Considering ethics in visual storytelling: A study of nonprofit organisations on Instagram

Marcus Messner and Jeanine Guidry, Virginia Commonwealth University

Abstract

This study analysed the social media engagement of nonprofit organisations in the health sector on the mobile photo sharing app Instagram as well as their ethical guidelines and considerations. The Instagram accounts of leading nonprofit organisations in the U.S. health sector were examined through a content analysis over a three-month period in the spring of 2014. In addition, social media managers at the health nonprofit organisations were interviewed on ethical challenges caused by Instagram as well as social media policies that guide their organisations' social media engagements. Results show that the Instagram engagement of many of the organisations is still in an experimental stage, despite the increasing popularity of the platform. In addition, hardly any of the social media policies and guidelines directly address the engagement on Instagram.

Introduction

Nonprofit organisations are a large and significant part of the U.S. economy. A report from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (2014) lists more than 1.5 million tax-exempt organisations in the country and states that approximately 25.4% of Americans over the age of 16 volunteered through or for a nonprofit between 2009 and 2013. According to Kanter and Fine (2010), the nonprofit sector has been one of the fastest growing of the U.S. economy, making up approximately a tenth of the entire economy.

These organisations and their public relations professionals have gained new opportunities to engage interactively and in dialogue with their stakeholders and publics through social media (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Some nonprofit organisations have been at the forefront of adopting social media strategies and have utilised social media platforms for community engagement, fundraising and monitoring of their online brands.

However, in the nonprofit sector, as in many other industries, the majority of organisations still do not use social media at their full potential, but primarily as a traditional one-way communication channel (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Messner, Medina-Messner, Meganck, Quarforth, & Norton, 2013). In some segments of the nonprofit health sector, the problem seems to even be a non-adoption issue. A study focused on the use of social media among hospitals found that few of them used social media at all (Coustasse & Slack, 2012). This happens at a time when social media platforms are more and more developing as an important strategy for health communication and health information exchange (Kontos, Emmons, Puleo, & Viswanath, 2010).

People increasingly search for health information on the Internet, and the information they find tends to influence medical decisions they make (Kata, 2012). According to Fox (2011), 15% of social media users have received health information from others through social media platforms. It is, therefore, important to analyse how nonprofit organisations utilise these new platforms to communicate with their audiences. Social media have the potential to create improved communication channels between health care providers and patients as well as for direct patient-to-patient exchanges.

One of the fastest growing social media platforms is the mobile photo-sharing app Instagram, which was started in 2010 and was taken over by Facebook two years later. Instagram has 150 million monthly active users (Crook, 2013) and averages 55 million posted

photos and 1.2 billion 'likes' on a daily basis (Dora, 2013). According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Duggan & Smith, 2013), Instagram is already as popular as Twitter and has users who utilise the platform in high frequency. Public relations professionals, therefore, see Instagram as a new way to engage with young audiences through visual messages (Cision Navigator, 2013; Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, & Hopkins, 2013). However, they also acknowledge that Instagram is likely to cause social media crises or ethical challenges due to its visual and mobile nature (Wonham, 2013).

Nevertheless, hardly any academic research has been conducted on the impact of Instagram on the field of public relations and none on its impact on health communication. The goal of this study was, therefore, to analyse the ethical considerations for visual social media engagement with publics on Instagram at leading nonprofit organisations in the health sector and provide insights for public relations practitioners in this field. It is important to study the application of Instagram in this field and the perceived ethical consequences, as Instagram is one of the fastest growing social media platforms with rapidly increasing adoption rates among younger generations. The study used a content analysis of Instagram posts of leading health nonprofit organisations as well as in-depth interviews with social media managers at these organisations to evaluate the organisational Instagram engagement with their stakeholders and to analyse the impact of ethical guidelines on that engagement.

Literature review

Social media platforms are part of a rapidly changing communications environment, and the speed of the message delivery increases the ethical concerns about accuracy, honesty, and full disclosure (Bowen, 2013). However, currently there are few ethical guidelines dealing specifically with social media. Complicating this situation, Bowen (2013) explains that readers often have difficulty distinguishing if someone posting on social media speaks as a representative of an organisation or is expressing a personal opinion. Using the deontological approach to ethics, Bowen (2013) developed a list of ethical guidelines for using social media: be fair and prudent, avoid deception, maintain dignity and respect, eschew secrecy, is it reversible, be transparent, clearly identify, rational analysis, emphasise clarity, disclose, verify sources and data, establish responsibility, examine intention, encourage the good, and consistency builds trust. With the increased use of social media platforms in health communication, concerns about their use have also come to the forefront in this field. Primary among those concerns is the issue of patient privacy and HIPAA compliance (Hawn, 2009). Medical students have been dismissed and at least one physician has lost a malpractice case because of online posts (Hawn, 2009; Wiener, Crum, Grady, & Merchant, 2012).

Social media experts emphasise the importance for businesses and organisations to create a social media policy or social media guideline (Baer & Naslund, 2011), recommending that these policies include components such as philosophy and goals, transparency, confidentiality and proprietary information, and handling and escalating inquiries (Baer & Naslund, 2011; Kanter & Fine, 2010). Herndl and Licona (2007) use the term 'constrained agency' when referring to the complexities that are the result of when companies both limit and enable agency. Agency and authority, in this model, can conflict, but are not automatically at odds. Institutional authority can create opportunities for action by providing employees with the authority to act, but can also impose limitations on those actions (Weber, 2013).

Baptista and Galliers (2012), when studying social media adoption within organisations, distinguished between two contrasting approaches: the closed and the open model. In the closed model, organisations retain central control, while in the open model organisations encourage two-way interactions. For example, employers may encourage employees, on social media, to write in voices that are approachable and interactive. On the other hand, companies often only want those elements of their employees' voices that fit well with the company's brand and identity (Weber, 2013).

In their study, Baptista and Galliers (2012) focused on eight organisations and their social media practices, and found that social media adoption can provide opportunities for *rhetorical diffusion* – multi-directional and decentralised communication.

In a national survey of nonprofit organisations and their use of social media, Messner (2014) found that the duration and frequency of a social media engagement by an organisation is connected to the stage of the policy or guideline development. The study found that only 35.9% of organisations had written policies with ethical guidelines and that the most common issue addressed in them were ethical standards, organisational goals and work responsibilities.

Social media policies and guidelines are especially important at organisations as new social media platforms constantly develop and have the potential to quickly increase in popularity with audiences. The photo- and video-sharing application Instagram is such an example. Started in 2010, Instagram has grown quickly as a mobile social media platform and has reached a similar popularity as Twitter with 300 million users (Instagram, 2014; Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). Millions of photos are shared every day and most users are very active on Instagram with about a third of them returning multiple times a day. Instagram has been growing rapidly, reaching 150 million monthly active users who are posting 55 million photos and contributing 1.2 billion 'likes' to the platform on an average day (Crook, 2013; Dora, 2013). Instagram is only available as a mobile application and has thereby become the visual engagement platform for mobile phones and tablet computers. According to a study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Dungan & Smith, 2013), "Instagram and Twitter have a significantly smaller number of users than Facebook does, but users of these sites also tend to visit them frequently. Some 57% of Instagram users visit the site at least once a day (with 35% doing so multiple times per day), and 46% of Twitter users are daily visitors (with 29% visiting multiple times per day)" (para 4).

Among public relations professionals, Instagram is seen as an effective way to build brand personality and loyalty. In addition, using newer social media platforms often allows a brand to reach out to a different part of the public (Cision Navigator, 2013). Visual images tend to be more engaging than text alone (Abbott et al., 2013). However, Guidry, Messner, Jin and Medina-Messner (2014) found in a study of Instagram posts about fast-food companies that negative content is posted by customers and employees alike and is mostly related to service and work environment. At the same time, the research showed that the companies themselves were just starting to engage on Instagram and never responded to any negative posts on Instagram. The authors concluded that companies should utilise Instagram as a pre-crisis monitoring tool and include it in their communication strategies.

Research questions

Since little academic research on the impact and use of Instagram exists at this point, and considering the pivotal role the nonprofit health sector plays in society, this study attempted to explore the Instagram engagement and practices among leading health-focused nonprofit organisations. The first research question posed for this study, therefore, attempts to explore the social media engagement of nonprofit organisations in the health sector:

RQ1: How do health sector nonprofits engage with their publics on Instagram?

Considering the complicated ethical context in which health-sector nonprofits operate and the unique characteristics of social media communication, understanding how these nonprofits perceive and address ethical issues related to the use of social media and specifically Instagram is important. The second research question posed for this study, therefore, is:

RQ2: What are the ethical issues perceived by health sector nonprofits regarding their use of Instagram?

Finally, social media policies are recommended but not adopted by all organisations. In addition, these policies can both encourage and inhibit the optimal use of

3

social media. Understanding the adoption of social media policies and guidelines in the nonprofit health sector is a first step of understanding the importance and the nuances of best practices in these policies. The third research question for this study, therefore, is:

RQ3: How are social media policies and guidelines implemented and used in health sector nonprofits?

Methodology

To answer the research questions posed for this study, quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a content analysis of Instagram content posted by nonprofit organisations and through in-depth interviews with social media managers at nonprofit organisations. For the quantitative content analysis, a sample of nonprofit organisations from the health sector was drawn from the latest rankings of the 200 and 50 largest charities in the U.S. (Forbes, 2011; Forbes, 2013). Health is one of the most important areas for nonprofit organisations on these rankings and, therefore, a sample of health-sector nonprofits was drawn through already available category listings. This resulted in a sample of 19 nonprofit organisations, all of which had an Instagram account. However, pre-testing found that the Mayo Clinic had never posted to its Instagram account before this study was started and was, therefore, eliminated.

The final sample for the content analysis included the following organisations: American Cancer Society, American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, American Red Cross, Arthritis Foundation, Autism Speaks, City of Hope, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Doctors without Borders, Heart to Heart International, International Medical Corps, March of Dimes, Mercy Ships, Mount Sinai, Smile Train, St. Jude Children's Hospital, and Texas Children's Hospital.

Instagram content from these 18 nonprofit organisations was collected over a three-month period from March 1 through May 31, 2014. A longer three-month time period was chosen to avoid that the sample could be heavily influenced by an organisational crisis or other external circumstances. First, the lifetime numbers for each account were recorded, the total number of posts, the number of followers and the following. Then, each Instagram post on each of the days in the sample by all of the organisations was analysed. This resulted in a total sample of 1,059 Instagram posts. A content analysis was carried out to determine the frequency of the nonprofits' engagement as well as the publics' engagement with the Instagram posts, measuring likes, comments, and total engagement as dependent variables. Total engagement was operationalised as the total number of likes and comments for an Instagram post.

The content analysis was conducted by two trained coders and the coding manual was pre-tested before the actual study was started. The two coders assessed intercoder reliability on approximately 10% (n=100) of the coding material at .96 for *Scott's Pi* (Scott, 1955).

In addition to the content analysis, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with social media managers at the organisations in the above-mentioned sample during June and July 2014. All 18 organisations were contacted with interview requests and 10 of them granted an interview, which constituted a response rate of 55.6%. Nine of the interviews were conducted and recorded via telephone. One social media manager asked that the interview be conducted via email. Most of the interviewees were designated social media managers; a few were directors of communication in charge of social media. In this study, they are referred to as only social media managers. All of the interviewees were granted anonymity in the interviews to allow them to speak freely about their organisational Instagram engagement.

During the in-depth interviews, social media managers were asked three sets of questions. The first set included general social media and Instagram engagement questions, while the second set focused on the organisations' Instagram content and their targeted publics. The third set of questions concentrated on the implementation and use of social media policies and guidelines for Instagram and other social media platforms as well as ethical

4

dilemmas faced and expected on Instagram. After the interviews were completed, the interviewer transcribed the recordings and entered them with the one email interview into the research software NVivo for analysis and categorisation of the interview content.

Results

This study analysed 1,059 Instagram posts by 18 leading health-sector nonprofit organisations during a three-month period as well as in-depth interviews with social media managers at 10 of the organisations. The research questions posed for this study will be answered separately in the following sections.

RQ1: How do health sector nonprofits engage with their publics on Instagram?

The data from the content analysis showed that each nonprofit had on average posted 215 times during the lifetime of its Instagram account. However, the range was wide with the lowest number of lifetime Instagram posts at two and the highest at 1,583. The average number of followers was 5,584, again with a wide range from the lowest number of followers at 111 and the highest at 38,165. The average number of Instagram accounts followed by each organisation was 192, once more with a wide range with the lowest number of Instagram accounts followed at zero and the highest at 797.

During the three-month sampling period, each organisation posted on average 58.8 times and 0.6 times per day. However, the distribution of Instagram posts again varied greatly by organisation. Mount Sinai accounted for 47.4% (n=502) of the posts in the sample alone, followed by Autism Speaks with 11.1% (n=118) and March of Dimes with 10.5% (n=111) of the posts. Organisations like American Cancer Society and Smile Train, however, each accounted only for 0.1% (n=1) of the Instagram post.

All of the Instagram posts (n=1,059) in the sample received at least one like. On the other hand, only 47.8% (n=506) of the posts received at least one comment, while 52.2% (n=553) did not receive any comments. On average, an Instagram post in the sample received 3.4 comments (SD=8.03) and 182.9 likes (SD=

333.82). The number of comments ranged between 0 and 67 and the number of likes between 0 and 2,459. The lowest average of likes for an organisation was 3.4 (SD=2.20) per post, and the highest average number of likes was 1,610.1 (SD=376.37). The lowest average number of comments for an organisation was 0.35 (SD=0.68) per post, and the highest average number of comments was 22.6 (SD=15.20).

From the analysis of the qualitative in-depth interviews, several themes emerged regarding the importance of Instagram, the personnel committed by the organisation, the frequency of the engagement as well as the targeting of Instagram content to the organisations' publics. For many organisations, Instagram is not the primary focus of their social media engagement, either because it is still a fairly new platform compared with established ones like Facebook and Twitter, or because they don't have enough time to engage on another platform. One social media manager, for instance, stated that "We've been on Instagram for a while, but there hasn't been much action. One more thing that we have to deal with is that we've got multiple platforms and we have to focus our energy". Another social media manager pointed out that there is a learning curve to the engagement on Instagram: "We just started Instagram three to four months ago, but we are still new to it."

Many of the organisations interviewed for this study engage daily on Facebook and Twitter, some even post several times a day. When asked how frequently the organisations posted on social media, one social media manager replied: "Every minute of every day. We're extremely active on most of the major social media platforms. Depending on the platform we are doing planned posts anywhere between one and three times a day, but when you count things like retweets and engagement, it's many, many times a day. We really try to not just post things and walk away, but respond to comments and all that good stuff." Another social media manager said that the focus rarely expands beyond the major platforms: "For Twitter and Facebook, it's pretty much daily. Other platforms, it is more sparingly as when

5

applicable content comes around. We focus mainly on Twitter and Facebook."

Many organisations post less frequently on Instagram than on Facebook and Twitter, often because they have been active on the platform for less time. One of the social media managers said "To start off with, we are just dipping our toe into the water and starting off slow. We are working toward a goal of posting once a week." Another social media manager said that the Instagram engagement depends on whether visual content is available: "We try to post to Instagram when we have compelling content. So sometimes that's once a week. Sometimes it's a dozen images in a week."

Several nonprofit organisations also have clear goals for their Instagram posting frequency: "With Instagram, our goal is about twice a week", said one social media manager. Another one added that the organisation posts "At least once or twice a week. Sometimes more if we have more going on." However, only one of the organisations views Instagram as one of the social media platforms it can post to more frequently, while it is more limited on Facebook. "On Facebook, we have our biggest audience, and we have to be really careful how much we are sharing. We are allowed two posts per day, so we don't want to over-share. Instagram allows us to post more content", said the social media manager of the organisation.

The overall social media engagement at the nonprofit organisations largely depends on the personnel committed to the social media strategy. All interviewees handle social media at least as part of their position. A couple of them have staff assigned to work with them, while others work on social media by themselves. For some, social media is their main responsibility: "I am a full-time social media manager, so it is primarily me. Although there is someone on the marketing communications team, who helps me out about 25% of the time", said one social media manager. For others, it is just one part of a larger public relations job: "I am the director of communication. I handle social media, media PR, videography, video editing, photography, website, website management. All kinds of stuff. Social media is a part of it." Only a few

of the social media managers have a larger team they oversee.

While Instagram is not one of the major platforms in the social media strategy for the organisations at this point, many of them are analysing the role Instagram can play in their strategy. Besides the focus on visual content, many social media managers describe their content for Instagram as more human, more authentic, and less focused on selling something. One of the social media managers said that "I think on Instagram, it puts a face of humanity behind our brand, it allows us to connect with people in a very human way". The social media manager added, "It doesn't necessarily make it look like we are selling. We are not always pushing people to see our website and to see our content. It's just kind of engaging." Another social media manager pointed out that Instagram content should not be too polished: "When you are posting stuff, make sure it's authentic. Make sure it looks like it is taken on a phone and not something your art department put together."

Other nonprofit organisations view Instagram as a platform to post content they might not post to their other social channels. "We really try to steer away from disaster heavy content. We aim for vintage images, interesting images that highlight other lines of service, or very out-of-the-box content that we otherwise might not post to our other social channels, like Valentine's Day pick-up lines."

Many organisations see Instagram more as an engagement tool than a marketing tool: "For Instagram there is not as much of an opportunity for a call to action, so we went into this knowing it is really an engagement tool. A way to engage a younger demographic which may be missing on some of our other social media channels and it is not a place to say register now, buy this, sign up here. It's really just more like 'hey, here's some things fun and interesting and compelling and this is a peek at our work'." Another use of Instagram for the nonprofits is showing their publics how the organisations operate. One of the social media managers stated "We use Instagram in general to show what the culture is like in our organisation, engaging with us as we post one of our events, as we post an employee award,

and things like that". Another social media manager confirmed this: "On Instagram it's obviously just images, but we try and give an overview of all of our activities on Instagram."

The variety of content posted on Instagram can be very wide on the organisational accounts, underlining the experimental nature of the engagement at this point. "We also do series of posts on Instagram. One-off posts are great. But when you do a series of posts and create a campaign around it, you engage more people. So we do a lot of health campaigns, health awareness campaigns: ovarian cancer campaign, skin cancer, prostate cancer, but also smoothie recipes", said one of the social media managers. Most nonprofits also mentioned that Instagram users tend to be from a younger demographic. "Instagram obviously trends to a younger demographic. It trends to a demographic that is more willing to accept mobile networks in their lives and throughout their lives", explained one of the social media managers:

However, several of the organisations also mentioned Instagram's limitation of not including clickable links in the posts: "Of course on Instagram there is no linking. You can use hashtags but you cannot put a link in the comments and make it clickable, so that changes how the messaging is done", said one of the social managers.

RQ2: What are the ethical issues perceived by health sector nonprofits regarding their use of Instagram?

The social media managers were asked to describe their own perceived ethical challenges in their use of Instagram and many of them mentioned HIPAA as their primary challenge. The social media managers pointed out that they need to make sure that permission is obtained from anyone who appears in the organisation's Instagram photos as all of them work in the health sector: "You know the biggest challenge is to be careful that since it is all photos, so make sure you have permission to use the photo that you are posting", said one social media manager. "Related to that somebody may have given permission to post a picture and changed their mind." Another social media manager added, "Whenever we post a photo, we always have consent of our patients.

And we do explain that the photo of them could be shared on social media."

One of the social media managers also emphasised the importance of legal advice: "Really the first and only thing to come to mind is the right to use images. I've consulted with our legal department as the best way to go about that to make absolutely sure." Another one explained, "With any social media channel and health care there's concern of HIPAA violations, patient privacy being violated. That is why we have training and policies surrounding it. With Instagram being photo- and video-based, someone can snap a photo of someone – maybe they are in the background – and now they are on Instagram exposed to thousands and thousands of people. Maybe millions. We have an issue there. If you are taking a picture in the hospital and there is a patient in the background that is obviously a clear concern. That's the number one thing we talk about in policies."

Another theme that surfaced in the interviews was the organisations' decision on when to share photos that are not generally perceived as positive and upbeat, photos that deal with death and grief as well as with serious illness and medically graphic situations. One of the interviewees explained "I guess the most ethically challenging thing we've had to do would probably be that you want to educate patients and their families on what goes on in the patient care life cycle. But part of that life cycle is not always positive and we need to deal with death, end of life, and bereavement. There's always a segment that doesn't want to see or be reminded of that kind of stuff because they either are in that situation or have family members who have passed away. That is the toughest." Another social media manager replied, "There are editorial decisions to be made. You don't want to post distressing images unless the story particularly warrants it or hangs around that image. We do find that followers respond to positive, happy images, so we do try as much as possible to sort of share good news, which is often quite difficult for our organization." This is a notion that is shared among many of the social media managers: "With images especially, we have to be very careful that we are not pushing something out

like that may be inappropriate because the patient passed away, isn't doing well, or anything like that."

Another ethical dilemma is the danger of exploitation, as one social media manager pointed out: "You just don't want to be exploitative, especially if you are sharing pictures of children. That is the main thing. We have permission to share all the photos. We don't share anything too graphic on the surgery side. I haven't experienced any ethical issues beyond that." The social media manager added, "One of my colleagues yesterday used the term poverty porn. I want to make sure we are showing not just images of children that are sad beforehand, but also show them after surgery."

One social media manager also mentioned the ethical challenge to make sure no photos from private accounts are re-posted by the organisation: "We wouldn't want to repost someone whose posts are private. If they aren't making it public to everyone, it is not really our place to make it public for them. I think that's the big one."

RQ3: How are social media policies and guidelines implemented and used by health sector nonprofits?

While all of the organisations pointed to ethical challenges in the Instagram engagement, not all of them have a social media policy or guideline. Eight of the 10 nonprofits reported having a social media policy or guideline, while two do not have either. However, the two social media managers whose organisations do not have a policy or guideline recognised the value of having one and were planning to develop and implement a policy in the future.

Social media policies and guidelines at the eight organisations belong to two categories, those having to do with style and those having to do with content. In addition, most nonprofits described that their policies and guidelines are meant for posts to the organisation's own social media platforms as well as directed toward employees who post on their personal social media profiles about their work with the nonprofit. "While employees need to make it clear that the views they are expressing are theirs alone and not necessarily those of our organisation, we want to share the powerful stories our employees are telling. Probably the

three most important guidelines are: be transparent, be accurate, and be considerate", said one social media manager.

Several social media managers mentioned that they started out with strict rules and intentionally changed those rules from forbidding ones to more encouraging ones. One of them explained "We have right now in place an electronic policy, an electronic communications policy. And I think the wording in there is something like we do not forbid social media usage by employees, but we have strict rules about messages. So one thing we are trying to do at the moment that we are working through is setting the initiative as a whole to be more open to social media, think about how we want our employees and patients to engage and be a member on social media? How do we want to empower them to share our content and spread it farther afield? So, we are really thinking through that a lot and seeing if we can do something as simple as tweak the language from 'we do not forbid it' to 'we encourage it just during hours when you are not doing your day job.' Also coming up with the old one-pager instead of reading through this 14-page document. Basically a one-pager crafted for social media use, like don't post pictures of patients. Respect copyright and confidentiality. Kind of a one page that's written in a human way, that's warm, that doesn't scare people off and make them not want to read it. So we are working on that and hopefully will be distributing that along with an update to the electronic policy. We are making a really fundamental shift from not forbidding toward encouraging engagement."

Instagram is seen as a platform to showcase the 'great work our employees are doing' and one of the nonprofits mentioned the desire to empower those employees to share the work they do with the world. "It is different than it was 20 years ago. Social media is a part of people's lives in a big way and even if the organization chooses not to be, it's still going to happen. So we've tried to give parameters to help our employees, if they do choose to talk about their work in their personal channels, to help them so that they are comfortable. We want them to share the great work that they are

8

doing for the organization, because our employees are doing great work."

At the same time, a general awareness seems to have developed that times have changed, that people are more savvy with social media than a few years ago, and that ultimately an organisation cannot completely control if and what employees post on personal social media profiles. "We have guidelines. We can't dictate what people do on their own time. We can't dictate what people say; however, we do have guidelines. It was harder a couple of years ago when social media was newer. People really didn't understand how much trouble you could get in, not just at work but posting a picture of you acting like a drunken idiot on the weekend and having your mom see it. Or your spouse. Or your kids. People have gotten a little bit smarter and savvy about what to post and what not to post on Facebook."

Teaching employees how to properly use social media for the good of the organisation is also an often-recurring theme in the interviews with the social media managers: "We have guidelines for all of our employees. It is a part of our new hire orientation. It just goes over and outlines how people are supposed to and not supposed to use social media. For them to be aware and cognizant how they represent or may represent our organization when they are out there in social media." This was also confirmed by another social media manager who said that "We have internal policies so when employees engage on a channel, we want them to be familiar with these policies. Learn the do's and don'ts. We want to protect them and we want to protect the brand." Another one underlined this by saying that "We have standards we try to uphold when we work on internally crafted messages, guided by social media strategies. We work off of both guidelines as well as style guides. It's kind of a modern digital style guide adapted for the social space." To some organisations, social media engagement means dual representation, in which personal and professional levels cannot really be separated anymore: "The way we position it is that when you are in social media, you represent both. You are representing and are doing it personally as well

as it could potentially be tied back to you and your work at our nonprofit."

One of the social media managers listed a few practical examples of the organisation's social media guidelines: "A few examples of our social media content policy: If you can't do or say something via other means, by email, by phone, in person, then you shouldn't do it via social media. Always treat what you post on social media as permanent, discoverable and sharable." The same nonprofit's social media policy specifically recommends the social media posts to "be as visual as possible", something that is particularly fitting for Instagram. However, none of the nonprofit organisations specifically addressed policies or guidelines for Instagram in their social media policies or guidelines.

Rather than focusing on particular platforms, many nonprofit organisations focus on the big picture approach to their social media engagement in their social media policies and guidelines and when dealing with potential ethical dilemmas. "A lot of nonprofits engage on social media. Whether it is ethical issues or being exposed or they hear about all of these horror stories, work closely with your legal team. They can guide you on what can and cannot be done. You draft comprehensive internal and external social media guidelines. You train employees – whether they work for the social media team or not they should be trained in what can and can't be done. Then you have a great strategy in place where you are planning out what you are doing over the six months, one year, and beyond. You'll be okay and it is definitely advantageous to be on social media", said one of the social media managers interviewed for this study.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine the engagement of nonprofit organisations on the mobile social media application Instagram and the ethical considerations with the organisations for this visual social media engagement. The content analysis of Instagram posts and the in-depth interviews with social media managers at the nonprofit organisations showed that the engagement is only at an experimental stage for

9

many of the organisations. At this point, many have not developed a sophisticated strategy for Instagram that is similar to the strategies most of them use every day for their engagement on Facebook and Twitter. Based on the classification by Baptista and Galliers (2012), many organisations are using a closed model approach at this point with a lot of central organisational control. However, several organisations described that they are in the process of developing guidelines to encourage a more open Instagram and general social media engagement for their employees with the audiences.

Rather than using Instagram as just another tool in their social media kit, several organisations stated that they are developing Instagram into a unique tool for specific purposes, such as demonstrating authenticity and giving a behind-the-scenes look into their organisations. However, the content analysis of organisational posts also demonstrated that there is still a wide range in the use of Instagram, with some organisations using it several times per day and others hardly every posting a photo at all. Facebook and Twitter are still the main priority for most of the organisations, despite the fact that younger generations especially are heavily using Instagram and that the platform is increasing its popularity rapidly.

Despite the still experimental nature of their Instagram engagement, many nonprofit organisations clearly described the ethical challenges they face on Instagram. Privacy issues and HIPAA regulations are at the top of their list. Especially, the visual nature of Instagram is creating ethical challenges for the nonprofit organisations, as they need to verify consent from patients and bystanders in their photos and videos. This circumstance prevents a more spontaneous engagement in the health field and might be a reason why some organisations are hesitant to engage on the platform more frequently. As Instagram becomes one of the leading platforms and a daily part of social media plans in public relations, nonprofit organisations will have to implement guidelines for their employees to address and avoid ethical and legal challenges on Instagram. Additionally, training on how to

develop compelling visual engagement strategies for Instagram seem necessary as well.

At this point, however, Instagram is not a major focus of the social media policies and guidelines at these organisations. Two of the organisations did not even have policies or guidelines in place when their social media managers were interviewed for this study. This is surprising in so far as all of these organisations are among the leading ones in the U.S. health sector and are being looked up to for best practices by smaller organisations. This will have to change as these organisations professionalise their organisational engagement on Instagram and that of their employees.

Conclusion

This study provided an initial insight into the still experimental engagement by nonprofit organisations on Instagram. The findings show that Instagram is on the radar of many organisations and that they are starting the process of developing effective engagement strategies as well as adequate policies and guidelines for Instagram. More research is needed as Instagram today is already used by as many users as Twitter. While this study analysed a small sample of leading nonprofits through content analysis and in-depth interviews, a broader analysis is needed to provide a national examination of the Instagram adoption among organisations and how they address the specific challenges generated by a visual social media engagement. The next step should include a national survey of nonprofit organisations on their Instagram engagement as well as a broader analysis of Instagram posts by nonprofit organisations and their audiences. Future content analyses should also examine the engagement of the Instagram audiences as well as the potential two-way engagement of the organisations. This will help to develop best practices for nonprofit organisations and help to guide their future engagement on Instagram as the social media platform continues its predicted growth path in the U.S. and worldwide. Based on the interviews conducted for this study, it is clear that many organisations see the potential of Instagram for their social media toolkit and are exploring the platform to

10

professionalise their engagement as they have done in the past with Facebook and Twitter.

Acknowledgement

References

Abbott, W., Donaghey, J., Hare, J., & Hopkins, P. (2013). An Instagram is worth a thousand words: An industry panel and audience Q&A. *Library Hi Tech News, 30*(7), 1–6.

Baer, J., & Naslund, A. (2011). *The NOW revolution: 7 shifts to make your business faster, smarter, and more social*. Hoboken, N.J: Wiley and Sons.

Baptista, J., & Galliers, R. D. (2012). *Social media as a driver for new rhetorical practices in organisations*. Research paper presented at the 45th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

Bowen, S. A. (2013). Using classic social media cases to distill ethical guidelines for digital engagement. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 28*, 119–133.

Cision Navigator. (2013). Instagram – the PR perspective. Retrieved from http://navigator.cision.com/Instagram-The-PR-Perspective.aspx

Coustasse, A., & Slack, C. (2012). Potential benefits of using Facebook in the healthcare industry: A literature review. *Insights to a Changing World Journal, 1*, 41.

Crook, J. (2013). Topping 150M users, Instagram promises ads within the next year. Retrieved from http://techcrunch.com/2013/09/08/topping-150m-users-instagram-promises-ads-within-the-next-year/.

Duggan, M., Ellison, N. B, Lampe, C., Lenhart, A., & Madden, M. (2015). Social media update. *Pew Internet & American Life Project.* Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/01/PI_SocialMediaUpdate20144.pdf

Forbes. (2011). The 200 largest U.S. charities. Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com/lists/2011/14/200-largest-us-charities-11.html.

Forbes. (2013). The 50 largest U.S. charities. Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com/top-charities/

Fox, S. (2011). The social life of health information, *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved from http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Social-Life-of-Health-Info.aspx.

Guidry, J., Messner, M., Jin, Y., & Medina-Messner, V. (2015). From #mcdonaldsfail to #dominossucks: An analysis of Instagram images about the 10 largest fast food companies. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 20 (3), 344–359.

Hawn, C. (2009). Take two aspirin and tweet me in the morning: How Twitter, Facebook, and other social media are reshaping health care. *Health affairs (Project Hope), 28*(2), 361.

Herndl, C. G., & Licona, A. C. (2007). Agency, Kairos, and the possibilities of social action. In M. Zachary & C. Thralls (Eds.), *Communicative practices in workplaces and the professions: Cultural perspectives on the regulation of discourse and organizations* (pp. 133–154). Amityville, NY: Baywood.

Instagram (2014). 300 Million: Sharing real moments. Retrieved from http://blog.instagram.com/post/104847837897/141210-300million

Kanter, B., & Fine, A. (2010). *The networked nonprofit: Connecting with social media to drive change*. New York, NY: Jossey-Bass.

Kata, A. (2012). Anti-vaccine activists, Web 2.0, and the postmodern paradigm – An overview of tactics and tropes used online by the anti-vaccination movement. *Vaccine, 30*(25), 3778–3789.

Kontos, E. Z., Emmons, K. M., Puleo, E., & Viswanath, K. (2010). Communication inequalities and public health implications of adult social networking site use in the United States. *Journal of Health Communication, 15*(sup3), 216–235.

11

Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer–Mediated Communication, 17*(3), 337–353.

Lovejoy, K., Waters, R. D., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Engaging stakeholders through Twitter: How nonprofit organizations are getting more out of 140 characters or less. *Public Relations Review, 38*(2), 313–318.

Messner, M. (2014). To tweet or not to tweet: An analysis of ethical guidelines for the social media engagement of nonprofit organizations. In M. W. DiStaso and D. Bortree (Eds). *Ethical practice of social media in public relations.* New York: Routledge (p. 82–98).

Messner, M., Jin, Y., Medina-Messner, V., Meganck, S., Quarforth, S., & Norton, S. (2013). 140 characters for better health: An exploration of the Twitter engagement of leading nonprofit organizations. In H. N. Al-Deen & J. A. Hendricks (Eds.), *Social media and strategic communications.* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan (p. 119–136).

National Center for Charitable Statistics. (2014). Quick facts about nonprofits. Retrieved from http://nccs.urban.org/statistics/quickfacts.cfm

Scott, W. A. (1955). Reliability of content analysis: The case of nominal scale coding. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 19*, 321–325.

Weber, R. (2013). Constrained agency in corporate social media policy. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 43*, 289–315.

Wiener, L., Crum, C., Grady, C., & Merchant, M. (2012). To friend or not to friend: The use of social media in clinical oncology. *Journal of Oncology Practice, 8*(2), 103–106.

Wonham, L. (2013). Fighting the fallout from a fast-food fail. *Ragan's PR Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.prdaily.com/crisiscommunications/Articles/Fighting_the_fallout_from_a_fastfood_fail_14678.aspx.

Author contact details:

Marcus Messner, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture, Virginia Commonwealth University, PO Box 842034, Richmond, VA 23284-2034, mmessner@vcu.edu