Nonprofit organizations and Facebook use

Mary Beth Scherer

The University of Toledo

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A Thesis
entitled
Nonprofit Organizations and Facebook Use
by
Mary Beth Scherer
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Liberal Studies Degree

Dr. Sumitra Srinivasan, Committee Chair
Dr. Paulette Kilmer, Committee Member
Dr. Brian Patrick, Committee Member
Dr. Patricia R. Komuniecki, Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo
December 2010
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An Abstract of

Nonprofit Organizations and Facebook Use

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Mary Beth Scherer

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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The University of Toledo
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In-depth interviews are used to determine how organizations related to women and girls’ empowerment use the social utility Facebook as a marketing, public relations and communication tool. Findings indicate organizations use Facebook to increase outreach and maintain relationships with their audiences. Social media platforms like Facebook have influenced the way nonprofit organizations communicate, as evidenced by this study. Although the majority of the participating nonprofit organizations would like to have more time and resources to devote to Facebook and other social media platforms, this is often not an option. This study offers a unique suggestion for increasing Facebook effectiveness.
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Chapter One

Introduction

With the development of social media, the ability to stay connected and form links to like-minded individuals is easier than ever before. Terri Burnett, assistant director of career services at The University of Toledo, is a self-proclaimed Facebook addict who typically logs into the site at least three times a day. She uses the site to share photos, post status updates, link to articles and see what her friends are up to.

Beyond posting, tagging and sharing, Facebook has enabled Burnett, who suffers from the autoimmune disease, scleroderma, to form a network of supporters. Through online social networking, she has been able to build connections with approximately 50 individuals who also have scleroderma. “Putting a group of people together who have a similar challenge and being in a group of people who understand where you’re coming from can be very therapeutic,” Burnett said. She views social networking as an opportunity to teach people about a disease most individuals aren’t aware of (personal communication, August 24, 2010).

Like Burnett, millions of people use social media to maintain and build connections with other individuals. In addition to individuals, organizations that understand how crucial an online presence is to their success have also become active users of social media. With the development of social media platforms like Facebook, MySpace
and Twitter, it is no longer enough for organizations to restrict their online presence to a professional website or webpage. Because of this technological boom, organizations increasingly need to understand how to properly use social media as marketing, public relations and communication tools. With a greater understanding of the benefits and possible disadvantages of social media, organizations can make informed decisions about participating in the social media phenomenon.

1.1 Goal of the Study

This study will focus specifically on the social utility Facebook and its role in nonprofit organizations devoted to women and girls’ empowerment, wellness and fitness. The goal of this study is to provide organizations that are interested in maintaining a Facebook presence with an overview of how some organizations are currently using the Facebook tool. Using Facebook as a means of promotion may ultimately help organizations with limited funds save money and better focus their current resources. Overall, this research will open up a new dialogue about nonprofit organizations and social media. Limited academic research has been done to analyze the benefits and potential drawbacks associated with utilizing the platform. Compiling research on the subject of Facebook and discovering how some nonprofit organizations are currently using the tool to gain support and awareness for their missions and connect with current supporters will help other organizations realize the benefits and potential disadvantages of creating a Facebook presence.
1.2 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

Q1: How do nonprofit organizations related to women and girls’ empowerment, wellness and fitness currently use Facebook to increase interest and support for their organizations and mission?

Q2: How has the Facebook phenomenon changed these nonprofit organizations’ traditional marketing, public relations and communication efforts and ultimately, how they communicate with their audience and gain support?

Q3: How can these nonprofit organizations adjust the way they currently use Facebook to take full advantage of this social utility?

For the purpose of this research, the term nonprofit will be spelled as one word. Twenty-one dictionaries prefer spelling nonprofit as one word, although the term is sometimes hyphenated. Occasionally, the word “nonprofits” occurs as a noun, especially in the field’s literature. In quotations, original spelling of terms will be retained.

1.3 Nonprofit Organizations Used for This Study

This research analyzed the following nonprofit organizations: Women’s Sports Foundation, Girls on the Run, Girls Incorporated, Step Up Women’s Network, and Women Win. These organizations were chosen based on the criteria that they all support the mission of women and girls’ empowerment in some way and potentially have a lot to gain as participants on Facebook. It’s possible that other organizations related to causes and missions might also benefit from communicating with like-minded supporters.
through this platform. All of the organizations chosen for this study currently maintain active Facebook pages.

Billie Jean King founded the Women’s Sports Foundation in 1974. The national organization advocates for equality, educates the public, conducts research and offers grants to promote sports and physical activities for girls and women. These ventures support physically and emotionally healthy lifestyles (http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/).

Girls on the Run was founded in 1996. The international organization’s mission is to prepare girls for a lifetime of self-respect and healthy living through a learning program that combines training and running. The goal of the enterprise is to encourage positive emotional, social, mental, spiritual and physical development (http://www.girlsontherun.org/).

The roots of Girls Incorporated stretch back to 1864. The national youth organization is “…dedicated to inspiring girls to be strong, smart, and bold” and provide educational programs to American girls, particularly in underserved areas. The goal of the program is to “…help girls confront subtle societal messages about their value and potential, and prepare them to lead successful, independent, and fulfilling lives” (http://www.girlsinc.org/).

Step Up Women’s Network was founded in 1998. It is a national organization “…dedicated to advancing women and girls” that builds relationships between professional women and underserved teen girls through the process of mentorship, networking and advancement. The organization helps facilitate opportunities to improve the possibilities for teen girls (http://www.suwn.org/).
Women Win began in 2007. This global organization aims to empower girls and women through sports. “Women Win works by building partnerships with key players, sport initiatives, investors, and institutions at global and local levels, and by influencing policy and practice in the field.” The organization aims for quality programming and sets standards around good practices for girls and women in sports (http://www.womenwin.org/).
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

2.1 Social Media and Facebook

Social media changed the way people communicate. Whether it’s Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn, millions of individuals, and now organizations, joined and continue to join social networking platforms daily. Online social networks provide an opportunity for people and organizations to create public or semi-public profiles and communicate with other people who also belong to the same network or platform.

According to Ben Parr in, “In 2009, Social Media Overtook Web 2.0,” social media is a new type of communication that “…creates a world conversation and dialogue” (2009).

As technology advances, social media consistently develops to include new features and applications. Clara Shih references some of these advancements in her book, The Facebook Era: Tapping Online Social Networks to Build Better Products, Reach New Audiences, and Sell More Stuff. “Starting as early as 1995, online social networking pioneers Classmates.com, SixDegrees.com, and Friendster introduced the notion of profile pages and friend connections” (Shih, 2009, p. 17). These sites lead the way for the development of some of today’s most popular social networking sites: Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn. Shih indicates the influence of social media is undeniable. “One would be hard-pressed to find a high school or college student today who doesn’t use
Facebook or MySpace, and what we’re seeing as this demographic ‘grows up’ is that the sphere of influence for these sites is expanding from social and dating life to professional opportunities and business interactions” (Shih, 2009, p. 17).

Social media platforms continue to develop and offer more options and features to users with each development. “Each iteration of social media has been richer in content and interactivity, and each has brought more mechanisms for self-expression and our ability to display our likes and dislikes, from favorite films to choice of washing powder, to groups of people who may share similar interests. Internet-mediated social networks are offering people a rich array of facilities and content” (Phillips, 2008, p. 80).

Although social media tends to be relatively easy to operate, it may require more time and resources to use the tools effectively. “Social technologies, such as blogs, video and photo sharing sites and networking platforms, not only have the potential of enabling individuals and organizations to share content and socialize, but also to filter news and information, to organize events, and to foster collaboration or participation. Yet, these technologies do not perform on their own--they require a cultural and organizational commitment, including resource allocation in the form of time and personnel” (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009, p. 67).

One particularly interesting social networking platform is Facebook. Founded in 2004, Facebook is considered a social utility that currently includes more than 500 million active users (http://www.facebook.com/). Facebook provides an opportunity for these users to communicate with friends, co-workers, family and, ultimately, the masses. The social networking site was originally designed to support college networks only (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). This online social network application consists of a number of
different features enabling users to perform these tasks: create profiles, display pictures, accumulate and connect with other users, view profiles, share user content and send instant messages (Papacharissi, 2009).

“Millions of people use Facebook every day to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet” (http://www.facebook.com/). The features available to Facebook users are often easy to use and provide users with a number of possibilities. “Some of the most popular features of Facebook include its photo-sharing abilities and the ability for users to contribute applications that work with the open-source foundation of the website, constantly refreshing and rejuvenating content, which presents a draw for several users, making it popular and, for some, addictive” (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 204). For example, in 2009 the average user spent more than 55 minutes per day on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/).

Facebook claims to be accessible to everyone, but some argue that it contains a demographic bias that limits users to those who are literate and enjoy Internet access (Papacharissi, 2009). “As social networking sites become more ingrained in daily life, they will soon see a more diverse audience in terms of age, culture and socio-economic status” (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009, p. 106). It’s possible that this change has already started taking place. Individuals of all ages are discovering social networking. In 2005, Facebook expanded to include high school students, and soon after, anyone could join Facebook (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Although Facebook used to provide virtual gathering places for friends and acquaintances, these sites recently acquired a more diverse group of members. Marketers,
politicians, job recruiters, for-profit organizations and nonprofit organizations are creating a persona on sites like Facebook (Wong, 2008). In April 2006, more than 4,000 organizations joined Facebook within two weeks, when Facebook expanded its registration (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009). “Since social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook began allowing organizations to create profiles and become active members, organizations have started incorporating these strategies into their public relations programming” (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009, p. 102).

Social media like Facebook can provide organizations with an excellent opportunity to establish, maintain and build upon relationships with employees, departments, related organizations, customers and suppliers (Altes, 2009).

With the abundant number of features and applications available to users, it’s not surprising that the business world has developed a strong interest in Facebook. As social media continues to grow and diversify, it becomes even more important for organizations to take advantage of this technology (Barnes & Barnes, 2009). “From a business perspective, it is unwise to remain disconnected and on the sidelines” (Barnes & Barnes, 2009, p. 29).

Facebook consists of a number of tools and features to help organizations engage their audience. The Facebook wall is the center of the Facebook page or profile. It allows the user to add and share content like photos, comments, videos and status updates (http://www.facebook.com/).

In addition to the wall, another major component of Facebook is the News Feed, which is a “constantly updating list of stories from people and pages that you follow on Facebook” (http://www.facebook.com/). This can be particularly beneficial for users on
Facebook to see what’s new with the organization they are following and gives organizations an opportunity to capture the attention of their followers.

Many businesses and organizations have chosen to represent themselves on Facebook by developing Facebook fan pages. “Facebook Pages can be thought of in much of the same way as normal profiles on the site – brand or celebrity Pages have the ability to have friends, they can add pictures, and they have walls that fans can post on” (Greenstein, 2009).

![Women’s Sports Foundation Facebook Fan Page](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/WomensSportsFoundation?v=wall)

**Figure 2-1:** This snapshot provides an example of how the Facebook fan page appears. Women’s Sports Foundation Facebook Fan Page. (2010). Retrieved from http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/WomensSportsFoundation?v=wall

The article, “Perceptions of Corporations on Facebook: An Analysis of Facebook Social Norms,” delves into the idea of “Facebook culture.” For the purpose of this research, the following definition of culture from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary will be used: “the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic.” The article ultimately advises organizations to
be aware of Facebook culture before developing a presence on this platform. “Companies wishing to engage in public relations and marketing efforts on Facebook have to be mindful of Facebook culture, and their communication with the public must conform to Facebook social norms. Failure to adapt communication efforts to the local social norms presents the risks of failed communication efforts, being labeled as spam, and in the long run, damaging Facebook culture” (Vorvoreanu, 2009, p. 67). Although it is uncertain whether organizations that present themselves on Facebook without adapting their communication style will damage Facebook culture, the research indicates that adapting to Facebook culture can be crucial. Organizations should keep these cultural requirements in mind when developing a strategy for gaining interest and support via social media outlets.

While many organizations have already developed a Facebook presence, Dr. Vorvoreanu’s research suggests they are failing to make an impact. “When asked about perceptions related to the organization-public relationship dimensions of trust, openness, involvement, investment, and dialogue, students did not report being impressed by corporations’ Facebook presence. On the contrary, students were suspicious of corporations’ motives and felt corporations were intruding on their territory” (Vorvoreanu, 2009, p. 78). Although these findings may discourage organizations that have already developed social media identities, they provide feedback and offer suggestions about how to improve upon their current Facebook presence. Ultimately, this research implies that old techniques may not necessarily work in a new medium.
2.2 Nonprofit Organizations

2.2.1 Adoption of Technology in the Nonprofit Sector

Data compiled in a research study by Josh Greenberg and Maggie MacAulay from Carleton University in Canada suggests the potential of social technologies “remains mostly untapped” by nonprofit organizations. “NPOs should be leaders in using social technologies to grown and strengthen their networks. These are, after all, relationship-driven organizations: online communities and social media offer a new way of harnessing existing loyalty and passion” (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009, p. 74).

Although utilizing online social networks sounds like a great way for nonprofit organizations to gain support and interest, it is important to understand how these agencies adopt information technology. Traditionally, nonprofit organizations have been slow to adopt the Internet and are perceived to be about five years behind the for-profit sector (Macedo & Pinho, 2006). “It has been recognized, however, that the Internet impacts on virtually every non-profit [sic] activity. These activities include, but are not restricted to, using the Internet as a tool for raising awareness and influence, as a means for creating an information resource and as venue for fundraising and mobilizing people for specific causes and programs of action” (Macedo & Pinho, 2006). Unfortunately, nonprofit operations do not always utilize the tools that the Internet offers. For example, “…even though practitioners recognized the value of the Internet for helping improve an organization’s competitiveness and image, they were skeptical about its ability to advance the organization” (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009, p. 105).

For nonprofit organizations that “…tend to agree on shared causes and are dedicated to a progressive process of social change for the betterment of themselves and others,”
Facebook is an extreme shift from traditional fundraising and marketing techniques (Kenix, 2008). Charitable organizations see great potential in recruiting young activists who are already users of online social networks like Facebook (Wong, 2008).

According to an article, “Using Web 2.0 Technologies to Connect with New Supporters,” nonprofit organizations are making intelligent decisions to examine online social networks as a place to not only remain connected to current supporters but also gain new supporters (Fine, 2009). Social networks contain a generation of users who are passionate about social causes and eager to affect change. Cause-related nonprofit organizations are looking for that type of supporter (Fine, 2009).

2.2.2 Facebook in the Nonprofit Agenda

Facebook made it even more beneficial for nonprofit organizations to participate on their social network when they created their ‘Causes’ application, which is designed to help organizations with their fundraising and relationship-cultivation efforts. The ‘Causes’ application allows individuals to donate to a registered organization and recruit other Facebook members to support the cause. In addition to the ‘Causes’ option, other applications allow individuals to make donations and give organizations an opportunity to send messages to supporters (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009).
Nonprofit organizations use these applications and features available on Facebook to “…streamline their management functions, interact with volunteers and donors, and educate others about their programs and services. Through interactions with stakeholders on Facebook and other social media applications, organizations seek to develop relationships with important publics” (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009, p. 103). One of the strengths of the Internet is its ability to unite publics and help people realize that they share interests with others (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). It’s likely that the development of Facebook has further strengthened this feature of the Internet.

At this point, nonprofit organizations are most likely aware of how crucial an Internet presence can be. However, nonprofit organizations’ slow adoption of the Internet could also translate to a slow adoption of social networking websites like Facebook. Although
they are not always sure how to utilize the tool, previous research suggests that nonprofit organizations want to be on Facebook (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009). Research also suggests nonprofit organizations have not incorporated many of the available Facebook and new media Internet applications. Nonprofit organizations often fail to take advantage of the interactive nature of Facebook. “They rarely provide information in forms other than external links to news stories, photographs, and discussion board posts, and they only attempted to get interested parties involved by providing them with a contact e-mail address to obtain more information” (Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, & Waters, 2009, p. 105). Facebook provides a number of tools and applications that nonprofit organizations can take advantage of to fully utilize social networking.

Although nonprofit organizations desire to use social media more effectively, Dr. Mihaela Vorvoreanu’s study, “Perceptions of Corporations on Facebook: An Analysis of Facebook Social Norms,” indicates organizations should not ignore the vital differences among social networking tools and websites. “As opposed to a visitor to an organization’s website, a Facebook user does not log on to Facebook with the expectation to interact with an organization. So, although the technology makes it possible for organizations to interact with publics on Facebook, the social norms and expectations of Facebook culture create a context radically different from Web sites [sic] and blogs” (Vorvoreanu, 2009, p.81 ). This insight indicates how crucial it is for nonprofit organizations interested in developing a Facebook presence to utilize the applications and interactive nature Facebook provides. Otherwise, it is very possible the organizations won’t fit in with the social norms of the platform.
Although there are clear benefits to participating in online social networking, many businesses and organizations give valid reasons for questioning whether or not they should participate in the phenomenon. Many organizations fear participating in online social networking because of what active social networking website users will say or post about groups (Altes, 2009). “When an organization opens itself up to conversation with its constituents, it is also doing so with its critics and other onlookers. This potential loss of steering control over the conversations others have about an organization and its activities is an issue of great concern, not only to nonprofits but indeed all organizations with strategic goals and interests” (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009, p. 68). Greenberg and MacAulay state they believe the benefits of “opening up the field of communication” outweigh the possible side effects (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009).

“Just because your organization has not established a social media presence does not mean your customers are not already talking about you” (Altes, 2009, p. 45). Organizations need to engage with their publics and join the conversation that is already occurring on sites like Facebook. “By engaging in the conversation that is already occurring, you are giving your organization a chance to respond and shape its perception” (Altes, 2009, p. 45).

When comparing social media to traditional public relations and marketing techniques, one might question what capabilities of these new tools make social networking very appealing. “For non-profits [sic], the power of social networks is engagement, not necessarily sheer dollar numbers” (Wong, 2008). In general, public relations personnel for nonprofit organizations possess limited financial resources to reach their publics. “…The web offers a unique opportunity to interactively reach
multiple publics without an immense sum of money” (Choi, Kiousis & Yeon, 2005, p. 62). One of the most important features and benefits of Facebook is its interactive quality. By taking advantage of Facebook and the Internet’s interactive quality, nonprofit organizations can practice and develop successful mass communication.

In their book, *Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach*, authors David W. Guth and Charles Marsh refer to a symmetrical model defined as, “A form of public relations that focuses on two-way communication as a means of conflict resolution and for the promotion of mutual understanding between an organization and its important publics” (2009, p. 561). According to these authors, Todd Hunt and James Grunig prefer the two-way symmetrical model over the two-way asymmetrical model defined as, “A form of public relations in which research is used in an effort to persuade important publics to adopt a particular point of view” (Guth & Marsh, 2009, p. 561). Hunt and Grunig describe the two-way asymmetrical model as “selfish” and indicate the model does not lead to conflict resolution. “Two-way symmetrical public relations works best when there is an exchange of resources. If an organization wants to acquire the resources it needs, it must be willing to give the resource holders something they need...In a two-way symmetrical relationship, an organization agrees to exchange resources to fulfill its values-driven goals” (Guth & Marsh, 2009, p. 93).

Facebook and the ability it provides for nonprofit organizations to interact with their audience, donors and prospective supporters relates to the idea of the two-way symmetrical model that Hunt and Grunig found extremely favorable over the two-way asymmetrical model. Facebook provides a forum for conversations and dialogue that potentially gives nonprofit organizations an opportunity to personally explain why their
cause is worth supporting while simultaneously gaining feedback and ideas from supporters and the public. Additional research will show whether organizations are truly developing a forum for two-way communication or simply using old persuasion techniques in a new social environment. It will be necessary for communication practitioners to further develop public relations’ techniques to fit the social media environment if they want to be successful.

Dr. Mihaela Vorvoreanu’s research on Facebook and social norms suggest there is a great opportunity available to nonprofit organizations interested in Facebook. “Students also had quite positive feelings towards non-profit [sic] organizations, with whom they became familiar through the “causes” application” (Vorvoreanu, 2009, p. 76). Despite these positive findings, an opportunity for improvement was also recognized in this research. “Students said they regularly express support for a good cause, but not go as far as interacting with the non-profit [sic] organization or donating money, partly because they did not think Facebook was a safe medium for credit card transactions” (Vorvoreanu, 2009, p. 76). Although it might be difficult to alter the belief that Facebook is not a safe environment for credit card use, it is possible to come up with alternative solutions to this problem. For example, do nonprofit organizations offer links to their website or a link to make donations outside of the Facebook platform? Creating alternatives and solutions to this problem will help organizations further benefit from using Facebook.

Another possible drawback of incorporating Facebook into a nonprofit organization’s communication and marketing plan is the lack of resources available to develop an active online presence. “Although the costs of adapting to changes in communication
technology are dropping considerably, there may still exist a digital divide between
organizations that have the financial and human resources to do so successfully”
(Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009, p. 75).

How can nonprofit organizations use social media more effectively? Some key ideas
to help engage these young people and raise funds include the following actions: monitor
the blogosphere, use video and photo-sharing, and conduct surveys (Fine, 2009). All of
these tactics can be done using Facebook. Ivan Booth of GI-Net said, “If you need bodies
on a rally, names on a petition, or donations in your coffers, mobilizing through
traditional means will work great. But if you need an active, educated, and effective
movement, organizing through social webs has the potential to create much more lasting
change” (Fine, 2009).

Organizations need to take advantage of Facebook’s interactive quality to create
more personal communication and dialogue with their audience. Vorvoreanu’s research
indicates personal communication is a key requirement for any organization wanting to
use Facebook as an effective communications, public relations and marketing tool. “Any
communication that does not come from an individual and is not personal is considered
inappropriate [for Facebook]. Students are open to the possibility of interacting with
employees of corporations, but only if these interactions are personal and authentic, not
scripted” (Vorvoreanu, 2009, p. 75). Although Vorvoreanu’s research also indicates
students are hesitant to interact with large corporations, the research suggests students’
attitudes differ greatly towards small businesses and nonprofit organizations
(Vorvoreanu, 2009, p. 75 ). This research on student attitudes positively indicates that
this thesis is necessary and relevant.
The limited amount of academic research on social media makes it difficult to determine the impact of these platforms. Despite the lack of scholarly inquiry, one can’t deny Facebook is influencing communication routines. By simply connecting to the Internet, one can see that social media is present and utilized, no longer just by individuals or for personal use.

With numerous features and applications available on Facebook, nonprofit organizations can greatly benefit from this cost effective tool. Many nonprofit organizations have already chosen to represent themselves on Facebook. If the organization has not yet chosen to introduce itself or mission, it’s very likely that audiences, supporters and donors have conversed online at this popular social oasis.

More research related to nonprofit organizations’ use of social media will benefit organizations that want to utilize social media effectively and want to understand the benefits and drawbacks of their participation. It’s clear that the Facebook phenomenon has already prompted nonprofit organizations to jump on board. Now these organizations need to know the benefits and potential disadvantages of joining the global conversation and how to utilize the social media phenomenon in a way that will not only benefit them, but also benefit the individuals and mission they serve.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Five nonprofit organizations devoted to women and girls’ empowerment, wellness and fitness were selected for this study. As previously mentioned, these organizations include Women’s Sports Foundation, Girls on the Run, Girls Incorporated, Step Up Women’s Network, and Women Win. These nonprofit organizations were selected for this research by using purposive sampling methods. Purposive sampling allowed for selecting the subjects nonrandomly based on particular characteristics. For this thesis, the important characteristics included nonprofit organizations devoted to women and girls’ empowerment and current participation on Facebook. “A purposive sample is similar superficially to a stratification sample in that the characteristic chosen is a stratification variable. A purposive sample does not, however, select subjects randomly on the basis of this stratification variable” (Frey, Botan, Freidman, & Kreps, 1991, p.135). Nonprofit organizations were chosen because membership and support are increasingly important to their survival, but resources are often limited. Social media, specifically Facebook, is a cost-effective tool for these organizations to consider when developing their communication strategies.

This research employed the in-depth interviewing data collection method, which is commonly used by qualitative researchers. “In-depth interview uses individuals as the
point of departure for the research process and assumes that individuals have unique and important knowledge about the social world that is ascertainment through verbal communication” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 119). One representative from each with a strong knowledge and involvement in that organization’s Facebook presence was interviewed by telephone. The following individuals participated in this research: Girls on the Run International Director of Counsel Management Erin Shamblin, Girls Incorporated Director of Marketing and Communications Alexander Kopelman, Women Win Director of Communications Sarah Murray, Women’s Sports Foundation Web Editor Lindsay Hock and Step Up Women’s Network Director of Marketing and Communications Alissa Zito. The schedule, a list of questions that guide the interview, consisted of 23 questions. This research incorporated moderately scheduled interviews which allowed the freedom to probe for additional information after primary questions were asked (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991, p. 110). Any follow-up questions were conducted using a combination of e-mail and telephone calls.

In addition to interviewing representatives from the chosen nonprofit organizations, two individuals with a strong knowledge of communications topics were interviewed. The University of Toledo New Media Coordinator Chris Ankney and 2010 – 2011 Media Fellow Will Sullivan were both consulted with during this research process. The schedule used to guide the interviews with these communications experts consisted of 12 questions. These experts provided a greater understanding of the Facebook phenomenon and insight into whether nonprofit organizations should utilize this tool. These interviews were conducted over the telephone and in person. Conducting interviews with experts in the field helped answer the research questions effectively.
The University of Toledo Assistant Director of Career Services Terri Burnett was also interviewed for this research. The interview was conducted in person, and the schedule consisted of 11 questions. The data collected during this interview was incorporated as a personal anecdote in the Introduction of this thesis.

A combination of note taking and audio recording was used to record data from the interviews. Themes emerged from the data collected, and conclusions were drawn regarding Facebook as an effective public relations, marketing and communications tool for nonprofit organizations.
Chapter Four

Navigating Facebook for Nonprofits

The findings from this research indicate organizations view Facebook as an effective tool for communication. The organizations in this study are currently taking advantage of similar Facebook features and are using the tool for comparable reasons. The following bulleted list provides an at glance summary of findings:

- Organizations use Facebook as a tool to increase outreach.
- The development of the ‘Causes’ application made Facebook a logical space for nonprofit participation.
- The interactive quality of Facebook allows for creative ways of promotion.
- The development of social media, including Facebook, helps reduce costs associated with advertising, marketing and traditional methods of promotion.
- The perceived value of social media platforms like Facebook has influenced the way organizations choose to develop and structure their marketing campaigns.
- Social networking platforms like Facebook have influenced the tone organizations use to communicate.
- Facebook is generally used as a supplement to traditional marketing and communications techniques, but not a replacement.
In order to use Facebook effectively, frequent and engaging updates are essential. Four out of five organizations agree having more time and resources to devote to Facebook and social media would be beneficial.

With the exception of one organization, all participants indicated there was ultimately one person responsible for updating and maintaining the Facebook page and presence.

When additional resources are not an option, unique ideas for utilizing the Facebook tool are worth exploring.

The subsequent sections of this chapter will expand upon this summary of findings.

4.1 Current Facebook Use

Facebook is a way for organizations to share and connect with their audiences. According to The University of Toledo New Media Coordinator Chris Ankney, it makes sense for organizations, both profit and nonprofit, to be present on Facebook. “People are talking about your business anyway on these sites. You need to know what they are saying in order to respond to it. Once you know what they are saying, and you can respond, it builds credibility and respect” (C. Ankney, personal communication, August 26, 2010).

It is almost easier for nonprofit organizations, especially those whose personnel are passionate about the mission, to engage with others on Facebook. “They might not be as visible as a Coca Cola or big brand names, but that doesn’t mean they are being less successful with their attempts to engage their audience” (C. Ankney, personal communication, August 26, 2010). Will Sullivan, 2010 – 2011 Donald W. Reynolds
Journalism Fellow researching mobile web development at the University of Missouri and previous interactive director at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, supports the idea that the opportunity for success on Facebook is much greater for nonprofit organizations than it is for commercial properties. “I think nonprofits, especially ones that are cause related make perfect sense because you’re interacting with your friends, and you’re talking about issues you’re involved with. It’s just the perfect dovetail experience for sharing information and your interests” (W. Sullivan, personal communication, October 14, 2010).

One goal of this study was to answer the following research question: Q1: How do nonprofit organizations related to women and girls’ empowerment, wellness and fitness currently use Facebook to increase interest and support for their organizations and mission? As anticipated, this research found all five organizations that participated in this study and currently maintain Facebook pages utilize the tool for similar reasons.

First, Facebook is a place where organizations can reach the constituents they might not be able to reach through traditional means of communication. According to Web Editor Lindsay Hock, social media can be a way for nonprofit organizations, like the Women’s Sports Foundation, to increase their outreach. “We as a nonprofit want to have the biggest reach possible, and while some people might not sign up for our e-news or visit our website daily, most people do sign on or sign up for Facebook” (L. Hock, personal communication, August 25, 2010). Organizations are aware of the large number of users Facebook has been able to attract. It’s logical for organizations to be present in a space where many of their members, donors and potential supporters are spending their time.
Second, when the “Causes” application emerged as a way to leverage real world social networks to effect positive change, it made sense for nonprofit organizations to represent their mission on the platform. Director of Marketing and Communications Alexander Kopelman explained that Girls Incorporated initially decided to join Facebook to participate in the “Causes” application. “When ‘Causes’ emerged and sort of got a little bit easier to use and more logical, it made sense for us to start our own cause on Facebook as a way of harnessing some of the interest and enthusiasm for our work” (A. Kopelman, personal communication, September 1, 2010). The “Causes” application was a motivating factor for nonprofit organizations to participate in the Facebook phenomenon. Organizations felt compelled to represent their missions on Facebook. In addition to utilizing the “Causes” application, nonprofit organizations have been able to create Facebook fan pages that operate and appear similar to the Facebook personal profile. By representing themselves through the “Causes” application or a Facebook fan page, nonprofit organizations are able to make sure their ideals are represented and supported on the platform.

Third, Facebook is an interactive space where each organization can promote not only itself and its events, but also promote its program partners. Director of Communications Sarah Murray described some ways that Women Win has used Facebook in the past and will continue to use the platform in the future. One of the most beneficial tools Facebook provides Women Win is the ability to share photos and video to promote their program partners. The ability to share photos and video of women and girls playing sports, primarily in developing countries, is powerful and changes opinions and stereotypes about what is acceptable for women and girls. Sharing these photos and videos can have
an impact far beyond sports (S. Murray, personal communication, August 26, 2010).

Facebook consists of features that allow the participating organizations to promote events, create dialogue and discussion, connect with the media, and conduct giveaways. All of these actions are excellent tools for promotion and ways for these organizations to encourage interest in their mission.

Overall, the participating nonprofit organizations are utilizing the Facebook platform and its features to increase outreach and maintain connections with current supporters, represent missions and ideals on a platform designed to cultivate conversations and support, and as a tool promote themselves and their program partners. These common uses model logical ways to incorporate social media, like Facebook, into an organization’s communication and marketing plan.

### 4.2 How Facebook Changed the Way Organizations Communicate

Social media and advancements in technology have and will constantly influence the way individuals and organizations communicate. According to Sullivan, this reality is a major reason why organizations should continually look for new opportunities and ways to advance their marketing and communications strategies by using tools like social media (personal communication, October 14, 2010). As part of this study, the following research question was asked: Q2: How has the Facebook phenomenon changed these nonprofit organizations’ traditional marketing, public relations and communication efforts and ultimately, how they communicate with their audience and gain support? All of the organizations that participated in this study said that social media has influenced
traditional marketing, public relations and communications techniques for a variety of reasons.

One of the greatest influences of social media is the way it is able to help reduce the costs associated with advertising, marketing and traditional methods of promotion. According to Murray, advertising, spreading the word and telling stories used to be associated with how much money an organization could pay. With the development of online social media and Facebook, spreading the word and telling stories is now free or significantly lower in cost. Murray said, “…money still speaks when using online social media tools, but I also think it’s allowed folks that don’t have big budgets, like anyone of our program partners, to be in charge of their own marketing” (personal communication, August 26, 2010). Director of Counsel Management Erin Shamblin agreed that social media can significantly lower costs in marketing and communications. Facebook has been a more cost effective way for Girls on the Run to spread the word about events and upcoming races than more traditional means of promotion like personal mailings (personal communication, September 1, 2010).

Social media has also influenced traditional marketing and communication techniques because of its “perceived value.” According to Kopelman, Girls Incorporated has been approached by many of the organization’s partners that want to do different kinds of social media based marketing campaigns. “The challenge that presents for an organization like ours is we are still appealing to a relatively small audience, and we are hitting them over and over and over with lots of different messages. We have to be very conservative in a way and stick with that idea of being respectful of people’s time and attention span” (personal communication, September 1, 2010). Social media has made it
easier to bombard people with information. “I think that it’s also creating audience exhaustion. You know, people just see so much stuff flicker in front of them that it’s harder and harder to get their attention,” Kopelman said (personal communication, September 1, 2010). This insight reinforces the previously mentioned idea and need for organizations to constantly evolve their marketing strategies and look for new ways to utilize social media that effectively grab the attention of their audience (W. Sullivan, personal communication, October 14, 2010).

For some organizations, participating online in social networking platforms has changed the way and tone they use to communicate. Director of Marketing and Communications Alissa Zito said social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, have made businesses and organizations like Step Up Women’s Network more courageous with the tone they use to communicate to the public and their supports. According to Zito, social media made the language people use to communicate with one another more casual. Social media has allowed nonprofit organizations to develop more fun, creative and engaging ways to communicate with their members, while still remaining professional (A. Zito, personal communication, August 31, 2010).

Although social media has significantly influenced the way organizations communicate, platforms like Facebook do not replace more traditional ways of communicating. Facebook generally supplements traditional communications and marketing techniques (L. Hock, personal communication, August 25, 2010). According to Ankney, social media hasn’t influenced the way organizations and businesses communicate with their audience enough. There are ways to further incorporate social
elements to more traditional ways of communicating, and successful organizations will find ways to do so (personal communication, August 26, 2010).

4.3 Unique Uses of Facebook for Increasing Effectiveness

In order to utilize Facebook as an effective marketing and communications tool, frequent and engaging updates are essential. On average, the research participants said they make updating Facebook at least once a day during the workweek a goal. According to Ankney, effective Facebook pages are updated at least daily, but it’s also important for organizations to pay attention to what fans and supporters of the Facebook page are responding to. When updating The University of Toledo Facebook page, Ankney takes note of how the page’s followers respond to his posts. “The removed fan count on days where I post more often is higher. So, I know that people get annoyed with being constantly shown things from me. I try to limit [updates] to things that I think I can get a reaction from people with” (personal communication, August 26, 2010). The goal is not to post or update to a degree that people get irritated and disconnect from the page. Organizations should pay attention to what’s happening and let their observations dictate how often they post (C. Ankney, personal communication, August 26, 2010).

Four out of five organizations agreed that having more time and resources to devote to Facebook and social media would be beneficial. According to Kopelman, Girls Incorporated is happy with the way they are currently using Facebook. If given more resources, they would most likely not channel them towards Facebook (personal communication, September 1, 2010). In contrast, the majority of organizations viewed Facebook as an effective communication tool and if they had the option, would devote
more time and energy to their Facebook and social media efforts. Having more resources to devote to Facebook and other social media platforms would allow Women Win to achieve a goal of using Facebook to help benefit its program partners. By helping program partners build Facebook networks, Women Win can build a greater community of girls and women’s sports and give their ideas greater exposure (S. Murray, personal communication, August 26, 2010).

Unfortunately, for most of these organizations, obtaining additional resources to devote to Facebook and social networking is not an option. Regardless of these challenges, this research asks the following question: Q3: How can these nonprofit organizations adjust the way they currently use Facebook to take full advantage of this social utility? This study found one organization is taking a unique approach to Facebook that other organizations should consider incorporating into their current techniques for using social media.

To ensure that Facebook is utilized effectively, despite limited resources, Step Up Women’s Network developed a unique approach by empowering every staff member to maintain the organization’s Facebook presence. With the exception of Step Up Women’s Network, all of the organizations that participated in this research indicated that ultimately one person was responsible for updating and maintaining their Facebook page. In many cases, managing the Facebook page was a small part of that individual’s job.

Zito, who is tapped into many facets of the Step Up Women’s Network and juggles multiple responsibilities, developed the idea to extend to the organization’s 11 staff members administrative access to Facebook out of concern that one person would not be able to give the conversations that happen on Facebook the time and attention they
deserve. Although Zito oversees all of the activity on the organization’s Facebook page, empowering the organization’s staff members to participate on their Facebook page has lead to variety, frequency and a more genuine dialogue. According to Zito, encouraging every staff member to talk online about the events they attend or news surrounding the organization has lead to genuine and more frequent conversations. It ultimately makes more sense for staff members to post about activities that they personally participated in, rather than having one person post details about happenings that they may or may not have witnessed (personal communication, August 31, 2010).

Some organizations may express concerns about giving multiple people influence in shaping a Facebook presence. “I would think that the reason would be kind of that institutional control. They don’t want everyone to be the voice of the organization. They want to kind of keep it controlled, which I certainly understand” (A. Zito, personal communication, August 31, 2010).

In addition to Zito monitoring the activity on the organization’s Facebook page, one way Step Up Women’s Network maintains consistency while giving multiple staff members access to the platform is by advising staff members to be conscious of the language and tone used in Step Up Women’s Network’s other written communications. By being knowledgeable about the ways and language the organization typically uses to communicate, staff members are then able to adjust their communication styles and drive conversations on Facebook. Staff members are also able to pull event language from different internal communications and incorporate it in their Facebook posts and social media outreach. “I think you can find other vehicles for controlled communication, but Facebook doesn’t necessarily need to be controlled as much as official publications or
statements from organizations. It’s much more viral and conversational. It’s almost more effective when it doesn’t sound like a mission statement” (A. Zito, personal communication, August 31, 2010).

Although this research did not prove whether giving more staff members access to updating and maintaining a Facebook presence necessarily leads to a more effective Facebook page, this unique idea could provide organizations that want to be more active on Facebook, but don’t have the resources to do so, with an alternative option. This study recognizes that out of the five organizations that participated, one is doing something significantly different from the others, and it has been successful. For most nonprofit organizations, staffing shortages and budget cuts are a reality. Any idea that can maximize outcomes while minimizing costs is worth exploring. As Zito pointed out, the Step Up Women’s Network staff members are not “11 full-time Facebook posters” (personal communication, August 31, 2010). Because many nonprofit organizations do not have the resources to hire “full-time Facebook posters,” Step Up Women’s Network’s approach offers a unique idea to consider when determining how to use Facebook more effectively to create original content and genuine conversations. This approach to Facebook allows organizations that are pressed for time and resources to distribute the workload successfully, as evidenced by Step Up Women’s Network.
Chapter Five

Analysis of Findings and Discussion

The goal of this study was to provide an overview of how some organizations are currently benefiting from using Facebook. This research successfully opened up a new dialogue about nonprofit organizations and social Facebook and will potentially influence organizations to devote more time and energy to promoting themselves using social media tools. Using Facebook as a means of promotion may ultimately help organizations with limited funds save money and better focus current resources. This research determined how nonprofit organizations are using Facebook, why they believe Facebook has influenced their traditional ways of marketing and communication, and developed suggestions for organizations to utilize Facebook more effectively. The interviews conducted with representatives from each organization, as well as additional opinions from experts in the communications field, provided insight into these topics and research questions.

The nonprofit organizations that participated in this study are currently using Facebook to ultimately engage with their supporters. Many participants expressed a hope that Facebook will enable them to gain additional supporters for their causes. Varieties of viewpoints were expressed regarding the ways social media, specifically Facebook, has influenced traditional marketing and communications techniques. Some of these views
include decreasing the costs in marketing and advertising and influencing the language and tone organizations use when communicating with their audiences. In addition, Step Up Women’s Network offered a unique approach to managing an organization’s Facebook presence by empowering every staff member to shape the organization’s Facebook page. This study recognizes the many benefits of the Step Up Women’s Network’s unique approach and recommends it as an alternative way for organizations that are tight on resources to ensure appropriate attention is given to Facebook and social networking.

Web technologies, including Facebook, are not typically “if you build it they will come” scenarios (S. Murray, personal communication, August 26, 2010). Maintaining a successful Facebook presence takes time, effort and resources. Organizations that create Facebook pages but do not want to think about new and creative ways to interact with the public and supporters probably won’t gain much from participating on the platform. According to Ankney, “The interactive quality is 98 percent of the reason why you should be using Facebook. If you don’t want people interacting with you, if you have no reason to engage with your audience, if you’re not interested in engaging with your audience, you should not be on Facebook” (personal communication, August 26, 2010).

Although academic research on Facebook and nonprofit organizations is limited, previous investigations indicate that individuals, organizations and ideas are represented on the platform. Nonprofit organizations have an opportunity to utilize the Facebook tool to help engage their audiences and increase awareness about their missions. It’s recommended that organizations, both for-profit and nonprofit, utilize this research as
they contemplate using or expanding their presence on Facebook as a way to communicate with their audiences.
Chapter Six

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

Although this research is successful in determining how organizations are currently using Facebook, why Facebook has influenced traditional marketing and communications techniques, and offers a unique suggestion for increasing effectiveness, the research is limited. First, this study includes nonprofit organizations that in some way support the idea of empowering women and girls. Although these organizations share this common characteristic, there are many differences among these organizations. Some differences include, but are not limited to, variations in the size, the available resources and tools, and the overall length of time each organization has been in operation. Despite these differences, many of their thoughts about and uses for Facebook remained consistent. Nevertheless, choosing organizations that are more comparable in size and outreach might enable the researcher to draw more specific comparisons between organizations.

This study is also limited in drawing conclusions about how the tool is currently being used and answering additional research questions because out of all the businesses and organizations represented on Facebook, only a very small sample was chosen. On the other hand, focusing on this select group generated an in-depth understanding via extensive interviews of how a small group of nonprofit organizations is currently utilizing the tool. It is important to recognize that additional nonprofit organizations represented...
on Facebook may operate in a very different way and distinctly differ from the
participants in their opinions about Facebook.

A third limitation of this study is all of the participating organizations currently have
a Facebook presence. Further research is needed to include organizations that have
remained disconnected from Facebook and other social networking tools. Comparing
organizations that currently participate on Facebook with those without a Facebook
presence might produce more insight about the benefits and disadvantages of using
Facebook as a marketing and communications tool.

In addition, more research is needed to determine the tangible benefits a Facebook
presence can provide to organizations. Throughout this research, the participating
organizations indicated that they believe Facebook to be an effective tool to connect with
their audiences and engage supporters, but beyond these observations, many of the
representatives from each organization had difficulty measuring the actual benefits of
participating in Facebook. Overall, the participants expressed a strong desire for more
research related to Facebook as a business tool. More research in this area will help
nonprofit organizations better determine how to distribute their resources and utilize
their time.
References


Appendix A

Schedule Used for Organization Representatives

1. How long have you worked for the organization you represent?
2. Please provide your official title.
3. In general, can you please provide a brief explanation of your involvement with social media, specifically Facebook, as it relates to the organization you work for?
4. Approximately when did the organization create its Facebook page?
5. Why did your organization decide to develop a Facebook presence?
6. Was joining Facebook a difficult decision?
7. What, if any, were some of your main concerns or hesitations?
8. Who is in charge of the content posted on Facebook and maintaining the page?
9. How much time and energy would you say your organization devotes to Facebook?
10. Are there specific guidelines that indicate how often your organization should update your Facebook page?
11. If you had more resources, would you choose to devote more time and energy to Facebook?
12. In your opinion, what are some of the most useful features available on Facebook
13. What are some of the negative aspects or results of joining Facebook?

14. What are some of the positives or benefits you have noticed from joining Facebook?

15. Have you run into many situations where you have needed to censor or control the information posted on your page? If so, please explain.

16. Are there any features of the platform that you have deliberately chosen not to utilize?

17. Has Facebook influenced you traditional marketing and communications techniques?

18. Is it important to utilize other methods of communication, such as the organization’s website, in conjunction with Facebook?

19. How important and beneficial is the interactive quality of Facebook to your organization?

20. Does the organization’s tone or voice change or remain the same when utilizing the Facebook platform?

21. What does your organization do well on Facebook and what are some areas you could improve upon?

22. Do you currently have any future goals or plans for your Facebook presence?

23. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel might be important for me to know pertaining to this topic?
Appendix B

Schedule Used for Communications Professionals

1. Please provide a brief background of your experience using Facebook as a professional or business and communication tool.

2. In your opinion, is Facebook relevant to the business world and why?

3. Why should organizations care about Facebook?

4. Do you think Facebook can be beneficial for nonprofit organizations that often have limited resources and depend on support and membership for survival? Please explain.

5. From your experience, has social media, particularly Facebook, altered traditional marketing and communication techniques?

6. What are some of the potential benefits of using Facebook as a marketing and communications tool?

7. What are some of the potential drawbacks of utilizing Facebook as a marketing and communications tool?

8. How important is it for organizations to alter their voice or communication style to fit in with the Facebook environment and culture?

9. Do you believe organizations that are already using Facebook are utilizing the platform to its full potential?
10. How important is it for organizations to make sure they are utilizing the interactive quality of Facebook?

11. Do you think it would be beneficial for organizations to devote more time and resources to Facebook? Why or why not?

12. Do you believe Facebook is here to stay? If so, do you have any opinions regarding future developments in social media?
Appendix C

Schedule for Personal Anecdote in Introduction

1. Do you remember when you were first introduced to Facebook and how?
2. What were your initial thoughts about the social networking platform Facebook?
3. Did you find Facebook was an easy tool to use?
4. What are some of the most common features of Facebook that you utilize? Some examples would be sharing photos or posting status updates.
5. Can you tell me about the disease Scleroderma and include some of the symptoms?
6. Are there places you can go to get support for this condition outside of the Facebook community?
7. How did you develop your support group on Facebook and what were your reasons for doing so?
8. What do you find most helpful about participating in this community on Facebook?
9. Do you think you would have been exposed to this type of support network had it not been for the development of Facebook?
10. Do you think Facebook can benefit other organizations and causes, specifically nonprofit, in the same way it benefitted you?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add or feel is important for me to know that relates to this topic?