

Investigating Stewardship Strategies on Nonprofit Websites

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ABSTRACT

Stewardship has been called the critical fifth step in the public relations process nonprofit organizations employ to develop relationships with various publics (Kelly, 2001). The purposes of this study are to explicate the meanings of the four stewardship strategies (responsibility, reporting, reciprocity and relationship nurturing) and, using a quantitative content analysis of nonprofit websites, to further understand how top nonprofits deploy these strategies online. Findings indicate differences based on organization type and web page; implications for practitioners and scholars are discussed.

Keywords: stewardship, nonprofits, websites, public relations, content analysis

For decades, 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations have collectively represented one of the fastest-growing segments of our society. These organizations rely on relationship management to build partnerships with donors, volunteers, policy leaders and other important publics to achieve their goals of leveraging improvements in their communities and making a positive contribution to solving pressing social issues at home and abroad.

According to Kelly (1998), one of the most important components of the relationship management process for public relations professionals is stewardship. She further posits that stewardship is comprised of four strategies that she labels as responsibility, reporting, reciprocity and relationship nurturing (Kelly 2001). In a nonprofit context, Jeavons (1994) suggests that stewardship relates to public relations practitioners' attentiveness to the actions of the nonprofit and how these actions affect supportive publics and other organizational stakeholders.

Despite the overarching importance of stewardship for successful relationship management by nonprofits, scholarship investigating this concept among these organizations has focused primarily on fundraising and the interplay between nonprofits and donors or potential donors (e.g., Waters, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). In an era when not

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only has the scope of nonprofits broadened, but also when many high-profile organizations such as the American Red Cross have come under attack for mismanagement of funds, ineffective governance, unethical acts and failure to comply with reporting responsibilities (Elliot, Eisinger & Sullivan, 2014), however, this somewhat narrow approach to stewardship seems too limited. Additionally, as public relations theory, research and practice continue to embrace two-way relational and dialogic communication models, nonprofit public relations practitioners and scholars can only benefit from including stewardship as part of practical and ethical approaches to building relationships and quantifying their effectiveness.

One way that public relations professionals in nonprofit organizations can effectively demonstrate good stewardship is through the use of organizational websites to transparently share information, demonstrate how they are effectively using organizational resources and provide opportunities for dialogue between the organization and its publics. The purpose of the research presented in this paper is two-fold: to build on previous definitions of the four stewardship strategies, and to better understand how the strategies are employed in the context of communications reflected in nonprofit organization websites. In so doing, the authors hope to make the concept of stewardship more accessible for public relations scholars interested in nonprofit research and measurement, practitioners working to effectively enhance public trust and communication, and educators training the next generation of nonprofit leaders.

To contextualize the utility of stewardship strategies, the current study examined the use of the four stewardship strategies in the manifest content of the top 10 nonprofits' websites (based on reported assets) for each of the seven nonprofit types (i.e., arts; education; environment; health; human services; civil rights, social action, advocacy; other public benefit) as defined by the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS). It was anticipated that the websites of these top nonprofits across all categories would provide an appropriate venue for determining the degree to which nonprofit organizations demonstrate their best practices related to the strategies of stewardship. Further, rather than studying a specific type of nonprofit organization and how it is viewed by donors, this quantitative analysis compares stewardship strategies employed by varying type of nonprofit entities, and how these strategies are deployed across key website pages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The genesis of relationship management as a topic of scholarly investigation can be traced to Ferguson (1984), who suggested that relationships are at the core of public relations. Fifteen years later, Huang (2001) declared that relationship management had "emerged as an important paradigm for public relations scholarship and practice" (p. 270). Ledingham (2003) explicated relationship management as a general theory of public relations focused on initiatives and strategies that are mutually beneficial for organizations and their many publics (Bruning, 2001; Grunig, 1993; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). This theoretical definition of relationship management formed the basis for the concept of stewardship.

Stewardship & Scholarship

Scholars have long recognized stewardship as a key component to relationship management for nonprofit organizations. In a 1991 article, Greenfield suggested that the purpose of stewardship is to “establish the means for continued communication that will help to preserve [stakeholder] interest and attention to the organization” (p. 148). Jeavons (1994) described the concept of stewardship as having ancient (even biblical) roots, and noted that nonprofit organizations, in particular, have an obligation to be good stewards of their resources because they are entrusted with those resources to benefit the public good.

In 2001, Kelly proposed stewardship as one of the most important steps in the relationship management process employed by nonprofit organizations. Previous models of public relations had proposed a normative process consisting of research, objectives, programming and evaluation but had failed to provide a cyclical paradigm for developing ongoing relationships. In Kelly’s conceptualization, the addition of stewardship, as a fifth step in the process, creates a model that offers the bedrock on which involvement is inspired and continued support sustained. She divided the construct into four underlying strategies or dimensions of stewardship. These were *responsibility*, defined by actions of a socially responsible manner as understood by those who have supported the organization; *reporting*, defined as meeting legal and ethical requirements of accountability; *reciprocity*, described as demonstrating the organization’s gratitude for support; and *relationship nurturing*, characterized as the organization understanding the importance of supportive publics and keeping them central to the organization’s consciousness (Kelly, 1998, 2001).

Building on Kelly’s work, subsequent studies have focused primarily on stewardship in terms of the management of relationships between nonprofit organizations and their donor publics. Findings from these studies offer further evidence supporting the utility of all four stewardship strategies as part of nonprofit practitioners’ efforts to develop successful fundraising campaigns (e.g. Worley & Little, 2002). Additional studies investigating the role of specific stewardship strategies have found that reciprocity is imperative for sustaining relationships with major donors (Waters, 2009a); that donor expectations and practitioner perspectives vary with respect to the magnitude and importance of stewardship strategies (Waters, 2009b); and that the four strategies of stewardship can work with other popular concepts in the public relations literature such as the organization-public relationship (OPR) framework to predict occasional major donations versus annual gifts (Waters, 2011a).

Parallel with the rise in online communications as an imperative portal for sustaining and enhancing relationships with organizational publics, stewardship-focused research has also begun to investigate the role of this construct in an online context. However, these studies primarily focus on a single type of nonprofit organization. One such study found reciprocity and relationship nurturing to be more prevalent than dimensions of responsibility and reporting in nonprofit health organization websites (Patel & McKeever, 2014). Another qualitative content analysis of email messages from the nonprofit

organizations, Susan G. Komen for the Cure and the Komen Advocacy Alliance, reported evidence of all four strategies of stewardship, although the use of the strategies varied, depending on whether the messages took an emotional, informational or political/economic approach (Weberling, 2012). This research stressed the need to continue exploring the concept of stewardship, particularly as it relates to online and direct communication with various publics.

More recently, Waters (2011b) has taken stewardship outside the nonprofit realm and applied the concept to a content analysis of Fortune 100 companies' websites. He found that, generally, for-profit corporations were most likely to display elements of reporting, followed by reciprocity, responsibility. Evidence of relationship nurturing, in particular, seemed to be lacking on the Fortune 100 websites (Waters, 2011b).

Importantly, these studies aid in clarifying the definitions of each of the stewardship strategies and offer indicators to measure the dimensions of the construct. This literature focused on nonprofit stewardship has defined *responsibility* as something organizations do to fulfill their mission and then demonstrate to the public to prove they are good stewards. In the context of nonprofit websites, evidence of this strategy includes success stories, mission statements, information about organizational history, trustee/staff listings, and third party endorsements (e.g. Charity Navigator). To delineate the *reporting* strategy from other similar stewardship strategies such as responsibility, previous definitions of the construct were refined by adding the exactitude of precise descriptions or specific quantifiable statements demonstrating the transparent flow of organizational assets. An annual report and other financial information are examples of evidence of this definition of reporting.

Reciprocity as a strategy of organizational stewardship as applied to a nonprofit organization is evidenced by visible signs of listening to different publics and thanking or recognizing them in return for their contributions to the organization. Volunteer or donor "spotlight" stories, a list of sponsors for a particular event and listings of community partners are examples of this definition of reciprocity. Additionally, *relationship nurturing* has been defined as initiating and/or participating in dialogues with various publics (including the use of social media) and expanding current involvement of individuals or publics into long-term relationships with the organization through solicitations for donations, volunteer recruitment, opportunities to take action to support the organization's efforts and contact information to connect with nonprofit staff members. To add further clarity to each of these definitions, the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Roget's Thesaurus* were consulted to assure the common understanding of each term was included in the authors' definitions of the strategies (see Figure 1).

Given that the home page of a website typically contains navigation to all internal sections of the site, and in light of the fact that it is the portal through which users most often access all other information, the authors began their analysis with an examination of the stewardship strategies appearing in the manifest content on the home pages of the nation's largest nonprofits' websites using these definitions. This led to the first research question:

RQ1: What evidence of the four strategies of stewardship appears in the manifest content of the home pages of the websites of the largest U.S. nonprofit organizations?

Beyond the Donor-Organization Relationship

Despite the broad initial conceptualization, a common thread throughout the existing body of nonprofit-related stewardship literature has been a focus on donor communications. However, as Feinglass (2005) points out, in the nonprofit sector, organizational credibility and engagement with multiple publics are cornerstones for success, dependent on a foundation of a wide array of effective public relations strategies. Further, as Tapscott (2009) has pointed out, the future viability of an organization will, in part, be determined by its transparency, interactivity and collaborative communication, oftentimes made possible by online communications.

Studies examining nonprofits' online communications also illustrate the need to better understand the stewardship concept across organizational stakeholder type. One such study of nonprofit websites found that organizations cater to donors more than volunteers (Yeon, Choi, & Kioussis, 2005). Meanwhile, a study of nonprofit Facebook pages found that only 13% of the organizations in the sample conducted fundraising on Facebook (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009), possibly because the organizations see Facebook as purely *social* media while they use their websites for fundraising. Yet another study of community foundation websites found that this communication channel has been more effectively used to share financial and performance disclosures than to open channels of communication for stakeholder input or interactive engagement (Saxton & Guo, 2011).

This literature highlights the struggles nonprofit organizations face in determining how to communicate with multiple publics in an online environment. Therefore, in addition to the "home" page, the present study includes a deeper analysis of the content present on web pages targeting not only the general public but also more specific potential stakeholders. These include the "about us," "take action/get involved/advocacy" and "support/donate/join" pages. Rather than simple documentation of indicators of stewardship strategies, for these pages the authors examined the strategy that dominates, or is given the most real estate on each of the pages, leading to the second research question:

RQ2: Which of the four stewardship strategies (responsibility, reporting, reciprocity, relationship nurturing) are dominant on the home, about us, donate and take action pages of nonprofit websites?

Finally, previous studies of nonprofit public relations stewardship strategies have focused narrowly on a single organizational type. However, it is possible that different types of nonprofits might approach stewardship differently. This suggested the third research question focusing on the presence or absence of the four stewardship strategies for each of the aforementioned web pages compared by organizational type:

RQ3: Are there significant differences in the ways different types of nonprofit organizations incorporate the four stewardship strategies in their organizational websites?

METHODS

The present study consisted of a systematic and objective content analysis of 70 nationally ranked nonprofit organization websites. The coding took place over a four-month period from November 2011 to February 2012.

Selection Plan

It was anticipated that highly ranked nonprofits (i.e., those with the greatest resources) maintain the most developed online presence. Although this was a purposive sample of top nonprofits, it was important to assure cross-sectional representation of nonprofit types. For this reason, the list of organizations was compiled using the NCCS rankings of the largest U.S. tax-exempt organizations based on assets as reported on their IRS 990 forms filed in 2010.

The list included the top 10 nonprofits by total assets within each of the primary nonprofit types (n=70). The nonprofit types are categorized as “arts” (e.g., art museums), “education” (e.g., academic institutions), “environment” (e.g., preservation groups), “health” (e.g., hospital systems), “human services” (e.g., public assistance organizations), “civil rights” (e.g., social action and advocacy nonprofits) and “other public benefit organizations” (e.g., foundations and other grant-making organizations). International organizations are distinguished as an additional type of nonprofit, however they were excluded from this study because of the high number of duplicate organizations (e.g., the American Red Cross, the Swiss Red Cross) and the likelihood of content appearing in a language other than English. Two of the “other public benefit” organizations did not have a web presence and, therefore, the top organizations from the same category in the previous year were used as replacements.

Coding Procedures

The pages selected for coding, “home,” “about us,” “take action/get involved/advocacy” and “donate/contribute,” were identified as the most commonly occurring pages in the context of nonprofit websites. They also directly correspond with the varying organizational stakeholders on whom nonprofits depend for success. Because nonprofits use varying titles to designate navigation to the pages selected for coding in this study, the authors discussed, defined and agreed upon what constituted the appropriate choice for each of the pages in instances when it was not apparent (e.g., the “donate” page may have appeared as “support us”). Additionally, when it was necessary to navigate within the site to find the appropriate page, the authors determined that no more than two “clicks” would be allowed, assuring that the coded pages represented the first information a site visitor would find on the topic. Given the evolving nature of online content, each of the pages was saved as a PDF prior to coding by two independent, trained coders.

Coding

Each coder first recorded an organization's Federal Tax ID number (EIN), organization name and total assets from the current year's IRS 990 form. The coders then recorded the NCCS listing for an organization's website URL, year founded and state of headquarters. If a website URL was absent, the coder conducted a Google search by name of the organization as listed in the NCCS rankings and recorded the organization's URL. Next, the coder categorized the type of organization as identified in the NCCS rankings.

The coder then reviewed the PDF of the home page of each website and coded for evidence of the presence or absence of the four stewardship strategies based on items coded in previous studies, as well as emergent indicators identified during pretesting. For example, evidence of responsibility could include links or text related to the mission, history, staff or endorsements from a third party (e.g. Charity Navigator), whereas indicators of reporting could include annual reports or financial information. Reciprocity (or recognition) could be demonstrated by stories thanking donors, volunteers or other groups. Evidence of relationship nurturing included indicators such as links to social media or interactive content-sharing forums (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube), donate now, take action, shop, membership or join our mailing list.

The coder then reviewed the information that appeared on the computer screen (without scrolling) to determine the dominant page strategy (i.e., responsibility, reporting, recognition, relationship nurturing). The amount of real estate that the strategy accounted for on the page was how the dominant strategy was determined. The coder then reviewed the organization's "about us," "donate," and "take action" pages and recorded the presence or absence of each stewardship strategy, as well as the dominant strategy on each page.

Inter-Coder Reliability

The codebook and coding procedures were tested using two trained coders who independently coded a random sample of websites representing 50% ($n=35$) of the population. The measure of agreement was determined using Krippendorff's Alpha. The values of agreement ranged from .67 to 1.0, which the authors considered satisfactory for this exploratory study (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).

FINDINGS

To address RQ1, coders looked for evidence of the four strategies of stewardship appearing in the manifest content of the home page of each website. Special attention was paid to differences between and among organizational types. The most common indicator of the responsibility strategy of stewardship was a link to the about us section of the site, which appeared on every home page of the nonprofit organizations sampled in this study (100%, $n=70$). The second most observed indicator was a link to or text of the organizational mission statement (36%, $n=25$). Third-party endorsement (e.g., Charity Navigator, "Best of" listings) appeared on 23% ($n=16$) of the home pages. Third-

party endorsement was the only significantly different indicator by nonprofit type with approximately half of the human services, environmental and civil rights nonprofit organizations sampled displaying evidence of this indicator ($\chi^2=14.42, p<.05$).

Only a limited number of the home pages displayed evidence of the reporting strategy of stewardship. The most noted indicator was a link to an annual report with 17% ($n=12$), while other forms of financial information, the second-most noted reporting strategy indicator, was observed on only 11% ($n=8$) of the home pages. There were no significant differences noted by nonprofit type.

Although the presence or absence of news-related content (e.g., newsletters, news coverage and organizational news) was coded, the lack of evidence for the reporting strategy of stewardship observed in this study might, in part, be attributable to the decision not to code the simple existence of each news story as evidence of reporting because an individual story actually could be an indicator of recognition (thanking donors), responsibility or reporting (indicating success in achieving the organizational mission with specific or general accounts) or relationship nurturing (inviting stakeholders to volunteer, donate or participate in an upcoming event).

Similar to the reporting strategy, only a limited number of organizational home pages included indicators of the recognition strategy of stewardship. The most noted evidence of this strategy was a listing of partnering organizations or businesses (17%, $n=12$). This was followed by recognition of volunteers or advocates (16%, $n=11$) and recognitions of financial gifts made by donors (11%, $n=8$).

Table 1: Frequency of Stewardship Evidence by Organizational Type on Home Page

	Arts (n=10)	Education (n=10)	Environment (n=10)	Health (n=10)	Human Services (n=10)	Civil Rights (n=10)	Other (n=10)	Total (n=70)
Responsibility								
About Us ($\alpha=1.00$)	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	70 (100%)
Mission ($\alpha=1.00$)	1	1	4	3	6	5	5	25 (35.7%)
3 rd Party Credibility*** ($\alpha=1.00$)	0	1	4	2	5	4	0	16 (22.9%)
Reporting								
Annual Report ($\alpha=1.00$)	1	0	2	3	3	2	1	12 (17.1%)
Financial Info ($\alpha=1.00$)	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	8 (11.4%)
Reciprocity								
Financial Gift Recognition ($\alpha=.69$)	1	0	2	2	2	1	0	8 (11.4%)
Volunteer/Advocate Recognition ($\alpha=.79$)	1	3	3	0	3	1	0	11 (15.7%)
List of Partners ($\alpha=1.00$)	1	1	3	1	3	2	1	12 (17.1%)
Relationship								

Nurturing								
Mailing List* ($\alpha=1.00$)	8	3	9	2	6	6	0	34 (48.6%)
Blog *** ($\alpha=1.00$)	3	1	5	1	3	5	0	18 (25.7%)
Events** ($\alpha=1.00$)	9	9	5	3	3	6	1	36 (51.4%)
Local Chapter* ($\alpha=1.00$)	1	3	3	10	7	4	0	28 (40%)
Contact Us ($\alpha=1.00$)	9	10	10	10	10	10	9	68 (97.1%)
Take Action* ($\alpha=1.00$)	8	5	10	6	6	9	1	45 (64.3%)
Donate* ($\alpha=1.00$)	9	10	10	5	4	9	1	48 (68.6%)
Membership** ($\alpha=1.00$)	7	0	6	1	3	3	0	20 (28.6%)
Shop* ($\alpha=1.00$)	10	0	4	2	3	1	0	20 (28.6%)
Twitter*** ($\alpha=1.00$)	7	8	8	7	5	6	0	41 (58.6%)
Facebook* ($\alpha=1.00$)	7	9	9	8	5	5	2	45 (64.3%)
LinkedIn ($\alpha=1.00$)	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	7 (10%)
YouTube*** ($\alpha=1.00$)	5	8	6	4	3	5	0	31 (44.3%)
Mobile Apps ($\alpha=.67$)	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	8 (11.4%)
News Coverage ($\alpha=1.00$)	0	1	3	1	0	3	1	9 (12.9%)
Organizational News ($\alpha=1.00$)	8	9	7	8	5	7	5	49 (71%)
Search*** ($\alpha=1.00$)	10	9	9	10	7	9	5	59 (84.3%)
News Page ($\alpha=1.00$)	8	8	10	8	6	9	6	55 (78.6%)
RSS Feeds ($\alpha=1.00$)	5	5	4	2	1	3	1	21 (30%)

Note. * $p=.000$; ** $p<.001$; *** $p<.05$

The most commonly observed stewardship strategy was relationship nurturing, which was evidenced by a number of different indicators. The most commonly appearing indicator was contact us with 97% ($n=68$), followed by donate (69%, $n=48$), take action (64%, $n=45$), Facebook (64%, $n=45$), Twitter (59%, $n=41$), and upcoming events listings or links (51%, $n=36$).

Although all the home pages tended to display evidence of the relationship nurturing strategy, the actual indicators of this strategy varied widely (and significantly) by organizational type. For example, environmental and arts organizations' websites were more likely than other types of nonprofits to provide opportunities to join the organization's mailing list ($\chi^2=25.96$, $p=.000$). Links to an organization's blog were more likely to be present on the home pages of environmental and civil rights organizations ($\chi^2=12.42$, $p<.05$). Arts and education nonprofits were more likely to post links or information related to upcoming events ($\chi^2=22.76$, $p=.001$).

Health organizations, most often represented by major national hospital systems, had the highest frequency of information about local facilities or chapters compared to other organization types ($\chi^2=30.00$, $p=.000$). Environmental and civil rights organizations were more likely to provide content or links to take action ($\chi^2=20.80$, $p<.05$). Environmental, education, arts and civil rights organizations were all highly likely to include information on how to donate to the organization ($\chi^2=34.74$, $p=.000$). Arts and environmental organizations were more likely than other organization types to offer connections to membership options ($\chi^2=22.96$, $p=.001$).

All of the arts organizations in the sample of nonprofit websites offered a link to shop online ($\chi^2=35.7$, $p=.000$). Links for both Twitter ($\chi^2=19.31$, $p<.05$) and Facebook ($\chi^2=17.30$, $p<.05$) more commonly occurred on the home pages of environmental, education, health and arts organizations. Links to YouTube channels were more frequently occurring on education organizations' websites than other nonprofit types ($\chi^2=15.29$, $p<.05$).

To answer RQ2, the authors next coded the dominant stewardship strategy appearing in the manifest content on the home, about us, donate and take action pages of each of the nonprofit websites in the study. Overall, by far the most frequently appearing dominant strategy on the home page of these organizations was responsibility (76%, $n=53$), followed by relationship nurturing (19%, $n=13$). Both the reporting and recognition strategies were judged to be the dominant strategy on only 3% ($n=2$) of the sampled home pages.

Responsibility was the dominant strategy on nearly all of the organizations' about us pages (96%, $n=67$). Trailing far behind as a dominant strategy on the about us page was relationship nurturing (4%, $n=3$).

In contrast, relationship nurturing was the most dominant strategy on both the take action and donate pages. Only 45 organizations in the sample included a take action page, and of those pages, this strategy was judged most dominant on 40 (89%). The only other strategy that appeared as dominant was responsibility (11%, $n=5$). Neither reporting nor recognition was coded as being a dominant strategy. These findings were significant at the .05 level ($\chi^2=31.99$).

A similar pattern was evident in the analysis of the donate page. Only 49 websites in the sample contained this page, and of those, relationship nurturing was the most frequently occurring dominant strategy (82%, $n=40$), followed by responsibility and recognition, each of which were dominant on 8% ($n=4$) of the pages. Reporting was the dominant strategy on only one of the donate pages of the sampled websites (2%). Differences between dominant strategies deployed on the donate page were significant at the .05 level ($\chi^2=58.30$).

Table 2: Dominant Stewardship Strategy by Page Type

	Responsibility	Reporting	Recognition	Relationship nurturing	Totals
Home Page ($\alpha=.82$)	53 (75.7%)	2 (2.9%)	2 (2.9%)	13 (18.6%)	70 (100%)
About Us ($\alpha=1.00$)	67 (95.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.3%)	70 (100%)
Take Action* ($\alpha=.76$)	5 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	40 (88.9%)	45 (64.2%)
Donate** ($\alpha=.77$)	4 (8.2%)	1 (2.0%)	4 (8.2%)	40 (81.6%)	49 (70%)

Note. * $\chi^2=31.99$, $p=.001$; ** $\chi^2=58.3$, $p=.000$

The final research question (RQ3) focused on possible differences in the ways that various nonprofit types incorporate stewardship strategies into their organizational websites. To investigate this question, the authors looked for evidence of the presence or absence of each of the four stewardship strategies on the home, about us, take action and donate pages of the organizational websites.

The authors found evidence of the responsibility strategy of stewardship on all organizational home pages (100%, $n=70$). Relationship nurturing was present on all but one of the organization’s home pages (99%, $n=69$). The reporting strategy appeared in the content of 53% of organization home pages. The least commonly occurring strategy on the home page was recognition (20%, $n=14$). Human services and health organizations were significantly more likely to include the reporting strategy on their home pages compared to other nonprofit types ($\chi^2=15.02$, $p<.05$). No other significant differences were noted.

Table 3: Dominate Stewardship Strategy by Page & Organizational Type

	Arts (n=10)	Education (n=10)	Environment (n=10)	Health (n=10)	Human services (n=10)	Civil rights (n=10)	Other (n=10)	Total (n=70)
Home Page								
Responsibility ($\alpha=1.00$)	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	70 (100%)
Reporting** ($\alpha=.79$)	4	2	4	8	9	6	4	37 (52.9%)
Recognition ($\alpha=.69$)	2	0	4	3	2	3	0	14 (20%)
Relationship nurturing ($\alpha=1.00$)	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	69 (98.6%)
About Us								
Responsibility ($\alpha=1.00$)	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	70 (100%)
Reporting ($\alpha=.77$)	8	8	8	9	9	10	6	58 (82.9%)
Recognition** ($\alpha=.87$)	3	0	3	2	4	7	0	19 (27.1%)
Relationship nurturing ($\alpha=1.00$)	10	10	10	10	9	10	8	67 (95.7%)

Take Action	Arts (n=8)	Education (n=5)	Environment (n=10)	Health (n=6)	Human services (n=6)	Civil rights (n=9)	Other (n=1)	Total (n=45)
Responsibility ($\alpha=1.00$)	8	5	10	6	6	9	1	45 (100%)
Reporting** ($\alpha=.77$)	5	5	6	3	3	3	0	25 (55.6%)
Recognition** ($\alpha=.77$)	3	3	5	2	2	3	1	19 (42.2%)
Relationship nurturing ($\alpha=.71$)	8	5	10	6	6	9	1	45 (100%)
Donate	Arts (n=9)	Education (n=10)	Environment (n=10)	Health (n=6)	Human services (n=4)	Civil rights (n=9)	Other (n=1)	Total (n=49)
Responsibility* ($\alpha=.86$)	9	8	10	6	4	7	1	45 (91.8%)
Reporting* ($\alpha=.76$)	6	6	7	3	2	6	1	31 (82.9%)
Recognition* ($\alpha=.71$)	4	7	6	5	2	4	0	28 (57.1%)
Relationship nurturing* ($\alpha=.86$)	9	10	10	6	4	9	1	49 (100%)

Note. * $p=.000$; ** $p<.05$

The responsibility strategy of stewardship was found on all of the about us pages of the organization websites in this study, regardless of type (100%, $n=70$). The relationship nurturing strategy of stewardship was found on nearly all about us pages (96%, $n=67$). Evidence of the reporting strategy of stewardship appeared on 83% ($n=58$) of the about us pages. Least common was the reciprocity strategy of stewardship (27%, $n=19$). Analysis of differences by organization type indicated that civil rights organizations are significantly more likely to include the recognition strategy of stewardship than other organization types ($\chi^2=22.91$, $p<.05$). No other statistically significant differences were noted.

Both responsibility and relationship nurturing strategies of stewardship were present on all of the take action pages (100%, $n=45$) of the organizations that had a take action page. In contrast, only about half of the take action pages (56%, $n=25$) contained the reporting strategy of stewardship. Less than half of the take action pages exhibited the recognition strategy of stewardship (42%, $n=19$). Evidence of the reporting strategy of stewardship tended to significantly appear more often on the take action pages of environmental, education and arts organizations compared to other organization types ($\chi^2=29.68$, $p<.05$). Significant differences were also noted for the recognition strategy of stewardship, which tended to be found more often on the take action pages of environmental and education organizations ($\chi^2=25.36$, $p<.05$).

The relationship nurturing strategy of stewardship was found on all 49 (100%) of the donate pages of all organizations with a donate page. Many of the donate pages contained evidence of the responsibility strategy of stewardship (92%, $n=45$). The reporting strategy of stewardship was found on 83% of donate pages ($n=31$), and the recognition strategy of stewardship was present on more than half of the donate pages

(57%, $n=28$). Evidence of the reporting strategy of stewardship tended to appear significantly more often on the donate pages of environmental and arts organizations compared to other organization types ($\chi^2=35.39$, $p=.000$). Significant differences were also noted for the recognition stewardship strategy, which was found more often on donate pages of education and environmental organizations ($\chi^2=38.5$, $p=.000$).

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to better understand how the four strategies of stewardship might function across communications with varying publics on nonprofit organizational websites. This study focused specifically on websites because they provide a key vehicle in today's technologically driven world for nonprofits to communicate with the wide array of existing stakeholders and potential strategic publics. Specifically, the authors investigated the presence, absence and dominance of the four strategies of stewardship on the websites of the largest U.S. nonprofit organizations in seven categories of organization type as defined by the NCCS.

Findings indicate that the relationship nurturing and responsibility strategies of stewardship, both key to informing and engaging publics, were consistently demonstrated through various indicators of stewardship on organization websites by almost all nonprofit organizations in this study. The presence of these strategies across all organization types and pages provides some indication that nonprofit organizations see their online communication as a vehicle for stimulating two-way communication. This provides initial evidence for the notion that public relations processes (models) become cyclical when there is a general focus on relationship nurturing, building and cultivation, combined with evidence of mission fulfillment. Further, it is possible that relationship nurturing may underlie all stewardship strategies. Perhaps relationship nurturing should be thought of as an overall goal of stewardship efforts rather than a strategy like reporting, responsibility and recognition, which tend to be more tactics oriented.

It is, however, somewhat disconcerting to note the inconsistent inclusion of reciprocity and recognition across key website pages and varying organizational types. Despite previous research pointing to the importance of recognizing and thanking publics who contribute to the success of an organization (reciprocity), and transparent financial disclosure and accountability (reporting), the nation's largest nonprofits fail to consistently include these strategies in their web-based communications.

The responsibility strategy of stewardship was the dominant strategy on the home and about us pages across all organization types. Conversely, the relationship nurturing strategy of stewardship was the dominant strategy on the donate and take action pages. The dominance of these strategies on select pages may indicate that the nation's largest nonprofits believe these are the best or most logical places to highlight specific stewardship aims. For instance, providing relationship nurturing information and links on pages that house solicitations for funds and volunteers opens channels of communication for dialogue with the organizations. The less frequent appearance of the

reporting and reciprocity strategies of stewardship on these pages, however, raises red flags. For example, those who have or are contemplating contributing to a nonprofit need specific financial information (e.g., annual report) to assure them that the organization is being a responsible steward of organizational assets. Similarly, those who have contributed to a nonprofit are more likely to continue to donate if they feel their actions are appreciated.

Environmental, arts and civil rights organizations displayed the greatest variety of stewardship strategies across the varying pages of their websites. If other nonprofits are seeking to achieve relationship management aims, they may be well served to mirror how these organizations have achieved balance in their stewardship objectives online. For example, it was surprising to see only some evidence of the responsibility and relationship nurturing strategies of stewardship, rather than the full gamut of the four strategies of stewardship within the websites of human service nonprofits (i.e., public assistance programs). While it is important for these organizations to provide information concerning programs and programmatic successes (i.e., responsibility), what may be more needed is developing open dialogue and cultivating relationships with visitors to these websites.

Additionally, education (i.e., primarily academic institutions), health (i.e., primarily large hospital conglomerates) and other public benefit organizations (i.e., primarily grant making entities and loan corporations) were less likely to be comprehensive in using all four strategies of stewardship. Perhaps this is because the structure of the nonprofits that comprise these categories are often less reliant on donations and volunteerism; however, in an era when transparency is key to maintaining public trust, it is imperative that these organizations extend their disclosure of information to be all encompassing.

LIMITATIONS

While this study contributes to our understanding of how stewardship strategies are presented in an online context, as with all research, this study has its limitations. First, limited budgets, expertise and staff may lead some nonprofits to limit the presence of the stewardship strategies in the manifest content of organizational websites. Next, as this study was a content analysis, it does not provide insight into the page views or stakeholder's attitudes towards the content presented. Further, while great consideration was given to the sample for this study, the findings may not be generalizable to certain nonprofit types (i.e., faith-based) or small nonprofits working in targeted geographic areas. Finally, evolving technology and the increasing use of mobile devices may affect the information available on nonprofit websites.

CONCLUSION

The concentrated scope of this study provided the opportunity to further test the operationalizations of the strategies of stewardship across nonprofit type as well as across the pages of organizational websites. By focusing on the largest nonprofits in the country, the authors were able to identify the online communication practices and

priorities developed by organizations with larger budgets. Future research should similarly examine the prevalence of stewardship strategies across varying sizes of organizations to continue to ascertain if models for best practices exist.

Further, building on the findings, the authors suggest that research on stakeholder and practitioner views of the utility of each strategy in online communications would be a particularly useful step in the development of valid and reliable scales for quantifying the effectiveness of each of the stewardship strategies. Surveys, focus groups and interviews would help accomplish these aims. Additionally, experimental research could break apart these strategies and allow for control over exposure to websites or other communications. This type of research would help scholars and practitioners to better understand the best strategies for facilitating effective two-way communication between nonprofit organizations and their many important publics.

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Stewardship Category	Dictionary Definition/Synonyms	Research/Literature Definition	Our Definition	Examples
Responsibility	<p>Capability to fill one's duty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answerability • Accountability • Commitment • Reliability • Trustworthiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting in a socially responsible way • Keeping promises to donors and other publics • Statements about using funding to fulfill mission and donors wishes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General overarching statements related to mission fulfillment • Generally creating awareness of issues related to organization's mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses alternative ways to tell how donations are used (such as narratives or general current issue stories) • Statements indicating generally, "We won" • General success story on how programmatic mission is achieved • Statements like, "Our partners asked for it, and we did it" <p><i>Specifics: Mission, History, About Us, 3rd Party Credibility</i></p>
Reporting	<p>Conveying information or facts; giving a specific account</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describing • Informing • Recounting • Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating accountability • Meeting legal and ethical requirements of accountability • Providing updates on progress and goal achievement • Inform about fundraising success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precise description of how mission is fulfilled • Specific quantifiable statement of success • Report of an issue with specific examples/numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success story with specific examples/numbers • 90% of every \$1 goes to achieving our mission • 60% goes toward research; 40% goes toward treatment <p><i>Specifics: Annual Report, Financial Info</i></p>
<p>Reciprocity/ Recognition*</p> <p><i>*in a nonprofit context the uses of the reciprocity strategy more closely resemble recognition.</i></p>	<p>Mutual, dependence, action, exchange, the act or process of acknowledgement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation/ Mutuality • Appreciation/ Favorable Attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General demonstration of gratitude or acts of appreciation • Acknowledgement and appreciation of public support • Sincerity • Friendship recognition • Listing of partners • Community relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible signs of listening to different publics • Thanking donors, volunteers, and other organizational supporters for their contribution to the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement of specific contributors, volunteers, etc. (more specific than "thanks to our donors, we were able to...") • Statements of "we couldn't do it without the contributions of ..." <p><i>Specifics: Stories (including features) or other content "spotlighting" the contribution(s) of donors, volunteers, groups, businesses, etc.</i></p>
<p>Relationship Cultivation/ Nurturing/ Maintenance*</p> <p><i>*Relates to literature associated with relationship building, nurturing & maintenance</i></p>	<p>Binding participants to an organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship: affiliation, alliance, association, bond, interdependence • Nurture: cultivate, develop, support, foster, educate, sustain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting the importance of supporting publics and keeping them central • Cultivating relationships • Maintaining open communication • Regular contact • Not solicitation only • Personalized attention • Invitations to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities for public to engage with the organization • Initiating and/or participating in dialogue with existing and potential stakeholders • Opportunity for publics to do something for/with the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitations to participate in events • Initiating and participating in two-way dialogue (online, etc.) • Calls to additional action • Recognizing birthdays or other milestones <p><i>Specifics: Social Media, Join Our Mailing List, Contact Info, Volunteer, Take Action, Donate, Shop</i></p>