Accountability in Sport for Development and Peace: An Application of the Nonprofit Virtual Accountability Index

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Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) organizations depend on a broad range of external stakeholders including donors, funding agencies, volunteers, government agencies, and national and/or international sport governing bodies for their daily operation (Giulianotti, Hognestad, & Spaaij, 2016; Svensson & Hambrick, 2018). Thus, leaders of SDP agencies are increasingly trying to be accountable to a growing number of stakeholder groups (Svensson, 2017). To date, however, only a few studies have been conducted to examine how SDP organizations utilize new technologies, including websites and social media for building and maintaining stakeholder relations (Hambrick & Svensson, 2015; Hayhurst, Wilson, & Frisby, 2011; Svensson, Mahoney, & Hambrick, 2015; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013; Wilson & Hayhurst, 2009).

A review of the broader nonprofit literature suggests organizational websites can play a significant role as a low-cost communication platform for communicating with stakeholders, particularly in response to the increasing demands for nonprofit accountability (Kirk & Abrahams, 2017). In SDP, Tiessen (2011) argued “online material is thus a key way in which such organizations represent themselves and their work to the public” (p. 572). In this regard, Dumont (2013) emphasized that the webpages not only meet the needs of the stakeholders but also allow them to collaborate with nonprofits for joint problem-solving in complex circumstances. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to examine the virtual accountability of SDP organizations. Specifically, we were guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do SDP organizations utilize their websites?
RQ2: What factors influence virtual accountability in SDP?

Data were collected directly from a total of 530 SDP organizations' websites, representing agencies across all six continents. Websites were coded using the Nonprofit Virtual Accountability Index (NPVAI) to measure information and interactivity available for stakeholders (Dumont, 2013). The NPVAI consists of five dimensions: accessibility, engagement, performance, governance, and mission. Analyses of variance and independent t-tests were used to potential group differences based on the geographical region where each organization was based, the geographical region of operation, the thematic types of SDP efforts, and the type of sport used to deliver programming.

The average overall NPVAI score was 45.7 out of 100 possible points. The scores for each dimension of the NPVAI are on a 20-point scale. The results of our analysis revealed that accessibility (M=16.8, SD=3.78), is the strongest dimension of virtual accountability, followed by mission (M=11.8, SD=5.37), and engagement (M=10.0, SD=4.74). At the same time, the mean scores for performance (M=3.9, SD=5.57), and governance (M=3.2, SD=3.53) were noticeably lower. Thus, our findings indicate that the average website for a SDP organization is easy to navigate and provide a fair amount of insight regarding their social mission and how they are working toward fulfilling it. Yet few organizations provide actual performance results or transparency regarding the governance of their organization. Significant differences were identified based on the organizational variables examined. Implications of these findings will be presented.