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Building and Maintaining Legitimacy Online: UNICEF's Use of Facebook

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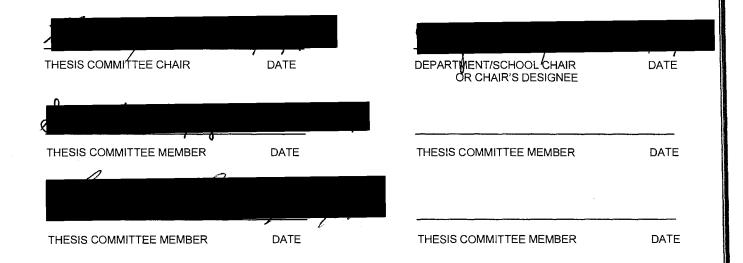Find out more about the program.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The rise of the internet has had a large impact on the world, to the point where it is changing the way our brains process information (Taylor, 2012). One of the major fields impacted by this change has been public relations. The rise of sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have allowed publics to engage with organizations with the societal expectation that the organization responds. Facebook boasts 1.19 billion active users a month with 80% of its users residing outside of the United States (Facebook, 2014). Twitter hosts 230 million active users a month with 77% of users outside of the United States (Twitter, 2014) while Linked has over 250 million registered users with 66% of those coming from outside of the United States (LinkedIn, 2004). These staggering numbers indicate the vast potential of social media to connect organizations with stakeholders.

Even though it is a relatively new medium, social media has evolved considerably since its inception. To stay competitive and innovative, social media sites routinely update their features, which in turn impacts how publics communicate with organizations. Facebook in particular has gone through extreme changes since its launch in 2004. The site, which was originally called TheFacebook, was only open to college students from select universities when it first launched. It allows users to create profiles, connect to others, message and upload photos, as well as leave comments on other user's "walls" (Jenkins, 2013). Since its inception many features have been added that have directly impacted the communication occurring on the site. The addition of status

updates, the newsfeed, marketplace, chat, a "like" button, real-time updates, and hashtags require scholars to conduct up-to-date studies that reflect the evolution of the medium (Jenkins, 2013). Even some of the functions added by Facebook have evolved over time. Facebook updates, for example, originally had the user posting in the third person, but now have been redesigned for users to talk in the first person. One of the most controversial, and groundbreaking, changes has been the evolution of the newsfeed.

Before the newsfeed the only way an organization could communicate with a user was if the user directly connected with an organization's profile. At the time it was considered taboo for an organization to post directly on a user's wall, limiting possibilities for organizations to engage with stakeholders (Vorvoreanu, 2009). Instead of having organizations post directly on stakeholders' walls, the newsfeed allows organizations to post updates on their own profiles and have them viewed by anyone that "liked" their pages. This circumvents the feeling that an organization's posts were perceived as advertising and increases the likelihood of relationship building for organizations. This altered attitudes towards organizations posting on Facebook, allowing them to get more out of their participation, in turn, increased the number of organizations on Facebook (Kelly, 2013).

At first many organizational accounts were run by company interns or those perceived as young and tech savvy. This demonstrated a lack of understanding of the medium's importance and its potential for causing problems. Over the years several public crises resulting from poor social media use have caused organizations to be very intentional with their online interactions. In response to this recognition many organizations now employ a social media director. Large companies have even hired

entire teams to run their accounts. While social media is an invaluable tool for

relationship building, it also provides environmental scanning and free in-depth data

regarding stakeholders.

Historically such benefits and services were paid for by organizations, creating

challenges for those with limited budgets, particularly nonprofit organizations. However,

social media's lost cost of use has led to a high adoption rate of the medium among

nonprofits (Huffington Post, 2012). These free services have become vital for a sector

where demand for its services is rising, but the funding is shrinking (Blackwood, Roeger,

& Pettijohn, 2012).

Nonprofits

While the services provided by sites like Facebook are free, many nonprofits

cannot afford to hire someone specifically to run their social media accounts. Instead,

many look to best practices or advice from scholars and practitioners for guidance in

using the medium. The societal need for nonprofit organizations demonstrates some

level of government failure to care for its citizens. In the United States the federal

government funds nonprofit organizations because they are better equipped to administer

aid and do so at less cost. In 2012 the Center for Civil Society Studies at John Hopkins

University reported that the nonprofit sector employs 10% of the United States'

population making it the third largest employer (Salamon, Sokolowski, Geller, 1999). It

is also a highly competitive industry with over 1.4 million organizations, each competing

for donor dollars and government assistance (The Urban Institute, 2012).

Nonprofits that have a large amount of overhead, or get embroiled in a crisis, can easily find themselves closing down because they rely so heavily on public support. Unlike the private industry that provides people with goods or services that must be paid for directly by the consumer, nonprofit organizations take the consumers' money and use it to provide other people with goods and services. Private donors are asked to give money to individuals they do not know and most likely will never meet. While there are tax break incentives for donations, that is not the only factor that drives support of nonprofit organizations. Donors give because they believe in an organization's mission and perceive it to be an effective manager of their donations. Historically, the United States federal government has been a major funder of nonprofit organizations as well. However, the economic recession has reduced government spending on nonprofits even while the need for nonprofit services is on the rise. This has created an extremely competitive nonprofit environment. In the private sector many claim that to remain competitive in the marketplace an organization needs to attract top talent. They do so with bonuses, perks, and golden parachutes. It is hard for nonprofits, on fixed budgets, to attract the top talent necessary to keep down costs and increase efficiency. There is an expectation by donors that their funds are going directly to aid, and not into the pockets of nonprofit workers. Those with higher overhead become targets of news reports which call into question the organizations' legitimacy.

If there is a public perception that an organization is no longer legitimate, the organization may lose funding, which in turn, impacts those that are targets of their aid. This can have terrible consequences for organizations that provide goods and services necessary for basic human survival as a drop in funding can mean the deaths of thousands

of people. The severe consequences that arise from a loss of legitimacy establish the

need for more research into the public relations efforts of nonprofit organizations to

create and maintain legitimacy.

Nonprofit public relations

The nonprofit sector is highly competitive and in order to attract donors

organizations are striving to stand out. When nonprofits close their doors it is often due

to the fact that they did not stay relevant. The modern age of public relations favors the

two-way symmetrical model which "practitioners use research and dialogue to bring

about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both their organizations

and publics" (Grunig, 2001, p. 13). Those engaging in traditional, asymmetrical models

of public relations can lose legitimacy as two-way, symmetrical communication becomes

an expectation of nonprofits. To engage in dialogue, an organization inherently needs to

decide who to engage and whose voice ultimately matters. In the past, many nonprofits

have had public relations problems stemming from an ambiguity concerning who the

organizations sees as their stakeholders (Dyer, Buell, Harrison, & Weber, 2002). Due to

a desire to attract more funding, many previous communication attempts by nonprofits

have been broad in focus, which has been problematic in the information age (Dyer, et al,

2002). While broad messages worked well when public relations relied more heavily on

the mass media to disseminate its messages, such approaches are less effective online.

Posting a message on a highly popular site, such as Facebook, does not guarantee that

stakeholders receive the message. If an organization's messages do not resonate with

stakeholders, they can choose to unfollow the organization or its posts. The internet has

created the ability for stakeholders to, not only reject a message, but limit future exposure

to the organization's messages. There is also a dialogic expectation by stakeholders in online environments which requires nonprofits to craft messages that engage stakeholders, not merely target them. Organizations need to be concerned with how users will interpret their messages online, and tailor messages to different cultures and beliefs. For those nonprofits operating globally this becomes even more of a challenge. Many international nonprofits have multiple, regional social media accounts that serve to better communicate with distinct groups; however every organization still relies on a central account to present its messages and engage with stakeholders.

Social Media and Nonprofits

"Perception is reality" is one of the mantras of public relations practioners and is a particularly fitting one for nonprofit organizations. A nonprofit must be perceived as legitimate by a multitude of groups including: local, state, and federal representatives community leaders, donors, potential donors, volunteers, receivers of aid, and potential audiences online (Dyer, Buell, Harrison & Weber, 2002). The nonprofit sector was quick to embrace social media due to its low cost and the potential for finding new donors. At first nonprofits did not utilize the full potential of social media and tended to use it primarily as a way to push messages to stakeholders. However, over the last decade the question of social media's effectiveness for public relations has been looked at extensively and has heralded for its ability to engage stakeholders. So in addition to finding new sources of funding, nonprofits use social media for storytelling, collaboration with other organizations, creating content that engages stakeholders, turning stakeholders into advocates, organizing protests, and a place for employees and volunteers to interact.

People support nonprofits in part because it enhances individual identity (Boenigk & Helmig, 2013). Social media allows people to publicly announce this support, which is done out of a desire for the individual to be associated with a nonprofit organization. On Facebook, for example, it becomes public knowledge when someone starts following an organization, and many users share nonprofit messages on their profiles which exposes non-followers to the organization. One of the questions organizations have been asking is how do we get our followers to share our messages? Learning more about an organizations' stakeholders allows organizations to create messages that resonate with stakeholders and increases the likelihood that follows will share their messages with others. Environmental groups for example, have found that their followers like memes and are likely to share one with others if it states an opinion or belief that they hold (Sniderman, 2011). The sharing of these memes also reflects the desire for users to construct and present an identity to others online.

Another innovation in social media use by nonprofits is allowing volunteers and employees to become speakers for an organization. When an audience perceives that it is getting an inside look at an organization it increases the likelihood that they will accept it as true. This means that volunteers and employees can influence public perceptions of the organizations they work for. While the ability for messages to go viral and spread quickly is seen as a benefit of social media it can also be a curse if one disgruntled employee, volunteer, or stakeholder decides to wage a campaign against the organization. This speaks to the danger inherent in allowing volunteers and employees to speak for the organization publicly. The organization must relinquish control of the message but, in return, the messages appear more authentic and spread faster.

Social media lacks the gatekeepers associated with traditional media, which can allow misinformation to spread and sometimes, for nonprofits, all it takes is one person claiming that the organization is corrupt to create questions of organizational legitimacy. For example, there has been one particular infographic that has been passed around Facebook since 2005 urging people not to donate to certain charities because of the amount paid to the organizations' top management. The information has been debunked, and all it takes is a five minute Google search to find out the actual amount the CEO makes, but yet the infographic still shows up routinely on Facebook. What this means is that misinformation is consistently being shared about organizations and it can have a negative influence on stakeholders who choose not to follow-up on its veracity. This can cause people to post rants or messages expressing outrage at these organizations, which can convince others to respond negatively to the organization as well.

Crafting unique messages that engage stakeholders is challenging, even more so for those working internationally. Finding out which stories will promote positive engagement with users can be tricky when religious, political, and cultural contexts vary greatly. Language and misunderstanding can become significant problems for nonprofits' social media accounts as well. However, some groups seem to navigate these waters better than others and, are not only creating worthwhile content, but are also participating in the discussion around the messages. If done successfully social media engagement can have numerous benefits for nonprofit organizations, including increases in donations and organizational legitimacy.

Rationale

The evolving nature of social media requires it to be continually studied as new functions create unique ways of interacting online. Recently, for example, Facebook added a feature allowing user comments to be upvoted or downvoted by others. From a critical perspective this can be troubling as it might serve as a way to further marginalize groups of people or their ideas. Rhetoric is not static and is constantly evolving. The use of social media has changed discussion expectations, added new words, and reassigned meaning to older words. It is important to constantly test theories and expand on them when necessary. In the past decade several important additions to public relations theories have added to the body of knowledge. The nonprofit sector also tends to take a "back seat" to the study of the private sector in public relations, which creates demand for more public relations research concerning the particular needs of nonprofits. For nonprofits such research is extremely beneficial because the budget does not always allow for an organization to hire a social media specialist. Instead, this type of research can help an organization effectively engages its supporters, reducing the likelihood of its demise by building its legitimacy with stakeholders.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) serves as the nonprofit to be studied since the consequences of its communication can impact the entire globe. There are no other nonprofits that compete on the global scale of UNICEF. Like other nonprofits, it still relies on the perceptions held by stakeholders that it is a legitimate organization. With the largest following of any nonprofit on Facebook, it becomes a leader in which many other organizations look to for best practices.

UNICEF utilizes several rhetorical strategies on Facebook to maintain its legitimacy with stakeholders. By looking at how those strategies are interpreted and responded to by stakeholders, UNICEF can increase the effectiveness in its online communications. The relatively unique capacity for stakeholders to interact with those in charge of sending out organizational messages of legitimacy emphasizes the dynamic nature of legitimacy. There have been many suggestions on how public relations professionals should run their social media accounts. But this study wanted to find out if UNICEF experienced the desired effect? Does Facebook cause organizations to be more vulnerable to questions of legitimacy?

This thesis sought new understanding into how nonprofit organizations and their stakeholders are engaging online. As the United States becomes more diverse, nonprofits need to be more intentional in their attempts to create and maintain legitimacy online. By studying the current dialogic efforts of a nonprofit with a diverse base of stakeholders, we can learn more about how organizations can effectively engage stakeholders online. First chapter two will examine relevant literature surrounding public relations, nonprofits, social media and how they relate. Chapter three will outline the methods used to conduct this study and chapter four will include an analysis of the data collected. Chapter five will discuss some important conclusions, limitations and avenues for future research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Legitimacy is important for institutions like nonprofits that rely on the support and/or approval of key publics to exist (Boyd, 2000). This thesis looks at social media as a platform for organizations to establish organizational legitimacy through rhetorical means.

Legitimacy

Under the umbrella of institutional legitimacy there are three types: pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and cognitive legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Pragmatic legitimacy for the organization "rests on the self-interested calculations of an organization's most immediate audience…often, involving direct exchanges between organization and audience" (Suchman, 1995, p. 577). Organizations "operating in highly uncertain environments are more likely to scan their environments for turbulence or change that may affect the homeostasis of the organization" (Lauzen, 1995, p.199).

Moral legitimacy "reflects a positive normative evaluation of the organization and its activities" (Suchman, 1995, p. 579). This means that an organization is perceived to be legitimate based on the moral judgments made by stakeholders (Willke & Willke, 2008). These judgments are subjective and are susceptible to change over time. Environmental scanning allows organizations to be aware of such changes and adapt accordingly.

Cognitive legitimacy is met through mental processing, rather than on interest or evaluation (Suchman, 1995). Generally this means that organizations are "accepted on grounds of broadly shared assumptions as necessary parts of the world" (Willke &

Willke, 2008, p.28). To encourage this perception an organization must demonstrate to stakeholders it fulfills a societal need.

Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definition" (p. 574). Therefore, if organizations are going to exist and function in society they must establish organizational legitimacy. The problem with legitimacy is that sometimes current social norms or trends conflict with current laws which can put an organization in a difficult situation (Metzler, 2001).

The need for legitimacy is created because the organization must defend its intake of resources that could be allocated elsewhere (Dowling & Pfeeffer, 1975). When multiple organizations compete in the same business, building legitimacy with stakeholders is even more important because multiple organizations are chasing those scant resources. Organizations are responsible for demonstrating this legitimacy through their messages, but it is those outside of the organization that ultimately accept or reject these messages (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

There are two types of legitimacy: institutional legitimacy and actional legitimacy. Institutional legitimacy theory postulates that for an organization to exist it must be perceived by the public as acting in accordance with public values (Boyd, 2000). On the other hand, actional legitimacy refers to the justification of specific actions by the organization to publics and stakeholders (Boyd, 2000). The need to justify specific actions, makes attempts at building actional legitimacy more common, because organizations are frequently more engaged in legitimizing decisions than they are in

defending the entire existence of the organization. However, many times specific actions are touted by organizations as proof of their institutional legitimacy.

An organization's legitimacy is not static, but rather is a social process (Mazza, 1999) that involves communicating messages in a public space (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). This aspect of legitimacy underscores the need to analyze messages of legitimacy on social media like Facebook, which have become important spaces for public discussion.

The challenge of legitimacy comes from the realization that no organization can fill all the needs and wants of all potential publics and stakeholders (Suchman, 1995). The difficulty of this challenge increases for international nonprofit organizations, that not only have to build legitimacy with those that donate money and spread awareness, but also with those who receive the organizations' support.

Nonprofit Legitimacy

The majority of research into legitimacy has focused on the corporate (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Epstein, 1972; Epstein & Votaw, 1978; Brummer, 1991; Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Ulrich, 1995; Boyd, 2000) and government sectors (Stillman, 1974; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Francesconi, 1982; Turkel, 1982; Habermas, 1989). There has been a significant lack of research into legitimacy in the nonprofit sector.

There are over two million nonprofit organizations in the United States alone, and many of them share similar organizational goals (Roeger, Blackwood, Pettijohn, 2012). This, in combination with a global recession that has increased the demand for nonprofit services and a drop in government assistance, has fostered a highly competitive sector (Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2013; Slyke & Brooks, 2004). To attract donors, nonprofits

need to prove to stakeholders they are more effective than other organizations with similar goals (Arrillaga-Andressen, 2013), which at its heart is a question of legitimacy.

The decrease in government funding has forced nonprofit organizations to find new sources of income, or else those organizations face the risk of shutting down. When a nonprofit organization shuts down it not only impacts its employees but, more importantly, it potentially stops aid to some of the most vulnerable groups of people in a country.

One way nonprofits have supplemented this loss of revenue has been through establishing partnerships with those in the private sector who are eager to engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Lichtenstein, Drumwright & Braig, 2004). This can be financially beneficial for nonprofits and help their visibility but it also carries potential risks. For example, research has shown that "consumers are more likely to donate to a corporate-supported nonprofit when the corporation has a weaker historical record of socially responsible behavior" (Lichtenstein, et al., 2004, p. 16). A nonprofit strapped for cash might see this as a golden opportunity, but it also ties the nonprofit's legitimacy and reputation to the private company. A corporation with a bad history is more likely to engage in future actions that can hurt relations with stakeholders. When a nonprofit is no longer perceived to be legitimate, donors stop funding it, and stakeholders can actively seek to dismantle the organization. If the public holds a negative perception of the partnership, both organizations can find themselves facing a crisis of legitimacy.

Nonprofits also face challenges due to the effects of working in diverse, chaotic environments. When working in multiple countries, organizations must be able to negotiate diverse cultural norms, values, and beliefs, let alone different laws. These

norms, values, and beliefs may not be stable, and can quickly create chaotic situations and environments. For example, organizations working in war zones are often embedded in an upheaval of ideology, which makes the norms, values, and beliefs held by stakeholders more likely to fluctuate. The opinions of those outside the warzones also fluctuate depending on media coverage and how their country understands the conflict. In these situations nonprofits need to be mindful with discussing how these conflicts are created. The mere act of bringing aid to refugees is a political act that can impact stakeholder perceptions of the organization's legitimacy.

This is why nonprofits need to make sure that their messages and arguments are easily understood by their stakeholders. For example, one of the problems UNICEF ran into when trying to eliminate Polio in Africa resulted from a significant misconception of the campaign. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo 50% of the population is unvaccinated to Polio, not because of a lack of access to the vaccinations, but rather because of parental refusal. UNICEF shared a story on Facebook in which Papa Mandella, an influential pastor who had once been a critic of the campaign stated, "At the time we saw polio occur in the hospital, we also saw the polio vaccine coming here for free. How can we explain this?" (Petit & Pittenger, 2013). By being exposed to new information Mandella was able to make sense of the epidemic. This in turn caused him to change his mind and become be an ardent supporter of UNICEF and the campaign. The challenge, of course, is reaching publics and stakeholders who have limited or no access to Facebook, as well as crafting messages that are easily understood by the majority of UNICEF's stakeholders. As studying the responses of publics and

stakeholders can give some indication to how messages are working but nonprofits need to continually monitor these responses and adapt accordingly.

As a whole the nonprofit sector has been suffering from a crisis of legitimacy (Salamon, 1999). When news outlets report on nonprofits, like the Kids Wish Network, which was labeled the "nation's worst charity," the legitimacy of the entire sector is called into question (Cohen, 2013). On social media, misinformation can spread easily, hurting the institutional legitimacy of nonprofits. The previously mentioned infographic on Facebook claims that the CEO of UNICEF earns $1,200,000 per year, has all his/her expenses paid, and has a company Rolls Royce (Snopes, 2013). It takes a mere five minutes to check these statistics online and find that they are false. However, the infographic continues to be shared online, creating legitimacy concerns for UNICEF.

Building legitimacy can be difficult in the nonprofit sector. With a plethora of new organizations springing up in the past decade, organizations must prove that existing organizations are not doing enough to deal with a particular societal ill. They need to demonstrate to the public that they are making the most out of their donors' dollars but, at the same time, recruit competent talent for administrative purposes. One of the stereotypes of the nonprofit sector is that it is low paying. This potentially can cause many talented employees to enter into the private sector without even considering a career with a nonprofit. The lack of a competent staff can hurt the effectiveness of the organization and/or its ability to create effective messages of legitimacy. A lack of competency can cause an organization's credibility to be tarnished, which directly impacts perceptions of legitimacy as well.

Credibility is built by nonprofits online by sharing pictures, videos, and feature stories that demonstrate the organization is accomplishing its goals and using its resources effectively. These are key concern when building and maintaining legitimacy. Social media has created a space for nonprofits to directly share these stories with stakeholders, bypassing traditional gatekeepers in mass mediums, which limited the exposure to such messages.

Legitimacy is a social process (Mazza, 1999) and therefore legitimacy is constructed in the public sphere (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). Due to the rise of social media use and its significant place in our public discourse social media is an ideal place for this process to occur. On Facebook, legitimacy can be examined by analyzing the way in which stakeholders respond to organizational messages. By clicking the "like" button, for example, is a good indicator of stakeholder support of the action. Also, by sharing organizational messages with their friends, stakeholders can increase the organization's visibility. Posts responding to organizational messages can give nonprofits a detailed understanding of how their messages are being perceived. Monitoring the comments of one's followers allows the organization to be aware of changing beliefs, values, and norms held by stakeholders and allows it to adapt accordingly.

Social media also provides immediate feedback concerning the legitimacy of organizational actions and decisions. One of the best examples involves the Susan G. Komen foundation and its decision to cancel future grants to Planned Parenthood, ostensibly due to a congressional investigation into Planned Parenthood (though many stakeholders thought it was the political views of its anti-abortion board members which

really caused the cancellation). When this story was leaked to the public, Twitter feeds were overrun with individuals expressing anger towards the foundation. This led to the foundation reversing its decision after only three days. Three days of social media outcry created legitimacy concerns that the foundation is still feeling today with multiple senior executives leaving, lower attendance at foundation functions, and worries about how to recoup lost funding (Sun & Kliff, 2012).

Perhaps Komen's biggest challenge during the crisis was its inability to understand how stakeholders assigned meaning to its messages. Much of the research into the crisis has focused mainly on the messages pushed by the foundation (Bruell, 2012; Watt, 2012). But clearly its stakeholders did not accept Komen's rationale for the decision. Komen underestimated the impact the national conversation surrounding women's rights would have on the public's understanding of its actions. Intentional or not, it stepped directly into the debate surrounding a woman's right to choose. Its status as a women's health organization, its previous ties to Planned Parenthood, and the national perception of Planned Parenthood as a place to receive abortions should have been thoughtfully considered as key influences on the interpretation of its decision before it was made public. Clearly there is a need to understand how people respond to organizational messages, particularly through social media. If nonprofits can have their legitimacy damaged online as fast as the Susan G. Komen Foundation experienced, then it warrants study into how legitimacy can be built and maintained online. Social media requires nonprofits to embody modern public relations approaches to legitimacy building that involve dialogic communication with stakeholders.

Rhetorical Approaches to Public Relations

Defining public relations has been something that scholars and practitioners have debated due to conflicting perceptions of public relations role, as well as the role of the practitioner, in organizations. The divide comes down to whether one believes public relations should take a managerial or technical role within the organization (Vieira & Grantham, 2014). Those roles require different actions, which in turn create unique definitions of public relations.

Heath and Coombs (2006) define public relations by blending the two roles. For them public relations is:

> The management function that entails planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making to help any organization's ability to listen to, appreciate, and respond appropriately to those persons and groups whose mutually beneficial relationships the organization needs to foster as it strives to achieve its mission and vision (p.7).

This definition is useful because of its recognition that without establishing mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders an organization cannot exist. It also defines public relations as a managerial function while including the technical components as well. This makes it fitting for studying nonprofits, which rely heavily on private donations and perceptions of legitimacy.

A rhetorical perspective of public relations is a very useful theoretical approach for analyzing public relations messages for this study because it is through rhetoric that "individuals and organizations negotiate their relationships" (Heath, 1992, p. 22). The

rhetorical approach recognizes that when facts are presented to publics, they do not contain inherent meaning. Instead practitioners are tasked with assigning meaning to those messages for stakeholders and publics (Heath, 2008). It also acknowledges that meaning is co-created, which helps us understand how social media messages can play a role in constructing legitimacy.

Colloquially rhetoric tends to have a negative connotation, but it brings an ethical component to public relations. Kenneth Burke's (1969) famous declaration that society is a marketplace of competing ideas highlights the importance of rhetoric's role. In other words, society functions best when the actions of the people are coordinated based on shared, co-created meaning (Heath, 2008). Today when an organization posts online, users are able to comment and share that information with (potentially) thousands of people. These comments may critique the message and the responses by the organization can help negotiate meaning, thus co-creating the meaning of the messages. A rhetorical analysis of this process provides a detailed examination that looks not only at how users are responding to messages but also sheds insight into why they are responding to those messages. For example, a rhetorical study of the controversy with the Susan G. Komen Foundation allows the organization to understand why its response to the crisis failed. The organization tried to ascribe its own meaning to its actions that were not shared by stakeholders. While the foundation claimed that its move to stop funding Planned Parenthood was not political, stakeholders rejected that meaning. Both those who were critical of the decision and those supported it did so from the understanding that it was a political decision. While they differed on whether or not it was a good thing, stakeholders were united in assigning meaning that conflicted with the legitimacy

attempts by the foundation. This demonstrates the need for analysis that involve a rhetorical dialogue between stakeholders and publics.

Before the rise of social media, the focus on stakeholders' rhetorical responses to organizations primarily focused on groups like unions and environmental groups (Heath, 1992). This is mainly due to the lack of individual agency. To get the attention of traditional media outlets in the public sphere individuals had to organize into larger groups with more resources and voice. However, the meaning generated through social media messages has become important to study because social media has allowed individuals to interact with organizations directly, as well as develop interest groups with incredible ease that previously was not logistically possible. A rhetorical approach to public relations looks at social media favorably because of its belief that decisions are better if people who are interested in them can communicate openly and assertively about them (Heath 2000, p.86). For example, on Facebook users can respond to organizational messages by posting comments and nonprofits can engage those responses.

Rhetorical study argues that "how we perceive, what we know, what we experience, and how we act are the results of our own symbol use and that of those around us" (Foss, 1996, p. 3). Action by stakeholders is influenced by the symbols used by organizations. In social media the symbols used not only include words, but images, and other types of posted content, to which stakeholders respond with their own symbols. This usually merges into a shared understanding by both parties, as long as the organization takes the time to try and understand its stakeholders, which good public relations practice would suggest it would. Negotiating symbols on social media is part of an organization's role in public discourse as it provides legitimacy and allows for

beneficial relationships for both organizations and stakeholders.

Social Media and Public Relations

The biggest change to the practice of public relations has been the invention of the Internet and the rise of Internet 2.0. Before the Internet practitioners were "forced to rely on their relationships with media gate-keepers and the information subsidy to get word out about organizational activities to stakeholders and publics" (Kent, 2013, p. 337). This can be beneficial for organizations that may not have piqued the media's interest enough for coverage and it allows them to directly connect with stakeholders. In addition, individuals and small organizations previously not able to mass communicate are given a voice. While this is seems beneficial, it also increases the chance of an organization's legitimacy being challenged publicly (Springston, 2001).

Social media has reinforced the importance of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way, symmetrical model of public relations (Grunig, 2001). The model uses "research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both their organizations and publics" (Grunig, 2001, p. 12). Some scholars have been critical of this model stating that it is too idealistic and underscores the self-interest that drives public relations efforts of organizations (Pieczka, 1995). Kent and Taylor (1998) state that while the model is important and effective, Grunig makes a mistake with equating dialogue as part of the process and that dialogue is actually the product of a two-way symmetrical model of public relations. It is not part of the process because an organization cannot create dialogue by itself (Kent & Taylor, 1998). It is the result of creating a space for dialogue to occur.

To create a space for dialogue, practitioners need to employ systems that are structured and involve processes that are guided by specific rules for communicating (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Social media provides practitioners and stakeholders a structured venue in which organizations can establish general rules for engagement. For example, Facebook's low cost, high popularity and user-friendly interface make it an ideal location for nonprofits to practice a two-way, symmetrical model of public relations that ultimately builds and enhances the perceptions of an organization's legitimacy.

Social Media and Nonprofit Organizations

Facebook, along with other social media, provides organizations a unique environment in which to directly listen and respond to their publics and stakeholders. A better understanding of stakeholders' messages not only helps an organization respond to such messages more effectively, it can help an organization accomplish its goals. It also allows nonprofits to use agenda setting by determining which issues are to be featured in its posts.

Before the advent of the Internet, nonprofit organizations had undeveloped public relations when compared to the private sector (Dyer, Buell, Harrison, & Weber, 2002.) However, this was due to budgetary constraints, not an inability to appreciate the importance of public relations. The low cost of social media is one of the main reasons for its high adoption rate by nonprofits; in fact 43% of nonprofits that use social media do not include social media development in their budgets (Nonprofit Social Networking Benchmark Report, 2012). This means that 42% of nonprofits on Facebook are able to do so without having to hire extra staff. Facebook, in particular, has been extremely

popular with 98% of all nonprofits in the U.S. having established at least one Facebook account and average over 8,000 followers (Nonprofit Social Networking Benchmark Report, 2012). However there is some argument as to the effectiveness of its use by the nonprofit community (Sommerfeldt, Kent & Taylor, 2012).

Previous research into online communication can provide insight into the problems experienced by nonprofit organizations online. In her paper Jan Fernback (2007) found that participants in online groups possess incongruous understandings of the character of online social relationships. In other words, people have different concepts of what constitutes appropriate communication online which creates diverse understandings of online relationships. The potential for conflict or misunderstanding is relatively high on Facebook due to stakeholders each understanding their own relational role differently. This can be seen in the perception of the appropriate use of grammar online. The term Grammar Nazi has been used to describe people who correct the grammar of others online. By using this term users are voicing an opposition to the expectations others have regarding online communication. Culture also plays a factor in stakeholders' understanding of what constitutes appropriate communication online. Fernback found that "opinions about the nature of communal interaction online are rooted in meanings they construct about the value of community and from their interactions with others in their online and offline social spheres" (p. 57). The way nonprofits are discussed offline has ramifications for its Facebook community, which can be hard to address in cultures with low levels of access to the internet. However, those who have access to the Internet and engage with nonprofits through social media can influence those without access.

St. Amant (2012) states that context is incredibly important to online communication as well. Aspects of context can lead to misinterpretations of online messages sent by nonprofits or their followers, as well as misunderstandings by followers of how to communicate, the purpose of the communication, as well as what a culture deems as appropriate communication. When looking at context St. Amant focuses on three aspects present in online communication: context and communication, context and culture, and context and identity. Context and communication postulates that when individuals understand purpose within a specific context it influences what is considered credible communication (St. Amant, 2012). Context and culture is also important because culture not only provides different expectations of context and how to communicate credibly, but those norms and expectations evolve when culture is affected by local and global events (St. Amant, 2012). Finally, context and identity is important to consider in online communication because identity plays a role in how individuals know what context they are in at any given time (St. Amant, 2012). A rhetorical understanding of public relations acknowledges this flux of context and its influence on meaning.

Kent and Taylor (1998) stated that the Internet also provided an ideal location for public relations practitioners to utilize the two-way, symmetrical model in a manner that would foster dialogue with stakeholders. Taylor, Kent, and White set out in 2001 to conduct a case study to see if this theory was being put to practice and determine which practices were the most effective in creating dialogue. After analyzing fifty profiles of several environmental advocacy groups, three strategies emerged that were the most likely to increase dialogic communication: conservation of members, generation of return

visits, and organization engagement. However, these organizations were not representative of nonprofit organizations at large, Water, Burnett, Lamn and Lucas (2008) showed the majority of nonprofits engage in traditional tactics that do not create dialogue with stakeholders. There is some evidence that this is changing and that nonprofits are trying to find new ways in which to engage stakeholders. There is also evidence that social media can benefit indirectly through the work of individuals outside of the organization.

For example, because social media allows individual stakeholders to mass communicate, several people have created independent national fundraising campaigns that they then donate to several nonprofits. For example, a woman named Amanda Justus created a nonprofit called 31 Heroes and ran a national fundraising event at multiple locations using only Facebook, WordPress, and online message boards (Feerick, 2012). She was highly successful in creating a grassroots campaign that helped fund several nonprofit organizations that worked to serve American veterans. Such individuals are referred to as "free agents."

Free agents can be beneficial for organizations in reaching new donors, who possibly might not have responded so positively if solicited directly by the organization. For example, free agents raised more than $250,000 on Twitter for the nonprofit organization Charity Water (Carpenter, 2011). Free agents, like donors, are more likely to donate their raised funds to organizations perceived as legitimate. However, it has not been determined if free agents are adding funding to organizations, or just redirecting the flow of donations.

Another benefit is that social media allows nonprofits to anticipate potential risks to their legitimacy through environmental scanning. In 2008, 75% of nonprofits reported using social media to monitor their names, causes and other 'pertinent' information (Barnes & Mattson, 2008). Environmental scanning on Facebook does more than assess potential future crises; it also helps nonprofits find solutions to current problems. The Humane Society, for example, used environmental scanning to explain why its online auction fundraising campaign was getting no bids on Facebook (West, 2011). After looking at the demographics of its Facebook followers, the organization realized that the majority of them were 18-30 year olds who were not likely to able to pay for the high priced items which required a $10,000 starting bid (West, 2011).

Social media also allows nonprofits to control the images which accompany its organizational messages. Images carry powerful emotional appeals that are vital to fostering prosocial behavior in stakeholders (Cialdini & Fultz 1990; Wang 2008; Kemp, Kennett-Hensel, & Kees, 2013). Images are also used to enhance brand image, bring attention to specific issues, bring in new supporters, as well as address the organization's legitimacy. For example, when a Facebook follower clicks the "like" button on a post with an image, that action appears in the feed of the friends of that follower exposing them to the image. A powerful image can help a message stand out online, and can increase the likelihood a user will stop to read the organizational message. The sharing of images posted by nonprofits has led to many finding new supporters and increasing their visibility online (West, 2011).

Some organizations have even created Facebook games to engage stakeholders. Farm Rescue, a game that plays off of the popularity of Farmville is a game in which the

user is in charge of a virtual farm. It is used as a way to spread awareness of animal cruelty. In the game you are in charge of rescuing animals from battered cages and have to teach animals how to get back in touch with their natural instinct. The game also has an "actions" page where users can donate money, sign petitions, and get more involved in the animal rights movement (Sniderman, 2011).

It is clear that nonprofits can, and should, utilize social media to create and maintain legitimacy with stakeholders. The low cost and significant reach of social media makes it an indispensable public relations tool. The ability to control message content while engaging stakeholders in dialogue allows organizations to take an active role in the construction of their legitimacy. For the many reasons outlined here, it is important that nonprofits maintain their legitimacy with stakeholders. Therefore, it is vital that current studies examine the rhetorical strategies nonprofits use on social media to create and maintain legitimacy and analyze the meaning created by those strategies. The following chapter offers a case study and methodology that allowed this thesis to accomplish these goals.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The nature of social media means that users not only interact with the organization online, but also with each other, which may impact how meaning is assigned to organizational messages. The heavy reliance on stakeholders by nonprofits makes insight into how they interpret and understand organizational messages extremely valuable. The purpose of this study was to examine how the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) attempts to create and maintain organizational legitimacy with stakeholders on Facebook.

A Case Study Approach

In the United States many nonprofits have found themselves receiving less support from the government and those that are not able to find new donor sources end up closing down. When long standing organizations like Jane Addam's Hull House, which was established in the late 18th century, close down, other nonprofits want to understand why it happened and learn how to avoid a similar fate. In essence, case studies can help organizations learn from others' mistakes as and their successes.

Yin (1984) states that the case study is the best research method to utilize when "the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p.13). In the past decade the Internet has produced new opportunities for organizations and publics to interact, which has had a significant impact on how public relations is accomplished. Case studies help scholars learn about how organizations are using these technologies, and whether or not that use is

having a positive or negative impact on the organization.   This is helpful for organizations like nonprofits who have limited budgets and may not have staff trained in new technology.

Case studies have helped organizations improve their relationships with employees, communities, investors, consumers, and media outlets, developed new methods for crisis management, and established new ethical standards for the field (Center & Jackson, 1995).   They also serve as tools for teaching, providing real life applications of scholarly theory.

Choosing a nonprofit to study is important because "the images and discourses produced by advocacy NGOs have significant impacts on the communities who are the targets of their aid; images of people and their needs attract and repel funding and make political interventions more or less likely" (Dempsey, 2009, p. 328).   Not only would this study benefit nonprofit organizations looking to be more intentional with their social media use, but it also highlights the impact nonprofits have on communities, not just through their actions, but also their rhetoric.

Social media also presents a space for nonprofits to disclose information and improve perceptions of transparency.   While the amount of transparency an organization should take on is arguable, the nature of nonprofit organizations arguably creates a higher expectation of transparency.   In the past decade there has been a rising global demand for nonprofits to increase their transparency (Valentinov, 2011).   This can be partially attributed to the numerous public scandals in the sector by news media in the late nineties (Gibelman & Gelman, 2001).   These scandals mainly involved embezzling funds, which

resulted from a lack of transparency and accountability by the organizations involved. In the United States nonprofit organizations do not pay federal taxes. However, in 2008 the Internal Revenue Service implemented the 990 form, which requires nonprofits to turn in annual financial reports in the first major attempt in thirty years to increase the accountability of nonprofit organizations (Kosterlitz, 2008).

This study specifically examined the role public relations messages on Facebook play in co-constructing organizational legitimacy between UNICEF and its stakeholders. While the private sector has enjoyed a plethora of public relations case studies, there exists need for more research into the nonprofit sector. Many public relations theories and strategies have been developed for the private sector, and have yet to be tested for their effectiveness for nonprofits. This is an important concern because a lack of effective public relations can cause nonprofits to receive less funding, which in turn can affect the lives of potentially thousands who depend on their services.

This study set out to address the following research questions:

R1) What rhetorical strategies does UNICEF use in its attempts to create legitimacy?

R2) What meaning are stakeholders assigning to the messages?

R3) What rhetorical strategies do followers use to communicate or influence these meanings?

The Case: UNICEF

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund was originally founded to aid those left in the aftermath of WWII. It eventually was made a permanent fixture of the United Nations and expanded its mission to the world as a whole, holding offices in over 190 countries. The main focus of the organization concerns societal ills afflicting women and children including the lack of access to food, education, healthcare, as well as security from violence.

UNICEF was originally created in 1946 to provide food, clothing, and healthcare to women and children in Europe (UNICEF.org). The decision was based on the belief that women and children would be in greatest need because so many men were absent from their homes due to WWII (Morris, 2010). While women and children may have been the most at risk group after the war, the choice to focus on those groups had some negative effects. UNICEF, in essence, was striving to replace the role of family provider, and by excluding men from assistance "made it clear that because a man's citizenship status virtually guaranteed his access to government assistance, mothers and children were more vulnerable" (Morris, 2010, p.632).

After WWII the United Nations decided to make UNICEF a permanent institution. UNICEF has regional offices in one hundred and ninety countries, while maintaining its headquarters in New York. When it comes to finances, UNICEF is very intentional in keeping overhead and fundraising expenses low. "Watchdog groups say no more than 35 percent of donations should go to fundraising costs" (Tampa Bay Times, 2013). UNICEFs' expenditure budget is 3,866 million (U.S. Dollars) with only 449

million (12%) going to management and fundraising (UNICEF, 2012). 57% of

UNICEF's funding comes from international government support, 32% comes from the

private sector and/or non-governmental organizations, 9% from inter-organizational

support, and 2% from other sources (UNICEF, 2012).

Since WWII UNICEF has shifted away from its original policies, which

reinforced gender roles that unintentionally marginalized women. UNICEF's campaign

to treat and prevent syphilis in Europe is a great example of what that change looked like.

In her study on the campaign, Jennifer Morris points out that while UNICEF strived to

remain apolitical, campaigns like the one regarding syphilis inherently can become

political because of cultural norms surrounding such health issues (Morris, 2010). In its

campaign UNICEF had to fight against the European perception that children and

mothers who had the disease were "unworthy of treatment" (Morris, 2010, p. 636).

Before the campaign, government initiatives to combat Syphilis in Europe focused on

prevention in males, while focusing on women as carriers of the disease despite research

that showed men could carry the disease as well (Morris, 2010). Predominantly male

governments created health programs geared at curbing the spread of the disease, but did

so through public shaming of those with the disease, which caused many women to avoid

seeking treatment. By positioning men as victims of a disease spread by women, men

were more likely to be treated (Morris, 2010). This partial solution was ineffective in

fighting the disease.

UNCIEF drafted a new program geared at increasing the number of those seeking

treatment by changing the public's perception of gender and its association with syphilis.

UNICEF sought this change through, "calling into question legislation that imposed

curfews, banned women from certain public places, and refused women service except during approved hours" (Morris, 2010, p. 638). Unless countries agreed to the norms set out by UNICEF they could not receive treatment. One of the major requirements, that became a source of contention for UNICEF, was that to receive aid countries were to only treat women and children (Morris, 2010). Because of this issue, along with the rise of other diseases, UNICEF's efforts to curb syphilis were largely ineffective. While it did succeed in getting many countries to change the perception of women as the primary source of the disease's spread, it reinforced the original westernized roles of women that set the policy for UNICEF. This was achieved through positioning women and children as victims of the disease, not the perpetrators, and helped UNICEF receive more funding for its efforts by western governments (Morris, 2010). Unfortunately, as UNICEF discovered, positioning women and children in that manner was not beneficial for the women and children themselves (Morris, 2010). After this, children tended to be the focus of UNICEF, until the 1960's when the UN started discussing global violence and discrimination towards women.

During that time UNICEF expanded its efforts to tackle health and societal issues not related to WWII, working heavily in developing countries (Morris, 2010). The organization went through even greater change that benefited women during the 1970's second-wave of feminism. These changes helped future campaigns become more successful by working with mothers in developing countries. To become more effective UNCIEF has changed its policies and campaigns over the years. However, it can be argued that it still is highly reflective of western notions, which can create resistance to its campaigns. This example also demonstrates how UNICEF's policies became more

effective as they included more of the people who are the target of its aid in the process.

Today the majority of its governmental support comes from the United Kingdom, the

U.S., Norway, the European Commission, Japan, Canada, Sweeden and the Netherlands,

while the regions that UNICEF spends the most money in are Sub-Sarahan Africa and

Asia.

In 1965 it was awarded the Nobel Peace prize, for promoting peaceful

relationships between nations. UNICEF uses celebrities as "ambassadors" that serve to

focus on specific issues, as well as represent the organization to the public. As time went

on the organization broadened its organizational goals to include a focus on child

education.

UNICEF also engages in research that produces statistics on important issues

relating to children, and helps bring them to the attention of the United Nations. These

reports have also caused governments to change their policies. Most recently UNICEF

released a report detailing the widespread, systematic, and institutionalized abuse of

Palestinian children prisoners by Israel (UNICEF, 2013). Israel responded by

cooperating with UNICEF to improve the treatment of its child prisoners.

UNICEF also engages in corporate partnerships and inter-organization

collaboration to help find new solutions to old problems. Recently it partnered with

Johnson & Johnson, McKinsey & Company, the Clinton Health Access Initiative, the

Zambia Prevention, Care and Treatment Partnership, and the Zambia Centre for Applied

Health Research and Development for UNICEF's project Mwana (UNICEF, 2013). This

project was based on research that the early detection of HIV transmitted from mother to

child substantially reduces HIV-related morbidity and mortality (UNICEF, 2013). With

only three laboratories in Zambia able to perform the tests, there was a substantial wait

time for results. To dramatically cut the wait time, the organization is taking advantage

of the incredible growth of mobile phone use in Zambia and using short message service

(SMS) to deliver test results.

One way that UNICEF makes its presence known to Americans at an early age

has been through its well-known Trick or Treat fundraiser for UNICEF. Founded in

1950, the fundraiser involves elementary school children raising money near Halloween

for UNICEF. Kids go out with orange boxes asking for donations to help other children

around the world. For many this is their first introduction to the organization, and can

lead to a positive impression of the organization at an early age.

While UNICEF is an international group, there is still an expectation of

transparency. As stated earlier, its role of providing global aid can be tricky when

navigating multiple cultural norms and laws. Social media not only allows organizations

to appear more transparent by posting organizational news, but it also provides a space

for stakeholders to respond to the organization's messages. Differing ideas regarding

gender roles, the roles of children, as well as what is considered ethical, can be voiced

online. Normally legitimacy concerns for a nonprofit revolve around differences in

organizational behavior with their nation's laws and/or customs. UNICEF has to account

for over one hundred unique countries, making legitimacy messages valuable to examine.

Thematic Analysis

Even though UNICEF has hundreds of Facebook accounts, this study focuses on its central account for several reasons. The first is that the central account posts are more likely to be posted in English, with the majority of user's comments in English as well; which helped in the coding process. The second benefit of using the central account is that its followers are arguably more diverse than an account that focuses on a particular region or country. Finally, UNICEF's central account has close to three million followers, making it its largest account.

All posts from September 2013 by UNICEF on its central Facebook account were collected, along with the comments made by users. The number of people leaving comments on posts ranged from approximately 20 to 80 comments per post. September was chosen as it demonstrated consistency in terms of posting, which indicated that it was following a specific strategic plan. The collection finished on January 8, 2014 and any comments made after that were not considered. To analyze the data a thematic analysis was applied.

A thematic analysis was the best method for analyzing the data set for this study because it helped make sense of the messages on UNICEF's Facebook account. One of the challenges of qualitative research "lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (Patton, 2002, p. 432). A thematic analysis allowed for the categorization of a multitude of meanings and helped create understanding of the meaning being constructed. While every relationship between an individual and organization is different to an extent, there are common expectations of engagement by stakeholders. There are also common

expectations of organizations on Facebook, which can help or hinder organizations efforts for legitimacy. The amount of data collected over the month was massive, and a thematic analysis reduced the data by indexing it. It also allowed the researcher to identify, label, and interpret the messages. To determine what constituted a theme, messages needed to demonstrate three criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). Recurrence was established when at least two segments of data held the same thread of meaning. Repetition was met when key phrases, words and ideas were repeatedly found, and forcefulness required that the text included features that stressed certain ideas (Owen, 1984). For this study forcefulness also included the use of capitalized words, extra exclamation points, as well as large amounts of text in a single comment. They were included because they are commonly used techniques to communicate intensity on social media. The lack of nonverbal communication online can be circumvented by font style, punctuation, as well as long blocks of text. For example, capitalizing all words in a message indicates a loud aggressive tone. When users add more than one exclamation point it adds to the forcefulness of the statement, just as large blocks of text convey passion. Owen (1984) states that themes "are less a set of cognitive schema than a limited range of interpretations that are used to conceptualize and constitute relationships" (p. 274).

Analysis

After data was collected, the users' comments, along with UNICEF's direct responses, were collected. UNICEF's posts were analyzed using open coding in which a code word (or phrase) was used to encapsulate the meaning of the message. Then the posts were coded in the same manner. These codes were then compiled into one

relatively large list. The codes were then clustered, revealing redundancy in an effort to reduce the number of codes to make the data more manageable. Finally, axial coding was conducted to help develop a short list of themes that could be applied to the majority of the messages from UNICEF. The data from UNICEF's posts was then analyzed for rhetorical strategies within the themes. After these themes were established the photos were analyzed to look at how they contributed to the rhetorical strategies. These themes were used as a guide to how users were responding to the strategies.

The comments left by stakeholders went through a similar process of analysis. Open coding allowed for comments to be coded by meanings that were recurrent, repetitious, and forceful. The list was then separated into two lists: themes found in responses to UNICEF's messages and themes found in comments geared at influencing the meaning of UNICEF's posts. These two lists were also analyzed as to their relation to the photos accompanying UNICEF's posts.

Chapter Four

Analysis

One of the problems for global organizations, like UNICEF, having one central Facebook page is that while its posts can be translated into several languages, followers' messages are limited by their coherency. Much of UNICEF's work involves getting basic education to impoverished countries or countries suffering from conflicts that have disrupted the education system. This, combined with the variety of languages spoken by users, can make conversations on Facebook difficult. Facebook has the ability to translate followers' comments, but many times it does not effectively translate, due either to the limited software or lack of proper grammar by commenters, who are found in countries suffering from the very educational disruptions UNICEF is attempting to eliminate. While these problems also affected this analysis they are a good reflection of the difficulty UNICEF faces when trying to unpack the meaning of Facebook comments.

Eight posts were published by UNICEF on its central account in September 2013. Each post averaged 4,880 likes, 83 comments, and 813 shares. The data was analyzed by conducting a thematic analysis that sought to answer three questions. First, what rhetorical strategies does UNICEF use on Facebook to build and maintain legitimacy? Second, what meaning are users assigning to these messages? Third, what rhetorical strategies do followers use to communicate or influence these meanings? This chapter is organized around these questions. First, it will examine UNICEF's rhetorical strategies.

Rhetorical Strategies used by UNICEF

The rhetorical strategies utilized by UNICEF reflect a need to legitimize its existence to its stakeholders. Institutional legitimacy is built and maintained using pragmatic, moral, and cognitive rhetorical appeals. At times a post would appeal to a mixture of these components. These strategies appeal to those living in communities in which UNICEF works as well as outside stakeholders.

The first rhetorical strategy used by UNICEF to build and maintain its pragmatic legitimacy is what can be called "the ripple effect." One of the primary ways in which nonprofits demonstrate their legitimacy is by showing donors where their money is going and how effectively the organization is using that money. UNICEF takes this a step further by highlighting the stories of those previously helped by UNICEF who are now helping others get access to UNICEF's support. On September 16, 2013 UNICEF posted:

> Our inspiration for the day: Rana, 13, is going door to door in Za'atari refugee
> camp to let other children know that it's time to go back to school. For many
> #childrenofsyria, this is a real challenge. Since last year, more than 2 million have
> dropped out of class. We're working to change these numbers. Learn more:
> http://uni.cf/Syria.

This post reflects the work UNICEF is doing in Syria, but like many of its posts the focus is not on UNICEF, but on individuals who are engaged in actions that support its mission. When clicking on the link for more information we find out that Rana has had her education, lost due to the war in Syria, returned to her thanks to UNICEF. However, she

was not content with just receiving the education provided by UNCIEF. She recognized its importance and wanted others to receive that benefit as well. The message to followers is that UNICEF works so well it gets others to work voluntarily for its initiatives. Education is a shared value between the organization and stakeholders and the post demonstrates some congruence of values. The campaign to get education to displaced Syrian refugees is legitimized through Rana who demonstrates just how much she values her education. It is doubtful that the refugees have access to the Internet as UNICEF is struggling to bring basic education into the refugee camps, so it is most likely a rhetorical tactic targeting outside stakeholders. This reinforces the statement by UNICEF on its official website:

> We promote girls' education – ensuring that they complete primary education as a minimum – because it benefits all children, both girls and boys. Girls who are educated grow up to become better thinkers, better citizens, and better parents to their own children.

By reporting on examples that demonstrate it is achieving its organizational goals UNICEF creates a perception that its efforts are legitimate.

> The ripple effect was also used in UNICEF's post on September 21, 2013:

> "So what are you going to report on?" "Food." "Why food?" "I sometimes help WFP distribute the daily rations in the camp. We've been eating bulgur wheat and lentils for the last six months and a lot of us are sick of it. I want to ask people what foods would make them happy." Malik, 18, who recently completed a journalism workshop with UNICEF Middle East and North Africa at

the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. Learn more about the situation

for#childrenofsyria - and how you can help: http://uni.cf/syria/"

Malik took a workshop from UNICEF and is now reporting on the conditions of the

Syrian refugee camps. This is another use of the ripple effect as Malik is not employed

by UNCIEF, but has been helped by the organization in the past. There is a Chinese

proverb that Ronald Reagan made popular in the United States which states, "you give

someone a fish, and they'll eat for a day. You teach someone how to fish and they'll eat

for a lifetime." Reagan used this proverb as validation for economic policy, striving to

emphasize the need for government programs that not only provide help, but also

training, so that eventually there would be less dependency on government assistance.

UNICEF takes a similar approach and argues, "We not only teach people how to fish, but

also how to teach others." This post builds and maintains UNICEF's pragmatic

legitimacy by creating the perception that a donor's dollar does more when given to

UNICEF. Since the nonprofit sector is highly competitive due to a rise in demand and

decrease in government assistance in the United States (Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2013;

Slyke & Brooks, 2004). This tactic serves to legitimize UNICEF by showing donors that

it is serving a crucial need in the world and doing it better than other organizations

(Arillaga-Andreesen, 2013).

It also builds moral legitimacy by highlighting the stories of local people in the

areas in which UNICEF works. Those featured are likeable, vulnerable, and demonstrate

that the local populace is supportive of the organization. An interesting aspect to the

story is that there is some criticism of the aid, but it is not directed at UNICEF. Malik's

criticism is light, he helps distribute the food but admits it is getting old eating the same

thing for months on end. The ability for a journalist to criticize the actions of an organization is something that resonates with stakeholders in countries with freedom of the press. The largest government donors to UNICEF in 2012 were the governments of Japan, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, and Denmark; all of which have free news media. Therefore, his criticism of the aid does not challenge UNICEF's legitimacy, but embodies morals shared by UNICEF's stakeholders in an attempt to bolster support.

A second rhetorical strategy utilized by UNICEF to create and maintain legitimacy is the power of progress. Stories of progress help maintain its legitimacy with current donors, as well as build legitimacy with potential donors and stakeholders. While UNICEF provides emergency aid for those afflicted by immediate conflicts such as war and famine, it also has long-term campaigns seeking lasting change. One of the most important issues being addressed by UNICEF is the child mortality rate due to preventable problems, such as malnutrition and lack of access to basic vaccinations. By posting progress reports, UNICEF highlights that the societal ills it fights are not only preventable, but are being solved with the support of stakeholders around the globe. This is important to convey to stakeholders as reports on societal ills by news organizations may lead to a tendency to ignore that many of these problems are preventable. UNICEF posted on September 13, 2014:

> The good news: Since 1990, the world has cut the number of child deaths by almost half, saving an estimated 90 million lives. The bad news: Last year, 6.6 million children under 5 died, mainly from preventable causes. That's around

18,000 every day. Find out more in our A Promise Renewed progress

report:http://uni.cf/APR2013 #Promise4Children.

This progress report serves two purposes. First it demonstrates the organization's

effectiveness and second, it highlights its continued need. Snch an approach

demonstrates UNICEF's utility and supports its continned existence, two key factors in

establishing legitimacy. The post uses statistics and a link to the report, a very business-

like approach that can be appealing to large donor groups snch as the Bill & Melinda

Gatcs Foundation, which is currently partnering with UNICEF to eliminate Polio. In fact,

Holley and Carr (2014) found that the incrcase of large donors in the past fifteen years,

has been accompanied by an expectation of measurable progress to the organizations to

which they donate. Arrillaga-Andreescn, author of the book Giving 2.0, states in a 2013

article in Bloomberg Busiuess Week that nonprofits need to "be prepared to address the

concerns of today's donors, who conduct the same type of due diligence on their

nonprofit investments as they do on their for-profit ones" (p.72). UNICEF meets such

demands by posting progress reports on its efforts, a challenge for an organization whose

mission is to find cures for currently incurable diseases. Legitimacy is establishcd in that

the goals established by the organization are obtainable, but are contingent upon the

amount of funding it receives. It is important to remind stakeholders that these problems

arc solvable because many times ncws organizations fail to mention that they can be

solved when reporting on such issues (Kensicki, 2004). To encourage continued support

UNICEF does not merely state that it is making progress; it also calls attention to work

that needs to bc done, maintaining its need for donor support and demonstrating continual

societal need for the organization.

A third rhetorical strategy used by UNICEF is positioning the organization as a team player working with other organizations to solve global issues. Instead of solely reporting its own efforts, or those aided by UNICEF, several stories featured other organizations prominently. On September 24, 2013 UNICEF posted:

> How can we use technology and innovations to help #ENDviolence? One idea is HARRASSmap, which encourages Egyptians to report sexual harassment - as a witness or a victim. Watch the co-founder in conversation with our Executive Director Anthony Lake, Ishmael Beah and others at the Social Good Summit at 15.25 EST today: http://mashable.com/sgs/ And join the conversation on Twitter at #2030NOW.

The competitive nature of the nonprofit sector makes this approach interesting. The story potentially could divert donor funds to other organizations mentioned in the story. However, this strategy is helpful in that it sends the message of what is really important to the organization: its mission. Legitimacy for the organization is maintained by communicating to stakeholders that UNICEF is working to find new solutions to old problems. If the organization relied on tactics established near the beginning of its founding, it could lose its legitimacy with the perception that the organization is out of touch. The millennial generation outnumbers the baby boomer generation, and the public relations strategies need to target that group, because they are the future donors necessary to support the organization. Baby boomers still contribute the most in terms of donations but that will likely change as time moves on. If millennials do not perceive an organization to be legitimate they will simply "start their own efforts – overnight, online, at almost no cost" (Fine, 2008). These types of posts reveal that UNICEF recognizes the

changing environment of its stakeholders and is making steps to adapt to that change and remain a valid enterprise.

In the HARRASmap post, the fact that UNICEF is at the Social Good Summit, along with other leading nonprofit organizations, lends it legitimacy by association. If the organization had large overhead and was inefficient, it is unlikely that other organizations would want to associate with it. The organizations that joined together for the Summit represent progressive tech companies as well as innovative foundations and organizations. It was hosted by Mashable.com, an online leader in new communications technology which targets millennial readers. The relevance of Mashable as a news source for emerging technology allows UNICEF to be perceived as a cutting edge organization.

A fourth rhetorical strategy is the Facebook posts' use of powerful imagery. There is a strategic difference in the pictures used for stories of others' actions and those in need of UNICEF's aid. The posts about empowered individuals actively supporting UNICEF portray individuals looking confident. For example, in the post about Malik discussed previously, he was positioned in his photo in front of a repaired building, arms crossed, a smile on his face and head cocked at a slight angle. In addition, Rana, the 13 year old Syrian refugee, is pictured in her hijab and baseball cap talking to other young girls in hijabs. Her body is positioned as someone of authority and, like Malik, looking confident. She stands with Mohamed, a teacher in Mali who goes into villages to make sure students make it to class and is pictured with a wide smile in front of a classroom. These images reinforce the legitimacy of the organization by showing those helped by UNICEF are happy, confident and full of life. These images also personalize the

messages; they literally give a face to the stories shared. This personalizes the situations

in which UNICEF works. Rana isn't just a name, she is given a face which in turn gives

a face to the issue at hand. The images give visual evidence that UNCIEF makes an

impact on their lives. This builds legitimacy by giving the reader visual confirmation of

the post, as well as playing off of perceptions of the third world as in need of the

developed world's support. In the picture featuring Rana, it is not indicated which girl in

the photo she is. The baseball cap and vest over her Hijab let stakeholders know that it is

Rana and allow stakeholders to identify with her and the cause.

The positive images stand in stark contrast to those utilized in stories that

primarily feature those needing aid. When reporting on the effects of violence on women

and children in the Central African Republic, UNICEF included a picture of a woman

named Karine and her children. Karine looks to be very young and is situated with a

baby in her arms and a toddler next to her on a cot in what looks to be a medical tent.

She looks directly at the camera with a blank expression, and even the kids show no

indications of a smile. The text accompanying the post reads,

> Violence in Central African Republic has placed children in double jeopardy –
> it's cut off food supplies, placing them at the risk of malnutrition, and it's made it
> dangerous to seek medical attention. Which is why mobile teams are going door
> to door to screen children for malnutrition. Learn how one team helped Karine
> and her children, pictured, get the care they needed: http://uni.cf/17Ldv91

The contrast between those pictured as empowered and those in need of UNICEF's aid

adds a visual component to its strategy of demonstrating progress while indicating future

need of stakeholder support. Previous research has also shown that emotional appeals

that foster pride or invoke sympathy promote prosocial behavior in stakeholders (Kemp

et al., 2013). These appeals also help build legitimacy.

A final rhetorical strategy used by UNICEF is providing stakeholders a clear call

to action. Every single post included some direction for additional action. Interestingly

UNICEF never phrases the call to action as a question, it is framed almost as a command.

For example, UNICEF posted, "Find out why yesterday's event on the rights of people

with disabilities was so historic." Other posts included phrases like, "learn how, read

this, join the conversation, watch this, find out more." UNICEF's followers on Facebook

are generally supportive of its goals. A supportive audience requires a rhetorical

approach that involves a call to action that allows the audience to move from passive

support to taking a specific action (Coopman & Lull, 2012). The strategy also positions

UNICEF as a legitimate authority that is handing out directives. A question posed might

hurt its legitimacy because it could be interpreted as lacking the power to make a

substantial directive. Also, UNICEF never includes a direct solicitation for donations. It

tells its Facebook followers to find out more about the issue and how they can help, but

remains vague on what that support entails. The only time there was an invitation to

donate money by UNICEF was in a direct response to users' comments about how they

could help regarding a specific cause. If organizations are constantly soliciting donations

through their posts on Facebook, stakeholders can start to equate an organizations' posts

with Facebook advertisements. This should be of concern for nonprofits on Facebook, as

even Facebook recognizes that its advertisements are not gaining enough attention by its

users and is constantly trying to find ways to increase their visibility. The large adoption

of Facebook by nonprofits (Curtis et al., 2010) requires organizations to compete for

attention, as well as donations. If every organization is directly asking for donations it

becomes a background of white noise ignored by those on Facebook. Instead UNICEF

provides new information on current events and topics which add depth to stories already

covered by the news media. The stories regarding Syria, for example, allow the

stakeholder to get a more detailed view of the problems faced by the refugees. This helps

establish UNICEF as an authority on the situations in which it operates. Demonstrating

this kind of in-depth knowledge is a tactic of legitimacy because it provides new content

that can only be retrieved through UNICEF's account. This knowledge is collected by

UNICEF so it can find out how best to help those in need of aid. This builds and

maintains its cognitive legitimacy by demonstrating its competence in understanding the

dire situations in which it works.

Even then the requests for donations by stakeholders are subtle, and positioned

secondly to finding out more information on the issue. For example, UNICEF responded

to a follower who was asking how she could get involved in helping the Syrian refugees

with:

Hi Yvonne, thanks for the question and concern. You can help us help Syrian

children by spreading the word about the conflict and the needs of children -

http://uni.cf/syria - and if you would like to make a donation to our Syrian appeal

you can also do so via this site. Thanks very much!

Right after UNICEF responded to that particular user, the next user commented asking

the very same question. Instead of pasting the same response, it crafted a new one that

directly targeted the user and tailored the message just enough to give the user similar information and a call to action, but without the appearance of an automated response. This personal touch is paramount for the use of social media, as its promise is in the engagement, not merely the ability to send out mass messages to stakeholders. If an organization refuses to engage followers on Facebook then the legitimacy of its online presence is questioned. Stakeholders have an expectation of a personal response on Facebook, even by large organizations such as UNICEF. The organization does not need to address every comment, and in fact that would be hard to do without a team of dedicated social media managers working twenty four hours a day. What is important is that they respond to those who comment first, which can encourage users to respond to the organizations' posts in a timely manner. Also, by engaging those who wish to help UNICEF's dedication to the cause is demonstrated. This maintains its pragmatic legitimacy by responding to stakeholders' personal desires to be a part of the change.

The strategies indicate a strategic communication plan that uses a multitude of appeals and arguments to build and maintain legitimacy. Stories feature logos appeals that demonstrate UNICEF's effectiveness and a continued need for support. The emotional appeals used in its messages allow the audience to celebrate UNICEF's victories as well as commiserate with those in the world that are need of UNICEF's support. Overall the strategies spread awareness of UNICEF's programs and actions, current global issues needing to be addressed, how stakeholder s can get involved, the progress being made and the positive effects of UNCIEF's efforts. These all help build and maintain UNICEF's legitimacy and support its continued existence.

Assigning meaning to UNICEF's messages

The importance of analyzing the rhetorical strategies used by UNICEF is contingent upon the meaning assigned to such messages by its Facebook followers. There is a particular meaning desired by the organization, but there is a need to see how stakeholders are unpacking that meaning. Social media changes traditional tactics used by nonprofits in pushing organizational messages in that the users have a chance to respond, and for their responses to be viewed by others, potentially influencing its interpretations of organizational messages.

The first major theme found in the followers responses was that UNICEF was engaged in "God's work." Even though UNICEF never evokes religious language, its posts have been interpreted in this way. This works to build and maintain the organizations' moral legitimacy with its Facebook followers. If the organization was involved in actions deemed contrary to one's religious morals, it could potentially lose legitimacy with its stakeholders because they are not likely to support organizations that they perceive to be engaged in actions in conflict with their personal beliefs. The role of God in the stories posted by UNICEF varied. Some praised God for UNICEF's actions, some claimed God was the one responsible for UNICEF's actions, some asked God to bless UNICEF, and others asked for God's forgiveness for allowing such situations to exist.

Interestingly enough, God is never blamed by stakeholders for creating the situations being addressed by UNICEF. For example, the post about violence in the CAR emphasizes the negative impact the violence has had on women and children. It does not

mention that the violence is between Muslim and Christian militias. To be fair the situation is complex, involving significant economic and political issues (Day & Agger, 2014), but religion has played a significant role in the violence (Aljazeera, 2014).

These comments suggest that followers grant UNICEF legitimacy because it engages in acts congruent with religious norms and laws held by UNICEF's followers. Interestingly enough there were no religious debates, and hardly any claims that UNICEF was working for a particular faith's conception of God, except for a few posts that praised Jesus Christ for the work being done by UNICEF. This ambiguity is beneficial for UNICEF. If stakeholders perceived UNICEF to represent the values of a particular faith it can alienate other faiths and lead to challenges of its legitimacy. Religious ambiguity also helps create a perception of unity in its stakeholders by avoiding divisions based on particular faiths.

The religious support reflects a moderate position, as many extremist groups have taken a violent stance against the education of girls, which is one of UNICEF's primary goals. For example, the story of Rana involves a young Muslim girl working to get other girls into schools sponsored by UNICEF. The right for young girls to receive an education is a belief shared by the followers, which helps to legitimize UNICEF. The lack of criticism from conservative religious groups on this issue indicates that UNICEF's stakeholders tend to be religiously moderate. For example, in Afghanistan there have been numerous attacks upon Muslim girls seeking education because of the belief that it is inconsistent with extremist conservative doctrines (North, 2012). The fact that these extreme views are not popular helps UNICEF's legitimacy in that it reflects broad opinions regarding girls and education. It is important to note that there might be

criticism of these posts, but they were not picked up in the analysis because of a language barrier.

The language barrier was another theme present within the users' comments. To achieve cognitive legitimacy, stakeholders need to be able to understand clearly the messages produced by UNICEF. This can be difficult when all of the posts on UNICEF's central Facebook page are in English. Users responded in a variety of languages including Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Dutch, Persian, Arabic, French, Galician, German, Greek, Malay, Turkish, with some comments blending some of these with English.

While Facebook has recently added the ability to translate messages, Google's translator proved to be more effective in translating the comments. Many messages were not translated correctly, either due to problems with the software or possibly the grammar of Facebook users. In fact, there were also several posts in English that were confusing due to issues with grammar. UNICEF only responded to comments in English, but it does have hundreds of accounts in other languages to get around this problem. The diverse languages are beneficial for building legitimacy with those who might only see UNICEF as a western organization. However, it creates problems with comprehension at times, and much of the criticism levied at UNICEF was confusing because of this.

A third theme found was a direct response to UNICEF's clear calls to action. The call to action is made in the form of a command or a suggestion; never as a question. Many users felt the need not just to follow the directive, but to let UNICEF know that they were doing what the message said to do. This demonstrates the legitimacy of the

organization for two reasons. First, if UNICEF had lost legitimacy its followers might follow the calls to action, but might be less likely to publicly announce it on Facebook. Secondly, users most likely would take no action at all or "unfriend" UNICEF. However, this is not the case and the fact that Facebook users publicly associate with the organization and announce their participation helps maintain UNICEF's legitimacy. This reflects self-interest stakeholders must be viewed a certain way online, which helps maintain UNICEF's pragmatic legitimacy. Stakeholders need to perceive that the information posted by UNICEF is useful to them and interesting. Suchman (1995) states that pragmatic legitimacy often involves direct exchanges between the organization and its audience, which is what is occurring on UNCIEF's Facebook page.

For example in the post about the new app HARRASSmap UNICEF states:

Watch the co-founder in conversation with our Executive Director Anthony Lake, Ishmael Beah and others at the Social Good Summit at 15.25 EST today: http://mashable.com/sgs/ And join the conversation on Twitter at #2030NOW.

The most common response by users was "ok." Over 2,000 users "liked" the post, but some still felt the need to directly respond to UNICEF. The ability for UNICEF to achieve such a response in its followers demonstrates that users perceived its involvement to be worthwhile and socially desirable. The Summit regarded new communications technology and possible applications for solving global problems, and the need to go beyond the simple like button indicates a perception that UNICEF's engagement is supported by its followers which in turn builds its legitimacy.

Another example of users responding to UNICEF's calls to action involves the sharing of UNICEF's messages by Facebook users. There were two ways in which users shared UNICEF's content with those in their own Facebook network. The first and most obvious is through the share button in which Facebook users can re-post an organization's content on their own wall, making it visible to those that might not necessarily follow UNICEF, as well as those who might have never even heard of the organization. The legitimacy of UNICEF for these people is built through the credibility of those that share the content. It also allows Facebook users to publicly identify with UNICEF, indicating it is socially desirable to do so. The second way users were sharing information was through "tagging" other people in the comments section of UNICEF's posts. By doing so, UNICEF's Facebook followers are able to post UNICEF's content on their friend's pages. If UNICEF were to post on a follower's wall it would be considered a social media faux pas (Vorvoreanu, 2009) and followers might be inclined to block the organization from interacting with its Facebook account.

Some users felt that UNICEF did not give them enough of a call to action and wanted to know what they should do to help. These posts usually came in two forms. The first when a follower claimed they possessed skills they believed would be useful to UNICEF but wanted to know if UNICEF would let them help. The second type were requests to help regarding the specific issues addressed in the post. UNICEF responds to the first few posts regarding asking for help, but stops quickly as followers repeat the same requests numerous times. This demonstrates that UNICEF cares, but it is still limited in how much it can engage. For example, Yvonne Katongo Sakala replied to the post regarding a Syrian camp in Jordan by stating, "How do I get involved? Am in

Zambia and have a heart for thes (sic) people." UNICEF responded by saying Yvonne

can spread awareness and providing Yvonne with the link to a site where she can donate

to the cause. Right after this exchange Martha Stransky asked, "Is there any way to

help?" to which UNICEF replied with a similar response, but changed it just enough

where it did not look like a computer was automatically responding to followers

comments. Of course right after this exchange somebody else asked to help and UNICEF

had to continue this process. However, this effort is valuable because it creates the

perception that the organization cares enough to give a personal response. Social media

is centered around interaction, and a stoic response to its followers would indicate that

UNICEF was not properly utilizing Facebook, which could negatively impact perceptions

of legitimacy.

A second theme was the lack of interaction between followers. This can be

explained through UNICEF's calls to action that required direct responses by followers.

For example, there was a post telling followers to join a conversation on Twitter, but it is

clear that UNICEF was not trying to foster discussion between users. The only times in

which this occurred was when two users posted their own content on Facebook. For

example, when responding to UNICEF's announcement that it would be releasing a new

report on the statistics of child deaths in the world, Dinnah Williams posted three

consecutive posts. Her first post was an article about a toddler that was kidnapped and

raped, her second stating that "she is 2 years old," and the third post was a link to her

own blog about child marriages. Noor Tanri'nin responded:

Dinnah Williams lets pray God to guide people who acts truly ignorantly showing

no mercy to humanity. And to apply a law that prevent such actions. May God

save, protect, and bless all the children around the world.

Dinnah Williams does not respond to this, but later posted two comments including an

article on Yemen considering banning child marriage and after that posted, "change is

possible, herein lies the power and positive results of social media." However she clearly

does not try to engage with other users, but is using a traditional push model for her

content. This demonstrates a difference in understanding the purpose for UNICEF's

Facebook page. Dinnah uses the page to spread awareness about issues related to the

posts of UNICEF, while Noor Tanri'nin viewed it as an invitation for interaction.

A third theme found in the users comments focused on posted images, rather than

the larger situation the represented. This indicates that UNICEF's photos are important

for its posts, but at times can become the focus of its users instead of the story.

Stakeholders picked up on the way the photos framed people by either looking happy and

empowered, or sad and in need of aid. This should be encouraging for UNICEF in that

users do not seem to be creating different meanings for the photos, although at times they

distracted from the issue UNICEF was trying to address.

For example Mae Onosaki responded to the story about Karina and the violence

in Central African Republic: She probably is a child. Child marriage is still rampant in

Africa. Pregnancy at a young age is a major cause of obstetric fistula, which causes

women to become incontinent, then often shunned and/or abused by their husbands,

families, and communities. By bringing up other issues, stakeholders can distract from

the conversation; which is about a specific issue. The lack of interaction on its page though can be beneficial, as users did not get derailed by this response. It is not threatening to UNICEF's legitimacy for a user to respond in this way, but it can potentially alter the discussion surrounding the post. If users continually assign a different meaning to the pictures, that change the focus of the post, it can hurt the effectiveness of UNICEF's message.

The responses by users tell us several things. First, is that users are interpreting the stories as in line with their own religious beliefs, which impacts their perceptions of UNICEF's legitimacy. The lack of UNICEF's association with a particular faith allows a wide range of faiths to support it. It also discourages religious arguments from arising by appealing to religious moderates. Second, is that there is a language barrier and/or educational barriers that might be limiting the interaction between stakeholders. This can also lead to misunderstandings between users due to errors in communication. However the lack of interaction between users suggests most users do not see UNICEF's posts as places to interact with fellow supporters. Instead most users choose to interact directly with the organization. The comments also demonstrated that liking a post or sharing it is not enough for users. When a user feels strongly about a post they feel the need to comment on it, even if the comments are merely synonyms for the word "like." These words are symbols that indicate that the user views UNICEF to be legitimate. Some felt so highly moved by the stories shared by UNICEF that they needed a direct call to action that they did not feel was included in the posts. These users went beyond needing to voice support of the issue, they wanted to be part of UNICEF's efforts.

There were several strategies followers used to communicate and/or influence the meanings of UNICEF's messages. Usually this occurred when followers felt that UNICEF's messages were lacking, biased, incorrect, or representative of interests that did not line up with their own interests. When disagreeing with the message pushed by UNICEF, followers responded with jokes and comments that demonstrated a feeling that UNICEF's position on the topic did not match up with their own views or morals. At times these comments directly challenged UNICEF, while others chose to challenge the statements of those featured in UNICEF's posted stories.

For example, UNICEFs' post on the rights of people with disabilities, featuring a quote by Stevie Wonder, along with a picture of the singer, attracted several contentious responses by users. Some stakeholders chose to belittle the quote by Stevie Wonder in which he stated, "no one should be excluded because they're blind, or because of any disability or because of their status or their colour." In response Facebook user Paul Mo posted, "Excluded from what? Driving a taxi?" William Antony Beeks posted, "it's not a reason to be automatically (included) either is it, you need to work for your right to be heard not entitled to it." The second comment conflicts with article one and article seven of the United Nations charter by which UNICEF is bound. Article one states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Article two addresses the issue of discrimination:

> All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination (The Universal Declaration of Human rights, 1948).

UNICEF's charter conflicts with the thoughts of these users, and such inconsistency can lead to legitimacy challenges. However, these perceptions about disabilities were not shared by the majority of followers commenting. Also, as stated before users appear not to read other users' comments to the extent they read UNICEF's posts.

When these comments were left on UNICEF's wall, the organization never responded and neither did other stakeholders. For these users the moral legitimacy of UNICEF was questionable as they exposed a belief that rights were earned. Not only did UNICEF decide not to respond to these comments, but other users did not respond as well. The fact that others did not agree with the comments, or that the challenge warranted a response, de-legitimizes those negative comments. However, UNICEF might need to respond if the comments created a debate between its followers as it could create a schism in its support base.

Some responded to UNICEF's posts by claiming that the organization was leaving other groups out, which challenges its legitimacy directly. This claim was expressed by several users, and looking at UNICEF's yearly reports, it is clear that there are certain areas of the globe which receive more of the organizations' aid. According to its latest financial report, in 2012 UNICEF spent the largest portion (43%) of its aid in Sub Sarahan Africa. The next largest area in which UNICEF sends its support is Asia (17% of its total aid) while other regions receive less than 10% each. This data suggests that UNICEF concentrates its efforts in certain regions over others. However, the comments made by followers claiming a bias exists that further marginalizes particular groups gets lost as many chose to use a specific post as evidence of this bias. For

example, in UNICEF's post on violence in the CAR Rukundo Dieudouné Dieudonné

posted in French: "Nous avons des pproblémes d'emplois chez nous.Nous sommes

totalement oublie (sic)."

According to Google Translate, the post claimed that the user's country was

experiencing a lack of employment and this was an issue ignored by UNICEF. These

comments became confusing as they did not seem to be responding to the article itself.

This confusion was apparent in much of the criticism as it seemed not to pertain to the

specific issue addressed in UNICEF's posts. The post that Rukundo was responding to

involved the efforts of Mohamed getting kids back to school in Mali, not about

employment issues. Rukundo also does not indicate where he believes UNICEF is

overlooking. Upon viewing his profile, it was learned that Rukundo resided in Puerto

Rico. While his response was a little confusing, it was not the only one that accused

UNICEF of overlooking certain areas of the globe. The problem is that if UNICEF tried

to include stories from every country in which it worked on its central site it would run

the risk of losing its social media legitimacy by flooding Facebook user's walls with

constant posts. This can lead to a user choosing the Facebook option to stop following

the organizations' posts or to click the unlike button. The more messages sent on

Facebook the less effective they become. However, comments demonstrate that there are

people who feel forgotten by UNICEF, and consequently do not view UNICEF as a

legitimate source of help.

Some even accused UNICEF of only serving areas in which it would stand to

benefit. For example, Anna Giagkou posted, "With all this money in unisef (sic) all this

years no child had to safer from hunger and the water pipes had to go all around the

world….its big business:'(." Here UNICEF's legitimacy is directly challenged, although

not coherently. The meaning is confusing, but seems to indicate that UNICEF has had

made no difference in the lives of children around the world. Ana was commenting on an

article regarding violence in the CAR, and did not comment on the post regarding the

global progress that has been made in helping children. This hurts the legitimacy of

UNICEF in that it casts doubts upon the likelihood the organization is able to accomplish

its goals.

For some users, UNCIEF is perceived as illegitimate because of its relationship

with the United Nations. For example, Mike Beard posted "the UN is a non factor. What

a waste of real estate." However these comments were few in comparison to the positive

reactions the majority of users conveyed on Facebook about the UN and UNICEF. By

not replying to these posts, UNCIEF attempts to de-legitimize the comments. Choosing

to respond to the criticism legitimizes the position, and would only be necessary if more

users expressed similar feelings.

Another component of the criticism included stakeholders who felt that

UNICEF's posts were either lacking something or not using the correct terminology, and

proceeded to add their own additions to UNICEF's messages. For example, Sonadita

Sifrendi responded to the quote by Stevie Wonder adding women to the list of those who

should not be excluded in the world. Leslie Dudley added as well "including their

Facebook status" implying that people can be discriminated against by what they post on

Facebook. Dibya Manandhar critiqued UNICEF's use of the word "Disabled" by stating:

I would say them differently able people, they are not disable, but they are able to

do anything much better than us the normal people in very different way, so they

are differently able people…

Again, these kinds of statements are not as common as the statements of support, but in

the interest of pragmatic legitimacy, UNICEF should be aware that its followers are

disagreeing with the definitions used in its posts. Language is dynamic and UNICEF's

messages should respond to public shifts in appropriate terms for groups of people to

remain legitimate. Using outdated definitions and terms that lose political correctness

can land an organization in trouble. If UNICEF wants to appear to be on the cutting edge

of nonprofit work and a relevant force it needs language that reflects that progressiveness.

Many users felt that UNICEF was a place to find potential stakeholders for their

own organizations. Several times there were posts regarding other organizations,

requests for help and attempts to get UNCIEF to engage in other issues. The different

expectations of the purpose of Facebook should be concerning as outside groups might

de-legitimize the Facebook page by filling it with advertisements. Some of it was

suspiciously similar to spam emails designed at stealing a person's personal information.

While the spam posts do not dominate its page, it is interesting that UNICEF does not

decide to remove such spam as it claims it will in its policy statement regarding its

Facebook page. For example, David Iyke posted:

My name is David, am 17.i need a foster parent with good behaviours to love me

as a son. And assist me in furthering my education as I embark into college.

Whoever God touches in his heart to be my foster parent should contact

me.dave.iyke.167@facebook.com, My mobile number is +2348160045800,

thanks n god bless you.

Although UNICEF reserves the right to remove spam posts many are left up, which can

be beneficial since taking them down might cause unnecessary conflict. There is an

assumption that when a message is deleted on Facebook that there is a conspiracy taking

place. Such was the case when Nestle decided to remove comments on its webpage,

although they were more political in nature (Smith, 2010). UNICEF might feel that

diligent removals of spam might result in a similar situation.

The nonprofit sector is highly competitive and those organizations using

UNICEF's page to promote themselves could potentially divert donor dollars from

UNICEF. It also might negatively impact followers' perceptions of UNICEF's

legitimacy if other followers are arguing that another organization is more efficient than

UNICEF. Demonstrating that a competing organization is more effective in its intake of

resources, as well as its actions, could lead users to stop supporting UNICEF in lieu of

another organization.

Another way in which users' altered and added to UNICEF's messages was

through discussing an issue's cause or who bore responsibility for the issue occurring in

the first place. This can potentially foster negative discourse between followers, although

not very likely given the lack of interaction between UNICEF's Facebook followers.

When reporting on the impact the Syrian war has had on women and children, who is to

blame? The government or the resistance? UNICEF never lays specific blame on the

party, indicating that both parties are responsible for its impact on women and children.

However, users can argue that UNICEF is not tackling the structures that create societal ills, or even that it is responsible for creating them by supporting oppressive regimes. If this perception were to be shared, it would challenge UNICEF's claim of being a supporter of all women and children around the globe.

Some blamed capitalism for creating the situations to which UNICEF was responding. This can question UNICEF's legitimacy because it is sponsored mainly by capitalist governments. Also, UNICEF's proposed solutions to get people out of poverty rest on the poor's ability to participate in the marketplace. UNICEF can encounter a crisis of legitimacy if more followers attribute the problems it is addressing to capitalism and start to notice that UNICEF espouses capitalist ideals. However the lack of coherence by users might prevent such comments from gaining traction with other followers. For example Miriam Eitana Macmull posted,

> It's not the empires who jeopardized africa? and capitalism that turns most of the world into hard labor? it's soldiers and mothers who are forced to kill the souls of the children so they don't dream of a whole new world, where everyone meets their needs and fulfills their dreams??????????????

The outrage is there, which UNICEF should monitor, but these beliefs do not seem to be shared by others so it does not appear as a significant concern for its Facebook page. If more people blamed UNICEF for promoting an ideology that creates these societal ills it could easily face a threat to its legitimacy and be perceived as a tool of oppression, rather than aid and liberation.

The strength of UNICEF's page is that it allows individuals to express their own ideas and even criticize the efforts of the organization. If UNICEF's followers felt that their comments were being deleted merely because UNICEF disagreed with them they might be willing to side with those challenging UNICEF's legitimacy. For example someone might disagree with another follower's assessment of UNICEF's efforts, but believe they have the right to state that opinion on Facebook. Other organizations that have tried to silence negative voices experienced problems with their stakeholders who believed the organization was silencing free speech. UNICEF's Facebook policies need match the expectations concerning communicating on Facebook. At the same time, if multiple voices of dissent are gaining ground online it needs to be addressed in a productive way that does not cause the organization to lose legitimacy.

Overall, the number of instances in which users tried to communicate and/or influence the meanings of UNICEF's messages were relatively small in number. However, in the past social media has demonstrated the ability for a small number of people attacking an organization's legitimacy to quickly gain support and the attention of mainstream media. UNICEF needs to monitor these comments to look for a convergence of negative meaning between users. The only common thread was the argument that UNICEF was part of the powers which create the very problems its organizational goals seek to solve. There was also a clear need for UNICEF to update its terminology to reflect societal trends which can lead to new politically correct terms. While the dissent was minimal, UNICEF needs to keep monitoring its environment and address user concerns when they gain legitimacy.

Ultimately what this thesis has shown is a more detailed analysis of how Facebook is being used by both UNICEF and its stakeholders. There has been some critique that organizations are not properly using the dialogic functions of Facebook (Sommerfeldt, et al., 2012), but after this analysis it appears that the blame is not solely on the organizations. These conclusions shed light on the need to conduct more research into how stakeholders are using Facebook.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

In 2013 Meg French, Director of International Policy and Programs said:

> In order to save children's lives we really need to be engaging with all sorts
>
> of different people. Whether or not that is with individuals, corporations, private
>
> sector, or governments, one of the critical ways of [engaging] is by telling the
>
> story of UNICEF, of our work, and of the lives of children. In order to tell those
>
> stories increasingly means telling those stories through online channels, through
>
> digital media, through social media (Meltwater.com).

While this provides some insight to how UNICEF tries to use its Facebook page,

UNICEF needs to be clearer on how it defines engagement. UNICEF has one of the

largest followings on Facebook among nonprofit organizations, but in the one month

span of posts examined in this thesis it responded to less than ten of its followers.

However, the large number of people voicing their support on Facebook indicates that the

posts resonated with users and helped build and maintain its legitimacy. There were

several key findings to this study that may illuminate why there is a lack of dialogue

taking place on UNICEF's Facebook account.

Summary of Findings

The first major finding of this study was the lack of dialogue between the

organization and its users. Even after averaging 83 comments for each of its posts,

UNICEF responded to less than ten followers. There was also a significant amount of

users who voiced support without comments. Each post averaged approximately 4,900 likes, and a little over 800 shares. These actions are significant as they help extend the visibility of UNICEF's posts to users with whom it is not connected.

The amount of comments voicing support of those featured in UNICEF's posts, the actions of UNICEF, and the organization itself indicate stakeholders are responding positively to its messages. In response to the research question, what rhetorical strategies does UNICEF use in its attempts to create legitimacy, several significant strategies stood out including the ripple effect, the power of progress, UNICEF as a team player, the use of powerful imagery, and calls to action.

The ripple effect helped build and maintain legitimacy by posting stories that featured the efforts of those who had been empowered by UNICEF and were helping spread awareness of UNICEF in their communities. For outside supporters this creates the perception that those receiving UNICEF's aid are grateful and are willing to help the cause. The support of those receiving aid validates the organization's efforts and tells stakeholders that UNICEF's aid is welcome.

The power of progress was used to address efforts made on a larger scale that validate UNICEF's aid and empowerment efforts. There were several posts featuring individuals helped by UNICEF that were supplemented with this type of posts. For those wondering if UNICEF's efforts make a difference, statistical proof was provided. However, its successes were always bundled with the message that there is still room for improvement. The theme of global progress shows the effectiveness of the organization

while demonstrating continued need for the organization, which both builds and strengthens stakeholder perceptions of legitimacy.

Another important strategy for building and strengthening legitimacy was UNICEF's association with other legitimate organizations. Several posts highlighted the combined efforts of UNICEF and other well-known organizations. These organizations were leaders in their respective fields and their legitimacy enhances, and in turn is enhanced by, their association with UNICEF. The groups UNICEF chose to publicly associate with were innovative organizations seeking new solutions to old problems. It signifies to the stakeholders that not only is UNICEF on the cutting edge, but it is highly dedicated to its organizational goals.

The use of powerful imagery also served an important rhetorical function for UNICEF's posts. By using pictures that elicit pity and pride, it is able to make convincing emotional appeals that research has shown to be quite effective. The pictures give a face to the names and statistics UNICEF includes within its posts. The majority of the pictures were positive and involved people smiling or enacting positive actions. The positive images were associated with UNICEF's work, and the negative images demonstrated the continual need for UNICEF.

Finally, UNICEF included a specific call to action in every post. Whether it was to learn more about the featured story or campaign, to engage with UNICEF on Twitter, share its content, or generic calls for action, UNICEF's posts always asked stakeholders to take some action. The statements are powerful, never asking, but flat out telling stakeholders what they should do. These were so effective that users felt the need to

directly respond by telling UNICEF that they would indeed do as instructed, helping us to understand the meaning stakeholders assigned to the messages the goal of (RQ2). There were several themes that gave greater understanding into how users were responding to UNICEF's rhetorical strategies: praising God for UNICEF and its actions; posting confusing messages that indicated a language and/or educational barrier, directly responding to calls for action, sharing a desire to lend more support, and choosing to focus on the picture in the post rather than the context.

UNICEF's followers also attempted to influence the meanings of UNICEF's messages by correcting UNICEF's messages, criticizing UNICEF's actions, challenging its legitimacy, trying to raise awareness of other organizations, soliciting direct aid from other users, drawing attention to other issues, and stating who was to blame for the problems addressed by UNICEF. These attempts were not visibly successful as very rarely did users respond to these comments. UNICEF needs to continually monitor these comments though to make sure that they are not gaining traction with other users. The lack of support for these attempts is a good indicator that stakeholders view UNICEF to be a legitimate organization and there is no need to act upon these calls from users.

Theoretical Implications

While the two-way, symmetrical model might be the ideal form of public relations, the findings here reinforced the conclusions of Sommerfeldt, Kent and Taylor (2012) that nonprofits are not using two-way, symmetrical communication to engage in meaningful dialogue with stakeholders. However, the research found here suggests that nonprofit stakeholders might not want lengthy dialogue and it might not be needed to

build and maintain legitimacy on social media. In previous discussions of legitimacy it is implied that ethical public relations practices must involve an open dialogue with stakeholders. But we must also consider how a company should respond to stakeholders that do not want to engage in lengthy discussions. The fact that the majority of comments involved one word or one sentence voicing support is very telling. Many users felt the need to let UNICEF know that they approved of the action, and those that voiced criticism did not do so in way that indicated a desire for UNICEF to respond. This indicates a high desire for users to be heard, but not necessarily responded to. UNICEF should still monitor its comments in case users desire a response. If there is a perception that UNICEF is not responding to the dialogic requests of its users, they might feel that the organization is not correctly using Facebook. When UNICEF responds, it does so in a personalized way that resonates with users expectations of engagement on Facebook.

Another aspect that is left out of the discussion regarding modern public relations is the possibility that opening up a public discussion with a stakeholder is more of a risk than a benefit for some organizations. The plethora of languages and poor grammar used by UNICEF's Facebook followers increases the likelihood of misunderstanding, which can create new challenges to UNICEF's legitimacy. If an organization cannot effectively interpret the messages of stakeholders, it is unlikely that UNICEF can respond effectively. This becomes more important when a user leaves a negative comment, as it can be difficult to understand how the user expects UNICEF to respond. If a stakeholder does not feel like UNICEF has adequately responded, the stakeholder might become upset enough to actively work against the organization by eliciting support from other stakeholders.

This study leads to new understandings of the importance of two-way, symmetrical communication in public relations efforts on social media. There needs to be some acknowledgement of the risks involved in engaging in dialogue with stakeholders on social media. The organization has been levied as the one in charge of creating honest communication that seeks mutually beneficial relationships, but without discussion of the stakeholder's responsibility.

Practical Implications

The first practical implication resulting from this study is that much of the literature surrounding the proper use of social media is grounded in an assumption of expectations held by stakeholders. To maintain legitimacy online stakeholders have shown to want to hear about the actions of the organization, and how their support is changing the world. UNICEF's number of posts also indicate that users want to hear about what nonprofits are doing with their money, but not all of the time. The lower frequency prevents stakeholders from getting tired of seeing UNICEF's posts in their feeds and deciding to stop reading UNICEF's posts.

When UNICEF posted, it provided interesting content that encouraged stakeholders to share with their friends. To establish a mutually beneficial relationship on Facebook, nonprofits must provide stakeholders a reason to follow them. Many corporations do this by providing deals or contests that entice stakeholders. This is not the best option for nonprofits, whose stakeholders can interpret such gifts as a fraudulent use of its funding. What UNICEF provides is a news service for those who want to stay

informed on global issues currently affecting women and children. Nonprofits' need to determine what value their posts are adding to their stakeholders lives.

By providing interesting content UNICEF is able to legitimize its claims for support while taking the focus off of the call to action. These stories help build the legitimacy of its presence on social media, which in turn has a positive effect on its institutional legitimacy. The need to share a nonprofit's story comes from, in part, a stakeholders need to demonstrate to others the legitimacy of their support. Stakeholders associate with nonprofits that enhance their personal identity in some way, and the content validates that desire.

Nonprofits can also learn from this study in that they should not be quick to silence those voicing criticism of its messages. Unless those messages gain traction with other stakeholders, negative comments are likely to be dismissed and viewed them as illegitimate. UNICEF only engaged stakeholders that wanted to find out how they could help, or those that were experiencing technical problems with the content. What this does is encourage positive responses by stakeholders, and ignore the criticism. The more ambiguous the criticism, the harder it is for a nonprofit to respond effectively. Criticism against UNICEF was ambiguous and even confusing at times, which makes a positive discussion with the stakeholder unlikely. However, if there are specific concerns about the organization's actions it should respond in a timely manner and not try to delete the criticism. UNICEF's decision to leave up several critical comments reflects lessons learned from past social media crises. For example, Nestlé's decision to delete the comments of stakeholders questioning the company's stance on non-sustainable sources for Palm Oil resulted in a much larger crisis (O'Reily & Magee, 2010). Stakeholders

who were indifferent to Nestlé's use of Palm oil voiced outrage at Nestle for not

understanding the rules for open dialogue that users perceive to exist. Nonprofits need to

keep monitoring their comments and make assessments as to what comments warrant a

response. They also need to be mindful of the messages they send, paying attention to

the ways in which stakeholders are interpreting and responding to such messages.

Limitations

While this thesis uncovered several important aspects of legitimacy building,

there are some important limitations. The first being that it chose to focus on a very

distinct nonprofit, UNICEF. With ties to the United Nations, UNICEF receives a vast

amount of funding and influence that is just not seen normally in the nonprofit sector.

The organization's size can be an indicator for stakeholders as the amount of interaction

they expect to have with a large organizations like UNICEF. The results indicated that

engagement with stakeholders might be riskier for nonprofit organizations, but the size of

the nonprofit likely has an impact.

Also, while hundreds of users' comments were analyzed, only eight posts were

collected. It is likely that UNICEF's rhetorical strategies are specific to the types of

situations covered in its stories; meaning that there are strategies that may have been

missed by focusing on one month's worth of posts. Large natural disasters like a tsunami

or an earthquake might require UNICEF to be more direct with its solicitation of

stakeholder support. The ways in which stakeholders respond to direct requests of

support in a crisis can build and maintain organizational legitimacy in a way not analyzed

by this thesis.

As stated before the language barrier also was an issue. Facebook has recently implemented a translate function, but at times it was not effective enough to adequately interpret the meaning of the comments. While there were limitations to this study, future research can help find answers to questions raised in this thesis.

Future Research

One of the questions that needs to be answered by a longitudinal study is how similar is UNICEF's usage of Facebook compared to other nonprofits? The rhetorical expectations for nonprofits might be contingent upon the size of the organization. For example, a study into the use of Facebook by small nonprofits might find that stakeholders desire more dialogue with the organization than they do with large organizations like UNICEF.

Also, UNICEF's refusal to engage those criticizing the organization is a phenomenon worthy of future study. The study of when nonprofits decided to engage the criticism of its stakeholders can provide important information to nonprofits looking to improve their social media use, as well as provide more insight into the creation and maintenance of legitimacy.

A larger study into the other accounts of UNICEF would also give insight into how practices of legitimacy are tailored for unique countries and cultures. The diverse rhetorical strategies can give insight for other nonprofits that work in similar countries, and provide a framework for those organizations looking to expand globally. UNICEF's central account needs to post content that appeals to over two million people, which impacts the strategies used and likely the amount of dialogue in which it engages.

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