Nonprofit Organizations and Social Media

February 2012

Introduction

This study was commissioned by the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) and conducted by the Community Research Institute (CRI) at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy. Nonprofits are increasingly taking advantage of social media tools to accomplish their missions. This study investigates which nonprofits in Michigan are using social media and how they coordinate and regulate social media use in their organizations. It also examines levels of satisfaction among organizations that use social media.

The data were collected via an electronic survey sent to 758 members of the Michigan Nonprofit Association for which there were valid email addresses. The survey was open from November 10 – December 2, 2011. A total of 217 people responded for a response rate of 28.6%.
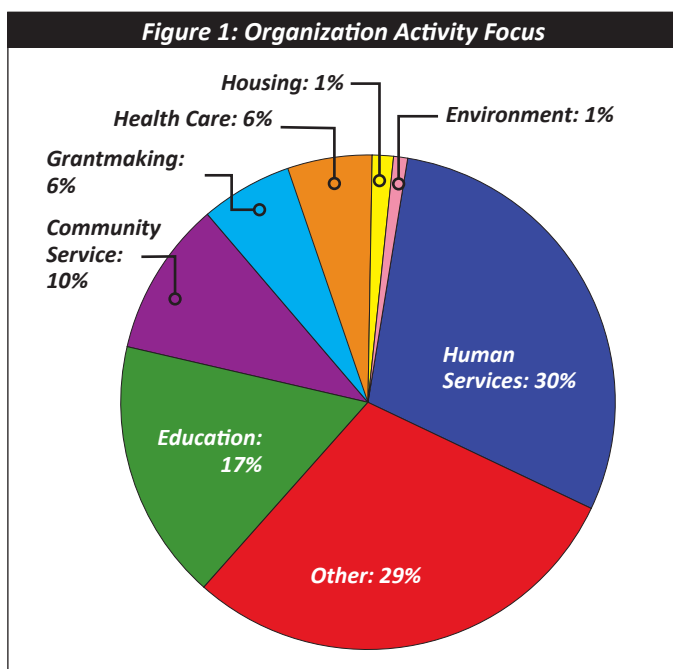
Getting to Know Respondents

Participants in the survey were asked background questions about the organizations they represent. **Figure 1** shows the percentage of organizations by activity focus. The Human Services and Other categories are largest, each with 30% of the sample. The Other category contains a wide variety of responses, the most frequent of which is advocacy (11 responses).

With regard to budget size, most organizations have small-to-medium sized operating budgets. A majority – 52% – have budgets of $500,000 or less; 30% have budgets between $500,000 and $5 million; and the remaining 17% have budgets over $5 million.

Social Media Use

For the purposes of this study, social media was defined as tools to share and receive content via the Internet. This includes blogs, Twitter, social networks (e.g. Facebook or MySpace), video sharing (e.g. YouTube), picture sharing (e.g. Flickr), podcasts, and other similar tools. On the whole, nonprofits have gone digital; 88% are now using social media of some kind. By far the most common type of social media used is a social network, such as Facebook or MySpace. Of those organizations that use social media, 95% use social networking tools such as Facebook. Roughly half of social media users use Twitter or video sharing tools, and the least used tools were picture sharing and podcasts. The organizations surveyed use social media for a variety of reasons. **Figure 2** shows the percentage of organizations that use social media for each purpose. Social media is used most often among participants to raise awareness.
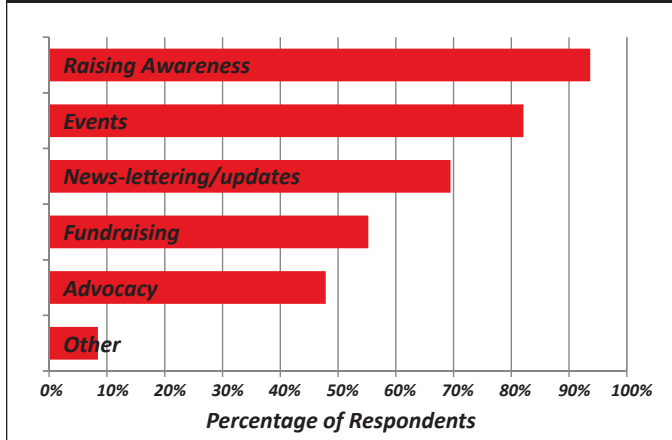
No statistically significant differences in social media use were found among nonprofits of various activity areas or budget size.

Figure 1: Organization Activity Focus

Housing: 1%
Health Care: 6%
Environment: 1%
Grantmaking: 6%
Community Service: 10%
Human Services: 30%
Education: 17%
Other: 29%

Number of respondents = 217

Figure 2: Purposes for Which Nonprofits Use Social Media

Raising Awareness
Events
News-lettering/updates
Fundraising
Advocacy
Other

Percentage of Respondents

Number of respondents = 190

Social Media Coordination

Participants were asked how their organizations coordinate social media communications. **Figure 3** shows the responses to this question. The data suggest that most often, nonprofits in Michigan have staffs that coordinate social media communications alongside other communications work.

Figure 3: How Nonprofit Staff Coordinate Social Media Communications

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.

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Percentage of Respondents
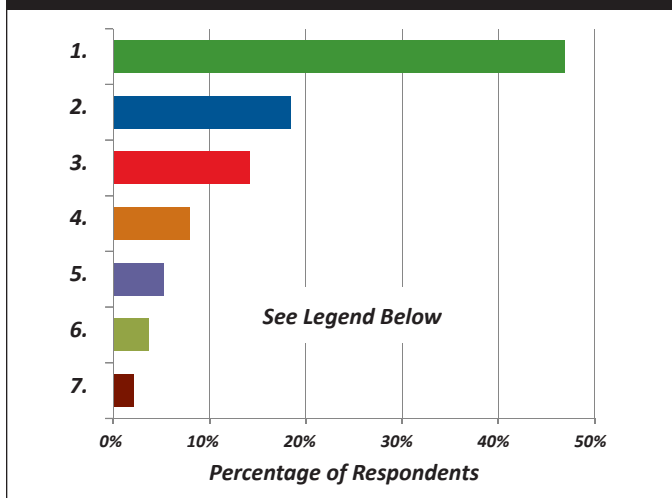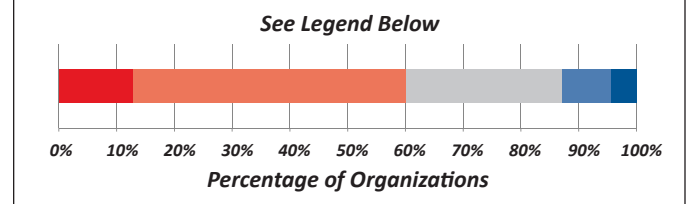
Number of respondents = 217

1. *Staff member(s) coordinating social media communications with other communications needs/tasks.*
2. *Individual staff members take the initiative to use social media as they see the need.*
3. *Shared responsibility for social media communications among all staff members within your organization.*
4. *Non-staff volunteers engaging in social media communications on behalf of the organization.*
5. *Staff member(s) solely devoted to social media communications.*
6. *Other*
7. *Social media responsibilities delegated to a consultant.*

Interestingly, most nonprofits do not have standard procedures (such as a style guide) to guide the organization's use of social media. Of those organizations that use social media, only 36% have standard procedures.

Satisfaction with Social Media Use

Organizations were also asked how satisfied they are with the results of their organization's use of social media. Possible answers were arranged on a five-point scale: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neutral, somewhat dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. Overall, most nonprofits are at least somewhat satisfied with their social media use. See **Figure 4** for a detailed display of responses to this question.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with Results of Social Media Use

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Percentage of Organizations

Number of respondents = 178

■ *Very satisfied* ■ *Somewhat satisfied* ■ *Neutral*
■ *Somewhat dissatisfied* ■ *Very dissatisfied*

A regression analysis was performed[1] to identify which organizations are most likely to be satisfied with their use of social media. **Table 1** shows the two statistically significant independent variables and their corresponding odds ratios. The lower and upper limits indicate a 95% confidence that the real odds ratio falls between these bounds.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Test of Satisfaction vs. Dissatisfaction

Independent Variable	p-value	95% Confidence Interval for Odds Ratio		
		Lower Limit	Odds Ratio	Upper Limit
Number of Tactics	*<.001*	*1.75*	*3.46*	*6.82*
Dedicated Staff Present	*0.034*	*1.11*	*4.20*	*15.87*

The strongest predictor of satisfaction with a nonprofit's use of social media is the number of different types of social media engagement used. Participants were asked to select all types of engagement used by their organizations; **Table 2** displays the answer choices offered. The specific variable that predicted satisfaction

was the number of different types used by each participant. **Table 1** indicates the odds ratio for every incremental increase in the number of tactics (which could range from 0 to 5); for each additional tactic used, the odds of being satisfied as opposed to dissatisfied are 3.46 times greater.

Table 2: Social Media Tactics
1. *Creating and disseminating **original content** in the form of blogs, Twitter, podcasts, or media sharing.*
2. *Re-posting or re-Tweeting **secondary content** (e.g. Your organization reposts a link to an article or blog).*
3. *Community building through an online network of individuals around a particular belief, cause, mission, or agenda through networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace, etc.*
4. *Facilitating the spread of content through hashtags, Facebook "Likes," and other similar tools to build momentum around a particular issue.*
5. *Crowdsourcing information. (Crowdsourcing is the act of using social media tools to solicit information, feedback, or expertise on a specific topic from wide audience.)*

It may be that using social media in a diversity of ways, taking advantage of the full range of social media tools, leads to satisfaction. On the other hand, causality may also travel in the opposite direction. Initial satisfaction with social media results may encourage users to explore a variety of other techniques available. Either way, it is clear that the number of tactics used and levels of satisfaction are related.

The second predictor of satisfaction is having staff dedicated to social media use (see **Figure 3**). For the regression analysis, we combined those responses that indicate there is a specific person with social media responsibilities (Answers 1, 5, and 7); all other responses (2, 3, and 4) were grouped together in a separate category. For organizations with dedicated staff, 66% are satisfied, compared to 54% for organizations without dedicated staff; these proportions are shown in **Figure 5**. The logistic regression revealed that organizations with staff directly dedicated to social media coordination are 4.2 times more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied.

Figure 5: Dedicated Staff vs. Satisfaction with Results of Social Media Use

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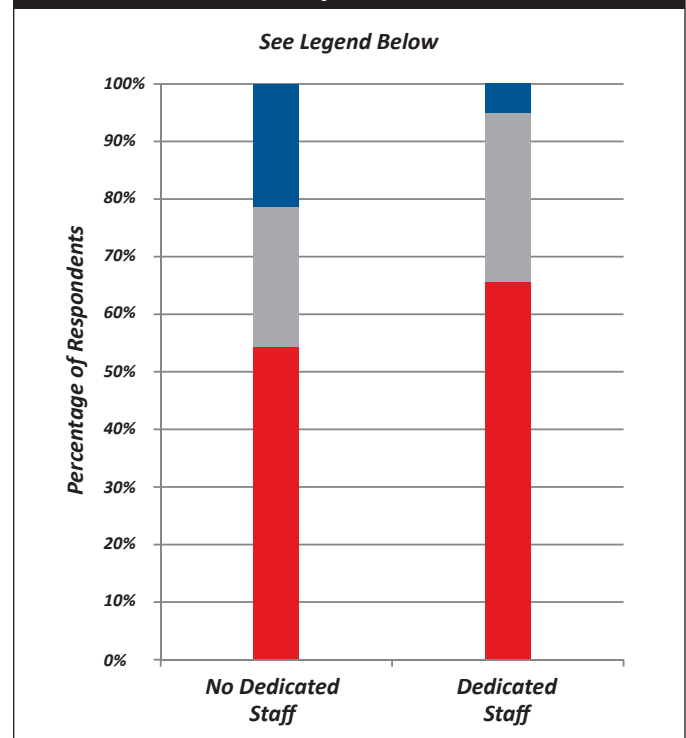
Number of respondents = 169

■ *Satisfied*   ■ *Neutral*   ■ *Dissatisfied*

Conclusion

A large majority of nonprofits are now engaging in social media use to pursue their organizational missions. There is a broad diversity in the ways in which they engage. Some organizations use social media for a single purpose, while others use it for many. Organizations differ in the way they coordinate social media engagement, ranging from dedicated staff to no one having formal responsibility.

Overall, nonprofits in Michigan seem to be satisfied with the results of their social media use. Just over 60% of respondents are at least somewhat satisfied. Two variables predict satisfaction: the presence of dedicated staff and the number of social media tactics employed. The statistical significance of the former is straightforward: if specific personnel are explicitly responsible for social media communications, efforts are likely to be better

coordinated and more consistent. The analysis suggests that using social media in a variety of ways is related to increased satisfaction. However, the direction of the causal relationship may be in either direction – or both. Satisfied users may devote more resources to social media or those who devote more resources may use be more satisfied – or this could be a self-reinforcing process.

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[1] The type of regression used is a logistic regression analysis (LRA). In this type of analysis, the dependent variable (satisfaction vs. dissatisfaction) is categorical. Therefore, LRA is used to predict the likelihood of a certain response for the dependent variable given the independent variables are present. In this case, LRA is used to predict the likelihood of a respondent being satisfied compared to dissatisfied given the presence of a variety of various independent variables. The likelihood is quantified by an odds ratio, which the LRA produces for each independent variable tested. For example, an odds ratio of 2 for a categorical independent variable indicates that when that variable is present, the respondent is twice as likely to be satisfied (holding all other independent variables constant).