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# Harnessing Social Media for Good: How Human Service Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media to Connect to Stakeholders and Clients

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Harnessing Social Media for Good: How Human Service Nonprofit Organizations Use Social  
Media to Connect to Stakeholders and Clients

by

Angela C. Volpe

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University | University of St. Thomas  
School of Social Work

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### Abstract

This banded dissertation examines how human service nonprofit organizations use social media to connect to stakeholders and clients and makes suggestions for how nonprofits can best utilize this powerful medium in their practice.

The first scholarly product was a qualitative systematic review that examined the existing literature regarding how human service nonprofit organizations use social media to enhance their provision of services for clients. Themes discovered included types of social media being used, levels of human service nonprofit organizations (HSO) social media engagement and reasons for use, and barriers to social media use.

The second scholarly product was a case study of an exemplar nonprofit organization's Facebook posts. A content analysis was conducted of the organization's posts for four months to understand how they engaged with their community and to discuss some best practices for human service nonprofit organizations to consider. Themes that emerged were the HSO acknowledging stakeholders and collaborations, a call to action, empowering clients, and informative posts.

The third scholarly product of this banded dissertation was a poster presentation entitled "Social Media for Social Good: Practical Lessons from the Current State of Literature for Nonprofit Human Service Organizations' Use of Social Media" and was presented on July 6, 2018 at the Social Work, Education, and Social Development Conference in Dublin, Ireland. The poster highlighted findings from systematic review including prevalent themes found as well as implications for practice and a direction for future development.

The first and second scholarly products found a need for practical policies to guide practitioners which consider confidentiality as well as the needs of the human service nonprofit

organization. Future research is needed to help HSOs establish ethical social media policies and procedures.

*Keywords:* nonprofit, social work, social media, stakeholders, content analysis, systematic review

## Dedication / Acknowledgements

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This scholarly endeavor is dedicated to the small human service nonprofit organizations who do amazing social work for their clients on shoestring budgets. I am constantly amazed by your creativity as you assist your clients.

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## Harnessing Social Media for Good: How Human Service Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media to Connect to Stakeholders and Clients

Human service nonprofit organizations are discovering how powerful social media can be when used appropriately. The Pew Internet and American Life Project surveyed American adults and found that 45% own a smartphone, 61% a laptop, and 18% a tablet or e-book reader device (Young, 2014). Americans are clearly ‘plugged in’ to the World Wide Web around them. There are more than two billion personal computers being utilized in the world and over 3.2 billion distinctive subscribers benefitting from a mobile device (Chan & Holosko, 2016). As of 2014, 1.97 billion people were active users of social media, a number predicted to climb to 2.55 billion by 2017 (Valentini, 2014). As the number of people using social media rises, so too does the potential power for social service nonprofit organizations in reaching their stakeholders.

Information and communication technology is already impacting our world, and it is critical that social workers incorporate its use to keep up with the changes that are happening. Information and communication technology (ICT) refers to the merging of “audiovisual broadcast systems, telephones, and computer networks through a single cabling or linking system” and reiterates the function of integrated communications and the assimilation of telecommunications (Chan & Holosko, 2016, p. 88).

Social media has the capacity to replace an extensive range of management methods in nonprofit and public organizations. It has influenced innovations in the way nonprofit organizations raise money and resources, organize, and advocate for policies and clients (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014). Social media is not like the conventional form of media (i.e. television or printed materials) but functions as an alternative way of interacting and networking. Social media includes an ever-growing list of digital technologies, such as

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, that lets users generate their own content. It incorporates the classification of ICTs but expands it to include an atmosphere where users can contribute directly (Young, 2017). Social media has profoundly altered the modes of communication that organizations and individuals use with each other.

For the purposes of this banded dissertation, human services nonprofit organizations will be broadly defined as organizations that meet human needs employing interdisciplinary knowledge and emphasizes prevention, fixing problems, and enhancing the quality of life of those served by the organization. They can function at micro, mezzo, and macro levels of service. One might just think of human services nonprofit organizations as direct providers like a mental health agency, but the definition also involves organizations that work collaboratively to provide services in support of individuals. This also incorporates organizations who advocate for clients or that work with other providers that help clients get needed services like housing assistance (Young, 2017).

Instead of embracing the potential that ICT offers, social workers have been slow to incorporate technology within their profession and in social work education (Berzin, Singer, & Chan, 2015; Youn, 2007). In the Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative, the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare has come up with twelve fundamental “requirements for social justice and human existence,” one of which is to “harness technology for social good” (Coulton, Goerge, Putnman-Hornstein, & de Haan, 2015, p. 2). Using social media is one way social workers can put this challenge into practice. I worked as a social worker in a very rural part of North Carolina for three years with limited formal resources. A friend was frustrated by the unmet needs she saw and started a nonprofit group on Facebook to let community members know about the needs of clients. She would post a need in an anonymous

manner and the need would be met by people in the community. I had a frail elderly client who had difficulty ambulating. Her family was poor, and they only had hard wooden chairs in their home. She spent the majority of her time alone in her room at the back of the trailer because the chairs did not support her body. I asked my friend to post the need and within five minutes a family donated their like-new reclining chair. The difference in the quality of life and even demeanor of this elderly client was as dramatic as night and day. She was able to interact with her family and be part of their lives again for the first time in over a year.

This banded dissertation was inspired by my experience of using social media in a rural setting to provide services for clients. Product one is a systematic review that looks at existing studies of how nonprofit human service organizations are utilizing social media to enhance and inform the provision of human services. Product two will be an exploratory qualitative study to help nonprofit organizations see the differences between a nonprofit human service agency's interactions with stakeholders with high-frequency usage compared to a nonprofit human service agency with low-frequency social media usage. Product three will be a poster presentation at a peer-reviewed conference prepared to give social workers in nonprofit organizations practical tools to manage their social media and effectively connect with stakeholders pulling from the findings of both product one and product two and using the Relationship Management Theory.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This dissertation was guided by relationship management theory by connecting how nonprofit organizations manage their social media pages and their relationship with their stakeholders. Relationship management theory focuses on stakeholder relationships assessing three parts: the overall view of the character of the relationship, the kinds of relationship, and the

viewpoints about the quality of the distinct relationship dimensions (Holtzhousen, 2014; Ledingham, 2003).

Relationship Management Theory acknowledges that for an organization to be healthy, relationships with stakeholders need to evolve and that communication is the strategic tool that can best develop and sustain relationships. The communication between nonprofit organizations and stakeholders needs to be dialogic in nature using two-way communication instead of one-way information sharing (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). Relationship Management Theory is concerned with effectively managing common interests and shared goals to result in mutual understanding and benefit for organizations and their public or stakeholders. Stakeholders are actors in the environment that may influence organizational success or failure (Maxwell & Carboni, 2014).

The overall view of the relationship between a nonprofit organization and its stakeholders is not generally grounded in theory, but instead is a good indication of the perceptions of stakeholders. Two kinds of relationships are observed between nonprofit and stakeholders: exchange and communal relationships (Holtzhousen, 2014). Exchange relationships look at common ground in interests and rewards. One party compensates another in exchange for a benefit gotten in the past or to be gotten in the future. Communal relationships happen over time as parties build a relationship. One member does something out of regard for the other with no consideration of a reward. This could be the best way to measure success of relationship management for a nonprofit organization with its stakeholders. Exchange relationships can make way to communal relationships in the future.

Literature regarding Relationship Management Theory focuses on four types of quality within the distinct relationship dimensions: trust, control mutuality, commitment, and

relationship satisfaction (Ledingham, 2003). Trust happens between two parties when one is certain of the other's integrity, dependability, and competence. Control mutuality happens when a nonprofit believes the opinions of its stakeholders are legitimate and gives stakeholders a chance to join in decision-making processes giving them some level of control. Commitment occurs when a nonprofit and its stakeholders both feel the relationship is worth putting time and energy in forming a long-term commitment. Relationship satisfaction applies to stakeholders being content with a nonprofit organization, particularly their dealings with the organization.

With this theory, stakeholder relationships are evaluated looking at nature of the relationship, types of relationships, the perspectives about the condition of the dimensions mentioned above (Holtzhousen, 2014). Researchers investigated the connection between those dimensions and stakeholder experiences, viewpoints, and postures. They found that when the public knew about an organization's support of their community, they were predisposed to thinking of the organization in a positive light (Ledingham, 2003). This theory can perhaps be a key piece of information for nonprofits as social media continues to become an important and powerful resource for these organizations.

### **Summary of Scholarship Products**

This banded dissertation is comprised of three scholarly products. The first scholarly product was a systematic review that examined existing studies that have researched how human service nonprofit organizations utilize social media to enhance and inform the provision of human services. This product incorporated a broad definition of human service organizations. It discussed how social media has developed over the past fifteen years, and types of communication engagement that happen when using social media. The researcher used the databases Psych INFO and SocINDEX and searched for terms such as "social media", "human

services”, “nonprofit organization”, “communication”, and “dialogic”. Specific terms were categorized and recorded on a spreadsheet to find relevant studies and reviews. A list of inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria determined which studies were reviewed in the paper. The product looked at the state of the research, themes that were discovered, and outcomes the studies found, as well as a focus for future research.

Social media in its current iteration has only been around for the last 15 years. To that end, the research regarding its utilization is fairly new and still in the exploratory phase. Since not much is known about this area, the second scholarly product was a case study of an exemplar human service organizations’ usage of social media to connect with stakeholders using the lens of the Relationship Management Theory to inform the research. The chosen human service nonprofit was a nonprofit domestic violence service provider based out of a southeastern state which generated content on Facebook multiple times a week. This case study utilized a content analysis of an exemplar HSO’s Facebook posts over the course of four months. Themes that emerged were the HSO acknowledging stakeholders and collaborations, a call to action, empowering clients, and informative posts.

The final scholarly product was a poster presentation at Social Work, Education, and Social Development (SWSD), an international peer-reviewed conference, on July 6, 2018. The conference is organized every two years by a joint committee represented by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW). This poster presented a qualitative systematic review of this newly emerging research area. It examined existing studies to learn how human service nonprofits utilize social media to enhance and inform the provision of human services. The review included a methodical literature search by identifying peer-

reviewed references related to human service nonprofits and their use of social media. Themes that emerged from the study included human service nonprofits' use of social media for information sharing, raising awareness of issues, fundraising, and marketing. The research found organizations were reluctant to fully engage with the public on social media using dialogic communication. It also became clear that organizations need to develop ethical social media usage policies.

Human service nonprofits would do well to consider what they want to get out of social media as an organization. Most currently do this haphazardly. Successful users of social media platforms had a clear vision of what their social media policies were and how to ethically implement them. They generated content almost daily and allowed stakeholders to have conversations with them in this public forum to build trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. Social media in its current form has existed for less than fifteen years. Continued research is needed to address how best to communicate with stakeholders through this powerful medium to enhance the services that nonprofit human service organizations offer.

### **Discussion**

Many human service nonprofit organizations (HSOs) have been slow to use social media, and research of its use is limited. The literature highlights the need for resources for human service organizations to effectively reach their stakeholders on social media platforms. HSOs that use social media typically post 0-2 times per week. Most of their use is to educate the stakeholder about the services they provide or events they are planning rather than using it as a chance for dialogic (two-way) communication. Most HSOs did not have social media policies or assess whether their social media use was reaching the intended population.

This scholarship is still in the exploratory phase as researchers have just begun to look at the targeted use of social media for stakeholder engagement. A lot of nonprofit organizations do not tactically use social media for dialogic communication exchanges with stakeholders. They encounter many obstacles to successful social media use for stakeholder engagement, like not having enough staff, not knowing how to manage social media, having no policies to address clients' privacy concerns, and limitations on information that can be shared (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). Most social media is used to amplify one-way communication instead of using it as a way of enhancing two-way communication. Many do not understand why they need to assess how effective their social media presence is.

Most of the latest research looking at nonprofit organizations' social media use has examined large, prominent nonprofit organizations instead of smaller, community-based organizations. There is significant promise for the organizations that tap into the already close relationship they have with stakeholders (clients and funders) by using social media's ability to engage their stakeholders. These studies found that most nonprofit organizations use Facebook and Twitter as information sharing tools but that their leaders do not agree on what role social media should play in the management of nonprofit organizations (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014).

The case study from product two gives a good example of how one organization has mastered mixing informative posts with ones that acknowledge stakeholders' help with their organization, displays their connections with collaborative agencies, empowers their clients, and challenges their stakeholders to act. The study also encourages agencies to remember to engage with stakeholders in two-way communication and listen to what stakeholders have to say.



### **Implications for Social Work Education**

Current traditional undergraduate social work students have had access to social media since they were in middle school. They post about every major moment in their lives and most of their mundane moments. As educators, we hear horror stories of social work students losing internships over inappropriate social media posts and wonder how this could have happened. The majority of educators have not grown up using social media and perhaps forget the need for guiding young social workers in this area.

Students in both formal and informal settings need to be taught the importance of appropriate and professional social media use. As social worker students are training in their undergraduate and graduate social work programs, it will be important for educators to engage with them about social media practices. The National Association of Social Workers gives vague guidance in their 2017 revision of the NASW Code of Ethics about social media focusing on conflicts of interest, privacy and confidentiality, supervision and consultation, and education and training. It is up to educators to help students understand the importance of professional social media usage and the nuances of its use.

Part of that training needs to have a critical thinking component to it. The needs of different types of clients will warrant different types of social media responses. For example, a stakeholder who has donated money to a nonprofit organization will likely want some type of recognition for their good deed and might want their name or picture in a social media post. On the other hand, a client using a nonprofit's service needs to have their confidentiality protected. Another confusing example would be posting a foster child's picture on social media. This is forbidden for foster parents and social workers; however, if that foster child is available for

adoption, the foster child's picture is often posted to generate interest and find a forever family for that child. Here we have a vulnerable client, but a completely different goal.

A student needs to be able to distinguish between stakeholders and clients in order to apply the appropriate level of protectiveness when it comes to social media for a nonprofit organization. This research found a need for policies that consider confidentiality as well as goals for its use, whether that be raising funds and resources, informing the community about services, recruiting additional volunteers, or finding a forever family. Students are already plugged into social media in their private lives and need to be reminded by educators of the ethical implications for social media use.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This emerging area of research is in its infancy and little is known about how nonprofit agencies use social media to connect to stakeholders. Survey instruments are just now being developed and tested, and further studies are needed to continue to improve them (Goldkind, 2014). More information is needed about how HSO leaders chose to engage in social media usage and why they choose or choose not to use the medium. Current literature focuses on larger human service nonprofit organizations. Future research should also study how smaller nonprofits use social media and to what degree of success.

Both scholarly products one and two emphasized the need for thoroughly considered policies for HSO social media use as well as ways to evaluate its effectiveness. HSOs should think about their own mission balancing the needs of confidentiality for clients. Future research should look at how nonprofits protect vulnerable populations as they use social media. Future research should also address how a HSO's organizational mission connects to its social media use. It should also investigate how HSOs set goals and what they take into consideration as their

goals are developed including informing the public about services and activities, requesting funds and resources, as well as gathering feedback from stakeholders and clients. Research should include learning how nonprofits assess the effectiveness of the goals they develop for social media use.

Leaders of human service nonprofit organizations have not been trained on how to ethically set up policy and procedures for social media use but are interested in it. They have not been taught how to develop social media goals or assess the success of their goals and need practical evidence-based guidelines. To that end, an HSO social media workshop should be developed and evaluated using Ledingham's Relationship Management Theory as a guide to enable leaders to enhance their organization's reach as they connect to stakeholders. HSOs lean heavily on the informative aspects social media has to offer. They need to be trained on how to fully embrace the dialogic nature for which social media was developed.

### **Conclusion**

Social media has the potential to level the playing field for the small human service nonprofit organization in extending its influence and reach. For social workers, use of this medium can have a direct and immediate impact on an individual's life such as it did for my client when she received her soft reclining chair. Its use cannot be done haphazardly or cavalierly, but with thoughtful consideration to what an HSO wants to get out of the medium as well as ensuring the confidentiality of clients. This banded dissertation provides a starting point for HSO's as they begin to contemplate their own policies and procedures surrounding the use of social media to enhance the provision of services for stakeholders and clients.

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Systematic Review of Social Media Utilization by Human Service Nonprofit Organizations

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Author's Note

The author is a doctoral student at St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas's dual Doctorate of Social Work program.

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### Abstract

Social media has become a main source of communication to stakeholders for many human service nonprofit organizations (HSO), and yet there is little research to guide nonprofits as they navigate this relatively new media outlet. The purpose of this systematic review is to examine existing studies that assessed the utilization of social media by HSO to enhance and inform the provision of human services. A methodical search of Psych INFO, Scopus, and SocINDEX was conducted. The results include a description of the studies found regarding social media usage by HSOs as well as a discussion regarding the state of the research. Themes discovered included types of social media being used, levels of HSO social media engagement and reasons for use, and barriers to social media use.

*Keywords:* nonprofit, social media, online, Internet, social networking, human services

### Systematic Review of Social Media Utilization by Human Service Nonprofit Organizations

The Pew Internet and American Life Project surveyed American adults and found that 45% own a smartphone, 61% a laptop, and 18% a tablet or e-book reader device (Young, 2014). As of 2017, seven in ten Americans used social media. Americans are 'plugged in' to the World Wide Web giving nonprofit human service organizations a unique opportunity to connect with stakeholders in new and innovative ways.

There have been significant changes regarding how people interact with shared material since the inception of the Internet. Web 1.0 allowed for only one-way communication. It was a way for organizations to share information, but there was no way to interact with those public messages. Web 2.0 technology, however, allowed for "sharing, linking, collaborating, and inclusion of user-generated content" (Ozdemir, 2012, p. 26). This iteration of the Internet allows two-way and reciprocal interaction between organizations and the public. Social media has evolved with the advancements of Web 2.0 offering a way to interact and network so that individuals can initiate content instead of only consume it (Young, 2012).

In this paper, the author conducted a systematic review of research regarding human service nonprofit organizations' (HSO) use of social media to enhance and inform the provision of human services and offer suggestions for future research. Human service nonprofit organizations are broadly defined here as organizations that meet human needs employing interdisciplinary knowledge and emphasizing prevention, fixing problems and enhancing the quality of life of those served by the organization. Human service nonprofit organizations operate at micro, mezzo, and macro levels of service and are not just direct providers but also involve organizations which work collaboratively to provide services in support of individuals. This article will additionally incorporate organizations who advocate for clients or work with

other providers which help clients obtain needed services like housing assistance (Young, 2017). Nonprofit organizations function in multifaceted settings with many stakeholders like “funders, referral agencies, government officials, volunteers, clients or participants, and board members” (Balsler & McClusky, 2005, p. 296). Stakeholders are a source of unpredictability for nonprofit organizations as they cannot be controlled and need to be monitored and managed.

This area of scholarship is still in the exploratory phase as researchers have just begun to look at the targeted use of social media for stakeholder engagement. Managers and social workers running human service nonprofit organizations often encounter obstacles to successful social media use for stakeholder engagement, such as not having enough staff, not knowing how to manage social media, having no policies to address clients' privacy concerns, and limitations on information that can be shared (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). Most nonprofits use social media to amplify one-way communication instead of using it as a way of enhancing two-way communication and do not understand why they need to assess how effective their social media presence is. This article aims to help human service managers and social workers understand the current literature specific to this area so that they can utilize this medium in their organizations efficiently.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Social media falls under the category of public relations for organizations, so this author researched public relations theories to find a conceptual framework to guide this systematic review. Relationship Management Theory focuses on stakeholder relationships, assessing the overall view of the character of the relationship, types of relationships, and viewpoints about the quality of distinct relationship dimensions (Holtzhousen, 2014; Ledingham, 2003). This theory sheds light on the potential outreach a nonprofit organization can have with the public at large

and its stakeholders specifically. John A. Ledingham set out to establish the relationship management approach as a general theory of public relations by explaining the idea of relationship management as the framework for different public relations functions (Dutta & Kumar, 2015). It allows organizations and their stakeholders to manage common interests and shared goals, and consequently, mutual understanding and benefit for each occur (Maxwell & Carboni, 2014).

Ledingham recognized four essential developments as this relational perspective formed and re-conceptualized public relations as a management function instead of a technician function. He identified fundamental concepts and types of organization-public relationships, their connections to public perceptions, knowledge, behavior, and relationship measurement strategies; and he developed organization-public relationship models that adapt to relationship precursors, process, and results (Dutta & Kumar, 2015). The relationship with a wide range of stakeholders advances organizational goals. Management of relationships, therefore, enhances the efficacy of the organization.

The overall view of the relationship between a nonprofit organization and its stakeholders is not commonly grounded in theory, but instead is a good indication of the perceptions of stakeholders. Researchers observe two types of relationships between nonprofits and stakeholders: exchange and communal relationships (Holtzhousen, 2014). Exchange relationships look at the common ground in interests and rewards. One party compensates another in exchange for a benefit obtained in the past or to be acquired in the future. Communal relationships happen over time as parties build a relationship. One member does something out of regard for the other with no consideration of a reward. This could be the best way to measure the success of relationship management for a nonprofit organization with its stakeholders.

Exchange relationships can make way to communal relationships in the future.

Literature regarding Relationship Management Theory focuses on four types of quality within the distinct relationship dimensions: trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction (Ledingham, 2003). Trust transpires between two parties when one is confident of the other's integrity, dependability, and competence. Integrity concludes that an organization is nondiscriminatory and moral. Dependability accepts that an organization will do what it says it will do. Competence assumes that an organization can do what it says it will do. A nonprofit organization gains stakeholder trust when these three areas are met (Dutta & Kumar, 2015).

Control mutuality happens when a nonprofit believes the opinions of its stakeholders are legitimate and gives stakeholders a chance to join in decision-making processes allowing them some level of control. Commitment occurs when a nonprofit and its stakeholders both feel the relationship is worth putting time and energy in forming a long-term commitment. Relationship satisfaction applies to stakeholders being content with a nonprofit organization, particularly their dealings with the organization.

With this theory, stakeholder relationships are evaluated looking at the nature of the relationship, types of relationships, and the perspectives about the condition of the dimensions mentioned above (Holtzhousen, 2014). Researchers investigated the connection between those dimensions and stakeholder experiences, viewpoints, and postures. They found that when the public knew about an organization's support of their community, they were predisposed to thinking of that organization in a positive light (Ledingham, 2003). This theory can perhaps be a key piece of information for nonprofits as social media continues to become an important and influential resource for these organizations.

Relationship Management Theory acknowledges that for an organization to be healthy, relationships with stakeholders need to evolve and that communication is the strategic tool that can best develop and sustain relationships. The communication between nonprofit organizations and stakeholders needs to be dialogic using two-way communication instead of one-way information sharing (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). Relationship Management Theory is concerned with effectively managing common interests and shared goals to result in mutual understanding and benefit for organizations and their stakeholders, who may influence the nonprofits' organizational success or failure (Maxwell & Carboni, 2014). Literature regarding nonprofit organizations and stakeholder communication is limited but focuses on disseminating information about the organization, fundraising efforts, advocacy, and communication.

### **Literature Review**

Social media is a way to interact and network so that individuals can initiate content instead of only consume it (Young, 2012). Electronic advocacy or e-advocacy uses technology to influence key stakeholders and change policy. Online tools like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and online forums can be employed to quickly raise awareness of issues relevant to HSOs. They present openings that nonprofit organizations can use to promote relationships and find new ways of fundraising online. They also offer an opportunity to for two-way communication between an organization and its stakeholders, not just a way to distribute information.

Part of the evolution of the Internet includes an ever-growing list of digital technologies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, that can be a fast, cheap, and collaborative way to reach stakeholders (Valentini, 2015). Ultimately, social media can reduce a nonprofit organizations' dependency on mass media and help them reach the broader public. It has profoundly altered the modes of communication that organizations and individuals use with each

other and has influenced innovations in the way nonprofit organizations raise money and resources, organize, and advocate for policies and clients (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014). These online tools can be employed to rapidly increase awareness of issues relevant to human service workers, as well as present opportunities that nonprofits can use to promote relationships and find new ways of fundraising online. It can provide a platform for developing two-way mutual communication and facilitate participation in their advocacy campaigns (Ozdemir, 2012).

Most of the latest research looking at nonprofit organizations' social media use has examined large, prominent nonprofit organizations instead of smaller, community-based organizations. There is significant promise for the organizations that tap into the already close relationship they have with stakeholders (clients and funders) by using social media's ability to engage their stakeholders. These studies found that most nonprofit organizations use Facebook and Twitter as information sharing tools but that their leaders do not agree on what role social media should play in the management of nonprofit organizations (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014).

Young (2012) found that human service nonprofit organizations used social media in four different ways: "community engagement, transparency, fundraising, and marketing/promoting" (p. 117). Ozdemir (2012) added that media campaigns need to have four basic abilities. The first one is to focus on one tangible and functional goal to make a change using social media. The second ability is to grab stakeholder's attention. This ability should be a genuine and unforgettable message that can get a person's attention who has a lot of other media trying to grab his/her backing. The third idea is to engage, or create a personal connection through "compassion, empathy, and happiness, via social media" (p. 30). The last ability is empowering stakeholders to take action.

Young (2012) gave the American Red Cross as an example of what he believed was the best use of social media in the nonprofit area. The American Red Cross started its social media campaign with Twitter and blogging as a way of expanding the organization's transparency and combatting negative opinions it had gained after Hurricane Katrina. This was a shift for their organization as they started to view social media as a way to "engage in conversations with critics, educate them and the broader public about an issue, and improves what they are doing" (Young, 2012, p. 117). The American Red Cross uses Twitter and Facebook as their two most used social media platforms. However, they also use blogs and other social media tools to meet their social goals by interacting openly with the community, enlisting volunteers, and showing transparency and accountability. This helps increase the public's trust in the American Red Cross. In the following section, the author describes the methodology of systematic reviews.

### **Methodology**

This research is a qualitative systematic review design. A literature search first cataloged all peer-reviewed references connected to human service nonprofit organizations' use of social media. A systematic inquiry was run using pertinent databases: SocINDEX with Full Text and PsychINFO. The following terms created the basis of the search blueprint: (nonprofit or non-profit or "not for profit" or npo or "nonprofit human service organization" or charity) and ("social media" or "social networking sites" or Facebook or Twitter). Articles were limited to scholarly peer reviewed journals published between 2005 and 2018. The search generated 261 articles. An additional article was found by looking through the references in relevant studies and reviews and 23 duplicates were removed. After the two databases were searched, abstracts and titles were examined, and unrelated studies were taken out. The author applied the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria listed in Table 1 once the irrelevant studies were eliminated.



Twenty-five percent of the studies were also reviewed independently for inclusion or exclusion by two colleagues to increase validity of articles chosen for this review. A consensus method was used to solve any disagreements regarding the inclusion of studies. The findings below include a description of the studies found regarding social media usage by human service nonprofit organizations as well as a thematic analysis in order to aggregate the findings of the included articles.

**Findings**

**Studies Included**

The author examined a total of 239 articles for relevance in this systematic review of HSO’s social media usage, and seven studies met the inclusion criteria. A summary of the key findings and barriers to social media use was provided in Table 2. Data was collected from a range of samples including social media account page posts, individual interviews, and surveys. Though international studies were part of the original inquiry, they were eliminated for not meeting the inclusion criteria. The remaining seven studies were focused on HSO in the U. S.

Table 1

*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Participants of the articles must clearly fit the included Human Service Nonprofit Organization definition.	Emergency / crisis management by public agencies.
Focus of the article must be on how these organizations use social media to communicate to stakeholders.	Religious organizations.
Must be original qualitative or quantitative research.	Medical facilities or programs.
	Studies looking at social media use as treatment.
	Reviews / Conceptual research.
	Articles not written in English.

Literature regarding nonprofit human service organization’s social media usage is limited, so the included articles are exploratory. Four were qualitative designs using content

analysis to examine the data of either a HSO's Facebook posts or worker interviews. Each used methods of coding to distinguish emerging themes and categories. Three studies used Likert scale surveys with an opportunity for the respondent to include additional information. Two of these studies pulled from the same survey and respondents and were written by the same author.

The nonprofit human service organizations studied included service types from general human service organizations, homeless services, HIV services, youth development, intervention services, domestic violence, mental health, emergency and crisis management, and child welfare. The studies includes Facebook page posts collected from 25 county departments, 17 HSO funders, and 242 HSO providers (Campbell, Lambright & Wells, 2014; Livermore & Verbvaya, 2016), as well as interviews with 44 HSO leaders, 10 HSO funders, 10 human resource workers from county departments, and 40 employees that managed social media communication for their local Red Cross (Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011; Campbell et al., 2014; Goldkind, 2015a). There were 389 HSO leaders surveyed; however, 264 of the surveys counted as the same sample for two articles written by the same author as mentioned above. These particular articles concentrated on different sections of the survey.

### **Prevalent Themes**

**Types of social media researched.** The studies typically focused on HSO's use of Facebook more than other social media platforms but also included LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube (Campbell et al., 2014; Briones et al., 2011; Goldkind, 2014, 2015b; Livermore & Verbvaya, 2016; Young, 2017). If a HSO used social media, they were more likely to use Facebook. Briones et al. (2011) reported the American Red Cross used Twitter and Facebook the most. Goldkind (2014) further separated the types of social media strategies noting differences between the use of video sharing applications (YouTube), microblogging (Twitter),

and social networking sites (LinkedIn and Facebook). In her research, social networking platforms were more likely to be used. The other studies did not tease out the differences between the types of social media platforms but grouped them into one category.

**Level of social media engagement.** Levels of social media engagement ranged widely between the different studies. Campbell et al. (2014) found that HSO funders and providers were much more likely to use social media than county human service departments. Goldkind (2014) found the older a HSO was, the more likely they were not to use social media. The researcher felt this could be because they already had established ways of connecting to their stakeholders. The researcher also found HSOs with greater financial resources had more significant levels of engagement of social media strategies. Young (2017) found that 74% of the HSO participants did 0-2 posts per week and 22% did 3-5 posts a week.

Goldkind (2015a) categorized different types of HSO social media users. She found that 20% of participants in her study were considered non-user HSOs. In these organizations, social media was either forbidden or felt the services they provided were more important than wasting energy on social media. Many of these organizations had social media sites blocked so that access was limited. 50% of the HSOs were beginner-sporatics. These organizations had social media accounts but did not have policies for engaging with social media. Their concern was about who would be in charge of managing the content, and often the responsibility fell to someone in a leadership position within the organization. Advanced beginners used multiple social media platforms, had a social media policy, and had considered the metrics and benchmarks they wanted to evaluate within their goals for social media usage.

**Reason for social media use.** The studies found similar reasons that nonprofit human service organizations used social media. The most common theme for why HSOs used social

Table 2

*Study Characteristics*

Study	Sample	Method	Key Findings	Barriers to Social Media Use
Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin (2011)	40 American Red Cross employees that manage the HSO’s social media accounts.	Qualitative research. Content analysis of in-depth phone interviews.	Reasons for social media use: open dialogic communication between itself and its stakeholders, build relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders, spread awareness of the organization, and for volunteer recruitment and engagement.	Sufficient time and staff Getting buy-in from board members.
Campbell, Lambright & Wells (2014)	25 county depts., 17 HSO funders, and 151 HSO providers’ social media accounts. Interviewed management from 20 HSO providers, 10 funders, 10 county human service depts.	The authors completed content analysis of social media pages and interviews.	Facebook was most commonly used, though only 49% of HSO used it. Few used other forms of social media. Reasons for social media use: marketing organizational activities, remaining relevant to key constituencies, and raising community awareness. Only one organization used social media to gain constituent feedback.	Concerns about client confidentiality, Lack of capacity and staff expertise to manage social media. HSOs that served vulnerable populations were less likely to use social media.
Goldkind (2014)	264 executive directors from HSO whose budget was greater than \$30,000.	The author used an anonymous mail back survey instrument with questions.	The most prevalent social media advocacy strategy was social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn with 49% of respondents. The older a HSO, the more likely to not use electronic advocacy. The HSO with greater financial resources used electronic advocacy strategies more.	Little guidance for leaders about which strategies might be effective or how to implement and manage the use of electronic tools effectively.

Study	Sample	Method	Key Findings	Barriers to Social Media Use
Goldkind (2015a)	24 self-selected HSO leaders. (Data from 20 interviews were considered)	12 structured qualitative interview questions regarding the HSO social media use and organizational structures. A content analysis was completed from the transcriptions of the interviews.	Social media is not a major communication outlet for HSO. 20% of participants were considered Non-users, 50% were beginner-sporadics, 30% were advanced beginners. For non-user HSO, social media was either forbidden or felt social media was a waste of time/manpower. For beginner-sporadics, they had social media accounts but did not have social media policies. They were concerned about who would be in charge of managing the content. Advanced beginners used multiple social media platforms, had a social media policy and had considered the metrics and benchmarks they wanted to evaluate.	Lack of time Lack of knowledge Lack of formal policies for social media Agencies did not have a detailed plan for evaluating the success of a social media campaign. Do not have a clear evaluation strategy for measuring the effectiveness of their social media goals. Board support was a problem. Lack of funding or communications staff
Goldkind (2015b)	264 executive directors from HSO whose budget was greater than \$30,000 (a response rate of 7% of surveys mailed out).	The author used an anonymous Likert-type survey	49% of respondents used a social networking site like Facebook or LinkedIn. The perceived effectiveness of using electronic advocacy strategies, policy goals, organizational sustainability, electronic advocacy barriers and facilitators, and the use of electronic advocacy strategies each have significant direct effects on perceived effectiveness.	There is not much research in this area to guide practice.

Study	Sample	Method	Key Findings	Barriers to Social Media Use
Livermore & Verbvaya (2016)	91 HSO involved with the Poverty Initiative, 47 had a Facebook page.	A qualitative exploratory design.	The article offers specific ways that an organization can increase their collaboration with community partners.	No barriers mentioned in the article.
Young (2017)	125 nonprofit human service organizations in a mid-Atlantic metropolitan community.	Cross-sectional survey design containing 24 questions adapted from organizational and social media literature.	<p>The most popular social media platforms were Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.</p> <p>Using social media to promote/advertise services or events and engaging with the community were their top two reasons for using social media.</p> <p>74% of HSO posted 0-2 posts a week. 22% posted 3-5 week.</p> <p>50.4% of respondents felt that using social media improved the rapport between the HSO and stakeholders.</p>	<p>HSO need consider strategic social media policies to be effective with goals and outcomes.</p> <p>Managing social media takes time and effort.</p> <p>Smaller organizations with limited resources may not be able to use social media to its full potential.</p>

*Note.* HSO = Human Service Nonprofit Organization

media was informing stakeholders about the services/activities that the HSO provided (Campbell et al., 2014; Briones et al., 2011; Young, 2017). In Campbell et al.'s (2014) study, one respondent said, "To get our name out there, to share information. Sometimes we're the best kept secret. This is what we're doing, come support us or participate in this event or this could benefit you". Their respondents also reported a concern remaining relevant to key stakeholders and raising community awareness.

In Briones et al.'s (2011), the respondents were the employees that managed social media communication for their local American Red Cross. It is unknown if these were volunteers or paid staff. It is also unknown if they were trained in public relations or human services; however, their answers were slightly different than the other respondents of the other studies. These respondents reported using social media to build relationships with a variety of stakeholders, spread awareness of the organization, and for volunteer recruitment and engagement.

**Communication and relationship focus.** While dialogic communication is one of the critical components of social media, it was not a chief concern for the majority of the HSOs in these studies. Campbell et al. (2014) discovered only one organization that mentioned using social media to gain constituent feedback. However, Young (2017) found that 50.4% of respondents felt that using social media enhanced the relationship between HSOs and stakeholders but did not highlight gaining insight from stakeholders' contributions to their social media page. Surprisingly, several leaders in Goldman's (2015a) study expressed recognition of social media's ability to enhance and foster two-way communications between organizations and their external constituents.

**Barriers to social media use.** Six of the seven studies discussed obstacle to HSO's social

media use which could be broken down into two areas: lack of resources and lack of policy and evaluation procedures. One also mentioned concerns about using social media in regards to confidentiality for clients, particularly for HSOs that served vulnerable populations like children (Campbell, 2014).

Lacking resources included time, staff, knowledge, funding, and buy-in from board members. Campbell et al. (2014) reported a lack of capacity and staff expertise to manage social media. The Briones et al. (2011) study's respondents were concerned about having sufficient time and staff to update social media regularly and getting their board members to understand the importance of the medium. Goldkind (2014, 2015a, 2015b) reported about the lack of time to contribute to social media, board support as a problem, and the lack of research in the area to guide practice. Young (2017) discussed how managing social media took concentrated time and effort that smaller organizations with limited resources might not be able to fully utilize in the desired capacity.

Goldkind (2014, 2015a) and Young (2017) each mentioned a lack of policies and evaluation procedures. Goldkind (2014) reported little guidance from implementing and managing effective social media strategies. The researcher (2015a) also noted that agencies did not have clear plans for evaluating the success of using social media. Young (2017) reflected that HSOs may need to think more strategically about social media policies if they plan to achieve their goals and realize successful outcomes.

### **Discussion**

Social media usage is a new subject of research for the area of human services. This systematic review enhances the literature by highlighting the lack of resources for human service organizations to adequately use social media to reach their stakeholders. The available



studies showed that the HSOs that used social media appeared to predominately use Facebook and posted 0-2 times per week. Most of the social media was used to inform stakeholders about what services the organization provided or activities that the organization is offering instead of offering opportunities for dialogic communication. Most of the organizations studied did not have social media policies or a way to evaluate the effectiveness of their social media usage.

### **Implications for Practice**

The included studies emphasized the need for well-thought-out policies for HSOs' social media use as well as a way to evaluate its usefulness in noting whether or not it is successful. In order to do that, HSOs need to consider their own mission and stakeholders. They must think about confidentiality and their clientele, especially if they serve a vulnerable population that needs specific social media policies to protect them. When thinking about policies, it is essential for HSOs to think about what their goals for social media use are. Do they want to use it to inform the public about services and activities? Do they want to solicit funding and resources? Do they want feedback from the public on how they are doing? They should also think about what a successful social media campaign would look like using not only social media metrics (likes, comments, shares, and views), but also if it brought in additional funding, resources, or volunteers.

It is vital that at least one person be assigned as the social media point person for the HSO who knows the social media policies of the organization and should make posts at least weekly. They should also be available to monitor the organization's pages and make use of the platforms' dialogic capabilities. Social media gives HSOs a unique opportunity to know what stakeholders are saying about their organization and to acknowledge and address it thoughtfully, increasing the organization's reputation as the literature shows that the Red Cross did after their

Hurricane Katrina social media challenges.

### **Limitations**

This area of research is only now emerging, so the findings of this review were limited. The studies themselves were narrow in scope. The studies focused on what the human service organizations say about themselves and none focused on what stakeholders said about the human service organizations. The studies often had a small sample size limiting their generalizability to other organizations. The instruments used in the quantitative research were new and needed additional study. The qualitative interviews were self-selected which could influence findings. However, with all the limitations, this is a start in helping leaders of human service organizations understand the potential that social media has to offer.

### **Future Research**

One of the biggest challenges for leaders of human service organizations in this area is the lack of knowledge in how to ethically set up policies and guidelines for social media use with an assessment plan in place to measure the success of their plan. A HSO social media curriculum/workshop using Ledingham's relationship management theory as a guide should be developed and evaluated to give leaders social media tools to empower their outreach to stakeholders. Social media has the potential to level the playing field for local human service organizations in connecting to stakeholders.

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Case Study of a Human Service Nonprofit Organization's Social Media Use: A Qualitative  
Content Analysis

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### Abstract

Americans are using social media to connect to each other and organizations in greater numbers while human service nonprofit organizations (HSOs) are reticent to use this new platform.

Research for using this tool is in preliminary stage and has found HSOs use social media to give stakeholders information, recruit volunteers, collaborate with their community and advertise events. This case study utilizes a content analysis of an exemplar HSO's Facebook posts over the course of four months. Themes that emerged were the HSO acknowledging stakeholders and collaborations, a call to action, empowering clients, and informative posts.

*Keywords:* nonprofit, social media, online, Internet, social networking, human services, case study, content analysis

## Case Study of a Human Service Nonprofit Organization's Social Media Use: A Qualitative Content Analysis

As of 2017, seven in ten Americans used social media for amusement, to network with their friends and family, to learn about current events, and to share information. Americans are now using the Internet in ways that give human service nonprofit organizations a remarkable opportunity to connect with stakeholders in ways that they could not have done even ten years ago. As the Internet's capabilities have advanced, social media has expanded to give people ways to interact and network by allowing them to create content instead of only consuming it (Young, 2012). Part of that expansion includes an ever-evolving list of digital platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, that let nonprofits reach stakeholders in fast, cheap, and collaborative ways (Valentini, 2015). Social media diminishes a nonprofits' need for mass media to reach the broader public. It has thoroughly changed the way organizations and individuals communicate with each other and has shaped the way nonprofit organizations raise money and resources, organize, and advocate for policies and clients (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014).

For this article, human services nonprofit organizations (HSO) is broadly defined as an organization that meets individuals' needs using interdisciplinary knowledge. It underscores prevention, improving quality of life and alleviating problems clients might find themselves facing. Human services nonprofit organizations include direct practitioners as well as those that work in conjunction with individuals providing supportive services.

Researchers have just started to look at the use of social media for stakeholder engagement, and so this area of scholarship is still in the exploratory phase. Most of the research has examined large, prominent human service nonprofit organizations instead of smaller, community-based organizations. Little has been done to look at specific examples of what



smaller-scale human service nonprofit organizations are doing in the field. This article aims to begin to fill that gap by providing a qualitative content analysis of an exemplar nonprofit's posts on Facebook over the course of four months to discover what stakeholders connected to the most and to offer potential guidelines for human service nonprofit organizations to follow.

### **Literature Review**

Because this area of research is still so new, there are a limited number of studies that have looked specifically at how human service nonprofit organizations have interacted with stakeholders using social media. Published studies have usually focused on HSO's use of Facebook since that was the most prevalently used social media platform at the time, but they have also used other platforms including LinkedIn, Twitter, and Youtube (Campbell, Labright & Wells, 2014; Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011; Goldkind, 2014, 2015b; Livermore & Verbvaya, 2016; Young, 2017). Existing studies focus on HSOs' level of social media engagement, reasons for social media use, and barriers to social media use.

#### **Level of social media engagement**

Goldkind (2015a) reported that social media is not a major communication outlet for human service nonprofit organizations. The amount of social media engagement often depended on how old the HSO was. Older HSOs were less likely to use any forms of social media, perhaps because they established connections to their stakeholders prior to the rise of social media (Goldkind, 2014). HSOs with larger budgets have had higher levels of social media engagement. Young (2017) studied the amount of times his HSO participants posted on social media each week and found that 74% posted 0-2 posts per week, while 22% posted 3-5 posts per week. Goldkind (2015a) categorized HSO social media users as non-user HSOs, beginner-sporadic HSOs, and advanced beginner HSOs. 20% of her participants were non-user HSOs. In these

cases, access to social media platforms was blocked by administration or use was limited, and it was considered a waste of resources. 50% of the HSOs were beginner-sporadic and had social media accounts, but no policies to guide how they interacted with the medium. Advanced beginners used more than one social media platform, had policies and goals to guide their posts, and evaluated whether they met their benchmarks.

### **Reason for social media use**

The most common theme in the literature for why HSOs use social media is to notify the public about the services HSOs offer (Campbell et al., 2014; Briones et al., 2011; Young, 2017). They (HSO's) also use it to recruit volunteers (Briones, et al. 2011), collaborate with community partners (Livermore & Verbvaya, 2016), and advertise events (Campbell, et al., 2014; Young, 2017). The consensus in the literature seems to be that HSOs do not take advantage of the main purpose of social media which is dialogic communication (Campbell, et al., 2014; Goldkind, 2014; Goldkind 2015a), though Young (2017) found that engaging with the community was one of the top two reasons given for social media use. Engaging with the community, however, does not specifically mean two-way communication. Campbell, et al. (2014) only had one of 40 HSO managers interviewed say that their HSO used social media to gain constituent feedback. This is a missed opportunity for HSOs. Briones', et al. (2011) study completed a content analysis of 40 employees who managed their local American Red Cross's social media accounts and found that one of the main social media uses was open dialogic communication between the HSO and stakeholders, building relationships in the community, spreading awareness of the organization, and volunteer recruitment and engagement. In Goldkind's (2015) qualitative study, several HSO leaders recognized that social media promotes two-way communication between an organization and their stakeholders.

**Barriers to social media use**

Obstacles to HSO's social media use breaks down into lack of resources (Briones, et al., 2011; Campbell, et al., 2014; Goldkind, 2014; Goldkind, 2015a; Goldkind, 2015b; Young, 2017) and lack of policy and evaluation procedures (Goldkind, 2014; Goldkind, 2015a; Young, 2017). A lack of resources includes not having the capacity or staff proficiency to manage social media (Campbell et al., 2014), not having sufficient time or personnel to update social media frequently or problems getting board members to buy in to using it (Briones et al., 2011; Goldkind, 2014, 2015a, Young, 2017), and a lack of research to guide practice in this area (Goldkind, 2015b). A lack of policy and evaluation procedures included little instruction in how to successfully execute and administer social media strategies (Goldkind, 2014), no discernable plan for evaluating the use social media (Goldkind, 2015a), and the need for strategically thinking about social media policies to achieve an HSO's goals and realize beneficial outcomes (Young, 2017). One study also showed the concerns HSO leaders had about using social media when serving vulnerable populations because of confidentiality (Campbell, 2014).

**Methodology**

This field of research is still new and most articles that examine this area concentrate on large nonprofit organizations like the Red Cross or have looked broadly at many HSOs at the same time. The goal of this case study was to understand what an individual human service nonprofit organization posts on Facebook and find what stakeholders of that HSO connected with the most. The design method was a qualitative, exploratory single-case study which looked at a phenomenon in the real-life context of social media (Denzin, 2012; Tsang, 2014).

A conventional content analysis was conducted of the Facebook posts of a nonprofit human service provider from a mid-Atlantic moderately-sized city. The researcher used

descriptive phenomenology, looking for themes that emerged naturally without preconceived categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This HSO's Facebook posts were chosen specifically because the organization fit within Goldkind's advanced beginner category for HSO social media users. The organization posted 3-5 times a week on multiple social media platforms and had a social media policy. The researcher did not contact the service provider but collected public Facebook posts from December 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018. The number of likes/reactions, comments, shares, and type of medium posted were also collected. This time period was chosen to reflect an average quarter of the year that also included a significant holiday as holidays contain additional types of posts not shown during the rest of the year. Posts were collected until saturation was obtained and no new information emerged.

The posts were converted into a Word document and uploaded to a standard qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, to aid in bringing to light patterns and themes. One of the drawbacks to the conventional content analysis design is the possibility of not finding key categories and therefore not precisely characterizing the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In order to enhance reliability, I coded all of the data once and then went over the data an additional three times to ensure that the coding was done consistently.

## **Results**

The focus of this study was on one human service nonprofit organization's social media posts over a period of four months, treating this organization as a case study in the use of social media. In this section, I will present the analysis results pertaining to the following categories that were found: acknowledging stakeholders and collaborations, a call to action, empowering clients, and informative posts, as well as the tone in which the material was presented on the

social media platform. For each category, I present a summary of the key themes that emerged from the total of 88 statements that were coded.

### **Acknowledging stakeholders and collaborations**

Nearly twenty percent of posts (n = 88) acknowledged stakeholders and collaborating agencies, thanking stakeholders and tagging collaborators. This theme included code groups: acknowledgement of funder, thanking coalition, thanking community volunteers, thanking law enforcement, thanking private funders, connections to outside nonprofit agencies, emphasis on collaboration, links to a coalition group, and linked posts tagging the nonprofit as a community member. Tagging allows social media users to engage with one another when they mention another profile in a post or comment. In Facebook, tagging alerts the recipient and hyperlinks to the tagged profile which increases the tagged account's social media reach. Some examples include:

Thank you to everyone who helped make our holiday bazaar such a success. Because of you over a hundred families will have a brighter Christmas.

The post included a graphic of a Christmas present with a tag that said, "Thank you". Another post example regarding a collaboration:

We are so grateful to [Private] Foundation for their support of our work to save lives, rebuild lives and secure safer futures for victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

### **Call to action**

One-fourth of the posts included a call to action for stakeholders following their Facebook posts included the following code groups: general calls to action, information for the community about the needs of clients, opportunities for the community to give, opportunities to

volunteer at the nonprofit, and opportunities to work there. Some of the posts were a small action step that did not cost much for the stakeholder:

February is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. Wear orange for love this Tuesday, February 13. #Orange4Love #HandsUnite #RespectWeek2018 #[Nonprofit Agency specific hashtag]

In the picture: “Wear Orange day Tuesday, Feb. 13”

Title for the picture: Wear Orange Day is a national day of awareness where we encourage everyone to wear orange in honor of Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month tell people why you are wearing orange and post pictures and updates on Instagram and twitter using #Orange4love #HandsUnite #Respectweek2018.”

Other posts asked more of the agency’s stakeholders whether that was a financial donation or for stakeholders to join the agency by volunteering:

Interested in sharing your gifts with others by volunteering at [Nonprofit Agency]? Join us at our next Volunteer Information Session on Wednesday, March 7 at 6 pm. No RSVP required.

The comment was posted along with a Venn diagram graphic saying “Find your gifts” on one side, and “Share your gifts” on the other with “become a [Nonprofit Agency] volunteer” in the shared space of the diagram.

### **Empowering clients**

21.59% of the posts had the following code groups: empowering quotes, message from a client, and/or a picture that evokes emotion. The empowering quotes usually were geared toward enhancing a client’s self-worth:

Here's to strong women. May we know them. May we be them. May we raise them.  
Happy International Women's Day.

In the graphic: "Her Time. She has been feeling it for a while—that sense of awakening. There is a gentle rage simmering inside her—she will nurture it and let it grow. She won't let anyone take it away from her. It is her rocket fuel and finally, she is going places. She can feel it down to her very core—this is her time. She will not only climb mountains—she will move them too. –Lang Leav

It is interesting to note there was only one picture and quote of a client in all four months of posts that were monitored:

Picture of an African American woman staring directly into the camera lens: For so long, I was told by my husband I was nothing, I had nothing and I could be nothing. [Nonprofit agency] helped me realize I really am something.

The HSO did not post very many pictures of people. The pictures they posted were of staff, volunteers, decorations, or gifts given. When they posted pictures geared toward clients, they were pictures meant to evoke emotion. For example, the agency posted a picture of a woman jumping with an umbrella in shadow in the foreground and a sunset and blue sky in the background with the words:

I choose to be unstoppable. I am bigger than my concerns and worries. The strength of others inspires me daily. I focus on my goal. I trust my intuition and live a courageous life.

### **Informative posts**

The majority (47.73%) of the posts had an informative component to them, whether that was information about types of domestic violence or information about the HSO itself.

Information about domestic violence included the code groups: connections to a broader conversation about sexual assaults on women, information about abusive partners, information about sexual assault, stalking, teen dating violence, victims of domestic violence, new domestic violence policies, and the number of possible victims of domestic violence in the county.

Leaving is a process. Not an event.” In the graphic: 75% of women who are killed in domestic violence homicides are murdered after they leave or in the process of leaving. Another post was a black and white picture of the back of a child in a heavy coat and hat shown with the back of a man in a coat. The man’s hand is grabbing onto the child’s coat and pulling. The comments stated, “Abusive partner used children to control victims. Abusive partners often threaten to gain sole custody, kill, kidnap or otherwise harm children if victims leave.”

Some posts were strictly information about the agency:

[Nonprofit Agency’s] office will be closed Monday, 12/25 and Tuesday, 12/26 for the Christmas holiday. Counselors are available 24/7 if you or someone you know needs to speak with a counselor. 24 Hour Crisis Hotline Domestic Violence: [phone number], Rape/Sexual Assault: [phone number], Solace Center: [phone number], Spanish Crisis Hotline: [phone number]. If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.”

The post included a colorful graphic that said, “Merry Christmas”.

Some posts combined both information about domestic violence and services the HSO provides to the community.

Domestic and sexual violence don’t take a holiday. They are an everyday, round-the-clock occurrence. [Nonprofit agency] provides a life-line of support – and a true home away from home – at holiday time and year-round. Though [Nonprofit Agency] served more than 9,600 victims last year, we cannot forget that as many as 100,000 [County]



residents may live silently at some time in their lives with abuse and violence in their homes.

Many of the post included more than one theme within it. For instance, the following post combined themes of collaboration, empowering clients, information about domestic violence, and information about services provided for clients:

The nonprofit shared a post with a picture in sepia tone with a dark hooded figure in the foreground and a Caucasian woman looking at the figure with a concerned expression: January is National Stalking Awareness month. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 76 percent of women murdered by an intimate partner were stalked first. If you are a victim of stalking and need help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE. [website link to a fact sheet about domestic violence and stalking].

## **Discussion**

### **Summary of major findings**

The findings in this study were similar to the ones found in the literature regarding reasons HSOs posted on social media. Campbell et al. (2014), Briones et al. (2011), and Young, (2017) all found a primary reason for posting was to inform the public about services offered. Similarly, there were double the amount of informative posts in this study than any other type of post. This HSO also used posts to recruit volunteers, link to collaborations in their community, and advertise for events they were hosting just as Briones, et al. (2011), Livermore and Verbvaya (2016), and Young (2017) found.

One of the largest barriers to HSOs using social media is concern regarding confidentiality of clients (Campbell, 2014). It is important to note that this particular nonprofit

agency dealt with an extremely vulnerable population but found interesting ways to work around their clients' need for confidentiality. They posted only one picture of a client during the four months their posts were monitored, and that post was about a client who had already been through their services and offered a testimonial of her experience. The agency dealt with confidentiality by posting graphics they developed and innocuous pictures that could have been taken from any general Google search. They made their own memes that were meaningful to their particular audience. Memes are pieces of cultural information that are circulated from person to person, slowly becoming a collective social phenomenon. Although they spread on a micro level, they have a large impact: shaping mindsets, informing behavior and actions of social groups (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006). By developing their own memes, they bypass the individual client, protecting their anonymity, and speak to universal truths about their clients' lives.

Just as Campbell, et al. (2014), Goldkind (2014), and Goldkind (2015a) found a lack of two-way communication in their studies, one piece missing from this nonprofit agency's social media statuses was their response to stakeholders. In their four months of posting 88 Facebook updates, they only responded to stakeholders' comments seven times. Most of those responses were related to specific requirements of donated materials that people wanted to give, e.g. only donate new toys, not used. This lack of didactic engagement was a missed opportunity for further interchange with people paying attention to their posts. One instance involved a woman posting a comment to a status update about problems she had previously experienced with a restraining order that was ignored by the perpetrating party. The agency did not interact with her comment with a reaction or response. They potentially missed an opportunity to reiterate the dangers victims face as they try to get away.

**Limitations of the study**

This was a case study of one exemplar human service nonprofit organization, therefore, there are limitations on how far the findings can be generalized or applied. Geographical and regional influences might have impacted the HSO's actions on social media. Another limitation is that the researcher was the only one to code the data which could have been affected by bias. Future studies could consider adding a second rater to participate in the coding.

**Implications for Human Service Nonprofit Organizations**

The findings affirm previous studies in this field as human service nonprofit organizations intersect with social media. As HSOs use social media, it is important that they ensure their practice adheres to the ethical needs of their clients for confidentiality. The case study in this research gives a good example of how to mix giving a community informative posts about their clients and services, acknowledging stakeholders' help with their organization, continuing to connect to collaborative agencies, challenging their stakeholders to act on their clients' behalf, and empowering their clients. It also challenges agencies to remember those previously missed didactic opportunities for which social media platforms were purposefully developed.

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Social Media for Social Good: Practical Lessons for the Current State of Literature for Nonprofit

Human Service Organizations' Use of Social Media

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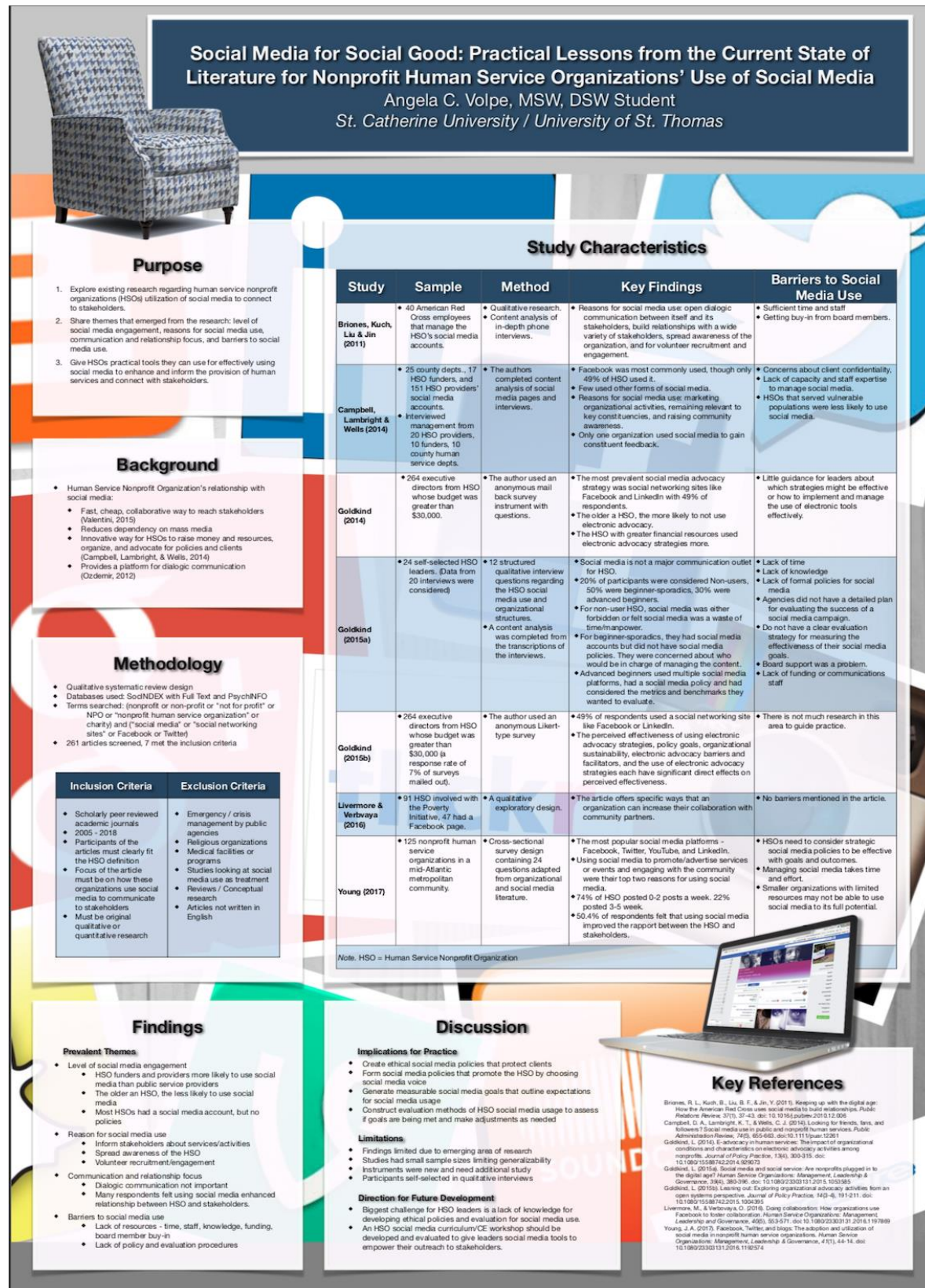
### Abstract

Social media is one of the fastest growing and most influential sectors of the Internet. Social workers in nonprofit human service organizations have been slow to adopt this tool to reach stakeholders. This poster presents a qualitative systematic review of this newly emerging research area. It examines existing studies to learn how human service nonprofits utilize social media to enhance and inform the provision of human services. The review included a methodical literature search by identifying peer-reviewed references related to human service nonprofits and their use of social media. Themes that emerged from the study included human service nonprofits' use of social media for information sharing, raising awareness of issues, fundraising, and marketing. The research found that they were often reluctant to fully engage with the public on social media using dialogic communication. It also became clear that organizations need to develop ethical social media usage policies. Human service nonprofits would do well to consider what they want to get out of social media as an organization. Most currently do this haphazardly. Successful users of social media platforms had a clear vision of what their social media policies were and how to ethically implement them. They generated content almost daily and allowed stakeholders to have conversations with them in this public forum to build trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction. Social media in its current form has existed for less than fifteen years. Continued research is needed to address how best to communicate with stakeholders through this powerful medium to enhance the services that nonprofit human service organizations offer.

*Keywords:* Nonprofit Human Services Organization, Social Media

The third scholarly product was a poster presentation at a peer-reviewed conference prepared to give social workers in nonprofit organizations practical tools to manage their social media and effectively connect with stakeholders pulling from the findings of Product One. The abstract was submitted and accepted to the Social Work, Education and Social Development (SWSD) Conference, held from July 4-7, 2018 in Dublin, Ireland. The conference is organized every two years by a joint committee represented by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW). Twenty-five hundred social work practitioners, educators, and researchers from around the globe gathered to learn the most recent innovations in social work. This conference specifically called for abstracts regarding the sustainable and ethical use of technology in human services. This poster presentation was presented on July 6, 2018.





### Findings

**Prevalent Themes**

- Level of social media engagement
  - HSO funders and providers more likely to use social media than public service providers
  - The older an HSO, the less likely to use social media
  - Most HSOs had a social media account, but no policies
- Reason for social media use
  - Inform stakeholders about services/activities
  - Spread awareness of the HSO
  - Volunteer recruitment/engagement
- Communication and relationship focus
  - Dialogic communication not important
  - Many respondents felt using social media enhanced relationship between HSO and stakeholders.
- Barriers to social media use
  - Lack of resources - time, staff, knowledge, funding, board member buy-in
  - Lack of policy and evaluation procedures

### Discussion

**Implications for Practice**

- Create ethical social media policies that protect clients
- Form social media policies that promote the HSO by choosing social media voice
- Generate measurable social media goals that outline expectations for social media usage
- Construct evaluation methods of HSO social media usage to assess if goals are being met and make adjustments as needed

**Limitations**

- Findings limited due to emerging area of research
- Studies had small sample sizes limiting generalizability
- Instruments were new and need additional study
- Participants self-selected in qualitative interviews

**Direction for Future Development**

- Biggest challenge for HSO leaders is a lack of knowledge for developing ethical policies and evaluation for social media use.
- An HSO social media curriculum/CE workshop should be developed and evaluated to give leaders social media tools to empower their outreach to stakeholders.

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Figure 1. Poster Presentation.

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