participants linked increasing awareness of the NSO and its sport to the subsequent acquisition of sponsors and commercial revenue. P5 identified that, by increasing awareness of the sport and its athletes, the NSO hoped to acquire sponsors as a result. P6 shared this objective: “Increasing that brand awareness, so increasing the likelihood of sponsors which, you know, obviously feeds into funding and growth in the sport”.

4.4.7 Build relationships with publics

The final main goal of public relations for two research participants involved building positive relationships with publics. P3’s response simply stated that a key goal for the public relations function was to build relations with publics. However, P9 provided a more in-depth answer: “healthy and thriving relationships because our community are the most important people to us and we want to have positive relationships and we want to continue growing with them”. P9 responded that all public relations activities were designed to maintain and grow positive relationships with the NSO’s publics, including asking the NSO’s community for ideas and feedback and

ensuring the organisation was anticipating opportunities to communicate with publics, rather than reacting.

Table 5 below provides an overview of the seven main goals of NSO sport public relations practitioners and the number of responses for each goal.

Table 5. *Research Participants' Main Goals of Public Relations*

Research participants' main goals of public relations	Number of participants who responded
Inform publics	5
Increase sport participation	5
Promote events	4
Generate positive publicity	3
Manage the organisation's reputation	2
Sponsorship acquisition	2
Build relationships with publics	2

4.5 Benefits of implementing public relations

Section 4.5 discusses the findings from research participants based on the third semi-structured interview question which asked: 'What are the benefits of implementing communication and/or public relations to the organisation?'. Participants' responses included multiple benefits but centred on three main themes: manage the NSO's reputation (7 responses), generate publicity about the NSO (7 responses) and keep publics informed about the NSO (6 responses).

4.5.1 Manage and improve the organisation's reputation

Maintaining and improving the reputation of the NSO was identified by seven research participants as an important benefit of implementing public relations. The benefits of a positive reputation were varied amongst participants, including attracting

sponsors (2 responses), creating a positive perception of the sport (2 responses), maintaining a positive reputation with the NSO's members (1 response), protecting the organisation's reputation from potential issues and crises (1 response) and lastly, P12 alluded to a positive reputation benefitting the organisation in several ways. P12 argued that a positive reputation was fundamental to the organisation and allowed the NSO to grow its sport, protect its reputation publicly, manage change with publics and ensure that the NSO has the trust and confidence of those key publics.

Using public relations to develop an affirmative reputation was a critical component of attracting sponsors to the NSO. P4 stated that having a positive reputation and strong brand directly correlated to the level of corporate interest the NSO received from sponsors. P5 discussed how the organisation had implemented a public relations strategy, including a focus on media relations, to alter the perceptions and reputation of the NSO. As a result, P5 acknowledged that the NSO had successfully secured new sponsors, funders and commercial partners.

I guess some of the benefits for us from a comms and PR perspective for the organisation is probably evident in the number of commercial partners we've got. So it's raised our perception of how credible we are as an organisation. (P5)

Improving the reputation of the NSO and its sport was a key benefit for two participants, who saw a direct correlation between a positive reputation and an increase in sport participation. Both P7 and P11 recognised that their NSO's sport had given rise to some historic perceptions held by publics. They both stated that a key strategy of the public relations function was to generate positive publicity, improve and manage the reputation of the sport. P7 commented:

Joe Bloggs sees that it's positive for the sport then that's one of the main things. And that helps bring people into the sport, making sure people are giving it a go, or see it as safe. See it that there are high profile people all over the country who [participate].

4.5.2 Generate positive publicity

The second key benefit of public relations discussed by seven research participants was the generation of publicity about the NSO and its sport. For one participant, the attraction of generating publicity was significant because it was perceived as a cost-effective way for the NSO to communicate messages. P4 discussed:

I think it's huge in sport because we don't have big budgets. So we can't afford to do great big press ads in the Herald every day. But what we can do is we can provide incredible content and stories and ideas that can actually get our messages out there.

The remaining six research participants viewed publicity as an opportunity to create positive news coverage about the NSO, including events, athlete successes and favourable stories. The underlying premise for the popularity of generating publicity appears to be that the media are an important communication medium for NSOs to reach publics. As an example, P5 identified that they implemented a media relations campaign designed to alter the perceptions that journalists may have of the NSO and, in turn, generate positive media coverage.

So I started off doing a bit of a fact finding mission and went around most of New Zealand media, like heads of sports and just had coffee with them and just said 'Why aren't you writing with us? Can you tell me what the barriers are?' and all that kind of stuff. So there was some really – things we did already know, but there was also, sort of, half a dozen things that were barriers that we needed to address. (P5)

4.5.3 Keep the organisation's publics informed

The final benefit associated with using public relations was the recognition by six research participants that the function is required to keep the NSO's publics informed. This theme follows a similar trend to section 4.4.1 in which participants discuss the importance of ensuring those participating in the sport are kept abreast regarding the NSO. P10, for example, acknowledged that most of their publics are internal, specifically those playing the sport, and therefore, communications are mostly

internal and focused on event and competition information. However, P11 did allude to the idea that people being informed about the sport may lead to an increase in sport participation.

Table 6 below provides an overview of NSO sport public relations practitioners’ adjudged benefits of implementing public relations and the number of responses to each benefit.

Table 6. *NSO Sport Public Relations Practitioners’ Adjudged Benefits of Implementing Public Relations*

Benefits of implementing public relations	Number of participants who responded
Managing the NSO’s reputation	7
Generating publicity	7
Informing publics	6

4.6 Most important publics

Section 4.6 identifies the most important publics as perceived by participants and is based on the fourth semi-structured interview question: ‘Who are your most important publics and why?’. Four publics were recognised as being the most important to NSOs: members of the NSO, specifically, those participating in the sport (10 responses), staff of the NSO (6 responses), NSO sponsors (5 responses) and the media (4 responses).

4.6.1 Members and sport participants

The most important public identified by 10 research participants is the people involved in the NSO’s sport. As an example, P8 stated that their participants, sometimes referred to as ‘members’ are “coaches, officials, volunteers, participants, whether they’re community level or high performance, they’re all our members”.

As outlined in section 1.1, delivering sport for participation is fundamental to New Zealand NSOs. P7 provided the general consensus from research participants that NSOs have many important publics, though none is more important than those participating in the sport: “I guess it’s sort of like an onion and there’s so many different layers but it all comes down to the participants”. Other participants concurred and P9 stated that participants “keep the sport alive and drive participation”.

4.6.2 Sport organisation staff

The second most important public recognised by research participants was the organisation’s staff. Six participants recognised that the NSO’s staff were engaging with publics and delivering sport programmes and services that were integral to the success of the organisation. Therefore, it was imperative that staff were informed and represented the NSO appropriately. P3 recognised the importance of internal staff communicating the correct messages with external publics: “If we’ve got 90 percent of the people engaging directly with the sports environment, we need to make sure that there’s alignment with what the internal audience is saying to our wider audience”. Similarly, P12, who is committed to managing the NSO’s reputation, discussed the importance of staff in the reputation management process:

Staff are our best vehicles for managing our reputations. So understanding who we are, why we do things, how we want to be represented, making sure that they have the information that they need to be able to do their jobs as best as they can.

4.6.3 Sponsors

The NSO’s sponsors were recognised as an important public, with five research participants explaining that they provide much-needed investment and funding to the sport organisation. Common responses by research participants acknowledged sponsors’ provision of vital funds which allow the NSO to operate, including funding the NSO’s

athletes and sport participation programmes. In one instance, a research participant explained that sponsorship was allowing the NSO to pay staff salaries for one year. In another example P6 affirmed: “So obviously sponsors are hugely important. Without sponsors we can’t do what we do because we don’t have the money to do it”.

4.6.4 Media

The final key public identified by research participants was the media, with four recognising them as important to the NSO. The media were endorsed by P3 as having the ability to reach a larger number of publics than its own communications channels and described the media as “the gateway to the public”. Additionally, P6 explained that positive publicity had enabled the NSO to increase awareness of the sport organisation and successfully acquire new sponsors. P7 offered a different perspective, viewing the media as an opportunity to augment the profile of the NSO’s sport and increase participation. Lastly, P12 described the relationship between the media and the organisation as a partnership:

It’s strange, I don’t think about media as much as stakeholder, I think of them as partners because we need them just as much as they need us... But they need our content which is hugely valuable. But we also need them to support our sport and talk about those positive stories as well.

The profile of P12’s sport means that they recognise the symbiotic importance of the relationship between the sport and the media. Media coverage of P12’s NSO is extensive and global, including its professional athletes, teams and competitions. Accordingly, P12 considered an important part of their role to be time spent with various media organisations and ensuring strong relationships exist between the sport and media organisations.

Table 7 below provides an overview of the four most important publics to NSOs and the number of participants who responded.

Table 7. *New Zealand NSOs' Most Important Publics*

New Zealand NSOs' most important publics	Number of participants who responded
NSO's members	10
Staff	6
Sponsors	5
Media	4

4.7 Key public relations activities

Section 4.7 discusses the key tasks undertaken by NSO sport public relations practitioners and presents the findings from question five of the semi-structured interviews which asked research participants: 'Describe and explain the key tasks you undertake in your role'. The responses given by the 12 research participants demonstrate that six key public relations activities are undertaken: social media and digital communication management (12 responses), media relations (12 responses), sponsor relations (7 responses), promotional activities (7 responses), advising senior management (2 responses) and issues management and crisis communication (1 response).

4.7.1 Social & digital media management

The management of social and digital media was an important public relations activity for all 12 of the research participants in this study. Common terminology used by participants in answer to question five revealed their belief that social media and website management form a fundamentally important part of the public relations function. P6 stated:

Making sure that I'm doing the basics, you know, keeping our website up to date, keeping our social media up to date, all that sort of stuff. The basics are really important and when I sit down every morning those are the first things I do.

Generally, the strategy governing participants' use of social and digital media was to promote the NSO, share information and communicate organisational news and content to sport participants, sponsors, fans and the wider New Zealand public. P8 outlined the management of social and digital platforms:

I look after our website and social media and creating content and maintaining and updating all those platforms as well as our weekly e-newsletter which goes out to all our members, as well as whoever else has decided that they would like to receive.

All 12 of the organisations represented in this study utilised a website, newsletter and social media for sharing content. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were the most prominent social media platforms used by research participants to communicate. Through the use of these NSO-owned communications channels, participants described how they are now able to circumvent traditional media and communicate their key messages as frequently as they choose and without restriction. P1 discussed the importance of social media to communicating with publics: "I'm putting stuff on social media just about every day. We have Facebook and Twitter and an Instagram account which gets pretty heavy airtime during tournaments". Additionally, P1 also used social media to promote the NSO's competitions and events.

Crucially, the limited finances of the sport organisations represented in this study play an important role in the uptake of digital communication mediums. For example, P7 stated: "What can we do for no money? And that's where we've pushed as big as possible with social media because you can get it out for free". Additionally, one participant shared the belief that their publics are no longer using traditional media. P9 reflected:

As much as we think we need to be in the newspaper, those guys are on their phone, they don't have time to open up the newspaper. Twitter is their main communication tool, so we've got to change the way that we're working. So yeah, social media is a massive part.

As part of the management of social and digital media, the 12 research participants are responsible for the creation of content which is then communicated via these platforms. Content for website, newsletter and social media frequently resembled the creation of video, photo and news articles and participants spent considerable time and effort "chasing interest stories" (P10) for these channels. P4's sport organisation featured a professional sporting competition with professional athletes and teams. This appeared to provide the impetus for an increased focus on providing publics with sporting content through social and digital media. Consequently, P4, who had three other public relations practitioners reporting to them, utilised one practitioner solely to manage the NSO's social and digital media channels and another to create content for those channels.

4.7.2 Media relations and publicity generation

Media relations and generating publicity were also recognised by all 12 research participants as key public relations activities. Predominantly, media relations and generating publicity occurred when the NSO's high performance athletes were successful or attended significant competitions. P7 explained this process:

If it's World Cup season then my main task is making sure our media are fed all of the stories that they need. That information is easily accessible and that our fans know where to go to find pictures or video, or whatever it is.

Interestingly, the NSOs with the heaviest focus on media relations were P4 and P12, with both sport organisations managing professional players, teams and competitions. These two NSOs also had the largest public relations departments amongst research participants and utilised public relations practitioners solely to

manage the media. Tasks included fielding media enquiries, correcting misreporting by journalists and generating positive publicity. P4 was both the manager of the public relations department and the designated media manager for the organisation. P4 explained this role:

I have everything to do with all media. So whether it's to do with the 21s [age-group team], New Zealand Secondary Schools, every single one of those comes through me. So if you want to talk to the [national team] you talk to me and then I set it up.

Specific media relations tactics were described by two participants as a strategy to build relationships with journalists in order to generate positive coverage. P5 stated that they focused on educating the media and providing content ideas to ensure the NSO and its sport were accurately and positively reported upon. Similarly, P1, who was a part-time public relations employee at their NSO, stated:

I mean the biggest thing we really promote is [sport] as a game of opportunities. Yeah it's just getting that message out as much as I can and building those relationships with the media and trying to create new relationships with the media.

Contrastingly, P11 the sole employee of their NSO, conceded that time constraints restricted the ability proactively to seek publicity opportunities, viewing the kind of media attention the organisation received as an opportunity to raise the profile of the sport and sport organisation.

Most participants discussed working closely with the media, holding regular conversations and building relationships with them. However, P9 was recently employed by the NSO and was critical of the current approach to publicity generation, viewing it as reactive rather than proactive. "It's really business as usual, just pushing out media releases, which I really hate doing, it's such a waste of time. I want to write about someone winning. We could have anticipated this [athletes winning]" (P9). It was further argued by P9 that it is crucial for minority sports, which often do not attract

media attention, to be more proactive and plan their media activities in advance. The participant believed that reactive media relations strategies are less likely to be successful with journalists and result in missed opportunities for the NSO.

The importance of media relations and publicity to the sport organisations represented in this study is further highlighted by three of the 12 organisations using an external contractor as the organisation's media manager. In all three instances the contracted media manager was specifically and solely responsible for generating publicity and newsworthy stories in the media regarding the organisation's elite athletes, events and competitions. Two participants provided clarity regarding this process. Firstly, P8 explained "we have a media manager who does our high-performance communications, or big organisational communications". Secondly, P2 identified the external media manager's job as: "specifically for our reporting on athletes and what they're doing". The consensus from the participants is that the media managers all have strong industry connections and professional relationships with the athletes and, in turn, positively benefit the organisation. P2 stated:

He usually gets a pretty good pick-up with what he's putting out there in the media because he knows how to write for the journalists and how they like to see things. He's a very good source of information for us.

4.7.3 Sponsor relations

Such is the importance of sponsorship to NSOs that seven of the 12 NSOs represented in this study employ a full-time commercial manager who is responsible for sponsorship acquisition and retention. Interestingly, five of these participants identified that an important part of their role involved working closely with the commercial manager. The majority of NSOs' employees work in small teams and it would appear that the public relations practitioner and the commercial employee are required to work together to achieve commercial goals. The relationship between the sport public

relations practitioner and commercial manager in the five NSOs was explained by P6: “So our commercial manager gets everything set up, obviously does all the contracts and things like that and then I become the main contact for that sponsor to come to”.

Specific sponsor relations tasks for the seven research participants involved in sponsor relations were: working with sponsors to activate the sponsorship, newsletter updates, meeting with sponsors’ to generate media coverage, website and social media content that promotes sponsors, and the production of media reports and evaluations for the sponsors. These public relations activities focused on, firstly, keeping the sponsor updated on organisational progress and secondly, attempting to provide the sponsor with brand exposure. P7 described this approach: “You’ve got partners who invest a lot of money into it and if we don’t get the coverage in the papers or splash it around our channels then they don’t see the value in it”.

4.7.4 Promotional activities

As previously outlined in this findings chapter (see 4.4.2), growing sport participation is one of the most important goals for both the NSO and the public relations function of the sport organisation. In total, seven research participants identified the promotion of events and sport participation opportunities as key public relations activities. P2 stated: “Obviously a lot of marketing and comms around events. So promoting events, promoting people to enter events, or people to come and watch events”. In addition to furthering sport participation, for both P4 and P12 promotional activities also included assisting the NSO’s marketing function to promote professional competitions, teams and events. As a sole employee of a minority sport, P11 explained that events were fundamental to providing people with the opportunity to participate, as well as grow the sport, the promotion of which mostly occurred on social media.

Importantly, it appears that this promotion is done through social and digital media and by generating publicity (see 4.7.1 and 4.7.2).

4.7.5 Advising senior management

Two research participants discussed the importance of providing advice to senior management. P4 viewed counselling senior management as the main role for the public relations department: “In certain situations it’s advising around messaging, advising around saying when to say, what to say”. P9 explained that providing advice involved educating staff on communications: “Another one would be counselling. Working with our HP [high performance] programme around helping them understand what to communicate, when to communicate and why”.

4.7.6 Issues management and crisis management

Only P12 discussed issues management and crisis management as key public relations activities for the public relations function at their NSO. The profile of P12’s sport organisation means that controversies and issues risk harming its reputation. P12 explained the proactive approach to managing issues before they became crises and reach the media:

What is really important is that we’re across issues as they happen so that we can manage them as best as possible and start with good process and look after the people involved, as opposed to starting with hosing down the media, which is when we’re finding out about them.

P12 shared that the NSO had a thorough issues management process, which includes anticipating potential issues which may be reported in the media, providing messages and responses to those issues and planning how they will transpire in the media. Given the high profile of this sport, P12 identified crisis management as an important function carried out by the public relations department. P12 explained: “When a crisis is in action that is always the first priority and BAU [business as usual] grinds to a halt”.

Table 8 below presents research participants' responses to the key public relations activities they implement in their NSOs.

Table 8. *Research Participants' Key Public Relations Activities*

NSO sport public relations practitioners' key public relations activities	Number of participants who responded
Social media and digital media management	12
Media relations and generating publicity	12
Promotional activities	7
Sponsor relations	7
Advising senior management	2
Issues and crisis management	1

4.8 Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of public relations

Section 4.8 presents the research participants' methods for evaluating the success of NSO sport public relations and provides responses from the sixth semi-structured interview question: 'How do you and others in your organisation evaluate communication and / or public relations effectiveness?'. Five methods for evaluating success were identified: social media and digital media analytics (10 responses), evaluation of media coverage (6 responses), feedback from publics (6 responses), surveys and market research (5 responses) and change in the behaviour of the NSO's publics (1 response).

4.8.1 Social media and digital media analytics

The use of quantifiable data, known as analytics, that are provided by social media, websites and other digital media, was the main method for evaluating public relations activities for 10 of the 12 research participants. The prevailing message from all participants was a high level of positivity towards utilising social media and websites because they provided in-depth data on the performance of their public relations activities. P1 shared the benefits of social media analytics:

I think our biggest day this year was back in February when the [national team] were playing in the [world championships] and funnily enough it's the photos and videos of the haka which attracts the most attention. I think on the last day over 100,000 people had viewed or forwarded it. They're valuable tools, I mean, we wouldn't get half the feedback and coverage if we didn't have those.

Other research participants also shared the benefits of using social and digital analytics, with P6 recounting that they are constantly monitoring website traffic and social media to determine whether publics were engaging with these communication mediums.

The 10 participants identified the ability to monitor social media and website platforms in real-time as a significant benefit. Real-time monitoring provides the facility to receive immediate feedback on the performance of social media and website content and make any necessary adjustments. For P8, engagement from publics on social media and website platforms represented the predominant measure of success.

4.8.2 Media coverage

Six research participants discussed media coverage as a successful measure of public relations effectiveness, particularly for the NSO's senior management. P2 explained the general approach: "I guess a big part of it is after the events. So every event that we have we do a bit of a comms and marketing report where we see where we've been in the media". Three participants did discuss using formal, paid media monitoring tools/services to assist in gathering media coverage, whilst the remaining three participants undertook a manual process to detect media coverage.

P12 provided an alternative viewpoint and considered that, whilst positive media coverage is a marker of success, so also is working with the media to ensure stories represent the NSO fairly and accurately. Media reporting on P12's NSO is extensive due to the attraction of the sport organisation's profile and its professional athletes and teams. Consequently, working with the media to maintain the NSO's reputation is seen as the public relations team's key responsibility. P12 explicitly stated that such an

approach is not about preventing media coverage, but rather that it should be fair and balanced. P12 explained:

Sometimes it is about getting out into the media and sometimes it's actually preventing it. So a KPI [Key Performance Indicator] for me isn't whether I like what the media writes or how our communications are delivered – it's more is it balanced and fair, and if it is, that's usually a good benchmark of whether we've been effective and done a good job.

4.8.3 Feedback from publics

Receiving verbal feedback from publics was a key evaluative measure of public relations success for six research participants. Two participants remarked that this feedback process involved ongoing conversations with internal publics, including staff and athletes. The remaining four participants identified that they receive feedback at the NSO's events, competitions or other sport participation opportunities. Many of the public relations practitioners attend the NSO's events in a working capacity and receive verbal feedback from publics. P7 stated:

Some of it is just that straight word of mouth and talking to people. It's not a measurement but it's a qualitative thing. It's an internal measurement for yourself. At the comps talking to the parents, talking to the [participants], talking to the industry and getting that feeling.

P9 also discussed being at events and receiving feedback from publics: "But I'm also on the ground at all of these events and I'm talking to a whole bunch of people and I get a really good 360 view of events or of a person and how they're feeling". None of the six research participants identified that feedback from publics is then reported to senior management or documented in a more formal manner.

4.8.4 Surveys and market research

Surveys and market research were conducted by five research participants to determine the success of the NSO's public relations activities. One participant discussed conducting an annual survey of its clubs and participants to measure its relationships

with publics and the success of its communications. Results are used to determine if the NSO has successfully achieved the objectives in its strategic plan of ‘robust relationships and communications’. The remaining participants, however, appeared to be concerned with evaluating other aspects of the NSO’s activities, rather than public relations. For example, two participants commented that research measured the strength of the NSO’s brand with its fans and a further two participants used surveys to measure sport participants’ satisfaction post-events and competitions.

4.8.5 Change in the behaviour of publics

One participant stated that behavioural change of the organisation’s publics was a key way in which they measure public relations. P3 provided an example of a change in the way journalists reported on the NSO. P3 explained that journalists no longer refer to the word ‘funding’ when describing how the NSO distributed funds but now use the more preferred term, ‘investment’. P3 stated that changing the perceptions and behaviour of publics towards the NSO was more important than using social media data to evaluate public relations success. P3 discussed:

I think with metrics you can always use them and I can use the ones that are in social media to the advantage of ‘Yes it’s going well’. But to me a more fundamental shift would be seeing, for instance, a journalist maybe even provide more balance, educating publics and creating advocates [of the NSO].

Table 9 provides an overview of the five ways in which research participants evaluated public relations effectiveness and the number of participants who identified using these methods at their NSO.

Table 9. *Evaluating the Success of Sport Public Relations*

Evaluating the success of NSO sport public relations	Number of participants who responded
Social media and digital media analytics	10
Media coverage	6
Feedback from publics	6
Surveys and market research	5
Changing publics’ behaviour	1

4.9 Challenges implementing public relations

Section 4.9 presents research participants' key challenges to implementing public relations at their NSO. The section is based on responses to question seven of the semi-structured interviews which asked research participants: 'What are some of the key challenges you encounter in delivering communications & public relations activities?'. Three key challenges were discussed by research participants: a lack of financial resources for the public relations department (9 responses), a lack of human resources in the public relations department (8 responses) and the management of the sport organisation's reputation on social and digital media (1 response).

4.9.1 Lack of financial resources

Nine participants recognised that a lack of financial resources was a key challenge affecting public relations. Three participants argued that a public relations budget would allow them to undertake paid advertising on social media platforms. P1, P5 and P8 all believed that additional resources would provide them with the opportunity to advertise NSO events and sport participation opportunities to greater effect. P5 explained this sentiment: "Some of the other challenges, budget is always a challenge. I'd love to have tonnes of money to do paid advertising, to do some cool stuff on social media".

The remaining participants argued that a lack of both financial resources and a dedicated public relations budget resulted in a focus on low-cost communications activities, such as the NSO's website, email newsletter and social media platforms. For example, P7 stated that the challenge to implementing public relations activities is "probably always the cost of it and what we can do for no money".

4.9.2 Lack of human resources

Eight research participants reported a lack of human resources as a significant challenge to implementing public relations at their NSO. This theme appears to be linked to the lack of a public relations budget and funding from the NSO. P6 echoed the sentiments of other research participants:

Without the budget you can't bring extra resource, whether it's writers or photographers or extra TV crew, or extra TV footage. So you have to be realistic with your planning as well. You know I can't be across every single social media channel all the time because there's only one of me and my job is much bigger than that.

Of the 12 sport organisations represented in this study, 10 employed a single public relations practitioner. Many of these practitioners were responsible for key organisational functions, including administration, event management, communications, marketing, sponsorship and media management. As an example, P7, who also managed the event function of the NSO, identified the difficulty in performing key communication tasks whilst also being responsible for the delivery of an event:

"Running the event and then having to disappear and try and write stuff and just getting pulled in a few different directions". P4, who managed a team of three and was responsible for both the marketing and communications functions, also discussed their team's requirement to work with the whole sport organisation.

We've got an events team as well and they run all the national events and we are at every event doing every result and stories and social and every programme, every event, every team we do comms, PR, media, marketing for. (P4)

4.9.3 Management of organisation's reputation on social and digital media

P12 was the sole research participant who recognised potential challenges and issues with managing social and digital communication mediums. It can be argued that the profile of P12's sport organisation, as opposed to the other organisations, is a key reason for this challenge being raised. The NSO receives high levels of public and

media scrutiny and generates significant media coverage, both through traditional media and social and digital media.

Specifically, P12 discussed the speed with which information and news stories spread on digital and social media and the challenge of incorrect reporting by journalists. According to P12, if an article written by a media organisation incorrectly portrays the NSO, it is often too late to withdraw or correct once it has been communicated online. P12 stated:

Most media are geared to digital so the challenge we have is that if it's good to go, they will go, which means they don't always validate and check information. Once it's out there it's difficult for us to correct and remedy.

P12 commented that most news stories are only read once by readers, so making subsequent changes to the article irrelevant alongside the damage incorrect stories may already have done to the organisation's reputation.

Table 10 below presents the key challenges which affect the implementation of public relations in New Zealand NSOs and the number of participants who responded.

Table 10. *Challenges Implementing Public Relations*

Challenges implementing public relations	Number of participants who responded
Financial resources	9
Human resources	8
Managing NSO reputation on social and digital media	1

4.10 Achieving the sport organisation's strategic objectives

Section 4.1 presents the way in which research participants believe public relations can be used to achieve the NSO's strategic objectives. The section answers question eight of the semi-structured interviews which asked: 'How could public relations be used to achieve your organisation's strategic objectives?'. Research participants presented five ways in which public relations could achieve the

organisation's strategic objectives: increase awareness of the NSO and sport and grow participation (5 responses), manage and improve the reputation of the NSO (4 responses), generate positive publicity about the NSO and sport (4 responses), assist in sponsorship acquisition (2 responses) and maintain positive relationships with publics (1 response). Two participants were satisfied that public relations was currently working effectively to achieve organisational objectives.

4.10.1 Increase awareness of the organisation and grow participation

Growing sport participation by increasing the awareness of the NSO and its sport was recognised by five research participants as a way in which public relations could achieve their sport organisation's strategic objectives. To heighten awareness, research participants believed that communicating the successes of its athletes and opportunities to participate in the sport, including events and competitions, was critical. One participant explained this approach to raising awareness:

Just trying to make sure people know what we're doing and that we're not just [sport participation] events. You know, we do [sport participation] programmes, we have the strategic plan, we have an annual report, we have a mid-year report that we introduced this year so it's just getting the information out and to the right people. (P7)

Recognising that the NSO had predominantly focused on generating publicity about the success of its athletes, P2 discussed an alternative approach to raising awareness of the NSO's sport and growing participation:

So I think we need to come back down and getting word out there about [NSO's sport] and getting people excited about [NSO's sport] and figuring out ways to do that at the bottom level, as opposed to just feeding information about what our athletes are doing and what our high performance team is doing.

4.10.2 Improve the reputation of the organisation

Four research participants recognised managing and improving the NSO's reputation as an important use of public relations to assist their NSO in achieving its strategic objectives. P2 suggested that a positive reputation was crucial to ensuring the sport was perceived positively, which in turn would help to grow sport participation.

Poor athlete behaviour at events and competitions was the main driver behind P8's suggestion that public relations can help the NSO to improve its reputation. P8 suggested that they are now profiling athlete successes, using athletes as role models and improving the reputations of the NSO's athletes to showcase the sport and change negative perceptions.

Contrastingly, P9 was critical of the absence of public relations in the organisation's strategic plan and called it a 'support function' of the NSO. P9 argued that the inclusion of public relations in strategic planning was important to help guide some of the decisions which may affect the NSO's reputation and communicate those decisions to publics. Lastly, P12 believed that improving and managing the NSO's reputation was integral to the success of the sport organisation. P12 stated:

I think it helps us give our licence to operate, you know. If your reputation is rubbish and no one trusts you and no one has confidence in what you do, if no one understands what you do, if the perception is negative it is really difficult to operate with freedom.

4.10.3 Generate positive publicity about the organisation and sport

Generating positive publicity for the NSO was identified by four research participants as a way in which public relations could further assist the NSO to achieve its strategic objectives. Generating positive publicity about athletes' successes and the NSO's sport was a way in which both P6 and P11 thought public relations could ensure their sport was more visible and encourage people, especially young children, to participate. P3 provided a positive viewpoint on using the media and believed that it is the gateway to the public, which in turn enforced the importance for the public relations function to continue to grow positive relationships with media organisations.

P10, a part-time employee representing a minority New Zealand sport, acknowledged their frustration at the lack of interest the media had shown towards the NSO and its sport. P10 did explain their efforts to generate publicity: "Even just having [the sport] wanted by the media, like you know, I spent months just sending stuff to the

media. And, you know, things haven't really picked up. And they could be really interesting".

4.10.4 Assist in sponsorship acquisition

Two research participants suggested that public relations could be used in a greater capacity to assist the NSO in acquiring sponsors. Both P6 and P11 acknowledged that sponsorships are integral to assisting the NSO's generation of funds to develop sport participation. The desired approach of both research participants' public relations strategy can be explained by P6's comments: "So ensuring that we have good brand visibility and active engagement means that we are in a better position to work with commercial sponsors and funders".

4.10.5 Maintain positive relationships with publics

The maintenance of relationships was identified by one research participant as being integral to growing the sport and ensuring publics are satisfied. Positive relationships with publics were part of the strategic plan of P2's NSO. P2 suggested: "In order to be successful, in order to get people [playing the sport], in order to get medals, we need to be involving our audiences, we need to be building those relationships and fostering those relationships".

Table 11 below presents research participants' suggestions on how public relations could be used to achieve their NSO's strategic objectives.

Table 11. *Research Participants' Suggestions for Achieving NSOs' Strategic Objectives*

Research participants' suggestions for achieving NSOs' strategic objectives	Number of participants who responded
Increase awareness of organisation and grow sport participation	5
Improve organisation's reputation	4
Generate positive publicity	4
Assist in sponsorship acquisition	2
Maintain positive relationships with publics	1

4.11 Inclusion of public relations in the organisation's strategic plan

Section 4.11 depicts research participants' responses to the inclusion of public relations in their NSO's strategic plan and is based on the ninth semi-structured interview question: 'How is public relations or communication included in the organisation's strategic plan?'. Responses from research participants can be categorised into three key themes: communications is included in the strategic plan (7 responses), no inclusion of public relations in the strategic plan (4 responses) and public relations is included as part of the commercial department in the strategic plan (1 response).

4.11.1 Public relations inclusion in the organisation's strategic plan

Interestingly, it appeared more likely for public relations to form part of the strategic plan of NSOs if research participants held senior manager positions. All five of the research participants who identified as senior managers at their NSO stated that public relations was included in the strategic plan. For example, P12 was a senior manager within their organisation and stated that the inclusion of public relations in the strategic plan meant they were able to track and monitor whether the function was managing and improving the NSO's reputation, then report those results to the chief executive and Board. P12 argued that "what gets measured gets done and taken seriously" and specified that the NSO's senior management and the Board now consider the management of the sport organisation's reputation as critically important. In turn, P12 remarked that this increased focus on reputation management by the public relations department now requires P12 to give greater attention to advising senior management on issues and problems and taking a proactive approach to communicating with publics.

4.11.2 Lack of public relations inclusion in organisation's strategic plan

Public relations was not included in the strategic plans of four research participants' NSOs. In all four cases these participants are not senior managers of the

NSO and three appear to struggle with their public relations reporting lines. One participant was satisfied with working as part of the commercial department and was predominantly focused on generating positive publicity about athletes through the media and social media.

For the remaining three participants who were not senior managers, reporting lines and access to senior management were issues. P3, who did report to the chief executive officer, identified that the management of the NSO lacked a “communications leader” and attributed this to the absence of public relations in the strategic plan. Contrastingly, P8 and P10 both reported to their respective sport organisation’s events manager and stated their dissatisfaction with this situation. P8 and P10 provided similar viewpoints concerning the lack of public relations in the NSO’s strategic plan. For example, P8 voiced their grievances about reporting to the NSO’s event manager, who was a senior manager, and stated that there was no involvement of, or consultation with, the public relations practitioner as part of strategic planning. P8 concluded:

Yeah so here is where I probably struggle, in terms of the organisational strategic plan there’s no consultation with the comms person and you kind of get told like this is what we want to do, there’s minimal reference to the comms side of things. So, they want to achieve all these things but probably haven’t really recognised in the organisational strategic plan how comms comes into play.

P9, who reported to the commercial manager, also recognised that public relations was excluded from the NSO’s strategic plan and acknowledged that the sport organisation is heavily focused on commercial goals. Rather than being seen as an important stand-alone function, P9 stated that public relations is expected to support commercial goals. Consequently, this appears to result in a lack of consideration of public relations in decision-making and the way in which the NSO communicated with publics. The response of P9 explained this further:

It's a support function at the moment and it should help lead some of the decisions that we make. I look at some of these things [strategic goals] and we're not so good at communicating that we want to be a leading NSO, you know. We're not good at that.

Table 12 below presents the breakdown between participants who identified the inclusion of public relations in their NSO's strategic plan and those who identified its absence.

Table 12. *Inclusion of Public Relations in the Organisation's Strategic Plan*

Inclusion of public relations in the organisation's strategic plan	Number of participants who responded
Public relations was included	7
Public relations was not included	4
Included as part of the commercial department	1

4.12 Influence on senior management and strategic decision-making

4.12.1 Research participants with influence

Section 4.12 provides the responses from research participants regarding the influence they have on senior management and NSO strategic decision-making. These responses are based on the tenth semi-structured interview question: 'What influence do you have in your role on senior management and strategic decision-making?'. The responses given by research participants can be arranged under three key themes, research participants who were senior managers at their NSO (5 responses), research participants who were not senior managers but did report to the NSO's chief executive officer (CEO) in some capacity (4 responses) and finally, research participants with no influence (3 responses).

Participants believed that a direct relationship with the NSO's CEO provided them with an understanding of the organisation's strategic direction. For example, P2 concluded: "I also get from him strategic direction, so what the Board would like to see more of, and you know, what he thinks we need to be focusing on". Participants

acknowledged that understanding senior management's strategic direction in turn impacted upon public relations activities. P3 stated:

I think it's good because ultimately if you're trying to implement the vision and strategy you need to understand what that means from the CE [chief executive], then hopefully from a comms perspective your comms will be aligned.

Furthermore, the importance of access to senior management appears to affect research participants' ability to perform public relations tasks. P12, as an example, viewed the access to senior management, the chief executive, Board and chairperson as critical in managing the organisation's reputation. P12 argued:

I think having a seat at the table is critical. There probably wouldn't be a day that goes by where I don't speak to the chief executive. I have a constant dialogue with my chief executive across a range of things.

P12 recognised the importance of access to senior management in order to influence decision-making that may affect reputation, including providing updates to senior management and the Board and advising them on issues which they may previously have viewed as unimportant. Furthermore, P12 explained that their public relations department conducted extensive environmental scanning to determine issues, which was used to inform senior management. P12 identified access to senior management and the chief executive as crucial to implementing the issues management process effectively.

Access to senior management also allowed research participants the opportunity to advise, counsel and impact organisational decision-making. Specifically, participants identified that providing the CEO with key messages for media enquiries and regular updates on the organisation and publics were common public relations tasks. For P9 this process was viewed as "counselling, helping them understand what to communicate, when to communicate and why".

It appears that the research participants are highly knowledgeable regarding their NSO and its key publics. Participants in this research study regularly interact with many of the organisation's publics, including athletes, sponsors, fans and employees. Thus,

participants recognised the important role in providing feedback from key publics to the CEO:

I'm in it and I see it and I see what people are saying about us and I monitor that really, really closely, I like to be able to feed that information back and say 'this is what people are talking about us and this is what they're saying and this is how they're interacting with us or not interacting with us'. (P2)

Research participants also pointed out that the responsibility of counselling senior management required them to be well-versed on organisational information and issues, and to be connected to, and informed about, key publics. One participant said:

The way I always look at it is that if you're actually supporting your CEO effectively then you need to have the direct line. You need to be so connected in with what's going on with the business, what does it look like, where are the issues - it's like you need to be there for crisis management, for issues management, for publicising big deals. If I see things that I think could become media issues I flag them directly to the CEO straight away. (P4).

4.12.2 Research participants without influence

Whilst the majority of research participants reported being able to influence senior decision-making, three research participants did not. One of those participants was satisfied with their reporting line; however, the remaining two research participants reported to the NSO's event managers and were dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction with incorrect reporting lines and lack of access to senior management was communicated by P8:

I kind of first point have got to sell it to him [events manager] and then he's gotta be the one who has to sell it up to the next level and it filters through and by the time you get to whoever needs to sign it off at the top some of the messaging's a bit lost.

Table 13 provides an overview of the benefits and challenges of research participants' influence, or the lack thereof, on senior management and strategic decision-making and the resulting effects on public relations.

Table 13. *Benefits and Challenges Associated with Research Participants' Influence on Senior Management and Strategic Decision-Making*

Challenges of no influence on public relations	Benefits of influence on public relations
Decreased public relations practitioner job satisfaction	Increased public relations practitioner job satisfaction
Lack of understanding by senior management as to the importance of public relations	Understanding of senior management's strategic direction
	Access to senior management assists in performing public relations activities – reputation management
	Supporting senior management with organisational issues and counsel decision-making
	Reporting publics' viewpoints and feedback to senior management

4.13 Summary

Chapter four has presented the findings on the current state of public relations in New Zealand NSOs. Key findings identify that 11 of the 12 NSOs employed a public relations practitioner, but none of those featured public relations in their job titles. These practitioners also appear to be female dominant, including those public relations practitioners identifying as senior managers. Additionally, reporting lines are varied amongst research participants, with just under half (5) reporting directly to the NSO's chief executive. Importantly, access to senior management appears to be a significant driver for the inclusion of public relations in the strategic plans of NSOs.

Practitioner understanding of public relations emphasises the diversity in perspectives of the discipline, but appears to focus on the management of communication and messages with publics that benefit the NSO. Similarly, goals and benefits of public relations are focused on the NSO and emphasise the importance of assisting the sport organisation to increase sport participation through various means.

An emphasis on managing the NSO's reputation, generating publicity and increasing the awareness of the NSO are important factors in growing sport participation. When asked how public relations can improve the strategic objectives of their NSOs, participants again focused on increasing sport participation and acquiring sponsorship through raising awareness of the sport and sport organisation, managing its reputation and generating publicity.

The findings reveal the attention on four publics as being crucial to the NSO: those participating in the sport, the NSO's staff, NSO sponsors and the media. Activities are heavily focused on social and digital media management, media relations and on generating publicity and promotional activities directed at increasing sport participation. Only a small number of participants identified with advising senior management and only one participant implemented an issues management and crisis communication process to protect the NSO's reputation.

The means by which research participants evaluate public relations is limited predominantly to quantitative data provided by social and digital communication mediums and the evaluation of media coverage.

Challenges affecting research participants principally concentrated on a lack of human and financial resource. Most research participants were required to operate on a limited budget and implement cost-effective communications solutions. Only one participant revealed a different challenge to resourcing and discussed the changing nature of managing issues and crises on social and digital media.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The following chapter discusses the meaning and significance of the findings and their contribution to answering the study's research question. Additionally, the chapter considers the impact of this research study on present and future public relations and sport public relations theory, scholarly research and practice.

5.2 Sport public relations practitioners in national sport organisations: An overview

The present study is the first to focus on sport public relations practitioners, aside from the scholarly research conducted on the sports information profession in United States college sport. Analysis of the job titles of the 12 research participants in this study highlights the fact that 'public relations' did not appear in any of their titles. Instead, 11 of the 12 participants had job titles that referenced 'communications', with the remaining participant overseeing the entire NSO. Financial limitations and the small number of employees in New Zealand NSOs also require the public relations practitioner to perform a variety of roles. In addition to the communications/public relations responsibility, some research participant job titles also included event management and marketing. Furthermore, participants stated that they were required to work across other organisational roles, including events, administration work, marketing and commercial activities. Thus, it appears that sport public relations practitioners in New Zealand NSOs are required to be knowledgeable across a variety of business activities and perform more than public relations tasks alone.

In New Zealand the use of 'communications' in practitioner job titles appears to be customary in the public relations industry. PRINZ research identified 'communications' as a common public relations practitioner title amongst its New Zealand membership (PRINZ, 2016; PRINZ, 2017). Therefore, it can be suggested that the use of

'communications' to describe New Zealand NSOs' public relations practitioners is not a surprising finding. Importantly, the finding that relates to the job titles of New Zealand sport public relation practitioners adds to the existing body of knowledge around sport-specific public relations roles, which to date has focused wholly on sports information in United States college sport (e.g. Hardin & McClung, 2002; McCleneghan, 1995; Neupauer, 2001; Ruihley & Fall, 2009; Ruihley et al., 2016). In New Zealand, it appears that sport public relations is performed under the job title of 'sport communication' practitioner.

When comparing the use of the terminology 'sport communication' and 'sport public relations', the job title of 'sport communications' practitioner is seemingly open to criticism from scholars. Section 2.3 of the literature review identified that proponents of sport public relations believe the term 'sport communication' encourages a technique-focused approach to the discipline, rather than a strategic one (Hopwood, 2010; L'Etang, 2013b, 2015). Sport public relations scholars, including Hopwood (2010) and Stoldt et al. (2012), advocate for 'sport public relations' as a discipline. As Dozier (1992) suggests, practitioners' roles subsequently define the activities they implement. Such an argument can also be made for the sports information profession, which has been criticised by scholars as being overly focused on tactical public relations tasks (Jackowski, 2007; Ruihley & Fall, 2009; Ruihley et al., 2016).

The findings of this research study appear to support Dozier's (1992) conclusion. The use of the term 'communications' in NSO sport public relations practitioners' titles appears to dictate practitioner roles and requirements. For example, the research findings identify that NSO sport public relations practitioners are clearly responsible for the management of communication for the organisation, hence their titles. As a result, research participants were focused on tactical and one-way communication tasks, such as publicity generation, content creation, social and digital media management and

website management. Research that explores whether a focus on ‘public relations’ in job titles alters the approach taken by sport public relations practitioners would be valuable. Additionally, research should compare and contrast whether the use of the term ‘communications’ in job titles impacts the roles of practitioners in the wider New Zealand public relations industry, or whether the technique-focused approach solely affects practitioner roles in sport.

5.3 The dominant use of sport public relations: Growing sport participation

The present study is the first known research that analyses how sport public relations is practised in the New Zealand sport industry. Importantly, the focus on New Zealand broadens existing insights into how the sport public relations discipline is practised as a whole. Presently, those insights are dominated by perspectives within the United States and the United Kingdom.

The findings suggest that public relations appears to be important to New Zealand NSOs, with 11 of 12 sport organisations (91%) employing a public relations practitioner. Particularly given the financial constraints on NSOs, as identified in the findings (see 3.9), this is a positive sign for the sport public relations discipline. Whilst New Zealand NSOs are not-for-profit organisations and are at the amateur end of the sporting spectrum, these 12 sport organisations are implementing professional business practices, such as public relations, and employing paid staff to execute them.

Currently, no sport public relations research has analysed a sporting environment such as New Zealand’s. The present research findings explicitly reveal that the NSO’s key role of delivering opportunities to participate in sport directly dictates how public relations is practised. The research findings highlighted numerous commonalities that are directly shaped by the importance of sport participation and sport participants. These included the goals of public relations, the benefits of implementing the function, the way public relations can improve the sport

organisation's strategic objectives and the identification of the NSO's most important publics.

Owing to the importance of sport participation and sport participants, New Zealand NSOs require sport public relations to focus heavily on communicating information to publics. The findings revealed that the research participants' main goals and the benefits of public relations involved firstly, providing information to publics, such as news and information to assist with sport participation, and secondly, using public relations to increase the number of those participating in the sport. It is unsurprising, therefore, that those participating in the sport, as well as the staff delivering sport participation, are identified as being the most important publics to the NSO. Additionally, public relations activities such as media relations and social and digital media management are used predominantly to increase the number of sport participants.

5.3.1 The importance of a positive reputation to growing sport participation

The research findings also establish the importance of maintaining a positive NSO reputation in order to increase sport participation. The significance of the NSO's reputation was recognised throughout the findings, including: how research participants understood public relations (see 4.3), the goals (see 4.3) and benefits (see 4.5) of using public relations and ways in which it could be used to achieve the organisation's strategic objectives (see 4.10). P12 summarised the overall benefit of a positive reputation to NSOs:

I think it helps us give our licence to operate, you know. If your reputation is rubbish and no one trusts you and no one has confidence in what you do, if no one understands what you do, if the perception is negative, it is really difficult to operate with freedom.

P12's statement is supported by literature (see 2.3.6), that discusses a positive reputation as benefitting an organisation in numerous ways, including good relationships with

publics, beneficial media coverage and increased sales (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Gregory, 2010; Mersham et al., 2009; Radic, 2013).

Research participants believed that a positive NSO reputation assists in increasing sport participation. As an example, P2 stated that a positive reputation for the NSO and its sport led to an increased likelihood that sport participants would view the sport more favourably. P11 also believed that public relations could be used to remove historical stereotypes about the NSO's sport. Other research participants believed that improving the NSO's reputation led to a rise in essential sponsorship and commercial revenue used to grow sport participation and fund the development of athletes. As an illustration of this tenet, P5 believed that public relations has improved the credibility and perception of the NSO, thus strengthening the likelihood of the sport organisation acquiring new commercial partnerships.

Reputation management is a specific area of public relations practice and one which does not appear to be widely recognised in New Zealand sport public relations. Only one participant (P12) discussed the use of the discipline as a means of managing the NSO's reputation. This is not the case in New Zealand's wider public relations industry, with PRINZ determining it to be a key area of work for its members (PRINZ, 2017). Previous research by PRINZ in 2017 involving 207 public relations practitioners also concluded that 56 percent of participants believed reputation management to be an area of professional practice that is expected to grow in the future. Thus, in all likelihood, reputation management will continue to increase in importance for New Zealand sport organisations. It is proposed that New Zealand sport public relations practitioners look to PRINZ for further professional development in this area.

It is suggested that NSO sport public relations practitioners need to begin planning and implementing reputation management as a key public relations activity.

Specific reputation management activities include ongoing research to determine how the organisation is viewed by publics and enabling public relations activities to be planned to address those perceptions (Radic, 2013; Smith, 2013; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012). As this chapter will discuss (see 5.6.2), public relations research does not appear to be conducted by the vast majority of research participants. Additionally, the literature review (see 2.3.6.2) identified community relations, as a part of corporate social responsibility, to be the second most common form of public relations implemented. However, research findings did not identify community relations as a public relations activity executed by research participants. With NSO access to athletes and a focus on delivering sport participation to local communities, it is suggested that community relations presents a positive opportunity for NSOs to improve their reputations.

5.4 A focus on one-way communication to benefit the organisation

The wide-ranging goals and benefits of public relations outlined in the findings chapter are also positive for sport public relations in New Zealand. Some of the research participants' goals and benefits were: informing their publics, managing the NSO's reputation, promoting events and sport participation opportunities, increasing sport participation, raising awareness and generating publicity. These findings highlight the diversity and breadth of use for public relations to achieve NSOs' goals.

Importantly for the continuing development of NSO sport public relations practitioners, the findings reveal that research participants are using public relations predominantly to benefit the organisation. Fundamentally, the research participants' understanding of public relations appears to influence the way an organisation views and implements public relations. The research participants' understanding of public relations highlights the wide-ranging views of the discipline which has also been described by scholars as difficult to define (Gordon, 2011). Interpretations of public relations included perceiving it as a function that should communicate key

organisational messages to publics, generate publicity, manage the organisation's reputation, manage relationships and be implemented as a strategic communication process. As P6 suggested, public relations is "effective communication between an organisation and its stakeholders, or its audiences, to get messages across". Only two participants identified using public relations as a way to build relationships with publics and one other identified it as a reputation management tool.

In contrast, according to scholarly best practice, public relations should be used to the mutual benefit of both the organisation and its publics (Broom & Sha, 2013; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Gordon, 2011; Lattimore et al., 2012; L'Etang, 2008; Mersham et al., 2009). Analysis of the findings chapter reveals a lack of consideration as to how public relations can build mutually beneficial relationships with publics. The approach taken by research participants sees them focus on traditional media and social and digital media to communicate with publics in a one-way and top-down approach. The goals of using these mediums focused on generating publicity and informing publics. Furthermore, the use of these one-way communication mediums supports the claim by scholars that sport predominantly follows the 'press agency' and 'public information' models of communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Pedersen et al., 2017).

Although the identified methods of communicating with publics are important to research participants, it is suggested that they also look to implement two-way communication as a means of mutually benefitting the organisation and its publics. Wilcox and Cameron (2012) argue that public relations is not simply the communication of messages; it involves listening and engaging. Engagement with publics provides the opportunity for the organisation to receive feedback and develop organisational solutions to problems which help create long-term relationships of benefit to both the organisation and its publics (Grunig, 2006). However, the research findings did not identify this process as existing.

In addition to emphasising the importance of receiving feedback from publics, section 2.3 of the literature review also highlights the need for public relations practitioners to understand their publics and evaluate how organisational decisions impact on those publics. Whilst research participants were able to categorise their key publics, as per section 3.6 of the findings, only one practitioner used issues management as a means of monitoring and evaluating the NSO's environment and its relationships with publics.

Sport public relations research conducted by Coombs and Osborne (2012) may provide practical solutions that the research participants in this study might find effective. Coombs and Osborne (2012) identified that the British football club, Aston Villa, built relationships using two-way communication during a time of organisational change. Senior executives created and attended events specifically to listen and respond to fans, as well as using online communication mediums to converse with them (Coombs & Osborne, 2012). Specific analysis of two-way communication in the New Zealand sport industry may provide more detailed and tailored solutions that are relevant to NSOs and the environment in which they operate.

The identified difference between research participants' understanding of public relations and that of scholars implies a need for sport public relations practitioners to receive continuing education and development. Although this research study did not determine whether participants had formal public relations training, clearly practitioners believe that public relations should benefit the organisation and do not appear to be informed by public relations and/or sport public relations definitions. It is argued that public relations institutes, such as PRINZ, as well as scholarly research, presently do not have a clear influence on the way in which sport public relations is practised in New Zealand.

5.5 Public relations activities in national sport organisations

5.5.1 Media relations as the dominant public relations activity

The finding that research participants identified media as a crucial public for NSOs and media relations as one of the most common public relations activities was not surprising. However, within the wider New Zealand public relations discipline, media relations does not appear as important. Research conducted of 433 PRINZ members found that only 12.8 percent identified media relations as the most common area of work (PRINZ, 2016). Corporate communications (17.8%) and internal communications (15.2%) were viewed as more important (PRINZ, 2016). Thus, the present research findings support the conclusions around the importance of the media in sport (see 2.3.1).

Current sport public relations literature has highlighted media relations as the most important function carried out by practitioners (Nicholson et al., 2015; Stoldt et al., 2012). Furthermore, much of that existing literature on sport public relations and media relations (see 3.2.1) is applicable to the findings of this research study. Specifically, media relations and publicity are particularly attractive to sport organisations because they are seen as cost-effective (Bruton, 2016; Smith & Stewart, 2015). Given the resource constraints on NSOs, the findings of this research study clearly identify that NSO sport public relations practitioners are more likely to use communication techniques and mediums that require minimal financial investment.

An additional finding which came as no surprise is the use of the media by research participants to acquire sponsors and commercial partners. Hoye et al. (2018) stated that the more media coverage a sport organisation can generate, the greater the likelihood that it will acquire sponsors. This statement appears to be true for research participants of this study, who successfully used social and digital media and traditional media to

generate positive publicity and create awareness of the NSO and its sport. P6 described an important benefit of public relations as: “Increasing the brand awareness. So increasing the likelihood of sponsors which, you know, obviously feeds into funding and growth in the sport”.

Scholars have also identified that sport organisations commonly employ public relations practitioners purely to generate coverage in the media (Nicholson et al., 2015), particularly in United States sport organisations (Favorito, 2007; Nichols, 2002). This situation appears to be no different in New Zealand. The finding that three NSOs employ an external practitioner to carry out media relations duties for the organisation further highlights the important relationship between the media and sport organisations in New Zealand. Research participants explained that these external practitioners brought with them expertise in media management, strong industry connections and positive relationships with athletes. Therefore, it may be suggested that the NSO sport public relations practitioners in this research study did not have the requisite skills to perform this role themselves. Consequently, given that the media is crucial to sport, sport public relations practitioners should consider on-going professional development in the area of media relations, with a view to organisations such as PRINZ providing specialised sport media relations training.

Existing research has also identified that public relations plays an important part in marketing communication and promoting a sport organisation’s competitions, programmes and services (Batchelor & Formetin, 2008). Media relations was important to all 12 NSOs in this research study and was used to generate beneficial publicity about the sport organisation and to promote its events, competitions and athletes. Accordingly, this particular finding supports existing literature which argues that sport is still reliant on the media for publicity and promotion in order to attract interest and audiences (Nicholson & Sherwood, 2016).

5.5.2 The emergence of social and digital media

The research findings revealed that all 12 NSOs identified media relations and social and digital media management as important public relations activities. Although traditional media relations remains crucially important to NSOs, the management of social and digital media appears to be growing rapidly in importance. For the majority of research participants, social and digital media management was an everyday public relations task. As an example, P1 explained they were “putting stuff on social media just about every day” and P6 viewed social and digital media management as “doing the basics”.

For research participants, these ‘basics’ and ‘everyday’ public relations activities involved using social and digital media to generate positive publicity through the creation of content, promote NSO events and competitions and provide information to publics, particularly those participating in the sport. Traditionally it has been the role of the media to communicate information and generate publicity for sport organisations (Nichols, 2002; Shilbury et al., 1998; Stoldt, Dittmore, & Pederson, 2014). That said, the literature review identified (see 2.3.1.5) sport as primarily using the ‘press agency’ and ‘public information’ communication models to do so (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Pedersen et al., 2017). Specifically, the ‘press agency’ model was used to generate positive publicity (Broom & Sha, 2013; Gordon, 2011; Lattimore et al., 2012) and the ‘public information’ model focused on communicating information to publics (Gordon, 2011; Lattimore et al., 2012). However, for this study’s research participants, it now appears that they are also using social and digital media to generate publicity and communicate information. Therefore, it is suggested that publicity and public information remain important to the NSOs in this research study, although research participants do not appear to be relying solely on the media to achieve their goals.

Social media also appears only to be used by research participants for information dissemination, rather than as a two-way communication tool. However, social media has been identified as no longer involving a “top down and one-to-many” approach and should focus on two-way communication (Lattimore et al., 2012, p.14). This medium of communication does appear to provide research participants with a successful tool to develop two-way communication with publics. Using the communication medium to allow publics to provide feedback and engage with the NSO may assist in the development of relationships. It is recommended that as well as communicating content, stories and information, practitioners should use social and digital media platforms to respond and engage in conversation with publics. Given that social and digital media are becoming more prevalent in New Zealand NSOs, specific research into how these organisations use them would be worthwhile.

5.5.2.1 The popularity of social and digital media

The identification in this research study of the popularity and prominence of social and digital media management is in keeping with previous research conducted in other sport settings, which has identified social media management as a key responsibility of college sports information professionals in the United States (Favorito, 2007; Ruibley et al., 2016; Stoldt et al., 2012). Significantly, however, scholars have identified media relations as playing the dominant public relations function in sport public relations (Nicholson, 2015; Stoldt et al., 2012). It might be argued that media relations may no longer be the most prominent public relations activity undertaken in sport. These findings suggest that further scholarly attention to the role that social and digital media now play in sport public relations is required.

As identified in the literature review (see 2.3.2) 88 percent of New Zealanders now use the internet and social media. Furthermore, PRINZ identified through research

of 216 members in 2017 that only 8 percent of practitioners do not use social media. Given these statistics, NSOs are well justified in now seeking to use these mediums to communicate with publics. The ability for social media to reach fans directly (Dittmore, 2013; Nicholson & Sherwood, 2016; Sage, 2010) was a particularly attractive proposition to research participants. Additionally, social media provided research participants with a means to communicate at will with the organisation's publics, particularly sport participants. As a result, this negated the reliance on engaging the media as often to reach publics.

Research participants dedicated significant time to creating content which was consumed by publics through these communication channels. Again, an attraction for the use of social and digital media was the ability for research participants to create content without the need for the media to promote and communicate it for them. This finding supports existing public relations research on social media, which has also identified the ability to communicate with publics without the use of the media as a key positive for practitioners (Kent, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012). Clearly the creation of in-house content, such as news articles, videos and social media, newsletter and website content provides an invaluable tool to research participants in this study and informs the belief that they can achieve organisational goals.

The present research findings suggest that a change in roles has occurred between sport organisations and the media. Traditionally sport organisations utilised the media to communicate their messages to publics; however the NSOs involved in this research study appear now to be using their own channels to do this. This is not a new concept in sport communication, as Pedersen et al. (2017) explain:

In the sport industry this collaboration with publics has traditionally occurred through the media, but as the industry has grown, so too has the need for more sophisticated methods of communicating with the public and shaping public perception in a manner that is favourable to the franchise. (p. 255)

However, a new finding emerges here, namely that New Zealand NSOs appear to be following suit. Social and digital media have presented these sport organisations with a tool to communicate with publics in a way that is beneficial to them. Thus, it appears that NSOs no longer have need of media organisations and journalists as much as they did formerly. This finding suggests that sport public relations practitioners have become the primary gatekeepers of information for their sport organisation. Wider analysis of the New Zealand sport industry would provide insight into how other sport organisations manage social and digital media and the flow of information.

5.6 The strategic use of sport public relations

5.6.1 Public relations as part of senior management

The research findings identified that public relations was increasingly likely to play a more strategic role if the practitioner was part of the NSO's senior management. As senior managers, the five senior sport public relations practitioners in this research study became advocates for public relations, with all five revealing that public relations featured in the NSO's strategic plan. As examples, P4 highlighted the ability to include communications "into every part of the business" and P7 concluded that communications is included "over everything" in the strategic plan. In all four instances where the public relations practitioner was not part of senior management or could not access senior management, public relations was omitted from the NSO's strategic plan. Importantly, incorrect reporting lines were a significant issue for two of those participants who revealed that, as a result, public relations had no influence on the NSO.

This research finding supports the argument put forward by Dozier et al. (1995) that public relations must be part of senior management if the organisation is to benefit from public relations as a strategic management perspective. It is argued that such access provided the five research participants with greater opportunity to implement

public relations successfully and strategically. For this research study, the findings reveal that access to senior management enabled research participants to ensure public relations was included in the NSO's strategic plan. Additionally, access allowed the public relations function to receive strategic direction from senior management and allowed research participants to counsel senior management and affect organisational change.

New Zealand research conducted by Sterne (2008), that analyses business perceptions of public relations in 28 of the country's top 200 companies, may provide some valuable recommendations to NSOs. Of particular importance given the emphasis on tactical communications' solutions used by practitioners in this study, Sterne (2008) argues that public relations practitioners must do more than this. Specifically, practitioners cannot rely on simply implementing their role as creators of media information, events and posters if they are to be taken seriously by senior management (Sterne, 2008). Recommendations for public relations practitioners include becoming advocates for their roles and show strong business acumen and benefits to the business and senior staff (Sterne, 2008). Furthermore, Sterne (2008) argues for public relations to demonstrate its strategic value to organisations, including the ability to solve issues and problems and unique ways to communicate with stakeholders. However, as will be discussed in the following two sections (see 5.6.2 and 5.6.7), sport public relations practitioners in this study for the most part do not identify issues and problems, nor are they demonstrating the effectiveness of public relations.

5.6.2 Using research to inform public relations practice

Whilst research participants appeared to focus on implementing communications solutions, all 12 revealed that publics were identified and goals and objectives were set for public relations (see 4.4). This is positive for sport public relations practice, with

scholars arguing that for public relations to be effective and strategic, publics, goals and objectives must be determined by the public relations programme as part of the strategic planning process (Broom & Sha, 2013; Gregory, 2010; Lattimore et al., 2012; Smith, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2013). This finding provides an important foundation for research participants and allows them to provide evidence to the NSO's senior management that public relations is linked to achieving organisational objectives.

Although public relations' goals and objectives appear to be set by research participants in this study, they do not appear to be part of a strategic approach to public relations. The goals and objectives for public relations are based on the issues and opportunities public relations seeks to solve and achieve as identified by the public relations research process (Broom & Sha, 2013; Gregory, 2010). Unfortunately, public relations research does not appear to be undertaken by research participants, with only one participant using issues management and environmental scanning as a means of detecting potential risks to the NSO's reputation. The undertaking and use of research in the creation of communications solutions would allow an NSO proactively to identify problems which may affect its relationships with publics and address these, to the benefit of both parties. Furthermore, by recognising issues, practitioners are then able to provide tangible evidence to senior management of the way public relations can benefit the NSO.

5.6.3 Evaluating public relations' effectiveness

Another key step in the strategic planning process which the research findings suggest to be limited is the evaluation of public relations in order to determine its effectiveness. For sport public relations in New Zealand NSOs to be effective in strategic management, it must heed the advice of scholars such as Grunig (2006), who

state that for public relations to have a place in strategic management, practitioners must measure its effectiveness.

The research findings provide insight into how NSO sport public relations practitioners evaluate public relations' effectiveness in New Zealand. Predominantly, evaluative measures utilised by research practitioners focused on analytical data provided by social and digital media platforms and media placement. Previous sport public relations research has also found that media placement and publicity generation in the media are the most common forms of evaluative measure by practitioners (Stoldt et al., 2009).

The use of public relations outputs, such as media coverage, to evaluate success is not only isolated to sport public relations, with scholars concluding that it is the most common method of evaluation in public relations (Gregory, 2010; Lattimore et al., 2012; Watson & Noble, 2014). Although the evaluative measures identified in the research findings provide valuable information to research participants regarding the interaction publics are having with the NSO's social and digital media channels, the use of them, including website 'visits', Facebook 'shares' and Instagram 'likes', would draw criticism from scholars because they are deemed to be ineffective ways of measuring the success of public relations.

In general, for public relations to evaluate its effectiveness, it must focus on 'outcome measurements', rather than simply communication 'outputs' (Gregory, 2010; International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, 2015). Outcome measurements include changes to attitudes, opinions and behavioural changes of publics (Gregory, 2010; Gordon, 2011; Lattimore et al., 2012; Macnamara, 1992, 2015). The Barcelona Principles, as developed by the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), recommend that outputs

include measurements such as public policy, awareness, attitude, behaviour, donations and corporate reputation (International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, 2015).

Particularly relevant given the focus on social media as an evaluative tool in this research study, the 'Barcelona Principles' offer practical advice for evaluating public relations effectively. 'Principle 6' of the Barcelona Principles states that public relations should be using social media to evaluate effectiveness (International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, 2015). However, of importance for this research study, social media evaluation should focus on engagements with publics, including conversations and web and search analytics, as well as sales data and survey data (International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, 2015). Ultimately, for sport public relations in New Zealand NSOs to be effective in strategic management, practitioners must measure its effectiveness (Grunig, 2006).

5.7 Public relations technician versus manager role in national sport organisations

5.7.1 Dominance of the public relations technician role

In a positive step for scholarly knowledge in the field of sport public relations, the present research study's findings on practitioner roles widens the understanding of the roles of practitioners working in the sport industry. Until now this understanding has only determined the current status of the sports information profession and its practitioners. Additionally, the present research findings provide insight of a context outside the United States and the United Kingdom. The research findings also lay the foundation for future research dedicated to analysing the roles of sport public relations practitioners in New Zealand.

Analysis of the research findings suggests that 11 of the 12 New Zealand NSO sport public relations practitioners who participated in this study identify with the public

relations role known as ‘technician’. Technicians are responsible for tactical tasks, such as managing social media and websites and creating content (Broom & Sha, 2013; Lattimore et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2013). Only P12 could be clearly identified in the research findings as occupying the public relations manager role, which is seen by scholars as requiring public relations practitioners to perform issues management and environmental scanning with a view to affecting organisational decision-making positively (Dozier & Broom, 2006; Gregory, 2010; Mersham et al., 2009).

The research findings conclude that the job tasks of NSO sport public relations practitioners focus heavily on those functions conducted by a public relations technician, including content creation for social media, email newsletters and websites and generating publicity through media releases. The findings also draw parallels with sports information in United States college sport, which has been described as focusing on the technician role (Jackowski, 2007; Ruihley & Fall, 2009; Ruihley et al., 2016; Whiteside & Hardin, 2011), including those practitioners in senior organisational management roles (Stoldt, 2000).

Section 2.4.1 of the literature review suggests that research on the sports information profession has concluded that public relations practitioner roles have begun to advance from technicians to ‘managers’ (Ruihley & Fall, 2009). Ruihley and Fall (2009) recognise that the college sport environment in the United States has forced public relations practitioners to become problem-solving facilitators and manage organisational problems and issues. High fan expectations and the coverage of sport by the media and internet have compelled public relations practitioners to manage issues quickly (Ruihley & Fall, 2009).

However, such an environment as that of college sport in North America does not appear to be the case in New Zealand sport. Only one practitioner identified risks to

NSO reputation from issues and crises, stating that they viewed issues management and crisis communication as important public relations tasks. P12's organisation manages global sponsors and professional teams and athletes and receives high levels of fan engagement and media scrutiny. Consequently, P12 stated that the public relations function was required to manage issues to protect the NSO's reputation and occasionally implement crisis communication, with access to senior management a decisive factor in the success of public relations. Clearly, the public relations manager role is crucial for P12, who is required to access senior management and affect the organisation's decision-making. It is unsurprising therefore that P12 stated:

I think having a seat at the table is critical. There probably wouldn't be a day that goes by where I don't speak to the chief executive. I have a constant dialogue with my chief executive across a range of things.

Whilst one other NSO was identified as having a professional competition, with increased media and fan attention, the remaining 10 NSOs do not appear to operate in an environment that involves high levels of media and fan scrutiny. These 10 sport organisations are at the amateur end of the sport industry spectrum, where sport participation opportunities are predominantly the key service provided. Therefore, it is argued that the professional end of the sporting spectrum is more likely to require sport public relations practitioners to perform the managerial role and it is unsurprising that, largely, New Zealand NSO sport public relations practitioners are not operating in this role.

5.7.1 Opportunities to enact the public relations manager role

Although the research findings identify that practitioners were performing the role of public relations technician, NSOs could benefit if practitioners were carrying out the public relations manager role. The majority of New Zealand NSOs in this research study are smaller organisations, with only two NSOs employing more than 100 employees and the remaining 10 all employing under 25. Consequently, it appears that

NSO's hierarchies are reasonably 'flat', leading to more opportunities for public relations practitioners to report to, or access, senior management. For example, five participants reported directly to the NSO's chief executive and four others reported to senior managers, including three to the organisation's commercial manager and one to the head of operations. One participant was the sole employee of the organisation and reported directly to the NSO's Board. The remaining two participants reported to the NSO's event manager and sections 3.10 and 3.11 of the findings chapter revealed their dissatisfaction at so doing. Therefore, generally it appears that research participants have access to senior management, a positive sign for New Zealand sport public relations practitioners, with seemingly greater opportunities in New Zealand NSOs to access, and thereby influence, senior management.

While the research findings identify that the majority of research participants have access to senior management, it might be suggested that those participants are not benefitting from access as much as they should. Notably, only one participant (see 3.12) identified a formal process of environmental scanning and issues management, with a view to informing senior management. That same participant was the only one to implement issues management as a public relations activity. The findings did reveal (see 3.12) that two participants provided feedback from their publics; however, it was also revealed (see 3.8.3) that publics' feedback was not formally documented and reported to senior management. It is suggested that research participants should formalise and document the feedback they receive from publics and deliver this to senior management.

Public relations would be of greater benefit to these sport organisations if practitioners began to implement issues management and environmental scanning, public relations activities viewed by scholars as being critically important (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Lattimore et al., 2012; Mersham et al., 2009; Seeger et al., 2001). It is

expected that the monitoring of the organisation's environment is then reported to senior management to affect decision-making (Mersham et al., 2009). By doing so, public relations practitioners are able to convey the opinions and views of the organisation's publics to senior management, with a view to developing mutually beneficial relationships (Smith, 2017). Determining the issues of publics, with a view to solving them, is critically important to organisations in the development of relationships with publics "because issues serve as the connection between an organisation and its publics" (Stoldt et al., 2012). Ongoing education may be required to ensure that those working in sport public relations roles in NSOs are equipped with the skills to perform these important public relations activities.

5.8 Appearance of a female-dominated New Zealand sport public relations industry

The findings of this research suggest sport public relations practitioners in New Zealand NSOs are predominantly female, with eight of the 12 (67 percent) participants identifying as female. This finding reflects the New Zealand public relations industry as a whole and supports the findings of PRINZ which suggest that over 70 percent of the country's practitioners are female (PRINZ, 2017). Furthermore, the findings support other scholars' arguments which have acknowledged the public relations industry as being approximately 70 percent female (Broom, 2009; Choi & Hon, 2002; Grunig & Toth, 2006). However, it is important to note that the present study did not seek to garner information on gender issues and experiences from participants. Such research would provide valuable insight into the experiences of female sport public relations practitioners in New Zealand.

In another positive step for academic research that explores sport public relations, this study's findings provide the first known analysis of practitioner gender balance

outside the sports information profession in the United States. Based on section 2.4.2 of the literature review, which highlights the sports information profession in United States as being male-dominated, it may be argued that the findings presented in this research study are unexpected. For example, current studies suggest the sports information profession in the U.S is over 80 percent male (Hardin & McClung, 2002; McCleneghan, 1995; Neupauer, 1998). Given the size of the United States sport industry, a larger sample size of practitioners working in New Zealand would allow for greater comparison between the two research settings. However, the present research study does provide a much-needed and alternative perspective to existing research on the United States sports information profession.

The present research findings also found that the majority of participants who were identified as ‘senior managers’ in their organisations were female. Five of the 12 research participants recognised themselves as senior managers in their organisations, four of whom were female. This initial finding is a positive sign for the public relations profession and suggests that females are not struggling to work in the sport industry. However, a larger sample size of research participants would allow for this finding to be explored further.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the research findings which were identified through the thematic data analysis process from the semi-structured interviews of 12 sport public relations practitioners. The chapter presents the different landscape of the New Zealand sport industry and the impact this has on the practice of public relations. The use of public relations to benefit the sport organisations in this research study is analysed and the argument is made that the discipline must be implemented in a way which also benefits the sport organisation’s publics. The chapter then discusses the

public relations activities implemented by practitioners, paying specific attention to the dominant use of media relations and social and digital media management.

Sport public relations as a strategic organisational tool is then analysed and arguments put forward as to how NSOs can benefit from the discipline being used in a more strategic manner. Lastly, the chapter discusses the sport public relations practitioners within New Zealand NSOs, specifically their job titles as ‘sport communication’ practitioners, the use of the public relations technician role, capitalising on access to senior management and the appearance of a female-dominated New Zealand sport public relations industry. The following chapter will provide a summary of the research study and present the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Overview of research findings

The findings of this study contribute the first known scholarly research to analyse public relations in the New Zealand sport industry. The study also provides invaluable understanding of the means by which sport public relations is practised by sport organisations outside the United States and the United Kingdom research contexts.

Ultimately, the study finds public relations to be a significant part of NSO's business activities, with 11 of the 12 sport organisations employing a paid practitioner. The wide-ranging goals and benefits of public relations that were identified by research participants is a positive finding for the discipline and shows that it is being used in a myriad of ways to achieve organisational objectives. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of using the public relations function to grow the NSO's sport and increase the number of people who participate. To do so, public relations focused on information distribution and one-way communication, primarily to sport participants. Additionally, research participants considered the reputation of both the NSO and its sport as integral to growing sport participation. Reputation management appears an important public relations activity, which at present is not widely practised.

This research study supports the existing sport public relations literature and found media relations to be the dominant public relations function used by practitioners. However, social and digital media management was a crucial public relations activity for practitioners, reducing the need for traditional forms of media. The study identified that many NSOs are not using social and digital media to garner positive publicity for the sport organisations and communicate information to publics. It appears that social and digital media are emerging as the dominant means with which practitioners now carry out public relations.

An understanding of public relations, specifically that it builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its publics, does not appear to be held by research participants. Current practitioner understanding holds the view that public relations is used to benefit and achieve the NSO's goals. Consequently, public relations is not used mutually to benefit both the organisation and its publics. It is argued that scholarly research and public relations institutes, such as PRINZ, are presently not influencing the practice of public relations in sport organisations.

A strong case is made in the discussion chapter for the implementation of public relations in a strategic way, one which does not rely so heavily on one-way communication through traditional and social and digital media. Limited sport public relations research has sought to analyse how sport organisations practise public relations in a strategic manner. Practitioners were able to identify goals and objectives for public relations, but these were not formed by research and did not undergo a rigorous form of evaluation to determine their effectiveness.

Evaluating the effectiveness of public relations is not only a vital and fundamental process, but it may additionally assist NSO practitioners to show the value and success of the discipline to senior management. Presently, outputs such as media coverage and analytical data from social and digital media are used to justify effectiveness. Identifying public relations outcomes, including behavioural, attitude and public policy change, are ways in which public relations can demonstrate its effectiveness.

The identification of sport public relations practitioners as holding the title 'communications' rather than 'public relations' presented as an unexpected finding. Additionally, it also furthered scholarly knowledge on sport public relations practitioners, which until now has focused solely on the sports information profession. It is suggested that New Zealand practitioners in NSOs operate as 'sport

communication' practitioners who implement important communication techniques for their NSO. It is argued that a full understanding of public relations and a change in roles to be more focused on the discipline may change the way in which it is practised.

Prior to the present research study, sport public relations research into roles outside New Zealand has focused only on sports information. This analysis has found the practitioners to be predominantly operating as public relations technicians. In similar vein, this study has identified New Zealand NSO practitioners also are operating as technicians, largely carrying out tactical tasks such as publicity and content creation. It appears that for most of the NSOs in this research study, the environment that they operate in, which largely does not have high levels of media and fan scrutiny, means that they are predominantly only required to perform the technician role.

However, the research study does identify opportunities for research participants to perform the role of public relations manager. The financial constraints on NSOs limit the number of employees the sport organisations can afford to employ. Therefore, this signifies that NSO's hierarchies and structures are reasonably flat, allowing greater opportunities for their sport public relations practitioners to report directly to the chief executive or senior management. The research study identified this aspect as a significant positive for practitioners, with more opportunities to counsel and influence organisational decision-making. However, it also identified those participants did not capitalise on access as much as they should. The research study argued that, in addition to performing tactical tasks, practitioners must show additional value to senior management, including identifying organisational issues via the implementation of issues management and environmental scanning.

The sport public relations practitioners in this study indicate a female-dominated occupation, providing a direct contrast to the male-dominated sports information

profession in the United States. The research also identified the practitioners in this research study who were classed as ‘senior managers’ as female. Thus, initial insights suggest that NSOs and the not-for-profit sport industry in New Zealand are not male-dominated.

6.2 Limitations and recommendations

A limitation of this study is the time constraints placed upon it by the requirements of the thesis component of the Master of Communication studies degree. Whilst the 12 sport organisations represented in this research study account for 13 percent of all New Zealand NSOs, a larger sample size would allow for more far-reaching conclusions to be drawn as to how the discipline is practised.

Nonetheless this exploratory study does present a broad understanding of the way in which sport public relations is practised in New Zealand NSOs and provides an important foundation for research hereafter. It is recommended that future research be conducted in greater detail across all the topics covered in this research study which would allow for an even richer insight into how public relations is practised.

Specific areas of importance appear to be the manner in which public relations is practised in a strategic way in New Zealand NSOs. Whilst this study’s interview questions asked practitioners about their goals, communications solutions and evaluative measures, it did not ask a question about public relations research. Subsequent scholarly analysis would benefit from applying a specific focus on strategic public relations, given that it is so crucial to the way in which the discipline is practised.

Future research is recommended to determine whether sport public relations is female-dominated across the wider New Zealand sport industry, as well as within NSOs. A larger sample size of New Zealand practitioners would allow for greater

examination across the sport industry in the country, as well as making comparisons with the much larger industries in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The literature review identified a lack of research in the area of social media in sport and this study found it to be an increasingly important way in which practitioners are now carrying out public relations. The rise in importance of social and digital media appears to be an area which requires scholarly attention. Additionally, it would be beneficial for future research to apply a specific focus on the use of social and digital media in NSOs.

This research study has also identified a disparity between public relations scholarly best practice and that which is implemented in the NSO sport industry. It is recommended that scholarly research and public relations institutes like PRINZ begin to influence the way in which the discipline is practised. Of particular help would be the provision of ongoing development and training to practitioners, especially in the areas of strategic public relations, reputation management, media relations, social and digital media and the construction of mutually beneficial relationships.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval for Interviews

1 November 2016

Deepti Bhargava
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Deepti

Re Ethics Application: **16/343 State of the discipline: Analysing public relations activity in New Zealand National Sport Organisations**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 31 October 2019.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEK:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 31 October 2019;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 31 October 2019 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEK is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEK approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEK grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,



Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: pauldavid.stevens@icloud.com

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What is your understanding of public relations?
2. What do you consider to be your main goals for communications or public relations?
3. What are the benefits of implementing communication and public relations to the organisation?
4. Who are your most important publics and why?
5. Describe and explain the key tasks you undertake in your role?
6. How do you and others in your organisation evaluate communication and/or public relations effectiveness?
7. What are some of the key challenges you encounter in delivering communication and public relations activities?
8. How could public relations be used to achieve your organisation's strategic objectives?
9. How is public relations or communication included in the organisation's strategic plan?
10. What influence do you have in your role on senior management and strategic decision-making?

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: 30/08/2016

Project Working Title: State of the discipline: Analysing public relations activity in New Zealand National Sport Organisations

An Invitation

I am currently in my second year of part-time study progressing towards a Master of Communication Studies at AUT University. Part of the requirement of the degree is to complete a thesis, which has a research component to it. Your participation in the research would be much appreciated and your knowledge and expertise in the sport industry will add value to the research project and its findings.

What is the purpose of this research?

It is of the belief to the researcher that public relations can significantly assist New Zealand sport organisations to achieve their strategic objectives. The research hopes to uncover how public relations and communications is currently being utilised in New Zealand national sport organisations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

The research study requires sport professionals who are responsible for communication and/or public relations activity in a New Zealand national sport organisation. You have been invited to participate either because you are a professional acquaintance or because your contact details were found on your organisation's website.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

Before the interview can commence you will need to sign a consent form which provides written evidence that you agree to take part in this research.

What will happen in this research?

Your interview should last no more than 45 minutes and I will ask you a series of questions. Once the interview is over your involvement in the research project is complete. Once the interview has been conducted I will transcribe the interview and the findings will be discussed as part of the thesis.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Providing open and honest answers, semi-structured interviews & probing, confidentiality & interview location, access to interview data and information.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

- You and the organisation you work for will not be identified in the findings. In the research findings interviewees will be referred to as Participant X, with “X” being the order of interviews conducted
- If you feel uncomfortable answering a question you may request that the I move on to another question or end the interview at any time
- All interviews are confidential and will be undertaken at a location which is convenient to you
- It is an AUT University requirement that information identifying you and your responses will be kept separately on an external storage device. Any data or information stored as a hard copy will be destroyed using the AUT University facilities and data stored electronically will be deleted. The only people who have access to data are the Project Supervisor, Deepti Bhargava and myself as the researcher.

What are the benefits?

By participating in this research you are aiding me in completing my thesis. I also aim to provide an informed thesis which benefits both the professional and academic fields of sport communication and public relations.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no costs associated to participating in this research.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have 5 working days from the date the information sheet was sent to you to consider this application.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes. All participants in the research are entitled to receive a copy of the transcribed interview and a summary of the research findings. Additionally, should you choose, it would be a pleasure to provide you with the final thesis.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Deepti Bhargava, *deepti.bhargava@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 6782

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O’Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 09 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Paul Stevens, *pauldavid.stevens@icloud.com*, 021 168 4806

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Deepti Bhargava, *deepti.bhargava@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 6782

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 01/11/16, AUTEK Reference number 16/343.

Appendix D: Example of Master List of Codes for Interview Question Five

Code Master List: Interview Question 5											
P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Media relations	Social media management	Advisor to CEO & management	Manager role	Media relations	Social media management	Events management	Website management	Media relations	Social media management	Responsible for all org. activities	Internal communications to staff
Informing key publics	Website management	Media advising - messages, advice	3 subordinates	Social and digital media and content creation	Events promotion	Events promotion	Social media management	More proactiveness required and a focus on campaigns	E-Newsletter	Social media management	Media relations
Website management	E-Newsletters	Media relations	Leveraging and managing sponsors	Media releases	Sponsor relations	Communication events	Content creation	Reactive comms - media releases	Content creation	Website management	Content creation
Social media management	Content creation	Events promotion	Social and digital media management		Work with the commercial department	Change from reliance on traditional media to social media	E-Newsletter	Disconnect with other staff	Photography	Media relations (passive)	Social and digital media management
E-Newsletter	Events promotion	Events	Media relations		Media relations	Website management	Focus on information and informing	Utilising social media more than traditional media	No money to promote on social media	E-Newsletter	Reactive media
Advertising through social media	Events promotion and publicity	Proactive approach to media relations			Informing	Social media management	Media manager	Social media management		Content creation	Crisis communications
Communications about sponsors and partners	Information and informing	Social media management				E-Newsletter	Events communication	Website management		Informing	Issues management
								Events promotion			Advising senior management

Appendix E: Example of Coded Data Extracts for ‘Social and Digital Media Management’

Social and Digital Media Management											
P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
<p>But also keeping our stakeholders up to date with what’s going on. So just this year I’ve started producing a newsletter which comes out every couple of months.</p> <p>I’m putting stuff on social media just about every day. We have Facebook and Twitter and an Instagram account which gets pretty heavy airtime during tournaments</p>	<p>So managing social media platforms is quite a time consuming one.</p>	<p>I am at the moment . I’m reviewing at the moment - I’m doing an audit at the moment because I think we have too many channels out there that are either we need to focus – find out what – I suppose it goes back to the objectives.</p>	<p>So we do that side of things but we’re also like in charge of the websites, all the social, all the content, content video creation, marketing campaigns, the everything to do with – all media. So whether it’s to do with the 21s, New Zealand Secondary Schools, every single one of those comes through me. So if you want to talk to the [national team] you talk to me and then I set it up. And so then I’m in charge of all those teams.</p>	<p>And our social media activity and updating our website, but don’t look at it at the moment.</p>	<p>Making sure that I’m doing the basics, you know, keeping our website up to date, keeping our social media up to date, all that sort of stuff. The basics are really important and when I sit down every morning those are the first things I do.</p>	<p>I guess in the communications like I said it’s changing from giving all the information to the third parties, to actually delivering it ourselves across our own platforms. And that’s the biggest change. So whether it’s our website, social media, our newsletter, the columns we talked about. Dealing with TV and trying to get [sport] on SKY.</p> <p>What can we do for no money? And that’s where we’ve pushed as big as possible with social media because you can get it out for free</p>	<p>I look after our website and social media and creating content and maintaining and updating all those platforms as well as our weekly e-newsletter which goes out to all our members, as well as whoever else has decided that they would like to receive.</p>	<p>As much as we think we need to be in the newspaper, those guys are on their phone, they don’t have time to open up the newspaper. Twitter is their main communication tool, so we’ve got to change the way that we’re working. So yeah, social media is a massive part.</p>	<p>OK so I run the website, the Facebook, the Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.</p> <p>So it’s essentially maintaining the website. So that’s news articles, which involves obviously chasing interest stories.</p>	<p>Raising the profile, basically any kind of media, social media.</p>	<p>So the spectrum covers media, the work we deliver from a design and brand perspective, the content we provide in each of our channels, reactive media, to crisis management, general enquiries and also getting those positive stories out there and collateral and a bit of marketing in our team.</p>