Book Review

Cases on Strategic Social Media

Utilization in the Nonprofit Sector

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Cases on Strategic Social Media Utilization in the Nonprofit Sector
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Social media such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, for example, are now ubiquitous in society. The proliferation of social media has also changed the way people and organizations communicate (Miller, 2011). Social media has revolutionized the way people make connections to one another and even to the organizations they support. All nonprofit organizations (NPOs)—and essentially all organizations, regardless of sector—will eventually come to use social media to connect with their various stakeholders, build community, accomplish program and outreach goals, and help fulfill their missions. NPOs fulfill important social, economic, and political functions in society (Boris, 2006) and rely on communication as an essential tool to fulfill their missions. Organizations that do this well are more successful in raising awareness, organizing communities, and advocating for legislation. As part of marketing and communications strategies, social media utilization can help NPOs reach larger audiences, build their social capital, expand their networks, provide channels for information dissemination, create marketing and fundraising campaigns, and provide advocacy conduits. From an economic standpoint, NPOs provide services that are not feasible or economical in either the for-profit market or the government services sector (Hill & Lynn, 2009; Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, & Clerkin, 2009). Socially, NPOs bring people together from different walks of life who learn to collaborate to achieve the common good (Boris, 2006). In terms of their political function, NPOs work on behalf of clients to advocate and influence policy makers (Lipsky & Smith, 1989). They also work to mobilize constituencies to support important programs or oppose pieces of legislation that may impact the constituencies (Guo & Musso, 2007; Guo & Saxton, 2014). In other words, they provide a pathway for underserved constituents or groups to participate in civic engagement on a larger scale. Like all businesses, NPOs rely on communications as one of the essential tools to achieve their goals and missions.

However, there is little empirical research on whether, how, or why NPOs use social media. Very little research has been done on social media use in small and medium NPOs. In addition, it would be more comprehensive if more diverse organization of NPOs involved, such as public schools. It is recommended that the researchers can use both qualitative and quantitative methods for understanding different facets of NPOs. For example, researchers may use scales to measure participants' feedback in NPOs or interviews for more deeply examine (Shin, 2008; Kaushik & Milam, 2013). This book introduces cases on social media utilization by nonprofit organizations, particularly small and medium-sized organizations. The cases in this book seek to add to the body of knowledge on social media use in NPOs, and provide practical guidance for nonprofit practitioners and suggestions for more systematic research by scholars.

The book is organized logically. In addition to the foreword and preface, there are 11 chapters, which cover five main topics. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce social media utilization and fundraising, addressing new Internet functions for generating revenues.

Herein, the ways that organizations use social media to expand their fundraising efforts by employing rapid diffusion of their campaigns and causes is discussed. In Chapters 3 and 4 social media utilization and advocacy is introduced, addressing the capacity created by social media for free flow of ideas and how organizations use social media to connect to families and advocate on their behalf. Social media utilization and marketing is presented in Chapters 5 to 7, describing how successful social media marketing plans use the information gained from dialogical communication to inform the way organizations and their marketing strategies are managed. Chapters 8 and 9 introduce social media utilization and organizational learning, explaining how to use organizational learning approach to develop social media policies. Finally, Chapters 10 and 11 address social media utilization and organizational capacity, including potential challenges NPOs may encounter when using social media.

This book provides comprehensive information and real cases illustrating the policies and procedures for NPOs when engaged in social media. More specifically, it not only provides the advantages for NPOs using social media, but also illustrates the help that stakeholders gain through thus building and sustaining relationships with their audiences, thereby facilitating the process of community building. Furthermore, this book can help stakeholders to understand the effectiveness of social media policies. Although the findings in each chapter may not be generalized to all NPOs, they are nonetheless instructive because they provide readers of this book with practical advice for adopting and using social media. Through this book, some challenges which NPOs face are brought to light, including ineffective utilization of social media, funding and staffing challenges, fear over a loss of control, and challenges to organizational culture and governance structures. In addition, it is made clear that interactive communication is quite time-consuming for organizational members.

We recommend a careful reading of chapter 8 to understand that a team learning approach allows the organization to incorporate diverse skills, and manage the creative tension between an organization and a social media environment. Team learning is a systematic approach, though not necessarily linear processes, through which team members combine expertise, challenges the limitations of members' individual and commonsense collective perspectives that potentially develops innovative solutions by the use of social media (Nicholson, Nicholson, Coyle, Hardin & Krishen, 2014). This chapter also provides a case for the claim that there are no hard and fast answers to social media issues in nonprofit organizations. This chapter also addresses that it would be interesting to learn if a team-based approach to writing policies actually does, as this case might suggest, help create a more comprehensive and, thus, more effective policy than those written by one department.

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