WHY EXAMINE SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR?

The evolution of the World Wide Web from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has changed the way people communicate. Web 1.0 refers to static websites of the 1990s unable to provide interactive web content (e.g., text, pictures, videos). Web 2.0 refers to interactive websites appearing in the mid-2000s being used and developed as a result of advances in software platforms (e.g., Adobe Flash), web feed formats (e.g., RSS), and web development techniques (e.g., AJAX). These advances have made possible the emergence of modern social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, for example, are now ubiquitous in society. Compared to traditional websites used for one-way sharing of web content, they allow users to create, update, and exchange web content in an interactive way (Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, & Hovy, 2010). They also facilitate the development of online social networks by allowing users to easily and instantly communicate with one another.

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) fulfill important social, economic, and political functions in society (Boris, 2006) and rely on communications as an essential tool to fulfill their missions. As part of marketing and communications strategies, social media utilization can help NPOs reach larger audiences; this in turn can help the organizations “increase their community presence, impact, effectiveness, and efficiency” (Waters, 2009, p. 473).

NPOs can use social media in different ways. They can quickly share web content with their stakeholders through Twitter (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), for example. They can also engage in two-way communications with stakeholders; this in turn can help them build and sustain relationships with their audiences, thereby facilitating the process of community building (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Kanter & Fine, 2010; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009).
Further, NPOs can ask their followers to take certain actions (e.g., donate money or advocate for a particular cause) (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Strategic use of social media technologies can help NPOs accomplish their goals. In terms of fundraising, social media technologies offer effective and economic ways for reaching potential donors (Waters, 2009); this in turn can translate into positive outcomes when conducting online fundraising campaigns. In fact, researchers have found that large NPOs with larger social networks in Facebook receive more donations via Facebook Causes (Saxton & Wang, 2013).

Further, NPOs can use social media to help accomplish their marketing and advocacy goals. Not only can they tap into social media’s interactivity and dialogue potential to reach their existing supporters but in doing so they can also reach larger audiences. For example, as of June 2014, there are 829 million daily active users and 1.32 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2014). In addition, as of January 2014, 86% of residents in the United States have access to Internet (Pew Research Center, 2014a), of which 74% use some type of social media (Pew Research Center, 2014b). Thus, social media offer NPOs the opportunity to increase the size of their social networks, which in turn can translate into higher levels of civic engagement and thus into effective advocacy campaigns.

In recent years, NPOs have increasingly adopted social media. For example, in 2012, of the 3,500 representatives of small, medium, and large NPOs that were surveyed, 93% indicated that their organizations had a presence on social media (NTEN, Common Knowledge, & Blackbaud, 2012). Despite this trend, the academic literature on social media utilization in the nonprofit sector is lacking (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2013). In fact, the little we know about it comes from empirical studies on large NPOs (Nah & Saxton, 2013).

Cases on Strategic Social Media Utilization in the Nonprofit Sector seeks to address this gap in the literature. In the United States, as of September 2014, 98% of all 501(c)(3) NPOs registered with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) are small and medium (i.e., they have less than $5 million in revenue)—in fact, 72% of these NPOs have less than $100,00 in revenue (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2014). Thus, there is a need for empirical evidence on how small and medium NPOs are using social media technologies to accomplish their goals and missions. Obtaining such evidence is important because, compared to large NPOs, small and medium NPOs often lack the financial, technical, and personnel resources needed to effectively use the interactivity and dialogue features of social media (Briones et al., 2011); this can greatly limit their ability to tap into these technologies’ potential for increasing their effectiveness and efficiency.
PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

_Cases on Strategic Social Media Utilization in the Nonprofit Sector_ is intended to foster a better understanding on how small and medium NPOs are strategically using social media to achieve their goals and missions. Acquiring such understanding is important for both academics and practitioners, as well as for those interested in pursuing careers in the nonprofit sector. After all, social media technologies offer NPOs cost-effective ways for communicating with their audiences. Also, if used strategically, social media can help NPOs improve their capacity for fulfilling their missions (Hackler & Saxton, 2007). Thus, through carefully selected and well-written case chapters, this book contributes to the theory and practice of social media utilization in the nonprofit sector.

POTENTIAL USES AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

This book is intended to serve as a reference for anyone interested in the theory and practice of social media utilization in the nonprofit sector. Specifically, it is relevant for academics interested in the study of social media in the nonprofit sector. The cases contained herein are a timely contribution to the body of knowledge on social media utilization and provide the foundations for future research. The casebook is also relevant for working practitioners who seek to develop cost-effective strategies for using social media within their organizations. The cases offer practical advice for strategically using social media to engage in fundraising, marketing, advocacy, civic engagement, organizational learning and capacity building. Further, the book is intended to be of value for advanced undergraduate and graduate students advancing in the field of nonprofit management. The cases included in the book can be used in courses covering such topics as social media utilization and fundraising, marketing, advocacy, civic engagement, organizational learning, and capacity building in the nonprofit sector. The book can also be used in courses such as using social media in the nonprofit sector, nonprofit leadership and management, nonprofit fundraising, and nonprofit technology.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized as follows. The introduction provides a general overview of social media. It provides definitions of social media and a brief historical background. It also discusses recent trends in social media utilization, including some of the ben-
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benefits NPOs may derive and the challenges they may face when using social media. The introduction concludes with a detailed overview of the cases contained herein.

The chapters in this book are organized into five sections. Each section focuses on a specific aspect of social media use in NPOs and contains two to three chapters. Based on a conceptual or theoretical framework, each chapter explains how a NPO used social media, the challenges it faced, and how it managed to address them. Each chapter also highlights opportunities derived from using social media and makes recommendations on how other organizations can go about adopting and using social media. Contributing authors offer suggestions for future research at the end of each chapter.

Section 1 examines how NPOs use social media for fundraising. In Chapter 1, Lauren Bacon Brengarth, Edin Mujkic, and Meg Millar analyze how social media were used to raise money during a wild fire in the United States. This chapter provides insight into how social media provided tools to create a small nonprofit and sell hundreds of thousands of tee shirts to raise money for the victims of the fire. The chapter also explains how social media and opinion leaders in traditional media contributed to help rapidly establish the NPO’s legitimacy in the community. In Chapter 2, Samantha Adler and Heather Carpenter explain the process through which a NPO was able to create and implement a successful peer-to-peer fundraising campaign. The chapter discusses how the organization successfully developed and implemented a social media plan to ultimately raise over $30,000 in just 10 days.

Section 2 explores how NPOs use social media to engage in advocacy. In Chapter 3, David Chapman, Katrina Miller-Stevens, John Morris, and Brendan O’Hallarn describe a NPO’s effective use of social media to advocate for and engage military families. The authors discuss how through social media the organization has been able to fulfill its mission of building community among U.S. military families around the world. In Chapter 4, Liang Ma and Zhibin Zhang illustrate the case of an environmental NPO in China involved in educating and mobilizing citizens to participate in urban air governance. The chapter explains how the organization has been using social media to mobilize citizens and advocate for policy change in terms of air pollution measurement.

Section 3 focuses on how NPOs use social media to market or promote their organizations. In Chapter 5, Gayla Schaefer and Leigh Nanney Hersey argue that NPOs must make a cultural shift in order to adopt social media as an effective marketing tool. Unlike traditional one-way communications, social media environment forces NPOs to adopt more dialogical methods, be more transparent, and experiment and develop new organizational norms. In Chapter 6, Erin Nemenoff and Julia Schenk study how a national NPO with diverse membership integrates
social media strategies into its marketing efforts. The NPO took the opportunities to further engage constituents, educate key stakeholders on social media use, discover new cost effective ways to manage social media, and create additional strategies to adapt to new technologies. In Chapter 7, Georgette Dumont analyzes how a NPO continues to adapt to both environmental and technical changes in order to successfully utilize social media. As an early adopter of social media, this NPO was able to be flexible in its adaptation to new sociotechnical environments in order to achieve its marketing goals.

Section 4 studies how social media improve organizational learning of NPOs. In Chapter 8, Jennifer Jones uses a case study of a NPO to highlight the benefits of using a team learning approach to develop social media policies. The organization used a team learning process to address the challenges through the creation of a Technology Outreach Committee providing a learning forum for the various staff persons involved. The author finds that this committee has improved the social media outreach effort of every program involved and offered valuable professional development opportunities to staff at multiple levels of the organization. Thus, the author suggests this Technology Outreach Committee as a model for other NPOs struggling to fully understand and address risks posed by social media. In Chapter 9, Kari Steen-Johnson and Bernard Enjolras examine how social media impacted NPO governance using an analysis of a NPO with a centralized governance structure. Social media provided the NPO with the capacity to engage people on a wider level, but traditional top down thinking had to be relaxed for staff to develop meaningful connections and trust with the constituents of the organization. In the end, the NPO chose to take a less relaxed path allowing people to comment on their social media posts but not to generate new threads.

Section 5 discusses the role of social media in organizational capacity building. In Chapter 10, Rui Sun, Hugo Asencio and Julie Reid explore how social media can help improve organizational capacity in terms of leadership, management, finance, and operation. The authors find that government grants and strategic use of social media in nonprofit organizations can lead to increased public awareness of the issues related to their organizational missions, greater fundraising capacity, and enhanced collaboration among their employees. In Chapter 11, Allison Turner and Kelsey Mattson investigate the ways in which social media are utilized in a NPO and to what degree they contribute to the organization’s capacity, the effectiveness of its particular strategy relative to its size and structure, and the significant challenges and opportunities posed by the integration of social media into the NPO’s organizational operations.

Finally, the conclusion chapter concludes the book with a discussion on the current development and trends of social media use in the nonprofit sector, and
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provides suggestions for future research. To be better prepared for the uncertain web environment, practitioners in NPOs need to determine how their organizations will continue to sustain their organizational relevancy with the advent of new web-based technologies. Meanwhile, there is a call for scholars to conduct systematic empirical research in order to better understand the antecedents and consequences of social media adoption and utilization in the nonprofit sector.

EXAMINING THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

This book is a timely contribution to the theory and practice of social media utilization in the nonprofit sector. It provides a thorough coverage of the most recent intellectual developments in the literature. It also offers an in-depth coverage of cases of small and medium NPOs that have been able to successfully use social media to accomplish their goals and missions. It expands the knowledge base by focusing on the study of small and medium NPOs, the ones that often lack the financial, technical, and personnel resources to successfully develop and implement social media programs. No text to date has provided an in-depth coverage of cases of small and medium NPOs that have succeeded at using social media, despite the challenges they faced. The emphasis of existing texts is on the technical aspects of social media and are not written with both academics and practitioners in mind. Cases on Strategic Social Media Utilization in the Nonprofit Sector helps fill this gap.

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