From adapting to adoption: Social Media Use by Small-to-medium-sized Human Service Nonprofits

Ming Xie
Doctoral Student, School of Public Administration
Student Research and Creative Activity Fair
March 1st, 2019
Houston Flood Relief Fund
For: Victims of Hurricane Harvey
Houston, TX
Organizer: JJ Watt

$3,284,700
of $4,000,000 goal.
Raised by 27,883 donors

DONATE NOW
DONATE IN SECONDS

Every Share Can Raise $37
Share on facebook

Supporters (28k)

$20
just now

Nadine Baldridge
Not a football fan, but am now a fan of...
THANK YOU TO ALL WHO DONATED & VOLUNTEERED!

$200,000 → $37 million
On May 23, 2018, 960 nonprofit organizations participated in Omaha Gives and raised more than $7.4 million.
Research motivations

• Increase our understanding of the social media activity of human service nonprofits and the relationship with organization’s goal, mission, and capacity;

• Give suggestions for effective exploitation of social media to generate social capital, and to develop strategic and interactive stakeholder communications.
Research questions

• What are the influences of nonprofit leadership, organization mission and capacity on social media adoption and use for small-to-medium sized human service nonprofits participating in Omaha Gives?

• What are, if any, the purpose, strategy and future plans for social media use for small-to-medium sized human service nonprofits participating in Omaha Gives?
Rogers’ (2003) Theory of Innovation Diffusion

- Relative advantages; Perceived risks
- Leaders’ perceptions of social media
- Organization’s mission, capacity, strategy

Compatibility
Research Design and Data Analysis

• Data collection
  ~ Semi-structured in-depth interviews

• Data analysis
  ~ Directed approach (Berg & Lune, 2011)
## Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization type</th>
<th>Number of full time employees</th>
<th>Org age in years</th>
<th>Annual operating budget</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Social media they are using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community improvement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$217,077</td>
<td>Board chair</td>
<td>Facebook (Hasn’t been updated since 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community improvement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$98,000</td>
<td>Board chair</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community improvement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$495,000</td>
<td>Associate director</td>
<td>Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community improvement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$480,000</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community improvement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>$118,000</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human service</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$175,000</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>$315,812</td>
<td>Development director</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vimeo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>$175,000</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; culture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>Office assistant</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; culture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>$12,000</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, youth development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>$292,000</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$292,000</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Facebook, Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>Communication chair of board</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Vimeo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment/advocacy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>Former chair and board member</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

1. Different platforms
Findings

2. Relative advantage

- Social media is helpful and valuable at reaching more people at less or no cost.
- O2: “On Facebook I have found that it would be easier and more effective to get people’s attention for nonprofits stuff.”
• O1, “As you and I both know that social media is a phenomenal way to reach people quickly, instantly… It’s a very quick way to mobilize people and get them all on the same page very quickly.”
Findings

3. Perceived risks

• Information overload;
• Balancing between communication and interaction with members and communication with public;
• Possible conflicts of online fundraising and traditional fundraisers.
• “The biggest challenge is what balance we have between too little and too much. Certainly I can spend all day long posting on Facebook. My job is fundraising, not posting on Facebook. So it’s not always my highest priority. But I also have to remember I am reaching hundreds of people pretty easily at no cost…If somebody posts all day long, I don’t pay attention.” (O3)
Findings

4. Organizations’ missions

• “Our mission involves all our programs, all our events, all our attempts to educate community about different things. So we promote our programs on social media, our events, our educated community on social media, different things. They are pretty much the same thing for us.” (O2)

• “The three key words of our mission are: connect, collaborate, and communicate. That is social media, social media, and social media.” (O4)
Findings

5. Organizational capacity
   • Limitation of time
   • Lack of professional skills
   • Lack of professional staff
Findings

6. Online fundraising

• Limited investment on online fundraising
• Reach the same donors of their traditional fundraisers
Discussions

• Currently, the small-to-medium sized human service organizations focus on how social media helps them to share information with partners and members and to raise awareness rather than on promoting conversation and dialogue.

• The limitation of time and professional skills and the concerns of information overload influence their use of social media.
Conclusion

• For small-to-medium sized human service nonprofits, they need to use social media creatively.

• The narrow or short-term vision of social media mostly is because of the limitations.

• How to use social media beyond the limitation of budget and resources should be thought based on organizations’ needs and capacity.
Thank you!

Ming Xie
mingxie@unomaha.edu