

Chapter 9

Nonprofit Organizations and Social Media Use: An Analysis of Nonprofit Organizations' Effective Use of Social Media Tools

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn has enhanced and increased the communication and engagement strategies available to nonprofit organizations. This chapter focuses on and addresses the question of nonprofit use of social media by examining the main objectives for using social media, and whether social media has been effective in meeting these objectives. Existing research on nonprofit social media use tends to focus on finding out which social media tools nonprofit organizations are using and which one of these yields the most impact. To answer these questions, descriptive analysis is conducted on social media technologies and their usage to identify associations between effectiveness of social media in meeting objectives. These questions go beyond asking why nonprofit organizations use social media and analyzes how they meet their objectives using various social media tools.

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INTRODUCTION

For many organizations, “social media” is a buzzword that signals the organization’s ability to reach its audience. In the nonprofit sector, the use of social-media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn has enhanced and increased communication and engagement strategies. Social media is a generic term for a collection of tools and platforms with which users can communicate, connect, and share content (Kanter & Fine, 2008). The rapid increase in social-media applications has made it difficult for most nonprofit organizations to keep pace, thus creating a knowledge gap for nonprofit organizations that want to integrate social media into their operations.

Most nonprofit organizations provide resources to strengthen communities and connect people to resources within their communities. Social media may make it easier to engage with stakeholders and recruit new supporters of the organization. Stakeholders are those with any interest in the organization, including volunteers, donors, and users of its services. Despite the growing use of social-media applications, what has not been explored is how nonprofit organizations have used social media, the main objectives they hope to achieve by using them, and how effectively they use those tools to achieve those objectives.

This research focuses on nonprofit organizations’ use of social media and how various social-media tools affect the organization’s mission. The purpose of this research is to better understand the main objective of using social media, and how effectively social media help nonprofit organizations meet their larger objectives. In a practical sense, understanding these insights is critically important. For nonprofit executives and directors, it is essential to understand how to reach, activate, and mobilize various stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

Extant literature on what motivates nonprofit organizations to utilize social media includes studies of how they use those applications, with their inherently interactive and decentralized structure, as a strategic tool to communicate and coordinate with important stakeholders, conduct advocacy, raise funds, and engage with the public (Edwards & Hoefer, 2010; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; MacAulay, 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Other research on nonprofit organizations’ use of social media has examined frequency of usage (Guo & Saxton, 2012), and the degree and breadth of nonprofit use of online content (Saxton, Guo, & Brown, 2007).

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