Social Media and Nonprofits: How Nonprofits Develop and Implement Social Media Strategy

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Introduction

Social media has revolutionized marketing in the last twenty years with businesses able to connect with stakeholders, customers and the general public through digital platforms. There are opportunities for the nonprofit sector to interact with the public on these platforms by spreading awareness of its mission and getting more people involved with the organization. Most mainstream social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) are free to use with the exception of the time cost put into content development. People are taking advantage of these social media sites, as well, Instagram having over *one billion* users worldwide and Facebook with roughly 2.89 billion active users, the most out of any social media platform (Statistical Research Team, June 2021; Statistical Research Team, September 2021). Not only are people on the platforms, but they are actively consuming digital media through their accounts. According to research from Statista between 2011-2020, people consumed more digital media than traditional media, with average daily digital media consumption of 470 minutes and traditional daily media consumption of 347 minutes, though the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this shift (eMarketer, 2021). Since there is no cost to create an account, almost anyone with internet access can connect with online businesses and nonprofit organizations within their communities.

Major corporations have taken advantage of social media marketing. Some of the largest business accounts belong to brand names such as Nike, with over 178 million Instagram followers, GoPro with 18.5 million followers, and Spotify with 7.1 million followers (Nike, 2021; GoPro, 2021; Spotify, 2021). However, social media continues to be underutilized by small businesses and nonprofits. The average small business only invests about 1% of its revenue into advertising while about 51% of all small businesses do not invest anything (Sullivan et al., 2021, p. 81).

The nonprofit sector has increasingly started using social media for various communication goals, which this research will explore. Survey research found that 87% of nonprofits around the world use social media and 97% have a Facebook page, the most out of any other social media platform (Mansfield, 2022). The same survey found "52% of the nonprofit staff responsible for managing their nonprofit's social media accounts have experienced social media burnout within the last 12 months" (Mansfield, 2022). This research shows that nonprofits are using social media but it does not explain how nonprofits are developing and maintaining a social media strategy. Public relations engagement literature, which this paper will use, helps explain how organizations can use social media to foster deeper engagement with the communities they serve.. This research focuses on nonprofit organizations because nonprofits are vital to grassroots democracy by providing resources to the communities they serve, thus allowing more time for individual agency (Smith, 2018). However, nonprofits are not able to effectively serve their communities if: (1) their communities do not know about their existence and (2) they do not receive the funding they need to provide those resources. Social media is a tool that can help both problems through information dissemination and fundraising.

A content analysis of 100 nonprofit organizations' use of Twitter showed tweets from the nonprofits had three distinct functions: information, community, and action (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 341). Another content analysis study was consistent with this and showed most nonprofits within the study used Facebook to market organizational activities or to bring awareness to what their mission is (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014, p. 659).

Research Purpose and Goals

This research explores how nonprofits develop, implement, and evaluate their social media activities. By talking directly with social media managers and communication directors through in-depth interviews, this research helps understand the challenges and opportunities nonprofit organizations have on social media. Content analysis research shows what type of content nonprofits share on social media; this research aims to take it a step further to see how nonprofits social media managers think about social media activity related to the perception of the content. Lastly, this research looks at how nonprofits utilize fundraising in their social media strategies. Thus, the research questions this paper will answer are:

1. How do nonprofits develop, implement, and evaluate their social media activities?

2. How is social media engagement related to the perception of the content?

3. How does social media strategy influence funding?

Literature Review

Nonprofits and Social Media

For this research, it is important to understand what social media is, what nonprofits are and how nonprofits impact their communities. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (p. 61). User-generated content is the text, pictures, video, audio, or links created and shared across social media platforms and are the key building blocks to making these applications function the way they do. The diffusion of the internet has brought forth new technologies that allow users to engage with one another instantaneously from across the world. *New media* is the term that refers to these technologies including "blogs, websites, email, text messages, social media, and social networking sites" (Saxton & Wang, 2014, p. 852). Earlier innovations of the internet primarily

functioned as a one-way communication tool, but the development of social media introduced the ability to participate in online discussions and share information (p. 852). This two-way communication has changed the landscape of relationship building with organization' stakeholders and donors, given the ability to send out solicitations for donations immediately. Numerous studies have been conducted on online fundraising from individual donors for nonprofits in social media (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020; Saxton & Wang, 2014; Tian et al., 2021), but no existing studies examined how nonprofits think about fundraising in terms of social media strategy.

This research focuses on nonprofit organizations because the organizations are mission-based and fundamental to functioning democracy. A nonprofit or NPO, not-for-profit, in the United States is an organization granted special tax-exempt privileges from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) because the organization supports a social cause and provides a public benefit to a community (Kenton, 2020). These organizations have been the backbone of impoverished communities since their inception but continue to face challenges with finances and capacity. Jamie N. Smith (2018) said, "Nonprofits are regarded by both citizens and policymakers as an integral part of fostering citizen engagement, a responsible government, and grassroots democracy" (p. 294). Their services often target low and middle-income communities and provide resources vital to the basic foundations of a community. Without these organizations providing free or low-cost transportation, repairs, food, water, and shelter, the people in the communities will see a much lower quality of life.

Social media is an effective tool for nonprofits to communicate their services, engage stakeholders and donors, and have a presence on the internet to get more people involved with their mission. Appleby (2016) breaks down the non-financial and financial benefits for nonprofits with active social media strategies; for non-financial benefits, nonprofits experience

higher web presence, the ability to disseminate information quickly and to have continuous

feedback channels which help with productivity (pp. 7-9). The financial benefits "include

utilization costs, time savings, fundraising opportunities, and visibility of support" (p. 9). Other

previous research has suggested that nonprofits that engage in advocacy work, or lobbying,

would benefit from an active social media presence as it increases their reach, adding credibility

to the mission of the nonprofit (Harris & McGrath, 2012).

Engagement

Engagement is a term in public relations theory that has been associated with various

forms of communication interactions. This research will focus on digital engagement as it has

become more salient in the last decade to help understand the function of social media regarding

civic engagement. However, there is also literature available on stakeholder engagement and

employee engagement (Dahnesh, 2017). Prior research on social media engagement has defined

engagement as the different interactions with user-generated content such as shares, likes,

comments, and recommendations (Jiang et al., 2016). Similar to this conceptualization of

engagement, Agostino (2013) analyzed the awareness of 119 Italian municipalities in a study by

measuring how many people liked or followed the social media platforms of the municipalities

and compared it to population data.

Not all social media engagement interactions have the same effect, though. The

interactions with digital content can range from "passive message consumption to active

two-way conversation, participation, and online recommendation" (Dhanesh, 2017, p. 928).

Digital engagement has also been conceptualized as the different shared experiences on the

platform which cognitively affect the way someone sees the social media platform in their life.

Calder et al. (2009) also referred to this as, "the consequences of engagement" (p. 322).

Muntinga et al. (2011) created a similar typology of engagement levels for corporate-elated

social media activities (COBRA):

> (1) the lowest level of content consumption (e.g., rating products or companies, reading
> product reviews; (2) a moderate level of contributions to page content (e.g. rating
> products or companies, taking part in wall post conversations, and commenting on posted
> videos or pictures; (3) the highest level of creation, which refers to creating and sharing
> user-generated content (Men & Tsai, 2013, p. 15).

While COBRA was created with corporations in mind, the typology of engagement levels

can help inform what nonprofits should aim for in terms of engagement. For nonprofits, this

could be volunteering or starting a Facebook fundraiser on behalf of the organization. Based on

an evaluation of the available engagement literature in public relations theory, Dhanesh (2017)

formed a definition of engagement based on the notions of engagement as both a tool for control

and collaboration:

> Engagement is an affective, cognitive, and behavioral state wherein publics and
> organizations who share mutual interest in salient topics interact along continua that
> range from passive to active and from control to collaboration, and is aimed at goal
> attainment, adjustment, and adaption for both publics and organizations (p. 931).

Engagement as a two-way communication is an important theme that emerged from the

existing public relations engagement literature, yet research has found that nonprofits are not

capitalizing on this function with social media (Dhanesh, 2017; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Not

engaging in this two-way communication can hurt organizations, as one study discovered that

users are willing to engage with organizations on social media if the organizations are initiating

conversations with them through the platforms (Avidar et al., 2015).

Social media engagement can translate into real-world effects. Wigly & Lewis (2012)

found that Twitter users are three times more likely to impact a company's reputation through

social media and that companies who were not active on Twitter received more mentions than the

ones that are.

Engagement is a multidimensional concept that has important practical implications. Understanding engagement as multi-dimensional can lead to a better development of social media strategy that looks to measure the impact of digital engagement on community relationships with nonprofits.

Social Media Strategy

Social media strategy refers to the goals and actions the organization takes in managing its social media accounts. Having a social media account is not enough to seem present on social media, it is equally important to maintain two-way communication with the audience to maintain interaction: "social media communication is not only interactive, but also participatory, collaborative, personal, and simultaneously communal" (Tsai & Men, 2017, p. 3). Previous research can help inform what determinants of success in social media strategy have been for other organizations.

Network size is important for both visibility of support and for the ability to disseminate fundraising information quickly. Research found that organizations with larger network sizes have seen greater success in their online fundraising campaigns (Bhati & McDonald, 2020). Further, researchers have shown that social media can help maintain meaningful relationships with stakeholders, which is vital for the success of the nonprofit (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). The frequency of posts also can have an impact on these stakeholder relationships and the overall success of the social media strategy. For example, Guo and Saxton (2018) found a positive association between stakeholder attention (e.g., the likes and reshares from stakeholders) and the frequency of tweets a Twitter account has. The number of shares a post gets is also important on social media because the shares essentially expand the nonprofits' original network to the network of the person sharing the post. This can help disseminate information faster and

researchers have used shares as a proxy for "level of attention" on a particular post (Guo &

Saxton, 2018).

Since this research will look at nonprofits of varying sizes across the state of Ohio, it is

also important to understand some of the organizational factors which could impact the

nonprofits' social media strategy. Nonprofits with larger budgets have more ability to send out

solicitations for fundraising which can increase the chance of receiving more donations (Saxton

& Wang, 2014). Age, or how long the nonprofit has been in existence, has also been positively

correlated with how many donations a nonprofit can raise (Calabrese, 2011). All these factors are

important in understanding the challenges and reasons for success in nonprofit social media

strategy, particularly with fundraising.

There has been some research more critical of the use of social media by nonprofits.

Ogden and Starita (2009) conducted a survey of midsize nonprofit organizations (revenue of

$1-$5 million annually) that found social media had little impact on fundraising and volunteers.

However, similar research at the time was more positive about the innovation of social media

and nonprofits' use but showed there is a disconnect in understanding how nonprofits can utilize

social media in their communication strategy. Waters et al. (2009) conducted a survey of 275

random nonprofit Facebook accounts and concluded, "nonprofit organizations did not use

Facebook to distribute organizational news…very few took advantage of the multimedia

advantages of the internet. Organizations [also] failed to publicize their public relations efforts"

(p. 104). It is important for nonprofits to understand how to properly utilize social media and

maintain an active social media strategy. However, the challenge of capacity within nonprofits

has impacted their social media usage. Waters et al. (2009) said:

Most nonprofits lack the resources or time to provide constant attention to a

Facebook page. Creating a profile and then abandoning it will create only minimal exposure for the organization, and it could turn off potential supports if they witness inactivity on the site…Social networking sites can be an effective way to reach stakeholder groups if organizations understand how their stakeholders use the sites (pp. 105-106).

Waters et al. study's conclusions are echoed in a study by Campbell, Lambright, and Wells (2014) who interviews random nonprofits about their social media use. The researchers concluded, "... the vast majority of interviewees either (1) had a limited view of social media and did not recognize its potential to create interactive dialogue, (2) were still developing their long-term vision for social media, or (3) lacked any long-term vision" (p. 658). Despite there being some research to suggest social media is not an effective use of resources, a significant amount of research has shown there are benefits to advocacy on social media if properly utilized by nonprofits.

A study from 2011 surveyed 662 people, mostly 18 to 30 with a college education, about their attitudes toward nonprofit organizations and environmental issues. There were 105 usable responses in the study and 36% of the respondents said they followed a nonprofit organization on social media, but the type of nonprofit was not specified (Miller, 2011, pp. 39-40). It also concluded that social media can be effectively used to help recruit volunteers (p. 40).

The previous research conducted suggests that it is good practice for nonprofits to make posts that elicit interaction and respond to those interactions in a timely manner. Posts on social media should invite stakeholders and donors to engage with the content, whether it is through liking (e.g. hearting), commenting, or sharing. Consistent posting aligned with the nonprofits' social media strategy goals is vital to maintaining interaction and engagement with stakeholders. Previous research found that nonprofit social media posts consisted of three themes: information, action, and community. The researchers concluded that using a variety of these themes instead

of focusing on one is the most effective strategy unless one of the themes is not aligned with the mission of the nonprofit (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

The exact number of times a nonprofit posts per week will depend on its goals for social media as well as its audience, but there is some data to help guide posting regarding social media platform algorithms. For example, a study conducted by Hubspot found that posting more than once a day on Facebook decreased engagement by over 50% (Cox, 2020). Hootsuite, a paid social media scheduler tool and blog, created recommendations based on social media insights and recommends posting on Instagram 3-7 times a week, Facebook once a day, and Twitter once a day (McLachlan, 2021).

Research has also highlighted some mistakes nonprofits make with their social media strategy. For example, nonprofits should only create social media accounts that they will keep active, they should not delete negative comments but instead respond in a respectful way that can increase their reputation and avoid posting the same content across all social media platforms (Bucea-Manea-Tonis & Gurgu, 2018, pp. 34-38). Not posting enough can lead stakeholders and the audience to believe the organization does not care about their social media, hurting their reputation and advocacy power (p. 42). Along with social media being a two-way communication platform, nonprofits can lose their followers on social media if there is a lack of interaction with them (p. 43).

Method

Data Collection

The method used in this research is in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews can produce a more thorough look at the specific nonprofit agencies interviewed and allow for follow-up questions based on challenges and successes nonprofits across the state of Ohio face in their

communication strategies. While many different methodologies have been used when conducting social media research, including surveys and content analysis, more information can be gathered from directly talking with nonprofit workers. The in-depth interviewing method allows for nonprofits to explain how they are developing, implementing, and evaluating social media activities. This methodology has previously been used to evaluate social media engagement and communication programs with communication managers, as well (Jiang et al., 2016).

A semi-structured interview guide was used to interview the participants with follow-up questions based on answers given in the interview. The questions focused on the following: how social media plays a role in the organizations' communication strategy, staffing and resources for strategy and content development, goals for social media usage, how nonprofits manage different social media platforms, what the content development process looks like, how nonprofits evaluate their social media activities and how nonprofits use social media for fundraising. These questions were decided upon for several reasons. The questions at the beginning of the interview help the researcher understand how active the nonprofit is on social media and how many resources are devoted to social media at the organization. Previous research has indicated nonprofits had a "limited view of social media and … lacked any long-term vision" (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014, p. 658). These questions help gauge what goals nonprofits have for social media and how nonprofits use social media to achieve those communication goals. This interview guide also explores how nonprofits develop content and utilize different platforms in their strategy. The researcher could not find any research that investigates how organizations develop content. There are content analysis studies of the social media content nonprofits have already published (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014), however, this research goes deeper in trying to understand the process of content development and the reasoning behind the decisions made.

Research Setting

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were held virtually through Microsoft Teams. The virtual setting gave the advantage of recording the entire interview and allowed the participant to be in a setting they are most familiar with, which made them more comfortable for the interview.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected partially using network sampling. Since previous capacity issues in nonprofits have been documented, it was anticipated to be difficult to find people to interview within nonprofit organizations. Many of the nonprofits belong to networks that interact with each other, thus making it desirable to ask participants for other participants they think would be helpful. Ten participants from ten nonprofit organizations were interviewed for this research. Half were found through network sampling; the other half were found through cold-emailing nonprofits with a web presence.

Analysis

Coding Procedure

The interviews were transcribed using the paid transcription tool Sonix.Ai. The researcher listened through each interview and edited the text to ensure accuracy of the transcription. The researcher then analyzed the answers to each question by using line-by-line coding to identify similarities, differences, and key themes that emerged from the participants. "Line-by-line coding works well with detailed data about fundamental empirical problems or processes whether these data consist of interviews, observations, documents, ethnographies and autobiographies" (Charmaz, 2006). After going line-by-line through each transcript, I synthesized the data into larger, more significant themes for each question. For each nonprofit

organization interviewed, I reviewed the organizations' most recent 990 forms on Guidestar and looked at the information in part 1 line 20 (net assets) and part 5 2a (number of employees).

Participant Sample

The ten nonprofit organizations interviewed for this research varied in number of employees and size in terms of net assets. Two of the organizations had over 100 employees, four of the organizations had under 10 employees, and the remaining organizations varied in size from 10-100 employees. The organizations also varied in terms of net assets. Three organizations had net assets of over $10 million, three organizations had net assets between $1 million and $10 million, and four organizations had net assets under $1 million. All organizations were in the state of Ohio, but one is part of a national entity with nonprofit centers across the country.

Organization Characteristics		Count
	Under 10 employees	4
Number of Employees	10-100 employees	4
	Over 100 employees	2
	Under $1 million	4
Net Assets	$1 million - $10 million	3
	Over $10 million	3

Results

There were 11 participants interviewed from 10 nonprofit organizations, two people participated in the interview for one organization. The participants varied in length of time working for the organization. Five of the ten participants had worked for the organization for less than a year. Three participants worked with the organization for at least a year and two participants had been a part of the organization for over 10 years.

Strategy Development and Goals

Three of the organizations that participated in interviews said they did not have a coherent social media strategy or did not have the expertise at the nonprofit to maintain a social media strategy, despite still posting on one platform. All the organizations said social media should play some role in the nonprofits' communication strategy, however, two expressed concerns with how many resources should be devoted to social media. One participant said they had experience with organizations that were investing a lot of time in social media but were not seeing a high return on investment because there was not a strategic focus. Two of the three organizations intend to increase resources for social media in the future.

Seven out of the ten organizations have a person or team devoted to maintaining a social media strategy. Organizations said social media impacted their organization through information sharing, connection with the community, call to action posts, cohesive brand messaging, partnership communication, and connection with donors.

Information sharing and call to action posts were the primary themes for impacts on social media. Information sharing includes sharing information about the resources offered at the organization and other operational updates. Call to action posts include some type of recruitment for getting social media users to engage with the organization outside social media. This could be event registration, volunteer recruitment, or even employee recruitment. Fundraising is also a call to action but is categorized as its own theme. Participants said they saw increases in volunteers and event registration through social media. One organization said they successfully recruited applicants for their Board of Directors through social media and another organization said volunteers frequently say they found the organization through social media.

Connection was another theme to emerge related to positive impacts from social media. Several organizations said they used social media to reach out to new people in the community or to do community listening (i.e. see what current needs community members are posting

about). Two organizations said sharing human connection stories on social media was a powerful tool to connect with community members. These stories are different from typical informational posts which do not connect a human face with the information being shared.

Social media posts that focus on the nonprofits mission or vision are categorized as cohesive brand messaging on social media. Four organizations specifically mentioned being able to use social media to create brand voice for the organization to encourage more people to engage with the nonprofit mission. Two organizations mentioned using social media for connecting with partnership organizations and three organizations mentioned its usefulness in connecting with donors.

The organizations with active social media strategies still faced some challenges with social media. One organization said they needed to improve donor relations on social media. Several organizations said they faced the challenge of reaching people who do not have internet access at all. These are the considerations nonprofits are making when developing their social media strategies.

Staffing and resources for social media varied from organization to organization. All the participant organizations, except for two, have a position whose responsibility is social media. Six of the participants have some type of director or head marketing person who oversees social media, whether it be drafting content themselves or editing content drafted by someone else in the organization. Five of the organizations have staff members who manage social media and develop content. Three of the organizations have a part-time intern or interns with social media responsibilities and two of the participant organizations have active AmeriCorps VISTA members who work with social media. One organization employs a part-time student, and another organization relies completely on volunteers for social media. Of the two organizations

with no current staff dedicated to social media, one said they plan to find a communications intern. The other does not plan to expand social media use for the time being.

The nonprofit organizations varied in goals they had for their organizations' social media presence. Seven of the participants mentioned goals around building awareness of different programs, resources being offered, or events happening to increase participation in the community. Four participants said it was a goal to create or maintain a brand voice or identity of the organization. Seven participants had a goal to build an audience on social media to create a community network, whether it is for current supporters to feel closer with the organization or for advocacy work. One nonprofit specified treating this type of interaction like a relationship. The participant used the example of balancing call-to-action posts, such as posts calling for donations or volunteers, with more informational posts about what is happening at the organization.

> They have to know that you're not just trying to ask things from them. It is a relationship, you do have to share what you're doing and temper those posts so that they can see that you know your stuff going on. You're not just always needing something from them.

When it came to goals for social media strategy, two participants mentioned the goal of increasing volunteers for programs or events. Four participants said increasing donations or connecting with new donors is a goal. One participant organization has the goal of community listening, "Maybe it's asking what people are looking for in their communities, asking what their favorite programming has been from us, something that would kind of guide programming in the future". Another organization had the goal of supporting similar organizations that align with their mission. One participant said the organization had no goals for their social media other than to be present, in case someone does look to see if they have a social media page, "It really is just for awareness within the community to say, 'Yes, we are here. Yes, we are present,' and show a

little bit of what we're doing, but it's very hard to do consistently."

Social Media Platforms

The nonprofit organizations varied in what social media platforms they are using, their reasoning behind using it, and the target audiences they were trying to reach on each platform. The platforms are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok and YouTube.

Facebook was the most used social media platform for all the participants. All ten participants have a Facebook page whether they are actively updating it or not. For one organization, Facebook is its only social media, another participant said they scaled back Facebook posting to focus on Instagram, and another said they post on Facebook to strictly have a presence there. The organizations that are actively using Facebook are trying to reach middle or older adults that are potential volunteers or donors. Three participants said they are also trying to reach people who need their services and have a variety of audiences they reach on Facebook, including clients, neighbors, and potential beneficiaries. One participant said they keep in mind that Facebook is primarily viewed on Desktop.

Six of the organizations have LinkedIn pages. Organizations with active social media content do not actively post on LinkedIn the way they do with social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. One organization actively uses LinkedIn to maintain a presence for its Board Members and reach their Board Members' connections on the platform. Another organization uses it for anything career related at their organization. One participant says they post regularly on LinkedIn, but the organization sees most of its LinkedIn engagement on personal accounts.

Nine of the organizations have Instagram pages. The one organization that does not have an Instagram intends to create an Instagram account in the future. Two organizations said Instagram is their most used social media platform. Most of the organizations said they were

trying to reach a younger demographic on Instagram. Two organizations mentioned students or

student organizations. One organization specified trying to reach the age range of 25 to 40 of

whom could be potential volunteers at the organization. Two organizations specified that

Instagram is popular with community partners whom they are trying to engage with. One

organization said that Instagram seems like a younger audience, but their organization sees

engagement from a wide range of age groups. Two organizations also said they see wide

audience engagement and are trying to reach whoever they can on the platform.

Twitter is less popular with nonprofit organizations. Only half of the participants

interviewed said the organizations they work for have a Twitter account. Three of those

participants said Twitter was not used as actively as the other social media sites they manage.

One organization has a Twitter for when they want to engage with a national hashtag about an

awareness campaign or other community organizations. Another has Twitter because one

community partner is active on Twitter and tags their organization in different posts even though

their organization does not actively post on the platform.

YouTube is used differently than the other social media platforms. Of the six participants

that have YouTube pages, only one organization said they routinely upload videos. The other

organizations use YouTube to store videos for internal usage or to have a play to upload more

rare video content to be posted across other social media platforms. None of the organizations

said they were trying to build any type of audience or engagement on the YouTube platform. One

participant referred to YouTube as the organization's "archival library."

Tik Tok was the least common social media platform out of the ten participant

organizations interviewed. Only one organization said they had a TikTok which was recently

started. They said they use it with the goal of showing a more fun side to the organization and to

attract younger people to get involved. One organization reserved its Tik Tok username but has

no set plays to post content there. Another participant said they would love to see the

organization start a TikTok, but it would be difficult without having someone more familiar with

the platform to maintain the video content.

Nonprofit organizations manage multiple platforms within their social media strategy in

different ways. Eight out of the ten participants are actively posting on two or more social media

platforms. Four participants specified different social media management tools to schedule out

content in advance. The majority of organizations said they posted the same content across social

media while altering it slightly to fit the platform (i.e. putting a link in the Instagram bio and

referring to 'link in bio' in the caption of the post since hyperlinks cannot be accessed in IG

captions). One participant said they try to do one content specific post for each platform in their

strategy.

Content Development

Nonprofit organizations all have different ways of approaching content development in

their social media strategies, but most nonprofits interviewed with active social media strategy

described having some collaboration from around the organization, especially in the case of

organizations with multiple program areas. Seven participants have a recurring theme post that

would serve for information delivery purposes (i.e., fun facts). One participant said they

developed visual templates to maintain consistency across posts. Two participants said they have

developed a series of posts in their strategy; posts that have a similar content theme for a limited

time frame, as opposed to routine posts which have no planned end of usage. Four participants

described checking for any content that is timely, whether it be events the organization is hosting

or holidays. One participant said the organization pays attention to what content is performing

well and makes future content decisions based on that.

Image-based content is the most popular type of content amongst the nonprofit organizations' social media. All participants described needing to have some type of visual to capture the users' attention, except for the platform of Twitter, which one participant said depended on the context. Three participants said they utilized some video content as it was available. This content was usually produced by someone outside of the organization, sometimes in partnership with the organization or as part of media coverage about the organization. One participant that uses video more frequently in their strategy said that certain programs have better activities to capture on camera than others.

In terms of content that performs better on social media, the nonprofits varied. Six of the participants described image-based content with any type of person or group of people featured, whether it be a staff member highlight, a group image, or an action shot. One participant said certain program areas get more attention on social media than others. Another organization said any type of celebratory "big news" post always performs the best, such as winning an award, or a big goal being achieved. One participant's images of their building perform well, and another participant said videos in general perform the best, regardless of content in the video.

Fundraising

Of the participant organizations that have active social media, all the participants use social media for fundraising. Five of the participants direct users back to their own website when doing a fundraising push. Three participants said they use or have used Facebook fundraisers in the past -- two of them have moved away from Facebook fundraisers because the organizations do not get as much information about the donor as they would directing the donor back to their own website link. Three participants said others have made Facebook fundraisers on behalf of the organization and one organization said encouraging people to do so is part of their strategy. One participant said the organization uses a platform called JustGiving, like GoFundMe, which

another participant said they use for specific project fundraising. Overall, the participants were

positive about their fundraising experiences through social media.

Strategy Evaluation

The participants were asked to evaluate the organizations' social media activities. Six

participants described their activities as positive and successful. One participant shared that they

received a compliment on their social media presence in a meeting. Another participant said,

"We're seeing turn out and resources being used to the level that we are really aiming for or

higher…". The other four participants said they could not evaluate because they did not collect

any baseline metrics to evaluate from or do not routinely check analytics. One participant said

it's important to think about the return on investment of what is being put into social media:

> Of course, everybody would like to be able to do more [with social media] if
> there's a return on it, but I think we're really at that point where we have to look at
> what are we investing in and what is the return … It's good to have out there to some
> degree, but I've never had anybody volunteer because they saw it on Instagram. You
> know, that may be the third thing that triggers it, but it has to it has to be used as
> part of a strategy, for sure.

The participants that had staff devoted to social media were more positive about meeting

goals in their social media strategy and engagement from call-to-action posts. Overall, the

participants were positive about their social media activities even if they said there were plans to

make improvements in the future.

Conceptualizing Engagement

This paper uses a multidimensional definition of engagement (Dhanesh, 2017). Part of

this research includes understanding how nonprofit organizations conceptually think about the

term engagement in context to social media since research has shown engagement can be a

deeper tool to foster meaningful interaction with communities online. The participants generally

categorized engagement as actions on social media (such as likes, shares, and comments), a tool to connect with or build an audience, or as one piece in a strategy that gets users to take engagement offline with the organization, like volunteering.

> I guess from our perspective, it is real action. Just getting people involved with the organization through a platform that they're familiar with and that they're on frequently and just communicating what we're doing here. And I can't think of it without thinking in terms of measurements. I guess ensuring that there is like some interaction there, if they're not coming to things in person, for the past two years maybe this was the only way that people were engaging at all with the organization was through these digital platforms.

When forming a strategy, it is important to understand why people following a nonprofit account engage with that nonprofit organization on social media. While research talking to those followers and their motivations would be beneficial, it can also be helpful to understand how nonprofit organizations think about this question. Six nonprofits said they think their followers appreciate the work they do or the mission they are working toward. Three participants said they think people follow them to see good news:

> I think a lot of it is that it's positive news, you know, people like to see good news. There's so much bad news out there. So they like to see something positive and then they feel like they're connected to it. So they feel like they can be part of this positive change that's happening in the world.

Four participants said people followed them to get involved with the organization somehow -- whether it be attending an event, to volunteer, or participating in a fundraising sale. Two participants said people especially engage with content where a person is recognized by their followers. People enjoy celebratory content about other people within their community. One participant said people follow to get information about a service they provide, and another participant said they think operational information is the main reason people follow.

Challenges

Participants in this research shared challenges their organization faces when creating their social media strategy. One participant said that it is difficult to keep up with the evolution of social media. The participant said their organization has struggled to decide when to take on a newer social media platform, such as Tik Tok. Another similar challenge is the lack of staff expertise about social media at nonprofits. The nonprofits in this study that were most successful in achieving their social media goals are the nonprofits with a social media manager or marketing team responsible for social media. Nonprofits with unpaid social media volunteers also saw success on social media but did not have procedures established to measure goals. The participants that had the most challenges with their social media strategy were the ones that did not have anyone at the organization responsible for social media. It is important to note that the organizations with full-time paid staff managing social media also have other responsibilities outside social media.

Discussion

The results from this research give insight into how ten nonprofits across the state of Ohio are developing and managing social media strategies. Like past research, challenges came from capacity issues with resources dedicated to social media strategy. The organizations that had most success in their strategies had one or multiple people dedicated to content development and collaborated organization-wide for information to post on social media. This collaboration across the organization is important for success because it makes social media a priority in marketing in multi-program organizations. It also helps social media managers strategize and plan content in advance to avoid "call to action" burnout.

The results on social media platforms echoed similar research. Overall, nine out of the ten organizations have social media accounts across various platforms, whether they are maintaining an active strategy for the platform or not. Facebook is still the most dominant social

media platform out of the nonprofits interviewed for this study, with Instagram in second. Twitter

is less frequently used by nonprofits but does have certain uses. YouTube is not used as a typical

social media platform where content is updated regularly to build an audience and engagement,

but more as a storage platform for videos. Tik Tok is becoming more popular with nonprofit

organizations, but capacity issues present the challenge of maintaining active video content on

the account.

In terms of content development, social media posts still generally follow the three

themes established by Lovejoy & Saxton (2012): information, action, and community. The

perception of the social media content does impact the engagement of that post. The community

posts are increasingly important since most nonprofits expressed the posts on social media with

human connection performed the best. This includes posts about staff members, which can make

users feel closer to the organization by Call to action posts see success with audiences who are

engaged on social media and feel connected to the nonprofit online, but it is important to

strategize these posts or else the audience can experience burn out. Social media is a give and

take relationship -- too many fundraising pushes can cause users to disengage. It would be

desirable to limit call-to-action posts to one to two times a week to maximize the effectiveness of

these posts.

A successful social media strategy could include two information delivery posts, one to

two community engagement based posts (i.e. encouraging users to comment on a post), and one

call to action post a week. The more the audience feels connected to the nonprofit, the more

likely they will take their engagement from online to offline, whether it be volunteering or

attending an event. Video content performs well because it can be a physical voice to the

organization, which carries more weight than reading a caption on social media, however, it can

be taxing to continuously create video content without a team. When possible, nonprofit

organizations should try to incorporate video content in their social media strategies to give their

platforms a dynamic voice.

This research shows that nonprofit organizations that are maintaining social media

strategies are meeting communication goals set for themselves, whether it be increasing

volunteer or event turnout, establishing a brand voice, or connecting with donors. This research

helps establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for different goals:

GOALS	KPIs	METRICS
Information Sharing	Number of information posts published in a month	Total amount of shares and likes
Call to Action	Facebook Event Registry	Total clicks on "I'm Interested" for Event
Fundraising	Gifts Secured in Time Period	Total amount raised, number of shares, number of individual donors, link clicks
Connection	Average response time	Response time for messages, response time for responding to comments, number of comments and messages received in time frame
Brand Messaging	Number of mission-based posts in a month	Total amount of shares and likes
Partnership Communication	Number of posts about partners	Total times tagged in a timeframe, total posts about specific partner

The organizations that use social media for fundraising mainly drive traffic to their own

website through posts with links since Facebook restricts donor information, making it hard to

build donor lists from that information. However, nonprofits in this study found success in

encouraging individual users to create Facebook fundraisers on behalf of the organization rather

than hosting the fundraiser themselves. Overall, all participants were positive about fundraising experiences through social media.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

This study can help inform future public relations scholars to understand the opportunities and challenges nonprofits face in social media from the perspective of social media managers and directors. There are opportunities to build engaged communities on digital platforms with a social media strategy and some nonprofits *are* actively building these communities. There are challenges where resources are not devoted toward social media use. For practical use, this research can also help inform nonprofit organizations about other organizations' success in developing and maintaining a social media strategy through goals and evaluation. This paper establishes three steps in social media strategy: development, implementation, and evaluation. After decisions are made by an organization about what social media platforms will be used, the goals for using those platforms, and what target audiences the organization is trying to reach, nonprofits can begin the management of their social media strategy which is the continuation of those three steps. Social media best practices included throughout the paper are informed by public relations literature and could be helpful to social media managers trying to improve their strategy.

The theoretical implications for this paper include how nonprofit social media managers and directors are conceptualizing the word engagement. While some participants consider engagement to be actions on posts such as liking or sharing, other participants conceptualized a deeper form of engagement which helps create these engaged online communities that donate and volunteer.

Recommendations for Future Use

Future public relations research can look at how often these digital communities take action offline, such as attending an event or volunteering, based on a call-to-action post. Participants in this research said they saw increases in volunteers, donations, and event attendance from social media, however, further research could set out to measure how many volunteers are recruited from social media. Similar studies to this research could be conducted to help understand more about the decision-making process nonprofits have with their social media strategy, especially studies that focus more on the differences in small, grassroot organizations versus national nonprofits across the United States.

Limitations

This study does have limitations. All the nonprofits are in the state of Ohio which could leave out certain regional issues organizations may experience. Only one of the participant organizations was part of a national nonprofit entity, therefore results could be different for nonprofits with different organizational structures. The researcher did not collect any social media metrics from the participant organizations which means success stories are anecdotal from the participants. However, participants were open about challenges faced and their goals for improvement.

Appendix

Interview Guide

How long have you worked with ORGANIZATION NAME?

How do social media platforms play a role in your communication strategy?

- LOW USAGE: Can you expand on the reasons why your organization decided not to use social media platforms?

- HIGH USAGE: In what ways does the social media presence impact your organization?

What does the staffing and resources for social media look like for your organization?

If the participant uses social media platforms, then ask:

- What goals do you have for your organizations' social media presence?

- What social media platforms does your organization use most often? Can you please expand on the reasons behind using these (versus other) platforms?
    - How/why did you choose that platform as a main social media channel?

    - Who is a major participant (target audience) in the platform?

    - How would you evaluate the performance of your social media activities on the platform?
        - Successful? Why do you think so?
        - Unsuccessful? Why do you think so?

    - Have you managed multiple social media channels?
        - If no, do you have any reason that you have managed one social media platform?
        - If yes, how do you manage multiple social media channels? Do you post similar content on multiple social channels? Or do you create tailored content and post different content considering the characteristics of each platform?

    - Do you have any reason that you have managed each platform in that way?

- How do you create a posting? How do you brainstorm it? How do you craft a story? Does it have any series of themes?

- What types of content do you create? Image-based? Text-based? Video-based? When creating a posting, how do you leverage the different types of posts?
    - For example, when we create a text-based posting on social media, we can focus on information delivery. Likewise, how do you utilize each type of posting?

- Do you find that certain content performs better on social media? *Request expansion on the response if pointed answers.*

- How would you describe engagement from your organization's perspective? What drives engagement?

- How does your organization use social media for any sort of fundraising activities? *If the participants answer they don't use it, then ask them to describe the reasons behind the choice. If they say they do use it, then ask them to describe how they do that.*

  Probing Questions:
  - Has your organization ever used the Facebook Fundraiser function?
  - Has a user independent of your organization ever created a Facebook fundraiser to raise money for your organization?
  - Has your organization ever used crowdfunding through GoFundMe or other platforms on social media?

How would you define social media engagement?

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