

A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS: TOWARDS A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE

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Previous empirical studies of social media use by nonprofit organizations suggest that its dialogic potential has not yet been fully realized. Yet drawing from content analysis and surveys, these studies shed little light on the underlying motives and values that drive nonprofit social media practices, neither do they address to what extent these practices are effective on social media followers. To fill in the gaps of this existing research, I conducted two qualitative studies to explore the experiences of multiple stakeholders implicated in nonprofit social media use. First, I interviewed social media point persons (SMPPs)—nonprofit employees who self-identified as being primarily responsible for their organization’s social media planning and implementation—and found that SMPPs’ mindsets and social media tactics reflect dialogic principles, specifically those of mutuality, empathy, propinquity, risk and commitment. Second, I conducted focus groups with individuals who followed some of the SMPPs’ organizations on Facebook, and found that their followers want nonprofit organizations to take the lead building a community shaped by connection, dialogue and involvement. By comparing perspectives of SMPPs and their followers, I found that dialogic activities on social media can catalyze a culture of dialogue within a community, encouraging sharing, mutual support and connections. To facilitate the process, nonprofit professionals have taken on the role of a moderator that promotes dialogue centered around the community.

Taken together, my research expands our current understanding about nonprofit organizations' roles in public relations, and raises questions for future research about how nonprofit professionals balance the dialogic culture they work to cultivate on social media with other organizational priorities within an organizational or even sector-wide context.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SMPP: social media point person

CMC: computer-mediated communication

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The nonprofit sector in the United States relies heavily on the public to thrive. Compared to for-profit organizations, nonprofit organizations have fewer resources but a wider array of stakeholders to answer to, including the general public (Sisco, Collins & Zoch, 2010). Public relations play a critical role in raising funds, attracting new members, mobilizing resources, cultivating relationships and fulfilling the mission (Feinglass, 2005). With scarce resources, public relations practitioners need to be more creative and effective with the use of communication tools to reach target audiences.

Public relations practice used to be dominated by one-way, monologic communication, as it allows nonprofit organizations to fulfill their public reporting obligation (Boris & Steuerle, 2006), partially due to legal reasons and partially for accountability purposes. In the United States, nonprofit organizations are required by law to disclose to the public their financial information (Brody, 2006). Failure to do so can result in the revocation of nonprofit status. Public disclosure is also a practice to demonstrate accountability, which is critical in proving nonprofit organizations' standing in negotiations for support, staff and legitimacy (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Salamon, 1999; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). If nonprofit organizations fail to hold themselves accountable, they risk losing the public trust which can result in the loss of donors, volunteers and other supporters who "self-identify with the goals of the organization" (Ospina, Diaz & O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 8). Indeed, recent scandals have prompted the public to demand greater openness and transparency from organizations in all three sectors (Waters, 2007; Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). Despite the importance of disclosing key information, public relations scholars contend that one-way

communication has limitations in building a mutually-beneficial relationship between an organization and its key publics (Grunig, 1993), especially if the organization has special social or moral responsibilities (Grunig & Grunig, 1989). Monologic discourses in public relations campaigns, for example, have been criticized for instrumentalizing public opinions, as it allows communicators to impose their own perspectives on information receivers to meet their organization's needs (Botan, 1997).

In recent decades, best practices in public relations have highlighted the importance of organizations engaging stakeholders in two-way, dialogic communication so they can provide feedback (Grunig, 1989). A thread of public relation scholarship has re-examined the role of two-way communication through a dialogic lens. In the context of organizational communication, scholars define dialogue as a “negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325). It cultivates collaborations with stakeholders by prompting organizations to respond to stakeholders' inquiries for information (Kent, Taylor & White, 2003), to solicit their input (Barrett, 2001), and to facilitate their interactive engagement (Saxton & Guo, 2011). Dialogue also allows organizations to have a better understanding about people's needs, and thus be able to align their services and products with those needs (Saxton & Guo, 2011).

Besides these utilities, dialogue is interpreted as one of the most ethical and humanistic forms of communication in communication studies (Buber, 1970; Rogers, 1994; Botan, 1997). It implies that all communicators are equal and no one should dominate the communication (Habermas, 1990). Public relations scholars adapt this concept and argue that dialogue is more ethical than monologic discourse while communicating with the public, for it is premised in a balanced and equal exchange of

information (Botan, 1997; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Dialogue recognizes the right of organizations to present their own perspectives but also allows the public to express different opinions. In this way, the public are free to communicate their concerns regarding organizational practices (Day, Dong & Robins, 2001). Therefore, dialogue has been proposed as an alternative to monologue in justifying the ethicality of organizational communication and the organization, itself (Botan, 1997). Yet, dialogue by itself is neither ethical nor unethical. As Kent and Tylor (2002) point out, it can be subverted if any party involved in the dialogue attempts to manipulate the process or exclude the participation of others.

Social Media Use in the Nonprofit Sector

The evolution of public relations theory and practice is facilitated by new media technologies. The advent of the internet, for instance, has made mass participation more ubiquitous as the public are no longer relegated merely to the passive, receiving end of the broadcasting system. Social media, in particular, has emerged as an alternative to mass media. As people who access social media for information simultaneously become distributors of information (Veil, Buehner & Palenchar, 2011), it challenges organizations to be more transparent and responsive, else the public can turn to alternative sources to address their information needs (Botan, 1997; Stephens & Malone, 2009). In organizational studies, this new form of communication on social media is receiving increasing attention (Amblee & Bui, 2011; Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hu, Pavlou & Zhang, 2006). A global survey of public relations professionals indicates that 73 percent of the respondents believe social media has changed the way organizations communicate, and 88 percent of respondents agree that

social media has made communication more instantaneous for organizations, as they are under the pressure to respond more quickly to critiques (Wright & Hinson, 2009). In addition to the fast distribution of information, social media offers useful tools for dialogic principles to be tested in practice. By accommodating the shift from a mass-mediated approach to a “much more conversational, relationship-building approach” (Kelleher, 2015, p. 282), the affordance of social media that enables organizations to engage key publics in interactive dialogue can be essential to fostering productive organization-public relationships with trust and mutual understandings (Jo & Kim, 2003; Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Despite the assumption that nonprofit organizations can and should tap into the interactive features of social media to pursue dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Kelleher, 2015), a number of empirical studies suggest that the nature of current social media use has not lived up to these expectations (e.g., Saxton, Guo & Brown, 2007; Water & Jamal, 2011; Young, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Guo & Saxton, 2013). Early studies focusing on one or two individual, high-profile social media technologies such as blogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Traynor, Poitevint, Bruni, Stiles, Raines, Little & Sweetser, 2008; Kelleher, 2009) and social networking sites (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), as well as conventional websites (Kent et al., 2003; Taylor, Kent & White, 2001; Park & Reber, 2008), find that organizations still rely heavily on social media for basic informational use. More recent studies begin to differentiate patterns of use across various social networking sites—primarily between Facebook and Twitter, the most popular social media platforms among individual and organizational users (Nah & Saxton, 2012; Miller,

2010; Phethean, Tiropanis & Harris, 2013; Guo & Saxton, 2013). These studies suggest that organizational activities across various social media must be examined separately because they function so differently and because organizations may use them for different purposes. The affordances of Facebook, for instance, enable the site to play a significant role in generating and maintaining conversations, whereas the affordances of Twitter are more supportive in directing online traffic to organizations' homepages and raising awareness about the organization (Phethean et al., 2013).

In addition, researchers who have studied nonprofit organizations' social media use have not reached any conclusions about the causes of what they characterize as underutilization, although some researchers point to the lack of human and financial resources that might limit use (Young, 2012; Miller, 2010), while other researchers argue that social media should free nonprofit organizations from some of their resource constraints by offering cost-effective tools in areas such as advertising (Obar, Zube & Lampe, 2011) and volunteer recruitment (Murray & Harrison, 2005). The latter attribution seems to be more likely given the analysis of data from a survey carried out by Nah and Saxton (2012), which finds that the association between social media adoption and organizational assets is weak. Meanwhile, surveys of nonprofit professionals also suggest that social media use can be influenced by a series of organizational factors such as the position of the person holding related responsibilities (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton & Sweetser, 2010), the type of mission (Nah & Saxton, 2012), degree of board support (Young, 2012), and organizational structure (Searce, Kasper & Grant, 2009). These diverse findings reflect the complexity of understanding social media use in the nonprofit context; nevertheless, we need additional research to

provide clearer evidence for explaining this so-called insufficient use of social media for dialogic communication.


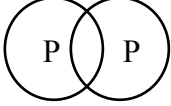
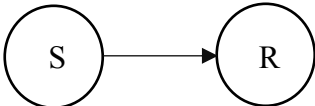
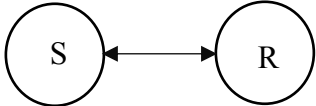
Limitations in Current Research

While social media adoption is happening at a rapid pace in both the private (Bughin & Chui, 2010) and nonprofit sectors (Barnes, 2014; Barnes & Matteson, 2009), our empirical understanding and theorizing about the implications of social media in serving organizational purposes seem to lag behind (Raeth, Smolnik, Urbach & Zimmer, 2009; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Our understanding of social media use in the nonprofit sector is limited in three key ways. First, there is a lack of clarity and consistency in how researchers operationalize the constructs of “interaction” and “dialogue” in studies of the organizational use of social media. Many empirical studies of social media adoption claim that communicative practices are “interactive” or “dialogic” without defining either word (Lovejoy & Saxton; 2012; Kent et al., 2003). Some researchers use the two words interchangeably, implying that dialogue on social media is equivalent to interactive conversations (Lovejoy & Saxton; 2012; Phethean et al., 2013; Agostino & Arnaboldi, 2016); while in other research, interactivity is interpreted as part of the dialogic loop (Taylor et al., 2001; Kent et al., 2003).

Through the lens of computer-mediated communication (CMC) scholarship, the concept of interactivity encompasses both one-way and two-way communication processes (Downes & McMillan, 2000; McMillan, 2002a). As Figure 1 indicates, responsive dialogue refers to two-way communication in which the information sender—or the organization in a public relations context—takes primary control over the process. Mutual discourse dissolves the distinction between the organization and its audiences, by

giving “more egalitarian control to all participants” in a two-way communication process (McMillan, 2002b, p. 169). According to the definitions of McMillan (2002a, 2002b), the concept of dialogue in computer-mediated communication is much clearer; it can be conceptualized by responsive dialogue and mutual discourse. The two communication models, which both emphasize two-way communication, differ on the levels of audiences’ control over the communication process. A lack of clarity and consistency about these constructs in the nonprofit scholarship, however, makes it difficult to synthesize across studies and build a complementary body of research about social media use in the sector.

Figure 1: Four Models of User-to-User Interactivity

	Direction of communication	
Level of receiver control	One-way	Two-way
High	<p>Feedback</p> 	<p>Mutual discourse</p> 
Low	<p>Monologue</p> 	<p>Responsive dialogue</p> 

Note. S = sender, R = receiver, P = participant (sender/receiver roles are interchangeable)
Reprinted from *Exploring models of interactivity from multiple research traditions: Users, documents, and systems* (p. 169), by S. J. McMillan, 2002b, In L. A. Lievrouw & S. Livingston (Eds.), *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequences of ICTs*. London, UK: Sage. Copyright 2002 by Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

Second, the suite of research methods used in the existing body of scholarship has limitations for understanding the value of and motivations for nonprofit organizations’ social media use. One of the most fundamental challenges with the existing body of research is that numerous studies of the organizational use of social media tend to provide

a nearly exclusively quantitative picture of social media adoption, drawing from survey data and content analyses of social media posts. While they focus on understanding to what extent interactive features such as responses, likes, shares, or retweets are used (e.g., Water & Jamal, 2011; Waters et al., 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Taylor et al., 2001; Kent et al., 2003), research questions about why particular features are used and towards what ends are generally overlooked. In addition, these studies are likely to conflate the affordances of a technology with its appropriation—assuming the functions and features of a technology shape or dictate how a technology is actually used or, more problematically, how it should be used. Such an assumption is misleading, in part because most social media platforms were originally designed for individual use. Facebook, for example, was launched in February of 2004 to serve college and high school communities (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Registration was not open to organizational users until April 2006 (Miller, 2010). The assumption that organizations can benefit from social media in the same way as individual users is an empirical one that must be explored, not assumed. Indeed, one concern arising from recent research is whether social computing technologies adequately support the objectives of nonprofit organizations (Volda, Harmon & Al-Ani, 2012). Recruiting volunteers from social media, for instance, does not help volunteer coordinators target those individuals who are truly interested in the mission of the organization and committed to long-term support (Volda et al., 2012). Similarly, mass participation enabled by the Internet has made it difficult for grassroots organizations to mobilize their members around specific goals targeting specific groups of people in specific geographical areas (Brainard & Brinkerhoff, 2004). And research in organizational communication suggests that the increasingly widespread

user-generated content and linking practice presents a challenge for organizations in retaining control over the dissemination of authentic information (Stephens & Malone, 2009).

As Phethean et al (2013) point out, content analysis alone cannot explain how and why social media is used in a particular way, and surveys are insufficient to capture the various motivations and expectations that can affect its appropriation. Both methods thus have limitations in explaining whether the perceived use of social media accurately reflects its intended or actual use by those who hold the direct responsibility for nonprofit organizations' social media accounts. Therefore, to understand how and why social media is appropriated at the organizational level, it is important to shift the unit of analysis to the experiences of people who are either orchestrating or are affected by nonprofit organizations' social media practices.

Third, as McMillan's interactivity models are premised on the proposition that at least two parties need to be involved for dialogue to take place, it points to another gap in the existing studies—the lack of research about the public's experience of and reaction to nonprofit organizations' dialogic activities on social media. All known studies focus exclusively on the self-reports or digital traces left behind by sample nonprofit organizations on social media platforms (e.g. Waters et al., 2009; Phethean et al., 2013; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Guo & Saxton, 2013). No research thus far explores how the public responds or, critically, what expectations or desires the public have with respect to nonprofit social media use. In other words, when research employing content analysis classifies a message as “dialogic” or the organization has presumably employed “dialogic” features via surveys and self-

reports, one can only assume that there is potential for the organization to engage the public in dialogue, but whether or how such dialogue is taking place remains unclear. Indeed, according to the interactivity models of McMillan (2002b), the public can engage in dialogue in different ways, and some types of engagement might fit better with the definitions of dialogue. Yet without considering the perspectives of those who are involved in the dialogic communication, it is difficult to understand whether the dialogue nonprofit organizations seek to promote through social media is in line with what the public expect from their online experience. It thus urges us to examine the entire communication process between organizations and their target audiences.

Research Questions

To address these gaps in the existing literature, my dissertation takes a grounded theory approach in order to: first, to understand the perspectives and practices of organizational users in the nonprofit sector, particularly with respect to the dialogic affordances of social media and second, to explore social media audiences' experiences with these practices. My research is guided by three key research questions.

- RQ1: How do nonprofit social media professionals describe the various aspects of communication that they intend to foster on their organizations' social media, especially on Facebook?
- RQ2: How do nonprofit organizations' social media followers characterize the types of experiences they want to have with nonprofit organizations through social media, especially on Facebook?
- RQ3: What are the similarities and differences between nonprofit social media professionals' and social media followers' perspectives about nonprofit

organizations' current social media practices, especially those on Facebook?

Dissertation Outline

In Chapter 2, I describe the methodology of the research. First, I conduct face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with nonprofit professionals who have the primary responsibility for their organization's social media accounts. Second, I conduct focus groups with individuals who follow some of the participating organizations on social media.

In Chapter 3 and 4, I present findings based on my iterative and largely inductive analysis of interview and focus group data. Chapter 3 describes findings from interviews with nonprofit professionals, in which I explore the various aspects of communication that nonprofit organizations intend to foster on social media through the lens of Kent and Taylor's five principles of dialogue (2002). In Chapter 4, I describe findings from the focus groups with social media followers, identifying three major themes that characterize the kinds of experiences these participants want to have with nonprofit organizations through social media—connection, communication, and involvement.

In Chapter 5, I compare findings from the interviews and focus groups to explore the similarities and differences between nonprofit professionals' and social media followers' perspectives about nonprofit organizations' current social media practices. I find that they share the belief that social media can help nonprofit organizations to foster a community based on shared interest in the cause. The desired community is built upon connections, shaped by dialogic communication, and bears the risk of encountering unanticipated comments.

In Chapter 6, I further synthesize the findings of this research. By analyzing interview and focus group data from the multiple stakeholders that are necessary actors in dialogic communication, I find that nonprofit professionals who are primarily responsible for social media in their organizations try to catalyze a culture of dialogue within a community that encourages sharing, mutual support and connections. And the active role they have played to facilitate and moderate online discussion expands our understanding about nonprofit organizations' roles in public relations practice. To better understand how the dialogic culture that nonprofit professionals work to cultivate on social media works within the larger organizational context, as well as to what extent they balance the values and needs of the online community with other organizational priorities, I conclude by describing several recommendations for future work.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Little research has been conducted to understand how organizational users use social media through a qualitative lens. Existing research does not explain the reasons behind nonprofit organizations' choice of social media platforms and strategies, nor do they address whether the actual use conforms with the intended use (Phetean et al, 2013). A qualitative inquiry is ideally suited for providing the more nuanced understanding of social media practice that will be valuable.

This research contributes a multi-stakeholder understanding of the intentions, perceptions, and experiences of those individuals implicated in the dialogic communication around nonprofit organizations' social media pages. In the first study, I conduct face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with nonprofit professionals who have primary responsibility for managing and contributing to their organization's social media accounts. In the second study, I conducted focus groups with individuals who follow the organizations on social media whose social media professions participated in the interview study. Both methods are well suited for the exploration of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives (Richardson, Dohrenwend & Klein, 1965; Smith, 1975). Open-ended questions in both methods allow researchers to elicit responses in participants' own terms and to follow up with additional questions to explore unanticipated issues (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005).

The process of data collection and analysis—for both interviews and focus groups—is guided by grounded theory, a qualitative research method that combines “the depth and richness of qualitative interpretive traditions with the logic, rigor and systematic analysis inherent in quantitative survey research” (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 548). By

constantly comparing data, categories and themes, grounded theory applies a primarily inductive process to explore issues, phenomena and understandings in a natural setting, and builds conceptual frameworks by looking into the richness of lived experience and subtlety of observational context (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). It allows theoretical frameworks and analytic interpretations to emerge from the empirical data rather than being imposed upon it (Walker & Myrick, 2006; Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Due to the lack of in-depth understanding of the dialogic use of social media by nonprofit organizations, my research questions are exploratory. A grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis is most suitable for this type of exploratory research, for it sheds lights on new hypotheses rather than testing them (Babbie, 2013). It also enables me to study the topic without making assumptions prior to the collection of evidence.

Readers of this dissertation, as with any interpretivist qualitative work, need to be mindful of the subjectivity of the researcher and participants when making sense of the findings. As a researcher with a particular interest in the communicative characteristics of social media use, my inclination was to search for patterns and themes about communicative activities while interpreting the data. Although this decision helped to focus and scope my analysis, it might have hidden or minimized other characteristics that could otherwise have emerged from the data. For example, during the interviews I asked SMPPs general questions about the organizational context within which they planned and executed social media tactics. In addition to the data that I chose to explore in depth here, participants also shared details about the internal politics of resource distribution, which may be of great interest to researchers who intend to examine the effects of

organizational factors on social media implementation. From the participants' side, SMPPs generally displayed an optimistic attitude about the potential benefits that social media can offer for their organizations. As their jobs could be contingent on realizing these benefits, further research is needed to more clearly articulate the rationale and motivation behind this sense of enthusiasm.

It is also noteworthy that subjectivity, itself, cannot be seen as a limitation; it reflects a qualitative paradigm that views reality as socially constructed and open to personal interpretations (McMurray, 2011). Indeed, the rigour of my data collection and analysis is assured by following recommended procedures of grounded theory, which as a qualitative method does not aim for statistical generalization. Rather, it allows researchers to assess the potential transferability of the findings to other similar situations and contexts (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). For future research focused on heuristics of representativeness and generalizability, I recommend numerous directions for future work in the conclusion.

Because of the pervasive and predominant use of Facebook among nonprofit organizations, interview and focus group questions were structured around the use of this particular social media platform. Facebook is the most used social media platform among both individuals and organizations. It ranks the second most visited site worldwide, only behind Google (Alexa, 2015). In the United States, 92 percent of the 400 most successful fundraising organizations are active on Facebook (Barnes, 2014). The large user base of Facebook suggests that findings of this research will be of great value to organizations that aim to reach and engage as many people as possible through their social media activities. Facebook is also one of the most well-studied social media platforms in public

relations and nonprofit studies. Its usefulness in meeting various organizational objectives has been under consistent academic focus (e.g., Waters et al., 2009; Guo & Saxton, 2013; Nah & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). It is also well-suited for studying dialogic communication and relationship-building practices because it is found to be more effective in generating and maintaining conversations than other social media platforms including Twitter (Phethean et al., 2013). In addition, Facebook offers a wide array of options for users to engage with organizations: They can click on “like” and “share” buttons to interact with the post, or type in the reply field to interact more directly with the poster. As computer-mediated interactions encompass various types of interactive and dialogic activities (McMillan, 2002a, 2002b), such a variety of interaction mechanisms can facilitate the classification and differentiation of social media activities.

Although I framed key questions around Facebook use, interviews and focus groups participants were free to discuss their experiences with other social media platforms, if these experiences were relevant to the questions.

Study I: Social Media Practice of Nonprofit Social Media Point Persons

In study I, I conducted semi-structured interviews with employees from a variety of nonprofit organizations who each self-identified as being primarily responsible for the social media planning and strategy development in the organization. Interviewees’ job titles varied from Social Media Intern, New Media and Web Coordinator, Communications Manager, Vice President of Marketing, to Executive Director. All interviewees were significantly involved in the day-to-day social media activities of the

nonprofit organizations with which they worked. In this research I refer to these individuals as social media point persons (SMPPs).

From October 2014 through July 2015, I conducted 28 semi-structured interviews with 19 SMPPs from 19 nonprofit organizations in Indianapolis, Indiana. I recruited participants through Facebook messages and via email referrals by people in my own social network. SMPPs ranged in age from 24 to 74 and included 2 male and 17 female participants.

In order to ensure that our understanding of social media is not biased toward use honed for any one particular mission or service area, I recruited participants strategically from nonprofit organizations with varied NTEE codes until my data analysis reached theoretical saturation across the diversity of sample organizations. The final sample included participants representing human service organizations ($n = 5$), arts and humanities organizations ($n = 4$), health organizations ($n = 3$), higher education and educational institutes ($n = 2$), foundations ($n = 2$), environmental organizations ($n = 2$), and a church ($n = 1$). Details about organizations' service areas and the job titles of their SMPPs are listed in Table 1. I designed the interview protocol in two sessions. Some participants chose to do both sessions back-to-back, whereas others selected two separate dates to complete the interview. Each pair of interviews lasted from 34 to 200 minutes (81 minutes, on average) per participant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Collection

The protocol for the first interview session was designed to enable participants to reconstruct the organizational context in which the participants developed their social

media tactics. It included three strands of questions. The first set of questions focused on SMPPs' personal and professional experiences with social media. Because nonprofit organizations are relatively new to social media (Brainard & Brinkerhoff, 2004), SMPPs may not have a lot of resources to draw their knowledge from. It is possible that they learn about social media at work or in their personal lives. The second set of questions focused on situating SMPPs' role in the organization. As social media use in an organizational context may require teamwork, these questions were developed to explore to what extent SMPPs' rank in the organizational hierarchy influenced the actual implementation of social media tactics (Curtis et al., 2010; Hackler & Saxton, 2007). The third set of questions were designed to elicit SMPPs' opinions about the atmosphere within the organization towards social media, which may shed light on some of the internal factors that affect its use.

Interview session I was mainly structured to answer the following questions:

- What were SMPPs' past experiences with social media, including their personal and professional use of different social media platforms?
- What was the nature of their current position and their social media assignments?
- What organizational factors influenced their social media practices?
- What role did social media play in the overarching philosophy and culture of the organization?

During this session, I also asked participants to sketch the network of social media support within the organization. The purpose of this exercise was to help visualize SMPPs' work flow and to understand how social media was positioned among other

platforms and modalities in organizational communication. I was particularly interested in the types of information SMPPs received from co-workers, volunteers and other stakeholders, whether they were texts, videos, or graphics. Participants used arrows to indicate the direction of the information, whether it was supplied to them as a piece of content to put on Facebook, or it was a public comment they received and directed to related departments.

Interview session II focused on understanding SMPPs' reflections about concrete instances of social media use. The purpose of this session was to discover how social media tactics were carried out on a day-to-day basis, and whether they were consistent with the general blueprint shared in the first session. In this session I asked participants to elaborate on their motivation and strategies behind posts that I had pre-selected, such as their choice of timing, wording, pictures and videos if any, and opinions on public comments. SMPPs also had the opportunity to reflect on posts they believed were worth discussion. Then I asked them to share their personal objectives as well as the organizational objectives for future social media use, in order to: 1) explore if dialogic communication was, indeed, valued and among organizations' priorities, and 2) understand the challenges of social media use, and to what extent the technology or the organization played a role in these challenges.

Interview session II was developed around the following questions:

- What were SMPPs' tactics with Facebook and other social media platforms, if applicable?
- What were the challenges and benefits of using social media for their organizations?

- What were their ideal activities on social media, and obstacles to achieve these ideals?
- What was the goal for the future use of social media?

In order to classify interactions, any public response to these pre-selected posts, such as likes, shares and comments, were recorded for further analysis.

Per best practice in grounded theory (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross & Rusk, 2007), I iteratively refined the interview protocol as findings from previous interviews informed subsequent interviews. For example, as SMPPs in earlier interviews reported using Facebook analytics to evaluate social media performance, I added the question “did you use social media data or analytics” into the interview protocol and asked SMPPs to explain the way they used those data.

Data Analysis

Following the best practices of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Draucker, et al., 2007), I conducted multiple phases of data analysis using a constant comparative coding strategy.

The open, inductive coding of interview transcripts surfaced a wide variety of strategies and tactics in the use of social media. Subsequent axial coding, which helped me to understand the relationships between the low-level tactics and the high-level strategies, foregrounded various characteristics that reflected the nature of the communication SMPPs wanted to foster. Lastly, I conducted selective coding to relate many characteristics to a few core categories that are mostly like to reflect the themes of my findings. This coding process enabled me to categorize communication characteristics

and verify emerging themes until reaching a point of theoretical saturation (i.e., additional data no longer contributes to new properties about a theme).

As I was engaged in the iterative process of grounded theory, I shifted back and forth between the interview data and the research literature and found that most of these communicative characteristics were aligned with the conceptual map of dialogic communication proposed by Kent and Taylor (2002): mutuality, empathy, propinquity, risk and commitment. The theoretical framework of dialogic principles draws from scholarship in philosophy (Buber, 1970), communication (Johannesen, 1990), and public relations (Pearson, 1989). As Table 1 indicates, Kent and Taylor (2002) developed the framework to characterize various tenets of dialogue in public relations: mutuality (characterized by collaboration and mutual equality), empathy (characterized by supportiveness, communal orientation and confirmation), propinquity (characterized by immediacy of presence, temporal flow and engagement), risk (characterized by vulnerability, unanticipated consequences and recognition of strange otherness) and commitment (characterized by genuineness, commitment to conversation and commitment to interpretation). In addition to their theoretical significance, these tenets have concrete applicability in an organizational context.

Table 1: Dialogic Tenets and Characteristics

Dialogic tenets	Characteristics
Mutuality	Collaboration Mutual equality
Propinquity	Immediacy of presence Temporal flow Engagement
Empathy	Supportiveness Communal orientation Confirmation
Risk	Vulnerability Unanticipated consequences Recognition of strange otherness
Commitment	Genuineness Commitment to conversation Commitment to interpretation

Using the dialogic tenets and characteristics as the analytic framework, I completed another round of data analysis, coding communication characteristics of strategies and tactics into each tenet and characteristic. Details of my findings are presented in Chapter 3.

Study II: Feedback of Social Media Followers

In this study, I collected data through focus groups with individuals who were following some of the participating organizations on social media. The focus groups enabled a unique understanding of: 1) whether current nonprofit practices on social media were aligned with public expectations, and 2) to what extent the public reacted to nonprofit organizations' social media tactics.

I asked SMPPs who participated in study I to post a message on my behalf to recruit focus group participants from their social media followers. Most of the SMPPs who agreed to help made the announcement on the organization's Facebook page; a few of them also passed the message through email and word-of-mouth. Between March 2016

and June 2016, I conducted 6 focus groups with 26 individuals who followed 5 participating nonprofit organizations on Facebook (Table 2). The number of participants for each focus group ranged from 1 to 9. Participants who responded to the recruiting messages followed 5 out of the 19 organizations represented in study I, including: 2 human service organizations, 2 health organizations and 1 arts and humanities organization. Including 5 males and 21 females, this pool of participants represented a range of nonprofit stakeholders such as employees, clients, customers, volunteers, patrons, donors and fundraisers. Focus groups ranged in duration from 50 minutes to 107 minutes (with an average duration of 67.5 minutes). De-identified information about focus group participants is presented in Table 2, grouped by the participating organizations they followed.

Table 2: Organizations and Individuals Participating in Interviews and Focus Groups

Organization ID	Mission/Service Area	Social Media Point Person (Interviewee): Pseudonym and Job Title	Facebook Follower (Focus Group Participant): Pseudonym and Relationship to the Organization
01	Human Services	Nora, Online Marketing Manager	Sophia, customer Peter, former employee Madison, customer Evelyn, customer Savannah, customer
			John, customer (only participant who had a separate session)
02	Arts and Humanities	Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator	Anna, patron James, patron Mike, patron Lucy, patron Eleanor, patron Henry, patron Leo, patron
03	Health	Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator	Naomi, volunteer and fundraiser Lauren, client
04	Health	Diana, Program Assistant	Taylor, donor Ruby, donor Alexis, donor Vivian, donor Leah, donor Penelope, donor Harper, donor Claire, donor Kylie, donor
05	Human Services	Mary, Chief Communication Officer	Grace, employee Olivia, volunteer
06	Human Services	Linda, Communications Manager	N/A
07	Human Services	Lily, Social Media Intern	N/A
08	Arts and Humanities	Emily, Director of Digital Communication	N/A

Organization ID	Mission/Service Area	Social Media Point Person (Interviewee): Pseudonym and Job Title	Facebook Follower (Focus Group Participant): Pseudonym and Relationship to the Organization
09	Foundation	Bill, Director of Creative and Digital	N/A
10	Foundation	Steve, Social Media Strategist	N/A
11	Church	Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication	N/A
12	Environment	Chloe, Programs Coordinator	N/A
13	Education	Zoey, Principal	N/A
14	Higher Education	Lydia, Communications Specialist	N/A
15	Human Services	Julia, Marketing Director	N/A
16	Environment	Cora, Director of Public Relations	N/A
17	Arts and Humanities	Sara, Executive Director	N/A
18	Arts and Humanities	Chelsea, Vice President of Marketing	N/A
19	Health	Alice, Community Engagement Coordinator	N/A

Data Collection

The first half of each focus group session focused on understanding participants' experiences with the participating organization: how they got connected on Facebook, what they expected for social media activities, what feature(s) of the social media platform made them feel being involved, engaged or interacting with the organization, and what they believed was the goal for the organization's use of social media. Because the purpose of focus groups was to explore public perceptions of nonprofit organizations'

current social media use, some questions were designed to elicit feedback about practices reflected in previous interviews. To collect more concrete feedback, I presented each focus group with 4 posts which I have used in the interview with the organization the participants followed, and asked for participants' opinions to these posts.

In the second half of the session, I invited participants to share their understandings explicitly about four major goals that emerged from previous interviews with nonprofit SMPPs, that the participating organizations attempted to achieve with their social media tactics: engagement, dialogue, relationship and community building. In this second half of the session, I also invited participants to share their experiences with other social media platforms, in addition to Facebook and additional nonprofit organizations.

In general, the focus group was structured around the following key questions:

- How did social media followers of nonprofit organizations experience dialogue, as well as other types of engagement, with these nonprofit organizations?
- What were the activities that made followers think they were engaged with nonprofit organizations on social media?
- How did followers perceive the purposes of nonprofit organizations' social media tactics, such as fostering engagement, promoting dialogues, building relationships, and constructing communities? Were they on the same page, or did they expect for different outcomes from their social media experience?

Data Analysis

Because the focus group study was designed to interrogate findings from the interview study, I began with deductive coding based on the framework of dialogic

principles (Kent & Taylor, 2002), which has been adopted as an analytic lens for analyzing the interview data in study I. Yet during my initial attempt at deductive analysis applying this same analytic lens to the focus group data, I found that Kent and Taylor's framework of dialogic principles overwhelmingly emphasizes the role of the organization. As such, they do not completely reflect—although they do not conflict with, either—the voices of the focus group participants.

As a result, I shifted back to analyzing the focus group data taking the same coding procedure as I did for the interview data—open coding first, followed by axial coding, and selective coding. Through inductive data analysis, I verified that I had achieved theoretical saturation in the identification of three major themes: connection, communication, and involvement. These themes, embodied in the motivations, purposes and expectations of focus group participants, reflected the primary reasons offered for why the public choose to follow and interact with nonprofit organizations on social media.

Characteristics of each of these three themes are presented in detail in Chapter 4.

Comparative Analysis of the Interview and Focus Group Data

Finally, I conducted a comparative analysis of the interview and focus group data, comparing and contrasting the goals and expectations of SMPPs and their followers. For this comparative analysis, I applied the themes derived from the focus group study to the interview data, because the three major themes emerged from focus group analysis were broader and more encompassing than the dialogic principles. Patterns related to connection, communication and involvement emerged repeatedly in both focus group discussions and interviews. I revisited the interview transcripts and coded data related to each of the three themes. Through a cross-cutting comparison between the interview data

and the focus group data, I identified and refined three values shared by both SMPPs and their followers: connection (derived directly from the connection theme), dialogue (a more precise characterization of the value of communication shared by both stakeholder groups), and community (the value of involvement shared among both stakeholder groups). The values of connection and dialogue played important roles in fostering a community appealing to both SMPPs and their followers. An in-depth analysis of interview and focus group data reveals there is little disagreement among participants about the importance of these three values; instead, they express a diversity of thoughts and understandings about how these values can be enacted in practice. In instances when participants present complementary views to explain their activities and motives, I try to reflect these differences in my explanation of each value.

The three shared values and their interrelationships are examined and presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER THREE: DIALOGIC TACTICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA POINT PERSONS

Whereas previous survey-based research reported that nonprofit organizations frequently lacked clear strategies for social media use (Hackler & Saxton, 2007; Young 2012), all social media point persons (SMPPs) in this study purposively plan, implement and adjust their social media strategies. And in contrast to the inferences drawn from content analyses of social media feeds that nonprofit organizations are failing to live up to the dialogic potential of social media (e.g., Saxton et al. , 2007; Water & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), most social media tactics employed by SMPPs in this research demonstrate a strong commitment to fostering dialogue. Indeed, my analysis finds that most of their tactics correspond to one or more of the dialogic principles framed by Kent and Taylor (2002), including mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment. These principles characterize the core values of dialogic communication, which are interwoven and mutually reinforcing in SMPPs' social media practices.

Mutuality

The principle of mutuality, characterized by a collaborative orientation and a spirit of mutual equality, acknowledges that “organizations and publics are inextricably tied together” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 25). The collaborative orientation is exemplified in the way that people seek to “understand the positions of others and how people reached those positions,” as in a dialogue, no one is supposed to “possess absolute truth” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 25). The willingness to open oneself up and to embrace the positions of others are essential to collaboration. The spirit of mutual equality emphasizes that all parties involved in dialogue should be “viewed as persons and not as objects” and

that “the exercise of power or superiority should be avoided” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 25).

The principle of mutuality is the most central to the strategies and tactics employed by SMPPs, particularly in their explicit requests for input from their audiences. SMPPs do not view audiences merely as targets for organizational messages, but rather, as valuable partners in contributing content and voicing opinions. For example:

We are always looking for people who have been touched by a[n organizational] grant... to share their story with our community. So I actually reached out to her [on Facebook] ... about whether she’s interested in sharing her story and working with us. So that’s something that I am always watching for in comments. (Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization)

Nearly all SMPPs mention inviting content from the public to make the conversation carried out on social media more mutual. Some SMPPs do so by hosting online contests: “So like the photo contest, it’s a two-way conversation ... I want people to talk back to us, and we can constantly have that conversation” (Chelsea, Vice President of Marketing of organization #18, an arts and humanities organization). Others use weekly rhythms to set expectations for alumnae to share their photos every Thursday “to energize, reengage, and show off our rich history” (Linda, Communications Manager of organization #06, a human services organization). Other tactics that reflect the collaborative nature of dialogue include encouraging followers to redistribute posts via their networks: “I try constantly to reach people through grassroots efforts... share the story about what we are doing and spread the word about events we are having.... It’s having those partnerships that plays a huge role in nonprofits” (Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization).

SMPPs also work to give their organization a more personal presence on social media to shift the tone of organizational communication; this shift reduces the power disparity between the organization and its followers, making the dialogue more like that between friends. For example, Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute, wants her organization to be “seen more than just a brand”, Chelsea, Vice President of Marketing of organization #18, an arts and humanities organization, likes to show the “human aspect” of her organization, and Alice, Community Engagement Coordinator of organization #19, a health organization, tries to “put a face on an organization.” And they operationalize these ideas in tactics such as leaving the name of corresponding staff in posts, with the belief that it would help foster positive interactions:

We found people are, especially when they are angry, are more likely to... respond positively to our comment if they know we were responding personally and not just as the museum. They realized we were people [laughter]. So we always just sign our names. (Emily, Director of Digital Communication of organization #08, an arts and humanities organization)

The principle of mutuality is also reflected by SMPPs’ responsiveness to different voices, even if some of them are negative. Despite their ability to remove challenging comments from the public domain, SMPPs try to understand how people form their opinions and reply accordingly, sometimes through strategic collaboration with the public. One SMPP notes that if she takes the time to respond to questions that are framed negatively, it models and sets the stage for the public to respond in kind, which can have an even larger positive impact on social media:

There have been times that people have questions about our mission, and it’s not been nice conversation at all.... I think it is good for the public to see that we care enough to respond, that we take time to craft a comment to address concerns, and speaks to what we feel important, and what we want people to do. And also I see once we’ve done that, then a lot of times

people that are supporters of ours... will come to our defense. And sometimes people doing that over us makes a bigger impact. (Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization)

The principle of mutuality underscores the ethical aspect of dialogue, that the communication process should be mutual instead of being manipulated or dominated by any party (Habermas, 1990). This principle is exemplified by SMPPs' tactics to empower their followers to contribute their content and opinion and by crafting a voice for their own organizational communication, making it more personal so as to minimize the power dynamic between the organization and the public.

Propinquity

The principle of propinquity is characterized by immediacy of presence, temporal flow and engagement (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). In an organizational context, dialogic propinquity means that organizations are willing to involve the public in discussions of matters that may affect them and that the public have the intention and ability to communicate with organizations about their needs and concerns.

Immediacy of presence suggests that dialogue is held in a "shared space" on current issues, rather than "after decisions have been made" (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). SMPPs' intention to have "real-time conversation" specifically echoes the immediacy of social media presence (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church). To facilitate conversations in real time, one common tactic is to create easy-to-share content such as themed pictures for special occasions, for example:

[We post] themed, digital valentines every year, and [our Facebook followers] go nuts. Everybody loves them; everybody shares them. It's great, easy content and gives everybody a warm fuzzy. (Chelsea, Vice

President of Marketing of organization #18, an arts and humanities organization)

Temporal flow focuses on moving past and present understandings towards a shared future that is “both equitable and acceptable to all involved” in the dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). This feature is exemplified in SMPPs’ efforts to solve existing problems for stakeholders through social media, as they are working towards a solution that can be accepted by all parties involved. SMPPs report multiple strategies and workflows, all oriented toward helping to solve problems that are shared on social media, for example:

So we’ll direct them to [the] appropriate person on campus to talk to, or we’ll direct them to the website for more information, or you know if somebody is having a big problem, if they are on campus we can contact [the staff who is responsible] and she’ll get in touch with that student... make sure everything is okay. (Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute)

Because social media is primarily used to communicate solutions of the organization, SMPPs are particularly careful with their tone, timing and choice of words. As comments and responses on Facebook are visible to the public, miscommunication of SMPPs would not only jeopardize their efforts to provide an acceptable solution, but also harm the reputation of their organization, for example: “So before I commented back... I contact[ed] the Digital Strategist first just to say ‘hey I’m gonna respond to this person here is what I’m gonna say’” (Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute).

Sometimes SMPPs would take the communication off social media so stakeholders can get more specific solutions, instead of standard replies, for their inquiries:

Depending on what their question is ... So if that is a really quick, easy question, like “where is this event located”, I will just shoot them that answer in a Facebook message. If it’s something that would go a little more in depth, I will ask for their email address or share ours with them to take that conversation off the social media. (Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization)

Engagement, the third feature of propinquity, means that dialogic participants are willing to “give their whole selves to encounters” rather than maintaining a status of neutrality or as an observer (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). It encourages dialogic participants to express themselves instead of staying neutral. My analysis suggests that SMPPs’ tactics of encouraging stakeholders to share their opinions tend to reflect the value of engagement. Using posts that contain questions to solicit feedback, for example, is a common practice among many SMPPs, for they believe that by asking a question, they can “get people thinking” (Mary, Chief Communication Officer of organization #05, a human services organization). SMPPs also take advantage of the affordances of tagging on social media platforms, encouraging audiences to tag the organization in their posts so she (and the organization, by proxy) can be part of their conversations, as well. For example, Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization, reports that she asks volunteers to share their first volunteering experience on Facebook and to tag the organization, so she can say “congratulations” and also asks the volunteer to keep the organization “posted on all the fun things that happened” during volunteering activities. She sees this kind of dialogue as an effective way to keep people “engaged.”

While SMPPs apply various tactics to promote engagement among followers, they want to promote the positions of their organizations, as well. This intention is exemplified by posts that provide actionable information related to the mission of the

organization. For example, Sara, Executive Director of organization #17, an arts and humanities organization serving youth populations, shares her experience of using Facebook to appeal to parents of their students, warning them of a group that has been approaching young people around schools and parks and presenting them with extremist propaganda about minority groups. Her intent here is to alert parents so that they understand the goals and tactics of this group and so that they can intervene if their children are approached:

That's the [news] campaign we are working on... so [parents] can read it and know what this group is about...Well, they are targeting Indianapolis in July, and we just knew about it, so try to make people aware of this group is coming to Indianapolis.... what they are doing is not illegal, we can't keep them from doing it, but we are trying to make people aware of what they are really telling these kids, so parents would know, and if they don't want their kids to hear of that, they will keep them away from them. (Sara, Executive Director of organization #17, an arts and humanities organization)

The principle of propinquity elaborates on the conditions and purposes of dialogue. Features of engagement and immediacy of presence suggest that in order to have dialogue, every party should be willing to disclose their position and actively participate in the dialogic process, rather than staying neutral. The temporal flow sheds light on the end goal of dialogue, which is to seek for an acceptable and equitable future for every party involved (Kent & Taylor, 2002). For SMPPs, while the end goal of dialogue is sometimes a concrete solution to a mission-related issue, it is also construed to mean, in a more abstract sense, a community based on shared values and mutual understandings.

Empathy

Kent and Taylor borrow the term empathy from the communication and psychology literatures, defining it for public relations scholarship as “the atmosphere of

support and trust” for dialogue to succeed (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 27). By placing themselves in the position of the public, they assert that public relations and communication staff should try every means to facilitate the dialogue. The dialogic principle of empathy encompasses supportiveness, a communal orientation and confirmation. Supportiveness suggests that organizations provide scaffolding that encourages dialogue, such as ensuring accessibility to the media or venues in which the dialogue is being held, ensuring the availability of materials that support the dialogue, and working towards mutual understandings during the dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

My analysis suggests that SMPPs develop many tactics to support their audiences in engaging in dialogue. One strategy adopted by nearly all SMPPs in this study is to limit the amount of content posted to their newsfeed so that they don’t overload their followers with an excessive amount of information. Indeed, many SMPPs report that the frequency and number of postings are carefully planned, for example:

I just think it’s becoming a lot better when we don’t put as many [posts] on a daily basis, we don’t overwhelm people with those, so that’s why I try to either do... something about a camp that happened previously that weekend or just something—words of wisdom, inspirational quotes, things about nature. (Lily, Social Media Intern of organization #07, a human services organization)

In order to help as many people as possible access the information that will enable them to participate in dialogue, SMPPs actively seek to distribute information through multiple media channels so it can reach all stakeholders, even those who are less familiar with social media or the internet, in general. One SMPP notes that some audiences “do not even have email addresses,” yet she does not want to “push them aside completely” because they are also important stakeholders. Therefore, she tries to “balance using this

new technology” with the continuous use of “more traditional” forms of communications (Chloe, Programs Coordinator of organization # 12, an environment organization).

In Kent and Taylor’s original framework, the operationalization of the communal orientation of empathy seems to emphasize the community-building function of communication in public relations. With new communication technologies, Kent and Taylor suggest that individuals and organizations are “becoming inextricably linked”; through communications they can “create, rebuild, and change local and global communities” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 27). Although SMPPs do not report specific tactics that achieve change at these scales, they are actively considering the role of social media in building more communal relationships. Some of them believe Facebook can help them to achieve communal relationships by getting “virtual conversations to become real-time conversations” (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church) and by connecting community members “on an emotional basis” (Steve, Social Media Strategist of organization #10, a foundation). Others affirm that the ultimate goal of community building is to achieve positive change, and see social media as a means to affect that change on individuals’ lives, for example:

My idea of having a strong social media presence is to have an audience who not just likes you or follows you, but actually feels that if they come to our page they would see something that they enjoy seeing—or that motivated them, educated them, or made them feel good, or put a light in their day. And then they keep coming back, and we know that we impacted them positively. (Diana, Program Assistant of organization #04, a health organization)

SMPPs also try to demonstrate their commitment to be part of a larger community of organizations that share the same mission or are devoted to the same cause. For example, Chloe, Programs Coordinator of organization # 12, an environment organization, reports posting regularly about her organization’s involvement in

Conservation Day for the purpose of “reiterating” their support for environmental priorities. On social media, the communal orientation is primarily exemplified by SMPPs’ interactions with other organizations and groups in the community, such as following these entities, tagging them in the posts and comments, or reposting content from their profile pages. Many SMPPs also see it as an opportunity to show their support for organizational partnerships. For example:

So we partner with them, we share their content, we mention them, they mention us, so it’s kind of a partnership. (Steve, Social Media Strategist of organization #10, a foundation)

We are able to tag an organization that is also on Facebook, we do. Just to show partnerships with people, just to show we support them, their work... just a good thing to do. (Alice, Community Engagement Coordinator of organization #19, a health organization)

And SMPPs also want to showcase their communal orientation to the public.

Indeed, an important reason for SMPPs to engage in inter-organizational interactions is to highlight their role as a caring member of the community:

When we like, share and comment on another organization’s post, it shows their fans, ‘hey [our organization] is out there, they are paying attention, they are an invaluable member of the community.’... So I think that’s really important because I think it gives us more credibility within the community. (Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization)

The third facet of empathy, confirmation, refers to the need for participants in dialogue to acknowledge the voice of others (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In public relations, confirmation suggests that organizations should recognize different voices and different opinions, including and especially those with whom there might be disagreement, as people who feel ignored are less likely to engage in further dialogue. In practice, confirmation is exemplified by SMPPs’ efforts to “comment back or like” the comments left on the Facebook profile page, which is principally how they show the public that they

are “listening to them” (Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization).

SMPPs, in general, report numerous strategies and tactics that embody the dialogic principle of empathy. They report being dedicated to offering sufficient—but not overwhelming—information, which forms the foundation of dialogue; they acknowledge feedback, which encourages further engagement. The communal orientation of empathy is exemplified by SMPPs’ tactics to expand the dialogue from among a couple of communicators to a larger community surrounding the organization or the subject.

Risk

The dialogic principle of risk underscores the potential risk inherent in any genuine, unscripted dialogue. Risk has three core characteristics—vulnerability, unanticipated consequences, and recognition of strange otherness (Kent & Taylor, 2002). All three of these characteristics are in line with the challenges perceived or experienced by SMPPs as they engage with the public on social media.

Kent and Taylor emphasize the risk of vulnerability in dialogue, that participants are “vulnerable to manipulation or ridicule by other parties involved” (2002, p. 28). Nearly all SMPPs recognize that one of the challenges of hosting discussions in an open forum such as Facebook is moderating rude comments or personal attacks against discussants. Some participants noted using built-in tools developed by Facebook as a starting point, for example to filter out “foul language,” and if commenters “try a misspelling” to “bypass” the filter, she would “go and hide that comment” (Nora, Online Marketing Manager of organization #01, a human services organization). But beyond the use of these more automatic features, which largely work invisibly in the background,

SMPPs expressed a desire to find appropriate ways to hold people accountable for their actions online:

Sometimes people say things in social media because they can get by with it ...that's bullying... not only ... I might delete... [but also] call these people accountable, and say, "you're gonna post like that you will be deleted from our system, you can't get by with that..." .And it's not just a matter of not being able to handle it when people disagree with me, or disagree with something [the organization] said, that I can live with it, it's when it goes over that mark, that line of respectful discourse. (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church)

The quote above also points to a key distinction about dialogue, emphasized by multiple SMPPs, that the appropriateness of discourse should not hinge on agreement. This perspective aligns with the dialogic framework of Kent and Taylor, who contend that disagreement is inherent in dialogic communication, exemplifying a sense of strange otherness—"a consciousness of the fact that the 'other' is not the same as oneself—nor should they be" (2002, p. 29). The recognition of strange otherness suggests that the purpose of dialogue is not to forge agreement. Instead, it offers opportunities to share diverse opinions. SMPPs realize that agreement cannot be always reached and that people should be allowed to express different opinions; as such, they report frequently leaving negative comments about the organization on the Facebook page if they are not insulting or flaming. Some SMPPs believe it would help the public understand that organization is open to their voices, positive and negative: "... people need to hear our point of view on that, and to know how we would handle such a thing, and also know that we can take something that is not rosy" (Diana, Program Assistant of organization #04, a health organization). And as Mary, Chief Communication Officer of organization #05, a human services organization, explains, their responsiveness both to "good stuff or bad stuff" demonstrates that the organization is "a part of community."

From the public relations perspective, Kent and Taylor contend organizations should accept individuals as unique parties and value the differences they bring into the dialogic relationship. In practice, SMPPs are mindful of the differences among their audiences and they are committed to respecting such diversity. This mindset is exemplified by SMPPs' attention to content and wording. For example, one SMPP of an international human services organization says she needs to be extremely careful with words like "Christmas" and "Thanksgiving" because the organization needs to recognize national holidays in other countries and respect the fact that people elsewhere are celebrating holidays in different ways (Lily, Social Media Intern of organization #07, a human services organization).

The risk of unanticipated consequences emphasizes that the spontaneity of dialogue can yield unpredictable outcomes. SMPPs know that they cannot maintain full control over online communication, neither do they expect to. Especially with a profile page that is open to the public, people can and do interpret organizational messages in numerous ways, and they bring those diverse interpretations into discussions. In practice, SMPPs seem to focus on reducing the likelihood of some kinds of unpredictable outcomes, especially minimizing the likelihood of unanticipated misconceptions. Although social media allows some degree of flexibility in presenting and editing information, they express caution in gatekeeping organizational information, which is difficult to retract, "once it is up":

Once it is up, as we all know, it is there. That's how social media is. We can't really take it back. You can update it, correct it, but if someone may have screenshotted it and they want to make fun of you about it, then they can. And part of it is to keep our reputation, held to high standard. (Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization)

SMPPs also report using disclaimers to shield the organization from the unanticipated consequences of dialogue, especially when SMPPs want to be clear that they are articulating their personal opinions rather than speaking on behalf of the organization. For example, one SMPP says she has “a disclaimer” on her “personal page” to claim opinions posted on that page do not represent the organization she works for (Sara, Executive Director of organization #17, an arts and humanities organization).

While crafting the messages, SMPPs also anticipate what kinds of words might trigger unwanted consequences. For example, Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization, explains why she would avoid using the term “contributing partner” to describe the role of her organization in a joint event with other organizations:

So “contributing partner”, some people interpret that as, you are pouring money into this channel, and that can be a sensitive topic. We don’t want to be seen as pouring money into this, we want to pour money into our mission and cause... So I mean, always being conscious with that kind of thing. (Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization)

In addition to Kent and Taylor’s framework of three types of risk inherent in dialogue, I also find that dialogue, itself, offers a means to self-regulate risk, if participants continue exchanging information to promote mutual understandings. Some SMPPs observe that audiences are willing to self-moderate the discussion:

Some of those [comments] are positive some of those are negative, but really it’s self-moderating, because even the negative one, there are people that were backing what we had to say, where we didn’t have to feel that we had to come out and defend ourselves. (Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute)

The principle of risk suggests that “parties who engage in dialogue take relational risks” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 28). In an organizational context, the exchange of

different opinions helps to reduce uncertainty and misconceptions, which according to Kent and Taylor is the reward to strong organization-public relationships. SMPPs understand that risks are inevitable in dialogue, although they actively implement various tactics to minimize risks, such as moderating discussions with the help of filters and choosing language for their posts that is more appropriate for audiences with diverse backgrounds. They also see the value of having open, unscripted dialogue, especially when they observe people who agree with their organizations being willing to join the dialogue in support of their organizational mission.

Commitment

The principle of commitment emphasizes that dialogue supports the efforts of communicators to express genuine thoughts, to respect diverse positions and values, and to work together towards shared understandings and mutual benefit (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This principle is characterized by genuineness, commitment to conversation and commitment to interpretation,

Dialogue that is genuine is “honest and forthright” in revealing one’s position (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 29). For SMPPs, genuineness is best exemplified by the authentic tone of their posts. A common practice that foregrounds genuineness in dialogue is the work of SMPPs to collect and post testimonies from clients who have been benefited by programs offered through the organization:

So I actually reached out to [a named Facebook follower], because we are always looking for people who have been touched by a grant [made by the organization] ... to share their story with our community. So I actually reached out to her and be in touch with her about whether she’s interested in sharing her story and working with us. So that’s something that I am always watching for in comments. (Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization)

Commitment to conversation emphasizes keeping the conversation going and working towards “mutual benefit” and “common understandings” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 29). I find that the use of conversational language may reflect such commitment, in particular. For instance, Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization, says she would “put conversational spin” on posts to make the dialogue ongoing among followers. SMPPs also reflect about working to keep the conversation flowing through different channels: “Whether it’s Facebook, email or phone, or they write us a letter... I want as many comments as we possibly can” (Bill, Director of Creative and Digital Marketing of organization #09, a foundation). Yet he also comments on the challenging overhead of fostering open lines of communication across so many different media in return: “I want to make sure we have the resources available to interact with all these comments that we received.”

Commitment to interpretation emphasizes the importance of intersubjectivity, where “both parties attempt to understand and appreciate the values and interests of the other” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 30). SMPPs try to respect alternative interpretations that emerge from dialogue on social media, even though some interpretations may challenge the intended agenda of the organization. For instance, Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization, notes that she understands that people “can still state their opinion.” To respect their efforts to bring different voices into the discussion, she chooses not to “hide it or obviate” negative comments from the page. And she realizes “a lot of times you do that, you just make the person to say something else.”

Meanwhile, SMPPs also seek for the right to defend their positions in the discussion, which suggests they see themselves as equal as other discussants. As Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization, notes, on behalf of the organization, she can “disagree with whatever they are saying” and “state [organization’s] stance on it.” And Sara, Executive Director of organization #17, an arts and humanities organization, uses her own experience to stress that the dialogue would be discontinued if other discussants do not appreciate the alternative interpretations she attempts to bring in:

The person from here that was trashing me on the blog, I messaged him privately, and I said, if you have a problem, let me know and we will discuss it, and she never would discuss it with me. She wants to trash me out there in writing, but I gave her the opportunity... I just dropped out the session and let it go... If you have a problem, discuss it with me privately, don’t trash me out there in public. (Sara, Executive Director of organization #17, an arts and humanities organization)

The commitment to interpretation is also reflected by SMPPs’ moderation activities, when they work to ensure that discussants have an equal opportunity to express themselves, free of condemnation and judgment. One criterion they apply to evaluate the appropriateness of online discourse is whether it is expressed in the same manner as in face-to-face conversations:

But what you say on Facebook, you need to be able to say in front of your colleagues.... There are so many opinions, so much diversity in this community. What you say could offend somebody, that’s not the biggest issue; it just needs to be that you say it with grace, with respect, and those are kinds of, I mean you say it in a way that is gracious and respectful about other people’s opinions. (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church)

Similarly to the principle of mutuality, the principle of commitment also reflects the core value of dialogic communication, that communicators should be free to disclose their genuine ideas, beliefs and positions, even though it will sometimes means that

communicators will disagree. Commitment is exemplified by SMPPs' attempts to promote mutual understandings based on intersubjectivity. Although consensus cannot be always reached among followers over certain issues, they try to ensure that all parties can state their opinions, free of condemnation or being ridiculed.

Discussion

While data from content analyses of social media posts and surveys of organizational users suggests that nonprofit organizations have under-used social media for dialogic communication (e.g., Saxton et al., 2007; Water & Jamal, 2011; Waters et al., 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Guo & Saxton, 2013), my grounded theory analysis reveals that social media practices in the nonprofit sector are carefully planned and orchestrated by SMPPs, and that both their tactics and mindsets reflect the principles of dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Through the lens of dialogic principles, dialogue is a process rather than an end product, and activities that might not appear to be interactive in real time are intentionally programmed by SMPPs to scale up dialogic communications. For example, sometimes the SMPP may withdraw from the dialogue in order to expand the dialogue from something occurring between the audience and the organization to something that engages a larger, more empowered online community. In research, this kind of "inactivity" may be hard to detect using surveys or content analysis, for these methods are good in exploring issues and activities that are visible to the eyes of researchers. Yet through the interviews, I find it is also important to understand the underlying motivations and purposes behind what SMPPs choose not to do.

My in-depth interviews with SMPPs suggest that although the practices and values of SMPPs are aligned with dialogic principles, they do not see themselves as the

primary driving force behind the dialogic process. Indeed, sometimes they work to foster a dialogic community by making their own role less visible in dialogue. Therefore, they are intentionally proactive about being *reactive*—allowing and encouraging audiences to start conversations and waiting for the right time to join. This more intentionally reactive stance suggests that in a public domain, an organization can play the role of a moderator, promoting and facilitating dialogic communication.

This moderator role, which may not require SMPPs to take part directly in the dialogue, corresponds in particular, to the dialogic principles of mutuality, risk and commitment. In an open dialogue with the public, the respect for mutuality prompts organizations to see individual participants as equals which, in turn, prevents them from interrupting others' conversations, even though they might take place within the context of an organization's social media feed. Meanwhile, revealing personal perspectives in a shared space nevertheless bears risks. It increases the chance of being opposed or attacked, especially if the conversation is taking place online where people have the ability to post from a pseudonymous account, a scenario which can correlate with more irresponsible communicative behavior (Notar, 2013; Marlin-Bennett & Thornton, 2012). While SMPPs sometimes opt to be more responsive rather than proactive in dialogue, they are nevertheless dedicated to holding people accountable for what they express, and making sure the overall environment is friendly to all discussants. Together, these communicative practices suggest that SMPPs may indeed be marshalling dialogic communication to catalyze a larger community for civic discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR: WHY INDIVIDUALS FOLLOW NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS ON FACEBOOK

In order to understand how social media audiences perceive and understand current practices, I recruited Facebook followers of nonprofit organizations of which I have interviewed the SMPPs. Because the qualitative data that has been collected and analyzed is based on their feedback of Facebook usage, I refer them as Facebook followers, although they use other social media platforms as well.

By analyzing focus group data, I find the major goal for people to follow nonprofit organizations on Facebook is to form a community that connects individuals with shared interests. Participants from different focus groups, regardless the different missions of organizations they follow, share the same idea of “being part of something” (Sophia, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). And they tend to approach the concept of community from multiple angles while discussing it in different contexts. Some participants believe social media helps to maintain connections within the community: “...social media is a way to connect if you already get people in your community... a way to keep connected with them” (Peter, former employee of organization #01, a human services organization). Others describe the atmosphere of community as a family: “I mean, you’re part of it, this’s a family, this is the group and this is what we do... again a community feeling” (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization).

To offer a more nuanced understanding about the community Facebook followers expect nonprofits to build through social media, I take a grounded theory approach to analyze focus group data. Through axial coding, I identify three major themes that

characterize the nature of the community based on perspectives of followers – connection, communication, and involvement.

Connection

The word “connection” is mentioned repeatedly when I ask participants what they like to have on social media, or for what purpose they use social media. Through focus group analysis, I find Facebook followers of nonprofit organizations want to use social media to develop two types of connections: 1) connections with other people, and 2) connections with the nonprofit organization they follow. In the following sessions I will elaborate on characteristics of these connections and outcomes of connection building.

Connections with People

As social media transcends geographical boundaries, it enables people from different areas to get connected and communicate about their shared interests. Facebook followers of nonprofit organizations are found particularly interested in opportunities to connect with other people. One participant, who volunteered for the participating organization as a fundraiser, believes these connections can glue people together and make “more of a community” (Naomi, volunteer and fundraiser of organization #03, a health organization). Another participant describes nonprofit organizations’ social media presence makes them realize “there’s a place for you” (Anna, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization). Besides Facebook, participants also use other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. According to Peter, former employee of organization #01, a human services organization, nowadays people “live on social media”. As their preferences of social media platforms vary, they expect organizations to adopt multiple platforms so people can “connect with people in different formats from

Instagram all the way to YouTube” (Peter, former employee of organization #01, a human services organization). Their feedback suggests nonprofit organizations may have an advantage in connecting people because they have a distinct mission or cause to serve. Indeed, many participants believe nonprofit organizations should take the lead to bring people with shared interests together, and form a community around the cause that concerns them all.

Although focus group questions focus on participants’ activities on social media, many of them think connection building should not happen only online, as they also want nonprofits to post about offline connections and engagement, such as “opportunities to give or to be involved” (Madison, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). These social opportunities, mostly offered through offline events, are essential to start new connections and even form the community, as Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization, explains:

You go to the event, you all hang out together, you have stuff get posted during the event maybe, then afterwards you can find them easier and become friends with them easier because you have a conversation with them during that event so that’s connecting people and slowly building up that nonprofit community, by connecting each other easier. (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization)

And social media can help nonprofit organizations to disseminate event information. A participant who recently relocated to the city says that without social media, she does not know “where to look to find events” (Evelyn, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). Another participant expresses that among all news outlets, social media is the favorite one when she searches for events:

I attend a lot of events that I see, you know, that nonprofit groups I follow, when they post their event, I am much more like to go to it from seeing it on Facebook than any other source, you know, that I get that information

would it be an e-mail or website or wherever. (Ruby, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

These testimonies from focus group participants confirm the important role social media plays in people's social life. While nonprofit professionals can tap into the great potential of social media to facilitate interpersonal connections among their stakeholders, the information they share through social networks can also encourage individuals to form strong connections with the organization they represent.

Connections with the Organization

In addition to connecting with other people, Facebook followers of nonprofit organizations are also looking for opportunities to connect with the organization. Some see the connection as an invitation to join a community which is centered around the cause represented by the mission of the organization:

I think the thing that kind of stands out for nonprofit ... is just making you feel like you are part of the organization. So something that makes you feel like you are special and they actually welcome you in and invite you into their organization. So you might not work for them, you might not have to be a volunteer, but you at least feel a part of it. So you feel somehow you are connected to the organization. (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization)

To facilitate such connection, followers expect nonprofit organizations to create relatable content. They are more likely to be motivated if they feel the post is applicable to them, such as stories that make them think "this is me" (Madison, customer of organization #01, a human services organization), or activities that make them believe "I can do it too" (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization).

Posts that demonstrated nonprofit organizations' accountability are also well perceived among followers. For instance, a participant who donated tissues to the health

organization she follows talks about how she appreciates information about research results with donors' tissues:

From my prior work history research is not cheap to do, scientists have to get paid, for the materials and so forth, but to give the tissue, to make that living tissue, you're a living donor and knowing what can come of that down the road, that's much more worthwhile than me handing them a check. (Alexis, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

These accountability posts can enhance the connection by helping the public to understand what the organization accomplished for the cause. If the organization can demonstrate proper stewardship with donations, people tend to feel more confident to make further support.

Connection: Motivation, Purpose and Outcome

In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the connection building process, I also investigate the patterns of interactions that Facebook followers have with posts, and observe an enthusiastic use of "like", "share" and tag, mainly for the purpose of highlighting the good deeds they have accomplished in their own networks. And they expect nonprofit organizations to facilitate such recognition. For example, one participant share with me the excitement of having nonprofit organizations recognize volunteers in their own networks through tagging:

If someone went out on a disaster and took a photo of them just helping someone else and then you tag them on their Facebook, and then people know the good that they do. Then their friends get to see that and they're like "Oh my God, good job! I'm proud of you!" stuff like that. (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization)

As the community is based on the social media, followers seem to believe good deeds can happen online as well. Spreading a meaningful, helpful message through one's social network, for instance, is considered as philanthropic by many focus group participants. As one participant explains, sharing is helpful for the information "may help

somebody else”, and if people “just sit on things and not share them ... then how is anyone else is going to be informed” (Vivian, donor of organization #04, a health organization).

It thus suggests that people want to do something good and meaningful with social media and they want it to be publicly recognizable. Sharing allows them to tie their names to a nonprofit brand, which seems to be a modest way to highlight one’s philanthropic identity. A participant who used to work in an international company explains why people are more motivated to share messages for nonprofit organizations instead of businesses, using her own experiences as an example:

We tried so hard to get people to share stuff, like things, act, do anything. It was so less likely because it wasn’t a good cause. People don’t feel as motivated to be active and to share for you or to spread the word because it doesn’t help them ... for sharing it. Not so much as sharing a [nonprofit organization’s] post like “I did my good deed today. I shared a non-profit story.” So I think it’s a difference. People feel like they’re doing good when they share non-profit stuff and that’s ultimately what Facebook is all about nowadays. (Olivia, volunteer of organization #05, a human services organization)

Although these sharing activities can be motivated by Facebook followers’ own need for recognition, they also help to “increase that [organization’s] presence and increase what’s on people’s newsfeed” (James, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization). Participants are aware of their contribution and they think nonprofit organizations should take advantage of it: “So you always get word of mouth but social media is a tool that can be used, you know, very effectively” (Alexis, donor of organization #04, a health organization).

Another reason that may drive people to connect with nonprofit organizations is the need for socialization. A focus group participant who also works for the nonprofit organization she follows as a volunteer coordinator says she notices that people are

seeking for “community engagement project” or “something to give back to the community” because they want to “fill a social void” (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization). As social media offers various options for people to develop social lives, online and offline, it creates a win-win for the public and nonprofit organizations: Through sharing, people get more opportunities to interact with others who are interested in the same cause, whereas organizations receive the support and attention they need.

Therefore, a major outcome of connections is to increase exposure of organizational messages and eventually, to grow additional connections for the organization. Facebook features make the process much easier. With a simple click of “like” or “share”, people can publicize their support of an organization. And with tagging function they can ask people in their networks to pay special attention to posts they are interested in.

Communication

As reflected by the focus group, the community on social media is constituted through computer-mediated communications. For instance, one participant mentions a micro lending nonprofit organization she volunteered for forms a community based on social media for members all over the globe to communicate:

And you could have a lending group for people who live in the Netherlands or whatever, so you do build community... there is a way for you to communicate, sort of in forums or more kind of away from actual public posts you can actually communicate with each other. (Savannah, customer of organization #01, a human services organization)

An in-depth examination of focus group data suggests Facebook followers prefer communications to be personal and reciprocal, with the organization and with each other.

The personal aspect is reflected by tones and contents of information they share, whereas the reciprocal aspect is embedded in the communication process.

Personal Aspect

Many participants use the word “personal” to describe their ideal Facebook use. One participant says using Facebook is “more of a personal connection”, and thus expects nonprofit organizations to be “more personalized” (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). The word is also mentioned while participants describe the community:

I mean, you’re part of it, this’s a family, this is the group and this is what we do, and we support each other and we are positive... again a community feeling, I think it’s more on a personal level. (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

The personal nature of communication is embedded in exchange of personal experiences. A participant who follows a health organization makes an example to explain how questions based on personal experiences can catalyze communications and grow affinity among community members:

So it’s basically like, you know, I just had that diagnosis what do I do or I am going to the doctor or when did you have your first mammogram... that would be questions that would generate activity, it would generate talk, it would generate basically engagement by contacting each other, in addition to a lot of people getting to know each other. (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

Comparing to information distributed through official channels, “knowing somebody experiencing it” is more likely to touch people “personally” (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization). For participants who have first-hand experiences with the problems and issues that nonprofit organizations are addressing, being able to share and read about personal experiences can be an important way to gain support. It collaborates with findings of health community studies, which find the primary goal of

online health communities is to exchange emotional and informational support (Newman, Lauterbach, Munson, Resnick & Morris, 2011; Vlahovic, Wang, Kraut & Levine, 2014). On social media, such exchange also helps to cultivate empathy and trust within the community, for personal experiences are found “more believable” (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization).

Reciprocal Aspect

In a communal setting, Facebook followers also expect to have two-way communications, with individuals and with the organization they follow. Being able to make a voice and make sure that voice is being heard are “very attractive” to them (Sophia, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). Without vocal and visual cues in face-to-face contact, they rely on Facebook features to communicate. For example, “by liking or commenting,” they are able to share and talk back (Sophia, customer of organization #01, a human services organization).

The back-and-forth process highlights a key characteristic of dialogic communications: reciprocity (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Analysis of focus group suggests that having reciprocal dialogues is associated with positive community experiences, as responses from other community members offer not only valuable information, but also emotional support. For example:

Say for instance a young lady like I said, I haven’t had my first mammogram and I’d say potentially in my group, I will go and say “hey ladies I am going for my first mammogram today, what do I expect? ... What should I expect? What am I looking for?” Basically whatever question I want to have. I could just post “I’m scared” or I just post “I’m nervous” or just whatever, and somebody would comment and say “hey it’s nothing, you’ll get through this” and then the next lady in my post will be “I can come with you” or “when is your appointment? I’ll come with you.” “Do you need someone to come with you?” It’s just that kind of support. (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

Similar as communications with individuals, Facebook followers value organizational responsiveness, even if it is a click of “like” on their comments. For them it is a signal that shows the organization is “actually reading it” (Mike, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization), “listening to what they are saying” (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization), and “going to take action on whatever it is” (Mike, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization). They also think that if the organization is open for dialogue, it would appreciate honest opinions, including critics. For example, one participant believed “nobody is perfect”, yet “you need to listen to your customers”. Therefore, “an honest dialogue with the public would be a good one” (Evelyn, customer of organization #01, a human services organization).

Interestingly, even though participants desire to have reciprocal communications with nonprofit organizations, they prefer the organization to initiate the dialogue by “put[ting] something out” (Naomi, volunteer and fundraiser of organization #03, a health organization). “Posing questions”, for instance, is quite effective in soliciting public responses (Mike, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization). In the other hand, although participants like to have responsive and constructive communications, they are aware of the possibility of getting involved in dialogues they do not like. Especially on organizations’ Facebook page, dialogue is open to the public and thus bears the risk of unanticipated encounter with discussants who “have nothing but bitter negative things to say” (Vivian, donor of organization #04, a health organization). Therefore, to maintain a supportive atmosphere for communications,

followers want discussants to comply with guidelines that are developed upon on shared norms, and misbehaviors to be regulated:

And you just let it be known, this is what the group's expectations are, this is the guidelines of the group. Now if things get out of hand, which hopefully they wouldn't, you're going to be removed from the group, and it's just that simple. (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

The findings suggest that although the affordance of social media keeps changing, people still keep the basic expectation for the climate of online communities: being positive and respectful. As dialogues are taking place on nonprofit organizations' profile page, they expect the organization to play an active role to make and enforce norms and encourage positive discussions within the community.

Involvement

Another major finding emerged from focus group data is followers want to work with nonprofit organizations to form and develop the community through involvement in activities organized by the organization. According to Peter, former employee of organization #01, a human services organization, involvement is a means to demonstrate they are part of the community: "I got involved with stuff that I felt I was part of that community. Because I was engaged, I was doing stuff."

Based on where the activity is taking place, involvement can be online or offline, although there appears to be no clear boundary between the two types of involvement when participants describe their experiences.

Social Media Involvement

Involvement on social media offers valuable opportunities for followers to interact with nonprofit organizations they support. One participant notes she prefers to participate in activities that are "really simple, really easy" so she could do it "in a matter

of minutes... while also bringing awareness to a great cause” (Penelope, donor of organization #04, a health organization). Therefore, interactive activities such as “contests” (Sophia, customer of organization #01, a human services organization; Lucy, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization) and “selfies” (Leah, donor of organization #04, a health organization; Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization) are particularly well-perceived among focus group participants for their convenience to enter.

The interactive aspect also suggests Facebook followers are not satisfied with being on the receiving end of information. They are eager to joining the content creation process to contribute to the organization’s social media outlets. In practice, they expect the organization to provide basic structures or themes to facilitate contribution. The selfie wall is a vivid example of how structured content contribution inspires public involvement, as one participant describes:

They can take a selfie right over there and they’re going to post it on Facebook. Then people see like “Hey Johnny is in the [participating organization] right now, doing stuff. That’s pretty cool, I’m going to like that.” Stuff like that, little creative ideas to make it during the event, people are posting on social media. (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization)

In general, Facebook followers are more likely to have enjoyable experiences if nonprofit organizations can incorporate interactive components into involvement activities, lower the barrier to participate, and make the involvement visible to the public (or at least to participants’ networks).

Offline Involvement

When I asked participants for their understandings about involvement, a participant shares the following perspective which is echoed by other participants:

It's so cool when you have a big event that you go to and then everybody's there for the same cause. That is just so humbling. It makes you feel like you're a part of something, there's that social aspect, you have people hanging out with each other and that's just really, really good. That moment when you have a big group of volunteers all coming together and helping out. (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization)

Although her description is based on offline voluntary events, it reflects three major elements that most participants expect nonprofit organizations to offer: purposes (“part of something”), connections (“people hanging out with each other”) and meaningful involvement opportunities (“helping out”). These expectations may be parallel with their understandings about communities in general. Indeed, as noted in the “connection” section, participants like to get involved both online and offline, yet when they describe their past experiences, they do not try to distinguish where involvement is taking place. The example of selfie wall in particular suggests the boundary between online and offline involvement can be blurred, as both could happen spontaneously, facilitated by smartphones and social media apps.

Discussion

The affordances of social media in supporting organizational performance have attracted academic attention across disciplines. In the field of nonprofit studies, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) present the “Information-Community-Action” scheme to classify the organizational communication functions on social media. Based on content analysis of nonprofit organizations’ Twitter updates, they argue that organizational use of social media is hierarchic—that offline actions are more significant than online activities. Therefore, they argue, nonprofit organizations should target their online activities towards promoting offline actions such as attending events and making donations, and focus their overall social media strategies on “converting” followers into offline donors,

volunteers and advocates. However, findings from my focus group study suggest the end-goal desired by Facebook followers is not *action*, as Lovejoy and Saxton's scheme might suggest, but to become part of a *community* of shared interests which is characterized by interactive involvement, personal connections and dialogic communications. Action, as a form of involvement, is a means to achieve community—as opposed to the inverse, as implied by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012).

In addition, the relationship between online and offline involvement is more nuanced than the unidirectional process implied by the Lovejoy-Saxton framework. Indeed, the majority of the Facebook followers are existing stakeholders of the nonprofit, actively engaged with the organization offline. They begin following the organization on Facebook because they are looking for opportunities for more continuous involvement. For example, one focus group participant who follows a social services organization has been a long-term client of the organization. Following it on Facebook is her way to reconnect after moving to a different city (Evelyn, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). Another participant began her relationship with a health organization when she was diagnosed with the disease that the organization seeks to cure, and she followed the organization afterwards as she became active on Facebook (Lauren, client of organization #03, a health organization). It is also worth noting that Facebook followers care more about whether their actions are contributing to the community rather than whether their actions are undertaken online or offline. For instance, sharing and reposting messages from a nonprofit organization's Facebook page is perceived by many followers as a meaningful action—advocating for a good cause. They do not give less credit to social media activities than they would give to offline activities.

While Lovejoy and Saxton argue the community-building function of social media use is realized through interactivity and dialogue (2012), I find that social media followers tend to view the establishment of connections as the first step towards community, for example: “Slowly building up that non-profit community by connecting each other” (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization). It suggests nonprofit organizations may have an advantage in cultivating connections, especially among people who share the enthusiasm in the same cause, as they have a clear mission around which people can rally. And Facebook also helps nonprofit organizations to connect with individuals. When people use features such as “like” and “share” to indicate their supportive attitude over a post, they are also highlighting their connections with the organization by making that post within their social networks. This kind of advocacy thus enables nonprofit organizations to gain additional connections.

In addition, analysis of focus group data suggests that dialogic communication is key to Facebook followers’ positive experiences in the community. More specifically, they want dialogue to be personal as well as reciprocal; in this way, they feel that information is more authentic and that responses from peers offer them a form of emotional support. Facebook followers also value the ability to be in dialogue with the organizations they follow. Through dialogue, individuals formerly known as the audiences are no longer on the passive, receiving end of information but also become information providers and distributors. They are free to voice and disseminate their opinions online, and on Facebook, to share with people in their networks. As Kelleher (2015) suggests, such spirit of sharing can challenge the traditional thought of having “a central organizational authority” to manage interpersonal relationships between

“members of publics and members of organizations” (p. 299). As interpersonal communications become increasingly important in influencing the relationships between organizations and the public, it echoes a shift from mass-mediated approach to a “much more conversational, relationship-building approach” in public relations practices and scholarship (Kelleher, 2015, p. 282).

Meanwhile, because social media offers an open forum to the public, discussants may be exposed to comments that they find inappropriate or offensive. The risk of exposure to these sorts of comments is the primary concern of organizations’ Facebook followers and is the most likely factor in preventing people from engaging in dialogue online. Facebook followers believe that the nonprofit organizations they follow should take the lead in structuring and administering discussions among the community in order to minimize audiences’ exposure to inappropriate and offensive comments and create a culture of positive communication. For example, one participant argues that the organization should take the responsibility to set rules to regulate interpersonal communications as it presumes the ownership of its social media outlet “it will be your group” (Vivian, donor of organization #04, a health organization).

In general, focus group participants are satisfied with nonprofit organizations’ efforts to facilitate connections, dialogic communications and community, while a few think the organization they follow could have done even more to create connections among new followers, for example: “I don’t see a lot of that going on in social media right now, people connecting with each other through social media” (Grace, employee of organization #05, a human services organization). It reinforces the belief that connections with others are both significant and foundational to followers’ experiences of social

media. In the next chapter, I will compare findings from focus groups and interviews to compare and contrast values and perspectives between SMPPs and their followers.

CHAPTER FIVE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERSPECTIVES FROM SOCIAL MEDIA POINT PERSONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

While some studies have argued nonprofit organizations are not sufficiently using the dialogic features of social media (e.g., Saxton et al., 2007; Water & Jamal, 2011; Young, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Guo & Saxton, 2013), my research suggests otherwise. In chapter 3, I identified the major themes of nonprofit professionals' social media practices, and found they are aligned with dialogic principles developed by Kent and Taylor (2002). In chapter 4, I explored the expectations of social media followers towards organizational activities on Facebook, and found they indeed perceive and appreciate the efforts of nonprofit professionals in promoting dialogue. My analysis of qualitative data from both studies suggests that SMPPs and their social media followers are interested in using social media to foster a community underscored by three themes: 1) connections form the foundation of the community, 2) dialogic communication shapes the culture and norms of the community, and 3) online dialogue bears risks and thus needs to be moderated. SMPPs and their followers emphasize and/or prioritize different aspect of these themes. While followers, for example, tend to privilege connections and dialogue from the perspective of the individual, SMPPs try to highlight their organizations as important participants and partners while executing their social media tactics. In the following sections, I will unpack these shared understandings and more nuanced distinctions with evidence from interviews and focus groups.

Connection

The affordances of social media that enable connection through social networks are attractive to both SMPPs and their followers, although they tend to value connections

in slightly different ways. My analysis suggests that while SMPPs and social media followers are both interested in having nonprofit organizations build a community that helps connect individuals who share similar interests, SMPPs are also motivated to apply social media to connect followers with their organizations in personal ways.

According to focus group participants, Facebook in particular is for “a personal connection” (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization); it offers a platform for people to build a community by “communicat[ing] with each other” (Savannah, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). As the main goal for people to use social media is to stay connected with others, followers tend to view nonprofit organizations as yet another personal friend in their social network, which one participant characterizes as a “personalization of the organizations” (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). SMPPs have anticipated the desire of followers to connect with the organization on a more personal level, and they try to highlight different aspects of their nonprofit organizations in the tone and through selections of content. For example, one SMPP tries to “build a persona” for her organization by using “personal, warm, family, friend [like] voice” (Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization). Another SMPP makes a post recognizing all the board members because she wants to “give real faces and names to people who work or volunteer here” so followers would see the organization “more than just an institution” (Chelsea, Vice President of Marketing of organization #18, an arts and humanities organization). They try hard to make the community more supportive in terms of connecting people “in meaningful ways” (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church) and “on an

emotional basis” (Steve, Social Media Strategist of organization #10, a foundation), which happens to satisfy the psychosocial need of some followers for a sense of belongingness to a larger community: “And people connect. It’s good.... whatever it is, you know what I mean, you want to be there. I mean, because there’s a place for you” (Anna, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization).

As one of the most commonly used strategies for connection, the attempt to build a personal touch is also exemplified by the selection of post content, as SMPPs believe that people are more likely to feel connected to a cause if they are exposed to messages that can be related to themselves. In line with such expectations, SMPPs make many posts to feature individual stories or testimonies in the format of texts, pictures or videos, for example:

We are always looking for people... to share their story with our community. (Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization)

We showcase old photos of our alumnae. (Linda, Communications Manager of organization #06, a human services organization)

Another common tactic employed by most SMPPs to facilitate connection building is to offer as much information as possible, as they believe it would make people feel more connected to the event or the cause they advocate for, and eventually take actions upon it. Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church, describes the process as follows:

You can see [a message] two or three times, two or three different... four, five, six, seven different media, see that same message, and act on that. I mean you run across the mountain multiple times, and maybe after a while you go “maybe I really want to do that” or not, you are just like “bless me, I wish they quit sending that,” but either way, you know, you have response of some sort. And so we’ll be generating connection. (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church)

And SMPPs understand that not all their stakeholders are on the same social media platforms, or on any social media, at all. Therefore, they adopt various forms of communications to supplement the use of social media so people can receive more information: “We have to balance using this new technology with continuing to use older forms of communication” (Chloe, Programs Coordinator of organization # 12, an environment organization). And they agree with their followers that broadcasting too much information is a burden to audiences. For example, Lily, Social Media Intern of organization #07, a human services organization, states that she does not post “as many on a daily basis” because it would “overwhelm people.” And Eleanor, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization, affirms that an excessive amount of posts would make her “stop following.” These efforts to minimize information overload presents nonprofit professionals with a challenge of efficiency: In order to generate more connection with the organization, they want to expose people to information multiple times across multiple platforms, but they also want to do so with great caution. Some SMPPs thus establish a system to ensure that the quantity as well as quality of posts can live up to public expectation and also serve their organization’s goal. For example:

For our organization with the media center and audience we really set up the maximum of two [posts] a day. Sometimes it was one, and every now again we don’t post anything. It kind of “depends on”, really. (Linda, Communications Manager of organization #06, a human services organization)

Facebook, Google Plus, LinkedIn... I would say we post on those one to two times a week. And then Twitter is five times a day during the week, and two to three on the weekend. Instagram ... we try to do it every three to five days, we don’t want to overwhelm the audience, and we know Twitter is kind of a platform for, like I mentioned earlier, a consistent status update throughout the day, so we try to post every couple of hours. (Steve, Social Media Strategist of organization #10, a foundation)

In order to reach larger audiences, SMPPs also craft posts aiming to develop connections with other organizations, reflecting their understanding of community in a broader context. From their perspective, community does not only include individuals but also a cluster of nonprofit organizations and groups that share similar missions. It is thus equally important to connect with these organizations, on and off social media. For example, Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization, shares her experience to “constantly ... make contacts with different organizations” to share stories and “words about events,” and she admits “having those partnerships that plays a huge role in nonprofits.” And Steve, Social Media Strategist of organization #10, a foundation, concludes that these connections help the organization to connect “back to community.”

Although the majority of followers are more interested in having organizations facilitate connections among people or between them and the organization, a few expect to see more interactions among nonprofit organizations on social media, for example:

It would be really cool if they connected with other charities when that happens. And if they do then we need to know more about it, it would be a good post to have. (Madison, customer of organization #01, a human services organization)

Other social media audiences think the organizations they follow should do more to emphasize their connections by participating offline community events. One follower expressed her frustration when she observed the absence of the followed organization in local events: “I was surprised that they weren’t in the list of organizations setting up a table out on the canal” (Anna, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization).

While both social media followers and SMPPs believe connections can help to foster communities, followers are more likely to be motivated by their own needs to engage in connection-building activities such as sharing. Many of them aim to get recognized for their philanthropic activities, to gain personal satisfaction for doing good, or to satisfy their information need. For example:

People don't feel as motivated to be active and to share for you or to spread the word because it doesn't help them ... for sharing it. Not so much as sharing a [nonprofit organization's] post like "I did my good deed today. I shared a non-profit story. (Olivia, volunteer of organization #05, a human services organization)

The major goal for SMPPs, on the other hand, is to help their organizations to gain referrals: "They get that satisfaction review from somebody who is currently here, and that is just a great way to market [the organization]" (Zoey, Principal of organization #13, an education institute). In practice, these goals are complementary, as followers are willing to "increase that [organization's] presence ... on people's newsfeed" (James, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization) if they are really connected to organizational messages, for example: "If it is something that I feel passionate about I will share it on my page" (Vivian, donor of organization #04, a health organization). Some SMPPs thus see these kinds of connections as opportunities to motivate people to advocate for the organization in their personal networks, as Chelsea, Vice President of Marketing of organization #18, an arts and humanities organization, explains:

I think from a branding perspective... people have a stronger connection to a brand if they kind of internalize it, and also the more likely they are to recommend to somebody else ... and so that's what we try to build, we want people to know us, love us, and recommend us. (Chelsea, Vice President of Marketing of organization #18, an arts and humanities organization)

To gain more referrals, many SMPPs use their personal networks to spread organizational messages, and encourage other employees to do the same thing. For example, Steve, Social Media Strategist of organization #10, a foundation, says he tries to share content across his “personal channels” to “get people to notice a little more” about his organization. And Nora, Online Marketing Manager of organization #01, a human services organization, states it is also a strategy she uses, in particular, to get organizational messages to cut through the abundance of information on Internet:

I do believe it would be more and more difficult in the future for a brand to be able to speak and give the message out, there will be more filtering tools available, more ways for someone to not hear the voice, so I would really like to any of our employees to sort of help a brand out, and get that message across. (Nora, Online Marketing Manager of organization #01, a human services organization)

SMPPs are also aware that their followers value recognition and acknowledgement for their philanthropic activities. Almost every SMPP mentions crafting various posts on Facebook page to thank supporters. Some SMPPs offer specific details regarding supporters’ backgrounds and what they have contributed, such as names and links to their personal profile pages. According to Cora, Director of Public Relations of organization #16, an environment organization, it is a tactic to “call out specifically” by tagging people in the post so their friends could “see it and share it and like the content” in their own networks.

Meanwhile, a more nuanced examination of the connections that social media users have with the organization they follow suggests these connections do not only exist online. The majority of focus group participants have already connected to the organization to some extent before they follow it on social media, for example: “I just have been involved with the [participating organization] ever since they started it, and so

just as soon as they got a FB site I liked it, and I was following them ever since” (Ruby, donor of organization #04, a health organization). Pre-existing connections among people are extended to social media as well, for example: “Social media is a way to ... keep connected with them” (Peter, former employee of organization #01, a human services organization). These findings mirror more general social media research that the individual use of social media, especially Facebook, is mainly about staying connected (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007).

My analysis of focus group data suggests that these existing connections, especially those among individuals, can help nonprofit organizations to be more successful with “call-to-action” posts, as followers are more likely to take action if they receive appeals from someone they have a personal connection with, for example:

I got connected through my friend who is a leukemia survivor and that’s how I heard about it. (Claire, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

We just started a fundraising in honor of her, our group of friends. Another friend has a team that walks for the [participating organization’s] race, so we’re part of that. That’s kind of how we got started and start following [the organization] on social media and being involved with them. (Naomi, volunteer and fundraiser of organization #03, a health organization)

The tendency is affirmed by social science research that social data can increase participation in offline activities (Bond, Fariss, Jones, Kramer, Marlow, Settle & Fowler, 2012). SMPPs seem to notice it and craft tactics around it. One common practice is to ask followers to “share their photos” (Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute) featuring their involvement with the organization. Such activity is also seen as an effective way to “energize” and “reengage” stakeholders (Linda, Communications Manager of organization #06, a human services organization).

Many SMPPs are also actively tapping into followers' personal networks on social media to get their appeals across to the public, for example:

I'll send an email, or a message out to some of our volunteers and say, go get the word out, we need these many volunteers at this point to do these things, see if you can find some help, and they get out there, make contact. (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church)

Although the interviews and focus groups centered around understanding communication on social media, some SMPPs also shared their perspectives about offline, real-time communication, which they believe is equally important in terms of enhancing connections within the community, as Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church, describes:

We see this social media not as a technology thing but as an opportunity ... to help develop community... if I can get virtual conversations to become real-time conversations. (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church)

SMPPs' thoughts are shared by a few followers who describe connection as a process "to be involved with an organization... beyond just that computer screen or the phone screen" (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization), a relationship "more in person" like "know[ing] each other's names" (Evelyn, customer of organization #01, a human services organization), or an interaction that people have to begin with "one-on-one contact" (Lucy, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization). Connections, then, are not viewed as either solely online or offline engagements, but as a blending of both online and offline activities.

In summary, data from both interviews and focus groups suggests that SMPPs and social media followers have reached a kind of consensus regarding the community they envision—it is built upon connections among individuals and with organizations who

share an interest in the same cause. As social media is mostly used for maintaining personal connections, SMPPs try various tactics to personalize their organizational presence to help followers connect to the organization in a more personal way. Some followers are additionally interested in connection building efforts among organizations, suggesting that there might still be room for nonprofit organizations to publicize their partnerships and connections with other organizations on social media. SMPPs also realize social media enables people not only to foster new connections but also to maintain existing connections. Therefore, they encourage followers to share organizational messages within their personal networks, with the hope of increasing awareness and expanding their influence.

Dialogic Communication

While connections seem to lay the groundwork for communities on social media, dialogic activities help communities to thrive. They happen among followers, among organizations with shared causes, and between followers and the organizations they follow. Similar to SMPPs' and followers' shared understanding of connection, they also share an understanding that privileges more personal forms of dialogue. It is not merely a form of communication, but also a channel to solve problems and gain support for both organizations and their stakeholders.

On social media, dialogue can take place in many forms. Direct comments, use of “like” or “share”, and tagging people or organizations in the posts or comments are all considered as engagement in dialogue by both SMPPs and their followers, for example:

By liking or commenting ... [I am] able to talk.” (Sophia, customer of organization #01, a human services organization)

“Through comment[ing] back... we have to show them that we are also engaged with them.” (Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization)

Similar to their expectations for connection, both parties want dialogue to be personal in content and in the way they communicate. Analysis of focus group data suggests social media followers like posts featuring individual stories as they create a more personal tone to the dialogue, for example: “You need to hit people with personal stories” (Lauren, client of organization #03, a health organization). As Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization, explains, the personal connection implied through these stories makes them feel more related to the cause:

They heard about it, the cause, it was not personal to them... and they are probably not gonna be as active ... whereas for instance the walk, most people have someone that has either had breast cancer or had a family member that has and they're coming to bring support. (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

Some SMPPs have also experienced that a more personalized social media dialogue has been particularly helpful in reconciling disputes. One SMPP says if they respond “personally” instead of talking like an organizational authority, people are more likely to “respond positively” (Emily, Director of Digital Communication of organization #08, an arts and humanities organization). This observation suggests when the public are upset by organizational messages, they may react less intensely if they realize the party they are interacting with is also a human being.

As many SMPPs notice that more personalized posts can make people “feel compelled” to engage in dialogue or even take further actions (Cora, Director of Public Relations of organization #16, an environment organization), they try various tactics to make the communication more personalized, including having staff respond with their name signed after each comment (Emily, Director of Digital Communication of

organization #08, an arts and humanities organization) and posting handwritten notes in the form of photos “instead of typing them out” (Lily, Social Media Intern of organization #07, a human services organization). They also post about individual stories and testimonies, such as: “We are always looking for people who have been touched by a grant [made by the organization] ... to share their story with our community” (Eva, Communications and Marketing Coordinator of organization #03, a health organization). And they find this type of posts usually get “the best reaction and best engagement” (Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization).

The primary motivation for SMPPs to have dialogue with stakeholders is to let the latter know that the organization is “listening to them” (Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization), which is aligned with the understanding of many followers that dialogue through social media is an opportunity for organizations to hear their voice: “You need to listen to your customers” (Evelyn, customer of organization #01, a human services organization). Consistent with the mindset of being part of a larger community, SMPPs also try to engage other nonprofit organizations in the dialogue, as it allows them to showcase their organization as “an invaluable member of the community” and thus increase its “credibility” (Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization). Followers, on the other hand, seem to care more about their personal experiences within the community: “You’re part of it, this’s a family, this is the group and this is what we do ... a community feeling” (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization).

Another significant factor that motivates SMPPs and followers to engage in dialogic communication is to solve problems: Followers use social media to report issues

they have experienced, while SMPPs try to respond to them with helpful information on a timely basis. For followers, it is important that the organization is “listening to what they are saying” (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization) and “going to take action on whatever it is” (Mike, patron of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization). Their thoughts are echoed by many SMPPs, especially those from human services organizations. For example:

Social media is really truly about giving people customer service. (Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization)

It is really important for our fans, our friends to know we are listening to them. (Julia, Marketing Director of organization #15, a human services organization).

In practice, it is common for SMPPs to collaborate with other departments and staff for solutions to specific inquiries:

So we’ll direct them [Facebook followers] to appropriate person ... we can contact [the staff who is responsible] and she’ll get in touch with that student, make sure everything is okay. (Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute)

In addition to offering solutions, dialogue can be a source of emotional support for social media followers who are particularly in favor of exchanging personal experiences or having conversations in a personal tone. A follower of a health organization offers an example of the type of support she likes to have from others within the community:

I will go and say, “Hey ladies, I am going for my first mammogram today, what do I expect? ... What should I expect? What am I looking for?” Basically whatever question I want to have. I could just post “I’m scared” or I just post “I’m nervous” or just whatever, and somebody would comment and say “hey it’s nothing, you’ll get through this” and then the next lady in my post will be “I can come with you” or “when is your appointment? I’ll come with you.” “Do you need someone to come with

you?” It’s just that kind of support. (Taylor, donor of organization #04, a health organization)

As the quote above suggests, sometimes followers prefer to have interpersonal dialogue with others in the community to address issues that matter to them. SMPPs have indicated a supportive attitude towards this type of dialogue. Most SMPPs choose not to interrupt dialogue among followers, and neither do they remove those personal exchanges, unless they are offensive to others. For example, Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization, explains the reason she takes no action upon a comment is because she feels the comment is only trying to bring the post to another person’s attention. Their practices seem to mirror the argument of Phetean et al. (2013) that nonprofit organizations intend to encourage an autonomous community among social media users.

While SMPPs respect unrelated conversations among followers that happen in the context of their posts, they also attempt to prompt dialogue between followers and their organizations. Posting structured questions, for instance, is a typical practice to solicit responses from the public. As Mary, Chief Communication Officer of organization #05, a human services organization, claims, an effective way to “get people thinking about” the post is through “asking a question.” Focus group data reveals that followers prefer this kind of direct questions because they prompt them to provide meaningful feedback, for example:

If you want dialogue that you have to put something out to your audience to start, otherwise you’re just saying, ‘Oh, the event was great’ or ‘I had a good time’ so I don’t really see that as dialogue. (Naomi, volunteer and fundraiser of organization #03, a health organization)

A few followers believe that questions and prompts should be thoughtfully structured to appeal to people’s interests, so they would be “naturally compelled to

comment”, while in contrast, statements of facts or pictures make followers feel “more compelled to share or like ... than to comment on” (John, customer of organization #01, a human services organization).

In sum, dialogue on social media can take place in various forms; it enables people to communicate their questions and concerns and allows the organization to respond with recommendations or solutions. It also offers a means for individuals in the community to ask for or provide emotional support through the exchange of personal experiences. Both parties prefer dialogue to feel more personal, which is achieved through the type of content exchanged through dialogic process as well as the various tactics employed by SMPPs to mimic interpersonal conversations. SMPPs work to support dialogue both among followers—sometimes intentionally staying quiet to empower followers to drive the dialogue—and between followers and the organization, particularly through the use of direct questions.

Dialogic Risks

Although dialogue is desired by both SMPPs and social media followers, it also bears risks and thus requires moderation. Comparison of data from focus groups and interviews indicates the all parties are keenly aware of the possibility of encountering negative, sometimes even offensive comments online. This possibility is the primary concern that prevents followers from engaging in dialogues: “There are some ignorant people out there that have nothing but bitter negative things to say” (Vivian, donor of organization #04, a health organization). To address that, SMPPs employ tactics of moderation to hold discussants accountable for their speech:

Sometimes people say things in social media because they can get by with it ...I mean that’s bullying... not only I won’t like I might delete and call

on the carpet, I mean call these people accountable, and say, you're gonna post like that you will be deleted from our system, you can't get by with that... And it's not just a matter of not being able to handle it when people disagree with me, or disagree with something [the organization] said, that I can live with it, it's when it goes over that mark that line of respectful discourse. (Emma, Director of Marketing and Communication of organization #11, a church)

As addressed in chapter 3, some SMPPs utilize built-in tools developed by Facebook to filter out foul language. When these tools fail, they often moderate each thread manually: "If for some reason they are able to bypass my filters ... I either would go and hide that comment, or if I need to respond I will" (Nora, Online Marketing Manager of organization #01, a human services organization). Significantly, SMPPs will not remove comments if they reflect a point of disagreement. Instead, they try to address those viewpoints. From the perspective of SMPPs, dialogue helps both stakeholders and the organization, especially when the latter is challenged. They have experienced that their appropriate response to public inquiries, especially critiques, can help to improve the public image of their organization. For example, Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization, explains how she deals with public comments that question organizational missions on Facebook:

But there have been times that people have questions about our mission, and it's not been nice conversation at all. But we have very good and explanatory comments, to respond to them, and I think it is good for the public to see that we care enough to respond, that we take time to craft a comment to address concerns, and speaks to what we feel important, and what we want people to do. And also I see once we've done that, then a lot of times people that are supporters of ours...will come to our defense. And sometimes people doing that over us makes a bigger impact. (Fiona, New Media and Web Coordinator of organization #02, an arts and humanities organization)

As she explains, modeling the way that dialogue can happen when followers disagree with something can also help motivate other followers to defend the

organization, which makes an even greater impact. Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute, has also experienced a similar phenomenon:

Some of those are positive some of those are negative, but really it's self-moderating, because even the negative one... there are people that were backing what we had to say, where we didn't have to feel that we had to come out and defend ourselves. (Lydia, Communications Specialist of organization #14, a higher education institute)

In a dialogic communication on social media, SMPPs usually adopt the following practices to address public comments, depending on the types of comments they receive:

1) If the comment is positive, they interact with it in the form of liking or commenting to show support or agreement; 2) If the comment is a question or an appeal for help, they consult the appropriate department and deliver a recommendation by responding to the comment; 3) If the comment is criticizing the organization or signaling a misunderstanding, they respond with clarifications, explanations, sometimes making an official statement on social media; 4) If the comment is among followers and not offensive to others, they leave it alone; and 5) If the comment is insulting, they remove it, and some SMPPs would hold the discussant accountable: "I just automatically block those people" (Alice, Community Engagement Coordinator of organization #19, a health organization). With these efforts, they hope to minimize the risk of dialogue and build a more discussion-friendly environment on social media.

Summary

By comparing findings from interviews and focus groups, I find that both SMPPs and social media followers are interested in using social media to build a community based on connections and supported by dialogic communications. Social media followers tend to interpret connections as personal in nature, and SMPPs anticipate and

accommodate these preferences with tactics engendering a personal touch. Both parties value the affordances of social media to establish and maintain connections among people, while SMPPs also try to foster connections between followers and their organizations, as well as connections with other organizations who share the same mission. Meanwhile, the various features of social media enable people to engage in dialogue in different forms, such as liking and commenting. And through dialogue they are able to get help, solve problems and receive emotional support. While SMPPs value all types of dialogue, including those happening only among followers, they also want to encourage followers to engage in more dialogue with the organization. SMPPs also adopt moderation tactics, to more intentionally cultivate civil discourse around difficult topics or disagreements, working largely behind-the-scenes to create a safe, positive environment for followers.

The results of my comparative analysis suggest a number of actionable recommendations for SMPPs, including the following:

- The majority of SMPPs interviewed have tried one or more tactics that engender a personal touch, which have been perceived positively by their followers. These practices include making posts featuring individual stories, experiences and/or involvement with the organization; emphasizing the caring, human-like side of organization by signing the names of corresponding employees; and using a friendly voice to build a persona for the organization.
- As followers have indicated a strong interest in reading posts about the role of the nonprofit organization in the community, posts that feature their organization's

involvement in local community events, especially interactions with other organizations and groups would likely be valued.

- Social media followers also report liking to share posts that make them feel that they are participating in a good deed. SMPPs can tap into such preferences and craft messages in a way that encourages stakeholders to be part of the content distribution process. These strategies may also offer nonprofit organizations an opportunity to leverage the personal networks of followers to broadcast organizational information.
- Followers on social media who participated in focus groups do not really distinguish their interactions with the organization based on whether the interaction occurs online or offline. This suggests that nonprofit organization can use social media creatively to promote online and offline engagement simultaneously, especially during offline events. For example, they can ask participants to share their status and photos on social media during events.
- Organizational followers also report being comfortable using social media to ask for help from the organization, and sometimes they use it as a channel to report issues and problems. Meanwhile, many SMPPs report using social media to offer customer services and address public inquiries. Such practices can have a positive impact on the organizational image as the public can observe the caring side of the organization when it responds to stakeholders' needs.
- Followers report that well-structured, open-ended questions are more likely to prompt them to reply. SMPPs can use questions to solicit feedback or to encourage people to participate in discussions. Depending on their goals, SMPP

can make the question more related to followers' personal interest so as to encourage them to contribute to the dialogue.

- Many followers express that they are hesitant to leave comments because they are concerned that others may leave negative or even offensive feedback to their comments. Compared with the other communicative practices of SMPPs—posting, commenting, liking and sharing—SMPP's moderation practices are less visible to the public. While SMPPs expect people to follow norms of basic courtesy to respect other people's speech, these expectations are not articulated on the organization's social media profile pages. And none of the SMPPs report informing the public of the work they do to moderate discussions. Although followers infer many of the communicative strategies and tactics of SMPPs, they express little awareness of the work that SMPPs have been doing to moderate dialogue to promote civil discourse. SMPPs might experiment with various ways to be more transparent about their online moderation activities to help more people be more comfortable contributing to dialogue.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

My research has been motivated by critical gaps I identified in existing research regarding the dialogic use of social media in the nonprofit sector. In nonprofit studies, content analysis of social media posts and surveys of organizational users dominate the existing body of research, which almost universally concludes that nonprofit organizations have not tapped into the full potential of social media to promote dialogue (e.g., Saxton et al., 2007; Water & Jamal, 2011; Waters et al., 2009; Young, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Guo & Saxton, 2013). However, because this research relies on content analysis and surveys, it sheds little light on the underlying motives and values that drive nonprofit social media practices, neither does this research address whether and to what extent these practices are, indeed, effective on social media followers.

To fill in the gaps, I sampled two primary populations for this research and conducted two qualitative studies to investigate the experiences of stakeholders implicated in nonprofit social media use. My sample includes local nonprofit organizations with an active profile page on Facebook and their Facebook followers. A multi-stakeholder approach allows me to compare nonprofit organizations' social media practices with followers' reactions. It contributes an understanding, not only of the values and motives behind social media practices, but also how the public perceive these practices, and therefore shed lights on the effectiveness of current social media tactics. To increase the validity of data, I increased diversity in the sample by selecting organizations with different missions and sizes.

I adopted a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000) to collecting and analyzing qualitative data. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nonprofit

social media point persons (SMPPs), employees who self-identified as being primarily responsible for the organization's social media planning, implementation and day-to-day operation. Through inductive analysis of these data, I found that the majority of social media professionals in the nonprofit sector have purposively planned their social media practices and adjust them constantly to improve performance. Contrary to findings from other research, their mindsets and social media tactics reflect dialogic principles, specifically those of mutuality, empathy, propinquity, risk and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Second, I conducted focus groups with individuals who followed some of the interviewed organizations on Facebook. My analysis of these data revealed that Facebook followers are aware of and open to SMPPs' efforts to promote dialogue; they want nonprofit organizations to take the lead building a community—shaped by connection, dialogic communication, and involvement—on social media to connect people who care about the mission of the organization. Followers also rely on SMPPs to help ensure that the dialogue in the community remains friendly.

Finally, I conducted a comparative analysis of the data from interviews and focus groups. My comparative analysis revealed that SMPPs and their followers share the same understanding that social media can help to foster community based on personal connections and facilitated by dialogue. Both SMPPs and followers are aware of the risk of encountering negative comments online. Therefore, to maintain a supportive environment for dialogue, SMPPs are dedicated to active moderation of the organization's profile page.

In the next section, I will summarize and elaborate on the key finding of this research, a cross-cutting theme that emerged from both interviews and focus groups: The

role of social media in cultivating a culture of dialogue. I will conclude by summarizing the contributions of my research and making recommendations for future studies to further enhance our knowledge about nonprofit organizations' use of social media.

Cultivating a Culture of Dialogue

Understanding the dialogic use of social media in organizational contexts has attracted a broad group of researchers across disciplines. One of the challenges in this multi-disciplinary body of research is the weak connection between empirical work and research oriented toward theoretical development. While public relations scholars have made great progress in adapting the concept of dialogue from interpersonal communication and relationship scholarship to reinterpret public-organization relationship with a focus on the more balanced and equal exchange of information and power (Grunig, 1989; Botan, 1997; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Day, Dong & Robins, 2001), these concepts are not yet sufficiently used to guide empirical analysis. Similarly, in nonprofit studies, some researchers describe activities as “interactive” or “dialogic” without defining them clearly in empirical studies (e.g., Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Phethean et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2001; Kent et al., 2003). Meanwhile, computer-mediated communication scholar McMillan (2002a, 2002b) has developed a model of interactivity to operationalize concepts of interaction and dialogue in computer-mediated settings. According to his model, dialogue refers to two-way interaction in which the information receiver retains either a low- or high-level of control over the communication process. While McMillan's model offers some degree of clarification between the constructs of dialogue and interactivity, we still know very little about how the

information senders and receivers engaging in computer-mediated communication understand dialogue from their own experiences.

My research thus serves as a bridge between theories and practices, as it unfolds online in the Facebook pages of nonprofit organizations. My interviews with SMPPs reveal that nonprofit professionals have carefully planned and orchestrated their social media practices, with a mindset that resonates with the dialogic principles proposed by Kent and Taylor (2002). My data also suggests that activities that do not fit McMillan's definition of dialogue are intentionally orchestrated by SMPPs to encourage dialogic communication on a larger scale. For instance, some SMPPs tend to withdraw from the dialogue after they have offered sufficient information, so followers can have more autonomy to have their own dialogue. What appears to be "inactivity" is, in fact, an intentional effort to expand dialogic space from only occurring between followers and the organization to a much larger online community. The motives and effectiveness of this kind of "inactivity" are easily overlooked by the limitations of other methods, as content analysis and surveys usually look to activities that are present rather than absent.

Meanwhile, my analysis of focus group data from Facebook followers indicates that their actions are motivated by the intention to be part of a community that connects individuals with shared interests, and that dialogic communication is one of the major elements characterizing the community they idealize. Facebook followers express a strong desire for dialogue to be personal and reciprocal, and they embody these values in their own communication practices by exchanging stories and narratives based on personal experiences. These preferences are extended as expectations to the nonprofit organization they follow, and they are more likely to be attracted to posts featuring

individuals or scenarios that they can relate to themselves. Especially for followers of health organizations, dialogue does not only offer information but also becomes an important source of emotional support.

Together, evidence from interviews and focus groups suggests that dialogue on social media is more than a form of communication—it can catalyze a culture of dialogue within a community that encourages sharing, mutual support and connections.

In addition, my research also expands our current understanding about organizations' roles in public relations. According to McMillan's organizational communication typology (Table 3), there are four types of public relations (Grunig & Grunig, 1989; McMillan, 2002a): public information and press agency, which are both examples of one-way communication; and two-way asymmetric and symmetric communications, which are examples of two-way communication. One-way communication emphasizes the unidirectional dissemination of information by the organization, whereas the two-way communication accounts for the reaction of public as well (Stockhausen, 2014). Therefore, based on the organization's position in the communication flow and its goal, it can function as a disseminator of public information, a press agency, a scientific persuader who leads a two-way asymmetric communication, or a participant in a two-way symmetric, conversational communication (McMillan, 2002a).

Table 3: Four Models of Public Relations

	Direction of communication	
Goals of communication	One-way	Two-way
Symmetric	Public information	Two-way symmetric
Asymmetric	Press agency	Two-way asymmetric

Note. Adapted from “A Four-Part Model of Cyber-Interactivity: Some Cyber-Places are More Interactive than Others,” by S. J. McMillan, 2002a, *New Media & Society*, 4(2), p. 275. Copyright 2002 by Sage Publications. Adapted with permission.

Meanwhile, some researchers argue that the open environment of social media can also expose people to the risk of encountering irresponsible communicative behaviors (Notar, 2013; Marlin-Bennett & Thornton, 2012). My research reveals that Facebook followers are indeed concerned about such a risk and nonprofit professionals are dedicated to moderating communication on their organization's profile page so as to minimize the risk. This attention to moderation practices thus urge us to think about a new role that an organization can play in an open forum—as a moderator that promotes and moderates dialogue about the organization.

In the area of e-government and e-democracy, online moderation has been studied by an array of researchers to explore how information and communication technologies can be used to facilitate deliberative democracy (Wright, 2009; Edwards, 2002; Coleman & Gotze, 2001; Hauben & Hauben, 1997). Through a case study of The Netherlands' governments at the national, provincial and municipal levels, Edwards (2002) proposes three functions of moderation in online discussion management: (1) the *strategic function* which establishes and maintains boundaries of the discussion and delivers results to the decision making process, (2) the *conditioning function* which involves the moderator providing information and soliciting support and participation, and (3) the *process*

function which seeks to further the discussion as a collective and purposeful activity by enhancing interactions and setting rules. Edwards' three functions of moderation help to frame our understanding about how nonprofit organizations act as a moderator in online discussions.

Through the lens of Edwards' framework, I find that the conditioning and process functions better encompass SMPPs' current moderation practices. The conditioning function is exemplified in SMPPs' efforts to offer as much information as possible in multiple forms and through multiple channels, and their use of direct questions to solicit responses. The process function is echoed in their various tactics to make dialogue more interactive as well as friendly to discussants, such as asking followers to engage in activities like photo contests, inviting content from followers to make the post more relatable to stakeholders, and filtering out rude comments and foul language. SMPPs offered few examples of social media practices that resonate with the strategic function, possibly due to SMPPs' preferences to offer followers some space to discuss issues appealing to themselves, even if these issues are not quite related to the post or geared towards the mission of the organization. While such practice reflects their intention to foster an autonomous community with open and respectful dialogue, it raises a question about how nonprofit professionals balance these values and needs centered around community with other organizational priorities.

Recommendations for Future Work

Grounded in an in-depth examination of social media practices in the nonprofit sector, my research finds that nonprofit professionals are dedicated to cultivating a dialogic culture that shapes an online community and connects people with a shared

interest in the organization's mission. They have developed various tactics to achieve this goal, including tapping into followers' existing networks to involve more people, adding a personal tone to the message so followers can relate it to themselves, and offering solutions and emotional support through dialogue. They value the dialogue both among followers and between followers and the organization they represent. In order to build a more supportive environment for discussants, they take the responsibility to moderate dialogue on their organizations' social media profile pages, so people can enjoy having respectful discussions without being intimidated by rude and offensive comments. As Edwards (2002) suggests, online moderation can be performed strategically to facilitate decision making within the organization. While nonprofit professionals are indeed guided by a strategic mindset to plan and execute their social media tactics, the relationship between the dialogic culture they work to cultivate on social media and the larger mission and context of the organization would be an ideal focus for future research, situating our understandings of social media use in a larger organizational or even sector-wise context. Based on findings from my research, I present the following recommendations for future research.

As one of the most common practices among organizations represented in this research is to collaborate among departments and integrate social media tactics into the overall communication plans, media campaigns or development programs, I recommend that future research explore the nature of collaboration around social media use. A case study approach based on a specific public relations event, incident or movement would be particularly valuable. Case studies would allow researchers to examine the use of social media within a rich context that could also help professionals to assess the relevance of

the case to their own situations (Stake, 1978). Case studies would also enable researchers to track engagement online and offline, pre- and post-event. In that way, we might be able to understand how the culture of dialogue is formed, and how it moves back and forth between online and offline contexts.

In my research, many SMPPs reported delivering statistics that characterized social media activity to higher-level management, yet they had little to no feedback about whether or how these statistics were used in organizational decision making processes. Such a disconnect may cause misalignment between high-level strategy development and day-to-day work practices. Some studies indicate that the attitudes of the board can be a significant factor that affects organizational adoption of social media (Young, 2012; Hackler & Saxton, 2007). Future research, then, might explore the role of social media in organizational decision making. Researchers might interview CEOs, board members, and PR managers to explore their perceptions about the current uses of social media and about the ways in which social media relates (or not) to other functions of the organization.

As my research has prioritized a broad sample across organizational types and a focus on organizations that use Facebook, researchers might consider extending it by sampling more in-depth along a number of dimensions to better understand the transferability of these findings:

- Future research might sample from organizations using other social media platforms to understand whether and in what ways these platforms help nonprofit organizations to foster a culture of dialogue. The different affordances of various

social media platforms suggest that organizations may use them for different purposes (Phetean et al., 2013; Nah & Saxton, 2012).

- Future research might consider including organizations with different organizational structures. Through interviews with SMPPs, I found that the position of SMPPs in the organizational hierarchy can affect their ability to make and execute social media strategies. For example, in organizations with a flat structure, SMPPs are more likely to have some degree of liberty in integrating social media tactics into the overall communication and/or public relations plans, whereas in a highly hierarchical organization, the relative rank of SMPPs seems to affect whether and how they participate in the process. To provide more actionable guidance to organizations, it will be important to study to what extent organizational structure affects the effectiveness of SMPPs.
- Future research might also compare the use of social media by organizations with different missions or in different service areas. For instance, my focus group study data suggests that followers of health organizations may value the mutual and emotional support within the community of social media followers more than followers of other types of nonprofit organizations. But this observation is based upon the comparison of two focus groups of health organizations and other focus groups. Therefore, we need more comparative studies with the social media followers of a larger and more diverse sample of organizational types to better understand how the dialogic culture works for different kinds of nonprofit organizations, whether followers have different expectations for their social media

performance, and how nonprofit professionals align their tactics with these expectations.

My research also raises intriguing questions for future research in communication studies. While social media changes the ways organizations and individuals communicate (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011), it may also prompt them to develop new understandings about the nature of communication and/or the nature of dialogic communication. For example, liking and sharing Facebook posts are both seen by organizational followers as a form of participation in dialogue. This perception may challenge the traditional definition of dialogue. According to Kent and Taylor (2002), dialogue is developed upon ongoing, reciprocal communications. Yet the action of liking and sharing seems to be one-time while the dialogue discontinues at the follower's end. However, if taking the functions of "like" and "share" into consideration, the action helps to expose the post to the follower's network, and such exposure can have a positive influence on scaling the dialogue to involve a larger group of audience. Therefore, whether the use of social media features such as "like" and "share" has fundamentally changed the nature of dialogic communication in a computer-mediated context is an interesting topic worth future research—for example to understand how messages are distributed through people's personal networks, and to what extent such distribution stimulates more dialogue.

Conclusion

Taking a grounded theory approach, my research provides rich, qualitative data about the experiences, motivations and perceptions of nonprofit organizations' social media point persons (SMPPs) regarding their current social media strategies and tactics.

It is also among the first research to explore the experiences and perspectives of individuals who follow nonprofit organizations on social media, including their motivations for following nonprofit organizations and their perceptions of the social media tactics that are employed. My comparison of the two sets of data—the tactics of social media point persons and the perceptions of their followers—reveals some of the shared beliefs and expectations towards nonprofit organizations’ social media use, and provides actionable insights for nonprofit organizations who are (or wish to be) active on social media.

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Publications. Young, J. (2012). *The current status of social media use among nonprofit human service organizations: An exploratory study* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Yannan Li

EDUCATION

- **Indiana University**, Indianapolis, Indiana, United States
Ph.D. in Philanthropic Studies, 08/2009-11/2018
Field of interest: philanthropy and social media, nonprofit accountability, philanthropy ethics
- **Indiana University**, Indianapolis, Indiana, United States
M.A. in Applied Communication, 08/2006-07/2009
Field of interest: online communication, intercultural communication
- **Zhejiang University**, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, P. R. China
B. A. in Advertising, 09/2002-06/2006

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- 2016 IUPUI Graduate Student Travel Fellowship
- 2016 ARNOVA Doctoral Fellowship
- Dickinson-Stone-Ilchman Fellowship for Graduate Education, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2016-2017
- Graduate-Professional Educational Grant, IUPUI Graduate & Professional Student Government, 04/2016

- Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy Research Grant, 03/01/2016-06/30/2017
- Indiana Evaluation Association conference attendance scholarship, TPMA, 10/02/2015
- Best Thesis of Joan and Larry Cimino Award in Intercultural Communication, English Department, 2010
- Graduate Outstanding Research/Creative Project Winner, IUPUI Department of Communication Studies, 2007-2008
- Starr Fellowship of IUPUI, Fall 2007

RESEARCH AND TRAINING EXPERIENCES

- Earned the certificate in Principles and Techniques of Fundraising, offered by the Fund Raising School, 06/16/2014-06/19/2014
- Provided statistical analysis for reports and research using the dataset of Million Dollar List, 05/2012-08/2017
- Helped with data cleaning and validation for Form 990 “VALI-DATATHON” hosted by Aspen Institute, Washington, DC, 11/01/2017-11/02/2017

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Indianapolis, IN, 05/08/2012-08/2017

- Conducted data mining, collection and cleaning for the database of Million Dollar List (MDL);

- Offered descriptive and regression analysis for projects using MDL data;
- Conducted literature searches and environmental scans for new research projects;

Teaching Assistant, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy,
Indianapolis, IN, 11/16/2013-08/2017

- Worked for the certificate in philanthropy program (EMP) offered by LFSOP and Beijing Normal University China Philanthropic Research Institute. Major duties included offering simultaneous translation and cultural consultancy, coordinating classroom activities, and developing the curriculum for the fundraising principles and techniques course.

Development Intern, Indiana University Foundation, Bloomington, IN, 05/2014-
09/2014

- Conducted prospect research on Chinese alumni of Indiana University;
- Maintained the social media presence of IU Alumni Association on Chinese platform;

Special Programs Assistant, IUPUI Office of International Affairs, Indianapolis, IN,
08/06/2008-08/20/2012

Communication Intern, WFYI Metropolitan Indianapolis Public Broadcasting Inc.
Indianapolis, IN, 05/13/2008-12/08/2008

Research and Office Assistant, IU Public Policy Institute, Indianapolis, IN, 01/28/2007-
08/06/2008

CONFERENCES ATTENDED

- **Presenter**, 2016 ARNOVA (Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action) Conference, Washington, DC, 11/19/2012

- **Panelist**, Workshop: Histories of Humanitarianism: Religious, Philanthropic, and Political Practices in the Modernizing World, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC, 03/07/2014-03/08/2014
- **Poster**, 2012 ARNOVA (Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action) Conference, Indianapolis, IN, 11/16/2012
- **Co-presenter**, Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions symposium on "Humanitarianism and Human Rights in the 21st Century", Bloomington, IN, 10/11/2012
- **Panelist**, 2008 Central States Communication Association Conference, Madison, WI, 04/11/2008
- **Panelist**, 19th Annual Joseph Taylor Symposium, Indianapolis, IN, 02/29/2008

PUBLICATIONS

- Red Cross Society in Imperial China, 1904–1912: A Historical Analysis. (October 2015). *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. DOI: 10.1007/s11266-015-9660-5
- Professional reports: *Million Dollar Donors Report 2013*; *Coutts Million Dollar Donors Report 2014*; *A Decade of Million-Dollar Gifts*; *Million Dollar Ready*
- Co-author of *Giving in Puerto Rico (2016)*; *Giving in Chicago (2015)*
- Co-author of *Private Aid and International Development: Evidence from Million Dollar Gifts* (forthcoming)
- Co-author of *Million-Dollar Giving and Community Characteristics* (forthcoming)
- Co-author of *Economic Effects on Million Dollar Giving* (forthcoming)

- *Japanese Boy-Love Manga and the Global Fandom: A Case Study of Chinese Female Readers*, ISBN 978-3-8383-2448-7, Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010
- Co-author of *Xi Qian Zhe da (The Relocation of Zhejiang University in Western China)*, ISBN 978-7-3080-5304-4, China: Zhejiang University Press.

AFFILIATIONS

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IUPUI China Philanthropy Leadership Initiative