

**Ambassadorship in Women and Girls' Sport:
The Case of Basketball in New Zealand**

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Linden Moore
23 December 2024

Abstract

Influential individuals carry out vital marketing functions in community sport. This includes relationship building, word-of-mouth promotion and product/service development. There is no framework yet for this. Relationship marketing has a rich tradition in numerous bodies of literature. This research project has demonstrated that it is useful as well in the context of community sport ambassadorship.

Ambassadorship as a marketing phenomenon has been explored in previous research but is novelly conceptualised here in a women and girls community sport context. The conceptual work and subsequent typology was underpinned by 12 interviews with community sport practitioners and sport marketing scholars. This paper also outlines a further 17 interviews with community sport ambassadors undertaken for the purpose of better understanding their motivation and behaviour.

The nature of social media content that ambassadors share was also investigated, followed by an exploration of ambassadorship in sports outside of basketball, with the aim that sport managers should identify and support ambassadors working with women and girls in their sport community. Finally, a study of how girls perceive community sport ambassadors on social media is presented.

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Candidate Contributions to Co-Authored Papers

Moore, L., Naylor, M., & Johnston, M. Ambassadorship in Women and Girls' Community Sport. Submitted to <i>Managing Sport and Leisure</i> , September 2024.	Moore 80% Naylor 15% Johnston 5%
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Ethical Approval

Ethics approval was granted for this research by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 2 August, 2022. The ethics application for the five studies is approved for three years until 2 August 2025.

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Acknowledgements

This research is the manifestation of a dream and a series of observations that have been front of mind since 2019. It was evident from the time I started following New Zealand sport that people are the heartbeat of sport and their legacies are more than the work we see each day. Rather, it is their ability to connect with people that often defines their legacy. Having experienced the power of sport ambassadors personally, I felt a calling to explore what these people are doing around the world. So, when I decided to do a PhD it was only fitting that it would be the people – ambassadors - who would make this project a success.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

There is a rich tradition of influential people making a difference in community sport (Bradford, Hills, & Johnston, 2016). This is not only in the lives of young people but also in the development of sport itself. The latter is very important but has had less focus in mainstream media and published research. These individuals are often volunteers who we know are critical in sport communities (Cuskelly, 2004), but they are not always volunteers as there are others in community sport who are paid for the development work they do.

Ambassadorship is an appropriate framework to better understand this influential role, although considering it in a community sport context is novel. Indeed, the role that community sport ambassadors play can be characterised as marketing. Those on the frontlines of community sport engage and communicate directly with participants (and potential participants), promote programs, stage events and more. Broadly, these activities are not dissimilar to customer service, promotion and other functions within traditional for-profit consumer environments (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). In community sport, there are people who are promoting the sport in their roles, making them marketing agents. There is a substantial research gap around community sport ambassadorship as a social-psychological phenomenon. This includes how to conceptualise and define it as well as the motivations and behaviours of ambassadors, the online activity of ambassadors, how pervasive it is across various sports and how ambassadorial activity is perceived by girls' sport participants – the audience of interest.

The aim of this research is therefore to provide a suite of foundational insights about community sport ambassadorship. An evidence-informed understanding of community sport ambassadorship will be of value for sport practitioners who can recognise the activity, nurture it and place support systems around it. Women and girls' sport contexts are increasingly being prioritised through policy, funding and research and provides an appropriate focal point for this foundational work on community sport ambassadorship. The researcher is passionate and knowledgeable about women's basketball in New Zealand so this was chosen as the specific context for this project. A partnership with the aligned National Sport Organisation – Basketball New Zealand – was forged in support of this research project.

1.1 Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to investigate community sport ambassadorship as an existing, but not yet well-understood social-psychological phenomenon. To accomplish this, five studies were undertaken based on four research questions:

1. What are the types of ambassadors in women's sport?
2. What is the motivation for ambassadorial activity in women's sport?
3. What is the nature of ambassadorial activity in women's sport?
4. How effective is ambassadorial activity in women's sport?

The research questions are broad and foundational in nature as is appropriate for this initial work conceptualising community sport ambassadorship. The research questions streamline the focus of the overall project from broad to narrower. Taken together, focusing on community sport ambassadors types, motivation, behaviour and effectiveness provide an understanding of the domain as well as insights useful to practitioners.

1.2 Overview of Key Concepts

1.2.1 Ambassadorship

Ambassadorship has been explored thoroughly in previous research, mostly in the mainstream marketing literature. In this context, ambassadorship is characterised as a marketing practice and more specifically as a way to promote a place or product's attractiveness for consumers (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). While research on ambassadorship in community sport is sparse, King and Church (2017) argued that informally engaging with members of the community can help attract new participants in a sustainable way. In that paper it was put forth that key individuals perform marketing duties in community sport, and this is one of the only such references to the notion in published research. Indeed, one participant in the study characterised themselves as an ambassador for the club. This research helps set the scene for the focus on community sport ambassadorship in this project.

1.2.2 Women and Girls' Community Sport

There has been research on why girls choose to participate in competitive sports or engage in recreational activities (O'shea, et al., 2025). Research has demonstrated that girls are more likely to drop out of sport after adolescence than boys (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017; Eime et al., 2020). Australian studies have

shown that although some girls sample sport during childhood through beginner programmes, fewer than 25% transition to organised sport beyond ages 6-12 (Eime et al., 2019). Overall, there is a need to explore what helps girls' get into sport and stay involved including the key people that they engage with in community settings.

1.3. Research Context

This project investigates community sport ambassadorship in the context of basketball in New Zealand. In this context, participation has grown consistently and it is now one of the most popular sports in New Zealand (Shao, 2024). Basketball has experienced a rapid growth rate of 41-percent from 2021 in players aged 10-14 along with a 24-percent rise in secondary schools 3x3 participation and a 58-percent increase in female players (Hinton, 2023). One of the drivers behind the growth of the sport is a breadth of individuals in various roles ranging from paid staff in sport organisations to coaches, and elite players who act as marketing agents and advocate for the growth of the sport. There are a variety of individuals who are part of community sport and make it successful. For example, there are individuals who are paid to run community basketball programmes as part of their portfolio. Other individuals such as elite basketball players also incorporate advocacy work in their roles on the court by participating in and engaging with community basketball clinics. Basketball coaches are also at the forefront of this endeavour because in their role, actions, behaviour and communication influence the extent to which girls stay involved.

The primary researcher is familiar with the women's basketball community of New Zealand and has built relationships with key people who are active in promoting the sport to girls. The connections the researcher had built over time played an important role in facilitating the overall project and partnership with Basketball New Zealand (BBNZ) - New Zealand's national governing body for basketball.

1.3.1 Study 1

The first study is foundational in that it establishes a definition for community sport ambassadorship. Study 1 also features the development of a typology of community sport ambassadorship which relates to Research Question 1. The framework distinguishes among distinct ambassador types within the context of a sporting community (i.e., women's basketball). Typologies also serve as a tool for researchers to define and explain specific elements or variables that will be part of their research (Collier et al., 2008). Furthermore, typologies are a system that allow for the formation of concepts and enables the construction of categorical

variables (Collier et al., 2008). Typologies provide a way for researchers to characterise people in a community and their roles within it as is proposed here. It is not uncommon for a researcher's own observation and perspective to help shape a typology (for e.g., Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014). Here, the typology sets out ambassador types and their roles within the women and girls' basketball ecosystem.

1.3.2 Study 2

Interviews with a carefully sampled group of community sport ambassadors in Study 2 focused on ambassador behaviour and motivation (Research Questions 2 and 3). Seventeen interviewees were sampled across the five types of community sport ambassadors established in Study 1. A number of universal motivations and behaviours common across the five types of ambassadors were identified. Analyses also uncovered motivations and behaviours that were not universal but were common across more than one type of ambassador. Unique motivations and behaviours have also been identified that appear aligned to specific ambassador types. Study 2 is a pivot point in the thesis from the conceptual focus of Study 1 to engagement with community ambassadors themselves for the purpose of understanding their lived experience.

1.3.3 Study 3

As this research focused on community sport ambassadors, it was important to understand what those in the role are doing on social media platforms. Study 3 therefore involved an analysis of community sport ambassador social media content providing insights related to Research Question 3. Not only do social media channels allow users to connect with one another, but the channels also present a platform where those in positions of influence can engage with potential newcomers and shape behaviour via a personal connection. Content was included in Study 3 from platforms such as Instagram. Accounts were chosen from ambassadors across the five types established in Study 1.

1.3.4 Study 4

The fourth study is an examination of ambassadors within the women's community of three other sports: cricket, rugby and football. This study contributes to the overall thesis by exploring the wider applicability of community sport ambassadorship beyond basketball in which the other four studies are situated. It provides insights aligned to Research Question 3. Twelve people were interviewed, each with deep experience and familiarity with the women and girls' community of their sport. Interviewees worked at New Zealand Rugby, New Zealand Cricket, and New Zealand Football and a variety of Regional Sport Organisations

(RSOs). The roles of those interviewed in Study 4 were connected to women and girls' development in each sport and include development managers, coaches at the national and community levels, talent acquisition, and Diversity and Inclusion.

1.3.5 Study 5

Study 5 featured seven focus groups with female pre-teen and teenage basketball players for the purpose of exploring one aspect of the effectiveness of community sport ambassadorship. Girls participating in the focus groups had discussions about how they got started playing the game, what role community sport ambassadors played within their transition into the sport as well as how a selection of social media content resonated with them. Focus groups aim to collect data in the spirit of participatory research and are appropriate when young people are the focus (Bagnoli & Clarke, 2010). Focus groups are useful because individuals can bounce ideas off one another to create a synergistic effect. As was the intention, several important insights emerged from this study about how community sport ambassadors have influenced female basketball players as well as what online content resonates with them the most. Insights from Study 5 are also particularly useful for Basketball New Zealand to better understand what content resonates with their priority Under-12 age group

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of nine chapters (Figure 1.1). Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research purpose and thesis structure, along with a list of research outputs. Next, Chapter 2 is a literature review covering the body of research relating to ambassadorship in traditional marketing contexts as well as sport. Also in Chapter 2 is an overview of several theories related to the research is provided: Relationship Marketing, Source Credibility Model, Self-Determination Theory, Job Characteristics Model, Self-Presentation Theory, Social Influence Theory, and Uses and Gratifications Theory. In Chapter 3, the research paradigm and research design for the five studies is presented. The research participants along with the data collection and analysis procedures are also outlined. Chapter 3 provides an overview of basketball in New Zealand, along with an explanation of the research partnership with Basketball New Zealand. Chapter 4 (Study 1) provides a foundation in that community sport ambassadorship is defined and the typology of community sport ambassadorship presented. Chapter 5 (Study 2) covers the interviews that were undertaken with community sport ambassadors who are involved in women and girls' basketball. Chapter 6 (Study 3) is an overview of

the social media content analysis that was undertaken. Chapter 7 (Study 4) covers the interviews undertaken with representatives from across rugby, cricket and football. Chapter 8 (Study 5) comprehensively overviews the study in which girls participated in focus groups about community sport ambassadorship. Finally, Chapter 9 is a broad discussion of the results of the five studies. Managerial implications and suggestions for future research are also included in the final chapter.

Figure 1.1

Thesis Schematic

Chapter 1	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of research • Thesis structure • Conference presentations, research grants and publications
Chapter 2	Literature Review
Chapter 3	Method <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Paradigm and Design • Research Participants • Data collection and analysis • Basketball in New Zealand and Partnership with Basketball New Zealand (BBNZ)
Chapter 4 (RQ1)	Study 1 - Typology of Ambassadors in Women's Sport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition and Typology of Ambassadorship in Community Sport
Chapter 5 (RQ 2 and 3)	Study 2 – Understanding Ambassador Motivation and Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews With Community Sport Ambassadors
Chapter 6 (RQ 3 and 4)	Study 3 - Exploring Ambassador Social Media Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content analysis of social media content of ambassadors
Chapter 7 (RQ 2, 3, & 4)	Study 4 – Ambassadors in other Sports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewees familiar with community sport ambassadorship in women and girls' rugby, cricket and football
Chapter 8 (RQ 4)	Study 5 - Player perspectives of Ambassadors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups with pre-teen and teenage girls
Chapter 9	Discussion

1.5 Conference Presentations, Research Funding and Manuscripts

Table 1.1

Presentations, Funding and Manuscripts

Conference Presentations
<p>Study 1 - Moore, L., Naylor, M., & Johnston, M. (2022). Ambassadorship in Women and Girls' Sport. SMAANZ; Melbourne, AUSTRALIA.</p> <p>Study 2 - Moore, L., Naylor, M. & Johnston, M. (2023). Role of ambassadors in community sport for women and girls. EASM, Belfast; NORTHERN IRELAND.</p> <p>Study 3 - Moore, L., Naylor, M. & Johnston, M. (2023). The Social Media Activity of Ambassadors. SMAANZ; Canberra, AUSTRALIA.</p> <p>Study 4 – Moore, L., Naylor, N., & Johnston, M. (2024). Interviews to understand Ambassadorship in Other Sports. SMAANZ; Geelong, AUSTRALIA.</p> <p>Study 5 - Moore, L., Naylor, M. & Johnston, M. (2024). The effectiveness of ambassadorial content on Instagram – The Case of Girls' Basketball. NAASM. Minneapolis, USA.</p>
Research Funding
AUT Doctoral Scholarship – awarded July 2022
Manuscripts
<p>Moore, L., Naylor, M., & Johnston, M. Ambassadorship in Women and Girls' Community Sport. Submitted to <i>Managing Sport and Leisure</i>, September 2024.</p> <p>Moore, L., Naylor, M., Johnston, M. The Effectiveness of Ambassadorial Content on Instagram. To be submitted.</p>

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter is a review of literature that relates to and informs this research project on ambassadorship in community sport. The review starts with existing literature on ambassadorship in marketing, which provides a foundation for the current exploration of community sport ambassadorship. Next, the theoretical underpinnings of ambassadorship in this thesis are outlined. These include Self-Determination Theory, Job Characteristics Model, Social Influence Theory, Relationship Marketing, Social Marketing, the Source Credibility Model, Self-Presentation Theory, and Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory. Research related to topics adjacent to ambassadorship are then presented such as role modelling, influencers and parasocial interactions. Social media in sport contexts relates to the current research, so several reflections on the aligned body of research are provided in this chapter. An overview of women and girls' community sport is presented. Context about women and girls' sport in New Zealand is specifically addressed, which is appropriate given that the project was conducted there. Last, an overview of women's basketball in New Zealand is presented to set the scene. Throughout, the body of related research is discussed in terms of the current research focus on community sport settings.

2.1 Ambassadorship

In this section, a review of published literature related to ambassadorship in traditional marketing/brand contexts is presented. Following that, an explanation of brand ambassadorship is put forth before an overview of the research on ambassadorship in sport. The content below informed the definition of community sport ambassadorship along with the typology of ambassadors in women's basketball that was developed in Study 1.

Ambassadorship & Marketing

Ambassadorship has been explored thoroughly in previous research, mostly in the mainstream marketing literature (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). In this context, ambassadorship is characterised as a marketing practice and more specifically as a way to promote a place or product's attractiveness for consumers (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Ambassadors engage with stakeholders in a way that an organisation hopes to be perceived (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001; Karmark, 2005). Ambassadors help identify and differentiate products/services as part of establishing competitive advantages (Kapferer, 2004; Louro & Cunha, 2001; Santos-Vijande et al., 2013). They can be understood as intangible assets, adding value to the company

(Heide et al., 2018). Ambassadorship has also been described in terms of employees acting as communicators (e.g. Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Heide et al., 2018; Opitz et al., 2018).

Ambassadors provide a “credible testimony” and can “through the word-of-mouth effect, influence others through their networks and relationships” (Andersson & Ekman, 2009, p.43). Word-of-mouth marketing is not only a cost-effective means of promotion but is also helpful when building relationships and influencing audiences (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). In the marketplace, ambassadors often interact with people directly. Organ (1988) has described some ambassadors as undertaking discretionary actions. The latter point is relevant to the current context of community sport ambassadorship, in which volunteers in sometimes unstructured roles engage the community in a variety of ways that they choose.

An ambassadors’ credibility and authenticity are vital and can be established through relationships (Goodman & Barnes, 2011). Further, their expertise often stems from first-hand knowledge which they convey in their roles (Goodman & Barnes, 2011). Sometimes referred to as “Honorary Ambassadors”, some individuals represent an organisation based on their reputation and long-standing engagement (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). The behaviour and motivation of these and other types of ambassadors appears to be varied and not yet well understood (Fischer-Buttinger & Vallister, 2008). First-hand knowledge and long-standing engagement are particularly relevant to those that are the focus in the current research project. In community sport, ambassadors seem to establish credibility through their affiliations, and by engaging others through various media. Overall, ambassadorship is well-established within both marketing practice and the related body of research. The concept is broad enough and has intuitive appeal as a fit outside of traditional consumer contexts. It is likely extendable to other contexts including community sport.

Brand Ambassadorship

Brand ambassadors are perhaps the most common and familiar type of ambassador. This type of ambassador has been the focus of the most research in the wider domain. Brand ambassadors are typically individuals who use a company’s products or services (Karlsson, 2018). They can influence consumers through their actions and communications (Kang, 2016). One reason that organisations might choose to use brand ambassadors is it can be a cost-effective marketing tool (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). While some brand ambassadors take the role voluntarily, others are paid for their service. In terms of motivation, some

brand ambassadors seek to gain experience in promotion, general marketing strategy, customer service, and product development (Torr, 2015). There is some overlap here between what we know about brand ambassadors and what is being conceptualised regarding community sport ambassadorship. Cost-effectiveness is one dimension where there is overlap.

A variety of people can serve as brand ambassadors. Organisations may recruit athletes, celebrities and influencers, or even their own employees to represent their brand (Sadrabadi, et al., 2018). As part of their role, brand ambassadors “distinguish products and give them attractiveness” (Sadrabadi et al., 2018, p.55). Ambassadors can shape customers’ attitudes by creating a desirable brand image (Sadrabadi, et al., 2018). Further, having someone recommend a product to another person in the same way as a friend would, can be more effective than traditional advertisements (Fisher, 2018). Here again are some dimensions that overlap between brand ambassadorship and how community sport ambassadorship seems to exist. For example, influential individuals in a sport community can make a team, program or event attractive to potential participants.

Brand ambassadors are often seen as opinion leaders or those who influence the opinions and behaviours of others (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013; Rogers & Cartano, 1962). Ambassadors can connect into various networks which may even include co-workers (Nicholson, 2018). Their work contributes to a brand’s community value through a series of practices that are different than traditional consumer business relationships (Schau et al., 2009). Ambassadorial practices have been argued to fit four categories, all of which work towards marketing objectives: 1. Social networking, 2. Community engagement, 3. Impression management, and 4. Brand use. (Schau et al., 2009).

It is common for brand ambassadors to exist in the sport marketing ecosystem. Individuals such as sports personalities are considered vehicles for advertisements or product endorsements (Arai et al., 2013). Another way that brand ambassadorship can manifest is when athletes can promote symbolic messages, which can attract endorsers (Mogaji et al., 2018). However, sportswomen do not have the same opportunities to partner with brands as their male counterparts (Mogaji et al., 2018). One way to address this is for sportswomen to promote themselves on social media, which helps them build a brand identity that is appealing to consumers (Mogaji et al., 2018). Although brands look to sponsor personalities that resonate with their existing target audience(s), there are opportunities for sportswomen to reach new audiences by becoming brand

ambassadors (Mongaji et al., 2018). To some extent, community sport ambassadors serve as brand ambassadors on behalf of their organisations. When ambassadors engage participants at the grassroots they have an opportunity to educate people about the sport and can help reach new audiences.

Ambassadorship in Sport

Ambassadorship in one form or another now transcends sport and has manifested in several ways. Schau et al., (2009) noted that the term ‘ambassador’ implies that members of a community are expected to behave in a certain way and exhibit practices on behalf of that community. In community sport, it would be expected that ambassadors behave a certain way that presents the sport as welcoming and attractive for newcomers.

Bardocz-Bencsik, Begović and Dóczy (2019) utilised ambassadorship in their exploration of athlete-endorsed projects in a sport for development and peace (SDP) context. It is not uncommon in sport for star athletes to be involved in sport for development and peace initiatives for either short or long-term commitments (Bardocz-Bencsik et al., 2019). This article provides support for the idea that there are people who play important roles in community sport and their work can be thought of as ambassadorship. Further investigation of their activity in the community is appropriate.

In a study of elite athletes as ambassadors for SDP, a set of characteristics included credibility, authenticity and expertise (Goodman & Barnes, 2011). The authors looked at the characteristics that elite athletes need to be successful ambassadors in SDP and discovered credibility and role modelling behaviour were crucial. It is also worth noting that “celebrities” campaigns on social issues is part of their public persona, therefore their credibility as development celebrities can be straightforward if they are credible as public figures” (Bardocz-Bencsik et al., 2019, p.412). In the context of the emergent conceptualisation of community sport ambassadorship here it can be argued that sport is part of community sport ambassadors’ public persona, which builds their credibility with audiences. When ambassadors interact in the community, they advocate for children to play sport which make them credible.

Another way that individuals in sport can serve as ambassadors is by promoting sport at local or regional level. For example, ambassadors in local sport contexts were the focus in Hempworth (2023) and cast it in a very favourable light in terms of their potential positive impact. This shift in thinking of ambassadors from representing brands in commercial settings to consideration in amateur settings is extended in this thesis. So,

some scholars have referred to ambassadors in various research contexts, but there is no definition or detailed framework yet established across sport generally or community sport specifically.

Ambassadorship in Community Sport

While there is no research yet on ambassadorship in community sport as its being conceptualised in this project, King and Church (2017) argued that informally engaging with members of the community can help attract new participants in a sustainable way. In that paper it was put forth that key individuals perform marketing duties in clubs, and this is one of the only such references to the notion in published research. Indeed, one participant in the study characterised themselves as an ambassador for the club. This study helps set the scene for the focus on community sport ambassadorship in this project.

From the related body of research, it is evident that ambassadorship is important in an array of contexts and has potential to be conceptualised and explored further in community sport settings. Although there are existing definitions of ambassadorship that are useful, they are often linked to brand or other marketing contexts and not community sport specifically. Related research tells us that there is some ambiguity around the nature of an ambassador's role and how they are motivated across an array of contexts. This includes whether the ambassadorial role is paid or unpaid, and the nature of the ambassador's motivation. Further study of ambassadorship in unique contexts will contribute to an overall understanding of how individuals drive other's behaviour. This is addressed in Study 1 in this project with focus on community sport.

2.2 Community Sport for Women and Girls

Women in sport is increasingly the focus of research (Rowe, 2019) and this relates to participation, high performance, media and sport development (Rowe & Sherry, 2020). Female sport participation is linked to healthier lifestyles, including better motor skills, improved psychological and social health and promote overall fitness (Eime et al., 2020). There has been research on why girls choose to participate in competitive sports or engage in recreational activities (O'Shea et al., 2025). Research has demonstrated that girls are more likely to drop out of sport after adolescence than boys (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017; Eime et al., 2020). Australian studies have shown that although some girls sample sport during childhood through beginner programmes, fewer than 25% transition to organised sport beyond ages 6-12 (Eime et al., 2019).

There is therefore a need to explore what helps girls' get into sport and stay involved including the key people that they engage with in community settings.

Another barrier that many girls and young women face when participating in community sport is discouragement from parents and relatives (Cooky et al., 2016). Further, these views maintain that 'girls' and 'sport' are incompatible (Drummond et al., 2022). As there are people who discourage girls from playing sport, it is important to also understand who are the people that encourage participation and drive enjoyable experiences. Community sport ambassadors foster positive experiences and are the focus of this thesis.

Research highlights that strong relationships are the foundation of enjoyment for young female athletes. Light and Pimenta (2020) found that a primary factor driving enjoyment in basketball is peer relationships. Leaders including coaches do not just develop skills in players, but they also form relationships with players that can influence their continuation. Prior studies have shown that how relationships are nurtured is a function of leadership. Coaches and other leaders in sport are instrumental, creating a culture that dictates whether women and girls ultimately stay engaged (Light & Pimenta, 2020). Having established that relationships are an important factor for why girls choose to continue in sport, the path is set for exploring how ambassadors foster and nurture their relationships with women and girls.

2.3 Marketing Women and Girls' Sport

As women and girls' sport continues to evolve, the way in which it is marketed has also done so. Although there have been marked improvements recently in higher profile contexts, the marketing of women's sports has historically been organic and unstructured compared to male contexts. There is now increased attention both from the media and from researchers on the breadth of women's sport including at the grassroots (Murray et al., 2022). Researchers have identified that word of mouth communication and team identification as successful marketing tactics for all sports including for women and girls (James & Ridinger, 2002; Bush, et al., 2005; Shackelford & Greenwell, 2005). For women and girls' sport as with all sport, organisations need to add value to their events to differentiate themselves from other forms of entertainment (Shackelford & Greenwell, 2005). Further, organisations need to be aware of the target market for women and girls' sport to maximise their audience (Eden et al., 2013). In short, women and girls' sport is unique and requires considered marketing practice (Antunovic & Olson, 2024) underpinned by research like that in this thesis.

Overall, there is a need to consider an alternate approach to understanding how women’s sport is being promoted and by whom. It is well understood that individuals fill roles in community sport but how they uniquely serve as marketing “agents” to drive the sport forward has yet to be explored. Throughout the wider community sport ecosystem, an array of individuals that are effectively filling a sales function, engaging directly with participants who can otherwise be understood as consumers in a more traditional sense. There is almost a complete lack of research on how grassroots sport is marketed in girls’ community contexts. Conceptualising ambassadorship in this specific context is novel and important.

2.4 Theoretical Foundations of Ambassadorship in Community Sport

Consideration of theoretical underpinning is crucial for any project like this in which an important mechanism such as ambassadorship is explored in a new context. The topics of ambassadorship and women and girls’ community sport helped guide the selection of theoretical frameworks presented in this thesis. Indeed, the overall project as well as each of the five studies have been informed by well-trodden theories in social-psychology (Table 2.1). Further details are provided as this thesis progresses, but at this stage where theory is first addressed it’s important to have a basic understanding of the five studies. Study 1 can be characterised as definitional/conceptual work, Study 2 an exploration of the behaviour and motivation of community sport ambassadors, Study 3 an exploration of the social media activity of community sport ambassadors, Study 4 an exploration of the wider applicability of community sport ambassadorship in cricket, rugby and football and Study 5 an exploration of what ambassadorial content resonates with girls. So, what follows next is a discussion of Relationship Marketing (Overarching all five studies); Source Credibility Model (Study 1); Self-Determination Theory (Study 2); Job Characteristics Model (Study 2); Self-Presentation Theory (Study 3); Social Influence Theory (Study 5); and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Study 5).

Table 2.1
Theoretical Underpinnings

Studies	Theory
1-5	Relationship Marketing
1-5	Social Marketing
1	Source Credibility Model
2	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)
2	Job Characteristics Model
3	Self-Presentation Theory
5	Social Influence Theory
5	Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G)

Relationship Marketing

Relationship Marketing is focussed on connection between two parties, with an aim to create additional value for customers, suppliers, or service providers (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996). Building relationships is essential in sport which can be characterised as a service environment and includes intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability. This makes relationships essential for the context instead of relying on transaction-based marketing (Egan, 2004). Therefore, relationship marketing is essential to building connections (Drury, 2008) in sport and encourages interactions and communication with audiences like potential sport participants.

Relationship marketing has been increasingly emphasised in sport contexts (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). This is because “sport marketers generally believe that relationship marketing efforts can enhance relationships with sport consumers” (Kim et al., 2011, p.576). Sport marketers can take a relationship marketing approach to communicate, listen and address consumer needs and desires, which can enhance their fanbases (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Yu & Trail, 2011). As community sport ambassadors regularly engage with their community, they can build quality relationships with the people they interact with and then inspire them to keep participating in sport. Given that community sport ambassadors leverage their positions as marketing agents, it is important for them to address the needs and desires of people on the grassroots so that they continue to build connections.

There are different tools that can be used to execute relationship marketing. Social media is a popular medium, as it is affordable and can reach audiences in a meaningful way (Abeza et al., 2013). The reciprocal nature of social media incorporates relationship marketing which Grönroos (2004) describes as “adding value”. However, to provide value, people and organisations need to focus on engaging consumers so they have higher engagement which can create stronger relationships (Rishika et al., 2013). The notions of creating value and engaging consumers (i.e., participants) clearly has relevance in community sport contexts.

Relationship marketing has been considered in community sport contexts previously. For example, Girginov, Taks, Boucher, Martyn, Holman, and Dixon (2009) studied how Canadian National Sport Organisations (NSOs) use the Web to create and maintain relationships with sport participants and their sport delivery partners. In that study, the point was made that “effective relationship marketing is based on the collection and analysis of information about participants and partners that form sport participation networks”

(p.15). This is an example of how sport organisations should view customers as lifetime partners and try to understand their changing wants, desires, and values (Bee & Kahle, 2006). While building relationships is important, Williams and Chinn (2010) pointed out that sometimes marketing and social media efforts are explicit. The authors argued that there are other instances that these efforts are less visible, a notion applicable to often unacknowledged volunteers in community sport settings that are the focus of the current research. Importantly, one can argue that the better the relationships are between those acting as ambassadors in community sport settings and the participants they engage with, the more likely it is that sport will flourish.

Community sport ambassadors often build relationships with participants via social media, especially within grassroots sport. Engaging with people online allows community sport ambassadors to form connections and help get people interested in their sport. Within the spirit of relationship marketing and the current study context it is important to explore how social channels are used to create bonds between key individuals and the participants in their sporting community. Overall, relationship marketing is an important consideration for all five studies as this type of marketing focuses on building relationship between consumers, which is pertinent in community sport. While relationship marketing forms the theoretical framework of the overall thesis, other theories are relevant and have helped inform the specific studies.

Social Marketing

As a structural framework (Stead et al., 2007) Social Marketing is helpful to build understanding of community sport ambassadorship. Multiple scholars have attempted to define social marketing (Dann, 2010). Broadly, the concept focuses on offering a social proposition (Peattie & Peattie, 2003) aimed to influence and effect behaviour change (Bell & Blakely, 2010). The practice of social marketing involves the use of commercial marketing techniques and adopts a 'relational' philosophy instead of a 'transactional' one (Hastings, as cited by Beishon, 2005). While commercial sport marketing often focuses on the relationship between customers and a service product provider (Bell & Blakely, 2010), relationship marketing has recently shifted to address a 'market of one' (Foley, 1997) with more narrow focus on consumers. Community sport ambassadors operate in complex social networks and interact with people directly instead

of providing a traditional product/service model, so the 'market of one' approach and social marketing framework is appropriate here.

Social marketing involves a proposition and ultimately an attempt to effect behaviour change (Peattie & Peattie, 2003). Community sport ambassadors can influence behaviour through the relationships they build with participants. They can therefore persuade potential participants to engage in sport for the first time or continue engaging. A social marketing approach can facilitate social change including involvement in the community (Peattie & Peattie, 2003). Collins (2005) recommended a long-term 'social sport marketing' plan to promote the benefits of exercise which is relevant here. These examples further the case that there needs to be more research focused on the marketing of community sport through a social marketing lens, which is addressed in this research. Community sport ambassadors are vital in the mission to create behaviour change in the form of participation in sport.

Social marketing includes two schools of thought: traditionalist and convergent (Bell & Blakely, 2010). The traditionalist way of thinking transfers conventional marketing principles to the social change setting as opposed to the convergent way of thinking, which takes an inter-disciplinary approach and implements concepts from outside of traditional marketing (Bell & Blakely, 2010). The traditionalist perspective focus on the promotion part of the marketing mix and perhaps the broader marketing mix more strategically (Bell & Blakely, 2010). Alternatively, convergent social marketers draw from theories related to communities, socialisation, social influences, and social relationships (Bell & Blakely, 2010). The extent to which traditional and convergent approaches relate to community sport ambassadors and their social marketing activity is not well understood.

A model of 'social sport marketing', suggests that behaviour change is brought about through a series of marketing actions that move an individual from indifference towards participation in a sporting activity, through realisation of, and commitment to, participation (Bell & Blakely, 2010). The foundation of social marketing and the model of 'sport social marketing' is an appropriate approach to study community sport ambassadorship for a few reasons. First, the primary function of grassroots sports is to develop and maintain relationships with participants. This relational approach to marketing is essential because community sport can be replaced with other activities so it's important for community sport ambassadors to create an

enjoyable environment so that participants want to return. Since community sport places a focus on participant retention, the ability to influence the behaviour of the participants is key.

When it comes to social marketing in sport and the role of community sport ambassadors, the 'stages of change' model is also applicable (Marcus & Forsyth, 2003). The stages are relevant in community sport. For example, sport managers may create awareness about their sport through various forms of promotion during the Pre-Contemplation stage (stage 1). In sport, peers and others holding influence can persuade and motivate people to participate during the Contemplation stage (stage 2), An information website may also help at this stage. The relationships that community sport ambassadors nurture are important because individuals may decide to participate as a result. Similarly, community sport ambassadors are also important during the Preparation (stage 3), Action (stage 4), and Confirmation (stage 5) stages during which they interact and influence members of the sport community. In summary, the essence of community sport ambassadorship is a proposition to engage in sport, so these key individuals are therefore engaged in social marketing.

Source Credibility Model

The Source Credibility Model is an important underpinning of the current study of community sport ambassadorship. This model can be used to understand positive source characteristics which persuade audiences (Hovland et al., 1953; Ohanian 1990; Petty & Cacioppo 1986; Sternthal et al., 1978). Ohanian (1990) outlined three elements that form credibility in a spokesperson: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. The same study concluded that these characteristics of endorsers are positively related to the intention to purchase and perception of quality for the products. Expertise and trustworthiness have particular intuitive appeal for understanding the effectiveness of community sport ambassadors even though they are not most effectively characterised as spokespeople. Sources that hold a level of expertness and trustworthiness are credible and therefore are persuasive (Hovland et al., 1953). The contention in this thesis is that community sport ambassadors use their expertise and trustworthiness to act as marketing agents facilitating girls' participation in sport.

In his commentary about the model, McGuire (1985) suggested that messages are effective based on the source's 'familiarity', 'likeability' and/or 'similarity'. The term familiarity is defined as "knowledge of the source through likeability, exposure as affection for the source resulting from the source's physical

appearance and behaviour” (p.311). Similarity refers to a supposed resemblance between a source and receiver of the message (McCracken, 1989, p.311). McGuire (1985) states that sources that are liked by and/or are similar to consumers can be more attractive and persuasive. Familiarity, likeability and similarity are all likely to be related to the effectiveness of community sport ambassadors. The Source Credibility model has been previously used in research related to marketing participant sport. For example, endorser effects on young adult’s attitudes towards social marketing advertisements (Behnoosh et al., 2018).

The conceptual work in Study 1 is informed by the Source Credibility Model with focus on positive characteristics of community sport ambassadors that can persuade audiences. The definition of community sport ambassadors that is ultimately put forth in this thesis aligns well with the tenets of the model. When girls recognise traits underpinned by credibility, it is likely that they perceive the ambassadors as persuasive and want to engage more in the sport.

The Motivations of Ambassadors

One of the aims of the current research is to explore and ultimately better understand how ambassadors in community sport are motivated, so it is appropriate to present a brief overview. Self Determination Theory (SDT) captures people’s growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the foundation for self-motivation and personality integration, in addition to the conditions that foster positive processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can each feature in the exploration of ambassador motivations in community sport, which is discussed below.

Intrinsic motivation is defined as doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself whilst extrinsic motivation looks at the performance of an activity to attain a certain outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When individuals are intrinsically motivated, they are unable to separate pursuing activities from receiving benefits (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). Anecdotally, it seems as though some community sport ambassadors in New Zealand wish to use their respective experiences and positions to help grow the game of basketball in New Zealand, rather than for external rewards. One example would be a community sport ambassador wanting to give back because they have benefitted from similar role models or mentors themselves. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation often relates to tangible, monetary rewards (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). Community sport ambassadors can serve in paid roles, working in places such as sport organisations or club teams and are remunerated for their work, which can also drive behaviour.

One of the research questions in this thesis relates to the motivations of ambassadors in women and girls' basketball. There is precedent studying the motivations of ambassadors more broadly. For example, Andersson and Ekman (2009) found that motivations tend to vary depending on the way in which ambassadors came into their role. Specifically, those who were appointed to their role tend to see the assignment as an honorary task and because of a past good deed. However, those who seek out the role themselves tend to want to contribute to the momentum of moving the product forward. However, this approach used an inductive method and didn't explicitly feature SDT as an underpinning. All in all, there is an opportunity to explore the motivation for ambassadorship in women and girls' sport and the tenets of SDT serve as a useful framework.

Job Characteristics Model

The Job Characteristics Model is also relevant to community sport ambassadorship. Specifically, ambassadors' behaviours which are the focus of Study 2 can be described as characteristics of the "job", although it is thought of more as a role in this research. In effect, the Job Characteristics Model helps us understand and design various roles such that those in the role stay engaged and advance an organisation's goals. The Job Characteristics Model consists of five components: skill variety (the degree to which the job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work); task identity (the degree to which the job requires an identifiable piece of work from beginning to end); task significance (the degree to which the job has an impact on the lives of other people); autonomy (the degree to which the job gives independence to determine the procedures and scheduling the work); and feedback (the degree to which work activities required by the job provides the individual with information about how effective they are) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). All five components of the model are relevant to the foundational work undertaken in this research on understanding the community sport ambassador role.

Related to the five components, employees often experience various psychological states such as perceived job knowledge, job meaningfulness, and personal responsibility, all of which lead to different work outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The employee's psychological state is linked to job satisfaction and good performance (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). When employees understand that they not only have sufficient knowledge of the work they do, but that it is also meaningful and have responsibility, then they will be more motivated to perform (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). Through the Job Characteristics Model one

can explore community sport ambassadorship in several ways. This includes looking at their behaviours in the community (skill variety); how they are recognised in the community (i.e., coach, athlete - task identity); if they feel like their work is impactful on girls in their communities (task significance); and what aspects of their advocacy they think are most meaningful (feedback). With insights in hand related to job characteristic components, community sport ambassadors can be organised and supported by managers focused on growing their sport. The Job Characteristics Model is useful at the point when managerial implications are considered from this research.

Self-Presentation Theory

How ambassadors engage with audiences on social media is a focus of this research project. This engagement can be explored with Self-Presentation theory in mind. This theory posits that people present themselves purposefully and selectively in a way that they want to be perceived (Goffman, 1959). Specifically, it means that people create positive images of themselves to avoid giving others undesirable impressions (Goffman, 1959). Importantly, this often takes place on social media. Self-presentation can take place as either front stage or backstage performances (Goffman, 1974). To this end, Study 3 was undertaken as part of this thesis to explore how community sport ambassadors present themselves on social media as well as if/how this intersects with the sport development dimension of their role. The content analysis of ambassadors' social media content in that study is therefore informed by Self-Presentation Theory.

One part of Self-Presentation Theory are front stage performances, which is the way that people act when they know others are watching (Cole, 2019). Community sport ambassadors often seem to engage in front stage behaviour when working in community sport. Further, we know that ambassadors' behaviour is in part shaped by how they believe an organisation wants to be perceived (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001; Karmark, 2005) so this likely influences their self-presentation as well. In this context of community sport ambassadorship, presenting oneself positively online and in-person is likely to influence whether girls engage in the sport. So, in Study 3 the ambassadors whose accounts were chosen were those who are most active on social media. To that end, the posts that were identified as front stage performances were selected for the content analysis.

Alternatively, backstage performances refer to how people act outside of society's expectations. Content that is categorised as a 'backstage performance' tends to be more related to one's personal life (Cole, 2019).

In addition to posting about basketball, some community sport ambassadors also use their social media channels to post about interests outside of basketball along with content about their personal lives. The content that is not related to basketball can be viewed as a backstage performance as it can reflect the ambassadors' personal lives.

Self-Presentation Theory has been used in explorations of athletes' use of social media. Bortree (2005) suggested that athletes post a mix of both front and backstage behaviours to connect with fans. There are different reasons that athletes choose to post content on social media. For example, Bae et al., (2023) discovered that front stage posts for athletes may include charity work and business ventures. It is likely that community sport ambassadors engage in a mix of frontstage and backstage behaviours online and it is appropriate to investigate further.

Social Influence Theory

Understanding the effectiveness of ambassadorial content is a cornerstone of this thesis and is informed by Social Influence Theory. This theory captures how individuals in social networks are influenced by the behaviour and ultimately conform to the behaviour standards in a certain community (Venkatesh & Brown, 2001). Social influence links the structure of social relations to attitudes and behaviours of actors who comprise a social network (Marsden & Friedkin, 1993). There are two types of social influence: informational and normative.

Informational social influence is when people are influenced to accept information from others about reality (Ying-Li, 2013). This type of social influence can cause people in a group to re-evaluate their positions when facts or other important information are brought up in hopes to make quality decisions (Kaplan & Miller, 1987). Community sport ambassadors engage in informational social influence when they share practical information about the sport or organisation. For instance, they can persuade people to attend events that are related to their sport or simply provide information that participants should factor in when making decisions about their involvement.

Normative social influence relates to the expectations of another person with a desire to maintain harmony in groups (Kaplan & Miller, 1987). It encompasses a need for people in a group to share the same behaviours and to either perform or not perform in a certain way, regardless of the individual's personal beliefs (Ying-Li, 2013). Community sport ambassadors create normative social influence when they curate

or promote a culture that they want for their organisation. When people join the club, they are expected to buy in to that culture for the harmony of the group. Overall, community sport ambassadors have an opportunity to influence participants by creating a welcoming space that includes behaviours that make grassroots sport inclusive for girls. Their influence encourages participants to return but we need to learn more about exactly how this works.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory addresses factors associated with the selection of media that users consume. The theory states that individuals select media to satisfy a need and will continue to use the media until the need is satisfied (Katz et al., 1973). This framework also recognises that individuals purposefully select “optimal media” that is available based on their current needs and are aware of their reasons for selecting various media options (Katz et al., 1973). Due to these factors, Li, Dittmore, Scott, Lo, and Stokowsk (2019) refer to the usefulness of the theory when examining the nature of sport digital media. Potential youth sport participants engage social media and the process by which they select content to consume is important. This theory is relevant and was considered in conjunction with the implementation of Study 5. How girls’ basketball players evaluate and ultimately select ambassadors’ media to consume is the focus of that study. Not only are community sport ambassadors active on social media, their accounts are often highly followed.

2.5 Role Models and Influencers

Role models inspire others as they have obtained a measure of success themselves (Meirer & Saavedra, 2009). They often demonstrate how to achieve success through a set of behaviours and actions (Meirer & Saavedra, 2009). Further, the experience of role models may be considered a road map that people can refer to learn about achieving a certain goal, even if they differ from the person watching them (Meirer & Saavedra, 2009). It is useful to understand the relevance of role models in sport as ambassadors who are involved in grassroots sport can inspire a target group of people by showcasing their journey and the habits that they practiced to achieve success. Although not all community sport ambassadors characterise themselves as role models, there is conceptual overlap worth acknowledging.

People who identify as influencers are known to share user-oriented product reviews, recommendations, and personal experiences on their social media channels (Schouten et al., 2019). Influencers are popular on

social media and there has been more research around the role of content creators and monetising social media content (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). There has also been a focus on social media and the return on investment (ROI) of influencer marketing (Beichert et al., 2023) as well as looking at which influencers most effectively engage with their followers (Wies et al., 2023). Influencers must consider the balance between remaining true to the vision that attracted their following in addition to the opportunity to make money from sponsors interested in reaching their audience (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). Community sport ambassadors are not influencers per se, but they engage with the public with the purpose of driving product sales. This has some overlap with engagement for the purpose of participation in sport. Previous research has explored the effect that influencers can have on consumers. For example, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that female Instagram users are perceived as relatable and this can affect purchase behaviour. The notion of relatability likely overlaps for females with influence in community sport settings. When consumers believe that their values and/or interests align with influencers, they are more likely to adapt their attitudes and behaviours (Cialdini, 1993; Kelman, 2006). That and the power of similarity between influencer and audience members (Gräve, 2017) are likely transferable to community sport contexts in which influence matters. Micro influencers have relatively modest followings but engage regularly with their followers via open lines of communication (Alampi, 2019). On the other hand, macro influencers are defined as having many more followers (De Veirman et al., 2017). Most community sport ambassadors are likely micro influencers with modest followership, but this requires further research.

Parasocial Interactions

When people interact with influencers and celebrities online, parasocial interactions (PSI) often occur. PSIs occur when audiences interact online with relatable and approachable personalities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Traditionally influencers also directly address their followers in posts which can cultivate a certain closeness so that followers see them as peers (Erz & Christensen, 2018; Gannon & Prothero, 2018). Further, when followers engage directly with influencers' posts, Schmidt (2007) found that the interaction may create a sense that the influencer is similar to oneself. In a marketing context, PSIs can bring people closer to celebrities or brands and enhance the relationship between the two entities (Labrecque, 2014). Community sport ambassadors seem to be active on social media and these PSIs should be explored further.

There is some precedent for exploring PSI's for professional athletes on X (Frederick et al., 2012), but a research gap remains at community sport level.

Influential Athletes, Icons and Volunteers

There are a variety of roles, titles and reputations that exist in community sport settings. There is some overlap among those who fill these roles, have these titles and have reputations with what is conceptualised here as community sport ambassadorship. Athletes are active in the community in different ways. For example, athletes have been influential and actively engaged in social issues (Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). Well-known athletes have previously been referred to as celebrities, such as Billie Jean King and Muhammad Ali, who had a capacity to combine sporting excellence with their commitment to engage in various causes to have a sustainable impact within society (Zirin, 2005). Nevertheless, at the peak of their career these personalities differed from today's ambassadors in terms of their social and cultural contexts, motivations, institutional involvement, and means of communication (Zirin, 2005). Some high-profile athletes wield influence in a variety of ways and may fill a community sport ambassadorship role at times. It's clear that not all community sport ambassadors are necessarily influential athletes in their own right.

Iconic people in sport are sometimes referred to as legends or stalwarts. Archetti (2002) defines a sports icon as any person admired for given qualities or achievements and regarded as ideal or model. Sports icons can also be understood to be “‘one of us’, (Hassan, 2013). It is common for sport icons to give back to community sport after achieving their own sporting successes and do so by volunteering or coaching. Icons seem to be prominent in community sport, so understanding what they are doing and formally giving them a title in the community is worth studying further. Again, there is some overlap here with what are known as “‘icons of sport” and the community sport ambassadorship role. This requires further investigation.

Volunteers in sport constitute a significant human resource (Kim, 2017) that is irreplaceable in many community sport contexts. When it comes to the motivation of volunteers, Bang and Ross (2009) found that it can differ based on contextual nuance and this is no doubt also true of community sport ambassadors. It appears that many community sport ambassadors are volunteers within their sporting communities, but not all are unpaid. So, remuneration and what we know of volunteers in sport contexts is important to keep in mind as exploration of community sport ambassadorship moves forward.

2.6 Social Media

Social media is an important aspect of this exploration of community sport ambassadorship. Although definitions of it are varied it can be understood as “Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication that facilitate perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content” (Carr & Hayes, 2016, p. 49). A primary goal of social media is to capture and monetise human attention, which results in features such as personalised algorithms and prominent influencers to capture and retain the attention of users (Van Bavel et al., 2024). Capturing people’s attention on social media has become highly competitive and has led people to create curated content that aims to capture attention rather than reflect reality or benefit humanity (Fisher, 2022). Overall, social media gives people – including community sport ambassadors – a platform to influence audiences.

Social media has emerged as a key communication and marketing tool in sport. For example, sports teams use it to develop communities for the purpose of building brand loyalty (Yost, 2010). A similar approach is likely to work for community sport ambassadors. Social media has also emerged as an important tool for athlete branding (Doyle et al., 2022) Ambassadors – including athletes - have an opportunity to market themselves on social media based on their interests and skill. Individuals have leveraged social media to influence on specific topics or issues, and this is particularly common in women’s sport. Social media platforms have emerged as an important tool for amplifying collective voices in women’s sports media (Crawford, 2023) and has led to the creation of other accounts that amplify topics such as gender equality and pay parity. Community sport ambassadors are no different, as they can use social media to develop sport participation bases among women and girls. While all community sport ambassadors might not all be present online, the ones who are have an opportunity to market their sport by sharing content online. So, related to the study of community sport ambassadorship, there are at least two ways in which social media should feature. The first is through a traditional content analysis, examining what community sport ambassadors post on social media. The second is to explore what social media content resonates with audiences. Shahbaznezhad et al., (2021), is a benchmark for how to analyse social media content but it has yet to be utilised in the context of community sport or sport development.

2.7 Women and Girls' Sport in New Zealand

The participation of girls in sport has precedent in research (Wilson et al., 2023). Rivera et al., (2022) conducted a study in Australia about how being outdoors and public recreation activities can connect adolescents and provide them an enjoyable environment to engage in. This study found that female participants ranging from 12-18 years-old visited recreational areas such as public parks, trails, or lakes at least once per week. There is a notable absence of research on this topic in New Zealand contexts.

Sport New Zealand, New Zealand's crown sporting entity, is particularly focused on a target participant group of girls aged 10-18 years old (Sport NZ, 2018, p.1). Previous research has shown that one of the integral factors for young women and girls in sport is the ability to have fun and socialise with friends. This has especially been a factor in participation for females in primary school (Sport NZ, 2018, p.6). For teenage girls in New Zealand, using sport as a way to keep fit has been marked as a priority for teenagers (Sport NZ, 2018, pg. 8). Therefore, it is important to explore and ultimately better understand the motives and drivers of sport participation for girls in New Zealand and this includes community sport ambassadors.

2.8 Summary

Overall, an understanding of who influences female engagement in sport is important. What ambassadors, role models, influencers and other leaders to do in this regard and its effectiveness is conspicuously absent from the related body of literature. What is currently known about ambassadorship is that it can be used as a marketing tool in that people can represent organisations a certain way and can help give competitive advantages. There is evidence from previous research of how people play important roles in community sport clubs, so that sets the scene to learn more about them. Ambassadorship is an established concept in the business and marketing literature and seems to have transferability to other contexts including community sport.

The conceptualisation of ambassadorship in community sport is underpinned by several theories and frameworks that provide credibility to this exercise. For example and as has been described, Relationship Marketing and Source Credibility Model provide a useful and justifiable underpinning for the topic. These frameworks provide a scholarly perspective in which to look at the topic of ambassadorship and help set the scene as ambassadorship is examined through a sport marketing lens.

There are several noteworthy gaps in the body of research in and around community sport ambassadorship. There lacks a clear definition of the phenomenon as well a framework outlining different types of community sport ambassadors. There is a need to explore not only what these people of influence are doing on the grassroots of sport for women and girls, but also their motivation for doing so. Another missing link in the literature is girls' as the target audience for sport development initiatives respond to ambassadorial initiatives. Having presented an overview of the existing literature and theories associated with this research, the next chapter will address the methods that were used to study ambassadorship in women and girls' community sport.

Chapter 3 - Method

The aim of this thesis is to generate an initial understanding of community sport ambassadorship in a women and girls' context, so a research design has been conceived to suit this foundational work. The research design can be described as pragmatic and multi-method, incorporating interviews, content analyses and focus groups. The project started with Study 1, comprising of definitional and conceptual work that resulted in a typology of community sport ambassadorship. This was followed by Study 2, 3, 4 and 5 that have generated insights advancing the body of literature in this area and that are useful to practitioners. The project explores ambassadorship through several complementary study designs, generating a breadth of evidence related to the four research questions.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research was guided by a pragmatic paradigm. This paradigm suits the researcher's world view and was appropriate for the real world context in which the research has been undertaken. Pragmatism is a philosophical belief that allows researchers to consider authentic knowledge by looking at the real truth (Ormerod, 2006). It also promotes methodological decisions that are connected to the research question and stages of research (McBeath, 2023). The pragmatic philosophy refers to any concept in the real world has a link to a type of experimental condition with observable results (Ormerod, 2005). Pragmatism allows for a combination of methods to explore research questions most effectively by examining the natural world while also incorporating perspectives through human interactions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Due to its applied and practical nature, this study of ambassadorship in women and girls' sport aligns well to a pragmatic approach. In addition, the five studies focus on the personal accounts and lived experiences of participants. Pragmatism is also appropriate because it involves dialogue that contains different types of knowledge that are viewed as tools to help people cope and thrive in the environment (Rorty, 1990). This project involves the accounts of individuals: ambassadors and their ambassadorial activity, as well as an exploration of how girls perceive ambassadorship. These lived experiences provide a foundation for understanding for community sport ambassadorship.

A pragmatic approach has been utilised previously in sport research. For example, Sherry et al., (2017) used the approach to study Sport-for-Development in the Pacific Islands region. Giacobbi et al., (2005) noted that pragmatism looks to solve real-world issues while stressing the importance of evaluating research

findings based on practical, social, and moral consequences along with effects on the human condition. A practical lens is well suited to this series of studies which aim to generate useful insights for women and girls' sport practitioners.

According to Walsham's (1995) outline of interpretivism, knowledge is reality and is socially constructed by humans. It is therefore appropriate for the qualitative dimensions of this series of studies to explore the inherently social ways in which ambassadors engage with others. An interpretive approach aligns with pragmatism because pragmatism explores the world through human perspectives and interactions. Saunders and Thornhill (2012) stated that interpretivism includes the researcher as a social actor and enables appreciation of differences between people. This notion of the researcher being an actor within the research setting is also complementary with the pragmatic approach. Overall, pragmatism and interpretivism are well suited for this project because this research includes real-world knowledge, which is constructed by humans, and aligns with interpretivism.

Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research uses text, words, and talk to develop concepts that facilitate understanding of social phenomena (Gephart, 2004; Yauch & Steudel, 2003). This type of research focuses on "documents, analyses and interprets how human beings construct and attach meanings to their experiences" (Patton, 2015, p.13). Interviews in qualitative research aim to elicit participants' views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories to gain access to their experiences (Fossey et al., 2002; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). A qualitative approach was appropriate in this project as the experiences of ambassadors and those they engage with was essential. Probing personal experiences was also essential to understand how girls respond to online content from ambassadors. Qualitative research can be effective to facilitate understanding of a small number of participant views through relatively broad questions, which aim to achieve a depth of understanding (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Fossey et al., 2002).

Ontology & Epistemology

Ontology is consideration of the existence of other people, the roles they play and their purpose (Zakus et al., 2007, p. 136). This consideration has informed the pragmatic approach to studying ambassadorship in women and girls' community sport. Investigating not only the existence of ambassadors but also their purpose in women's sport including lived experiences and human interactions is essential to understanding

how they help grow and maintain interest. Epistemology focuses on how humans know things and how knowledge is acquired rationally and transactionally (Zakus et al., p. 140). Thinking about this helped shaped the researcher's approach to this project because the content that ambassadors share and their interactions with the community allow them to communicate knowledge to participants about not only basketball but also values that extend beyond sport. This knowledge can be studied using a pragmatic approach because acquiring such knowledge comes from observing and learning from other people in the community who have experience doing similar things. However, the approach here is also applied insofar as one key outcome will be actionable insights shared with key industry partners.

3.2 Research Design

This thesis features a multi-method design, comprising a sequence of studies in which multiple forms of data are collected (Creswell, 2015, p. 2-3). Multi-method studies feature individual phases of research that are complementary but are not generally integrated until inferences are made (Anguera et al., 2018). In the current project, those inferences are brought together in a final discussion in Chapter 9. A multi-methods design is appropriate for this project given the novelty of community sport ambassadorship as a phenomenon and the benefits that will accrue from exploring it in various ways. Multi-method research works well within a pragmatic framework (Schrauf, 2016). Singular and multiple realities are likely to emerge from the various participants who will be sharing insights across these studies which will allow for recommendations and solutions to be presented related to what can be described as 'real world issues' (Feilzer, 2010). The multi-method design has precedent in the body of sport management literature (e.g., Uhrich, 2014) which is increasingly inclusive of diverse methodological approaches. Within the sequence of five studies in this thesis, the lived experiences of ambassadors and participants are captured across three studies while the other two studies provide complementary insights. The research questions were conceived and framed as simply in line with the researcher's pragmatic, epistemological and ontological viewpoint. Ultimately, it was appropriate to frame the research questions in the sequence presented as understanding the types of community sport ambassadors (RQ1) sets the foundation for exploring the behaviours and motivations of ambassadors (RQ2), as well as the nature of content online and its effectiveness (RQs 3 and 4).

The first study is inherently pragmatic because the typology is based on reflections and conversations that relate to lived experiences from members of the community. The second study's qualitative approach

captures the ambassadors' activity itself, therefore also aligning with pragmatism (Rorty, 1990). This is due to the authentic knowledge that comes from working directly with those in the grassroots spaces of sport. Capturing the lived experiences is essential for these interviews because each ambassador has different perspectives and motivations that have shaped their work. Study 3 is a qualitative content analysis of social media also consistent with the pragmatic framework in that it offers insights about ambassadors' experience of working in the community via social channels. Study 4 is pragmatic as the interviews are aimed at understanding the experiences of ambassadors in rugby, cricket and football and how the ambassadors' activity influences participation in those sports. The focus groups in Study 5 also align with pragmatism because of the focus on the lived experiences of participants engaging with ambassadors. Data collection for multi-method research includes gathering data that is informed by research questions (Fossey et al., 2002). Interviews were carried out to understand ambassadors' motivations and behaviours, while content analysis was utilised to understand the nature of what ambassadors post on social media.

Study 1

In Study 1, a definition of community sport ambassadorship was developed and a typology of community sport ambassadors was created using a process outlined by Sartori (1970). A typology is a systematic way of classification and establishing relationships among concepts. Typologies are a way for researchers to define and explain elements or variables that are part of their research (Collier et al., 2008). The proposed typology here is a systematic way to classify types of ambassadors in community sport.

Those interviewed by the researcher in Study 1 were asked to reflect on the evolving conceptualisation of community sport ambassadorship. The interviewees were sampled using the purposive sampling technique. This was appropriate as it provided guidance for the researcher as to which individuals with relevant experience and knowledge were a fit to be interviewed. This was in line with the essence of purposive sampling which is making careful sampling choices based on potential participant qualities (Etikan et al., 2016). In this case, the researcher purposefully selected for either familiarity with community basketball or sport marketing scholarship, and in some cases both. The number of participants was in part guided by Guest et al., (2006) suggested range of 6–12 being appropriate.

Interviewees (n=12) were a combination of sport marketing scholars and those who work in the New Zealand or Australian basketball communities. The purpose of including people who work in different

occupations across the sport sector was to complement the scholarly lens through which the phenomenon being considered. Each of the interviewees had witnessed or experienced ambassadorial activity in community sport themselves. The interview guide was developed on the basis of understanding these experts' view on the viability and validity of the community sport framework which is the focus of this thesis.

Study 2

In Study 2, ambassadors in the women and girls' basketball community of New Zealand were interviewed. The purpose of these interviews was to address the research questions related to community sport ambassadors' motivation and behaviour.

The participants were sampled using the typology in Study 1 as a guide and the purposive sampling method. Quota sampling was appropriate to ensure those from each of the five types were included and thereby ensuring key group representation (Mason, 2002). Snowball sampling (also known as chain sampling) allowed participants to make recommendations as to potential additional interviewees (Robinson, 2014). Once the researcher generated a list of ambassadors that fit each of the five types based on the typology in Study 1, she then contacted participants via email. For those who agreed to take part, an interview was scheduled either in person or on Microsoft TEAMS.

The interviews in Study 2 were semi-structured. It was appropriate to use this method as the researcher wasn't entirely sure as to the direction of how participants would discuss their motivation and behaviour. Open-ended questions were an appropriate means to explore the motivations and behaviours of ambassadors. Prior to the interviews, the researcher curated an interview guide with open-ended questions that were specific to each type of ambassador. For example, Athlete Ambassadors were asked questions about how their role as elite athletes related to their ambassadorial behaviour. The researcher used follow up questions to probe each interviewee as needed.

In Study 2, Thematic Analysis (TA) was appropriate when identifying patterns related to community sport ambassadorial motivation as well as the behaviour of the ambassadors. This approach was also useful when exploring the behaviours and motivations because it investigates what the ambassadors' activity is and then reviews to see which themes are recurring. The result of the TA was insights about motivation across

the ambassador types as well as the activity that is engaged. TA was appropriate to analyse this study because the engagement with the data resulted in a rigorous understanding of motivation and behaviour.

Study 3

In Study 3, a selection of social media posts was analysed for the purpose of understanding community sport ambassadors' online activity.

Research participants whose social media content was analysed were purposefully sampled based on the typology in the first study. A key criterion of the sampling process was that the social media accounts of ambassadors included posts about women and girls' basketball. Since the aim of this study was to investigate the nature of what ambassadors post on social media, it was appropriate for the researcher to create a list of ambassadors based on the five types. Once a list of potential ambassadors was generated, the researcher then used the search function on Instagram and Facebook platforms to investigate if the identified ambassadors were active online. A total of 56 pieces of content were sampled from accounts across three community ambassador types.

Study 3 utilised a qualitative content analytic approach, which is appropriate for making replicable and valid inferences from data and applying it to a specific context (Krippendorff, 1989). The types of data that are used as part of content analysis typically come from written documents and visuals, or anything that recurs and has consistent meaning for a specific group of people (Krippendorff, 1989). A content analysis can also be characterised as a systematic and replicable method for analysing written and visual content (Riffe et al., 2005). Therefore, the research approach in Study 3 was appropriate to help understand the nature of the ambassadors' activity because it is a means of exploring both images and accompanying narrative on social media platforms.

The results for Study 3 were analysed by creating a categorical classification system for the social media posts that were included. The process began by brainstorming broad categories after the social media posts were selected. These categories were then compiled into a codebook by the primary researcher and discussed with the research team. Categorising in content analysis includes organising large quantities of text into content categories (Weber, 1990). The categories are patterns or themes that are directly expressed in the text or are derived from them through analysis (Weber, 1990). Then, relationships among categories are identified. Further, this step created a coding scheme, which serves as a translation device to organise data

into various categories (Poole & Folger, 1981). The primary researcher went on to complete one round of coding before sending separate blank code books to each of the PhD supervisors. Once the researcher and each supervisor finished their individual coding, the team met to make a collective decision about which posts were assigned to which category.

Study 4

In Study 4, the purpose was to understand the wider applicability of community sport ambassadorship in women and girls' contexts beyond basketball. To that end, a selection of those familiar with these contexts in rugby, cricket and football were interviewed.

The participants for Study 4 were individuals whose roles target women and girl's participation in rugby, cricket and football. These individuals were sampled using purposive and quota techniques. These sampling methods were appropriate as it was essential that the interviewees had knowledge of the women and girls' community in their sport so they could provide insights related to their specific sport. Similar to Study 2, there were some instances in which snowball sampling took place. In these cases, interviewees shared names of colleagues that they thought could also contribute to the conversation. Some potential participants were identified from Regional and National sport organisation websites. The primary researcher also leveraged her personal network to approach and invite potential interviewees. The final list included 12 participants who were members of National Sport Organisations (NSOs); Regional Sport Organisations (RSOs); rugby, cricket, and football clubs; and Regional Sport Trusts (RSTs).

The transcripts from the interviews during Study 4 were thematically analysed, as it allowed for the researcher to identify themes that were common across rugby, cricket and football. TA was appropriate to analyse this study because of the engagement with the data that came from the depth of the interviews with the participants.

Study 5

The purpose of the Study 5 was to explore if and how social media content of ambassadors resonates with girls in the community. To this end, a series of focus groups was undertaken in which girls discussed a selection of Instagram reels produced by community sport ambassadors.

Participants for the focus groups in Study 5 were girl basketball players between the ages of 8 to 18 years-old and were selected by way of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. The primary researcher

contacted over 20 team representatives initially about staging a focus groups with youth female players and seven teams ultimately participated including a total of 59 players.

Each focus group was conducted in a tournament setting because of the convenience for the researcher to multiple focus groups in a central location. The researcher leveraged networks from Basketball New Zealand - the primary industry partner on the project – to establish contacts and eventually assemble the focus groups.

In Study 5, the researcher conducted a series of seven focus groups with girls between the ages of 8-18 years-old. Focus groups are a form of research to collect data in participatory research, including when working with young people (Bagnoli & Clarke, 2010). Further, focus groups are defined as “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 2). This method also allowed for participants to hear each other and respond to each other’s points of view. Previous research has suggested that four focus groups is generally appropriate (Guest et al., 2016, Hennink & Kaiser, 2022) which was exceeded in this study.

As was the case with other studies in this thesis, data from the Study 5 focus groups were also thematically analysed. This allowed for patterns to emerge from the transcripts.

3.3 Basketball in New Zealand

The sport of basketball in New Zealand was well suited as the primary context for this research on ambassadorship in community sport. In general, participation in basketball in New Zealand has grown consistently and it is now one of the most popular sports in New Zealand (Jansen, 2024). Anecdotally, one of the drivers behind the growth of the sport is a breadth of individuals in various roles ranging from paid staff in sport organisations to coaches, and elite players who act as marketing agents and advocate for the growth of the sport. Sometimes, community basketball programmes are implemented by paid employees who, unlike coaches and elite players, have this advocacy work as part of a formal job description. Basketball coaches are also at the forefront of this endeavour because in their role, actions, behaviour and communication influence the extent to which girls stay involved.

Women’s national team players are another group of individuals within the wider basketball community who somehow fill a marketing function for the sport. They regularly engage and share knowledge seemingly to benefit the sport as a whole. The actions of elite female athletes also appear to be vital to the growth of the game but is yet to be looked at extensively through a marketing lens. Overall, there are individuals who do

important work in marketing women's basketball but the way in which they do this work seems to differ markedly. No framework or wider conceptualisation currently exists that can help us make sense of the roles and behaviours of individuals driving women's basketball forward in New Zealand.

The primary researcher is familiar with the women's basketball community, which aided the decision to base the research in this context. Over many years the researcher has witnessed ambassadorial activity and has built relationships with key people who are active in the grassroots in promoting the sport to girls. Having seen the impact first hand and knowing people who work in the sport, basketball was an appropriate choice to study this phenomenon. The connections the researcher had built over time played an important role in gathering participants and building a relationship with Basketball New Zealand (BBNZ) - New Zealand's national governing body for basketball – who ultimately became the industry partner on this project.

Industry Partnership with Basketball New Zealand (BBNZ)

This research project was conducted in partnership with Basketball New Zealand. The partnership provided value for BBNZ given that one of the organisation's interests is to nurture the growth of basketball for women and girls. One of the ways that BBNZ is nurturing the growth of women and girls' basketball is through a programme branded as Girls Got Game, which brings elite athletes into primary schools for the purpose of creating interest in basketball. The Girls Got Game programme is an example of a situation in which community sport ambassadors are active and play an essential role performing a marketing function. Given the nationwide scale of the endeavour, it was appropriate to understand who the ambassadors are who part of this programme, and what contributions they make as part of it.

The partnership was conceived prior to the project commencing and one key dimension was BBNZ facilitating introductions to conduct the focus groups with girls in Study 5. One way in which BBNZ influenced the studies was advocating for the inclusion of both pre-teen and teenage girls in the Study 5 focus groups. This differed from the pre-teen focus that had been proposed and was ultimately more inclusive and generated more holistic findings. Since the collaboration began, the research team has provided periodic updates on the research and is producing a series of infographics for them to disperse throughout their organisation and throughout the basketball community.

The researcher acknowledges the familiarity with the context of basketball in New Zealand along with the positive association with individuals because of personal connections and understanding that they do important work. Therefore, the bias would be positive given the positive experience of interviewing people. However, the relationship with Basketball New Zealand was new coming into this project. Whilst the team ended up championing the project as they were equally interested in the women's basketball context, they were able to bring new perspectives to the project given the new relationship. Additionally, considering one of the aims of this research was to have an impact, it was appropriate for the researcher to be involved in that area to make the most of the impact. This thinking aligns with an article from Galas (2017), which stated that the concern should be whether the researcher is transparent and reflexive about the processes by which data was collected, analysed and presented. Overall, it was appropriate to balance engagement with industry whilst being aware of biases.

Chapter 4 - Study 1

In the first study of this doctoral thesis, a working definition of ambassadorship in community sport was carefully considered and settled upon. The definition of ambassadorship was informed primarily by management and marketing scholarship but amended to fit the community sport context. After conceiving the definition, a framework to understand varying forms of ambassadorship was sought and a five-dimensional typology was the result. Developing a typology specifically addresses the first research question querying the types of ambassadors in women's sport. This chapter provides an overview of both processes that the researcher undertook. Twelve semi-structured interviews were undertaken with related experts who provided feedback on the conceptualisation of community sport ambassadorship. The Study 1 definition and typology reported here are foundational to the sequence of studies that follow and therefore the thesis as a whole.

As the field of sport management has evolved, various constructs and frameworks have emerged, often with pedigree elsewhere. Doherty (2013) outlined the interdisciplinary approach that sport management researchers undertake when conceptualising new phenomena. The approach here aligns insofar as ambassadorship is conceptualised in a women and girls community sport context for the first time – consistent with how it has been interpreted elsewhere in some ways, but a novel interpretation in others. In addition, online environments are explicitly considered in this conceptual work given how important they are in community sport.

4.1 Research Context

The primary researcher chose to explore community sport ambassadorship in the context of women's basketball in New Zealand. The researcher's observations and previous experience in the community indicated that individuals of influence were at least in part responsible for basketball being one of the fastest growing sports in the country (Newshub, 2023). The impact of the people who work in community sport warrants further investigation, making it a suitable case study in which to explore community sport ambassadorship. Additionally, the primary researcher is familiar with the women's basketball community and has a network of contacts that assisted in facilitating interviews and focus groups in the subsequent studies.

Numerous colleagues, community sport leaders and community sport researchers were probed informally during this initial conceptual work. This took the form mostly of short conversations in gymnasias, conferences and on campuses, but involved some longer conversations as well. That informal feedback from colleagues and practitioners has been in support of conceptualising ambassadorship in women and girls' community sport. The ideas presented in this chapter have also been presented at numerous international sport management conferences during which the feedback from colleagues has been positive and supportive regarding the appropriateness and novelty of this work. In a more formal ethics approved, semi-structured interview format, the researcher engaged a selection of twelve sport marketing scholars and leaders in the basketball community on the evolving definition and typology. The following sections discuss key words and concepts to be considered within a definition of ambassadorship in community sport as well as a presentation of a typology of ambassadorship in community sport.

4.2 Defining Ambassadorship in Community Sport

Defining the central construct of this doctoral thesis was a vital first step. Therefore, several key words and concepts from scholarly works on the topic of ambassadorship were considered to develop a definition specifically appropriate for the current research context – community sport for women and girls. It is important to acknowledge that volunteers play an important role in the community sport landscape and that some people are labelled as such. Volunteering is defined as “the voluntary giving of time and talents to deliver services or perform tasks with no direct financial compensation expected. Volunteering includes the participation of citizens in the direct delivery of service to others; citizen action groups; advocacy for causes, groups, or individuals; participation in the governance of both private and public agencies; self-help and mutual aid endeavours; and a broad range of informal helping activities. (Cnaan et al., 1996, p. 367). Although there is overlap with the aforementioned definition and the definition of community sport ambassadorship, there are differences. While the definition by Cnaan et al., (1996) is a starting point, but not every ambassador is a volunteer nor is every volunteer an ambassador.

In one oft-cited definition, ambassadors are described as people who provide “a credible testimony” and can “through the word-of-mouth effect, influence others through their networks and relationships” (Andersson & Ekman, 2009, p.43). Notions of credibility, influencing others and word-of-mouth effects were carefully considered from that definition.

Ambassadors are also characterised as community members who in some way work for the organization but not directly, at least not in the traditional sense of employment (Dawson, 2018). Additionally, Schau et al., (2009) noted that ambassadors are expected to behave on behalf of a community and exhibit certain practices. These elements were a starting point for the development work that followed due to apparent transferability to the current research context.

Ambassadorship can be characterised as ‘prosocial’ which is driven more by collective benefits rather than personal gain (Hassler et al., 2024). While there are for-profit organisations that hire and often benefit from brand ambassadors, the notion of ambassadorship seems to have evolved such that there is a wider utility of this way of thinking about influential people. Collective benefit rather than personal gain appears particularly transferable to ambassadorship in the current women and girls’ community sport context.

Pavlinský (2022) provided insight on ambassadors within the European Young Olympic Ambassadors Programme and this is instructive for the development work in the current study. In that programme, ambassadors are thought of as facilitators, reporters and promoters (Pavlinský, 2022). They are described as “open-minded and can create a welcoming environment” (Pavlinský, 2022, p.26). Ambassadors are “sociable, creative and enjoy conversing with people they have not met” (Pavlinský, 2022, p.26). This overview provides a framework and helps inform the development of a definition for the current context. Several other key words, phrases and concepts are discussed next.

Credibility

Credibility is an important dimension of ambassadorship. There are two main components that drive source credibility: expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland et al., 1953). Both are (on face value) important for ambassadorial work within community sport. From a marketing perspective, Keller (2008) stated that credibility is the extent that consumers make judgements about organisations that provide services and involves the consumer’s judgement about the expertise of the organisation. Again, one can envision the process whereby newcomers to community sport might make these judgements about the key people around. Previous research has indicated that the credibility of celebrity endorsers can positively impact the credibility of the brands they endorse (Elberse & Verleun, 2012; Nicolau & Santa-Maria, 2013; Spryet al., 2011). Likewise, if an ambassador with high credibility is connected to a sport, their credibility can positively impact perceptions of the sport more broadly.

There are at least six pathways to credibility and these are discovering oneself, appreciating constituents, affirming shared values, developing capacity, serving a purpose, and sustaining hope (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Ambassadors in community sport often develop capacity from their experience in the sport, which can involve affiliations with various regional and national sport organisations, teams and competitions. Appreciating constituents and affirming shared values are also undoubtedly important in community sport. Ambassadors influence others, shape attitudes and inspire both new and returning participants and the result is often shared values and sustained hope.

Ambassadors as Assets

It is appropriate to consider ambassadors as assets to an organisation (Yang & Lin, 2009). “Strategic assets” are things that are “simultaneously valuable, rare, imperfectly limitable, and non-substitutable” (Barney, 1991, p.109). Due to the marketing functions that ambassadors engage in within community sport environments, they can therefore be described as assets. In community sport, ambassadors can be characterised as intangible assets because of their ability to build personal connections with stakeholders. These connections are intangible to the extent that they are often not visible, documented or celebrated. While they add value through performance output and skills, the value of relationships can’t really be measured directly. For instance, the connection that a newcomer may form with an ambassador while attending a sports camp is powerful, but difficult to quantify. Hence, community sport ambassadors can be thought of as intangible assets bringing unique value. Ambassadors in a Northern Ireland football context have been characterised as playing a vital role facilitating a warm, welcoming environment for participants and others (Hepworth, 2023), essentially serving as organisational assets.

When community sport ambassadors build relationships with participants in person or over social media, they are promoting the sport in a unique way that is different than traditional marketing techniques like advertising and promotion. This uniqueness benefits sport by helping to generate new participants and helping to retain current participants. Heide et al., (2018) indicated that ambassadors add value to an organisation as assets by building relationships with current and future participants. The ability to facilitate this is a further reason to characterise ambassadors in community sport as assets.

Relatability

The extent to which ambassadors are relatable to audience members is also important. This is best understood as one's ability to reflect the feelings and attitudes of ordinary people (Duffy, 2016). Although there is no clear example in published research exploring the relatability of ambassadors to potential sport participants, it has been the focus of research related to social media influencers. For example, Reade (2021) examined how aspiring social media influencers create authentic content to be relatable with their followers. Curating social media content to be more authentic and relatable has become an important parasocial strategies for influencers who want to connect with their followers (Abidin, 2018). This concept translates well to a community sport context in which ambassadors can share social media content that is relatable and authentic. Van Dijck (2013) found that the more relatable social media content creators are, the more social capital they gather from connectivity, which can be converted into economic capital. Likewise, ambassadors in community sport contexts can accumulate social capital when they are perceived as relatable. Ambassadors can influence people's attitudes about becoming involved by presenting themselves in relatable way as being knowledgeable, authentic about their experiences and enthusiastic about the activity.

Approachability

For ambassadors, the extent to which they are perceived as being approachable to audiences is relevant and this has been explored in a variety of contexts including influencers on social media (Steinke et al., 2024). Hobday (2014) explored the characteristics of coaches who serve as mentors for their peers and approachability emerged. In brand ambassadorship research, being approachable has also come through as crucial (Crouch et al., 2016).

Influence

In considering the wider body of ambassadorship literature, the notion of influence is central. In short, influence is any change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviours that results from interaction with another individual or a group (Rashotte, 2007). Nowadays, influencers are accessible, believable, intimate and thus easy to relate to as they share aspects of their life with their followers and interact with them (Abidin 2018; Schau & Gilly 2003). Ambassadors in community sport are in a position of influence because they have a capability to change people's thoughts and attitudes about involvement in sport, which can often be accomplished through a series of interactions during which influence is exerted.

When ambassadors engage in online activity, they create a “para-social interaction”, an illusion of a face-to-face relationship that can heighten influence (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Knoll et al., 2015). Social media has provided ambassadors an environment where they can have para-social interactions when they share information about themselves or their interests. Ambassadors can then mobilise the para-social interactions to influence people’s attitudes.

Community Sport Ambassadors as Marketing Agents

Community sport ambassadors assume the role of a marketing agent insofar as they engage in many traditional marketing functions including conceiving/implementing programs, communication and promotion. In effect, community sport ambassadors act as messengers for brands (Spero & Stone, 2004) although we do not often think of sports that are being developed as brands. One way that ambassadors share messages with the community is by word-of-mouth marketing, which is also known as a ‘channel of communication’ (Eden et al., 2013). Ambassadors create a channel of communication with grassroots participants through personal interactions and perform marketing functions. Word-of-mouth marketing is a cost-effective tool used for promotion and can be employed when building relationships and influencing people (Andersson & Ekman, 2009). Ambassadors engage in word-of-mouth marketing regularly and this is aided by credibility, relatability, influence and approachability. Another important marketing function that ambassadors in community sport perform is personal selling. For example, an influential person in a community sport context might inform participants about an upcoming event, competition or other ways to foster deeper engagement.

That “sport gives us heroes to admire and positive role models who inspire young people” (UNICEF, 2004, p. 26) is an example of sport marketing activity that fits within the domain of ambassadorship. Indeed, athletes are key ambassadors and play a fundamental role in delivering the entertainment’ (MacIntosh & Nicol, 2012). Another example of a prominent athlete who has been characterised as an ambassador and therefore doing marketing work in a sport context is Norman Kwong. He is a Chinese Canadian football player who was considered a trailblazer for Chinese/Asians in Canada and fought through obstacles to reach sporting success (Chen, 2021). Kwong’s on-field success with the Canadian Football League (CFL) earned him respect and turned him into a cultural ambassador (Simons, 2001). Kwong is an example of person who acts as an ambassador by creating new opportunities for their community by breaking barriers and leaving

the sport in a better place for people to try. Essentially, in his role as an ambassador, he served as a marketing agent for the sport.

Qatar influencer Ghanim Al Muftah served as a brand ambassador for the FIFA World Cup 2022 representing another way in which the phenomenon exists. Al Muftah's presence as an ambassador was received positively as it conveyed awareness of the inclusivity aspect of the event to the audience (Rizana & Lisnarini, 2023). The awareness generation dimension of ambassadorship (again effectively a marketing function) is directly transferable to community sport contexts.

4.3 Definition

As a result of careful consideration of the ambassadorship literature inside and outside of sport, specific applicability within a women and girls' community sport context and extensive informal/formal consultation, the following definition was conceived:

An ambassador in community sport is a relatable and credible person in a position of influence. They are intangible assets performing a variety of marketing functions on behalf of the wider sport community.

4.4 A Typology of Community Sport Ambassadors

Having defined the concept of community sport ambassadorship, the next logical step was to develop a framework to understand various ambassadorial types in community sport – in other words the types of people who act as ambassadors. An appropriate way to do this was by developing a typology. The typology that was eventually settled upon captures the prominent types of ambassadors in community sport and their characteristics.

4.5 Definition and Typology Validation

Following the initial conceptualisation of the typology by the researcher and team as well as the informal and ongoing consultation that has been going on for many months, the next logical step was to present the conceptual work to a series of people for more formal feedback. This is characterised as a means to validate the conceptual work.

The primary researcher formally interviewed 12 sport marketing scholars and community sport practitioners (Table 4.1; pseudonyms included). Interviewees were purposefully selected for either familiarity with community basketball or sport marketing scholarship, and in some cases both. Each of the interviewees were believed to have witnessed or experienced ambassadorial activity in sport themselves,

hence making them ideal candidates to feedback on the working definition and evolving typology. Some of the questions that were posed in the interviews were as follows: 1. How do you see ambassadorship in sport? 2. Who do you think the ambassadors are in your sport? 3. What kinds of activity do you think ambassadors engage in your sport? The interviewees were then presented with the working typology and asked specific questions about each type and how relevant it was. The purpose of these interviews was to receive feedback about the nature of the relationships between ambassadors and the communities they serve.

Table 4.1

Study 1 Interviewees

Donna Watkins (DW)	Sport Scholar and Regional Basketball Board Chairperson
Morgan Webley (MW)	Employee at National Sport Organisation – Basketball New Zealand
James Jackson (JJ)	Scholar with sport management expertise
Clara Smith (CW)	Employee at National Sport Organisation – Basketball New Zealand
Samantha Logan (SL)	Employee at Regional Sport Trust – Aktive Auckland
Christian Grant (CG)	Scholar with sport marketing expertise
Emily Schroder (ES)	Scholar with sport marketing expertise
Shae Turner (ST)	Tall Ferns Cultural Advisor and head coach of a semi-professional women’s basketball team
Madison Vickers (MV)	Employee at Sport New Zealand
Josh Daniels (JD)	Employee at Regional Sport Organisation – Auckland Basketball Services
Chris Heal (CH)	Member of the Women’s National Basketball League (WNBL) Advisory Group
Claire Samuels (CS)	Scholar with expertise in women and girls in sport

Since the aim of these interviews was to generate insights about a working definition and evolving typology, the interviews were not deductive in nature as is appropriate within a qualitative research paradigm. Once the interviews were completed, an iterative process followed whereby the research team discussed the feedback and considered changes to the definition and typology. The typology was then presented back to those initially consulted as well as more broadly in a process that was inclusive of a variety of voices and individuals with an interest. This cycle continued until a widespread consensus was reached on the ambassadorial roles within the typology and how they were presented. The decision on when that consensus had occurred was made in conjunction with the research team.

All in all, the consultation with the expert interviewees was very positive. Widespread endorsement for not only the definition and typology but also the importance of the area of research was clear. No changes

were made to the definition as a result of the consultation and minor wording changes were made with the typology structure. For example, it was brought up that for ambassadors from within one of the final named types (i.e., Athlete Advocates), credibility is more meaningfully enhanced by achievements rather than a prominent social media following as had featured in some of the early conceptual work. So, the description of that type was eventually amended to reflect that insight.

In the end, the five named categories within the typology are as follows: Prominent Stalwart, Athlete Advocate, Grassroots Champion, Within Vocation, and Male Ally. Table 4.2 provides a brief characterisation of the five types of community sport ambassadors. A longer description of each ambassador type follows.

Table 4.2

Typology of Community Sport Ambassadors

Type A	Prominent Stalwart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility based on longevity and achievement • Multidimensional engagement in basketball • Highly visible and well-known
Type B	Athlete Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominent on social media • Credibility based on performance
Type C	Grassroots Champion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to have familial connection • Significant impact within region • Likely unpaid volunteer
Type D	Within Vocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid for ambassadorial activity • Within job description
Type E	Male Ally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free time and volunteer work • Most involved with women and girls • Involvement is enduring over time

4.5.1 Prominent Stalwart

Prominent Stalwarts are acknowledged by the community as someone who has garnered credibility based on their longevity in the sport. These individuals may be referred to as ‘legends’ of the game. This longevity links to a high degree of credibility. Their experience and success in sport fuels their reputation. This type of ambassador can be described as highly visible and well-known. They are likely to be recognised around the country as well as have a high local/regional profile. They’re likely to attend tournaments or awards ceremonies. Prominent Stalwarts typically have multidimensional involvement in sport, often filling a

number of roles. For example, this type of ambassador may be simultaneously a coach and a community sport club board member. In New Zealand's basketball community several former Olympians now hold coaching, development and high-performance roles at the same time.

4.5.2 Athlete Advocate

Athlete Advocates are ambassadors who are still actively playing the game at a reasonably high level. Their ambassadorial activity is mostly through engaging the community after matches, as guests at youth camps and online. They may be prominent on social media platforms such as Instagram or X where their activity reflects their passion for basketball. Some ambassadors of this type share photos of themselves working with kids and actively seek to pass on their love of the game to the next generation. These ambassadors' credibility is based on their sporting performance as well as personal character. Skill is an important consideration because it demonstrates that the athlete has reached a certain level of success in their sport.

4.5.3 Grassroots Champion

Grassroots Champions fill unpaid roles in basketball, often in an unselfish manner, but still make a significant impact within their region. In most cases this type of ambassador has familial ties within the sport that they operate in. For example, it may be that Grassroots Champions currently, or formerly, had a child in the sport. The roles that these individuals fill include representative or school coaches, team managers, referees, scorekeepers, or association board members. Based on the researcher's observation, grassroots champions are one of the most represented types of ambassadors in the basketball community.

4.5.4 Within Vocation

Within Vocation ambassadors often fill paid roles with National Sporting Organisations (NSOs), Regional Sport Organisations (RSOs), local sport associations, or government agencies. Individuals in these paid roles perform ambassadorial work that is often depicted in their job description. This might include designing and implementing programmes that are specific to women and girls in basketball. Some examples of these jobs include regional Community Managers and Community Basketball Officers at regional associations.

4.5.5 Male Ally

Male Ally ambassadors in the basketball community dedicate a large portion of their time to working with women and girls specifically. Another characteristic of this type is that they work to create

opportunities for women and girls often by way of skill trainings or strength and conditioning sessions. Male Allies also help women and girls off the court by preparing and educating girls about the importance of skills such as academics and working within teams to perform in collegiate and professional sport. Additionally, Male Allies have a longstanding enduring involvement with women and girls. Their work in the basketball community is consistent and high quality, and they make a name for themselves in the community providing a reliable and visible support system over time.

4.6 Reflections from the Interviewees on the Definition and Typology

As noted, the overall conceptualisation and focus on ambassadorship in community sport was well supported by the interviewees. The interviewees related that in women's basketball there is still a lack of resources to promote the game, so the influential individuals who do that work (often informally and unpaid) are absolutely essential. In contrast to a sport such as netball that allocates more funding for marketing the game, basketball is not yet as well- resourced (Chapman, 2018). The interviewees conveyed that individuals who are active in the basketball community take it upon themselves to market the game and connect with potential participants themselves. Some examples of comments made by the interviewees are provided next, which together reflect support for the community sport ambassador concept.

The importance of ambassadorship immediately resonated with an interviewee who works in women's basketball. This person recounted stories about witnessing the impact of ambassadors every day in their position at a Regional Sport Organisation (RSO) and recognised that ambassadors play an important role in increasing participation for girls compared to other sports.

“Ambassadorship probably has a greater influence on women's basketball than it does in other areas. I think that for our females and our younger females, having ambassadors and being relatable and credible is key in getting engagement. There's a large perception in basketball that the male's kind of have control of everything; they have better opportunities, the game is more set up for them. By having relatable and credible ambassadors that females can focus on, you're way more likely to get engagement from females in the sport.” – JD

One interviewee expressed her support for a focus on ambassadors because she believed they bring value to their communities by influencing behaviour changes in children and teenagers or otherwise prioritising the wellbeing of the youth in New Zealand.

“We acknowledge that there's been influential people around the sector for a while but thinking about the concept of ambassadors from a strategic perspective is something new. It's something we have started exploring, the role that ambassadors can play especially for influencing and driving behaviour change.” – MV

The idea that ambassadors play an important role in the community was also supported by another interviewee. CS emphasised the importance of highlighting ambassadors in the community so they can be nurtured by organisations and people around them.

“I think that particularly in New Zealand there’s a gap and those that we see as ambassadors, we need to elevate them and multiply them so that they’re more impactful.” – CS

As for the five types of ambassadors, there was support from across the 12 interviewees that the types described are active in the basketball community. For example, the descriptions of each of type of ambassador has meaning to people such as DW. Having worked in different positions in the basketball community, she has come across the people who fill these roles in grassroots basketball.

“...those five types and I can see. I can see examples that I’ve come across within community basketball and I’ve been involved as a player, as a coach, as a manager and in governance. Through all my different roles, I’ve seen those five different types and at different stages.” – DW

JD shared that the proposed typology resonated based on his experience in women’s basketball. Unlike other sports, they said that the success of grassroots basketball is not reliant on only one type of ambassador.

“Ambassadors in other sports tend to be superstars. In women’s basketball there’s a big variety of people that jump to mind, you don’t just think about the star athletes. You think of people who work in administration or coaching; it’s a whole community.” – JD

Prominent Stalwarts were a type of ambassador that resonated straight away with interviewees.

“When I think about ambassadors in sport, I often think of typically the retired athlete who gets wheeled out at important functions and says great things about the sport and how everyone should come in and play it.” – JJ

On the Athlete Advocate type, it was noted their credibility puts them in a position of influence and that basketball skills were important to distinguish elite athletes from those who are participating recreationally.

“Even if they aren’t at the top of the game, I think the wider community can still see that they have skill and the power to influence because of that skill. If you take that completely out and the athlete really is just a participant that loves the game but has not reached any level of skill or performance, do they still have a place to be an advocate? You need credibility based on performance for the athlete because otherwise you can still be an advocate or an ambassador, but you’d have to fall into one of the other categories then.” – CS

There was universal agreement on the appropriateness of the Grassroots Champion type. JD noted the ubiquitousness of these people in the community.

“There are so many of these people, right? These are the people in your associations and stuff. You’re literally talking about every coach, manager, association board member, all those people. They’re all ambassadors for the sport in their own right; they’re all volunteers; most of them have a family connection – they have a child playing or who used to play and they stuck around. There are lots of grassroots champions that we see every day.” – JD

MV was supportive of the Within Vocation type, noting growth in this type of role within the community.

“Vocational ambassadors are the ones we’re starting to see the most. However, ambassadors who fill vocational positions in their context exhibit ambassadorial activity in and out of the sports space. Rather, ‘they think about the audiences beyond the field’ given that the ambassadors can be seen as relatable in different spaces.” – MV

There was a consensus as well on authenticity of the Male Ally type. CS shared thoughts on the responsibility that Male Allies have in their positions of influence.

“There’s recognising where their place is as a Male Ally. In some situations, it’s their place to forefront things. In other situations, it’s to pull up the women around them to go move it forward. [To] let go of ownership and be able to say I’m allowing these females around me to take that place and feed into their leadership development...” – CS

4.7 Summary

Study 1 has provided the foundation for this research project through the conceptualisation of community sport ambassadorship and this sets the stage for the studies that follow. Specifically, two vital elements that help lay the foundation for this project are the definition of a community sport ambassador and a typology setting out ambassadorial types. These two important elements were conceived within a rigorous structure of consultation and feedback. The definition and typology set the stage for Study 2 in which ambassadors were interviewed to better understand their behaviour and motivations. This typology also informed selection of social media content to be analysed in Study 3. When exploring ambassadorship in other sports (Study 4), the definition and typology were central to setting the scene to generate useful insights. Finally, the typology was helpful in selecting content to be included in the Study 5, which included focus groups with young females who play basketball.

The conceptual work presented in this study was informed by Relationship Marketing, Social Marketing and Source Credibility Model. Relationship Marketing is relevant as the types of ambassadors which are conceived here share a common aim of establishing and maintaining relationships with girls in basketball. The way in which they recruit new participants is by being intentional in their interactions with participants by way of relational marketing which is part of Social Marketing. The conceptual work in Study 1 is informed by the Source Credibility Model as it focusses on the positive characteristics of community sport ambassadors, who play a role in persuading audiences to join their sport. The definition of community sport ambassadors that is ultimately put forth in this thesis aligns well with the tenets of the model. When girls

recognise traits underpinned by credibility, it is likely that they perceive the ambassadors as persuasive and want to engage more in the sport.

Chapter 5 - Study 2

Study 2 builds on the definition and typology of ambassadors in community sport that was developed in Study 1. Five types of ambassadors were identified in Study 1 and the next step was to learn more about each of these here in Study 2. Seventeen ambassadors were purposively selected by type and interviewed to understand what behaviours they undertake in their communities and their motivation for doing so.

The term ‘motivation’ has different meanings, including “a desire to perform a particular behaviour on a particular occasion” (Baumeister, 2016, p.2). The concept of motivation can also be characterised by a subjective feeling of wanting a specific outcome to happen and then wanting to do something specific to make it happen (Baumeister, 2016). Additionally, ‘behaviour’ can be defined as internally coordinated responses of individuals or groups to internal or external stimuli (Levitis et al., 2009). Behaviours are also a function people’s attitudes and beliefs and how they see the world (Chatterton, 2016). Following the interviews with the ambassadors, the audio recordings were transcribed and then thematically analysed. A number of universal motivations and behaviours common across the five types of ambassadors were identified. Analyses also uncovered motivations and behaviours that were not universal but were common across more than one type of ambassador. Finally, unique motivations and behaviours have been identified that appear aligned to specific ambassador types.

5.1 Method

In this study, 17 community sport ambassadors were interviewed during which they outlined their motivations and behaviours in women and girls’ settings. The aim was to interview at least three ambassadors from each of the five types of ambassadors identified in Study 1. The primary researcher utilised purposive, quota and chain sampling methods as part of the approach to selecting ambassadors to interview. The interviews were undertaken in a semi-structured format and the data was thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Sampling

A purposive approach was used when deciding which ambassadors to interview. This means of sampling involves researchers making deliberate sampling choices based on potential participant qualities (Etikan et al., 2016). It often involves selecting individuals who are information-rich, thereby enabling focus on a specific phenomenon (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002). It is also appropriate to characterise the

interviewee selection in Study 2 as quota sampling, in order to ensure that all five types of ambassadors were included. Quota sampling allows a researcher to identify categories with similarities to ensure that key groups are represented (Mason, 2002). The ambassadors were sampled from the typology in Study 1 and were recruited by way of the researcher's personal network. The researcher intended to interview 15 participants, however some participants responded once the interviews had commenced. However, the researcher opted to proceed with the interviews as intended and conducted them at a later date.

By their nature, ambassadors have networks that are useful to identify additional interviewees. Snowball sampling (also referred to as chain sampling) involves asking participants for recommendations as to who else might be a good fit for participation in a study (Robinson, 2014). Although an initial group of ambassadors to potentially interview was established, the primary researcher also sought out recommendations from interviewees about other individuals that they thought could potentially be interviewed.

Interviews

The primary researcher reached out to contacts from each ambassador type via email and requested an interview. The researcher interviewed five Prominent Stalwarts and three of each of the other types. A majority of the interviews took place virtually on either Zoom or Microsoft TEAMS, with a couple of interviews taking place in person.

The interviews were semi-structured, which was appropriate because this format can accommodate both closed and open-ended questions as well as follow up questions (Adams, 2015). The semi-structured format also provides opportunities for dialogue to ebb and flow in addition to the primary questions from a discussion guide (Adams, 2015). This approach was appropriate for exploring the work that ambassadors undertake in the community as the interviewer could not forecast where each discussion would lead.

Discussion Guides

Separate discussion guides (Appendix 5.1) were developed for interviews based on the ambassador type. Creating separate discussion guides was appropriate because the experience of individuals within each type was likely to differ based on the nature of their roles in the community. Questions were therefore tailored to reflect ambassador type uniqueness and elicit descriptions of motivations and behaviours. The questions were designed to provide the ambassadors several opportunities to describe their motivation and behaviours

in their role. Because of the newness of the phenomenon, various synonyms for what was meant to be an ambassador (i.e., advocate, champion and ally). These words were used to stimulate discussion about the labels that are featured in the typology.

Ambassador type and region for each of the 17 interviewees are presented in Table 5.1. A notation system is also provided in parentheses in order to attribute quotes later in this chapter.

Table 5.1

Study 2 Interviewees

Indicator	Region
Stalwart 1 (S1)	Auckland
Stalwart 2 (S2)	Otago
Stalwart 3 (S3)	Auckland
Stalwart 4 (S4)	Manawatū
Stalwart 5 (S5)	Nelson
Athlete 1 (A1)	Waikato
Athlete 2 (A2)	Canterbury
Athlete 3 (A3)	Canterbury
Grassroots Champion 1 (GC1)	Canterbury
Grassroots Champion 2 (GC2)	Auckland
Grassroots Champion 3 (GC3)	Otago
Vocation 1 (VOC1)	Otago
Vocation 2 (VOC2)	Auckland
Vocation 3 (VOC3)	Auckland
Male Ally 1 (MA1)	Auckland
Male Ally 2 (MA2)	Canterbury
Male Ally 3 (MA3)	Otago

5.2 Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, each was transcribed. The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA) which is the process for identifying and presenting patterns in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process also allowed for the interpretation of various aspects of interview data (Boyatzis, 1998). Specifically, thematic analysis focused on identifying motivation related to the role as well as behaviours. Analysis was carried out using an inductive approach, which is a data-driven approach to thematic analysis and leads to participant experiences driving the data analysis (Azungah, 2018). Inductive analysis also pre-empted the possibility of a researcher forcing a predetermined result (Bradley et al., 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thomas (2006, p. 238) noted that inductive analysis is an approach that “primarily uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts and themes”. Inductive analysis also allows the researcher to sift through data line by line and assign codes to paragraphs or segments of texts (Bradley et al., 2007; Curry et al., 2009). This was appropriate for the current study, in which motivations and behaviours of each

ambassador were ultimately categorised into segments of text that reflect motivation and behaviour across each category from the typology.

Thematic analyses were conducted in six stages as per Braun and Clarke (2006). The stages are; 1) familiarize yourself with the data, 2) generate initial codes, 3) search for themes, 4) review themes, 5) define and name themes, and 6) produce a report. Braun and Clarke (2019) have since advocated for a more ‘theoretically flexible’ approach known as reflexive thematic analysis, which allows for the six phases to be blended and more flexible thematic development. Reflexive thematic analysis reflects the qualitative paradigm, acknowledges researcher subjectivity, features organic and recursive coding processes and facilitates deep reflection and engagement with data. In this instance, reflexive thematic analysis was appropriate to identify and understand motivational and behavioural patterns that were common amongst the five types as well as those that may be unique to ambassador types. It is acknowledged that the TA focussed on the motivations and behaviours of ambassadors. Although there was other interesting content such as the Male Allies not exhibiting distinct motivations and behaviours in regards to their type, the primary focus was the motivations and behaviours of themes that were reported.

In the remainder of this chapter, ambassadors’ behaviour is characterised within and across types, as well as their motivations driving that behaviour. First, universal behaviours and motivations across all five types of ambassadors are presented. Next overlapping motivation and behaviour across more than one type is outlined. Finally, an analysis of the motivations and behaviours that came across uniquely from single types of ambassadors is provided. It is not argued that these motivations and behaviours are definitively unique to one or more ambassador type. Rather, these are the motivations and behaviours that were described most prominently by interviewees within the various ambassador types in this research. The likelihood that motivation and behaviour is actually universal or unique among types is discussed later in the thesis. It is also worth noting that not every participant perceived themselves as an ambassador; however, they still carry out ambassadorial work.

It is worth noting that what follows is not an exhaustive list or discussion of *every* motivation and behaviour that was described. There was simply too much data. Those that were prominent, easily understandable and with some potential to inform managerial strategy in community sport were prioritised.

A summary of motivations and behaviours across the five ambassador types is provided in Table 5.2. The table also depicts overlap among the types and highlights the nuances of each ambassador type.

Table 5.2

Behaviours & Motivations of Ambassadors

Universal Motivation and Behaviour Across the 5 Types
Motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give Back to Communities Behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Love of the Game During Community Events and on Social Media • Inspire Next Generation by Using Role to Champion the Sport
Motivation and Behaviour Across 2 or more Types
Motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A, C, D, E: Develop Young Players • C & D: Recognise Need to Invest in Women and Girls Behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A, B, D, E: Make Interactions With Young athletes Fun • A, B, C & D: Highlight Opportunities Through Basketball • A & B: Post on Social Media About Empowerment • C & D: Think Big Picture on Women’s Sport • C & E: Leverage Players in the Community as Role Models
Type A: Prominent Stalwart
Motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Better Opportunities for Young Athletes • Carry on Legacy From Previous Coaches
Type B: Athlete Advocate
Motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion Women’s Empowerment • Give Hope to Young Girls • Continue Family Legacies Behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate Youth Through Examples of Personal Experiences • Facilitate Dialogue About Athlete Wellbeing • Serve as a Role Model • Participate in Grassroots and Community Camps
Type C: Grassroots Champion
Motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the Sport a Better Place for Others • Create a Sense of Belonging • Provide Visible Female Leadership

Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead by Example in the Community
Type D: Within Vocation
Motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to Growing Women and Girls' Community Sport
Type E: Male Ally
(No unique motivation or behaviour)

Universal Motivation and Behaviour

One of the purposes of this research was to establish a broad motivational and behavioural profile for ambassadorship in community sport. This initial profile is characterised using the term “universal” and is offered prior to the subsequent presentation of motivation and behaviour of ambassadors *by type*. A general profile of motivation and behaviour is appropriate and useful as part of this exploratory study of a newly conceived phenomenon. The overarching finding here is that it appears that universal motivation and behaviours *do exist* among community sport ambassadors and that one specific motivation and two specific behaviours are clearly discernible.

Universal Motivation: Give Back to Communities

One prominent motivation is evident across the five ambassador types: a desire to give back to their communities. It is therefore possible that this motivation is universal across community sport ambassadors in women and girls' contexts. In other words, the motivation to give back appears to be foundational for those serving as community sport ambassador regardless of what type they are best characterised as and what role(s) they take on.

For example, S1 shared that she is motivated to give back by supporting young female athletes, who otherwise wouldn't have much support. This has influenced her behaviour as a coach, which includes assisting girls with reaching their goals and acting as a mentor for them.

“My goal even when I coach was like, OK, what do I need to do to try and get these girls to want and how can I help them to get there. I mean not just coaching like but just a lot of the stuff. Back then and still now it's you're on your own when you do it; like for the girls especially they don't get a lot of support.” – S1

Athlete Advocate ambassadors are also motivated by wanting to give back to the community. A2 shared that...

“When you establish yourself as a high level athlete people will want your knowledge and advice... people want to learn from you and there's a responsibility that comes with that. If people have invested in you to get to that point and you really love what you're doing, you'll want to be able to give back and

create more of you... I think part of being a high level athlete is realising it's not just you it's the community." – A2

The motivation to give back to the community was also evident among the Grassroots Champions. GC3 shared that she took up a volunteer leadership role at her local basketball association as way to have a positive impact on youth basketball players. This has fuelled an ongoing motivation to continue to give back to the community.

"Being in that space you start to appreciate the people who do make a difference in that environment and how important it is to get that right. Probably going on to the board was that pivot point." – GC3

It is evident that Within Vocation ambassadors are also motivated to give back to the community. VOC1 shared that he wants to give back because he recognised that girl basketball players needed more coaches and he understands the importance of giving girls more opportunities to play basketball.

"I don't see it as work, I want to help people get better and I find young girls who don't get much attention... they're much better to work with because they're grateful. The need to coach them is more important. They're grateful, that's a cherry on top to be honest." – VOC1

As was the case for the other four types, interviewees from the Male Ally type also articulated a motivation to give back to the community and MA1 described how this aligns with his personal values.

"My personal value set is about giving back. It would be easy to give back by joining Rotary or a community organisation or something like that but this is a way of giving back that I actually enjoy; it ticks multiple boxes." – MA1

Behaviour

Behaviour 1: Share Love of the Game With the Community During Events and on Social Media

A universal behaviour across the five types of ambassadors seems to be sharing a love of the game with the community, both in person and online. Ambassadors share their love for the game with the people around them, which can come from both interactions at community events and via social media. For instance, S2 explained that her work in the basketball community involves sharing her passion for basketball with up-and-coming athletes. S2 is often present at girls only basketball sessions that were sponsored by her local association and while there she shares the love of the game by reminding players to have fun, even if they are intimidated or frustrated.

"I feel that sometimes at the moment it's a bit of a grind and it shouldn't be a grind – it should a laugh or pickup game with the guys." – S2

For Athlete Advocates, sharing their love of basketball appears to manifest through uplifting and celebrating the game with the young women they interact with. A2 spoke about creating a safe space for the girls she

coaches so that they not only appreciate the sport, but also gain confidence to believe in themselves as they continue their sports journey.

“I never was aware of the disparity until I matured but I was always a fiery woman and stood up for myself. I want to inspire that strength and fire inside other women as well, instilling hope that they can have a bright future despite what other people might say and (with) the odds against them.” – A2

Ambassadors who are Within Vocation also report that they share their passion for basketball through their work. One interviewee described how she shares her passion for the sport and the opportunities that come with her job. The work that she is part of is underpinned by how she presents herself when performing her development role.

“I keep going back to what has basketball done for me and I know that it’s opened so many doors that I would’ve have never been able to open if I did other things; being able to travel, being part of a team and having lifelong friendships. I want to open that lens for other girls to have a look at what they can do”. – VOC2

Having had a positive experience in the game, S4 acknowledged the opportunities that came alongside playing basketball. Now she wants to leverage her position of influence to share a love of basketball by creating experiences that will inspire girls to enjoy the game.

“I enjoyed the game when I played. And the experiences with traveling and things like that – for girls, it’s an opportunity to travel the world. And it’s just the love of the game I think. There’s a lot of girls out there who love the game but just don’t quite know where to go or who to go to.” – S4

Behaviour 2: Inspire Next Generation by Using Role to Champion the Sport

The second behaviour that appears to be universal across the five ambassador types is using role(s) to champion the sport. Prominent Stalwarts often fill a variety of roles and can leverage these roles in various ways to create opportunities. S2 began inspiring the next generation of athletes when she began working with school kids. Her work included visiting schools, which had girls that were new to basketball until she visited them. After her first session, girls asked her about how to try out for their local teams.

“We did a Girls Got Game session... there was about 30 kids and by the end of the hour we said ‘put your hand up if you like to play basketball’ ... All I had done was be there for an hour with these five other girls and coaches but I feel like it’s those little moments that you’re lighting a fire. I don’t think enough of that goes on because people don’t see the glory and they don’t see the reward in that.” – S2

Grassroots Champions also fill a variety of roles involving advocacy for the sport by creating opportunities for girls to play at a higher level in their local area. As a primary investor in a new semi-professional team, GC2 now leverages her connections to facilitate girls playing basketball more competitively and ultimately maybe professionally.

“[The previous competition] had always been a bit ad hoc and we said if we’re going to invest in this, it has to be professional. The very first home game... the energy was electric. I thought I could do this if this is the level, this is what I want to be involved in. This is aspirational for girls, they’ll watch this and see there’s a future for them in this sport. When you have a bit of skin in the game that changes things.” – GC2

Ambassadors within the Male Ally type appear to inspire the next generation by using their roles as coaches and board members of women’s basketball teams. They champion the sport by providing a platform for girls to continue playing basketball by investing time and resources into spaces for women and girls to participate. MA1 mentioned that he believed that the semi-professional team he is involved in inspires the next generation of girls by providing a space for them to make money and pursue basketball as a professional career.

“I think seeing what it means to some of the people. After the final of Tauihi, we lost and that was disappointing but there was such a nice feeling in the changing room afterwards when we realised what we’ve done and we did it together. It’s the culmination of the dream for the likes of [names removed] and even the new ones coming through. It’s [about] what it’s achieved and provided and that was worthwhile.” – MA1

Athletes also use their roles as players and spokespeople to promote pathways that basketball can provide for girls, and the assumptions that can come alongside it. A2 has engaged in these types of conversations in her own career, and those experiences have led to intentional dialogue with the girls that she interacts with. Further, she inspires the next generation of girls by a light on how girls can be involved in local basketball and empower them to investigate those options further.

“A lot of people talk about the college pathway, [the] professional pathway. I never took that as a player; letting girls know that although that’s a huge part of what’s talked about at the high level, you don’t have to do that. You can still be impactful in different ways that are just as important as being an athlete. The idea that you have to abandon New Zealand basketball – you can be great here and do great things here.” – A2

Within Vocation ambassadors use their roles such as coaches and development officers to champion the sport and inspire the next generation of girls. Opportunities for girls to get involved in basketball can be sparse in certain areas, so ambassadors of this type report a deliberate practice of inspiring girls to seek them out. This is a situation familiar to VOC3, who played an important role in ensuring community basketball programmes run frequently at her club.

“Even just thinking about the girls I know playing when the opportunity’s given to them. There aren’t many opportunities to play at the community level, so when there are opportunities they jump at it.” – VOC3

Having now presented universal motivation and behaviours across the five ambassadorial types, the focus shifts to unique motivational and behavioural patterns.

Motivation and Behaviour Across Two or More Ambassadorial Types

This section is a presentation of motivation and behaviours that do not appear to be universal but rather seem to overlap across two or more ambassadorial types. Some motivations and behaviours that have emerged in this category include: wanting to develop young players; making interactions with young athletes fun, posting empowering content on social media, and thinking about the big picture impact for women's sport.

Motivation

Motivation 1 (PS, GC, VOC, MA): Want to Develop Young Players

An oft-described motivation amongst Prominent Stalwarts, Grassroots Champions, Within Vocation, and Male Allies was that they want to develop young players as part of their engagement in girls' basketball. For example, coaches have an interest to help participants improve and they incorporate that into their work. S2 is an example of this:

"It's wanting to help people be better and wanting them to love the game. I'll be walking past a kid who's having some shots and I'll give them a tip. If you can encourage people to love the game even if they're not good at it, no one can put a price on that." – S2

Grassroots Champions are also motivated by a desire to develop players. It was conveyed that nurturing the skills of players brings a greater reward than extrinsic factors such as monetary compensation. GC3 noted that she experiences this reward in her volunteer position in the basketball community.

"Being involved in women's basketball, I like to be able to help and develop players. Just putting in that time and making a difference. That's the reward I get out of it –no money can give you that sense of accomplishment, [that] happiness when you see someone develop and goals that they want to get to." – GC3

Within Vocation ambassadors often develop players as part of their work coaching teams and/or organising drill sessions. One example is a coach who focuses on high performance players and furthering girls' skill development. This strategy is aimed at keeping girls who are progressing involved in the sport and increase retention in teams.

"When it comes to players in my representative programme I'm all in, [I] put energy into it. For me moving forward I need to address that and figure out a way to keep the serious girls and remember they're the ones who I care the most about because if they want to play basketball at a high level and want to play basketball we'll help get them there." – VOC1

Male Allies develop players by intentionally creating opportunities for girls to succeed alongside their male counterparts. For instance, Male Allies put in the same amount of time into coaching their girls' teams so they can experience high performance opportunities both in New Zealand and overseas. They also help the girls set goals, and then work with them to develop so they can achieve them.

“I wanted them to have equal chance to succeed... That’s the main thing, you just want to get them at a higher level and for them to achieve their goals and hopefully I’ve done that so far for a lot of the girls.”
– MA3

Motivation 2 (GC, VOC): Recognise a Need to Invest in Women and Girls

An overlapping motivation across Grassroots Champions and Within Vocation ambassadors is they recognise a need to invest in women and girls within basketball. This recognition appears to fuel the ambassadors' subsequent efforts within the community. Ambassadors of these types often fill roles that are immersed in the community such that they regularly notice an acute lack of resources. As a result of this recognition, ambassadors aim to fill this gap, thereby contributing to the growth of women and girls basketball. An example of this emerged during an interview with GC2, who is involved in basketball as a board member of a semi-professional team.

“It had always been a bit ad hoc and we said if we’re going to invest it has to be professional; the players have to treat it like a job and have to be fit. I thought if this is the level, this is what I want to be involved in. This is aspirational for girls, they’ll watch this and see there’s a future for them in this sport.” – GC2

Within Vocation ambassadors also seem to recognise the need to invest in women and girls' basketball and this has fuelled their day-to-day activity developing the game. For example, VOC1 noticed that the women and girls space could use more investment at his local association. As a result, he makes a conscious choice to advocate for and coach girls specifically.

“I coach a lot of women’s basketball; I wouldn’t say it’s not a choice or a choice I didn’t decide to do it because of a reason I just saw that there was a need for some emphasis to be put in our girls rep[resentative] programme so that’s probably why I’ve specialised in it.” – VOC1

Behaviour

Behaviour 1 (PS, AA, VOC, MA): Make Interactions With Young Athletes Fun

One behaviour that appears to overlap across Prominent Stalwarts, Athlete Advocates, Within Vocation, and Male Allies is that they attempt to make interactions with young athletes fun. This can take place during skills sessions by creating a safe environment for participants to try new things, or off the court by creating positive individual interactions.

S2 reported making interactions fun by getting all participants involved in sessions, regardless of their skill level.

“When I do my sessions I work off what they enjoy, make it fun. If there’s a ‘cool kid’ I make them play with the ‘not cool kid’ try and get everyone loving the game and involved.” – S2

Athlete Advocates also report behaviours designed to facilitate fun interactions with the community. A3 shared an example of how she takes advantage of the time during autograph signing sessions to create fun and engaging experiences for youth athletes.

“Obviously having a smile on your face, engaging with them, asking them questions about themselves, finding out a bit more about them is definitely the way that I communicate. If you're going into a session and teaching a bunch of girls, learning as many names as you can, that's usually my goal. It's using the names and making it a personal connection rather than anything.” – A3

For Within Vocation ambassadors, building rapport with young athletes is key to creating a fun environment. VOC3 works with a grassroots programme that is held every week and notes that it is important to nurture relationships in order to make interactions fun.

“The relationships... whatever the age of the females coming in its engaging with them and building the rapport and that trust. Before they leave check in that they’re coming back so they know that you care and that you want them back.” – VOC3

Male Allies are also intentional about creating a fun environment for girls. MA1 focuses on the girls’ enjoyment when running sessions for girls at his local basketball club. He recognises that girls need to enjoy themselves if they have aspirations play at a competitive level, and this informs his approach during sessions.

“It’s about keeping girls in the game for as long as possible and having as much fun as possible because it’s a lot of work to get to that Tauhi [top league] level and you have to be pretty committed to it. But to keep them committed to it you have to keep them in the game until they work it out.” – MA1

Behaviour 2 (PS, AA, GC, VOC): Highlight Opportunities Facilitated Through Basketball

A common behaviour that appears common across Prominent Stalwarts, Athlete Advocates, Grassroots Champions and Within Vocation ambassadors is highlighting opportunities that basketball can provide. Athletes and Stalwarts alike seem to have invaluable knowledge about what pathways basketball can offer. Stalwarts, many of whom have rich and varied experiences themselves in the sport, use their knowledge in their various roles within the sport. For example, S4 described how she identifies opportunities to help girls figure out how to start using basketball as a pathway:

“... the experiences with traveling and things like that – for girls, it's an opportunity to travel the world. And it's just the love of the game I think. There's a lot of girls who love the game, but don't quite know where to go or who to go to. So we're trying to push just say, look, here's a healthy option for you.” – S4

Athlete Advocates also highlight opportunities that come as part of basketball pathways. Aside from being able to travel and forging new friendships, athletes are also authentic about the realities that happen behind the scenes. A1 said she tries to accomplish this by being transparent in regards to sharing the ups and downs that are associated with participating in sport. She described this as a meaningful aspect of her advocacy as an ambassador:

“Hopefully just how genuine it is, that I’m living out this playing lifestyle that I’m encouraging other girls to go on. It does have its highs and lows and I’ve experienced it all. I’m trying to tell as many young girls about the good highs and the lows as well as I go.” – A1

The opportunities that are made available through basketball can also be promoted to participants at a community level. Grassroots Champions report promoting courses that develop referees and statisticians for club basketball. For example, GC1 is a referee who leads referee courses in her hometown on the South Island. Her focus in particular is to show kids that being involved in basketball is not limited to playing or coaching.

“I referee the club basketball on Saturdays and I’m also the junior referee developer. For some of them it’s the first time they’ve refereed, some of them are there for the money, some are just there for the snacks but that’s ok because it’s cool to have them be part of that community.” – GC1

Ambassadors in vocational roles also report promoting pathways that are associated with basketball. For example, VOC2 is a coach and schools coordinator, and is motivated to advocate for girls to have similar experiences as she did as a player. The benefits of the pathways they educate participants about include building relationships and traveling the world.

“I keep going back to what has basketball done for me and it’s opened so many doors that I would’ve have never been able to open if I did other things: being able to travel, being part of a team and having lifelong friendships. I want to open that lens for other girls to have a look at what they can do. My motivation is I want there to be opportunities for young people through basketball.” – VOC2

Behaviour 3 (PS, AA): Post on Social Media About Empowerment.

A noteworthy common behaviour reported across Prominent Stalwarts and Athlete Advocate interviewees is that they post empowering messages on social media. One Stalwart runs social media pages (Instagram, Facebook) that share content specific to women’s basketball around the world. This ambassadorial behaviour began after her daughter travelled abroad to play and seemed to be without visible role models.

“I always thought that [the social media account] might die out after my daughter got to college. But this generation’s coming through and so I get groups of parents and players that come on every year, and it’s

emerging ones that are starting to see basketball is there pathway. Maybe the images in the social media that I use is more than inspiration than me, myself. I'm just showing them that they can do it.” – S1

Ambassadorial behaviour on social media is also undertaken by Athlete Advocates. Similar to Stalwarts, they aim to share empowering messages and celebrate the accomplishments of fellow females in their circle so other individuals can also be visible. A1 played professional basketball and utilised social media as a tool to empower girls and community members to watch or play basketball themselves. She is often quoted in news publications on this topic and has become a prominent voice empowerment empowering women and girls through her ambassadorship.

“... social media’s so big. I have a big presence, I’m quite often put in publications and things like that.” – A1

Behaviour 4 (GC, VOC): Think Big Picture on Women’s Sport

It was evident from the Grassroots Champions and Within Vocation ambassadors that were interviewed that they think long-term about the big picture of women’s sport. As a result of a lifetime of positive experiences with volunteers throughout her basketball journey, GC1 became motivated to provide similar experiences as a volunteer referee.

“All these steps in between that I got to enjoy and benefit from - I want to be part of that network, I want to be part of that basketball community so that other people can have the opportunities and enjoyment and join in the sheer love of basketball I got to have.” – GC1

Those in paid roles also understand the big picture. One of the ways in which this manifests day-to-day is educating people that women’s sport does not differ from men’s sport as a product. VOC1 hopes that these types of conversations will help girls want to stay playing the sport.

“I said ‘look I love women’s basketball and I’m going to push it. It becomes more normalised that women’s sport isn’t different to men’s sport.” – VOC1

Behaviour 5 (GC, MA): Leverage Players in the Community as Role Models

An overlapping behaviour for Grassroots Champions and Male Allies appears to be creating visible role models for the girls they work with. One of the Grassroots Champions described personal experiences of being inspired by athletes, so seeks to facilitate the same at her local basketball club.

“Community is really important in motivating kids. Little kids go to a game and parents say they spent the next three days wanting to go down to the local court and put up shots. That’s the sort of thing for me that’s really rewarding.” – GC3

Male Allies also report being intentional about promoting and uplifting female basketball players, putting them a visible position to inspire the girls they work with. For example, MA1 deliberately positioned his club team of girls so they could see professional female players in person.

“We deliberately organised my Under-13 training so we trained just before the Kāhu. When we were finishing the girls were coming in and they could see them lined up. The Under-13 parents were telling me how they went to Kāhu games, how much they enjoyed it and what a great experience it was. That was meaningful because that was what we hoped to achieve.” – MA1

Having now outlined several motivations and behaviours that appear to overlap across more than one ambassador type, the focus shifts to single ambassador types.

Type A: Prominent Stalwart

There were several distinctive motivations associated with the Prominent Stalwart ambassador type and these are described next.

Motivation

Motivation 1: Provide Better Opportunities for Young Athletes

One of the motivations that was reported only by those from the Prominent Stalwart ambassador type is that they want to provide better opportunities for young athletes. An example of a way in which they hope to fulfil this motivation is by setting an example for their own children. S1 is a former collegiate player who is motivated by creating a better experience with more opportunities for her daughter having experienced the highs and lows of the sport themselves.

“I think [it’s] because we’ve been through the whole system as players and we’ve seen how we were treated, how the game looked through our eyes. There’s players and then and I think it’s just about us wanting better for our daughters.” – S1

For S3, providing better opportunities for athletes comes in the form of finding ways to make basketball accessible for all girls, regardless of their demographic.

“I have even a bigger mission to make sure that New Zealand women’s basketball was something that any girl that could want to play or could play in. That’s why I’m starting my own club here at school because I know that’s something I can control. You talk about being an ambassador; I know that I just need to do my bit in my own little neighbourhood and that’s going to have its own ripple.” – S3

Motivation 2: Carry on Legacy From Previous Coaches

Another distinctive motivation amongst those in the Prominent Stalwart type is that they want to carry on legacies from the people that they learned themselves from. This often transpires by taking over for previous coaches so that the girls programmes can still be operational. This theme was conveyed in various ways by

several interviewees. For example, S5 shared that she started coaching a team that was once led by one of her mentors because she was encouraged to do so.

“I just wanted to carry it on. I didn't want to leave a gap, so when former coach [name removed] finished coaching Waimea [College] she encouraged me to take on that Waimea college team. – S5

Type B: Athlete Advocate

Now an analysis of the motivations and behaviours that are unique to Athlete Advocates is presented.

Motivation

Motivation 1: Champion Women's Empowerment

One of the motivations that may be unique to Athlete Advocate ambassadors is their motivation to champion women's empowerment. This driver of behaviour came through prominently across several interviews. It is a motivation for A3, who did not grow up watching women's sport on TV due to the lack of coverage. Having been part of a semi-professional basketball setup in New Zealand that was broadcast on the Sky Sport channel, she is motivated to champion and empower girls so they push themselves so they can fulfil their potential.

“I think with basketball becoming more of a female recognised sport especially coaching and going into schools, it's being able to show them that they can play basketball and have [basketball] pathway. Being able to see that and even when you're at home flicking through the TV and there's a women's basketball game on Sky [Sport] – for some girls they would have never seen that on TV before, but they can now either watch it or have access to these players.” – A3

Motivation 2: Give Hope to Young Girls

Another motivation for Athlete Advocates comes from using their platform to give hope to young girls. The athletes' motivation to elevate visible role models also comes as a result of wanting to highlight opportunities that basketball can provide, including pathways that are not traditionally championed. Like other interviewees, A2 grew up as an athlete and was inspired by influential leaders providing hope in one way or another. A2 opted to stay in New Zealand in lieu of pursuing a collegiate basketball career in the United States. A2 previously played basketball for a social league and also coached players in Years 9 and 10. Filling positions as a player and a coach allowed them to show different roles that basketball can facilitate.

“Giving hope to younger girls, especially growing up in a world where there's not going to be a lot of hope outside of the basketball community. Letting them know you can be a hooper and giving them a role model as well. For me it was really good to have someone look up to so giving them someone to look up to so they don't just hear everything they're seeing it – someone who's lived these experiences, achieved A, B, C I can do that too.” – A2

Motivation 3: Continue Family Legacies

The desire to continue family legacies is also one of the motivations that were described by the Athlete Advocate ambassadors who were interviewed. For example, A1, a professional player for the in New Zealand's top league summarised that her motivation comes from the awareness that they are in a position to empower young women and is conscious that they fill a similar position to what her mother, a former professional basketball player, did for her generation.

“One of the other motivators for me was seeing my mum and the other women in her generation that came before how much they gave back . They're constantly trying to give back, so I think that was another motivator for me was seeing how much they did voluntarily, they always made time for us and this generation to have as many opportunities if not more than they did.” – A1

Behaviour

Next, an analysis of the behaviours that are specific to only Athlete Advocates is provided.

Behaviour 1: Educate Youth Through Examples of Personal Experiences

One of the behaviours that appears to be distinct to the Athlete Advocate type is that they educate youth through examples of personal experiences. A1 is one of the athlete ambassadors who played either collegiate and/or professional basketball themselves, and incorporates those experiences in their ambassadorial behaviour. This is exemplified by having conversations that show her experiences or contributing her knowledge to a project that helps inform athlete's decisions later on. A1 shared...

“I was involved in a programme by FIBA called WiLEAD which was all about women's empowerment and women's leadership. At the end they challenged us to create a project or a programme and what I wanted to do was a college support programme. Just finishing college and seeing the challenges people go through I thought this is a space that I'm relevant in, I've experienced it for six years I'm well-versed I want to give back to the next generation of athletes. – A1”

Behaviour 2: Facilitate Dialogue About Athlete Wellbeing

Another behaviour that emerged as potentially unique to Athlete Advocates is that they facilitate conversations about the importance of athletes' wellbeing. A2 is an example of how athlete advocates use social media to educate female athletes about basketball importance of looking after their mental health. Having been personally impacted in both areas, she wants to keep the conversation going so other women can be confident in their abilities as an athlete and as a person.

“I'm able to advocate for women's basketball by re-sharing posts, shouting out certain people, talking about the important side in terms of mental health for athletes or blasting women's basketball because that's not

recognised enough. I talk about it a lot; I have conversations with different players that I know and people that I know.” – A2

Behaviour 3: Serve as Role Models

Another behaviour that may be unique to Athlete Advocates is how they present themselves as being strong, visible role models for girls. A1 discussed how she recognises the importance of being a role model having grown up with younger sisters. Naturally, this behaviour is reflected in her ambassadorial behaviour.

“I think why I do is because growing up I had two younger sisters who were coming underneath me so anything I did would be reflected in their reputation as well. So I was always taught and learnt that at a young age that what I do matters and what it looks like matters.” – A1

A2, who also coaches in addition to playing basketball, puts relationships as central within her approach as an ambassador. Her personality has led her to be a role model as both a player and a coach for the girls that they coach. One of the things that she role models in her involvement is the importance that character plays in sport. Having experienced this herself, she shared how she hopes to role model the same trait in the girls that they build relationships with.

“A big part of my why is the relationships. I was always a fiery woman and stood up for myself. I want to inspire that strength and fire inside other women as well. What I push as a coach is who you are, the drive behind everything in your life. A huge part is teaching girls is be who you are, stay true to your character and do things that are good for you and good things will come.” – A2

Behaviour 4: Participate in Grassroots and Community Camps

Athlete Advocates’ behaviour includes off-court involvement through grassroots and community camps. A1 is an example of how athletes are involved in grassroots camps insofar as during her offseason, she returns to her hometown to help her family run a basketball academy called Basketball Secrets, which coaches young kids at the grassroots level and build the game for future generations and improve the game across the board for boys and girls. Part of the camp includes giving out gear from her college or New Zealand teams. This is meant to show kids the types of opportunities that can be facilitated through basketball.

“Me and my sisters, we’ll give out Washington State gear sometimes, we give out old New Zealand gear. I think that resonates with kids they’ll wear it around so that’s how we give back to the community. I think kids do get a lot of confidence just being around someone like [name removed] and all of that.” – A1

Type C: Grassroots Champion

Next, an analysis of the motivations and behaviours that are unique to Grassroots Champions is presented.

Motivation

Motivation 1: Make the Sport a Better Place for Others

One of the motivations that may be uniquely associated with Grassroots Champion ambassadors is their aspiration to make basketball a better place for others. Grassroots Champions serve in leadership roles and are involved in making decisions that affect the growth of clubs. For example, GC3 served in a governance role on her local board where she was responsible for leading a team of people who was responsible for basketball activities. Having personally experienced the benefits that the sport can bring, she leveraged her role in governance to give back to the community to further improve its offerings.

“Doing what I can to make it better is the simple answer. I’ve sort of realised along the way that the experiences I’ve had have been valuable so being able to capitalise on that and do the best we can and keep big picture, that’s the most important part. Keeping an open mind about what’s best for the sport, what’s best for our players.” – GC3

Making basketball a better place for girls includes the contribution of innovative ideas for the betterment of the game. For example, GC2 shared how her involvement with the Northern Kāhu, which a team part of New Zealand’s new semi-professional basketball league, contributed to the growth of women’s basketball. Despite the team not winning the league championship, GC2 viewed the team’s inaugural season as a step forward to showcasing and creating better opportunities within basketball.

“Even though we didn’t get the result we would’ve loved, we achieved a heap of what we wanted to achieve. The next step is how do we make it more holistic, how can we help you in your life, help with education, whatever else. For us it’s just the start because I think basketball is a vehicle for women.” – GC2

Another example was given during an interview when GC2 shared how she and some other volunteers brought girls’ basketball specific merchandise to a kids league and created a girls only space. The inception of these safe environments makes the sport a better place for girls.

“We went to the kids league to get some interest in coming to our last game with Girls Got Game merch. We’re doing an activity and the girls got to choose some merch and the boys stood there and asked ‘when are they going to do the Boys Got Game?’ I was like ‘I’m sorry this is just for the girls’. It felt like they had something that the boys didn’t which isn’t usually that way.” – GC2

Motivation 2: Create a Sense of Belonging

Another motivation for Grassroots Champions is that they want to facilitate a sense of belonging. By building a strong community, they believe that girls will learn how to work as a team and foster relationships alongside that. GC1 is an example of how Grassroots Champions are motivated to create a sense of

belonging for others as she uses part of her role as an ambassador because of the experience that she had when she was younger.

“Personally, I didn’t always relate super well to my peers. But basketball has [given me] a vehicle to be part of a collective, to be part of something, to learn how to win, to learn how to lose, pick yourself up and just be part of something. Looking back at how that really shaped who I am, how I deal with things now and what matters to me.” – GC1

Motivation 3: Provide Visible Female Leadership

Another motivation that appears unique Grassroots Champions is that they want to provide visible female leadership for youth basketball players. This motivation was reflected amongst this type of ambassadors, including GC1, who is a volunteer referee in the Canterbury region. Specifically she is motivated by knowing that she can provide visible leadership for both girls and boys.

“I’m visible, I’m active, I’m there and whether I like it or not I’m a role model. There’s visibility in our club, someone who cares. Even for boys seeing me as a leadership figure going ‘she knows what she’s talking about’ or ‘she’s invested in us’ being visible and present is a kiwi thing. It’s the care and support and being visible for them.” – GC1

Behaviour

Lead by Example in the Community

An example of a behaviour that is unique to Grassroots Champions is that they want to lead by example in their communities. GC3 is one of the grassroots champions who discussed this behaviour. When she served in a governance role for her local basketball association, she put communication as a priority to ensure the people she was working with were working toward a common goal. Her involvement was inspired by a need for better communication from people in leadership positions at her local basketball association. Therefore, when she decided to step into her governance role, she wanted to lead by example by being transparent with her peers which included a streamlined a channel of communication.

*...I know that we’re so short on girls so I’m going back to the drawing board and that’s how I get my hands in it. It’s being a role model, lead by example. A girl can be at the front of this, be a referee at a national tournament - be a leader in our community. The idea of being a leader now can be many things.
– GC1*

Type D: Within Vocation

There was one distinct motivation that emerged for Within Vocation ambassadors, which is presented below.

Motivation: Contribute to Growing Women and Girls' Community Sport

The motivation for Within Vocation ambassadors is that they chose their roles because they wanted to contribute to the women and girls space. Although women and girls' basketball is beginning to receive more attention, traditionally organisations tend to not invest the same amount of money or resources in programmes for girls. Despite the circumstance, the popularity of basketball continues to expand, and there are more paid positions in basketball organisations. The expansions of basketball organisations also creates capacity to create more girls only opportunities. An example of this is a basketball community lead, who knew that women's basketball was the space that she wanted to work in was because she noticed that women and girls are often overlooked in terms of investment. When asked about what motivated her to apply for her role, she responded:

"I didn't see any choice. If I don't do it, who's going to do it? In the basketball world women and girls are overlooked. Girls need a safe space to play and if I don't step up and do it than no one else is going to do it in a male-dominated organisation." – VOC3

VOC1 is also motivated to perform in his position because he noticed that women and girls were not getting the same attention as the boys teams were. He saw a need to invest in his local girls representative programme, which led him to focus on coaching girls as a main part of his job portfolio.

"...I just saw that there was a need for some emphasis to be put in our girls representative programme so that's probably why I've specialised in it the last few years to varying levels of success." – VOC1

Type E: Male Ally

No motivations or behaviours discernibly distinct from the other types.

5.3 Discussion

The focus of Study 2 was the motivations and behaviours of community sport ambassador in women and girls' sport contexts. The typology from Study 1 was an important lens to explore this through. Exploring the universality and uniqueness of motivation and behaviour within and across the five types was a priority. Although it was notable that some motivation and behaviour was reported by interviewees across the five types, some disparity and nuance does seem apparent. Notably, the Male Ally ambassador type does not seem to be associated with unique motivation or behaviour distinct from the other types.

Self Determination Theory is an appropriate framework to understand the motivations of ambassadors. Overall, it appears that community sport ambassadors are intrinsically motivated in that they emphasise how much they want to give back give back to the community. This motivation is inherently intrinsic as they

work for the satisfaction that they gain from the activity as opposed to tangible compensation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Given that many community sport ambassadors are fill roles as volunteers and take up unpaid roles this is not surprising. However, it is possible that Within Vocation ambassadors could have some form of extrinsic motivation, even if it did not come across in these interviews. The Job Characteristics Model was also helpful in this study of ambassadorial activity. Specifically, the model can be used to understand the behaviours of community sport ambassadors as well as provide insight into the identifiable pieces of their work (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Relationship Marketing and Social Marketing are also reflected in this study as relational marketing ties in with understanding the motivations and behaviours of the ambassadors. Specifically, what are the kinds of activities that the ambassadors partake in to build relationships with girls. It also underpins the exploration of how they provide value and ultimately sell the proposition to girls that playing basketball is something they should do.

Several limitations of Study 2 should be acknowledged. One limitation in this study is that a relatively small number of ambassadors were interviewed including small subsets from each type. Therefore, the extent to which motivation and behaviours are actually universal or unique should be interpreted cautiously and further research undertaken to generate further insights on this project. Another limitation is that the primary researcher was familiar with several of the participants before the interviews began and some had knowledge of the project. These interviewees could therefore have accentuated or embellished their stories believing they were doing the right thing to help the researcher.

Chapter 6 - Study 3

One of the ways that community sport ambassadors engage various audiences is through social media. An important aim of this wider research project is to understand the activity that ambassadors undertake, including in online environments. Therefore, here in Study 3, the online activity of the five types of ambassadors was the focus. This study involved both sampling ambassadors for whom social media accounts were explored as well as sampling posts/content from those accounts. Instagram and Facebook were the platforms from which a selection of ambassadorial content was analysed. A total of 56 posts were selected across Instagram and Facebook, which were then thematic analysed and categorised.

6.1 Method

The design of this study was bespoke insofar as it features some similar elements of previous social media research, but did not directly align to any. A novel design was needed given the “first of its kind” aim that was being pursued in terms of the social media activity of community sport ambassadors. Put another way, the data collection and analysis undertaken in this study was informed by related studies to some extent but tweaked to suit the novelty and specific context of this research. The approach taken here is similar to Chan et al., (2016), who used the principles of content analysis to extract social media data. These principles are: identify data sources; develop a codebook of categories for each post; code the data; assess reliability; and analyse results (Manual, 2013). This study also used codes (‘categories’) as a means to understand what types of content ambassadors are posting on social media. Members of the research team individually coded the data to ensure intercoder reliability before analysing the results.

Content Analysis

As a systematic and replicable method for analysing written and visual content (Riffe et al., 2005), content analysis was appropriate for this study of community sport ambassadors’ social media activity. This type of analysis is a means of examining content on any communication medium (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011) including social media platforms (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). Content analysis is a widely used research

method within management and marketing disciplines (Vowles et al., 2017). The process allows a researcher “sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion” (Stemler, 2001, p. 1).

Sampling

As in Study 2, generating data across the five ambassadorial types was initially a priority. However, only content from the accounts of Prominent Stalwarts, Athlete Advocates and Male Allies was ultimately included. Despite an exhaustive effort, it was not possible to find active accounts from the other two ambassadorial types within the women and girls’ basketball context of New Zealand. So, although it was originally believed that *all* ambassador types were engaging the community on social media this didn’t turn out to be the case.

Purposive Sampling

The most effective way to select social media content for this study was purposive sampling. This means of sampling involves selecting participants that are likely to produce appropriate and useful information (Kelly, 2010) and is a way to effectively identify and select cases with limited research resources (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when selecting the units that are to be studied (Rai & Thapa, 2015). It facilitates the identification and selection of individuals as information-rich cases to learn more about a specific phenomenon (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling allows for different and important views to be included in the sample (Mason, 2002; Robinson, 2014; Trost, 1986).

Selection of Ambassador Accounts

The social media accounts included in this study needed to feature content that was ambassadorial in nature and in a women and girls’ basketball context. Based on her familiarity with the people and social media activity within the community, the researcher first immersed herself among the accounts of community sport ambassadors that could potentially be included in the study. Ambassadors tended to share content mostly on Instagram and Facebook so these became the focal platforms. Next, the researcher created a list of ambassadors that she believed could be categorised in the typology from Study 1. The next step was to ensure that the identified accounts had public profiles (O’Callaghan & Douglas, 2021). Previous research has established a series of best practices when engaging with Public Data that is searchable online and involves individuals who “create data about oneself, visible to any other user of the publicly available

platform (when online)” (Lauterwasser & Nedzhvetskaya, 2023, p.2). Social media users submit to having their data collected by virtue of signing up for and posting on a social media platform without any explicit discussion of the exchange taking place (Lauterwasser & Nedzhvetskaya, 2023). Ambassadors were not notified that their accounts were being selected for this study as their posts were public. Once the researcher had a list of ambassadors who had public social media accounts and posted about basketball, a refined list of social media handles was generated and shared with the supervisory team.

The content in this study can be described as *Representative Examples*, which refer to individual documents or users that are important to the analysis and presentation of topic models in order to make sense of a conceptual topic (Lauterwasser & Nedzhvetskaya, 2023). Representative examples serve a demonstrative purpose (Lauterwasser & Nedzhvetskaya, 2023). Although documents aren’t the focus in Study 3, thinking of a selection of ambassador’s social media content in this way is appropriate because the posts are representative of ambassadorial activity. During the analysis phase of this study, the selected social media posts were categorised based on the nature of the content.

Ultimately eight accounts (Table 6.1) were purposefully selected from the Prominent Stalwart, Athlete Advocate and Male Ally community sport ambassador types. It was hoped that accounts from ambassadors across all five types would be included; however, it was discovered that Grassroots Champions and Within Vocation ambassadors were not actively using social media accounts for ambassadorial activity. It is important to note that this does not suggest that these ambassadors are not active on social media, rather they seem to primarily use social media in other ways.

Table 6.1

Ambassador Social Media Accounts

Ambassador	Handle	Platform	Posts
S1	@TullyBevilaqua	Instagram	1-2
S2	@coachmcmassage	Instagram	3-13
A1	@kalanipurcell	Instagram	14-18
A2	@ellafotu	Instagram	19-23
A3	@LaurynHippolite	Instagram	24-29
MA1	@cvaughn	Instagram	30-41
MA2	@MikeLacey	Facebook	42-52
MA3	@instituteofhoops	Instagram	53-56

Selection of Social Media Content

Once the eight social media accounts were selected, it was appropriate to establish criteria to filter and identify posts that were to be included in the analysis. Knittel et al., (2021) described filtering social media posts as part of an interactive system that enables visual analysis of social media data. There is very little precedent in the related body of literature for how to best filter and select social media for inclusion in empirical analysis. However, Mayring (2014) stated that researchers in this area of inquiry must ultimately “filter out particular aspects of the material... or to assess the material according to certain criteria” (p.64). When selecting content for inclusion, one of the criterion in this study was that it was posted from 2018 – 2022 to ensure recency and current relevance. In the end, 56 posts were selected to be analysed (Appendix 6.2).

Categorisation and Code Book

In order to analyse the nature of ambassadorial social media activity, it was appropriate to establish a system. Categorising in content analysis includes organising large quantities of text into content categories (Weber, 1990) reflecting patterns or themes that are directly expressed in the text or are derived from analysis. Creating a list of categories (sometimes referred to as ‘codes’) has been undertaken in related research. For example, Crabill et al., (2022) used a systematic classification of coding and identifying themes that emerged from online news media coverage of the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup bid. It has been suggested that categorisation like that undertaken here has managerial benefit. Firms aiming to drive value and deeper consumer engagement fine-tune social media strategies by categorising and analysing content (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Categorisation can also inform decisions about how frequently to post various types of content (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Overall, categorising content is a valuable exercise to better understand the nature of what community sport ambassadors are posting online.

The categorisation process in this study included meetings between the primary researcher and the research team to help sense check the process of categorisation that was being undertaken (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). At the outset of the analysis, members of the research team brainstormed words and this led to named categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). The result was a series of descriptors describing what ambassadors were posting on Instagram and Facebook. The 56 posts were classified into 10 categories that were used to describe the nature of ambassadorial content. Once the categories were formed by the research

team, the primary researcher compiled them into a codebook (Appendix 6.1). Codebooks are documents that are comprised of written procedures by which units are categorised and can help ensure reliability of the data (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). This stage of content analysis has precedent in sport marketing research (for e.g., Doyle et al., 2022).

Intercoder Reliability

Once the categories and codebook were created, the next step was for each member of the research team to individually match each post to the category or categories they thought reflected it best. Intercoder Reliability (ICR) was sought to ensure consistency of coding protocol (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017). The ICR process began when the primary researcher individually coded each post. A blank codebook was then sent to a supervisor for a first round of feedback. Next, feedback was sought from the second supervisor to ensure a robust and unbiased categorisation process. The team then met again to discuss the categorisation. Following a lengthy discussion, a final code book was established.

6.2 Results

The analytic process established nine categories (Table 6.2) to classify the nature of the social media posts from the community sport ambassadors: Appreciation, Recognition; Celebration; Self-Promotion; Four sub-categories of Promotion: campaign, organisational, programme, and event; Content Redirection; Education; Inspiration; Pride/ Reflection.

In some cases, there were posts that seemed to fit under more than one category. This is known as multi-category content (De Choudhury et al., 2012). What multi-category means in data below means that even though one post is categorised *principally* as one category. Further explanation of the categories follows as well as discussion of the results.

Table 6.2

Community Sport Ambassadors' Social Media Content Categories

Content Category	Description
Appreciation	Acknowledge achievements.
Recognition	Highlight the work of others.
Celebration	Celebrate achievements.
Self-Promotion	Promote own activity in the community.
-Promotion: Event	Promote event(s)
-Promotion: Programme	Promote programme(s).
-Promotion: Campaign	Promote campaign(s).
-Promotion: Organisation	Spread awareness of organisation(s)
Content Redirection	Link to others' content,

Education	Share knowledge.
Inspiration	Inspirational content.
Pride / Reflection	Delight related to achievement.

Appreciation

The first content category of community sport ambassador’s social media activity includes acknowledging the achievements of people in the basketball community. An example of this is a post from S1, reflecting her appreciation for the experience of working with a group.



Content from Male Allies can also be characterised as appreciation. MA2 exemplifies this when he acknowledged another person about an idea for his website. This post is another example of multi-category content. While it is categorised principally as content redirection, it also seems appreciative in nature.



6.2.2 Recognition

When social media content includes recognition, it highlights the work of a single individual. An example is a post from MA3 recognising the player’s passion and commitment to basketball.



Stalwarts also convey recognition in their content, such as S2 who shared a photo of her with an athlete she was coaching. The context for the photo is that the athlete was recognised for her hard work in training.



Celebration

Celebratory content acknowledges the achievements of individuals in the basketball community, often in a joyful, unserious way. For example, A3 posted a photo of herself and some of her teammates with a trophy whilst celebrating their team winning their conference championship. Although this post categorised principally as celebration, it also seems promotional in nature.

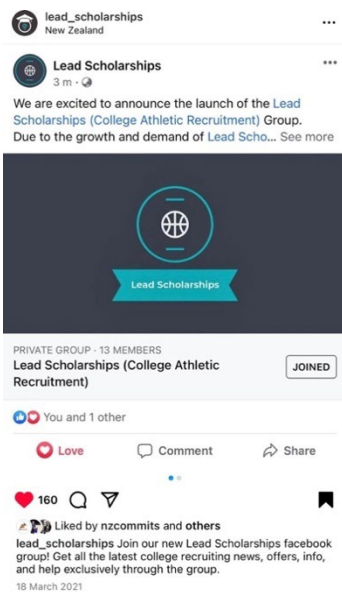


Male Allies also produce content that can be categorised as celebratory. For example, MA3 shared an Instagram post celebrating a player that he coached when she committed to playing basketball at an American university.



Self – Promotion

Content that reflects self-promotion is produced by ambassadors when they highlight their own activity in the community. An example of self-promotion in social media content come from MA1, who shares updates about his business and his clients. The purpose of these posts is to promote his services so that he can grow his offering.



Athletes can use social media to self-promote basketball activities that they are personally involved with. A1 is an example as she is showcasing her jersey as a means to bring awareness to her team.



428 6
 Liked by jr_swoosh and others
 kalanipurcell 🏀 Battle Of The Bridge 🏀
 First home game 🏀
 Auckland Dream vs North Harbour Breeze
 Tonight 7.00pm @ Epsom Girls Grammar
 EVERYONE COME SUPPORT!
 @aucklanddream @harbour breeze 🏀 🏀 🏀

External Promotion

There were four categories related to external promotion that are evident from the content analysis: *Event Promotion, Programme Promotion, Organisational Promotion, and Campaign Promotion.*

Event Promotion

Content that promotes events brings awareness in the basketball community. There were several examples of this including A3 who posted about an event that her team was playing in. She seems to deliberately frame the caption of the post to inform people of the event and encourage them to attend.



laurynhippolite
 Cowles Stadium
 359 7
 Liked by george_robinson and others
 laurynhippolite grand final weekend 🏀 🏆 come support
 LU, 3:40pm Saturday, Cowles Stadium :)
 12 September 2019

Another example comes from MA2, who shared a Facebook post that helped build awareness of an upcoming women’s basketball game:



Programme Promotion

Programme promotion refers to social media posts that promote programmes that a community sport ambassador may be involved in. Examples of programmes are basketball camps that the ambassador is affiliated with or other development opportunities. S2 showcased programme promotion in one of her Instagram posts:



Another example comes from MA2 who posted a graphic advertising a workout that he orchestrated for high school girls.



Organisational Promotion

Organisational promotion refers to content that is dedicated to spreading awareness of organisations involved in women and girls’ basketball. A3 posted an example of organisational promotion when she shared photos of a professional basketball team that she was playing for in Australia.



Organisational promotion was also the focus for S2, who posted about her work with a local basketball association.



27 likes, 2 comments

Liked by [george_robinson](#) and others
coachmcmassage @canterburybasketball running Girls Got Game sessions on the Eastside!
[View all comments](#)
28 October 2020

Campaign Promotion

The campaign promotion category includes social media posts that showcase campaigns about women and girls' basketball that the community sport ambassadors are involved with. In the following post, A1 included the hashtag of a Basketball New Zealand campaign called "Girls Got Game".



754 likes, 42 comments
kalanipurcell No words just love for this team & this family ❤️
[#girlsgotgame](#)
18 November 2019

S2 also posted about the “Girls Got Game” campaign in a more direct way with the words themselves depicted in the image.



Content Redirection

Content redirection is another category that can be used to classify the social media activity of community sport ambassadors. When ambassadors engage in content redirection, it means that their post serves the purpose of redirecting people to content in various forms located elsewhere. This might be to a website or to the social media posts of others. The following are two examples of MA2’s posts that fit into this category:



Education

Posts that fit in the educational content category, focus on teaching others about women's basketball. S2's post is a photo of girls exercising outside at a time when they didn't have access to a gym. The intent seems to be providing an example of resilience, thereby teaching followers how to keep moving forward in challenging circumstances.

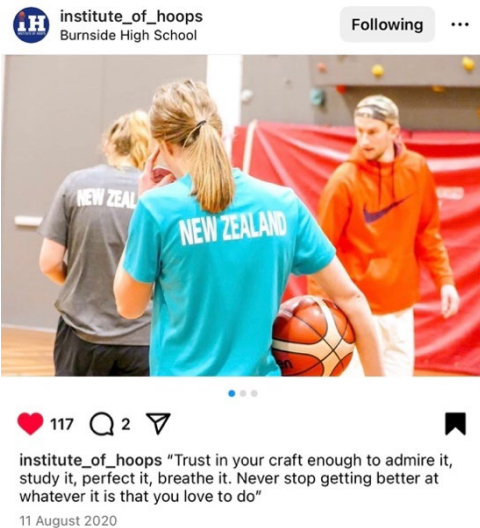


Another example of educational content comes again from S2, who posted about a group session about leadership that she helped organise.



Inspiration

Some community sport ambassador social media posts can be categorised as inspirational. These are posts that seem to have the purpose of encouraging women and girls to participate in basketball and highlight opportunities that are associated with it. An example comes from MA3 who provided an inspirational quote alongside an image of two elite female basketball players. Although the post below is categorised principally as inspiration, it also seems promotional in nature.

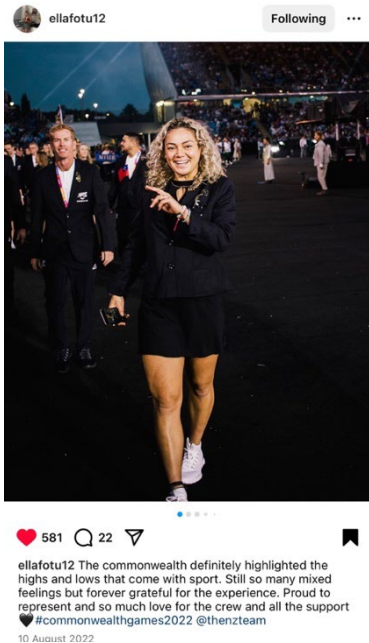


S1 also shared an image combined with an inspirational statement.



Pride/ Reflection

Social media posts that can be described as fitting into the Pride/Reflection content category showcase those feelings in one way or another. An example of a post reflecting an expression of pride comes from A2 who expressed her feeling of pride alongside photos following a 3x3 basketball tournament in which she represented the national team.



A3 is another example of an athlete whose content reflects pride. In this instance, she reflected on her time playing for the national team.



6.3 Discussion

Nine distinct categories of social media content are evident from the posts of community sport ambassadors. One key implication that is related to the results of this study involves the potential benefits of community sport ambassadors posting content that could be described as multi-category by nature. It became

apparent in this study that ambassadors of all types have a tendency to post content that is reflective of different content categories. Therefore, it is likely beneficial for community sport ambassadors to post content that has a number of purposes in an aim to reach a broader audience. There is evidence elsewhere that social media can have multi-level effects (Luo et al., 2023). The information that ambassadors share through their social networks will mean different things depending on who views it (i.e., participant, coach). Therefore, it is of strategic relevance for ambassadors to post multi-category content in an effort to reach more people. The idea is that the more varied and multi-dimensional the content, the greater chance that it will resonate with a wider audience.

Self-Presentation Theory was used as an underpinning for this study as it focuses on the ways that community sport ambassadors present themselves publicly online. This is due in part to the fact that ambassadors are posting content that reflects them in a positive way as they are aware that people are paying attention to them (Cole, 2019). For the Athlete Advocate type particularly, the way in which they present themselves seems important. Self-Presentation was an appropriate theory for this study as the way that ambassadors curate their online presence is an important part of the work that they do in the community. They engage in front stage behaviour, meaning that they post content with the understanding that they have an obligation to come across in a certain manner to audiences (i.e., girls and their families). This study also aligns with Relationship Marketing as the way that ambassadors conduct themselves online is in a way similar to brands that engage in relationship marketing (Achen, 2017; Parganas et al., 2017; Williams & Chinn, 2010). The way ambassadors present themselves online can influence whether participants wish to join the sport. In community sport, this is done through a relational approach which is in line with Social Marketing theory. Social media has also been penned as ideal for engagement (Abeza et al., 2020). So, the sample of social media posts in this study was to get an understanding of how that play out and the types of content ambassadors post.

This study also provides evidence that there is a difference in the types of content that various types of ambassadors post online. For example, self-promotion was a common type of content for Athlete Advocates and this is not unexpected. Highlighting expertise in a particular area of interest (Scolere et al., 2018) is important for marketing and development purposes which is useful to community sport ambassadors. The importance of self-promotion in women's sport was emphasised by Mogaji et al., (2018), as a means to gain

the attention of brands for potential endorsements. Sportswomen have not historically had the same opportunities to partner with brands as their male counterparts (Mogaji et al., 2018). Indeed sportswomen could more heavily weight self-promotion on their platforms so that they can build a brand identity (Mogaji et al., 2018). This is especially important as the marketing of women's sport has previously been done organically – often by athletes– as mainstream media has not traditionally provided coverage. There is space for further conversation about how to make it optimal. There is an opportunity for ambassadors to tweak self-promotion content such that it reflects another content category like inspiration. This type of content may resonate more broadly.

There was also a distinctive feature that stood out from the social media accounts and content posted by Male Allies. This involves them being present on social media profiles that are independent of their personal profile. These second profiles are often dedicated to posting content related to women and girls in basketball. Their posts tend to be limited to one category and air on the side of information sharing instead of playing to emotions. It can be inferred that Male Allies might feel as if they need a façade to hype up women's basketball given that they're males in a female space.

Another way that Male Allies seem to differ from other community sport ambassador types in terms of social media activity is that their online activity is weighted heavily towards content redirection. Posts redirect readers to various pieces of content with minimal narrative conveying emotional attachment to the subject. It is noticeable that the nature of his content conveys a tone that is similar to that of mainstream media instead of personalising the narrative and reflecting the Male Allies' unique personality. While it is acknowledged that this approach of content redirection without much context might have worked previously, nowadays it is probably less impactful given the challenge of grabbing attention.

Two of the content categories that are evident from this study have been previously identified in social media research. Inspiration (e.g., Andonopoulos et al., 2023) describes how influencers inspire customers to engage with products. When consumers scroll on social media, they can become inspired by something on their feed, which leads them to become motivated to interact with products (Andonopoulos et al., 2023). Consumers tend to engage with new content that also aligns with their values and can then become inspired to try new experiences (Thrash et al., 2014). In community sport, girls interact with ambassador accounts on social media and as a result may be inspired to play more often or at a higher level.

Another social media content category found here that has precedent elsewhere is pride. Swanson and Kent (2017) emphasised how pride as an emotion is uniquely associated with sport. Individuals involved in sport (e.g., players and coaches) perceive pride as being deserving of a journey and experiences that come with hard work and team success (Maraniss, 1999). A person who is prideful can be referred to as a strategic asset that is linked with employee performance and business success (Katzenbach, 2003). In this context, individual and collective feelings of pride are likely to benefit the wider women and girls' sport community.

One important limitation of Study 3 is that the sample of ambassadors accounts was relatively limited. Additionally, only a certain number of ambassador social media accounts were public, so that posed a restriction as to how many accounts posts could be selected. There is potential that other types of content are being posted by community sport ambassadors that weren't necessarily identified here. Another limitation is that the sample did not include all of the ambassador types that were set forth earlier in this project. Within Vocation and Grassroots Champion ambassadors were not represented in this sample as there were a lack of suitable accounts that were within the research parameters.

Chapter 7 - Study 4

The findings from previous studies in this thesis indicate that ambassadorial activity is prominent across women and girls' basketball in New Zealand. Although evidence has emerged that ambassadors play a development/marketing role in growing basketball, it is important to explore whether the community sport ambassadorship phenomenon transcends other women and girls' contexts. In this fourth study, 12 interviews were undertaken with representatives from rugby, cricket and football. The purpose was to understand community sport ambassadorship in women and girls' contexts other than basketball. A semi-structured approach was used to interview people familiar with ambassadors in their women and girls' sport community. This study is linked to three of the research questions relating to motivation for ambassadorial activity; the nature of ambassadorial activity; and the effectiveness of ambassadorial content.

7.1 Method

In Study 4, 12 individuals were purposefully sampled to help understand whether community sport ambassadorship as conceptualised in this thesis exists in their sports.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Similar to Study 2, semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate to explore how the phenomenon of community sport ambassadorship manifests in women and girls' rugby, cricket and football contexts. This interview format was a fit for Study 4 as it provided freedom and adaptability in getting information from interviewees (McNamara, 2009). This interview format allowed for flexibility in approach on a topic familiar to the interviewees but one they may not have discussed in depth prior.

Purposive Sampling

It was essential that the interviewees had knowledge of the women and girls' community in their sport so they could provide the sport-specific reflections that were sought. In other words, a sampling scheme in this study needed to ensure that interviewees had the requisite knowledge and experience to offer insight on female leaders across their sport. Members of the research team were aware of individuals who worked in rugby, cricket and football and in some cases provided an email introduction to inquire about interviews. As in Study 2, there were some instances in which snowball sampling took place. Interviewees shared names of colleagues that they thought could also offer relevant reflections on the phenomenon of interest.

Some potential participants were identified from the websites of organisations at regional and national level. The primary researcher also leveraged her personal network to approach and invite potential interviewees. From there, a list of potential interviewees was generated.

Interviews

A variety of participants from national, regional and community organisations across the three sports were interviewed (Table 7.1). Job titles for the interviewees included Head of Women and Girls Football, Club Rugby Partner and Head of Female Engagement.

Table 7.1

Study 4 Interviewees

Interviewee	Organisation
C1	New Zealand Cricket (NZC)
C2	New Zealand Cricket (NZC)
C3	New Zealand Cricket (NZC)
C4	Auckland Cricket
R1	Auckland Rugby
R2	New Zealand Rugby (NZR)
R3	North Island Rugby Club
R4	Southland Rugby

F1	Northern Region Football
F2	Sport New Zealand
F3	Waikato, Bay of Plenty Football Federation
F4	Formerly Waikato, Bay of Plenty Football Federation

Discussion Guide

Each interview was guided by a series of pre-determined questions (Appendix 7.1) that prompted dialogue around the nuances of community sport ambassadorship in women and girls' rugby, cricket and football communities. The discussions were on topics such as whether ambassadors were active in their respective sports, the key characteristics of those people, whether sporting organisations are supportive of ambassadors' work and if ambassadors from the five types as established in Study 1 are present in these sport communities. The questions that were posed to the other sport experts included querying about ambassadors have with participants in their sports, which relates to Relationship Marketing.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were thematically analysed for the purpose of identifying and presenting patterns in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similar to Study 2, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) allowed for organic and recursive coding processes that involves deep reflection and engagement with data. The themes that were identified are the result of detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts (Thomas, 2006). This approach also allowed the researcher to capture patterns around a central idea (Braun et al., 2023). In this case, the central idea was if and how community sport ambassadorship exists in rugby, cricket and football. The analysis was undertaken using an inductive approach, which in RTA "is not intended to be 'pure'—devoid of any outside influence... rather seeks to allocate interpretative *primacy* to the experiences, perspectives and so on expressed within the dataset" (Braun et al., 2023, p.27). The researcher conducted and analysed the interviews, so the patterns that emerged from the dataset were based on her point of view. One of the advantages of using RTA was that it allows for the researcher to detect patterns in the later phases of analysis once familiarisation of the data has occurred (Braun et al., 2023). In this study, some themes were derived later in the analysis when the researcher discovered patterns among the data.

The process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis includes several steps (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The first step is the familiarisation of data, which the researcher was immersed in when reading the interview transcripts to gain an understanding of which units of data sound familiar. In this instance, the researcher made

observations about the recurring themes that appeared to be present in the data. Following that, the researcher coded the data, which involves extracting different meanings by closely reading the data and then assigning labels that allow for understanding of data segments. For this step, the researcher noted down the ideas that were recurring. One example is when the researcher noticed similarity in how the characteristics of ambassadors in rugby, cricket and football were being described by the interviewees. Next, initial theme generation was undertaken, which involved placing codes into possible themes. This includes identifying meaningful patterns and creating themes based on combining codes that fit together well. This was done when the researcher created categories to classify each of the codes according to similarity. The next stage includes reviewing and developing themes, followed by refining and naming themes. The researcher consulted with supervisors to discuss the themes themselves and how to organise this presentation of findings.

7.2 Results

The following presentation of results addresses themes evident from analysis of the interview transcripts. First, a broad overview about if and how community sport ambassadorship manifests in rugby, cricket and football in the women and girls' context is provided. The key insight is that ambassadorship – as a leadership and community sport development phenomenon – exists across the three sports. The presence of various types of ambassadors was also discussed by the interviewees, as was the behaviours of community sport ambassadors that they were aware of. Following that, interviewees' thoughts on the behaviours that ambassadors exhibit are discussed, then thoughts from interviewees regarding how ambassadors attract new participants. The interviewees' reflections on the effectiveness of community sport ambassadorship as well as how ambassadors attract new participants are then presented. Other themes that are presented include: the obligation for ambassadors to give back to grassroots sport; how ambassadors align with National and Regional Sport Organisations (NSO/ RSO); and the impact of ambassadors across age groups. Further discussion of each of these topics is presented below.

Community Sport Ambassadorship Across Sport

It was reflected across all 12 interviews that there are prominent people in the cricket, rugby and football women and girls' communities who are acting as ambassadors for their sport. This is important evidence in

support of the conceptualisation of community sport ambassadorship put forth in this thesis. Ambassadors were described as an important part of the framework of the sport in the grassroots community. They are embedded in the community and fulfil multiple roles. For example, C3 shared:

“...when you think about it more broadly you probably consider players the role models of the women's game. They're sort of players and they're volunteers at the same time. You're using volunteers and things like that to promote more directly the women's game. I feel like the ambassador side of things, that sort of just organically built into the into the framework of what cricket is in the community.” – C3

A similar sentiment was shared by C4:

“People are out there in the community championing it and doing a good job. ... there's also some people doing awesome stuff in schools and there's good people at clubs. I think there are some great people championing women's sport.” – C4

R3 provided commentary that ambassadors are prominent in their community. In her case, she describes how she and people in her network have stepped into ambassadorial roles.

“It's the people that become the marketing tool as you say. There are multiples of me, my mates who are out there. We are getting into stronger positions of influence.” – R3

R4 described two community sport ambassadors in her smaller, more rural part of the country. She recounted that two players from the national team fulfil an important sport development role.

“They're our Southland champions that are representing New Zealand on the world stage in Sevens. They're our ambassadors, the people [Southlanders] look to. It's having role models who look like you and that's how we've been getting the buy in down here is because we have that diversity in our role models. They're so many cool things happening starting with just these two girls.” – R4

In a football context, F2 noted the presence of community sport ambassadors in both formal and less formal roles.

“...in football there's different levels to it – someone can be a really great ambassador for the sport and a really great role model, whether that is through like a formal ambassador role or whether it's more a role that they've naturally kind of taken on themselves.” – F2

Alongside her statements about community sport ambassadors being present, F3 made the important point that ambassadors do not always intentionally fill the role.

“I think a lot of people who end up working or volunteering in women's sport end up in that role without necessarily wanting to and so you find yourself needing to be a spokesperson or needing to advocate.” – F3

Furthermore, interviewees described that not only does ambassadorship exist outside of basketball, but it is also effective and powerful. For example, R4 said:

“I think it's so effective and positive. ... in the women's space, connections and environments are so much more important because it's not just showing up and playing on the field; it's making them feel

welcome and part of the team. That doesn't always happen just from one person. It's having your community and ambassadors at all levels being there working together.” – R4

It was recognised that one of the ways that ambassadors can be effective is by creating change through leadership roles. R2 describes how ambassadors created opportunities for people like herself to become leaders in their sport.

“I'm standing on the shoulders of some amazing [women] the only reason why I have my job is because we've had ambassadors for women's rugby. For anyone to say it isn't critical would be naively, and I think arrogantly talking, that their role isn't hasn't been interdependent on amazing trail blazers and ambassadors before.” – R2

However, it takes a collaborative effort for ambassadorial activity to be effective. This was recognised by C4 when she explained how ambassadorial activity in cricket needs to be supported by clubs and organisations to have the greatest impact possible:

“I think it could be a really strong tool, but we all have to work together. We can't just rely on the [Auckland] Hearts players, myself, or the few women in our clubs that are doing awesome things... We also need to support our clubs and those advocates to make sure that their voices heard and that they are.” – C4

Community Sport Ambassador Types

In Study 1, a framework of different types of ambassadors in community sport was put forth. The five types are Prominent Stalwart, Athlete Advocate, Grassroots Champion, Within Vocation, and Male Ally. Therefore, it was appropriate to explore whether the five types of ambassadors exist in women and girls' sport communities other than basketball. It came across in the interviews that the five types of ambassadors do exist and are indeed active in the other women and girls' sport communities.

For example, interviewees were emphatic in conveying that Grassroots Champions are active in their communities. When probed, R4 immediately acknowledged the importance of volunteer ambassadorial activity in her community.

“We have so many of these volunteers who are standing up as strong women to pave the way because it's not easy, especially in a community where not everyone's accepting of it...” – R4

An interviewee familiar with the women and girls' cricket community described how Athlete Advocate ambassadors make an impact:

“I think having those big stars is really important. They're not untouchable, but there's the ones that can go into the communities and tell their stories and inspire younger generations.” – C4

F1 described how Male Ally ambassadors in the women and girls' football community dedicate time and energy to the benefit of the game:

“If I look in the coaching space, they've chosen through their whole coaching career to coach women and girls... because they have an absolute true passion for growing the game.” – F1

F2 noted that in football, two of the community ambassador types definitely exist and suggested that they were somehow interdependent and both valuable.

“... the legends or even the athlete advocates... I don't know if you can have one without having the other. They all carry weight...” – F2

The Passion and Relatability of Community Sport Ambassadors

From the interviews, it is evident that two specific characteristics seem to transcend community sport ambassadors across the three sports. One of the ways that ambassadors connect with members of the community is by sharing their passion for their sport. R3 spoke about how the ambassadors' passion plays an important role in their community engagement:

“[Ambassadors are] passionate, diverse in their skillset - everyone can do a bit of everything. That passion is definitely a key thing because there's a sense of connection and belonging so that's what keeps people there and around.” – R3

The passion that ambassadors share with the community can be a source of motivation for their involvement in the sport. Community sport is not always well-funded so often times ambassadors are limited with the resources they have to work with. F3 shared:

“I think everyone's very passionate about what they do. I think there's a strong commitment to making football happen at a community level.” – F3

Aside from being passionate about their work, another characteristic that ambassadors in community sport appear to share is that they are relatable. The ability for ambassadors to relate to their audiences is an important part of their work, as it reflects New Zealand culture. C3 commented:

“I think what you'll find... is that a lot of our role models and ambassadors are reflective of Kiwi culture. They appear relatable and they don't feel like out of touch. They're not trying to be someone that they're not.” – C3

F2 also shared that ambassadors in football can be described as relatable. She referred to an athlete that kids often relate to because she shared similar experiences to them.

“... [name removed] is a football Fern, but her heart lies in the community development space. ... she was someone that was relatable, that the region could connect with, someone that young girls and boys aspired to be...” – F2

Attracting New Participants

Interviewees agreed that ambassadors play an important role in attracting newcomers to their respective sports. One of the ways that ambassadors can do this is by visiting schools which is a useful way for them to

interact and connect with new participants. It is not uncommon for ambassadors to visit schools and run sessions, or speak about their experiences in sport. R1 mentioned this during their interview:

“... we have a schools team, they go out and give a great experiences in the schools...” – R1

School visits are a common circumstance for cricket ambassadors to recruit new participants. It was noted by C2 that ambassadors help plan and make these visits a success so that participants enjoy their experience:

“... we understand that convincing or getting a kid to love cricket happens in a multitude of ways and you can't rely on one means of doing that. For us it's about valuing the school visits as much as the social media, as much as the events that we run and so I think obviously the ambassadors have a massive role to play throughout that whole thing.” – C2

Age Group Impact

Another important finding from this multi-sport sample of women and girls' experts, is that the impact of community sport ambassadors may differ across age groups. For example, F2 said:

“I think teenage girls... those that are already involved in the sport, ambassadors are crucial for them realising the pathways and opportunities. If you're a more elite player it is crucial to have ambassadors and people you can look up to. And then I think the space that we haven't got right is recruiting new players, or what is the role of ambassadors and bringing new people into the game.” – F2

R1 suggested that pre-teen girls are likely to take in information differently than teenage girls. Therefore, the way ambassadors approach conversations with each age group is important to ensure that their message is impactful.

“...you speak a different language to different age groups. ... because younger kids, they like stories... not all, but most kids just like stories and explaining in a story what form and why they need to do what they do.” – R1

In cricket, the impact of ambassadors also seems to differ across ages. C4 elaborated that it would be useful for ambassadors to be intentional in their activity depending on the age groups.

“I would say young girls, they probably connect with real one-on-one stuff or like the girls going to their training and seeing their role models and stuff. I definitely think you've got to target your message for and the ways you go about it to the different groups of women and girls that are out there.” – C4

Obligation to Give Back

Several of the interviewees addressed whether community sport ambassadors in their sport feel a sense of obligation to give back. Reflections on this important aspect of how ambassadors are motivated were not

perfectly aligned. For example, F1 described how athletes feel an obligation to give back because there are not many people who actively advocate for their sport:

“I definitely feel there's a huge sense of obligation, especially in women's codes because we don't have the financial backing to kick up a fuss and say 'hey, we actually we deserve more.' Most people that grow the game, their reason for doing it is because the game has served them in one way or another.” – F1

F2 pointed out that a sense of obligation may develop over time.

“This is a fine line...I think it starts with it being a genuine desire to help and then it turns into sometimes people taking advantage of that good will. But then the point comes where clubs or NSOs or whoever it is, asks more and more of them. I think that's when it becomes an obligation.” – F2

In cricket, community sport ambassadors seem to understand their role in promoting the sport using online platforms. C3 explained:

“I do believe that they understand the obligation to promote what they're doing as an athlete to those that might be checking in on their channels and looking up at them as role models from, from that grassroots perspective as well.” – C3

It isn't clear whether community sport ambassadors in rugby settings feel a sense of obligation to give back.

R4 explains:

“Yes and no. I think that they do because it's the expectation that they give back to the community but it's not like when we find out that they're here we reach out to them; they reach out to us.” – R4

Organisational Support

Another important insight that flows on from the interviewees' reflections on community sport ambassadorship across rugby, cricket and football relates to how sporting organisations are acknowledging and supporting their efforts. There does not appear to be a consistent framework to support ambassadors.

For example, R3 shared that she feels like the NSO has good intentions to support the people who are growing the game. She then acknowledged a need for improvement when it comes to the NSO executing their aim of being supportive.

“New Zealand Rugby has intentions to support [us]. There's no follow through and strategy; it's the consistent lack of people in those jobs. ... you can write it on a piece of paper, you can write it on a report but where's your follow through and that's what makes us more sceptical.” – R3

In football, there is a belief that the NSO is aware of the community sport ambassadorship phenomenon.

However, some of the interviewees recounted stories of organisations taking advantage of ambassadorial

work because it is voluntary. F4 shared how this can lead to a strained relationship between the organisation and the ambassadors.

“I’m going to be a bit cynical and say that I think they know [ambassadors] exist, but don’t really have any mechanism or any desire to potentially support them, and they just hope it’s just going to continue...”
– F4

However, New Zealand Cricket, seems to have an understanding about the importance of ambassadors and their work in the community. C2 shared:

“There are volunteer recognition programmes, whether that be at a regional level or at a national level. We recognise our volunteers... That’s definitely the case in cricket, so we try and look after those people...” – C2

7.3 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore if and how community sport ambassadorship exists in sports other than basketball. To that end, several people with knowledge of women and girls’ communities in football, cricket and rugby were interviewed. Perhaps the most important overarching insight from this study is that the phenomenon exists and that community sport ambassadors play an important role in developing sport for girls. Further, the interviewees provided evidence in support of the five types of ambassadors that were established in Study 1. The interviewees expressed a familiarity with people in their respective communities who serve in the capacity of Prominent Stalwart, Athlete Advocate, Grassroots Champion, Within Vocation, and Male Ally. The exploration of ambassadorship in these sports was underpinned by Relationship Marketing and Social Marketing theories. The interviewees recognised people who can be characterised as ambassadors in the community, and they are familiar with how the ambassadors in their sport are selling the value proposition as to why girls should participate. Further, these people aim to recruit girls to play their sport – the product. This action aligns with the principles of Relationship Marketing. The Social Marketing framework was also reflected in this study as the interviewees broadly explained that ambassadors in their communities use a relational approach to marketing their respective sports to participants.

A key trait that was reflected across ambassadors in rugby, cricket and football is that they are passionate about their work. Passion was emphasised across all 12 interviewees. It keeps ambassadors engaged in their sport community, may compensate for a lack of resources which is common in community sport and can

inspire newcomers to take part. The interviewees also shared that ambassadors can be described as relatable among participants. Relatability helps ambassadors act as marketing agents for their sport community.

It was without hesitation that interviewees agreed that ambassadors help attract new participants to their respective sports. The way in which ambassadors do this seems to vary, but may take the form of visiting schools where ambassadors engage with kids face-to-face or volunteer at community events. Interviewees also shared that the impact of the ambassadors' activity likely differs across age groups. This is due to the fact that women and girls are receptive to different forms of outreach based on their ages. One-on-one connections with girls was described as important and the way in which ambassadors speak to girls matters. If ambassadors understand the ways in which the different age group receives information, the better chance they have of having a lasting impact.

Ambassadors were described by the interviewees as often feeling a sense of obligation to give back to their communities. Reflections on this sense of obligation varied across the three sports that the interviewees were most familiar with. It seems that most ambassadors understand that they are perceived as role models, so they understand that they should act as such in person and online. The opportunities for ambassadors to give back take different forms. For instance, interviewees shared that their organisations will sometimes contact ambassadors to make appearances at events while other times ambassadors reached to them. It is apparent that ambassadors and the people who work with them are aware that they are seen as role models, therefore they feel obligated to participate in community activities.

The interviewees discussed whether sporting organisations at regional and national level are aware of – and support – the work of community sport ambassadors. Responses from the interviewees suggest that NSOs and RSOs are aware that ambassadors exist in grassroots sport, but support structures are largely non-existent. Semler (1997) defines organisational alignment as the degree to which an organisation's design, strategy and culture cooperate to achieve the same desired goals. There is no evidence yet that this alignment exists around community sport ambassadorship.

Perceived organisational support refers to the extent to which an individual believes that an organisation values their contribution and cares for them (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017). This is related to Organisational Support Theory (OST), which takes into account elements of fairness, supervisor support and job conditions (Eisenberger & Huntington, Hutchison, & Sawa 1986; Rhoades &

Eisenberger, 2002). It is quite clear from the interviewees that organisations are not providing a well-orchestrated support system for community sport ambassadors. Although not explicitly discussed here, the extent to which community sport ambassadors do or do not perceive organisational support for their ambassadorial work should be explored further.

On organisational support, it appears that there is somewhat of a disconnect between those representing NSOs and RSOs and those closer to community sport. Some of those interviewed in this study work in NSOs and RSOs, and their perception is that they are aware of and are supportive of ambassadors. However, interviewees in this study who work in grassroots clubs expressed varying degrees of frustration when it comes to the level of support that they believe community sport ambassadors receive. What can be taken from this is that there is a need for alignment as ambassadors have the same goals as the organisations in that they want to grow their sports. However, ambassadors will be more effective if they receive support from the sport structures that they operate in. Overall, it appears that sporting organisations have room for improvement when it comes to providing resources that enable community sport ambassadors to operate.

Chapter 8 - Study 5

So far in this thesis, the focus has mostly been community sport ambassadors in women and girls' contexts themselves – who they are, their motivation, behaviour and social media usage. The next logical step in the sequence of studies was to explore how ambassadorial activity is perceived by girls in the sport community as – in effect – the target market. Therefore, in Study 5, the researcher implemented several focus groups to understand how a selection of ambassadors' social media content was perceived by preteen (Under 13) and teenage female basketball players.

The focus groups were implemented in a traditional discussion format such that the girls could offer their thoughts alongside others. However, each focus group began with an individual free thought listing exercise as a way to gauge the girls' individual reactions and facilitate the subsequent group discussions. Instagram reels produced by community sport ambassadors from around the global basketball community were identified and presented to the girls. Insights from both the free thought listings and focus group discussions are important because sport organisations can create content with these insights in mind, such that it can inspire and resonate with girls and young women as a distinct audience. The remainder of this chapter is an outline of the Study 5 method, a presentation of results and a discussion of findings.

8.1 Method

Study 5 was a series of focus groups that were undertaken to get a better understanding of how the social media content of community sport ambassadors in women and girls' contexts is perceived.

Focus Groups

A focus group method was appropriate for this study as a means to gather girls' perceptions of ambassadors' online activity. Focus groups are "carefully planned discussions that are designed to capture perceptions in a defined area of interest" (Krueger & Casey, 2019, p.2). They are a means to gather insights by having participants share subjective experiences in a forum, in which it is possible to holistically capture multiple perspectives (Rodriguez et al., 2011). In the current research setting, this method allowed for each participant to share their individual perspectives on ambassadorial content in a comfortable environment. Being in a collective setting also helps avoid a power imbalance between researchers and participants which might be present during one-on-one interviews, which can also help girls this age to feel comfortable (Shaw et al., 2020).

Sampling and Participants

Focus groups were conceived and implemented with participants recruited via convenience sampling, which is the process of selecting members of a target population that are accessible, available and willing to participate (Dörnyei, 2007). Convenience sampling was the most straightforward way to recruit participants for this study. It was decided to stage the focus groups during three major New Zealand basketball tournaments: Secondary School Nationals, Under-13 Regionals and HoopNation - which is an independent social basketball tournament for athletes of all ages and abilities. Tournaments presented a unique opportunity to engage with numerous potential focus group participants in a central location.

Coaches or managers of girls' basketball teams participating in one of the three tournaments were identified through the primary researcher and industry partner networks. Some contact details for team managers and coaches (i.e., email addresses and phone numbers) were provided directly by Basketball New Zealand (the industry partner for the wider project). Over 20 people were initially contacted and briefed on the plan to stage focus groups. Approximately 15 responded to express a willingness to help stage the focus groups with the girls on their teams. Conversations advanced to the point of scheduling the focus groups with several of them. From there, the focus groups were planned on suitable days and times during the tournaments. Contrary to the expectation of having to overcome challenges at the scheduling stage of focus group research (Gibson, 2007), the communication, planning and subsequent staging of the focus groups

went relatively smoothly. A description of the project, information sheet, consent forms and background information about the project were also provided to the team contacts in advance.

Previous research has established that six to eight people with a maximum of 10 is the ideal size for focus groups (Efken, 2002; Krueger & Casey, 2009). However, groups of four to six participants are more appropriate to foster discussion for children of age 6-10 (Adler et al., 2019). Due to a couple of instances of challenging last-minute logistics and inter-personal dynamics with contacts on site at the tournaments, these ideal focus group sizes were not always achieved. For example, one focus group included 15 teenage girls from one team who turned up at the same time and were keen to participate in a window of time between games. The researcher forged ahead with the larger than ideal group, and the girls respectfully let all their teammates contribute to the conversation.

Seven focus groups involving a total of 59 girls were conducted across two months, with between 5-18 participants per group (Table 8.1). In most cases, the focus groups were made up of girls from the same team. The data was gathered with participants from six regions of New Zealand: Auckland, Christchurch, Gisborne, Taranaki, Waikato, and Wellington.

Table 8.1

Focus Group Participants

Location	Event	Age	Number of Participants
Christchurch	Secondary School Nationals	16-18 years old	6
Waikato	Secondary School Nationals	15-18 years old	16
Taranaki	Under-13 Regionals	8-11 years old	5
Gisborne	Under-13 Regionals	12-13 years old	6
Wellington	Under-13 Regionals	12-13 years old	11

Auckland	HoopNation Tournament	16 years old	6
Auckland	HoopNation Tournament	18 years old	9

Focus Group Structure

Each focus group began with an open-ended discussion about how the girls began playing basketball. This was undertaken for two reasons. First, Basketball New Zealand indicated that insights on this would be valuable. Second, it was deemed a simple, comfortable topic and an appropriate way to develop rapport with the girls before the more pointed discussions on ambassadorial content that were to follow.

The main part of each focus group involved showing participants four Instagram reels (short videos) posted by ambassadors from within the wider global basketball community. The focus group participants completed a free thought listing to convey their perceptions of the reels including how each made them feel. The girls were instructed to write down words that came to mind about each reel they watched. The researcher then prompted a discussion with the whole group in follow-up to the initial individual thoughts conveyed in the thought listings. A free thought listing can capture initial responses to a stimulus (Ross et al., 2006) so was appropriate in this case. This exercise also increases the likelihood that only those responses elicited by the stimulus and those associations that were readily accessible are captured (Ross et al., 2006).

Assessing Response to Stimuli

The approach taken here of presenting Instagram content to a sample of basketball playing girls and teens for the purpose of gleaning sport development/marketing insights was unique. Indeed, this particular research objective and design is without precedent in the existing literature. It is perhaps best understood as attempting to assess target audience response to stimuli. In this case the stimuli were the ambassador’s Instagram reels and the response was captured via the girl’s reflections in thought listings and within a focus groups.

Despite no precedent in the body of sport marketing or development research, the research approach here does – to some extent – mirror studies in the fields of health promotion and celebrity endorsements. For example, the use of visual stimuli has been used to explore perception and preferences for promotional

materials in health research (Schlichthorst et al., 2019). Focus groups have also been used to gather teenagers' perceptions of engaging with social media about health and the reliability of health information online (Fergie et al., 2013). The overlap between these studies and what was done in Study 5 is the intent to understand perceptions of what an audience likes and dislikes about the way that social media content is presented and the extent to which it resonates with them.

Put another way, the focus groups that were implemented in Study 5 were designed to capture *target audience receptivity* to ambassadorial content. In the field of green advertising, receptivity has been described as the extent to which consumers pay attention to and are favourably disposed and responsive to advertising (Bailey et al., 2016). The notions of favourable disposition and responsiveness align directly to the current research context. In the focus groups, girls were queried about the extent of their favourable disposition to the ambassadorial content and also asked if their behaviour would be impacted after seeing the social media content.

Bailey et al., (2016) defines target market receptivity as “the extent to which consumers pay attention to and are favourably disposed and responsive to advertising that uses green messages in the marketing products or a company itself” (p.570). The receptivity they referred to was measured by way of a questionnaire to gauge consumer's perceptions of green advertising. In this study, a similar approach was taken as audience receptivity was assessed via free thought listings and focus groups discussions about ambassadorial content on Instagram.

In other fields, research has been undertaken to understand preferences about ambassadors. It was discovered by Sadrabadi et al., (2018) that brand ambassadors can be effective for electronic word of mouth advertising in Instagram. Likewise, community sport ambassadors engage in what (at times) resembles electronic word of mouth advertising. It was therefore appropriate to assess receptivity such that insights could inform what ambassadors share moving forward. In this instance, community sport ambassadors are marketing engagement in basketball.

Instagram Reels

It was decided that showing focus group participants short video clips was an effective way to assess their response to community sport ambassadors' online activity. Instagram reels are a vertical video sharing feature that enables users to record and edit video clips to share with other Instagram users (Menon, 2022).

Reels provide opportunities for users to get creative with content without impacting the aesthetics of an Instagram grid (Anderson, 2020). These short videos can provide access to a diverse set of content such as blogs, news, or other life hacks (Kang & Lou, 2022). When an Instagram reel is posted, it can be shared on Instagram feeds and on Explore Feeds which can increase audience reach (Anderson, 2020).

Instagram reels can potentially inform, entertain and persuade an audience and this is particularly the case related to topics they find important (Molem et al., 2024). Despite this assertion, Molem et al., (2024) acknowledged that research on how short video platforms broadly influence people's views is sparse. Community sport ambassadors and their audience is a novel context to move this line of research forward.

Selection Criteria for Instagram Reels

In this study, the four Instagram reels were selected as representative of specific ambassadorial types from the Study 1 typology. The aim was to find Instagram reels that reflect ambassadorial activity online (i.e., content that was positive in nature and could shift target market attitudes and behaviours). The chosen reels were designed to elicit perceptions of the girls' receptivity to online content. The process for selecting reels to include in this study began with the primary researcher considering familiar ambassadors from each type. Identifying social media accounts in this way has precedent (Molem et al., 2024) and is justifiable based on the novelty of this wider area of research and specific study. Next, the primary researcher reviewed each account to see what reels had been posted.

Once a number of potential accounts and reels had been identified, the primary researcher chose six that best showcased ambassadorial activity and these were subsequently brought back to the research team for further discussion. The criteria that led to the selection of the final four reels was; 1) understandability for the target audience, and 2) the length of each reel. The reels needed to be understandable for girls of the focal age group. The four reels were also deliberately selected to be of varying lengths such that reflections on this reel characteristic could be sought. The discussion among the research team on reel inclusion continued until the research team came to a consensus. Ultimately the research team decided that four of the six reels were most appropriate for inclusion.

The four reels came from community basketball ambassadors in Australia, Kenya and the United States. No Instagram reels suitable for this study were available from New Zealand-based basketball ambassadors, so international content was necessary. Table 8.2 provides an overview of the type of ambassador shown in

each reel, reel category (i.e., promotional, motivational, interview), location of the reel, and the reel length.

A longer description of each reel follows the table.

Table 8.2

Description of Instagram Reels

Reel	Occupation / Type of Ambassador	Nature of Content	Location	Reel Length
Reel 1	Professional basketball player, Athlete Advocate	Motivational video	Australia	30 secs
Reel 2	Volunteer, Grassroots Champion	Promotional video for girls basketball camp	Australia	44 secs
Reel 3	Basketball coach, Within Vocation	Interview about coach's journey	Australia/Africa	3 min, 26 secs
Reel 4	Sports reporter, Within Vocation	Postgame interview with WNBA player Breanna Stewart	USA	1 min, 30 secs

1

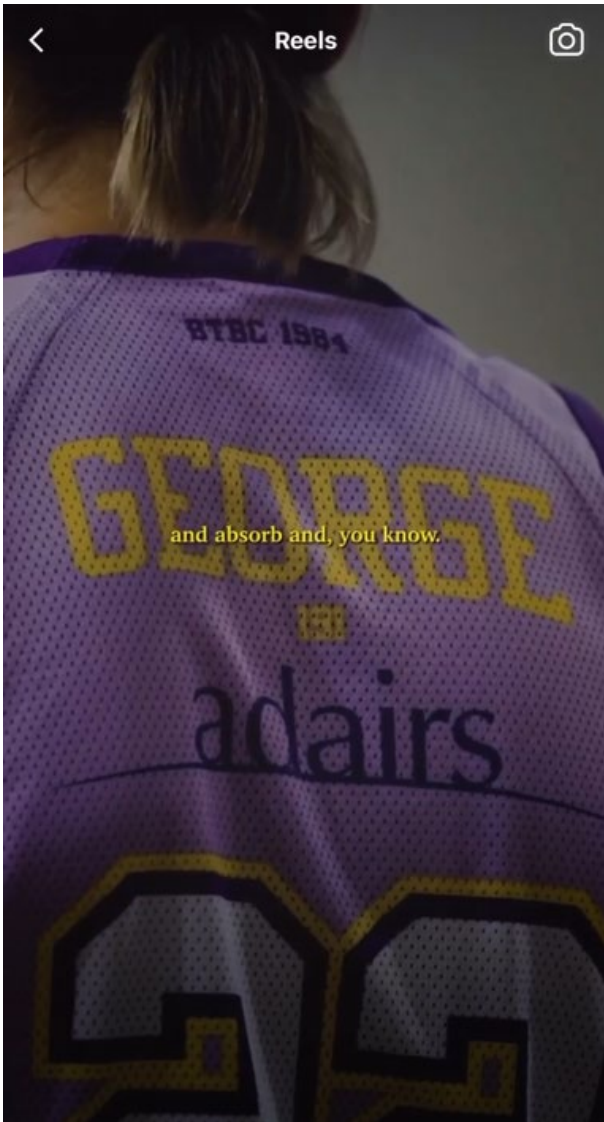
Discussion Guide

A discussion guide (Appendix 8.1) was carefully produced to facilitate participant engagement with and responses to the ambassadorial social media content that had been presented to them. Each question was crafted prioritising conciseness and using simple language, which are important when engaging children in focus group settings (Lund et al., 2016; Sandberg et al., 2017). Given the aim of this study, it was appropriate to ask how participants felt after watching the reels and what they liked or disliked about it. It was also appropriate to ask the participants what they thought about each ambassador. After each reel was shown, the primary researcher opened the discussion by querying the girls' initial reactions to the content. This discussion was a natural transition and prompted the girls to describe if and how the ambassador herself and/or the content resonated with them. The primary researcher probed and sought to understand the girls' reaction to the content in a variety of ways including deliberately having the girls respond to the thoughts/ideas of other participants.

Reel 1 (Figure 8.1) features Cayla George, an Australian professional basketball player who plays in the Women's National Basketball League (WNBL), the WNBA in America and for the Australian National Team. In this reel she discusses the importance of seeking improvement as an athlete. Her professional experience and large social media following made her a good choice to represent the Athlete Advocate ambassador type. She is an example of an athlete that New Zealand girls may encounter on their social media feeds. Therefore, it was appropriate to understand how participants reacted to content that featured someone of her position.

Figure 8.1

Screenshot of Reel 1 (Athlete Advocate Ambassador from Australia)



Reel 2 (Figure 8.2) is of a volunteer basketball coach in Australia being interviewed about a girls' community basketball camp. The event being discussed in the reel was one in which girls could try basketball in an encouraging environment. This reel was appropriate for the focus groups because both the Grassroots Champion ambassador and the event being described are relatable in a New Zealand context. It is likely that girls have encountered people like this previously and would be familiar with the nature of the event being described, so their reflections on the reel as a means to convey this content was a fit for Study 5.

Figure 8.2

Screenshot of Reel 2 (Grassroots Champion, Basketball Volunteer from Australia)



Reel 3 (Figure 8.3) is an interview with Liz Mills, an Australian basketball coach who is based in Kenya. Liz was the first female to coach a men's basketball team in Africa and openly addresses some of the obstacles she has faced to reach her goals. Mills is an ambassador for women and girls' sport because she leverages her social media platform to empower girls to pursue their goals. In this interview Liz addresses a variety of topics about women in coaching, her personal journey and the barriers women face as part of a male-dominated industry. This interview was included for the focus groups because although Liz was working in a

different country, her message and means of conveying it was deemed relatable and ambassadorial in nature. This reel was the longest of the four [3:26] that were presented so it was an opportunity to get further insight as to if or how length relates to the girls' perceptions.

Figure 8.3

Screenshot of Reel 3 (Within Vocation Ambassador from Australia, Coaches in Kenya)



Reel 4 (Figure 8.4) features Holly Rowe, an ESPN side line reporter based in the United States. Holly is an advocate for women's basketball through her various roles as a journalist. In this reel, she hosts a postgame interview with WNBA player Breanna Stewart an athlete advocate herself. This reel was an opportunity to gauge how the girls responded to the unique situation of two ambassadors engaging with one another.

Figure 8.4

Screenshot of Reel 4 (Within Vocation Ambassador from the United States)



8.2 Results

The results from the focus groups include both insights from the thought listings as well as the focus groups themselves. After the girls had viewed each reel, each participant wrote on average of five words throughout the free thought listing exercise. The most common words/phrases from each reel included: Reel 1 - motivating, improvement, learning; pushing yourself; practice to get better; Reel 2 – encouragement, relatable, community, positive; supportive; Reel 3 – promoting women, glass ceiling, honest; equality;

discrimination; Reel 4 – getting to the point, hype up teammates, humble, self-confidence, very good questions.

There was consistency across the focus group insofar as the girls in each were the most enthusiastic about the athlete in the first reel as they described her as a representation of themselves. In Reels 2 and 3, participants responded favourably to the ambassadors, but noted that the reels needed additional images/visuals for them to best relate to them. Participants also responded positively to Reel 4 involving two ambassadors, particularly noting the reporter’s clear questions.

Upon analysing the focus group data it became evident that the girls’ response to ambassadorial content is best understood based on a matrix. Assessing the girls’ reactions to ambassadorial content led to the identification of a “dual layer” framework that captures the nuance of social media receptivity in this context (Table 8.3). It is noteworthy that these results should be taken cautiously as the Instagram Reels feature content from ambassadors outside of New Zealand.

Table 8.3
Receptivity to Community Sport Ambassadorial Content

Foundational Pillars	Message Amplifier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatability • Understandability/ Relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement

The first layer, *Foundational Pillars*, can be described as essential elements that must be present within a piece of social media content for it to resonate with the girls. Without these elements, it is evident that a piece of content will not resonate or serve its purpose. The second layer, *Message Amplifier*, consists of content characteristics that effectively take a piece of content that has the pillars in place but can take it to the “next level” of meaningfulness. In the end it was possible to fit three key reflections into this dual layer model of ambassador social media effectiveness. The identification of these two layers is in effect the key insight from the girls’ reflections on ambassadorial content. The foundational pillars that emerged were Relatability and Understandability/ Relevance. The Message Amplifier has been labelled as Encouragement. These layers are explained next alongside quotes.

Foundational Pillars

The first layer that sits in the left column of the table are content characteristics that are categorised as *Foundational Pillars*. These are characteristics that social media content must have to resonate with girls in community basketball. The second foundational pillar is Understandability/Relevance. This characteristic is essential because it is not possible for girls to be moved, inspired by content if the message is unclear and/or they cannot follow what they are watching. Without relevance, participants noted that they were less likely to follow along and their reaction was muted. Importantly, the reels of 90 seconds or less were described by the focus group participants as more understandable and relevant.

Relatability

It became clear when analysing data that relatability was an important content characteristic. In this context, relatability refers to content that reflects personal experiences (Molem et al., 2024). When girls' basketball players relate to content, it seems to be because they share something in common with those depicted in the content or an experience.

Reel 1 was perceived to be relatable by the girls because the ambassador was in a position that they understood and seemed to share a desire to learn about the game.

“You can relate to it, not everyone knows everything. Most basketball players can relate to that.” – P1

“Even though she's a great basketball player now she still wants to learn more because no one is the best. She loves learning the sport and loves playing basketball.” – P33

On the other hand, reel 2 was perceived to be less relatable and perhaps more for an adult audience.

Participants shared that the reel would be more relatable to them if it included footage of girls participating in the camp that was discussed.

“I think the message isn't directed to the players, it's more so people involved in the whole situation or the people that help make the environment.” – P50

P5 shared that they would be more engaged in consuming the content if it “Cuts to the girls playing and the passion and excitement they had in the session.”

The potential addition of highlights of players participating in the camp was echoed by P56 who said it would be “more appealing to players [with voice overs].”

One participant noted that the reel would be more likely to resonate with the participants if it showed other kids.

“A better reel would be the kids talking to her something they can resonate with and reflect on.” - P3

Understandability/ Relevance

The perception of understandability and relevance is also considered a foundational pillar for community sport ambassadorial social media content. Participants identified that the first few seconds of reels should capture the main message so understandability and relevance of the content is clear to them. One example of when participants noted a high level of understandability was during a discussion of Reel 3. In that reel, the coach talked about herself and addressed the challenges that she has faced. Participants shared that the clear narrative helped them follow along and be inspired by the coach.

“The video has a plot line: she does a who am I / what makes her and then the problems that she faced and then her solution for it was to create more pathways so that other people like her have opportunities. ...there was a mixture of her talking and also her in her element in what she does...” – P48

Participants noted less understandability/relevance in conjunction with reel 2. For that reel, participants reported that they did not have enough information about the purpose of the content in order to decide if they want to interact with it or not. The importance of relevance was further highlighted when the primary researcher posed the question about whether Reel 2 was engaging.

“Probably not as much as the first [reel] because it doesn’t look like it has anything to do with basketball when you first look at it.” – P4

Further participant discussions suggested that for reel 2, unless girls were shown playing basketball at the beginning, it would be unlikely they would watch further.

“I don’t see anything basketball-wise so I’d skip it straight away.” – P59

Additional commentary was provided by P3, who shared that the inclusion of B-roll footage of girls participating in the camp would make it more interesting to watch. As a result, there is an increased likelihood that girls will watch the video on their feed because they understood its purpose.

“Cut to the girls playing and the passion and excitement they had in the session” – P3

Message clarity is important as it assists with creating a story line that is easy for girls to follow. An example of the importance of message clarity was highlighted in reel 3, as participants were confused during the beginning due to the long introduction. Therefore, it didn’t capture their attention right away and would have led to them skipping the video if not in a focus group setting as they were. The girls indicated that if they saw a caption like ‘First Women’s Head Coach’ that would likely capture their attention and want to engage with the reel.

“The start is confusing because someone else is introducing it. Even if it was titled ‘first women’s head coach’ it looked like something should be on the news” – P6

Additional commentary on Reel 3 really highlights the importance of narrative flow to increase their receptivity to ambassadorial social media content.

“I wouldn’t know it would be about the coach.” – P3

“As soon as I couldn’t understand the reporters I would scroll.” – P11

“I feel like you have to know a bit about her to watch the whole thing. If I didn’t know basketball or anything about it I’d probably carry on.” – P17

Reel 4 is an example of how a high level of understandability matters. The focus group participants appreciated that the reporter asked thoughtful questions and was knowledgeable about the person she was interviewing. The purposeful questions helped guide the interview which made it easier for participants to understand. For example, P38 observed how the reporter asked questions that were easy to understand as she was informed on the statistics that the player accumulated.

“She got straight to the point so it was engaging right from the get-go. She uses stats and asks the right questions to look for what she wants to be answered. She motivates the person to talk about themselves to give the viewers what they want to look at.” – P38

P57 also shared:

“She asked interesting questions that led to answers that I think athletes want to hear.”

Another example of how relevance was important for participants to remain engaged with the content came from P52, who pointed out that it was clear how the reporter was experienced in conducting interviews because she treated female players the same in that she didn’t ask different questions because of their gender.

“She knew what was doing. She was genuine and engaging and I thought the questions were effective and constructive. I also thought that because you see a lot of interviews where women get asked very different questions to men who would be in the same position...I thought she was asking questions that she would also ask men in the NBA or something so I thought it was good because it wasn’t gendered. – P52

Additionally, evidence of how reel 4 had a high level the understandability was reflected through the structure that the reporter took to forming her questions, which allowed for a relaxed setting where the player’s personality could shine.

“...upbeat tone and her questions were well-structured. When she asked the first question it wasn’t a full answer so she asked a follow up question to lead her to answer more which is good for a reporter. She tried to keep the interview entertaining and upbeat.” – P53

Message Amplifier

The second ‘layer’ that helps us understand girls’ receptivity to social media ambassadorial content has been labelled ‘Encouragement’. The idea here is that if a piece of content is relatable and understandable/relevant, it is likely to resonate with young female basketball players, but if it also features a theme of encouragement, it’s positive effect could be much greater.

Encouragement

Content that features encouragement in one way or another was received favourably by the girls.

Ambassadors who are genuine in sharing their vision for creating a safe space signals to girls that a person outside of their immediate circle is willing to help them try something new. It was noticeable throughout the focus group discussions how well participants reacted to ambassadors encouraging girls to become better athletes while also having fun.

A positive response to encouragement was described by P41, who reacted positively to reel 2 in which she perceived encouragement and selflessness.

“She did it for others as well, she didn’t do it for herself. She thinks about other people’s futures, she encouraged the girls and she makes sure her girls have fun.” – P41

P26 added how she appreciated the volunteer taking the time to encourage the girls and help them reach their potential in basketball.

“She was helping the girls to reach their potential on and off the court and make sure it’s still enjoyable for them.” – P26

The theme of encouragement was also raised during discussions about the coach in Reel 3. For example, P30 shared that she felt encouraged to try new things because of the opportunities that the coach spotlighted in the reel. She also felt encouraged that she is able to overcome similar obstacles as she progresses in her sporting career.

“[She] wants to show the world that women can be whoever they want and achieve their goals.” – P30

8.3 Discussion

The purpose of the focus groups in this study was to provide insight about how girls respond to ambassadors on social media. To better understand the specific elements of what inspires girls to engage with social media, two layers for understanding social media content receptivity in this context were created: *Foundational Pillars* and *Message Amplifier*. These elements are classified as foundational as they proved

essential for gaining girls' attention to watch the content and form the foundation of good ambassadorial content. There were two foundational pillars that emerged: Relatability and understandability/relevance.

On the other hand, to most effectively amplify ambassadorial content, a theme of 'Encouragement' is very helpful. Therefore, it can be inferred that the content that is categorised as encouragement is effective and that the content initiates women and girls to take action. Moreover, community basketball managers in women and girls' settings need to understand what constitute pillars and amplifiers in their environment. It is likely that there is some degree of transferability of pillars/ amplifiers across age groups and sports and countries, but there is work needed from social media managers and community club leaders to further understand what that is. This managerial suggestion is consistent with what we know more generally about social media, specifically that novelty and fresh content are necessary. Since new social media content is produced every day, it is necessary to evaluate the types of content that are being produced (Saket, Agarwal, & Mehrotra, 2024). Evaluating the types of content that are produced is important as it can "seemingly small decisions can influence the longevity of content" (Saket et. al., 2024, p.1).

It is likely that the three insights that are offered in this chapter are transferable to other basketball settings and indeed other sports, but it is the job of community sport managers – particularly those with marketing/social media as part of their roles – to identify and monitor this. The implication here is that every bit of community sport ambassadorial content should have the pillars, while new ways to amplify messages should be tested and evaluated.

As consistent with the first foundational pillar, each of the reels resonated with the girls in that they found the ambassadors in them to be approachable and inspirational individuals. For example, if an athlete (i.e., Cayla George, Reel 1) were to attend their training, they would want to be around her and ask questions about her basketball journey. With the volunteer in Reel 2, a majority of the participants said that they would consider attending a holiday camp with someone like her if it was held in their area. Coach Liz Mills (Reel 3) inspired participants and they mentioned they would like to be coached by Liz or a person of the like because they feel empowered to 'chase their dreams' from being around her. Participants gave a unanimous response when prompted about the sports reporter (Reel 4), stating that they would want to engage with Holly Rowe because of the way she was knowledgeable about the athletes she was interviewing and that she

created a space where the athlete felt comfortable answering questions. Further, all participants agreed that if there was a reporter in New Zealand doing something of the like they would want to interact with them.

There were also a series of observations that were made about the nature of the Instagram reels, which is in line with the Understandability/ Relevance pillar. These observations include thoughts on: 1) reel length, 2) context for the reel, 3) use of highlight tape / “B” roll footage. Feedback on these aspects can be adapted by sporting organisations when creating content so that it may resonate with a wider audience.

Focus group participants indicated that shorter reels were better for viewing. A general observation was that the optimal length for reels is approximately 90 seconds. Lengthy introductions to reels seem to be less effective compared to content that gets straight to the point from the beginning. An example of this was brought up during reel 3 with the basketball coach as was too long at about five minutes. Overall, if girls are going to be inspired by the reel, they need to be engaged with it from the start, and that starts with the length of the content. Previous research has noted that people’s attention span has decreased from 12 to 8.25 seconds (Schiller, 2023), meaning that there is limited time to capture girls’ attention.

The importance of having context for the reel so the participants understand what content they are watching is also essential for engagement. For example, providing a line of text at the top of the reel was deemed helpful by the girls so they could understand what they were watching. Without the context participants said that they would scroll past the particular reel if it showed up on their Instagram feed. Incorporating highlights or “B” roll footage of the person performing their role with a voiceover would make the reel more visually interesting. This was an improvement that was primarily raised after watching reel 2 (basketball volunteer) and reel 4 (sports reporter). With the volunteer, participants shared that they would be more inclined to participate in one of the camps if they saw footage of the girls playing in it so they would know what to expect. For reel 4, having highlights of the athlete that the reporter is interviewing would make the reel more eye-catching to watch.

Finally, having a message amplifier increases the chances that girls will want to interact with the content. When girls feel encouraged by the ambassador in the reels, they are likely to engage with it. This insight emerged particularly in reels 2 and 3, as participants expressed that they felt encouraged to pursue their goals based on the ambassador’s attitude in the reel.

This study highlights a gap in the literature as to how girls react to social media content with ambassadors in women and girls' community sport. In line with the theoretical framework of this project, Relationship Marketing, Social Marketing and Uses and Gratifications Theory were appropriate theoretical underpinnings for this study. Relationship Marketing in particular has been described as a way to shift the sport narrative and enhance perceptions and participation in organised sport for women (Jowdy & McDonald, 2003). Since the aim of this study was to understand the receptivity of the target market – girls basketball players - and how the make-up of social media and the ambassadors was in it, Relationship Marketing was appropriate as it refers to the importance of establishing, developing and maintaining of relationships. It is important to understand how ambassadors build relationships and it is also appropriate to assess whether it resonates with girls. Given that the focus here is aimed at gauging the perceptions of girls to the content and their commentary of the ambassadors in it, the relationships that ambassadors form with girls is essential for their behaviour change, which is the aim of the ambassadors' work. Social Marketing was also appropriate as the way the ambassadors in the reels can be described as engaging in relational marketing by the way they interact with the people around them. The feedback can be used to create more meaningful campaigns. The Uses and Gratifications Theory was also an appropriate theoretical framing here since the focus group participants provided insight to what types of social media content gratifies them as well as what satisfies them. Insofar as Social Influence Theory, the reels are examples of ways that girls can be influenced by the ambassadors to make a behaviour change and become part of community sport. Informational social influence is also relevant here as the ambassadors in the reels share information about basketball. This may influence girls to become involved.

However, there are limitations on this study that should be acknowledged. The first limitation is that the content that was presented to the focus groups derived from ambassadors' social media accounts from around the world, not New Zealand specifically. Although the participants were familiar with a few of the ambassadors that were shown, this could be streamlined in future. This is due to the fact that the popularity women's basketball in New Zealand is still growing; however, there is a lack of media coverage around this topic, which can contribute to a lack the girls' lack of awareness of ambassadors may be located outside of their primary city.

Another limitation is that only four reels were involved in this study, thereby limiting the breadth and scope of video that was assessed. This was in part due to the limited number of reels that were deemed to be suitable for the purpose of the study. In the future this aspect can be improved by broadening the selection guidelines so that more reels are chosen to generate a bigger sample size.

Chapter 9 - Discussion

In this thesis, five studies were carried out to investigate community sport ambassadorship in a women and girls' context. The studies were undertaken in partnership with Basketball New Zealand. The research was guided by pragmatism and featured a multimethod approach. Several research questions guided the project:

1. What are the types of ambassadors in women and girls' community sport?
2. What is the motivation for ambassadorial activity in women and girls' community sport?
3. What is the nature of ambassadorial activity in women and girls' community sport?
4. How effective is ambassadorial activity in women and girls' community sport?

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together results from the five studies in a discussion of implications and future research. Limitations of the thesis are also discussed.

This chapter is comprised of several points for discussion that have come about as a result of the findings in this thesis. The interpretation and discussion that follows relates primarily to the findings of the five studies collectively, rather than individually. The aim of the chapter is to discuss ambassadorship in community sport as a theoretically grounded new conceptualisation and naming convention for a phenomenon that currently exists but should be nurtured carefully for greater impact.

9.1 A New Perspective of Ambassadorship

In this thesis, community sport ambassadorship has been explored using women and girls' basketball in New Zealand as a research context. To this point, ambassadorship has most commonly been associated with brands in mainstream and marketing research. In this study, a new conceptualisation of ambassadorship in a community sport context has been developed. Previously, individuals that are referred to as community sport ambassadors here have been informally referred to as role models, volunteers, champions and more. Those characterisations are not incorrect but perhaps imprecise or incomplete based on the multi-dimensional nature of the sport development role being carried out. As a result of this thesis the community sport ambassadorship role is now better understood and the stage is set for nuanced discussions to take place within sporting communities. It is important to point out that the terms volunteer and ambassador are mutually exclusive. While many ambassadors are volunteers, the term volunteer does not do justice the promotional and marketing work that they do. The term volunteer is still important in community sport,

however the data from in this thesis provides evidence that both volunteers and paid people in the community are filling what is known as an ambassadorial role.

The overall project was set in motion by two key aspects of Study 1: a) a new conceptualisation and definition of community sport ambassadorship and b) a typology of community sport ambassadorship. Once the definition was conceived, it was appropriate to create a typology of the types of ambassadors that exist in grassroots basketball. Given that this research is novel in the community sport context, it was appropriate to create a framework that could help shape the remainder of the project. By conceptualising community sport ambassadorship and five prominent types, this research has established new naming conventions that can be used by sport managers for the purpose of facilitating participation and other forms of engagement. A variety of people play an important role in developing sport in community contexts and through this project those individuals are now accurately named and the work they do can be better recognised.

The process of creating the definition and typology involved several steps. For the definition, the researcher carefully considered scholarship on the topic of ambassadorship, mostly derived from the management and marketing bodies of literature. Ultimately, the researcher used key words and concepts to develop a definition that was uniquely appropriate to for women and girls' community sport. The typology was developed through a similar process. Broadly, the researcher's observations informed the typology process as she was familiar with women and girls' basketball – and had an initial understanding of the nature of ambassadorial activity.

The next step included establishing some broad parameters to distinguish types of community sport ambassadorship. Next, the researcher conceived names for each of the five distinct types of community sport ambassadorship, thereby developing the typology. The researcher then presented both the definition and typology to 11 people for the purpose of feeding back on how the conceptualisation and typology were developing and ultimately to support it. The people who were approached for the purpose of providing feedback on the evolving conceptualisation of community sport ambassadorship were knowledgeable and experienced in areas such as sport marketing scholarship, women and girls' basketball, and community sport more broadly.

Collectively, those interviewed in Study 1 provided robust validation for the definition and typology of community sport ambassadorship. There is now evidence that community sport ambassadors exist and play

an important role in sport development and specifically participant marketing. Evidence also now exists in support of the five types of community sport ambassadors which are presented in the typology. Thus, the definition and typology are as robust as one could hope for in a new venture like this. Validation for the community sport ambassadorship phenomenon in Study 1 set the platform for the four studies that followed.

In Study 2, interviews with a sample of community ambassadors from each of the five types provided insights related to the research questions on motivation and behaviour. Exploring the nature of what ambassadors post on social media in Study 3 was also guided by the typology. Ambassadors of all five types also seem to be present in rugby, cricket and netball contexts, as was discovered in Study 4. With the wider aim of building a broad, initial understanding of the phenomenon, it was deemed appropriate to somehow assess how girls respond to community sport ambassadorship and this was done via focus groups and a selection of Instagram reels in Study 5.

One of the most important, high level findings of this thesis focused on community sport ambassadors is that they are in a position to influence people. This notion of influencing behaviour has been linked more broadly to leadership (Maibach et al., 2007) and makes sense in this context. Indeed, ambassadors can influence girls' decisions to participate in sport, how often they do so and more. In sport contexts, community sport ambassadors can influence people in different ways, such as one-on-one interactions during events or by posting content on social media about their sport. The way in which ambassadors recruit participants makes them marketing agents for community sport and evidence emerged of this across the five studies. However, the work of the ambassadors is often unrecognised. The framework for community sport ambassadorship has allowed for research to be carried out and ultimately generated insights about their activity so that more support for them can be offered both informally and formally moving forward.

This project was carried out in the context of women and girls' basketball so this new perspective of ambassadorship in community sport settings is most applicable there. However, there is also evidence from this project (Study 4) that the definition and typology has relevance across other women and girls' contexts including rugby, cricket and football. Furthermore, the community sport ambassador role is very likely present in boys' sport contexts too, although no direct inferences are made about that within this thesis. This is an important area for future research.

Theoretical Reflections on Community Sport Ambassadorship

The theoretical underpinning of community sport ambassadorship outlined at the outset of this thesis was extensive. Insights related to several of those have come through and are worth reflecting on. Relationship Marketing (Ravald & Gronroos, 1996) helps us understand the creation of value based on connection between people. In sport contexts, Kim et al., (2010) argued that relational interaction can enhance the experience for sport consumers. Without doubt, evidence emerged across this thesis that the relationships that are created between community sport ambassadors and female sport participants fuel participation and drive the development of basketball. Importantly, evidence emerged that relationships exist in this way within other girls' sporting communities as well. Consideration of girls' sport participation through a relationship marketing lens is prevalent in sport marketing research, so the current research further contributes to the theoretical framework. Further, the current thesis builds on the emergence of relationship marketing as an appropriate theoretical frame for spectator or more traditional sport consumer marketplaces to community sport where it is also clearly relevant.

Related to Social Marketing, community sport ambassadorship was framed in terms of behaviour change and a proposition to engage in sport. The experience of playing sport themselves was cited by several of the community sport ambassadors interviewed in this study as motivation for their ambassadorial activity. This therefore provides evidence that community sport ambassadorship is supported by the tenets of social marketing, making it as well an appropriate frame for future research in this area. This is not the first research to frame sport development in terms of social marketing (e.g., Bell & Blakely, 2010) but does provide further evidence and a different angle.

The mechanisms through which influence and persuasion work is the focus of the Source Credibility Model (Hovland et al., 1953). Behnoosh et al., (2018) are among those who have explored influence in sport participation contexts using this as a theoretical frame. One of the tenets of the model and pillars of effective persuasion is expertise, a theme that came out in several ways in this thesis related to community sport

ambassadorship. There is a credibility dimension to community sport ambassadorship that could be further explored in future research.

Community Sport Ambassadors and Social Media

In this thesis, it has been found that social media plays an important role within community sport ambassadorship. Evidence has emerged in this sequence of studies helping us understand how ambassadors use social media as well as how it is received by members of the women and girls sport community. In Study 3, the content analysis indicated that the community sport ambassadors' social media posts include distinct themes and elements of self-promotion, content redirection and recognising other people. In contrast, Study 5 focus group participants indicated that they were more likely to be engaged with content that was easy to follow and had contextual relevance. So, there is a bit of a distinction there between what community sport ambassadors are posting and what content is likely to resonate most with the audience of interest to those developing women and girls' basketball. This distinction is important and worth reflecting further on.

A lack of alignment between content that is being posted and what girls' find most engaging is a missed opportunity. For example, one of the categories of content that Athlete Advocates posted was characterised as self-promotional. In some instances, there were social media posts that were only self-promotional in nature and could not really be categorised any other way. However, the focus group participants in Study 5 shared that they are more likely to engage with community sport ambassadors' content that is relatable and easy to follow. In essence, content that is posted by elite athletes and self-promotional in nature is not likely to resonate with younger girls who are not in a position relate. In contrast, content that focuses on aspects of basketball that younger girls can relate to such as that which reflects on one's path to elite basketball etc. may resonate better. This gap represents an opportunity for organisations and ambassadors to think about how they can incorporate the elements that girls find engaging in an effort to increase engagement with content.

The distinction between what ambassadors post online versus the characteristics of content that captures girls' attention leaves an opportunity to share best practices regarding sharing content. For example, community sport ambassadors should post content that they believe is mostly likely to resonate with the target - young female basketball players. Moving forward, community sport ambassadors could post content of a type that we now have some evidence to suggest is more likely to resonate.

From previous research, we know something about the types of social media content that influences audiences. For example, the work of Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), conceptualised three categories of social media content that influence audience engagement allows for further reflection on the aforementioned gap between what content is currently shared and what resonates with audiences. The categories are as follows: rational, interactional and transactional (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). In Study 3, it was found that the content ambassadors share is a mix of rational (e.g., content that is informational, functional, educational) and transactional (building brand resonance and sales promotion). For example, several ambassadors shared information about upcoming events. Transactional content included the promotion of commercial opportunities. In Study 5 it was found that content which reflects experiences, personalities, employees, brand community, customer relationship, and cause-related content resonates the most. For instance, girls shared that they were the most engaged with content that clearly positions ambassadors as relatable to their situations. So, one important takeaway from Studies 3 and 5 is that if community sport ambassadors wish to have maximum impact, posts that are interactional by nature are preferable.

An important aspect of community sport ambassadors to consider when posting on social media is for their content to provide viewers with a clear idea of what they are watching. Contextual relevance was one of the ‘foundational pillars’ of resonant social media content that emerged from the focus groups in Study 5. This finding aligns with Shahbaznezhad et al., (2021), which discussed that context is important in order to gain an understanding of the relationship between the type of content and engagement. Findings from Study 3 revealed that some ambassadors simply repost content without narrative to describe what it is, which can lower content engagement rates. Further, the content that was pulled from the ambassadors’ social media accounts appeared to be more generic and at times seems to lack context and relatability. Although not every piece of social media content will necessarily reflect the person’s ambassadorial role, the content should provide some idea of what they do in the community. As per the focus groups in Study 5, girls are more likely to engage with the content if they have a clear understanding of what the ambassador is doing. There is precedent of people using strategies to inform themselves before they make a decisions before engaging with a brand or business, which is important in making strategic decisions (Peláez, Martínez, & Vargas, 2019). One of the ways that users decide which content to consume is by way of a model that includes a decision-making model that obtains an alternative ranking contextualizing the feelings/opinions of the users

represented through intervals of feeling consistent (Peláez et al., 2019). Similar here, girls use context as a way to decide which content they are interested in.

In addition to posting their own content, community sport ambassadors may also re-share content from other ambassadors. Although sharing other people's posts is an act of ambassadorship as it shares information, it might send a different message than if the ambassador created the content themselves. This is a point to keep in mind as it could influence girls' behaviours. Critically, what can be taken from this work is that the ambassador should think critically as to how their content might influence girls. It also depends upon the qualities of the messenger, the prevalent context, and the underlying receptivity of the audience to believe it, in terms of appealing to their established beliefs, interests or concerns. This feeds into the need for these insights to be shared with ambassadors and the organisations in which they operate so there is a guideline for them to follow so they know their content will resonate with their target audience.

Ambassadors and Self-Promotion

Since social media plays an important role in community sport ambassadorship, it was appropriate to explore the ways in which ambassadors engage online. The notion that ambassadors are active on social media is related to RQ3 focused on the behaviours of community sport ambassadors. This query was addressed during Studies 2 and 4. For example, ambassadors shared during the interviews in Study 2 that they are active on social media to promote their sports. This often includes events, or other people in the community. Then in Study 4, individuals familiar with the women and girls' communities across football, cricket and rugby added commentary specifically related to the extent to which the behaviour of ambassadors was self-promotional.

Although ambassadors in basketball did not explicitly state whether or not they were comfortable promoting themselves on social media, it is worth exploring further given its prominence in rugby, cricket and football. The Study 4 discussion mostly focussed on the community sport ambassadors' online activity, however the interviewees were not quite aligned on whether ambassadors participate in self-promotion on social media. There are instances where interviewees shared that sport organisations were aware that ambassadors are active in community sport, but they do not promote themselves online. In general, cricket ambassadors seem to understand the importance of incorporating self-promotion as part of their social media

activity so they can have a greater impact on the community. However, self-promotion is often an uncomfortable topic in football. From a rugby perspective, it came across that self-promotion, if it happens at all, is approached organically.

Informal Ambassadorship

The primary focus of this research project is to highlight people who play a pivotal role in administering and marketing community sport. However, not all people who serve as ambassadors are given that title. Rather, they perform the marketing function, but are doing so without being explicitly labelled as such.

There are instances whereby individuals on social media can be directly characterised online as ambassadors in community sport. However, the individuals who are featured online are not always explicitly labelled as such. For example, an Australian podcast shared a tweet on the platform 'X' that characterised an Australian basketball player as an ambassador for women's basketball. However, not every similar piece of content is labelled explicitly as that example. It is also common for social media campaigns to showcase prominent people in sport that promote a variety of things from events, initiatives and even telling their personal stories. An example is from Basketball New Zealand, which launched a series called *Breaking Barriers* which highlights the stories of the New Zealand women's basketball team. The content consists of athletes sharing their journeys through basketball along with advice for girls who want to pursue a similar pathway. Although not directly labelled as ambassadors, the athletes who are featured in this campaign can be perceived as inspiring for girls to play basketball which is an act of ambassadorship. It is likely that campaigns of a similar fashion exist, and are worthy of future discussion to understand how the people featured in those types of campaigns resonate with girls.

9.2 Managerial Implications

There are numerous managerial implications related to this collection of studies. These implications are most relevant for sport managers working in women and girls' communities. The study was carried out in the context of basketball, so relevance is highest for those developing that sport, but evidence also emerged that community sport ambassadorship is relevant across other women and girls' sport as well. It's likely that the following ideas are relevant to some extent in boy's sport contexts but those interpretations should be made more cautiously.

Nurturing Community Sport Ambassadorship

Sport managers would be very well served to nurture community sport ambassadorship in several ways. That starts with very straightforward information sharing about the phenomenon including gradual “socialisation” of the typology of community sport ambassadors that has been established here. It would be worthwhile for sport managers operating at national and regional/state/provincial levels to share the typology with sport organisations to simply raise awareness about the types of people that are operating in their sport. Discussions ought to follow about the existence and prominence of each type such that the unique way in which community sport ambassadorship occurs in communities is collectively understood and ultimately nurtured. The typology that was put forth at the onset of this project is specific to basketball, however it is possible *or maybe even likely* that other types of ambassadors exists in other community and cultural contexts. When leaders within sporting communities share an understanding of the nature of community sport ambassadorship a bespoke means of nurturing these key leaders can develop.

There are increasingly signs that the community sport ambassadorship phenomenon as conceptualised and ultimately explored in this thesis is relevant in contemporary sporting communities. Examples from around the world reflecting community sport ambassadorship have come to light during this thesis undertaken in New Zealand. For example, Sport Ireland and the organisation *Her Moves* have partnered to create a Junior Sport Ambassador Programme which promotes sports and movement with girls in schools (The Shona Project, 2024). Another example comes from the Regional Sport Organisation (RSO) Queensland Gymnastics, which created a Queensland Gymnastics ambassador programme that aims to engage more kids in the sport (Queensland Gymnastics, 2024). These are examples of how sport governing bodies at various levels are acknowledging organic/informal ambassadorship and are creating some structure around it.

Organisational Support

Building on the higher-level implication of the need to generally nurture community sport ambassadorship, the need for specific organisational support from organisations with the resources to do so, warrants further discussion. Indeed, an important finding from this research is that the inconsistency of how organisational support of community sport ambassadors is perceived. From interviews conducted as part of this thesis, it came through that sport organisations seem to be aware of community sport ambassadors, but it

was apparent that they do not always provide the necessary support for ambassadors to succeed. For example, an participant who works for a grassroots rugby shared that although the national sport organisation is aware of the programmes that the club orchestrates for their community, the organisation does not acknowledge the work or provide financial support for it.

Organisational support was specifically addressed by interviewees in Studies 2 and 4. For example, the interviewees in Study 4 made it quite clear that they believe there is a lack of support for the work ambassadors are doing in their communities. When interviewees were probed about whether they believe organisations are supported, the interviewees familiar with the women and girls' communities in rugby and football said they did not believe that ambassadors have resources to further their work. However, the participants from cricket organisations were more optimistic that organisational resources are in place for them to succeed. In Study 2, a universal motivation and behaviour for community sport ambassadors themselves across the five types was that they described benefit from organisational support. Although community sport ambassadors did not describe a lack of support around them, it is clear that they would benefit from support from national and regional sport organisations.

It is also important for community sport ambassadors to sense that there is support for their work when they come to join another organisation. This is described as Perceived Organisational Support (POS), which refers to employees' "global beliefs about the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501). POS is fostered by two beliefs of employees: 1. the personification of organisation, and 2. rewards based on the organization's discretion (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The personification of organisation is when employees assign human characteristics to the organisation and view actions by agents in the organization (e.g. managers) as actions of the organisation as a whole (Eisenberger et al., 1986). On the other hand, the "favourable or unfavourable treatment that employees receive which indicates the organisation's benevolent or malevolent orientation towards them" (Loi, Hang-Yue, & Foley, 2006, p.103). POS is achieved as long as employees believe that the rewards they receive are based on discretionary choice as opposed to external constraints beyond the organisation's control (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). Additionally, voluntary support from organisations are highly valued by the employees since they indicate the organisation's genuine respect for the employees and recognition of the employees' contributions (Loi et al., 2010). The nature of POS is relevant to community

sport ambassadors and the organisations around them. Community sport ambassadors will naturally have beliefs about the values of the organisation they work for and can decide if they want to continue working should those values align with theirs. If not, the ambassadors could feel underappreciated, as if they don't belong or that their work in the community is not important.

Several interviewees in Study 4 indicated that ambassadors in their sport do not feel supported by their organisations. It was noted by interviewees familiar with rugby and football that the NSOs understand the importance of and are aware of community sport ambassadors, but the lack of acknowledgement for their work persists. This is an area for NSOs and RSOs across various sports to reflect on moving forward.

Recognising Community Sport Ambassadors

It has come across in this research that community sport ambassadors play a crucial role in the success of the operation of community sport. However, not every person in community sport carries out work that is reflective of the term ambassador. For example, people who wash team kits or hand out water cups at a marathon are not ambassadors. The distinction is that while these individuals do important work, they are not serving marketing functions and actively recruiting participants to grow the sport. Although the discipline of sport marketing has evolved, there are opportunities to expand thinking beyond commercial and elite contexts and shift into community contexts because the aim of bringing a newcomer into sport participation is in itself a marketing opportunity as there are similarities to selling a product.

Ambassadors are not always recognised by their colleagues for their work. Therefore, another important implication is that there is an opportunity for sport organisations to implement a recognition programme that identifies and conveys gratitude for those who serve in as ambassadors in their community. Given that ambassadors are important assets for growing sport, it is important that they feel appreciated by governing bodies in their sport. As a result, it is common that ambassadors in community sport burn out from working long hours often without pay. In this thesis, one of the aims of focusing on community sport ambassadors was to make organisations aware that they exist and are performing essential marketing functions on the grassroots. Therefore, when organisations are aware of the ambassadors who are essential to growing their respective sports, conversations can take place regarding how to recognise and uplift their work.

The recognition of community sport ambassadors is similar to the concept of employee recognition, which has been explored extensively in business and management literature. Employee recognition in the

workplace can be classified as follows: Personal recognition; recognition of results; recognition of job dedication; and recognition of workplace practice (Brun & Dugas, 2008). Research from Nazir and Islam (2017) also showed that engaged employees work toward their objectives and are also good team members who take responsibility and want to contribute to the organisation's goals. Although not all ambassadors are compensated, these elements are still applicable in a community sport context. An example could be a recognition programme whereby sport organisations more deliberately and publicly recognises the work they do. This recognition can provide assurance to the ambassadors that they are valued, which can enhance their performance and benefit the sport as a whole.

Naming and Utilising Community Sport Ambassadors

There are instances that community sport ambassadors are directly named as such, but it is not yet common. There seems to be a natural humility inherent in many who serve as community sport ambassadors so naming them may not initially be welcomed. There are many ambassadors who are humble by their nature. This is particularly true in New Zealand as there's a degree of humility in the community. However the interviews in this research provide evidence that people fill ambassadorial roles in spite of the fact that they don't think of themselves as such. This thesis is not arguing that the community sport system needs to start labelling people as ambassadors, rather it proposes a managerial perspective that is useful to think of some of what these people are doing as ambassadorial work. There is likely to be longer-term benefit from the structure and recognition that this provides. For example, organisations could support or give ambassadors advice of what to post on social media or reinforce how the importance of how they speak to newcomers when they arrive because they want them to return. Further, organisations can more purposefully embed ambassadors as spokespeople or champions on behalf of various initiatives. Being named and embedded may lead to more deliberate ambassadorial behaviour from those who are named which would benefit the sport community. Given the evidence generated in this thesis about girls' responsiveness to effective messaging that it is relatable and easy to follow, there is an opportunity for named ambassadors to engage in embedded programs with good support. There is managerial value in thinking of a subset of volunteers or paid staff as ambassadors so that the ambassadorial work and marketing work that they do can be rewarded, supported and reinforced. This can also allow ambassadors to receive additional training such as seminars and workshops about the importance of what they're doing and how to

get better at it. However, this does not replace volunteer training and it does not mean that everyone in women's basketball needs to be called an ambassador and not volunteers.

Upskilling Community Sport Ambassadors

One important way that sport managers can support community sport ambassadors is to offer opportunities to upskill. This may take the form of content creation and communication skill sessions with community sport ambassadors. For example, sport managers can facilitate workshops that share information with ambassadors of all types on how they should structure and tone their engagement with young people. Evidence from Studies 3 and 5 regarding what ambassadors are posting contrasted with what girls say engages them most can content creation workshops. For example, ambassadors could be taught that while posting generic photos may catch some girls' attention, including an inspirational theme will be more engaging.

9.3 Future Research

Several areas for future research are evident based on the studies that have been conducted as part of this thesis. The focus of this section is to present ideas for future research across the five studies.

Formal Community Sport Ambassadorship

To this point, ambassadorship has mostly manifested in informal settings. This means the way that ambassadors perform their roles and interact with girls is unique to each person and usually occurs without a strategy emanating from an aligned sport organisation. There are more formal examples of ambassadorship campaigns and programs that have emerged recently. An area for future research would be to explore and assess these more formal ambassadorial structures. In other words, studying organisations that have active ambassador programmes in community sport would be a suitable next step for research.

Community Sport Ambassadorship – Male Participants

The overarching theme of this thesis is focussed on ambassadorship in women and girls' sport. However, another area for future research is to explore ambassadorship as it relates to community sport for males. This topic is worth exploring as it is likely that some elements of ambassadorship would manifest differently in boys' sport contexts.

Evidence has emerged that males and females differ in their identification with role models (Lyle, 2009). Research from Anderson & Cavallaro (2002), showed that boys are more likely to choose same-sex role

models. Therefore, it is appropriate to explore whether role models are gender-specific (Wicker & Frick, 2016). There are also certain attributes that boys look for in role models, such as being caring and trustworthy (Bricheno & Thornton, 2007).

Broader Relevance, People and Structures of Community Sport Ambassadorship

While this project provides evidence that ambassadors play an important role in marketing grassroots basketball, a logical next step of this area of research would be to look deeper into the role that ambassadors play in other sports. Although this query was addressed in Study 4, there is more work to be done about better understanding who the types of ambassadors are in other sports and if their ambassadorial behaviours differ, not just in New Zealand, but also globally. Role models in football have been studied previously (Wicker & Frick, 2016) but this is not quite equivalent to how community ambassadorship has been positioned in this thesis. Further, because of inappropriate behaviour on- and off-the-field (Lyle, 2009), not all high profile people in sport would make appropriate community sport ambassadors. This warrants further research. This is evidence that further exploration is necessary for understanding not only what ambassadors are doing, but how receptive participants are to them based on their actions. It was pointed out by Warmenhoven et al., (2021) that knowledge is important when informing strategies that are specific to educating and supporting parents, peers and coaches in facilitating athlete development and improving player welfare on the youth athletes' journeys. The people who help facilitate these types of conversations can be thought of taking on an ambassadorial role. Future research in this area can include defining the roles these people take on and gaining a better sense of their specific actions so they can make workshops and community interactions more meaningful.

Further Exploration of Social Media and Community Sport Ambassadorship

Study 3 in this project involved investigating of the nature of content from community sport ambassadors on social media. Specifically, the content analysis explored the tone of the content related to women and girls' basketball that ambassadors share on Instagram and Facebook platforms. However, there is an opportunity for future research to explore the nature of what community sport ambassadors post on other popular social media platforms such as 'X' and TikTok have yet to be studied. Future research should include content that is sampled from other platforms to understand if ambassadors post different types of content and if so, what is different about it. Overall, it would be useful to explore whether ambassadors are

using these platforms to engage a broader audience. This recommendation is based on the work of Shahbaznezhad et al., (2021) which called for a more robust empirical examination regarding the role of different content types in social media to better understand its use and relationship with engagement.

9.4 Conclusion

There is evidence from this thesis that community sport ambassadors are performing essential marketing functions in grassroots sport. For example, in Study 2 it was found that the specific motivation which was shared across the five types included giving back to communities. The behaviours that were common across the five types included sharing Love of the game during community events and on social media and inspire the next generation by using their role to champion the sport.

The findings have provided a general understanding of what ambassadors do in the community, why they do it, and also how girls perceive. Implications for sport managers are numerous but most focus should be on acknowledgement and support. For example, regional and national sport organisations can highlight the work of community sport. There are numerous ways in which this line of research can move forward which have also been outlined.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethics Approval

3 August 2022
Michael Naylor
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Michael

Re Ethics Application: **22/147 Ambassadorship in Women and Girls' Sport: The Case of Women's Basketball in New Zealand**

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

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 2 August 2025.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: linden.moore@autuni.ac.nz; melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz

Appendix 5.1 – Study 2 Discussion Guides

Type A: Prominent Stalwart

- Give me an overview about your role in basketball.
- Do you see yourself as an advocate for women’s basketball? And if so, how?
- What was the point you decided that women’s basketball was the one to stay in?
- You’re in a position to help build character and better lives: tell us what you do when you speak to a young girl for the first time who’s never played basketball.
- What’s your strategy for talking to people outside the basketball community and how bring them in?
- What do you hope to accomplish by giving back in your community?
- From your perspective, do you believe you are inspiring young women to play basketball?
- To what extent are you thinking about the wider community (and its development) when you are active in the community?
- What is your motivation for your work and activity in the basketball community?
- What aspect of your advocacy do you think is the most meaningful for others in the community?

Type B: Athlete Advocate

- Do you see yourself as an advocate for women’s basketball? And if so, how?
- What to do and how does it work?
- What do you hope to accomplish by giving back to your community?
- How important do you think approachability is for highly accomplished athletes and for them to put an effort toward being conscious of that during ambassadorial activity?
- From your perspective, do you believe you are inspiring young women to play basketball?
- Did you have role models when you were a young player? If so, how did they inspire you to achieve your goals?
- To what extent are you thinking about the wider community (and its development) when you are active in the community?
- What is your motivation for your work and activity in the basketball community?
- What aspect of your advocacy do you think is the most meaningful for others in the community?

Type C: Grassroots Champion

- How did you get started in working with basketball?
- Is it different being an ambassador now versus 5 or 10 years ago?
- What was your pivot point or stage where you started caring more broadly about the sport?
- What was the point that you decided that women’s basketball was the one to stay in?
- Do you find that once the girls start into the sport and stick around? What do you do to keep young women interested in playing basketball?
- How do you move the sport forward, aside from character building? How do you engage newcomers and keep returning players interested?
- You’re in a position to help build character and better lives: tell us what you do when you speak to a young girl for the first time who’s never played basketball.
- What’s your strategy for talking to people outside the basketball community and how bring them in?
- Do you see yourself as an advocate for women’s basketball? And if so, how?
- What is your motivation for your work and activity in the basketball community?
- What do you hope to accomplish by giving back in your community?
- From your perspective, do you believe you are inspiring young women to play basketball?
- To what extent are you thinking about the wider community (and its development) when you are active in the community?
- What aspect of your advocacy do you think is the most meaningful for others in the community?

Type D: Within Vocation

- Do you see yourself as an advocate for women’s basketball? And if so, how?
- Why do you choose to work with women and girls specifically?

- How do you move the sport forward, aside from character building? How do you engage newcomers and keep returning players interested?
- You're in a position to help build character and better lives: tell us what you do when you speak to a young girl for the first time who's never played basketball.
- What's your strategy for talking to people outside the basketball community and how bring them in?
- What is your motivation for your work and activity in the basketball community?
- Do you find that once the girls start into the sport and stick around? What do you do to keep young women interested in playing basketball?
- From your perspective, do you believe you are inspiring young women to play basketball?
- To what extent are you thinking about the wider community (and its development) when you are active on social media?
- What aspect of your advocacy do you think is the most meaningful for others in the community?

Type E: Male Ally

- Do you see yourself as an advocate for women's basketball? And if so, how?
- Why and when did you choose to work with women and girls specifically?
- What is your motivation for your work and activity in the basketball community?
- What do you hope to accomplish by sharing basketball content on your social media page(s)?
- From your perspective, do you believe you are inspiring young women to play basketball?
- To what extent are you thinking about the wider community (and its development) when you are active on social media?
- What aspect of your advocacy do you think is the most meaningful for others in the community?

Appendix 6.1 – Study 3 Content Analysis Coding

Post #	Appreciation	Celebration	Self - Promotion	Other promotion: refer to 4 sub-codes in table below	Content redirection/ Call to Action	Recognition	Education	Inspiration	Pride/ reflection	Build excitement (hype post)
1				X						X
2			X				X	X		
3	X					X			X	
4						X				
5				X						
6	X					X				
7	X						X			
8	X						X		X	
9				X (Programme + Campaign)						
10				X (programme + campaign + organisational)						
11	X			X (programme + campaign + organisational)			X			
12	X		X	X (campaign + organisational)						
13	X			X (programme + org)		X				
14				X (campaign)					X	
15				X (event + organisational)						
16			X	X (event)						
17			X						X	
18		X	X						X	
19			X	X (event)					X	
20		X		(event)					X	
21			X	X						
22			X	X (event)					X	
23			X	X (event)					X	
24			X	X (event)					X	
25		X								
26									X	
27			X	X (event)						
28	X		X	X (organisational)					X	
29			X							
30				X						
31				X						
32			X	X (organisational)		X				
33						X				X
34				X (event)						
35			X	X (organisational)		X				
36			X	X (organisational)		X				X
37			X	X (organisational)	X					
38				X (org)		X				
39				X (event)		X				
40					X					
41				X (event)		X				
42		X			X					
43	X			X (event)	X	X				
44					X					
45	X			X (event)	X					
46					X					
47					X					
48				X (event)	X					
49	X	X		X (event)	X			X		
50					X					
51					X	X		X		
52					X		X			
53			X	X (event)	X					
54			X					X		
55	X		X	X (organisational)		X		X		
56	X	X	X	X (organisational)		X				

Appendix 6.2 – Study 3 Social Media Posts

Type A – Tully Bevilaqua

1



2

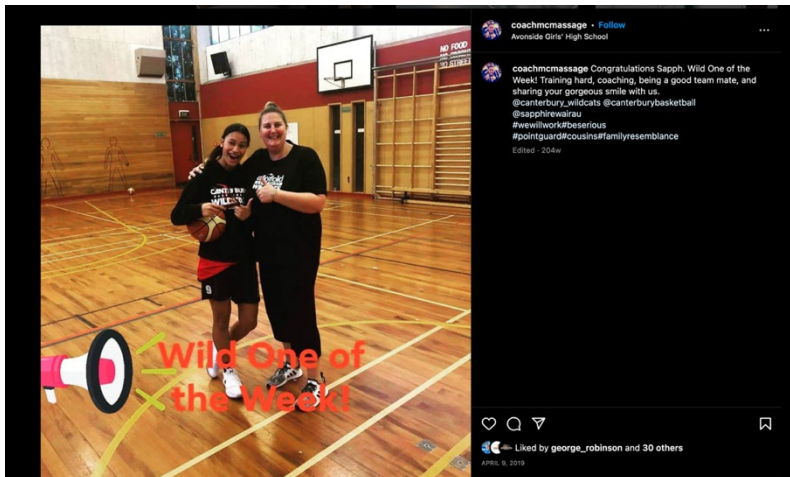


Type A – Lori McDaniel

3



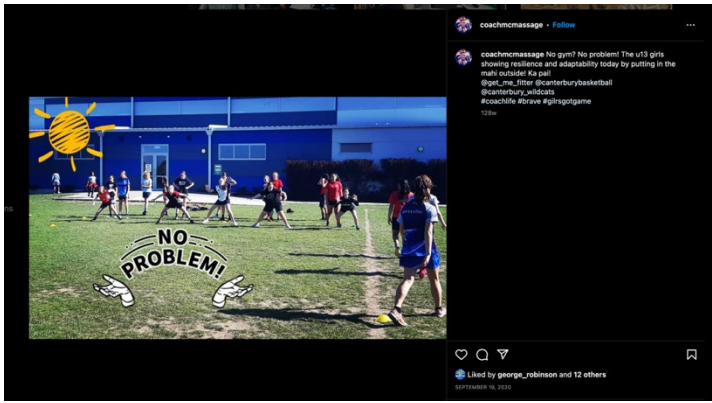
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5



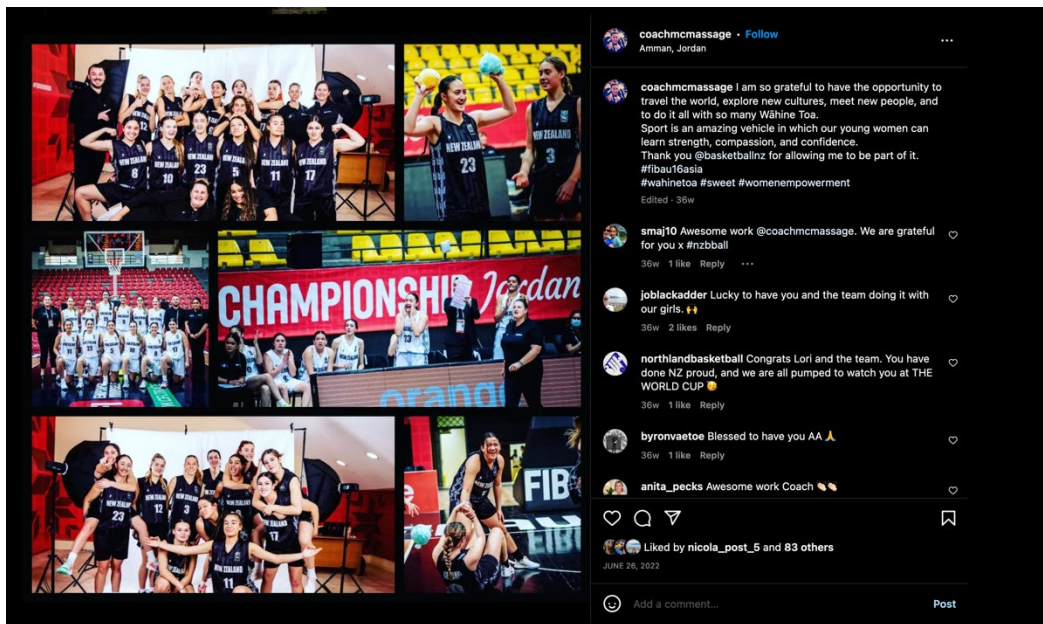
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7



8



9



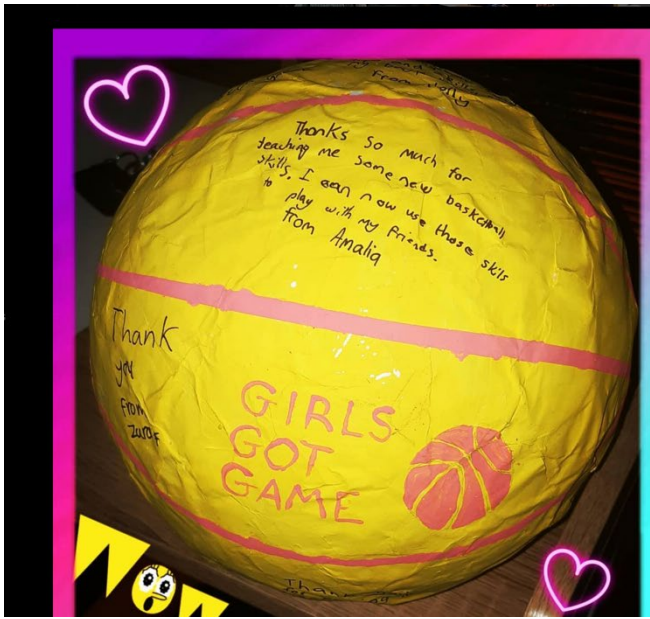
10



11



12



coachmcmassage • Follow
Canterbury Basketball Association

coachmcmassage What an amazing thank you card from the girls at Heathcote Valley School for their GGG coaches! And how awesome is the comment "...to play with my friends"!!! #papermache #coachlife #grateful #girlsgotgame ## @canterburybasketball Edited · 116w

babyvies4616 That's awesome
116w · 1 like · Reply

Liked by **george_robinson** and 38 others
DECEMBER 17, 2020

13

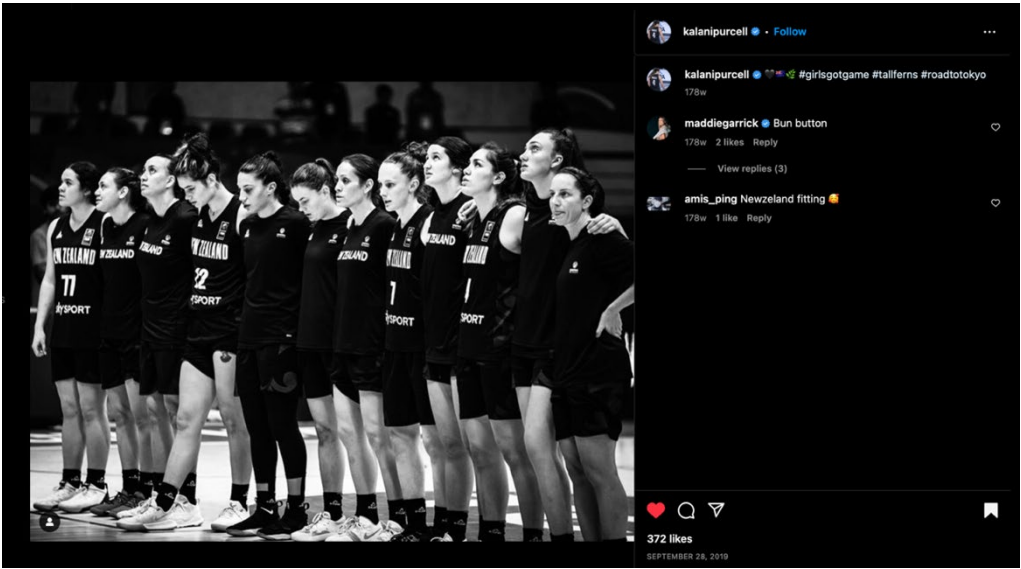


coachmcmassage • Follow
Covles Stadium

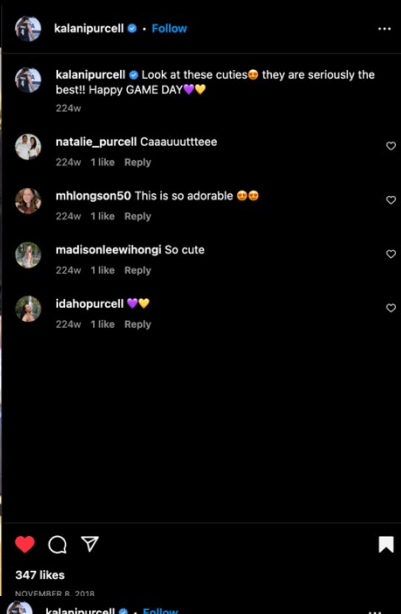
coachmcmassage Appreciation post! Thank you to all the coaches, parents, athletes, and referees that worked together to allow our Selection Weekend to run smoothly and conclude our WPP program over the weekend. We thank you for all your mahi! #community #ballislife #coachlife @canterburybasketball @northcanterbury.basketball 102w

Liked by **george_robinson** and 54 others
MARCH 22, 2021

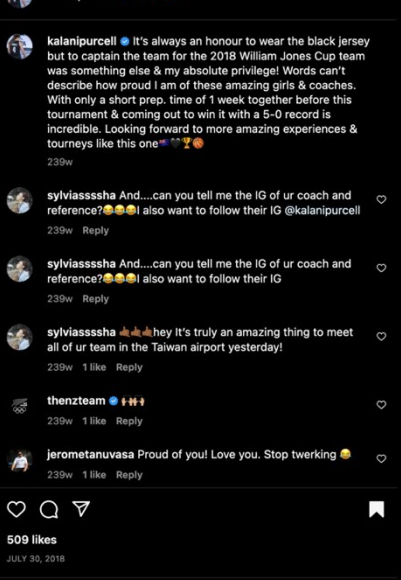
Type B – Kalani Purcell



17



18



Type B – Ella Fotu

19



20



21



22

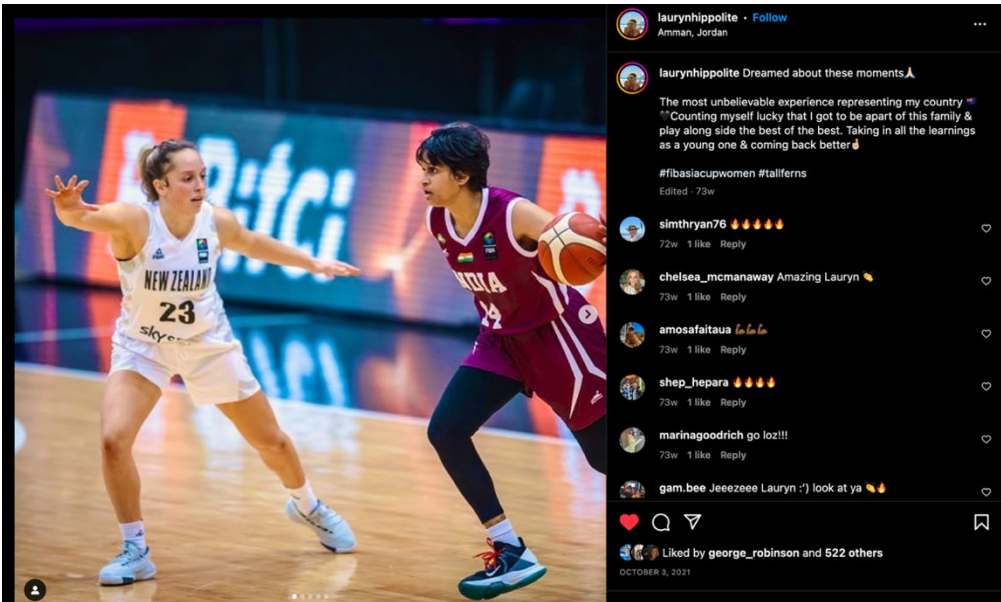


23



Type B – Lauryn Hippolite

24



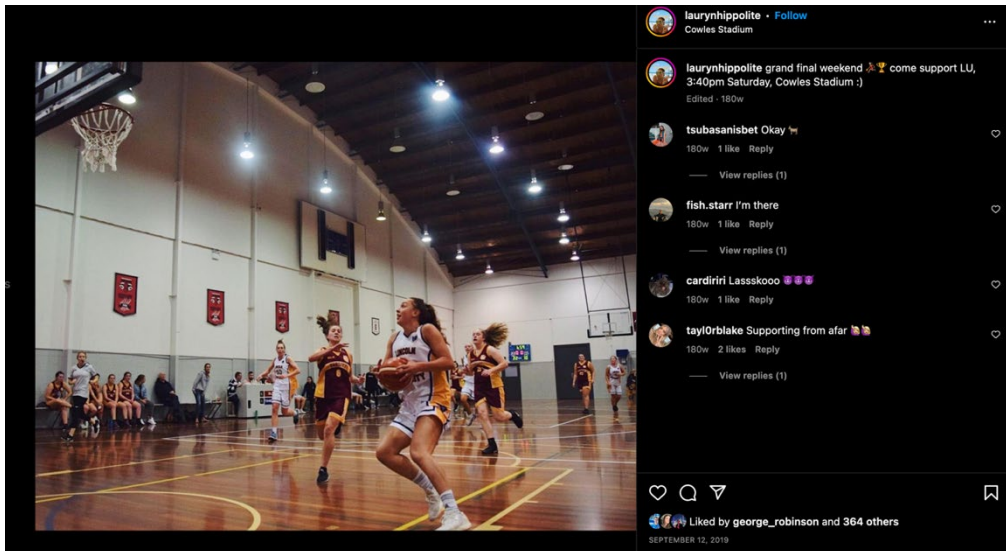
25



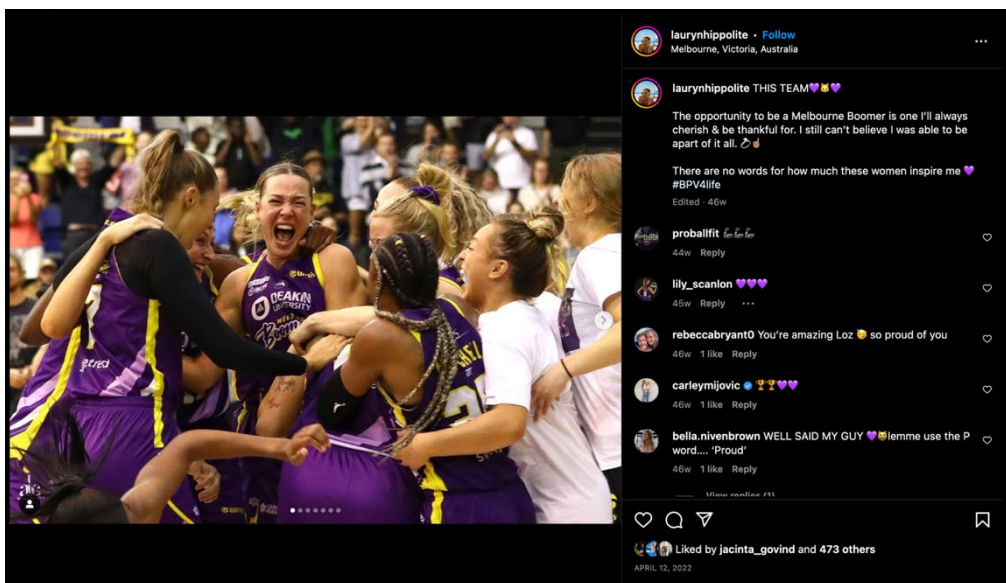
26



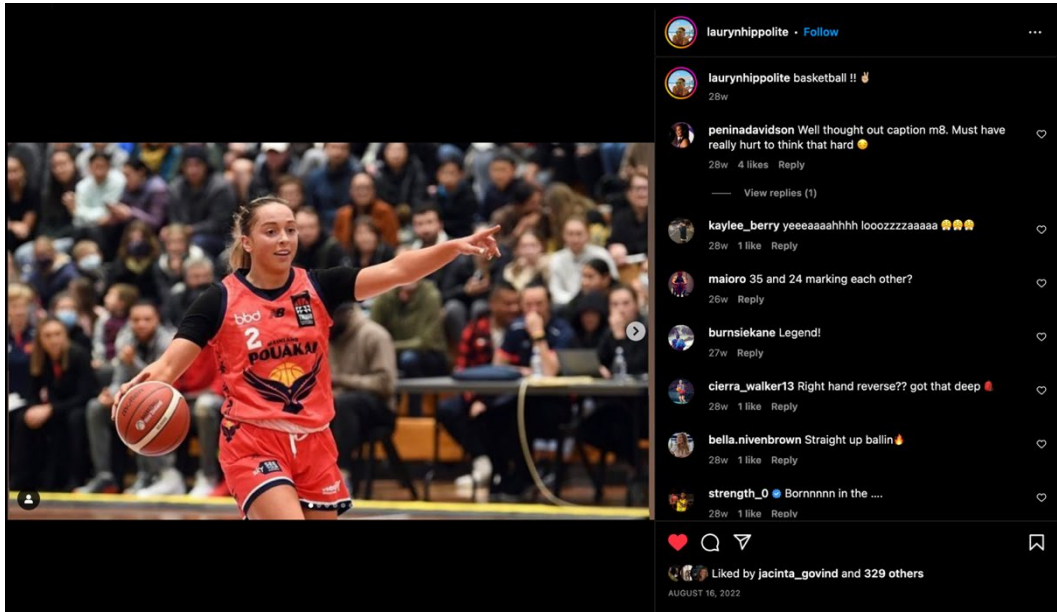
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28

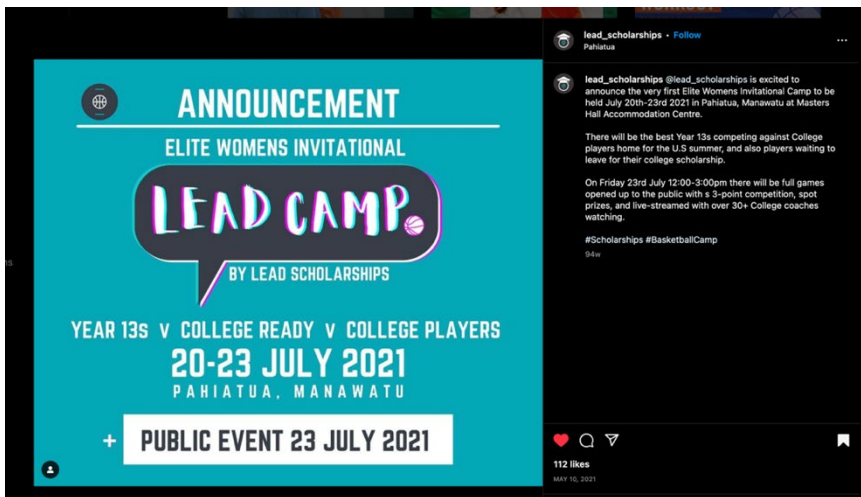


29



Type E – Lead Scholarships (Chris Vaughn)

30



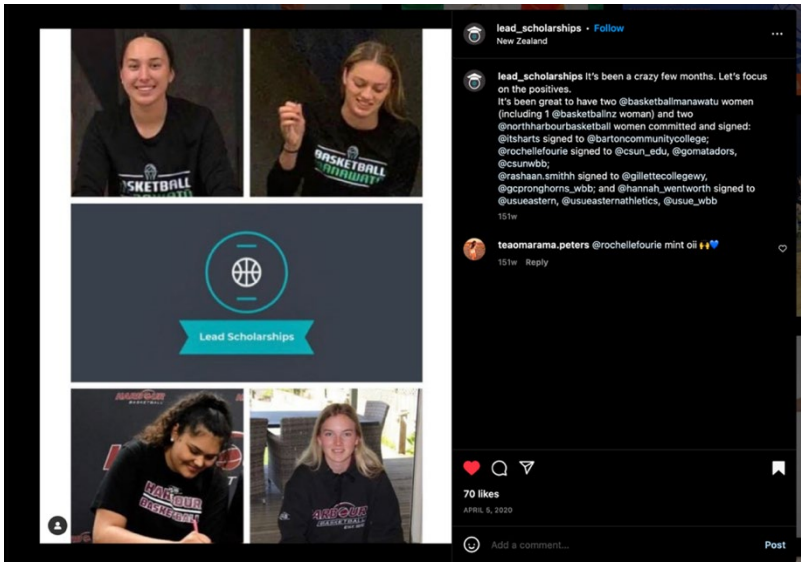
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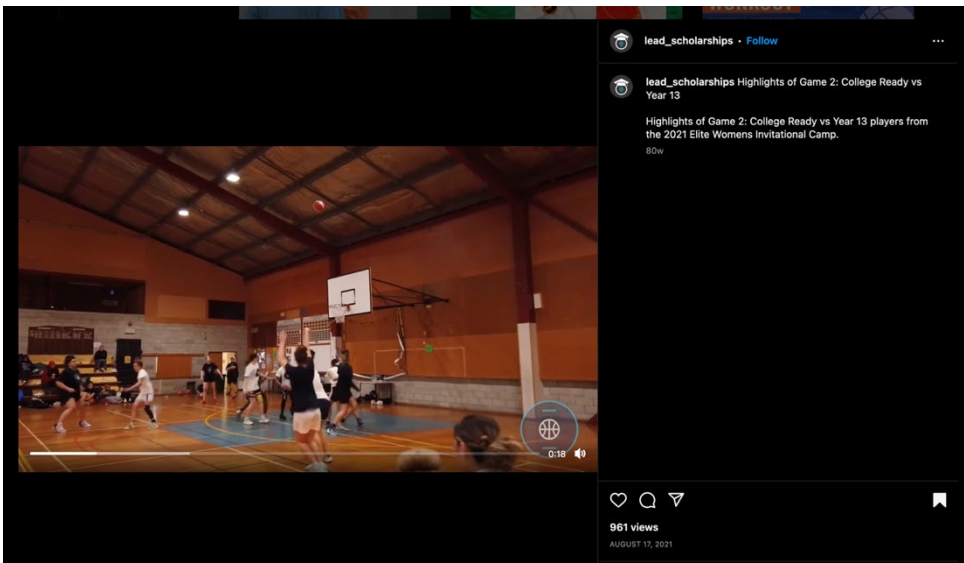
32



33



34



35



lead_scholarships · Follow
Spartanburg, South Carolina

lead_scholarships We would like to congratulate @basketballnz player @hmatthews42 from Kaiapoi High School, @mainland.eagles, @northcanterbury.basketball, and the @canterbury_wildcats on committing to study and play at NCAA Division 1 school @woffordcollege and the @woffordterriers @wofford_wbb team. Helen worked with @lead_scholarships and had over 40 Division 1 and Division 2 schools enquire about her and was offered several scholarships at all divisions and associations before choosing Wofford College (which came through another channel). Helen has amazing handles and great court-vision that will fit in well in the strong @southernconference. Watch this space for updates on her progress! #scholarships #NZtoUS #basketball #recruitment

154w

81 likes

36



lead_scholarships · Follow
Richfield, Utah

lead_scholarships It is so fantastic to see 7 Kiwis in one @njcaa Conference Playoff game! Including @lead_scholarships alum @ella_bradley, @brooklynpowhare, @hannah_wentworth, and @kay.p28. The @usue_wbb vs @csi_womens_basketball. What a fantastic game and a reflection of the growth of basketball in New Zealand. #College #Basketball #Scholarship

98w

ka1tlin ❤️❤️❤️
98w · 2 likes · Reply

262 likes

APRIL 10, 2021

37

Lead Scholarships
3 m · 🌐

We are excited to announce the launch of the **Lead Scholarships (College Athletic Recruitment) Group**. Due to the growth and demand of **Lead Scho...** See more

PRIVATE GROUP · 13 MEMBERS
Lead Scholarships (College Athletic Recruitment)

👍❤️ You and 1 other

❤️ Love 💬 Comment ➦ Share

lead_scholarships · Follow
New Zealand

lead_scholarships Join our new Lead Scholarships facebook group! Get all the latest college recruiting news, offers, info, and help exclusively through the group.

107w

168 likes

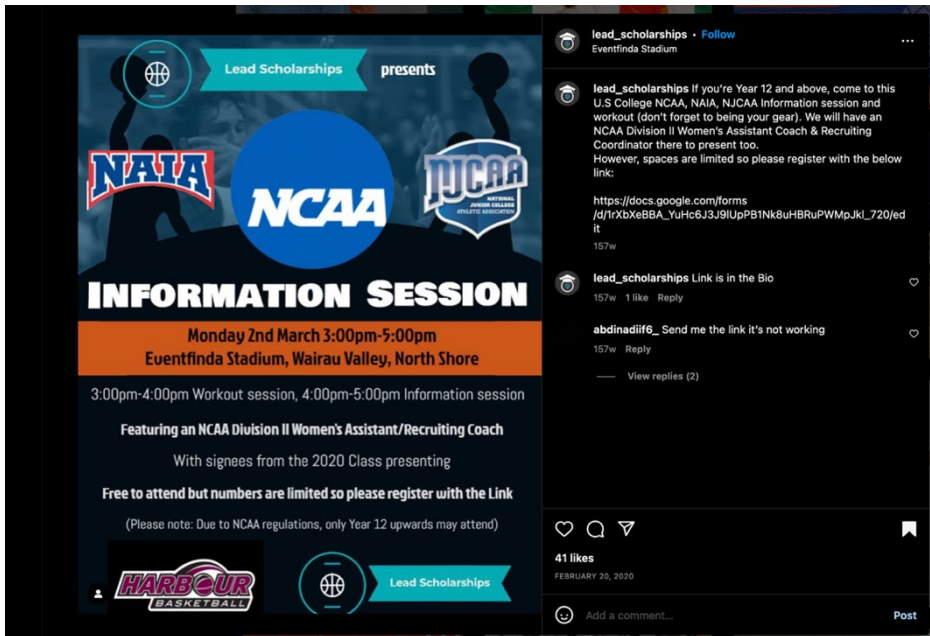
MARCH 18, 2021

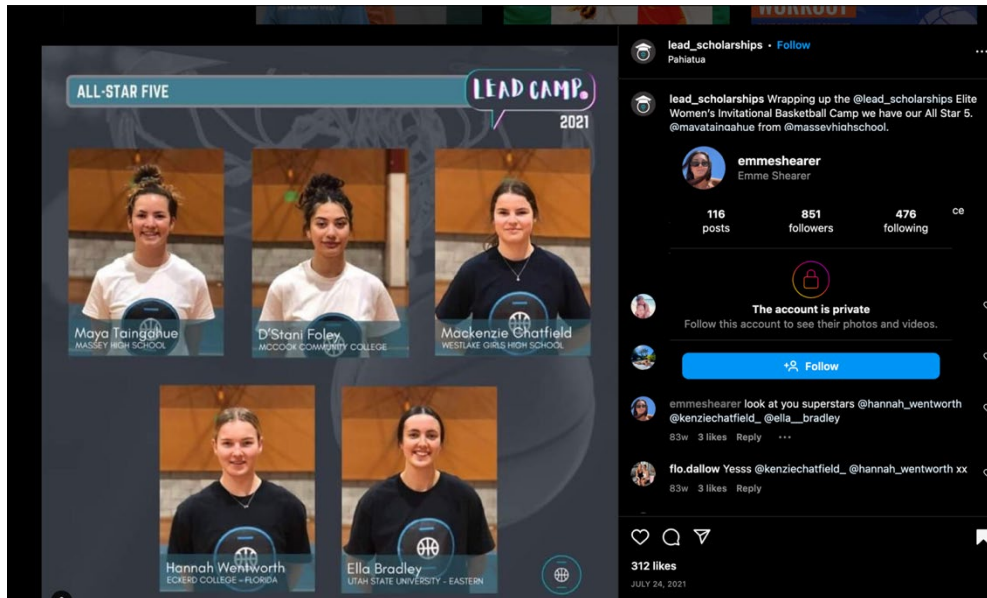
Add a comment... Post

38



39





42




43



44

Lacey Lowdown
November 8, 2018 · 🌐

Here we go – the American college season is underway and there have been plenty of Kiwi women in action. Update on blokes tomorrow.



LACEYLOWDOWN.COM


Kiwi women in action as American college season begins
The waiting is over – the US college season is underway and in this post we take a look at ...

👍❤️ Justine Reed, Olivia Tuipulotu-Collier and 26 others 2 shares

45

Lacey Lowdown
June 14, 2021 · 🌐

Thanks to the encouragement and work of **Darci Finnigan** the Lowdown is now able to bring you regular updates and reports from the Auckland Secondary Schools Senior A competitions.



LACEYLOWDOWN.COM

Secondary School's Senior A roundup
One Tree Hill College and St Kentigern College are on a collision course to decide top spot ...

👍❤️ You, Josiah Maama, Bevan Murray and 32 others 7 comments 7 shares

46

Lacey Lowdown
December 19, 2021 · 🌐

In case you missed it here is what went down between BYU and Washington State (photo courtesy of Leanne Walker) <https://laceydown.com/.../five-kiwis-on-show-in-byu-v-.../>



👍❤️ Justine Reed, Chris E Vaughan and 49 others 1 comment 1 share

47

Lacey Lowdown
August 21, 2022 · 🌐

Plain sailing in Girls Prems and Senior A semi-finals for Westlake, Takapuna Grammar and Northcote College but what a finish in the Baradene v MAGS game. Here's the wrap courtesy of our friends at [Northern Kāhu](https://bit.ly/3QGxP7n)
<https://bit.ly/3QGxP7n>

41 2 comments 1 share

Like Comment Share

Write a comment...

Agnes Topia
Thank you for all your updates of our Prems games...just wasn't our night... 🙄
...Good luck to both teams in the finals it will be a good one 🙌🏻🤔
#bballisthewinnerattheendoftheday#

48

Lacey Lowdown
July 26, 2022 · 🌐

It's tonight folks!

Northern Kāhu
July 26, 2022 · 🌐


🎉💙 IT'S GAME DAY 💙🎉

It's that time again Kāhu whānau!!
Tonight we take on the @southernhoiho at Eventfinda Stadium @ 7pm!
Ti... See more

49

Lacey Lowdown
November 26, 2022 · 🌐

A young fan congratulates Amiee Book on reaching a major career milestone. That and all the Div I Black Friday news here:
<https://laceydown.com/.../book-close-to-ton-number.../>




👍❤️ You, Josiah Maama and 29 others 1 share

50

Lacey Lowdown
September 29, 2022 · 🌐

It was an absolute pleasure to sit down with Darci and pen this story.
<https://nz.basketball/from-player-to-coach-darci.../>



👍❤️ 28 1 comment

51

Lacey Lowdown
March 3, 2021 · 🌐

Good work Emme! Named to the All-West Coast Conference Freshman Team.

EMME SHEARER
FRESHMAN | G | AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

6.4 POINTS
2.1 REBS
24 STEALS

WE ARE PORTLAND

You, Justine Reed, Josh Davis and 46 others · 4 comments · 2 shares

52

Lacey Lowdown
January 12, 2022 · 🌐

Latest Division I news including career high from Tayla Dalton.

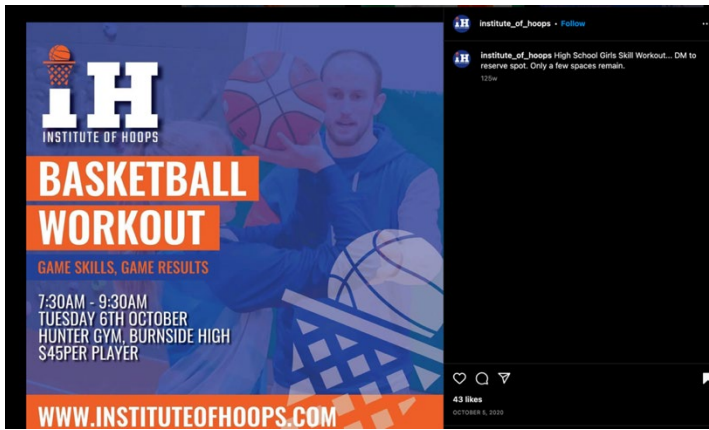
LACEYLOWDOWN.COM

19-points apiece for Dalton and Perrott-Hunt
Tayla Dalton scored a career high 19 points to help carry Saint Mary's College Gaels to an ...

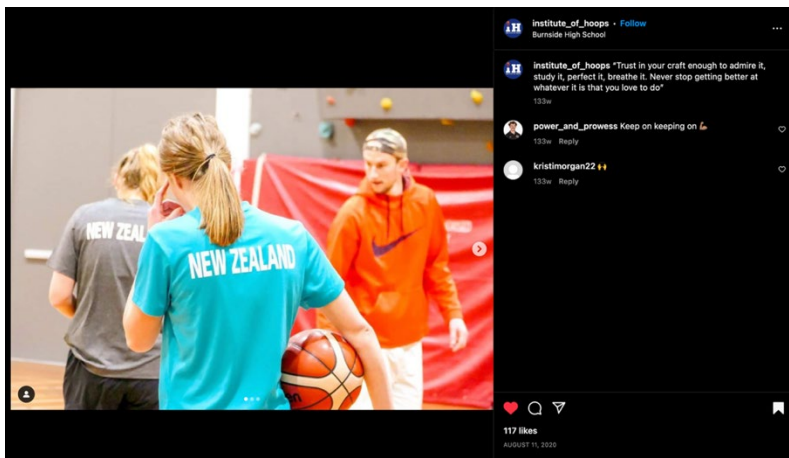
Chris E Vaughan and 37 others · 4 shares

Type E – Adam Morgan

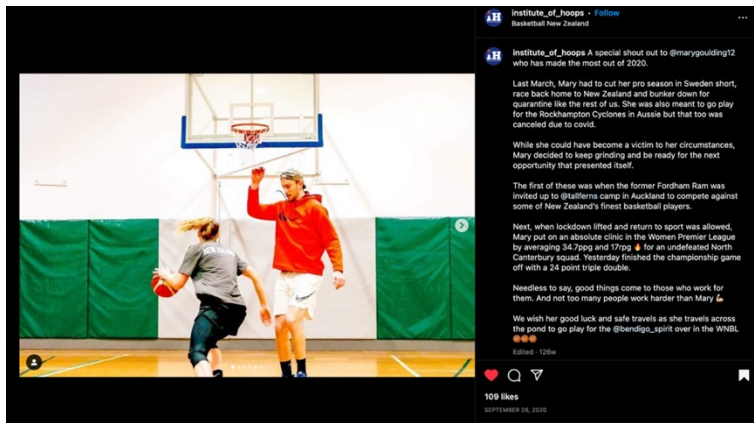
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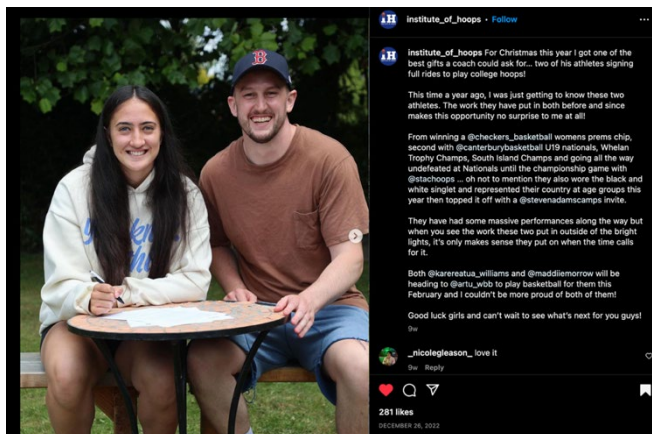
54



55



56



Appendix 7.1 – Study 4 Discussion Guides

- Are there prominent people in your community who seem like they are serving as ambassadors/ marketing agents/ champions in your sport?
- What are some of the key characteristics of people in your sport?
- How prominently are promoting themselves and if so, do they overlap with promoting the sport?
- Do elite athletes feel sense of obligations to the grassroots community?
- Do descriptions such as Prominent Stalwart, Athlete Advocate, Grassroots Champion, Within Vocation, and Male Ally sound familiar in your community? Can you think of people of who are doing this?
- What are NSOs doing to support people who do this work? Have there been discussions about the important role that individuals have in your community?
- Which ambassador type is most meaningful to members of your sport?
- How do ambassadors help attract new participants?
- How effective is ambassadorial activity?
- Does ambassadorial activity differ across age groups?

Appendix 8.1 – Focus Group (Study 5) Guiding Questions

- How do you feel after looking at the reel?
- How could the reel have done better?
- What could have made it more inspiring?
- Does this xxx person make you want to play basketball?
- Does it make you want to hang out with this person?