
Understanding publics' engagement with non-profit organisations through Facebook: A typology of messages and motivations behind public-initiated conversations

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Abstract

This study explores how publics initiate conversations with an organisation via Facebook. Through an analysis of publics' postings on two large international non-profit organisations' Facebook pages, the Salvation Army and Goodwill, this study identified seven different messages types used by publics to engage organisations. Also, the study provided five motivations for publics to initiate dialogic communication with non-profit organisations.

Introduction

With the increased use of social media, public relations practitioners, and academics have sought to understand how to utilise this medium as a tool for building and maintaining dialogic relationships with publics. In fact, many studies have explored how organisations communicate through social media (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Although these studies found that social media provides organisations with opportunities for dialogic engagement and two-way communication, most studies have focused solely on organisational efforts or benefits, overlooking how or why publics communicate with them. In other words, even though dialogic communication is considered as "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" by two parties (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325), much of the existing literature has focused on one-way or monologic communication, without understanding the dialogue that publics engage in with organisations.

This study investigates how publics engage with organisations through social media. More

specifically, looking at engagement in the context of dialogic communication (Taylor & Kent, 2014), it examines how publics initiate communication with non-profit organisations, through one of the most popular social media platforms: Facebook. A qualitative content analysis is employed to explore the types of messages that publics post on the Facebook pages of two of the top non-profit organisations: Goodwill Charities and The Salvation Army. An analysis of three months of Facebook conversations initiated by these organisations' publics revealed the types of messages that publics use in initiating such conversations with non-profits through social media. The findings provided insights into the publics' motivations for engaging with the organisation. As such, the study will inform public relations practitioners' efforts to design social media strategies to gratify publics' needs and motivations for engaging in dialogic relationships with organisations.

Literature review

The use of social media has become so widespread that publics expect all organisations to have a social media presence. According to a Nielsen report (2012), about 47% of social media users voice their opinions about a product or service through organisational social media channels. The report also showed that 65% of them get information about a brand, product, or service via social media.

Social media offers various advantages for organisations to communicate with their publics. Subsidising traditional media, social media helps organisations build brand or

corporate awareness (Gunelius, 2011). Moreover, social media allows organisations to engage directly and in a timely manner with various publics, bypassing traditional media (Sedereviciute & Valentini, 2011). Put another way, with social media's potential for fostering dialogic communication, organisations can easily interact and build relationships with their publics (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Briones et al., 2011).

Non-profits' use of social media

Both for-profit and non-profit organisations are actively adopting social media for communicating with their key publics. Given their need for public support and resources, due to the growth in number of non-profit organisations and the decline of government funding, non-profit organisations welcome cost-effective channels like social media to recruit supporters and engage with their publics (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Barns and Andonian (2011) found that non-profit organisations are more proactive in using social media than corporations, showing that non-profits such as higher education institutions and charities used three types of social media—blogging, Facebook, and Twitter—more than corporations do. A recent survey showed that 93.3% of responding non-profit organisations have a presence on social media sites (Nonprofit Social Network Report, 2012).

According to the Nonprofit Social Network Report (2012), the average cost for non-profits to recruit new Facebook friends or Twitter followers is US\$3.47 and US\$2.12 respectively, while the average value of new Facebook supporters to the organisation is between US\$161 and US\$214. The report also found that over 80% of non-profit organisations view the use of social media as valuable to the organisation. Undeniably for non-profit organisations, using social media is not an option but rather indispensable for building successful relationships with publics (Fine, 2011).

However, despite their need to be social, some non-profit organisations are reluctant to increase social presence due to the lack of know-how or resources. The Nonprofit Social

Network Report (2012) showed that 60% of non-profit organisations considered lack of social media strategies as the main factor hindering non-profits from being active on social media. Currently, a simple online presence is the most frequently used strategy among non-profit organisations, followed by emailing the organisational list and promoting events (Nonprofit Social Network Report, 2012). Additionally, both practical and academic research has found that non-profit organisations make limited use of social media. Rather than fully utilising the two-way features that social media offers, many non-profit organisations use social media as a subsidy to traditional media, and as a means to distribute information (see Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Cho, Schweickart, & Haase, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters et al., 2009, Waters & Jamal, 2011).

Engaging publics via social media to build dialogic relationships

The concept of public engagement has emerged in public relations scholarship, which has heralded the potential for social media to engage with publics. Despite the fact that the term has been widely used, there is a lack of consensus on a definition. Some view online engagement as publics' involvement in organisational activities, such as leaving comments on organisational social media or 'liking' organisational Facebook messages (e.g., Cho et al., 2014; Saxton & Waters, 2014), whereas others conceptualised engagement as a psychological state of publics (Men, 2012). The current study adopts Wenger's (1998) definition of engagement as "active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning" (p. 173). Therefore in the context of social media, engagement takes place when publics initiate or participate in conversations with an organisation and its publics via their social media platforms.

The concept of engagement has been highlighted in dialogic communication. In their original explanation of the five principles of a dialogic theory, Kent and Taylor (2002) considered engagement as one of the features of propinquity, i.e., the availability of publics to

express their needs to organisations, and for organisations to consult with publics. Recently, through an extensive review of current engagement scholarship, Taylor and Kent (2014) summarised five categories of engagement research in public relations literature: engagement via social media, employee engagement, organisation-stakeholder engagement with corporate social responsibility (CSR), civic engagement to build social capital, and dialogic engagement. Focusing on dialogic engagement, Taylor and Kent further argued that engagement is essential to building dialogic relationships, which ultimately create social capital. Dialogic engagement, they explained, “assumes accessibility, presentness, and a willingness to interact” (p.8), all of which are present in conversations between organisations and publics (as well as the publics of these organisations themselves) via social media.

While focusing on websites, precursors for social media, Kent and Taylor (2002) asserted the value of online venues, where “public can actually engage other human beings in discussions about organisational issues” (p. 31). Some empirical studies support Kent and Taylor’s argument, revealing the value of social media as an engagement tool. For example, Saxton and Waters (2014) found publics are more likely to ‘like’ messages that create dialogue than those that solely provide information. Similarly, exploring how organisations and publics engage in Facebook, Cho et al. (2014) found that publics leave more comments on two-way symmetrical messages that nurture relationships with publics than informative or persuasive/promotional messages. However, both studies found that organisations’ use of social media was limited to disseminating information, rather than utilising engaging opportunities with publics for dialogic relationships.

Motivations engaging organisations via social media

To maximise the potential benefits of social media as an engagement tool, it is imperative to understand publics’ motivation to engage with organisations given that publics’ active participation in dialogic communication and

contribution to dialogues is necessary for building dialogic relationships. Some of the current scholarship has been concerned with explaining what motivates publics to use these platforms (e.g., Smith, 2010). Uses and gratifications theory (U&G) has proven to be a good framework to explain publics’ use of social media. Originally developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), U&G proposed several typologies of audience gratifications and needs, addressing the main question of why individuals use certain media. Unlike traditional media research, which focuses on the effect of media on passive users, U&G is based on the assumption that media users are active and selective in using and consuming media to fulfil their needs (Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1974). While the original U&G research focused on traditional media channels, it has been also actively applied to the new media environment. In applying U&G as the framework for understanding publics’ use of new media and social media, many scholars (e.g., Boyd, 2008; Kaye, 2007; Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Nov, 2007; Shao, 2009) have explored media users’ motivations, such as entertainment, integration, or social interaction, personal identity, and information. The first motivator, ‘entertainment’, involves relaxation, enjoyment, escapism, and emotional relief (Muntinga et al., 2011; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Shao, 2009) whereas ‘integration and social interaction’ refers to media users’ sense of belonging, connection with others, and emotional support (Boyd, 2008; Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008; Kaye, 2007). The third motivator, ‘personal identity’, is rooted in the self of individuals, including self-expression, impression or identity management, and self-enhancement (Boyd, 2008; Nov, 2007; Papacharissi, 2007). The fourth and last motivator, ‘information’ is related to the need for information, advice, and opinion to reduce potential risks (Kaye, 2007; Park et al., 2009; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003).

Recently, several scholars have expanded social media motivations by adding two more motivators, namely remuneration and empowerment. For example, Muntinga et al. (2011) explained that whereas ‘remuneration’

pertains to rewards, benefits, or economic incentives, ‘empowerment’ refers to publics’ power or influence on an organisation or other publics.

Based on their engagement levels, different motivators play important roles in influencing public engagement in social media. Ko, Cho and Roberts (2005) found that consumers with high levels of information, convenience, and social interaction motivations are likely to engage in human-message interaction, while those having high convenience and social interaction motivations have a tendency to engage in human-human interaction. In addition, Muntinga et al. (2011) found that information, entertainment, and remuneration are driving forces for public consumption of brand-related contents, the lowest level of engagement, whereas contributing to and creating contents are driven by personal identity, integration/social interaction, and entertainment.

While this existing literature may help non-profit organisations understand publics’ motivations to engage with them, scholarship is lacking explanations of how publics initiate conversations with organisations on social media. Therefore, in an effort to contribute to addressing this research gap, the current study explores the content produced by publics on the organisational Facebook site. As an initial step to understanding *why* publics engage with non-profits, this study seeks to address the following question: What types of messages are found in the communication initiated by publics on non-profit organisations’ Facebook pages?

Method

The study purposively chose two non-profit organisations that share similar missions: Goodwill Industries International Incorporated and The Salvation Army, which are ranked second and sixth respectively in the Top Nonprofit Times 100 in 2012. The Nonprofit Times lists the top ranking largest non-educational non-profit organisations in the United States. Both organisations are community service organisations that provide similar involvement programmes, which

include receiving donations, working with volunteers, and fundraising through thrift shops. While these organisations are similar in their mission, they differ in that The Salvation Army is a religious organisation, while Goodwill is not.

The data was collected from the official Facebook sites of these organisations. Facebook was selected because it is the most popular social media site (Social Media Today, 2012) and because 86 of the 100 top non-profits have a Facebook account. From the official Facebook pages for each organisation, the researchers selected the option of ‘posts by others’ to reveal the conversations started by publics, and collected all the data available from November 2012 to January 2013. This time period covered the comments publicly available on both Facebook pages at the time the data was collected. This resulted in a total of 838 posts for The Salvation Army and 73 posts for Goodwill. All the comments available were included in the sample. In this analysis, comments are the original posts made by publics or Facebook users on the organisation’s Facebook page. Besides the number of comments by publics, the researchers also counted the number of comments by other publics including the organisation, the number of likes by other publics including the organisation, whether the organisation responded to the comments, and whether the public who originally wrote the posted liked or commented on the organisational responses. ‘Likes’ are clicks on comments that traditionally are interpreted as offering positive feedback to a post (Facebook, n.d.).

The data was analysed using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method involves coding every sentence, assigning a label (or theme) to describe the content coded, and comparing it with the next, thus identifying the themes that emerged from the text. A theme is “a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vii). The constant comparative method “combines systematic data collection, coding, and analysis

with theoretical sampling in order to generate theory that is integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a form clear enough for further testing” (Conrad, Neumann, Haworth, & Scott, 1993, p. 280). Using this method, themes or categories are derived from the data, so that each new item is compared with the previous one, and each new theme or category represents one not previously identified in the data. This way, the method ensures that all data analysed is represented in the resulting findings, and that themes, or categories, are refined and defined based on these findings. Once all possible themes were identified, they were compared with the theoretical categories included in uses and gratifications theory.

In this study, the unit of analysis was one line of text in the comment. Two coders analysed the comments separately and then combined the list of themes they had identified. Several steps were taken to ensure the validity of the findings (see Creswell, 2007). First, the researchers collected all comments posted by Facebook likers for both organisations. Then, they divided the sample and coded independently, identifying the first group of themes. Once this was done, they exchanged

their findings and samples to discuss and describe the themes identified. Finally, they worked together to construct the final list of themes and their descriptions, and to collapse them into theoretical categories.

Findings

This study focused on the comments made by publics on the organisation’s Facebook page. Table 1 summarises the frequencies of comments and likes by both the public and the organisation. The frequency analysis demonstrated that although Goodwill did not respond to the comments posted by their likers, The Salvation Army actively engaged with Facebook likers, both by posting replies to their comments ($N = 171$), and by linking their comments ($N = 114$). Findings also showed that the publics were engaging each other by responding to comments posted. They liked the posts by other publics (Salvation Army: $N = 578$, Goodwill $N = 0$), liked posts by the organisation (Salvation Army: $N = 37$; Goodwill: $N = 0$), and received responses from other publics to the comments they posted (Salvation Army: $N = 559$; Goodwill: $N = 4$).

Table 1. Interaction on the organisation’s Facebook pages from public-initiated conversations

Nov 2012 to Jan 2013	Posting by publics	Likes by the organisation	Organisational responses to publics’ posts	Organisations both liked & commented	Likes by publics on publics’ comments	Likes by publics to organisation’s responses	Postings by publics to which others responded
Salvation Army	824	114 (12.84%)	171 (19.26%)	578 (65.09%)	43 (4.84%)	37 (4.17%)	559 (62.95%)
Goodwill	35	0	0	0	24 (68%)	0	4 (11.4%)

The constant comparison analysis of comments posted by the publics of these organisations revealed a list of 23 themes, which were reviewed and collapsed into a typology of messages posted by publics on these social media sites. These themes were grouped in the following seven categories or types of public comments: inquiries, requests, experience, grievance, advocacy, advisory and self-promotion.

The first type of comment, *inquiries*, refers to posts requesting information or clarification from the organisation. These may include requests for clarification on policies or second-hand information that they received about the organisation. For example:

“I LOVE Goodwill. Your store on Broadway in Chula Vista, CA is clear, organized and has very friendly employees. Every time I go there I find stuff for my entire family and I feel like most of the prices are great deals. Do you have a time frame on when the San Diego Home Ave location going to be reopened after renovations?” (Goodwill Facebook, December, 2012)

The second type of message is similar to the previous category in that it is asking for something from the organisation. However, in this case the individual is asking for assistance or material goods, instead of information. This type of message can be called *requests*, and they refer to people using the organisation’s Facebook page to ask for help for themselves or for someone else in need. For example, one person posted the following message in Goodwill’s page:

I have a young couple who is in dire need of a twin bed for their 3-year old daughter. Can anyone here help? (Goodwill Facebook, December, 2012)

Experience messages refer to narratives in which a Facebook friend would share their first or second-hand experience with the organisation. For example, this message was posted on the Salvation Army’s page:

When my kids were little we started a tradition during the holidays and

throughout the year. Every time we see the Salvation Army kettles we donate at every single one. It might be \$1, \$5, \$10. My kids are now getting older and we are still carrying on the tradition. It’s a great way to teach your kids to help those in need. Hope they do the same when they have kids of their own. (Salvation Army Facebook, November, 2012)

Another user posted:

2nd year ringing the bell. We had a lot of fun. You may get a little cold on the outside but you leave with you heart feeling full and warm. (Salvation Army Facebook, December, 2012)

The fourth type of message, *grievance* refers to directing accusations or complaints against their organisation and its practices. The grievance message types can be further classified with two sub-categories of *complaint* and *attack*. A *complaint* is when publics share dissatisfactory experiences with a non-profit organisation. For example, one Facebook follower posted on these organisations’ Facebook page:

You get more and more expensive and I never actually see anything that your money is going to. I’d rather donate to smaller in-town thrift stores. At least they can keep their prices low, and some of them actually donate to good causes. (Goodwill Facebook, November, 2012)

On the other hand, an *attack* involves the verbal assault of organisation, and/or its mission. This often implies accusing the organisation of wrongdoing. One Facebook user posted:

When the Sal Army stops discriminating against gays I’ll return to contributing to this organisation. Sadly, most bell-ringers I’ve spoke (sic) with don’t even seem to know that this is a group that condones HATE. (Salvation Army Facebook, December, 2012)

Advocacy messages defended the organisation and its mission, often in response

to attacks from other Facebook users. For example, in response to the grievance message above, one user commented:

The Salvation Army does not discriminate, nor does it condone hate. You are sadly mistaken, you have poor information, and perhaps taken things out of context. Jesus loves you, and so does the Salvation Army, please, you do not know what you are talking about. (Salvation Army Facebook, December, 2012).

Advisory messages refer to those in which the public shares ideas as to how the organisation could improve their service or mission. These ideas are shared in a positive and helpful tone, rather than a critique. This example of advisory messages was found in the Salvation Army Facebook page:

You should organize your pants by size like Goodwill does. It's difficult to shop by color like you have it now. (Salvation Army Facebook, November, 2012)

The last message type, *self-promotion*, refers to messages in which the users share their own news or events on the organisation's social media site. Usually these will have little or nothing to do with the organisation itself, because the purpose is to communicate with the other people on the organisation's platform. For example, one user posted this message in the Salvation Army Facebook page:

In 2013, we change the world. In 1 minute, find out how you can spread some love! For every scarf sold, the Full Circle Project by AEON Attire gives one brand new scarf to someone in desperate need of warmth. (Salvation Army Facebook, January, 2013)

Discussion

Highlighting the value of social media, which offers organisations opportunities to engage in dialogue with their publics, scholars have sought to understand social media engagement from the perspective of the organisation. Yet, despite the fact that either side can initiate this

dialogue, existing research focuses heavily on how organisations use social media, neglecting how publics initiate dialogic communication with an organisation on social media. Whereas it is quite clear why organisations use social media, i.e., to share updated information of organisations to publics or to build and maintain relationships with them, little research has explained what motivates publics to engage with organisations via organisational social media venues. In an effort to address this research gap, the present study explored messages initiated by publics on organisational Facebook pages.

By employing the constant comparison method, the study explored conversation initiated by publics on two non-profit organisations' Facebook pages. Based on the qualitative analysis of Facebook postings on the Goodwill International and Salvation Army Facebook pages, the study found seven different types of message strategies that publics use to initiate conversation with organisations and with their publics: inquiries, requests, experience, grievance, advocacy, advisory, and self-promotion. More specifically looking at each category of message strategies we found that there are many motivations for publics to initiate discussions via organisational Facebook sites. For example, publics use social media to fulfil their need for information. In the *inquiries* message category publics are either requesting information about an organisation or asking for clarification. Beyond requesting information, the second message strategy, *requests*, is used to ask organisations to help them or others in need, i.e., to receive organisational services. Whereas both inquiries and requests strategies seek organisational resources—either information or services—the third message strategy, *experience*, is publics voluntarily sharing their personal experiences with organisations.

Based on these findings, the types of messages identified in this study can be compared with the motivations based on U&G theory, and some logical connections can be made. In the case of inquiries, the motivation is logically information seeking; and in the case of experience, the motivation would be social

interaction or integration. These similarities (demonstrated in Table 2) highlight how U&G theory can also serve to understand the public's

motivations for engaging via non-profit organisational social media sites.

Table 2. Typology of messages posted by publics in organisational Facebook page

Message type	Motivation ¹	Example
<u>Inquiries:</u> Requesting information or clarification from the organisation.	Information-seeking	"I LOVE Goodwill [...] Do you have a time frame on when the San Diego Home Ave location going to be reopened after renovations?" (Goodwill Facebook, December, 2012).
<u>Requests:</u> Asking the organisation to help them or others in need.	Exchange ²	"I have a young couple who is in dire need of a twin bed for their 3-year old daughter. Can anyone here help." (Goodwill Facebook, November, 2012).
<u>Experience:</u> Sharing narratives or anecdotes in which a Facebook friend would share their first or second-hand experience with the organisation.	Social interaction/integration	"When my kids were little we started a tradition during the holidays and throughout the year. My kids are now getting older and we are still carrying on the tradition. It's a great way to teach your kids to help those in need. Hope they do the same when they have kids of their own." (Salvation Army Facebook, November, 2012).
<u>Grievance:</u> Directing accusations or complaints against their organisation and its practice.	Empowerment	Complaint: "You get more and more expensive and I never actually see anything that your money is going to. I'd rather donate to smaller in-town thrift stores. At least they can keep their prices low, and some of them actually donate to good causes." (Goodwill Facebook Page, November, 2012). Attack: "When the Sal Army stops discriminating against gays I'll return to contributing to this organisation. Sadly, most bell-ringers I've spoke[n] with don't even seem to know that this is a group that condones HATE." (Salvation Army Facebook December, 2012).
<u>Advocacy:</u> Promoting or defending the organisation and its mission, often in response to attacks from other Facebook friends.	Empowerment	"The Salvation Army does not discriminate, nor does it condone hate. You are sadly mistaken, you have poor information, and perhaps taken things out of context. Jesus loves you, and so does the Salvation Army." (Salvation Army Facebook December, 2012).
<u>Advisory:</u> Sharing ideas as to how the organisation could improve on their services.	Empowerment	"You should organize your pants by size like Goodwill does. It's difficult to shop by color like you have it now." (Salvation Army Facebook, November 2012)
<u>Self-promotion:</u> People sharing their own news or events. These postings have a loose or in-existent connection to the organisation's mission	Personal identity	"In 2013, we change the world. In 1 minute, find out how you can spread some love! For every scarf sold, the Full Circle Project by AEON Attire gives one brand new scarf to someone in desperate need of warmth." (Salvation Army Facebook, January 2013)

¹ Adapted from Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory.

² New motivation identified in this study was not included in current U&G theory's explanation of motivations for use of social media.

However, the authors could not link the *requests* message type to any existing motivation explained by the theory. A loose connection could be made between the remuneration motivation, which pertains to rewards benefits or economic incentives (Muntinga et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the people who posted on these organisations' Facebook pages were not looking for rewards or economic incentives, but rather for assistance, most likely because of the nature of these organisations. Therefore a better label that could be assigned to this motivation could be 'exchange', which could include the remuneration motivation of U&G and the main motivation for the *requests* messages, which was to obtain a needed good or service organisation. It could be concluded that in the case of non-profit organisations, U&G theory as it pertains to social media, might need to add another motivator type or expand on the remuneration type to explain these types of requests.

The findings of this study also showed that publics use organisational Facebook pages to threaten or endorse organisational legitimacy. Publics who were dissatisfied with organisations complained or even attacked the organisations publicly (*grievance* messages) while some publics endorsed or defended the organisation's practices and mission (*advocacy*). These were often in response to attacks from other Facebook users who accused the organisation of some wrongdoing. In addition, publics shared ideas about how organisations could improve on their services (*advisory*). The motivation behind these types of strategies is considered as empowerment, in which publics impact or influence the organisations and other publics. These three types of messages fit logically with the U&G empowerment motivation, which explains the use of social media to exert power or, more fitting in this case, *influence* over other publics.

Lastly, the study found that some publics share their own news or events on organisational Facebook pages even though the news or events were not directly related to organisational mission or practice (*self-*

promotion). This message type is related to the personal identity motivator of U&G theory, and is possibly used to leverage the organisation's public venue and its networks for self-promotion.

Conclusion

Many public relations scholars assert that the social media channels help organisations build dialogic relationships with their publics (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Briones et al., 2011; Cho et al., 2014; Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013). While social media provides more opportunities for both parties to easily and actively engage each other, the existing literature heavily explores one party's (i.e., organisations) efforts in building relationships with another (i.e., publics), neglecting another direction of dialogic loop (i.e., from publics to organisations). Even though Broom, Casey and Ritchey (1997) asserted the importance of understanding publics' motives and needs, which are antecedents to building relationships, there is a lack of effort to address publics' motivations for interaction. One of the main contributions of this study is that, by incorporating U&G theory with message types in public-initiated Facebook conversations, non-profit organisations can understand the latter's motivations. Such understanding may lead to building more effective online relationships.

By analysing the message types, the study's findings revealed the dynamic motives of publics in engaging with organisations via social media channels, especially Facebook. Whereas non-profit organisations may not always be taking advantage of the benefits of social media as a two-way communication channel (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Cho et al., 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011), publics of non-profit organisations are using social media for multiple purposes, ranging from self-promotion to seeking organisational resources or to influencing organisational practices and other publics' opinion. In other words, the findings suggest

that publics are engaging each other in dialogue using the organisation's social media site as a venue to meet. Organisations, then, have the choice of joining in the dialogue or not.

By offering this typology of message strategies initiated by publics, this study provides non-profit organisations with an opportunity to learn the various motivations of publics who share their concerns or requests with organisations, and therefore opportunities for engaging in dialogue. Sedereviciute and Valentini (2011) assert the importance of understanding the messages or content shared by publics via social media with following reasons:

When content shared by certain social media members is perceived by other social media members as relevant and significant for their concerns, they acquire legitimacy. Hence, the relevance of issues discussed and shared grants legitimacy to those individuals that post those contents (p. 231).

Thus, it is timely and crucial for public relations scholars to understand message strategies and publics' motivations behind the messages in order to make their social media practice more open and engaging. By learning the content types shared by publics and addressing publics' motivations, organisations can provide appropriate information and engage with their publics, leading to stronger organisation-public relationships.

Additionally, in providing a typology of messages this study can serve as a theoretical benchmark on which future studies on social media engagement of non-profit organisations can be based. More importantly, it provides insights into how organisations can initiate dialogic exchanges with their publics and benefit from the social capital that can result from these (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Limitations and future research

There are some limitations of this study that should be acknowledged. First, as an exploratory study, purposive samples were used to propose typologies of publics' message strategies. Given that there are various types of

non-profit organisations that serve different missions to advance society, the findings from these two community service non-profit organisations may not be applicable to the other types of non-profit organisations. Also, due to the distinctive nature of the non-profit sector, the message typologies proposed in this study may not reflect the way publics from for-profit organisations or from government organisations use the organisation's non-profit Facebook pages. Thus, this study should be replicated for different types of organisations in future studies.

Second, while most social media allow for dialogic exchanges, the unique characteristics of Facebook should not be ignored. Publics may have different message strategies when engaging with organisations via other types of social media, such as Twitter or YouTube.

Also, given the exploratory nature of the study, more systematic and quantitative approaches should be considered for future study, to address the most common message strategies used by publics and to which extent organisations continue the dialogic loops initiated by publics.

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