

Social media discourse: A case study of nonprofits' use of interactive communication



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INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this study is to examine how nonprofit organizations from different sectors utilize social media platforms as a public relations tool for media relations, donor relations, volunteer relations, and interactive communication. Existing literature shows that the use of social media is a beneficial method of communication for public relation practitioners working for nonprofit organizations (Curtis et al., 2010). Nonprofits' frequent shortage of staff members, time, and resources make it difficult for them to interact with their stakeholders (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011). Social media can help organizations communicate more efficiently and effectively (Briones et al., 2011). This study uses the case study method to understand communicative functions and benefits of social media. Specifically, it examines three nonprofit organizations from the top three sectors in the industry: health services, education, and social and legal services. It focuses on their use of the top three social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Examining the organizations' use of social media may reveal sector-specific techniques that can benefit growing organizations.

RQ: How do the American Cancer Society, Boys & Girls Club of America and American Red Cross utilize Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube?

METHODOLOGY

1. Located social media accounts on the organizations' websites
2. Recorded the number of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube posts each organization had for 2013
3. Randomly selected from each month: 10 posts from Facebook, 10 tweets from Twitter, and one video from YouTube
4. Analyzed and categorized each collected message
5. Organized messages by categories to determine patterns

THEMES

Providing Resources (providing facts and tips)

- Linking helpful websites with important information and reminding stakeholders to follow other Twitter accounts for chapter specific updates

Engaging Audience (encouraging action)

- Encouraging stakeholders to spread awareness and help the organizations reach their goals, contribute to a discussion, and participate in a fundraising event

Telling Stories (providing inspiration)

- Providing stories told by people whom lives were changed by the nonprofit, recognizing alumni and their success, and sharing inspirational quote to help people get through the day/week

Sharing Program Updates

- Providing sympathy and support for victims of natural disasters or tragedies, posting jobs, and sharing speaker quotes from events and information on events and programs

Recognizing Supporters

- Thanking sponsors, donors, and followers for their support and donations

FINDINGS

| Rank | American Cancer Society | Boys & Girls Club of America | American Red Cross |
|------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Engaging Audience (N = 83) | Engaging Audience (N = 86) | Sharing Program Updates (N = 80) |
| 2 | Providing Resources (N = 65) | Sharing Program Updates (N = 68) | Providing Resources (N = 78) |
| 3 | Telling Stories (N = 38) | Telling Stories (N = 19) | Recognizing Supporters (N = 21) |
| 4 | Recognizing Supporters (N = 17) | Recognizing Supporters (N = 17) | Engaging Audience (N = 14) |
| 5 | Sharing Program Updates (N = 11) | Providing Resources (N = 7) | Telling Stories (N = 12) |

| Rank | Facebook | Twitter | YouTube |
|------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Engaging Audience (N = 74) | Engaging Audience (N = 102) | Telling Stories (N = 10) |
| 2 | Sharing Program Updates (N = 70) | Providing Resources (N = 100) | Sharing Program Updates (N = 9) |
| 3 | Providing Resources (N = 45) | Sharing Program Updates (N = 80) | Engaging Audience (N = 7) |
| 4 | Recognizing Supporters (N = 19) | Telling Stories (N = 44) | Providing Resources (N = 5) |
| 5 | Telling Stories (N = 15) | Recognizing Supporters (N = 36) | Recognizing Supporters (N = 0) |



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