

Examining the Role of Social Media in Organization-Volunteer Relationships

Windy L. Hovey

This case study examined the use of social media sites by a nonprofit social dance center and the role the sites played in the relationships between the organization and its volunteers. Document analysis was used to study the center's Facebook group, YouTube channel, Flickr site, and blog. Interviews and a focus group were then conducted with the director, operating manager, and 16 volunteers. The study presents new information about strategies organizations employ to cultivate relationships with their publics through social media. It also demonstrates ways in which social media use can result in both positive and negative relationship outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

For nonprofit organizations, social media sites, such as blogs and Facebook, offer new ways to engage publics in activism, publicity, and fundraising (Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2008, 2009; Kanter, 2007; Mattson & Barnes, 2007; Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). Additionally, social media sites are often inexpensive – if not free – to use and require only basic computer skills. These aspects make social media seemingly ideal for many nonprofit managers who are limited in time and resources.

Social media advocates caution, though, that incorporating social media into communication strategies without attentive planning and evaluation can result in an ineffective and inefficient use of resources (Paine, 2007). In professional forums, there has been much discussion about how to measure the return on investment in social media (Bentwood, 2008; Huyse, 2007; Kanter, 2009a; 2009b; Paine, 2007). Social media metrics can be placed into three categories: analytics that measure traffic, content, and buzz; financial cost and benefit analyses; and relationship measurement scales. Relationships cultivated through social media are generally the most difficult of the three categories to measure; however, relationships are critical to track because they are fundamental to an organization's innovation, efficiency, and community support (Paine, 2007).

This study expands on public relations research that has examined how organizations can use social media to build relationships with their publics. (e.g., Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Rubel, 2009; Teich, 2008; Waters et al., 2009). Specifically, the current study reports on how a nonprofit community dance center uses social media to cultivate relationships with its volunteers and outcomes for those relationships.

Windy L. Hovey is a recent graduate from the University of Oregon with a M.S. in Communication and Society and a certificate in Nonprofit Management, windyhovey@gmail.com.

The case organization has characteristics of both a nonprofit organization and a business. The center does not have 501(c)(3) status; it is a project under a registered umbrella nonprofit organization for several other community groups. Further, the center has never been financially supported by grants, government contracts, or donations. It was opened and is run on revenue from entrance fees; rental of the space to dancers, teachers, and community groups; and personal support from the director. However, the center is more relatable to a nonprofit organization in its use of volunteers to plan and implement programs. Volunteers contribute their time in many ways – from the construction of the dance floor and renovating the facility, to greeting dancers and taking admission at the front desk, to organizing and promoting events. The center's overarching mission resembles one of a nonprofit group. The director and operating manager, the only paid staff, both expressed that the center provides critical opportunities for community interaction and sustainable activity in the historic downtown section of the city.

This study offers public relations theory in relationship management as one framework for determining return on investment in social media. The resulting qualitative assessment broadens the findings of public relations studies of organization-public relationships and social media that are, to date, predominantly quantitative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media

There are many accounts of how some of the nation's largest nonprofits are using social media (e.g., Chronicle of Philanthropy 2008, 2009; Mattson & Barnes, 2007; Verclas, 2007). Social media can help nonprofits share the work of publicity and advocacy with volunteers and be open with organizational information (Cronk, 2007; Fine, 2006; Waters et al., 2009). Furthermore, Brinckerhoff (2007) reported that the use of social media is one way nonprofits can engage individuals of the Millennial generation as donors, employees, and volunteers. Recent studies show that older generations are also using social networks regularly (e.g., Pierce & Wood, 2008; Smith, 2009). Thus, social media sites have the potential to broaden audiences for nonprofits across generations.

Recent public relations studies show that public relations practitioners across sectors are adopting social media, but they are not using the sites to the fullest means (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008; Kent, 2008; Xifra & Huertas, 2008). However, other public relations studies have indicated that social media help organizations to cultivate relationships with their publics. Kelleher and Miller (2006) found that an audience-perceived conversational style on a company's blog led to positive outcomes for the relationship. Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) concluded that blogs offer more opportunities than traditional Web sites for two-way dialog between an organization and its publics. Sweetser & Metzgar (2007) found that blog readers perceived a lower level of crisis for an organization than those who don't read blogs. They stated:

In regard to relationship management, the conversational human voice factor and the responsiveness/customer service factor appeared to be the key components in improving relationships with publics during a crisis through an organizational blog. (p. 342)

A study by Wright and Hinson (2008) reported that public relations practitioners also believe social media enable organizations to respond quickly to questions and concerns from their publics and helped them to build relationships with strategic publics.

Many social media users now combine professional and personal networking through platforms such as Facebook (Kanter, 2008; Monty, 2008). In recent years, scholars have reported benefits and consequences of online interaction for interpersonal relationships and society. Reported downsides are loss of trust resulting from anonymity and dishonest online representation (Tompkins, 2003), a decline in offline interpersonal relationships (Nie, 2001), and weakened existing social ties with family and friends from the loss of face-to-face contact (Kraut et al., 1998; Putnam, 2000). For Putnam (2000), physical presence was an important factor in civic engagement, and he was particularly concerned with the effects of electronic media on social capital. He warned in his book *Bowling Alone*, "No sector of American society will have more influence on the future's state of our social capital than the electronic mass media and especially the Internet" (p. 410). Alternatively, there are findings of positive effects from online socialization. Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2007) concluded from a study of college-age students that social networking sites such as Facebook build social capital by enabling students to maintain and form new friendships online. Furthermore, Bargh & McKenna (2004) found that online communication can promote face-to-face contact. Discussions of online interaction and personal relationships are complicated by variables such as different personality types and the multitude of purposes for which people engage in online networks.

Relationship Management

Since the late 1980s, public relations scholars have recognized the importance of studying and measuring relationships between an organizations and their publics (Lindenmann, 1998). In 2000, Broom, Casey, and Ritchey offered the following definition of these types of relationships:

Organization-public relations are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationships. (p. 18)

They recognized that relationships are dynamic in nature; however, relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time (Broom et al., 2000). Several public relations scholars contributed to the process of determining how to measure organization-public relationships (e.g., Broom et al., 1997; J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000;

Hallahan, 2004; Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Scholars have categorized organization-public relationship concepts into antecedents, cultivation strategies, and relationship outcomes. *Antecedents* to relationships are the perceptions, motives, needs, and behaviors that lead to the formation of a relationship (Broom et al., 2000). *Cultivation strategies* are defined by J. E. Grunig (2002) as “the communication methods that public relations people use to develop new relationships with publics and to deal with the stresses and conflicts that occur in all relationships” (p. 5). Broom et al. (2000) defined *relationship outcomes* as “the outputs that have the effect of changing the environment and of achieving, maintaining, or changing goal states both inside and outside the organization” (p. 16). Table 1 presents examples of cultivations strategies and relationship outcomes that have been defined in scholarly research and that are pertinent to the discussion section of the current study.

Volunteer Management

Volunteers are a unique public with whom nonprofit organizations continuously cultivate relationships. Volunteers remain critical for the success of nonprofits, even as the nonprofit sector increasingly adopts models and business practices of the for-profit sector (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Salamon, 2002). Nonprofits rely on volunteers for critical functions, such as fundraising, promoting public awareness, and leading programs (Grimm et al., 2007). Moreover, volunteers are an asset to society because they help to build social capital (Becker & Dhingra, 2001).

Over the past decade, scholars in public relations, sociology, and nonprofit management have contributed to the growing understanding of volunteer management (e.g., Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Bortree & Waters, 2008; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Dyer, Buell, Harrison, & Weber, 2002; Farmer & Fedor, 1999) and the role volunteers play in building civic engagement and social capital (e.g., Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Salamon, 1999; 2002). However, nonprofits' appointment of staff and resources to volunteer management remains minimal (Grimm et al., 2007). This indicates a continuing need for studies of volunteer-organization relationship cultivation.

Table 1
Examples of Cultivation Strategies and Relationship Outcomes

Cultivation Strategies	Definition	Scholars Cited
Assurances	A strategy an organization uses to show recognition of its publics and their concerns	Hon & J. E. Grunig (1999); J. E. Grunig & Huang (2000); L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Ehling (1992)
Dialog	An organization's attention and responses to the information received from its publics	Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (1998)
Openness	An organization's willingness to share its opinions, concerns, and problems	Hon & J. E. Grunig (1999)
Positivity	A strategy that an organization uses to engage its publics in activities that them to enjoy the relationship	Hon & J. E. Grunig (1999)
Stewardship	An organization's actions that demonstrate responsibility for the good of its greater community.	K. Kelly (2001)
Relationship Outcomes	Definition	Scholars Cited
Control mutuality	The extent to which an organization and its publics agree about the degree of influence they should exert in a relationship	J. E. Grunig & Huang (2000); Hon & J. E. Grunig (1999)
Co-production	Voluntary promotion of the organization by its publics	(Derville (2007); Sheth & Parvatiyar (1995)

Research Questions

This study used three research questions to explore what a nonprofit group's volunteers think about online socializing and how they might use social media to promote an organization's mission. It also explored how an organization's leaders use social media in ways that may or may not build relationships with their volunteers. The nonprofit group selected is referred to in this study as the Community Dance Center.¹ The center's mission is to offer community members opportunities to learn and engage in social dance.

¹ The name of this study's case organization and participants have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality.

RQ1: To what extent do the center’s volunteers use social media and what opinions do they hold about social media?

RQ2: How do the director and manager of the center use its social media sites and in what ways do the sites help them in building relationships with volunteers?

RQ3: To what extent do the volunteers use the center’s social media, and what are outcomes of the use on their relationship with the center?

METHOD

Document analysis of the center’s social media sites, as well as a focus group and in-depth interviews with the staff and volunteers were conducted. Interview guides were used for consistency for the interviews and focus group, and they included probe questions that sought clarification and elaboration on subject areas. The narrow focus of a case study approach allowed for the study of details, context, and nuances of the case organization.

Participants

This study’s participants included the director and general manager of the dance center, 3 former volunteers, and 13 current volunteers (see Table 2, List of Participants). Among the volunteers were 9 women and 7 men. There were two age groups: the first group was between 19 and 33 and the second group was between 42 and 62. All participants were Caucasian.

Table 2
List of Participants

<i>Administrators</i>	<i>Age</i>
David, Director	48
Deanna, Manager	44
<i>Volunteers</i>	
April	19
Tania	20
Alex	21
Brent	21
Sara	22
Brian	23
Melissa	25
Mark	27
Nick	33
Robert	42
Amy	47
Andrea	49
Angie	52
Anne	56
Laura	58
Mike	61

Recruitment, Sampling, and Access

Approval for research was granted after conversations with the center's director and operating manager prior to data collection. Several recruitment methods were used including requests made in-person, by e-mail, and through the center's Facebook wall. Each volunteer participant was entered into a drawing for a gift certificate to a local home and garden store.

Data Collection

Document analysis of the center's blog, Facebook group, YouTube channel, and Flickr site prior to the interviews and focus group aided in formulating questions for the interviews. A hand-held digital audio recorder was used during the interviews and focus group. The recorded interviews and focus group were then transcribed. Personal notes about personal reactions and participants were recorded throughout the data collection period. These personal notes about each interview can help with later interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Data Analysis

An inductive analysis approach was used to test relationship management theory. In this research design, "categories or dimensions of analysis emerge from open-ended observations" (Patton, 2002, p. 56). Comparative coding methods defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) were applied. The process included *microanalysis*, which is the combination of both *open coding*, the identification and categorization of properties and dimensions that emerge from data, and *axial coding*, which is the process of linking those categories to subcategories (Patton, 2002).

A spreadsheet was used to code phrases from each interview. Units of analysis were determined by including every sentence that was associated with each theme and concept. They ranged in length from one-sentence responses to long paragraphs that included both the question asked and the participant's response. Each pattern was listed in an individual row down the first column of the spreadsheet. Each participant received his or her own column, starting with the second column of the spreadsheet. Units of text from each subsequent interview were inserted in the participant's column at a pre-existing pattern row or in a newly created pattern row. Several units were placed into multiple pattern rows. Finally, patterns were merged into a final list of categories, which was used to inform the results. Member validation and triangulation of methods were used to build the study's quality and credibility.

RESULTS

Case Description

The director of the Community Dance Center (CDC), David, founded the center in 2002 to provide a permanent dance facility for the existing local community of dancers. They leased the building and, with the assistance of several volunteers, they renovated and decorated the space. The director, volunteers, and dancers in the community organize daily dances and lessons at CDC. Professional dancers visit to

perform and teach master classes. David is a software, systems, and Web site developer by profession. He created a Web site and set up each of the social media sites for the center.

Many of the center's volunteers called for improvements within the facility: better lighting, a heating and cooling system, improved sound system, and a restored ceiling. Andrea articulated "The whole thing kind of looks like it's been through a war or like it might authentically be out of Havana, Cuba, in modern times..." There was underlying uncertainty from many of the volunteers about the organizational structure and financial sustainability of CDC. Several volunteers described a perpetual shortage of funding that restricts projects and facility upgrades.

The center's identity is established in part by its location on the west end of a downtown avenue that contains many empty store fronts and is a popular hangout area for youth and transients. In 2007, the City failed to achieve the votes necessary for a bond measure to pay for redevelopment in the area, due in part to heavy lobbying by the director of CDC. Plans presented by out-of-town developers would have displaced the center. All but one of CDC's volunteers interviewed commended the director for his outcry against the initiative and were grateful that the center still existed. Yet despite the director's efforts, some volunteers questioned how long CDC would be able to or should remain in its location. They cited facility limitations and an uncertain future of the neighborhood.

Internal Politics

In nearly all of the interviews and in the focus group, volunteers brought up a history of disagreements among dancers at the center. They also noted disputes between the director and either themselves or other CDC volunteers. Arguments among dancers centered around dance etiquette and technique. Some of these took place over a listserv which volunteers, dance instructors, and musicians use often to announce events at CDC. The volunteers I interviewed preferred to stay out of these arguments; some had even unsubscribed from the listserv to avoid reading them.

The source of contention between David and some volunteers was disagreement in decisions he has made, including organizational structure and sustainability, use of the center, renovations to the facility, and types of music played at dances. Some interview participants said that they had stopped volunteering at CDC due to these disagreements. Most, although aware of the disagreements, opted to stay out of what I often heard referred to as the center's *internal politics*.

RQ1: To what extent do the center's volunteers use social media and what opinions do they hold about social media?

Volunteers' Use of Social Media

The volunteers' use of social media, both in frequency and types of programs, did not follow any pattern of age. There were volunteers in the younger age group who shunned most social media and volunteers in the age group of early 40s to 60s who

used one or more social media sites almost daily. Many in the 40s to 60s group did, however, tend to think that social media were better geared toward communicating with the younger group. Laura, who is in her 50s, commented "As far as social media for young people, I would think that they would be using it more. I'm guessing for a lot of people my age, we weren't raised with all this."

All but three of the volunteers had Facebook accounts. The frequency that volunteers logged into Facebook varied from several times each day to once every couple of weeks. Use of blogs also varied. Three of the volunteers followed more than one blog regularly for personal or professional interests. This was in contrast with several volunteers who said they never read, posted, or commented on blogs. All of the volunteers had accessed YouTube at least once before. Some of them, like Angie, who is in her early 50s, said they use it for educational purposes. She explained:

If I have anything I'm doing research on, anything. If I could be on a desert island with unlimited power and YouTube and a fairly decent video card, I could stay there for the rest of my life.

YouTube was also accessed for online entertainment. None of the volunteers had Flickr accounts, although a few of them had heard of it before.

Volunteers' Opinions Of Social Media

Several of the volunteers in both age groups expressed strong reservations about social media use. There were four main themes: impersonal communication, privacy, accessibility, and triviality.

Impersonal communication. The most frequently raised concern among volunteers of all ages was that online socializing displaced time that could be spent on interacting with people in the real world. Andrea remarked:

Social networking sites irritate me in some way because if I want to be social, I want to be in person. And am I at [CDC] dancing with someone, or am I at home sitting at my computer typing to someone that, "Wouldn't it be fun if we were dancing?"

Amy told me she thinks that blogs are for people who have too much free time. She added, "They're not putting in enough time with people in real life, and I just think it's horrible."

Many of the volunteers in the older age group attributed this concern to being in a different generation that was more likely to communicate offline. However, younger volunteers shared this concern as well. Mark recalled:

I have this distant memory of being at a [dance] event at [a large pizza restaurant] and there were about 30 to 40 people there learning how to dance...I

looked over and there was some guy with his back turned to everybody in the space surfing some online dating site. And to me that's just kind of crazy.

Privacy Online. Some volunteers also raised the concern about maintaining privacy online. Nick said he didn't believe people think enough about the images and information they publish online. His two main privacy concerns were that people provide private information to social media companies and that people are judged by future employees and friends for what is posted about them online. A couple of the volunteers were also uncomfortable with providing required information to register for social media sites, such as Facebook.

Accessibility. The primary reason that Mike, who is in the age group of late 40s to 60s, didn't visit sites abundant with videos and images was that he used a slow dial-up Internet connection. Mike was the only volunteer in the group for whom Internet connection speed created limitations for viewing social media, especially sites with videos and photos.

Triviality. Amy expressed strong contempt for social media. For her, social media sites are a product of the "me" culture that created them. She thought of all social media sites still as personal diaries that scream, "Look at me; look at me...blah, blah, blah, blah." Two other volunteers, both close to age 50 and who have Facebook profiles, noted that they don't understand the need for the "bells and whistles" of Facebook, such as the hug, poke, or gift applications.

RQ2: How do the director and manager of the center use its social media sites and in what ways do the sites help them in building relationships with volunteers?

Document analysis of the center's social media sites and interviews with David, the director, and Deanna, the manager, revealed many reasons and ways in which the center uses social media.

Facebook

As of June 2008, there were 126 members of the center's Facebook group. David suspected that most of the communication among CDC's online members was not visible by looking at the center's site. Rather than leaving messages on CDC's Facebook wall, they communicate with each other through Facebook's e-mail and event list applications. My interviews with volunteers confirmed this. The director was thrilled with Facebook because CDC volunteers were able to share in the work of organizing and promoting events without taking much of his time. He told me:

Sometimes the right [social media sites] get people so excited that they can do some of the work for you. It's a real boon to the nonprofit organizer. They won't even need to contact you much about it. I mean maybe you need to give them some permission in a group or something like that....I'm programming events off and on, deciding who's going to be around on a weekend and those people, because they're on Facebook too, interact with people.

David also believed Facebook provides online visual context that helps depict CDC. He said this surpasses what any text description of the organization could provide. He commented:

It was [called] Facebook because instead of just having your name up there, you put your face up there, and it allows you to kind of have a full view of all the people... That distinction is really important. In a sense you're putting a face on what you're doing.

Blog

David's initial posts to the blog in late 2004 set a tone of openness for the entries that followed. For example, in one post from November 2004, he discussed three challenges a nonprofit community project faces: finding and maintaining community support and serving the community effectively. He stated that, to him, the solutions to these challenges are transparency and community ownership. David wrote many posts about the conflicts between individuals regarding decisions made at the center. The blog's content was written in an informal, conversational style.

David also used the blog to recognize the work of volunteers. For example, in a post from 2006, he praised the work of many volunteers who had organized an auction night at the center to raise money. He stated that he was not surprised that they had pulled off such a high-quality event.

David also stated that he would like to place more internal information online, especially CDC's financial reports. He advised me:

I want to put our finances online. Real finances: How much did this event make, how much did it cost to run, what [were] our maintenance costs yesterday, and that sort of thing... I do think it's still possible to run a community transparently.

YouTube

On CDC's YouTube channel, there are two videos of professional dancers performing at the center. David has also utilized Google Video to share information about CDC with the community. In 2007, he developed a short video disputing the neighborhood renewal project that threatened the center. He presented the video at a weekly gathering of the city's opinion leaders prior to the November election. He also posted it on Google Video, placed links to it on the blog and Web site, and e-mailed a link to the video out on the listserv. In the video, which David narrated, he argued that a neighborhood will attract a consistent crowd of people by offering community projects, such as CDC, rather than new stores and more parking garages. He showed the empty store fronts along the avenue and recognized volunteers working on the center's renovations. It also showed people dancing at CDC and attending an art exhibit at a neighboring nonprofit.

Flickr

David posts photos of people dancing at CDC and also of community events that take place in the center's neighborhood in random order on Flickr. Similar to Facebook and YouTube, Flickr enables visual representation of the center. David reasoned "If we promoted ourselves just through text, it wouldn't work."

Online Visibility

David stated that using social media is one way for CDC to compete with all the other organizations offering events and entertainment in town. He advised, "You have to differentiate yourself somehow, and online differentiation is at the moment a major factor...The sooner you get on it, the more visible you become." He recommended using the social media sites developed by the most powerful companies, such as Google and Yahoo, because linking to these sites gives a site more virtual weight and visibility on search engines. He acknowledged, though, that no matter how much of an online presence an organization has, it still needs to promote itself through traditional sources, such as posters, word of mouth, and news media. Deanna, the manager, thought that social media make CDC more accessible to "people who use that sort of media more frequently."

Archiving

David and Deanna recognized the value of posting information and photos about CDC on the Flickr site and blog for the purpose of public archiving. David noted it was important to archive events and projects at CDC to provide a record for both the organization and for individuals who had a lot of personal history with the place. He stated:

I understand the notion of just keeping your eye on the future, but there is this long tail notion. You do reminisce, and you do think about what you're going to do in your future, based on what you have done in your past. So it's kind of nice to have that online.

According to Deanna, David has documented projects with photographs and video from the very first day they entered the building. She said this online documentation could prove helpful for future grants she was considering writing on behalf of CDC.

RQ3: To what extent do the volunteers use the center's social media, and what are outcomes of the use on their relationship with the center?

Each one of the center's social media sites had been viewed before by at least one of the volunteers. Overall, though, volunteers either weren't aware of or they didn't regularly visit CDC's social media sites.

Facebook

All but two of the volunteers who use Facebook were members of CDC's Facebook group. However, none of them said they visited the center's Facebook page more than once a month. For them, there wasn't enough different information on the

Facebook page than what was on the Web site, and they were already accustomed to going to the Web site. In addition to the Web site, volunteers received information about upcoming events through the listserv and e-mails sent to them through Facebook. Mark, in his late 20s, stated:

If [the Facebook page] had anything different or more information than the main...Web site that was relevant then perhaps I would look at it. But I kinda like on-demand summary that doesn't take too much of my time. For the focus group participants, the most important content about CDC came from the Facebook members. Nick stated

The point of social media like Facebook is to enable individuals to produce and to communicate. It's not interesting to go to the [Facebook site] and see what David is putting on that. [Turning to Tania and Brent] I'm interested in seeing what you're putting up and what you're putting up.

Although volunteers rarely visited the Facebook page, they often visited each other's profiles and communicated with each other via Facebook. Many of the volunteers were Facebook friends with other volunteers and members of the social dance community. The Facebook volunteers also used the site or saw the potential to use the site to learn more about people who dance at the center.

There were several volunteers who used Facebook to help schedule music for CDC. Facebook was often April's preferred communication tool when she contacted musicians and DJs. For her, it seemed like a "friendlier" conduit than e-mail for making requests. She logged into Facebook daily, and she told me she had a tendency to respond more quickly to Facebook messages than to e-mail. April knew of several musicians and DJs on Facebook. Andrea, too, used Facebook for what she called "professional networking," which included coordinating with other volunteers and musicians to prepare for dances at CDC.

Blog

Volunteers did not frequent the blog. Its existence was unknown to several of the volunteers, and it seemed unclear to them who the director's intended audience was. Furthermore, only three of the volunteers said they had some interest in reading the blog. Many of the volunteers who had seen the blog associated it with "political" content. For example, when I showed Mark the blog, he stated:

I think I actually have seen this. Once. I don't remember why. [Laughing] Maybe I clicked the link on the home page accidentally. It looked a little bit political, so I didn't really read it...It does say the [the name of the organization] but also is clearly [David's] diary. Those are the distinctions I have made in my mind. Which is why I look at this and say, "This is David's political stuff, and I'm not going to bother reading it." It doesn't strike me so much as a [dance] blog but more of a nonprofit project diary.

Some volunteers were interested in seeing a blog with less politics and more fun. Melissa said that she would read a blog that focused more on the dance performance reviews and biographies of dancers than the organizational projects and structure. Alex also said he might consider reading a blog for CDC if it were “more like people writing in an exciting way to reach out and get community members involved.” Sara was one of three volunteers who expressed interest in reading the blog once she saw it for the first time during the interview. When I told her the link to the blog was on CDC’s home Web page, she remarked, “I think maybe it would be good to make [the link] bigger, more obvious.”

Upon seeing the blog, there were a several volunteers who stated that the blog, as well as the Flickr site, were a good idea for CDC because they keep records of the organization’s history and events that are visible to anyone. Andrea said she had no interest in keeping up to date with the blog but said, “I think it's brilliant, and I'm glad he keeps it. Anyone who's interested could get an insight, and I'm glad that it's all here.”

YouTube

Since the center’s Facebook site had embedded videos with a link to its YouTube channel, some of the volunteers on Facebook were aware of the organization’s online videos. Volunteers reported they were most likely to see the YouTube videos if they received a link in an e-mail. Approximately two-thirds of the volunteers recalled seeing the political video David had produced by following a link from an e-mail he sent via the listserv. However, many of them reported feeling annoyed to receive a link to a video that had a political message.

Videos of instructors and professional dancers scheduled to visit the center sparked interest for volunteers. The volunteers, especially those who also taught lessons at the center, watched videos to pick up techniques and at times share them with students and fellow dancers. Sara told me she would watch videos to see her friends dance. Some volunteers also watched videos to find out more about the instructors, which helped them to decide whether or not they wanted to take lessons from them. Although volunteers found the videos to be helpful learning tools, many of them believed that videos of professional dancers performing, such as the ones posted on CDC’s YouTube channel, would intimidate individuals new to social dance.

Flickr

The Flickr site was the least recognized of CDC’s social media sites. It was the most difficult of the social media sites to access from the Web site because it required the most clicks (three) to reach. The Flickr site contains photos of people dancing at CDC and other community events and projects. Most volunteers thought using Flickr was a good idea for CDC to use because dance is a visual activity, though only a couple of volunteers expressed interest in returning to the Flickr site. Nick noted that since the lighting is always dim at the center, photos don’t turn out very well. Sara thought that the dim light in the photos captured the intimate mood within the center.

When I showed the Flickr site during interviews, some of the volunteers

mentioned they were curious to see if they or their friends were in them. Andrea had been previously informed by a friend that she was in a photo on the center's Flickr site, but she had never seen the photo. When we viewed the Flickr site together, we found a couple of photos of her. I asked Andrea, who volunteers her skills to CDC, whether she thought the online photos helped promote her professionally in the community. She responded that she didn't believe so: "I have no idea if anybody ever sees that picture. I have no idea."

During the focus group session when I showed the participants the Flickr site, Tania noticed one photo that included herself and another dancer in a closed embrace dance at CDC. Seeing the photo on the Flickr site made her uncomfortable. She explained to me that people who saw her on CDC's Flickr site who weren't familiar with the amiable intimacy of that particular type of social dance might make assumptions about her or the person with whom she was dancing. Tania did have the same photo posted on her Facebook profile. However, she was uncomfortable with seeing the photo on CDC's Flickr site because she didn't have direct control to remove it. She said she would have preferred to have been asked before the photo was posted to CDC's Flickr site.

Additional Insights

Most of the volunteers reported that the Web site and listserv were their main online sources for information about CDC because they contained the information they sought. Volunteers also reported that they mostly rely on traditional forms of publicity, such as fliers at CDC and word of mouth, to attract people to events. None of the volunteers had found out about CDC by viewing the center's social media sites. Further, the volunteers did not recruit new people to the organization by showing them the center's social media sites.

DISCUSSION

This study found that the variance of social media use among volunteers at the Community Dance Center did not follow any pattern of age or gender. This supports a recent study by the American Association of Retired Persons and Center For The Digital Future that reported a closing gap of Internet use among older generations (see Pierce & Wood, 2008). There was a tendency for the members in the age group of late 40s to early 60s to think that social media were geared toward a younger "me" generation audience. Yet volunteers in both age groups expressed concern about the opportunity cost of online networking. They came to the center because they were seeking the opportunity to dance, socialize, and physically connect with others.

Farmer and Fedor (1999) noted that a key reason volunteers are motivated to contribute time and energy to an organization is that they share its core values. In this case, the center's volunteers shared a mission to bring community members together around social dance with the director and manager. The dance center gave volunteers a space to fill their drive for physical connection that online sites could not provide. The director, manager, and volunteers shared the concern with scholars such as Kraut et al.

(1998) and Putnam (2000) of losing face-to-face connection to online communication. Furthermore, the volunteers' use of social media to accomplish tasks such as event promotion and coordination supports the observation by Bargh and McKenna (2004) that the use of online media can foster offline interaction.

Overall, the center's social media sites were not visited frequently among the volunteers. There were four reasons for this. First, many did not want to spend too much time online talking or reading about social dance that could be spent dancing. Second, the content about political and community issues found primarily on the blog and on the Flickr site did not interest many of them. There was some interest expressed in visiting the blog if it had more fun, dance-related content. The third reason was the obscurity of the social media sites to the volunteers. There were links to each social media site from center's Web site, but volunteers had rarely, if ever, followed these links. In general, the social media sites were not promoted at the center through other sources, such as fliers, word of mouth, or the listserv. The fourth reason was that the volunteers did not think they would learn anything new from the social media sites that they did not already get from the Web site or listserv. Therefore, they did not have incentive to visit the center's social media sites regularly or use them to recruit new individuals to the center.

This study used relationship management as a framework to understand how social media could influence organization-volunteer relationships. Document analysis of the center's social media sites, in addition to in-depth interviews and a focus group, revealed information about several organizational relationship cultivation strategies and relationship outcomes. The cultivation strategies discussed are *openness*, *assurances*, *positivity*, *stewardship*, and *dialog*, and the relationship outcomes discussed are *co-production* and *control mutuality*.

Cultivation Strategies

Openness. This study found that the strategy of openness may only be effective if a public is interested in the content. The center's director used the blog to document the center's events, decisions, and challenges. However, the volunteers who had known about the blog found its content too political. There was more interest in seeing dance-related content on a blog than information about organizational or community issues. Therefore, openness about issues that are not of interest can actually drive individuals away from an organization's social media and detract from the relationship.

However, some volunteers were interested in viewing the center's financial information online because they were uncertain of its financial resources and sustainability. Hon and J. E. Grunig's (1999) stated that sharing an organization's financial information is one application of openness. In the wake of recent money mismanagement cases in the nonprofit sector, it is important for nonprofits to remain transparent about their financial management (Young & Salamon, 2002).

Assurances. This study found that a nonprofit can give assurances that they care about volunteers through social media. The center's director used assurances by

recognizing volunteers' contributions on the blog and in a video he produced. Also, photos of volunteers engaged in their professions were posted to the Flickr site. Many scholars credit recognition as one source of volunteers' motivation to help an organization (e.g., Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Farmer & Fedor, 1999). However, this strategy's effectiveness depends on the levels of readership and awareness of the social media sites. In this case, since overall visitation to each of the sites was low, the potential effectiveness of this strategy was limited.

Positivity. This study identified public archiving on social media sites as a form of positivity. The center's blog and Flickr site provide searchable snapshots of the center that are available to anyone who wants to view them. Each recorded moment of the center's history is archived online. Even though there was general disinterest among the volunteers in visiting the blog and Flickr site, many acknowledged both the public accessibility of the information and the importance of these records.

Stewardship. This study found that social media can be used to implement the cultivation strategy of stewardship. The director, general manager, and volunteers shared a sense of stewardship for the neighborhood in which the center resides. The center's blog, Flickr site, and video that the director posted are tools he used to convey and document information about threats to the center and its neighborhood. In this case, social media aided stewardship efforts.

Dialog. It would seem that social media sites encourage dialog (e.g., Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). However, the center's social media sites were not a platform in which the director, manager, and volunteers engaged in any two-way communication. Nearly all of the content posted to the sites was contributed by the director. The lack of promotion in other media and the political nature of the content were road blocks to dialog. Further, although nearly all of the volunteers were members of the Facebook group, they did not frequently visit the group page because it did not hold any information that was significantly different from the Web site. The volunteers were much more interested in visiting the Facebook pages of the other volunteers and visitors to the center. Thus, they did not post comments, questions, or information directly to the center's Facebook group page.

Relationship Outcomes

Co-production. Facebook facilitated *co-production* by enabling volunteers to announce upcoming events and teachers to the other members of the center's Facebook group. In addition to promotion, some of the volunteers used Facebook to communicate with each other to organize and prepare for events. For the director, it was important that volunteers used Facebook to promote and organize dances and lessons with little or no staff management. One volunteer found that communicating through Facebook rather than e-mail was a more personal experience.

Control mutuality. Since social media allow publics to post material on an organization's online sites, it would seem that social media should increase assessments of control mutuality. However, for one volunteer, the Flickr site decreased

her satisfaction with the amount of control she has in the relationship. Upon seeing photos of herself dancing at the center on the Flickr site, she expressed feeling a loss of control over how she was presented to the public. In this case, the organization's use of Flickr led to a negative effect on *control mutuality*.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative methods used in this case study provide an in-depth context for organizational use of social media. Social media advocates urge nonprofits to engage in planning and evaluation to reach a positive return on their investment of time and resources. Relationship management theory offers one way to examine effective use of social media and the potential outcomes. This study of an organization's use of a blog, Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr provides new information about relationship cultivation strategies. It was determined that the success of these strategies depends in part on four factors: the public's viewpoint of the value of online versus offline interaction, the extent to which content on sites holds the public's interest, whether people are aware of the sites' existence, and the public's level of accessibility to the sites. This study also found instances in which social media can have both positive and negative outcomes for organization-public relationships.

Finally, this study documents the commitment of a nonprofit group and its volunteers to build social capital offline. It presents new research about volunteers' use of a social networking site to promote and provide opportunities for offline interaction. It also suggests that as the use of online networking platforms increases, volunteers may play a key role in developing and maintaining social capital offline.

Public relations scholars have only recently begun to use relationship management theory in social media research. To date, there are few public relations studies that review organizational use of social media, which leaves a multitude of possibilities for testing and expanding knowledge of organization-public relationships.

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