New sport-for-development programs are increasingly emerging in communities worldwide with intentions to address a plethora of social issues (Coakley, 2011). These programs are built on the assumption that sport can serve as vehicle for promoting positive social change, which has been reinforced by the United Nations (e.g., United Nations, 2003; UNOSDP, 2013). Despite the best of intentions, the use of sport-for-development has received criticism for the idealistic beliefs of using sport as a catalyst for development. In contrast to the multitude of anecdotal claims on the power of sport, sport is neither inherently good nor bad; how sport is used will determine whether outcomes are positive or negative (Coakley, 2011; Schulenkorf, 2012).

While the United Nations and governments are increasingly recognizing sport as a tool for development and peace, many of these programs are implemented in local communities by volunteer-driven non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These organizations are largely driven by requirements of external funding agencies. Kidd (2008), however, suggested these NGOs are: “woefully underfunded, completely unregulated, poorly planned and coordinated, and largely isolated from mainstream development efforts” (p. 376). As a consequence, many sport-for-development organizations lack sufficient capacity to achieve their intended goals and objectives or the ability to fulfill funding requirements. Sport-for-development organizations, however, are increasingly using social media to communicate with stakeholders (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013).

Social media provide organizations dynamic opportunities to communicate directly with stakeholders at relatively low cost (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), that can help increase their ability to achieve goals and objectives (Zorn, Grant, & Henderson, 2012). While scholars have considered programmatic and theoretical aspects of sport-for-development, the capacity of the NGOs delivering these programs remains largely unknown. Recent studies in sport-for-development have begun to examine collaboration processes (Lindsey, 2013) and how NGOs may increase their volunteer capacity (Welty-Peachey et al., in press), but no prior studies have adopted a multi-dimensional framework for organizational capacity. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to explore organizational capacity through the adoption and use of social media in a sport-for-development organization. Similar to previous research on community sport organizations (Misener & Doherty, 2009; Wicker & Breuer, in press), the present study is guided by Hall et al.’s (2003) multidimensional framework of human resources, financial, relationship/network, infrastructure and process, and planning and development capacity.

The purpose of the current study is to explore organizational capacity through the adoption and use of social media in a sport-for-development organization. The study is focused on a volunteer-driven organization guided by critical approaches to sport-for-development. Their mission is to engage people in addressing social issues in North America and East Africa using a holistic, community-based approach. The organization integrates sport with a multitude of non-sport activities focused on community development. The organization also works closely with local stakeholders to build local capacity and strengthen the infrastructure of local sport communities for implementing sport-based programming. The young organization has adopted several social media tools including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The present study aims to explore the adoption and use of these platforms in relation to the capacity of the sport-for-development organization.

Data collection is currently in progress with staff members in North America and East Africa. Prior to data collection, a pilot study was conducted with the Manager of Communications for another international sport-for-development organization based in North America. The pilot interview helped the researchers refine the wording and order of some of the interview questions. Interviews with staff members assess their perceived organizational values, adoption and use of social media, the perceived relationship between Hall et al.’s (2003) dimensions of organizational capacity and social media, attitudes toward the role of social media in sport-for-development, and future intentions.
Data analysis consists of a two-cycle coding process to reduce and analyze the data (Saldaña, 2013). This approach allows the data from the qualitative interviews to evolve from description to categorization and the emergence of conceptual themes. A constant comparative analysis is used to limit researcher bias and establish confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, trustworthiness of the data is established through member checks of the interview transcripts and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Preliminary findings indicate the increasingly important role of social media for the organization. While participants have discussed the perceived importance of engaging stakeholders in two-way communication via social media, the organization primarily uses Facebook and Twitter for sharing information with stakeholders with limited dialogue. Human resources, financial, and structural capacity appear to be determinants of the adoption and use of social media platforms, while Facebook and Twitter are perceived to influence the organization’s volunteer recruitment, fundraising efforts, and relationships with key stakeholders. Potential opportunities and risks for the organization in using social media have also emerged along with importance of establishing internal policies and procedures.

In sum, social media appears to be perceived as a valuable means of communication for sport-for-development organizations. Some dimensions of organizational capacity appear to be determinants of the adoption and use of social media. The preliminary findings of this study also suggest social media appears to be a promising tool for increasing the organizational capacity of a small, volunteer-driven sport-for-development NGO.