Not-for-profits and Social Media – Can We Find Strategic Value?

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

Social network sites (SNSs) and other social media have been widely accepted and studied as tools for engaging with stakeholders in the for-profit community. Relatively little, though, has appeared in the literature with respect to the use of social media by not-for-profit organizations. This research-in-progress paper presents the theoretical foundations and methodology for a longitudinal analysis of the use of various social media by a number of not-for-profit agencies and their constituents. Initial demographic and transaction volume analysis are also presented, with commentary about potential directions for institutions to leverage for strategic value.

Keywords

Social media, not-for-profit, non-profit, strategic value, competitive advantage.

Introduction

There is considerable research in the area of social media and for-profit enterprises, but relatively little in the area of not-for-profits. Study of social media in the not-for-profit arena has focused on public relations (e.g., Briones et al. 2011; Curtis et al. 2010), as well as mapping and crisis management (e.g., Goolsby 2010), and efforts to accomplish social change (e.g., Kanter and Fine 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). None appear to have accomplished any or all of the following:

- Longitudinal study looking at usage and interaction over time
- Sentiment analysis in interactions among participants and with the organizations
- Social network analysis to examine engagement levels within the social media environment
- Examining the cost and return to the not-for-profit for the use of this channel
- Demonstrating links between social media use by not-for-profits and their strategic objectives.

These analyses will provide the opportunity to examine the strategic goals of the organizations relative to their interactions on social media. This would include how the organizations’ interactions change over time as their environments change and as they learn how to manage the channel, how their constituents’ sentiments change and how sentiment affects engagement, and how the cost to the organizations might be weighed against the value derived.

Social media resources are demonstrably being used with positive results in many not-for-profit organizations (e.g., Witman 2013). However, as social media often carry no direct financial cost to the organization, they may be viewed as a “free” good and not managed as closely as they perhaps should be. Even without a required flow of funds to pay for the social media services, staff and volunteer time is still required to manage these channels, and the organization’s reputation is still at risk.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We present the theoretical foundations for the study and proposed analysis, followed by an overview of the pilot organizations for study. Some initial observations about those organizations’ social media activities follow, concluding with initial observations about the data, implications for practice, limitations, and directions for future research.
Literature Review

Not-for-profit organizations are defined here as organizations that exist for the purpose of providing goods or services, but that do not expect to earn a financial profit. As another differentiator from for-profit entities, the “customer” in a not-for-profit is really at least two separate entities – the client who receives goods or services, and in many cases the donor or donors whose donations make those services possible or more affordable (Kaplan 2001). In most cases, not-for-profit organizations provide goods and services that benefit the public in some way. These include educational and artistic endeavors, scientific research, or work on behalf of social causes.

In terms of strategically managing not-for-profit organizations, Kaplan (2001) describes a version of a Balanced Scorecard used in the for-profit community, but adapted to the needs of the not-for-profit (Figure 1, below). The starred notes refer to the corresponding perspectives in the for-profit balanced scorecard. This model begins with the organization’s mission – its fundamental reason for being. It then asks how to envision success in terms of its manifestation from the perspectives of financial donors, of customers/recipient, and of volunteers and staff. It further looks at business processes that are required for success, and at how the organization’s people (including both paid and unpaid (volunteer) staff) need to work together and learn in order to be achieve the organization’s vision.

For this study, we use Kaplan and Haenlein's definition of social media as any of a broad collection of services including “collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites (SNS), virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). This encompasses boyd and Ellison’s (2007) definition of SNS (though boyd and Ellison are specific to identify them as social network, not networking, sites), and goes beyond to include tools that allow sharing of content and dialog among contributors and others, including sites such as YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and other similar tools.

Given that the goal of most such media is to enable individuals (and individuals acting as agents of an organization) to share content and interact with one another (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), social media
might then provide a useful tool to accomplish many parts of the not-for-profit’s mission. These include engagement with donors and clients (what for-profit entities call Customer Relationship Management), collaboration among staff and volunteers, as well as marketing, building brand awareness, and other such functions.

The proposed study will examine the nature and purpose of social media engagements by not-for-profit organizations and how those engagements contribute to or detract from their success measures in the Balanced Scorecard. For example, organizations might use their social media channels to solicit for volunteer labor or donations, connecting with the Financial perspective of the Scorecard as well as potentially the Learning and Internal perspectives.

With the relative dearth of literature addressing the use of social media in not-for-profits, a grounded theory development approach (Urquhart et al. 2010) will be used. This approach calls for five key guidelines to be followed as the data is gathered and analyzed, and as theory is thus developed:

- Constant comparison of data to ensure ongoing fit between the data and the developing theory;
- Iterative conceptualization, continuing to make the theory more abstract and more integrated by relating theoretical constructs to one another;
- Theoretical sampling, making explicit decisions about data sampling based on the developing theory;
- Scaling up, explicitly working to connect low-level theoretical constructs to the broader literature; and
- Theoretical integration, that of relating any new theory to the existing and related theory in the field – in this case, both in information systems and in not-for-profit management.

To Urquhart et al.’s point with respect to theoretical integration, we anticipate several extant theories might fit into the results found in analysis of the live social media transactions. First, the notion of social capital (Vitak and Ellison 2013) may contribute to how individuals choose to engage or not engage in a public way, whether it’s to share information and insights, to offer encouragement, or even just to “like” a posting or comment. Information systems theories related to technology usage and fit (e.g., UTAUT (Venkatesh et al. 2003) and task/technology fit (Goodhue and Thompson 1995), among others) also provide guidance for what may motivate either an organization or a user to adopt not only the foundational social media platform, but also to engage and remain active with the organization’s content and pages on those sites.

The for-profit literature provides a rich history and background on which to build, including Porter and Millar’s (1985) work on how information itself (as well as the technology to manage it) can provide competitive advantage. Social media have also been examined in the for-profit space, primarily for marketing and customer relations (e.g., Mangold and Faulds 2009). Some lessons learned there are certainly applicable to not-for-profits, as those agencies still compete for donors, volunteer hours, etc. However, there are fundamental differences in the not-for-profits, as their constituents are often motivated by altruistic and other factors not present in the for-profits. Many not-for-profits operate with smaller and lower-paid staffs relative to comparable for-profits (Leete 2000), and thus can often devote less time to training for, understanding, and managing the social media channels.

**Research Objectives**

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the strategic value of social media to these various types of not-for-profit organizations. Social media often appear to be “free”, as there is often no direct flow of funds between the user and the social networking service. However, there is a non-trivial cost in terms of investment of volunteer or staff time to maintain the organizations’ presences on the social media sites, and there may be costs in terms of negative impacts on the organization if the social media are not managed well.

We hope that the research will identify best practices for use of social media, enabling not-for-profit agencies to make better choices about how to leverage these tools to further their missions.
Key research questions to be addressed include:

- How do not-for-profit institutions leverage their presence on social network/social media sites? Is it for fund raising, volunteer development, communication with clients, and/or other functions? How do these further their strategic priorities as laid out in the Balanced Scorecard?
- What levels of engagement are fostered with the social media communities by these various types of uses?
- What demographic types of individuals engage actively in each of these types of uses?
- How does an individual’s social network affect their engagement, or others’ engagement, in various types of uses? This will leverage techniques that together are known as social network analysis (Knoke and Yang 2007), examining how individuals are connected to one another, both directly and indirectly.
- What can sentiment analysis (e.g., Pang and Lee 2008) tell us about the engagements?
- How do these various types of engagement vary by size, geographic reach, and sector of institution?

These questions have direct bearing on the ability of the non-profit to accomplish its mission – it needs to use and respond to the channels where it can find its appropriate constituent groups (donors, volunteers, clients), and address them in a way that generates the type of response the organization is seeking. The questions address Whetten’s (1989) four criteria for a theoretical contribution – what the organization is trying to accomplish, how they’re accomplishing it through social media, why this media is a viable channel for that purpose, and who, when, and where the tools are being used.

Data Collection Methods

For the full-scale research project, social media pages used by not-for-profits will be selected for deeper analysis, based on a random stratified sample to cover different types of organizations, different regional foci, and varying sizes of organization. Initial analysis will be done on a small number of sites selected as purposive samples (and presented in part in this paper), chosen on the basis of providing sufficient active engagement to fully test the tools and techniques used for the data collection and analysis. Further detail about their selection is provided in Research Subjects, below.

Data collection will be performed primarily through the NVivo NCapture tool (QSR International 2013). This tool “scrapes” the content of an existing, publicly accessible Facebook Page, Twitter Feed, or YouTube account and extracts the content for loading into NVivo (a qualitative data analysis tool). NVivo’s NCapture uses application programming interfaces (APIs) under agreement with the social media sites to extract that data, as well as metadata about the postings.

NVivo and related add-ons will be used to extract and categorize postings, and code the postings into themes of activity from both the organization and its constituents. The R statistics toolset, including the sentiment package, will be used to conduct sentiment analysis, and to analyze the social networks of the posters. The rationale for applying sentiment analysis is to provide a measurable perspective on the content of social media postings from both staff and constituents, and examine how those perspectives affect constituent engagement (DiStaso et al. 2011).

Following the initial purposive sample, a larger sample of organizations will be gathered. Based on the initial sample, Facebook is the most commonly used social media tool among not-for-profits. We intend to conduct this random sample by using the Facebook Graph API (Facebook.com 2013), and specifically its search facilities. This enables us to search through all of Facebook’s Pages for particular keywords, particular self-identified classifications of pages (not-for-profits being one of those classifications), and particular geographic areas. From those aggregated lists, we will select a random sample of Pages to investigate further. This analysis will utilize the same tools and techniques leveraged in the initial analysis.

Similar approaches will be used, starting from the organizations whose Facebook Pages have been selected, to examine Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Reddit, Google+, blogs, and other social media sources.
Research Subjects

Four organizations were selected as purposive samples to conduct this initial study. The organizations include two in the area of housing services, one in human services, and one in microfinance. Two are international in scope, one is a local U.S.-based chapter of an international organization, and the last is a local U.S.-based organization with all operations in the southeast U.S.

HomeRepair is a not-for-profit based in the southeast United States. It operates largely in the Appalachian mountains, focusing on home repair activities. It uses donated funds to support its operations, and volunteer labor actually conducts the bulk of its home repair work. It was chosen due to the large involvement of high school and college age young people in its programs, and its largely US-centric and regional foci, though it draws volunteers from much of the U.S.

HomeBuild is a not-for-profit agency with organizational units in multiple countries around the world. It focuses on new home construction, though it also works on some home repair projects. Labor is often provided by volunteers, supplemented by professional crews for specific, specialized tasks. Donors contribute much of their operating budget, while new homes are sold to their new owners with repayment funds going to provide materials for subsequent new home projects. It was chosen in part as a counterpoint to HomeRepair, both in terms of its mission as well as its broad international scope and older demographic for both volunteers and clients.

HumanServe is a chapter of an international, multi-faceted human services not-for-profit organization. The chapter is likewise based in the southeast U.S., and provides a variety of medical care, emergency services, and disaster relief operations in its home area, while also supporting other chapters in its region as needed. Operating funds come from some of its activities that are paid for by recipients, and donors provide other funds, often to help provide relief after a specific disaster. This agency was chosen in part due to its central location in the midst of the 2014 U.S. winter storm season.

Finally, SmallLoan operates as a not-for-profit funding agency for direct microfinance lenders around the world. Microfinance was popularized by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus’ Grameen Bank (www.grameen-info.org), and is the name given to providing relatively small loans to business people, often in developing countries, where this capital can support significant increases in sales, profits, and operational efficiency. SmallLoan allows individuals to loan small amounts of money as part of a group funding a particular small business person in a developing country, and then to receive repayment over the life of the loan. SmallLoan also solicits donations to cover its own operating costs. SmallLoan was chosen due to its international scope, and for its key differentiation from the other agencies in that it is largely a donor-driven organization, and does relatively little with volunteer, “on the ground” labor.

Initial observations indicated different utilizations of social media by each of the four organizations. Each included a set of links on their primary public web sites to a collection of social media sites (and a link, in one case, for a RSS feed). A total of eight different social media sites were represented among those used by these four agencies. The specific linkages are identified in Table 1, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>YouTube</th>
<th>Google+</th>
<th>LinkedIn</th>
<th>Pinterest</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>RSS Fee</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HomeBuild</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HomeRepair</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HumanServe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SmallLoan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Social Media Linked on Organization Home Pages
Initial Data Gathering and Analysis

NVivo’s NCapture tool was used to capture web pages for the organizations, as well as Twitter and Facebook datasets for the initial analysis. A total of over 61,000 posts, comments, and tweets were captured across the four organizations, spanning as much as nearly 6 years. Summary statistics for the postings, comments, and tweets are provided in Table 2. The time periods represented by the data vary by organization and channel, based on when the organization started using that particular channel, and any limitations imposed by the social media sites’ data extraction APIs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Retweets From Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posts</td>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Likes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HomeBuild</td>
<td>31,564</td>
<td>18,433</td>
<td>3,035</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>638 since 8/19/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>since 7/15/08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HomeRepair</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>10,727</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1,261 since 6/14/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>since 10-1-13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HumanServe</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>1,430</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2,696 since 8/2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>since 12/4/09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SmallLoan</td>
<td>10,140</td>
<td>24,107</td>
<td>6,139</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>2,384 since 6/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>since 2/5/09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Summary of selected metrics for social media postings (end dates all 2/4/14)

Facebook provides limited information (when the poster permits it) about the person posting original information or comments. For three of the four organizations under study, posters representing themselves as female far outnumber those representing themselves as male, as shown in Table 3. If these activity levels are accurate, it may offer insight to the organizations about their active participants, and perhaps suggest the need to better engage the males among their constituents, and/or to target some messaging more directly to the females who are already engaged with the organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HomeBuild</td>
<td>18,393</td>
<td>10,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HomeRepair</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HumanServe</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SmallLoan</td>
<td>8,543</td>
<td>5,203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Facebook Postings by gender (where known)

Summary discussion of initial analysis findings for each of the four organizations is provided in the following sections.
**HomeBuild**

HomeBuild’s Facebook and Twitter postings are largely initiated from their various offices around the world, but a significant share of the original postings are initiated by constituents of various types. HomeBuild-initiated postings include notifications of events, solicitations for volunteers, inspirational comments, and kudos in support of local chapter activities, including its Scorecard’s Customer and Financial perspectives, as well as its Learning perspective. HomeBuild has over 60,000 Twitter followers, and over 250,000 Facebook Likes. A map of origination sites for a 10% sample of the HomeBuild postings is shown in Figure 2, demonstrating the global nature of HomeBuild’s activities and constituent base, and to some extent, the U.S. dominance in this media channel. This provides a view for HomeBuild of where the responsive portion of its audience is located, and the implied constraint and difficulty of reaching and engaging with its constituents outside the United States.

![Figure 2. Map of posting locations for HomeBuild (where location was provided)](image)

HomeBuild, as one of the largest organizations under study here, also receives a significant volume of postings from constituents. These range from notes of thanks to pleas for assistance, sometimes due to lack of responsiveness from local chapters. HomeBuild generally responds to these queries and requests promptly (usually within one business day), often with a note of appreciation from the original poster for this follow-through, reflecting highly on its Scorecard’s Customer perspective. Some of the queries are for contact information that should have been accessed via web searches, but Facebook provides a path for constituents to ask for it rather than having to look for it. This offers a mechanism for HomeBuild to provide a personalized connection to its constituents, albeit at the cost of having staff or volunteers clearly focused on managing this service channel.

With HomeBuild’s use of volunteer labor and donations of materials and funds to run its operations, it is perhaps not surprising that dominant words in its postings include donate, home, help, now, please, and thank you (along with their synonyms). It also focuses on the positive outcomes for its homeowners, resulting in frequent uses of words like happy, love, and support.

**HomeRepair**

HomeRepair is among the smallest of the organizations under study, at least as measured by full-time staff and social media engagement. It counts about 1,500 Twitter followers and over 20,000 Facebook Likes, reflecting the larger demographic footprint that Facebook holds in the young adult population vs. Twitter. Its postings are primarily focused on engaging with its volunteer base – inviting them to recruiting and recognition events, requesting their involvement in projects, and providing periodic inspirational notes.

While HomeRepair focuses on the visible task of repairing homes, it also emphasizes the value returned to the volunteer in terms of relationships with homeowners and other volunteers. Its volunteers are often high school and college students from various places around the U.S., and the impact of seeing another part of the country, and often one in far greater poverty than their own, has a significant impact. The social media channel provides an opportunity to share those insights more broadly than was previously
possible, and allows HomeRepair a far greater reach for its interactions, as well as a broader, more engaging conversation with and among its constituents, all in direct support of its mission and its Customer and Learning perspectives.

HomeRepair’s attention to this young demographic, and its focus on summer and home repair activities, are manifested in commonly used words in its postings. These include summer, volunteers, service, give, home, and love, each of which are aimed at the over 10,000 volunteers that work with them each summer. In addition, the young people (generally college students) who operate the day to day activities of coordinating volunteer work are addressed and recruited with frequent references to staff, training, project, and program. In addition, given the relatively low engagement level of Twitter users as a group (Murphy 2014), HomeRepair appears better served by focusing its attention on Facebook traffic.

HumanServe

HumanServe is smallest in terms of its total social media engagement, reaching about 2,000 Facebook Likes and over 5,000 Twitter followers. Despite this, it maintains an active social media presence of Twitter and Facebook, as measured by its total postings, particularly on Twitter. Its postings focus largely on engaging its volunteer and donor base to help with local, national, and international crises. It also engages in significant brand awareness campaigns, with postings from its national and international parent organizations.

Its postings tend to focus more on fund raising for itself and for its parent organization, with donate, now, help, home, disaster and emergency being frequently used in its postings. In addition, it had numerous postings during the heavy winter storms of 2014 with both offers of and requests for help. The availability of the mobile channel, with 3G wireless internet service, enabled people who were otherwise disconnected to stay engaged and either to seek help or to offer it if they were able. A graph of Twitter activity for HumanServe is shown in Figure 3, below. While it had a very significant bubble of activity in the second quarter of 2011, it also had a bubble of activity in the first quarter of 2014, with 25% of its quarter-to-date Twitter traffic coming during one day, January 29, during the height of the blizzard in the U.S. Southeast.

HumanServe, given its involvement in local emergencies, may well get more strategic value from its Twitter followers than its connections through Facebook, due to the more succinct and accessible format of Twitter, and in particular its mobile-friendliness.

SmallLoan

SmallLoan appears to be the most successful among these four in generating engagement among its social media audience. It has over half a million Twitter followers, and nearly 250,000 Facebook Likes. While it does not generate a large total volume of comments, many of its postings do elicit more than 5 comments each. Most of these postings are “success stories” of loans that have been used and made a difference in the life of the borrower, generating replies akin to “I love SmallLoan”, and encouragement to the borrower as well, reflecting success in its Financial and Customer perspectives.
SmallLoan, like many microfinance agencies, has recognized that making loans to women tends to have a disproportionately higher value to the community than do loans to men, on balance. As such, it makes sense that many of its postings and comments refer to women – it is the third most-frequently-used word in their social media content, after “people” and “loan”.

Interestingly, SmallLoan is the only one of the four agencies studied which publicly links its LinkedIn and Pinterest pages to its home page. As such, they appear to be leveraging the growing usage on Pinterest, and the visual engagement provided there. It is not yet clear what strategic objective they are pursuing through their LinkedIn presence.

SmallLoan has a similar international connectedness to HomeBuild, with many of its postings from outside the U.S. It has a much less skewed distribution than does HomeBuild, with less dominance from U.S.-based constituents. The map in Figure 4 shows the origin of about 15% of its postings.

![Figure 4. Map of posting locations for SmallLoan (where location was provided)](image)

**Conclusions**

Our initial observations from studying the volume and content of the data indicate that the social media tools are being used actively for a number of purposes across all perspectives of the Balanced Scorecard:

- “Telling the story” of what the organization is doing and its impacts – the social values-driven accomplishments of the organization are a fundamental differentiator of not-for-profits vs. for-profits, reflecting on its Mission perspective.
  - Postings with visuals (videos or pictures) generated substantially more “likes” and comments than postings without – providing insight or perhaps confirmation for the not-for-profit that a well-chosen visual can tell a much richer story than can a block of text, and gain broader reach through re-postings.
- Generating traffic through periodic notifications to constituents – in the form of inspirational messages, retweets of other interesting content, etc., supporting the Customer perspective.
  - Where these postings elicit positive responses from users, there is the benefit of the perceived positive feedback from the community.
  - Where these postings elicit questions or concerns, they provide an opportunity for the organization to respond in a proactive way and perhaps answer questions that address concerns held by more than the original commenter.
- Promotion of opportunities for volunteer service, and recruiting new and returning volunteers, supporting its Learning and Internal perspectives.
- Soliciting donations, supporting its Financial perspective.

Some organizations, due in part to the size of the organization or the size and activity of their social media constituency, have significantly more traffic on their social media sites than others. The apparent volume
of activity is, for several of the organizations, at least partly inflated by cross-posting of the same content to, for example, Twitter and Facebook, often with automated cross-posting tools. While this has the effect of reaching different audiences, it is at some level unfortunate that the discussions and engagement that happen in each channel are effectively disjoint from one another.

The content, at least anecdotally, appears largely positive in nature. Postings from the organizations and from constituents tend to generate significant numbers of likes, comments, and retweets, as appropriate. This is, of course, not entirely surprising since the members of these “communities” on Facebook, Twitter, and other sites are self-selected and would tend to be positive about the organization.

Even among this small sample of organizations, a wide diversity of social media channels has been leveraged, though we have just touched the surface in looking carefully at Facebook and Twitter content. The organizations represent themselves as having a presence on at least three social media channels each, and one on as many as eight. This may be due to “going where the users are”, recognizing that at some level, different audiences are dividing their time differently as social media channels mature. For example, reaching high school students may not be as readily doable simply through Facebook, as that demographic is reportedly leaving or reducing its activity there in favor of other channels, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and SnapChat.

Not-for-profit organizations, just like their for-profit brethren, have to look carefully (perhaps even more so) at the ways they invest their time and organizational reputation. Each social media channel provides a variety of interaction options, attracts a different demographic, and enables different types of engagement with constituents. To get strategic value from these channels, the organizations must focus on their mission, identify the goals for each channel’s interactions, and leverage the channels in ways that reach their intended audience, generate feedback where appropriate, and provide sufficient return on the investment in time and organizational effort.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

While clearly a research in progress, this work carries a number of limitations worth noting here. First, it is based initially on a small set of not-for-profit organizations, chosen to get some diversity of types of organizations, audiences, types of interactions and media used. Second, access to detailed social media content outside of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube is somewhat limited due to a lack of publicly accessible APIs for extracting data, along with well-defined terms of use to permit such extraction. Third, this work is currently being executed as a passive analysis of publicly accessible postings and comments. It will strengthen the research to be able to, in future iterations, interact directly with participants to better understand their motivations and contributions.

Future research directions will include gathering larger and longer-duration longitudinal data sets. A broader sample of not-for-profit organizations will be sampled, keeping the grounded-theory guideline in focus to select samples based on their contribution to extending and strengthening the theory. Analytical approaches will include, among other approaches, sentiment analysis, assessment of the effects of pictures or videos on response rates from constituents, assessment of the effects of timing of postings, and social network analysis of posters.

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