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Title

How Can Nonprofits Encourage More Stakeholder Engagement in Social Networking Sites?

Abstract

Social networking sites (SNSs) have engendered new opportunities for nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in terms of an organization’s transparency, dissemination of information, and involvement with stakeholders. Specifically, generating deep engagement with stakeholders has been regarded as the most prominent potential of SNSs for NPOs. Many studies have focused on how NPOs use SNSs for stakeholder engagement by examining the number and the content of their activities. However, less attention has been paid to actual stakeholder engagement in response to the organizational strategies. A few studies counted the number of likes, shares, or retweets of the organizational posts, but such engagement requires no more than the click of a button; these numbers may represent only superficial engagement. In order to evaluate the actual impact of NPO strategies used on SNSs, research must investigate stakeholders’ conversation and community generated in response to the organizational strategies deployed on SNS.

The purpose of this research is to examine how nonprofit strategies influence varied levels of stakeholder engagement in the online environment. Using network measures (i.e., degree centrality, reciprocity, and density), this study examines how often stakeholders reply to organizational posts and communicate among themselves regarding the posts. This study’s data are drawn from the Twitter accounts of the 100 largest NPOs in the United States. The month of October 2017 was chosen for the focus of this study. Every activity the organizations and stakeholders posted on the organizations’ Twitter accounts during that time period were gathered by accessing Twitter API.

The results suggest that organizations’ number of followers (i.e., network size), as well as their strategies of posting to a general public and replying directly to a specific stakeholder, have positive influences on stakeholder engagement in replying to the organization. However, organizations’ number of followers and posting to a general public do not have any influence on how much stakeholders communicate among themselves. An organization’s direct replies to a specific stakeholder is the only predictor of generating more conversation among stakeholders, supporting a basis for an autonomous community among stakeholders. These results suggest that
organizational postings are important for stakeholder engagement, but indicating a specific audience may encourage more autonomous and collective action by stakeholders.

This research contributes to the social network and online communication research by capturing the relational structure of stakeholder engagement and community in response to organizational strategies on SNS. Only a few studies have centered on stakeholder engagement on SNS, and those only counted the number of clicks. This study, instead, focuses on more meaningful involvement such as stakeholders’ replies to organizations and conversations among themselves, operationalized by network measures. Specifically, this research uniquely reveals the presence of autonomous community among stakeholders, which may potentially imply a supportive network for NPOs.

Keyword