Chapter 7

Friending and Funding Through Facebook:
Social Media Use of Regional Nonprofit Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Social media may be leveraged as a cost-effective way for nonprofit organizations (1) to share information and (2) as a platform for fundraising. This is especially true for regional nonprofit organizations which may have less dedicated resources for marketing and fundraising. This chapter has two main objectives. First, the impacts of regional nonprofit organizations' leadership and strategic emphasis on the use of social media for information transmission is examined. Insights are gained from leadership at 121 nonprofits and through analysis of 377 days of Facebook data for seven nonprofit organizations. The second objective of this work is to examine regional nonprofit organizations' use of social media for crowdfunding or raising donations through a network of social media followers. The Facebook pages of 647 regional nonprofits are examined, and insights are gained from key staff members at 10 organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media offers a viable platform for information dissemination, engagement, and fundraising for nonprofits. This is especially true of regional nonprofit organizations which may have less dedicated resources for marketing and fundraising. This chapter addresses two objectives:

1. To examine the impacts of leadership and strategic emphasis on the use of social media for information transmission for regional nonprofit organizations

2. To analyze the adoption of social media tools for crowdfunding (fundraising through a network of social media followers) for regional nonprofit organizations.

The majority of studies on social media and nonprofits, to date, have focused on large, national nonprofits featured in lists like the Nonprofit 100 Times, the list of the 100 largest non-educational U.S. nonprofit organizations (Nah and Saxton, 2012) and the Forbes National Charity seal program (Curtis et al., 2010). These studies provide valuable insights which are applicable to nonprofit organizations that typically have large operating budgets and staff. This chapter emphasizes nonprofit organizations which serve a regional audience. In doing so, it extends the literature on nonprofits and social media as it offers a lens into social media usage by smaller entities which are likely to have less financial and human resources. For example, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) had total revenues of $117, 222,668, 18 directors, and 853 staff members in 2013. Comparatively, the Hill Country Animal League SPCA (in Central Texas) has total revenues of $1,037,651, 7 directors, and 28 employees in the same year. These differences are likely to impact not only the adoption of relatively new technologies like social media but also how social media is used.

A national organization clearly has many spheres of leadership and influence. However, for regional organizations, the footprints of the executive director and board of directors are likely to be imprinted in most strategic aspects of the nonprofit, including its marketing and communications strategy. Thus, Section I of this chapter examines the impacts of two elements of leadership on information dissemination through social media: (1) the career background of the executive director and the (2) level of influence the board of directors. Executive director background and board influence have previously not been studied in this context. In addition, two strategic factors are analyzed: (3) an organization's customer orientation, for nonprofits, this is an organization's focus on its constituents and (4) the financial allocations towards social media.

Section II of this chapter highlights the use of social media followers for fundraising. Regional nonprofit organizations may have less resources to host fundraising events or engage in expensive donor focused campaigns. Social media offers a vehicle for crowdfunding through which a regional nonprofit is able to expand its fundraising reach through social media followers and their connections.

Each section of the chapter provides a literature overview and research hypotheses/questions, a detailed description of the data and analysis methods utilized, and then offers implications of the results. The chapter concludes with a combined section of limitations and future directions for research.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR INFORMATION TRANSMISSION

Social media provides a viable platform for sharing information. A large number of supporters can be reached through a single post or update. The following sections provide a review of relevant literature and then outline hypotheses related to regional nonprofit organizations' use of social media for information transmission.

Nonprofit Organizations' Use of Social Media to Share Information

Nonprofit organizations use social media across a variety of platforms. A content analysis of the most popular videos on the top 100 nonprofit YouTube channels finds that such videos are primarily used to

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