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## Creating online communities to build positive relationships and increase engagement in not-for-profit organisations

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### Abstract

*The introduction of social media and social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, has created public relations opportunities for not-for-profit (NFP) organisations that are substantially different from those available via traditional websites. Of the many types of social media that exist, Facebook is the most valued platform by businesses, which is no surprise as Facebook has the largest user rate and a diverse range of users globally, making it a perfect platform through which organisations can target their stakeholders. Drawing on a recent case study of the use of closed Facebook groups by the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA), this paper demonstrates how SNSs such as Facebook can be used by NFP organisations to create online communities that provide support for their stakeholders while building positive relationships that work towards achieving the elusive two-way symmetrical model of communication.*

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### Keywords

breastfeeding; Facebook; public relations; social networking sites; not-for-profit; excellence theory

## Introduction

The introduction of social media and social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, has created public relations opportunities for not-for-profit (NFP) organisations that are substantially different from those available via traditional websites. In addition to the static functions available on traditional websites, social media have enabled messaging capabilities, many interactive features, and most notably, the ability for these organisations to create their own communities and formal social networks (Saxton & Waters, 2014). Of the many types of social media that exist, Facebook is the most valued platform by businesses, which is no surprise as Facebook has the largest user rate and a diverse range of users globally, making it a perfect platform for organisations to target their stakeholders (Mangles, 2017). With features like groups, pages and 'likes', it can also unite a group of stakeholders with similar interests (Mangles, 2017).

Until now, research into computer-mediated public relations has been predominantly quantitative and undertaken with one of two main purposes: gathering behavioural data on organisations' actions (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Saxton & Waters, 2014; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001), or gathering attitudinal, survey-based and/or experimental data designed to measure stakeholder reactions to organisations' relationship-building efforts (Hall, 2006; Huang, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2007; Saxton & Waters, 2014; Waters & Bortree, 2010). Although both approaches have their merits, what has not been previously examined in great detail is how not-for-profit organisations encourage organisational relationship building via the creation of online communities aimed at providing support for their stakeholders. Drawing on a recent case study of the use of closed Facebook groups by the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA), this paper demonstrates how SNSs such as Facebook can be used by NFP organisations to create online communities that provide support for their stakeholders while building positive relationships that work towards achieving engagement, resulting in the creation of social capital (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

## Literature Review

### *Organisation-public relationships*

Public relations theory has undergone significant evolution over the past 20 years (Taylor & Kent, 2014). For a long time, Excellence theory (Grunig & Grunig, 2008) was the dominant paradigm and was considered to be the primary theory that demonstrated ethical public relations. More recently, several other theories have emerged as alternatives for describing the complexity of communication and organisation-public relationships (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Some of these new theories include organization-public relations (OPRs) (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000), contingency (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997), and dialogue (Botan, 1997; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Pearson, 1989; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). As a result, public relations scholars became aware that they needed to reconsider pre-existing concepts such as relationship, public, two-way communication, and the concept of engagement (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

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Public relations is a communication activity that assists organisations to engage multiple publics (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Ferguson (1984) asserts that the issue of relationships between an organisation and its key publics should be the central unit of study of the public relations researcher. The theory that claims public relations as a relationship management purports a four-step management process of analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation (Broom & Sha, 2012). In addition, the term public relations also implies that the discipline should focus on an organization's relationships with its key publics, concern itself with the dimensions upon which that relationship is built, and determine the impact that the OPR has on the organization and its key publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 56). In the current public relations landscape, OPRs are viewed as vitally important to organisations and their public relations activities.

### *Engagement and social capital*

The term engagement is used regularly in public relations literature, but is often left undefined. Taylor and Kent (2014) argue that engagement is a part of dialogue and through engagement, organisations and their publics can create social capital. Social capital is defined as the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures (Portes, 1998, p. 6). The term social capital suggests that the particular asset is attained through being involved in a community (Feldman & Zoller, 2012). The social ties that link community members together in a network are called bonding social capital (Putnam, 1995), which is commonly described as happening horizontally (Zahra & McGehee, 2013). An example of bonding social capital within a community might be the organisation of an informal community support group (Soulard, Knollenberg, Bynum Boley, Perdue, & McGehee, 2018).

Engagement can both influence interactions and guide the process of interactions among groups. The term engagement appears throughout modern public relations literature and a review of the literature reveals the term has been used in five different contexts: social media engagement, employee engagement, CSR and engagement, civic engagement and social capital, and dialogic engagement (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Engagement has historically been described as a form of one-way communication, most articles describing this from an organisational perspective while context rather than enactment is the focus of much of the literature (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Taylor and Kent (2014) argue that it is best to position engagement within dialogue theory, and argue that without engagement, there can be no dialogue. Dialogue as an established theory of ethics, purports that organizations should engage with stakeholders and publics to make things happen, to help make better decisions, to keep citizens informed, and to strengthen organizations and society (p. 388).

### *Social media use by organisations*

The term social media refers to internet-based applications that enable users to generate and exchange their own web-based content, and vary in terms of the amount of self-disclosure and information richness they support online (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media platforms such as Facebook offer organisations substantial opportunities for two-way communication and information exchange with their stakeholders without utilising traditional high-cost marketing techniques such as

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direct mail, meetings, or phone calls. Facebook posts and other social media activities allow organisations to reach out to stakeholders simultaneously as a group, of whom many will engage with those organisations via social media (A. F. Clark, Maxwell, & Anestaki, 2016). Social media offer a platform where organisations can develop and nurture online relationships with their stakeholders and engage them in open, two-way conversation (Briones, Kuch, Fisher Liu, & Jin, 2011; DiStaso & Bortree, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), without the time constraints of face-to-face interactions.

How stakeholders become and stay involved with organisations on Facebook via likes, shares, and comments is referred to as social media engagement and the social media industry defines engagement in terms of the responses made by end users (Big Commerce, 2018; Facebook, 2018; Wall Street Journal, 2015). The same definitions are also utilised in calculating stakeholder engagement among NFP organisations (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015; Saxton & Waters, 2014) and the number of likes, shares, and comments is used to assess stakeholders' preferred Facebook content for not-for-profit organisations on the Non-profit Times Top 100 list (Saxton & Waters, 2014). Facebook users prefer two-way communication over simple information sharing, and posts focused on community-building attract higher levels of engagement (A. F. Clark et al., 2016). When utilised effectively, social media embodies an interactive paradigm of public relations by highlighting the concepts of engagement, transparency, authenticity and dialogue in the online environment. However, although social media can display these characteristics, it would rarely demonstrate all of them all of the time.

One of the major criticisms of social media from a public relations perspective is how it can be used to deceive and mislead, and how it is often engaged purely for one-way delivery of information rather than meeting its objective of two-way communication (Schoenmaker, 2014). Schoenmaker's (2014) case study analysis of social media use in public relations practice revealed that social media is not as social as the name suggests, as practitioners' online behaviour indicates they are sharing and conversing, but not relating. Practitioners' use of social media demonstrates its interactivity but further guidance is required to create strategies for online interactions that surpass sharing, and result in online relationships (Linke & Zerfass, 2013). Public relations practitioners are generally very skilled in relating to their stakeholders offline and the focus needs to shift to developing equal knowledge in relating online (Schoenmaker, 2014). Many organisations have recognised the opportunities social media provides for engaging with stakeholders and have eagerly adopted it as a part of their communication tool kit (Cho, Schweickart, & Haase, 2014).

### *Social media and public relations theory*

Public relations scholars Grunig and Hunt (1984), developed four models of public relations: press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric. James Grunig then led a series of studies in which the idea of two-way symmetric communication as a best practice in public relations was further developed (Verheyden & Cardon, 2018). These studies culminated in a normative framework that continues to influence public relations theory today. However, Excellence Theory has attracted its share of criticism and public relations professionals need to move beyond the initial simplistic four models of

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communication to meet the public relations needs of organisations, both now and into the future (Kenny, 2016).

Consequently, Kent and Taylor (2002) stated that 'a theoretical shift+had changed the emphasis in public relations from managing communicationto communication as a tool for negotiating relationships+(p. 23). With the advent of social media, Grunig (2009) was hopeful that public relations practice would become more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible. Similarly, Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2012) refer to 'the public relations industry's infatuation with social media as a way of engaging in dialogue+(p. 9). Indeed, the first three of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) communication models (press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetric) place the emphasis on the organisation, whereas the two-way symmetrical model assigns all parties equal power position in the communication process (Verheyden & Cardon, 2018). However, although the majority of contemporary public relations theory emphasises the importance of two-way communication, it is difficult to find examples of two-way communication where power differentials are consciously addressed and mitigated (Macnamara, 2009).

Taylor and Kent (1998) pioneered the study of how organisations build relationships through the internet with two-way dialogic communication channels. They noted that the internet provides an opportunity to create OPRs through dialogic components (such as online forums) that provide input by and communication to stakeholders. Since this research was undertaken, several new social media channels have emerged including Facebook, but the basic principles of relationship building through dialogic communication on the internet still remain. The principles include: 1) include useful information on the site; 2) frequently update sites and generate new content to engage publics and encourage return visits; 3) make the sites easy to use and navigate; and 4) strive to keep publics on the site (Briones et al., 2011).

Since then, further research on dialogic communication via the internet has included Taylor et al. (2001) who found many organisations are not using the Internet in a dialogic manner, and Bortree and Seltzer (2009) who found this to be true in terms of blogs and social networking sites. One of their key findings was that organisations need to adhere to Taylor and Kent's (1998) principles by responding to posts and providing useful information. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) started with Taylor and Kent's (1998) dialogic principles and applied five concepts to measure OPRs in the online environment: commitment, control mutuality, communality, trust, and satisfaction. Commitment evaluates how stakeholders view an organisation's commitment to online engagement; control mutuality measures how interactive organisations are with their publics; communality refers to how the organisation and public identify with each other in terms of their values, beliefs, and interests; trust can be hard to achieve in an online OPR as the organisation must be seen as believable, competent, reliable, and consistent; and satisfaction contributes to whether or not the OPR meets the needs of the online community. Kent (2008) updated the original research on dialogic communication to focus on relationship building through blogs and discovered that blogs provide organisations benefits such as issue framing, relationship building, fostering trust, and identification+(p. 37). In summary, research on online relationship management shows that when practitioners understand the aspects of social networking sites, they can use them to engage and develop

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relationships with key publics (Macnamara, 2010; Nah & Saxton, 2012; Taylor & Howell, 2011).

### *Social media and NFP organisations*

Among the most active social media users are NFP organisations who have identified the value of social media as a tool to engage their stakeholders without the need to spend precious dollars (Barns & Andonian, 2011). Existing research surrounding NFPs' use of social media has yielded mixed results. Early studies found that NFPs had not yet utilised social media to their fullest potential as tools to engage stakeholders (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011). More recent research reveals that particular types of NFPs, such as advocacy organisations, are taking full advantage of the opportunity to disseminate information and build relationships with key stakeholders and the public (Guo & Saxton, 2014; JotForm, 2017). However, although there is substantial potential for public engagement, most not-for-profit organisations use social media primarily for the dissemination of information (as it is more cost-effective than traditional media), rather than taking advantage of its interactive functionality (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Cho et al., 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). This impacts the effectiveness of these platforms as a relationship management tool (Sutherland & Mak, 2017). In other words, NFP organisations primarily engage a one-way communication or public information model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) when communicating with their stakeholders via social media (Cho et al., 2014).

SNSs have also created new opportunities for NFP organisations in terms of transparency, dissemination of information, and engagement with stakeholders (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). Generating deep engagement with stakeholders is regarded as the most important potential purpose of SNSs for NFP organisations, because engagement can lead to collective action in the community or facilitate greater social impact (Aaker & Smith, 2010). Online communities represent a new potential for organisations to gather independent advocates for their organisation (Ihm, 2015) and for gathering individuals who self-organise around causes through collaborating with each other (Kanter, 2009).

Sutherland and Mak (2017) acknowledge that social media is in a unique position to facilitate two-way, dialogic communication when compared to traditional media. Furthermore, these platforms enable organisations to keep stakeholders updated with current information and valuable content that can both resonate and inspire positive responses, that can result in building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. To address this issue, Sutherland and Mak (2017) propose blending dialogic and relationship management theories (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Taylor & Kent, 2014) as a theoretical framework to explore social media as a public relations tool for NFP organisations. Furthermore, they have created an Integrated Social Media Communication Model to assist in the understanding of the dynamics of social media and how it can be a tool for cultivating stakeholder relationships (Sutherland & Mak, 2017, p. 129). Through their research into the social media habits of seven Australian NFP organisations, Sutherland and Mak (2017) explain how the integration of social and traditional media in the NFP sector presents three main benefits: 1) it increases the potential that the content will reach wider audiences; 2) it can reduce the use of already

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limited resources by repurposing content; and 3) it improves the likelihood of reinforcing key messages.

### *Social media use in Australia*

Since 2010, the use of SNSs has become a prominent global trend. Facebook is the dominant SNS among Australian users with 97 percent of female SNS users maintaining a Facebook profile (compared with YouTube . 43 percent Instagram . 41 percent and Snapchat . 36 percent (Sensis, 2017, p. 18). In 2016-17, approximately 86 percent of Australian households have access to the internet (up from 83 percent in 2012-13) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). As of May 2018, a total of around 60 percent of the country's population are active Facebook users, and 50 percent of the country log onto Facebook at least once a day (Cowling, 2018). Furthermore, SNS users engage in these platforms to satisfy social-emotional needs rather than just informational needs. Additionally, because SNSs are built based on individuals' existing social ties, the interpersonal relationships on a SNS tend to be more intense than on general online support groups (OSGs), where users often collaborated around a common interest (Rau, Gao, & Ding, 2008).

Given the numerous benefits that social media provides for NFP organisations, this paper draws on a recent study of the ABA's Facebook use to inform public relations practice. It will do so by demonstrating how a NFP organisation can effectively engage in relationship building through two-way communication with its stakeholders via the creation of SNS communities such as closed Facebook groups. The findings of this recent netnographic study of these closed Facebook groups (Bridges, 2016a, 2016b; Bridges, Howell, & Schmied, 2018b), demonstrate how SNSs such as Facebook can be employed by NFP organisations to create online communities that provide support for their stakeholders and build positive relationships.

## **Case study – Australian Breastfeeding Association**

### *Background*

Supporting breastfeeding is a vital public health strategy, as the health benefits of breastmilk span the entire continuum of childhood: new-born, infancy and early childhood (Sankar et al., 2015). Breastfeeding is not only important for babies, but also for mothers and families. Additionally, it has been shown to have substantial economic benefits for the wider community (Victora et al., 2016). The National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC) has endorsed the WHO/UNICEF strategy recommending infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months and continue to be breastfed following the introduction of solid foods until at least 12 months of age (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2013).

However, global rates of breastfeeding remain low with only 43 percent of the world's new-borns put to the breast within one hour of birth (World Health Organization, 2014). Australia has a relatively high breastfeeding initiation rate of 96 percent (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011), yet exclusive breastfeeding rates drop off with less than half (39 percent) of babies still being exclusively breastfed at three months and 15 percent at five months. Breastfeeding peer support is recognised as a vital intervention to support breastfeeding that can be effective in increasing breastfeeding rates (A. Clark, Baker, McGirr, & Harris,

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2018; Phillips et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2018; Thomson, Crossland, & Dykes, 2011). Extensive previous research demonstrates that women value the support they receive from other mothers as they have similar experiences they can relate to (Harari et al., 2018; Nankunda, Tumwine, Nankabirwa, & Tylleskar, 2010; Rossman et al., 2011; Trickey et al., 2018).

In Australia, peer support is provided by the ABA's 1200 trained volunteer breastfeeding counsellors and community educators who support parents via telephone, online and face-to-face services. These include the 24-hour Breastfeeding Helpline, Live Chat, antenatal Breastfeeding Education Classes, local support groups and evidence-based information provided online and in a range of publications. The ABA volunteers providing these services are mothers who have breastfed and completed a Certificate IV in Breastfeeding Education. They work voluntarily to provide empathy, reassurance, and up-to-date information to help other mothers (Australian Government Department of Health, 2017). Recently, these support services have extended to providing peer support via SNSs such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Bridges et al., 2018b).

### *Approach*

The case study data is derived from a netnography that was undertaken following the activities of 15 individual ABA sanctioned closed Facebook groups. Kozinets (year) coined the term 'netnography' which is defined as the use of ethnographic methods to study online communities (cited in James & Busher, 2009). Netnography finds its roots in the area of marketing and consumer research which incorporates insights from a range of research fields, such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies (Kozinets, 2010). Despite this, anthropologists, who are argued to be the original 'ethnographers' have been reluctant to follow communities into the online space (Beaulieu, 2004; Garcia, Standlee, Beckhoff, & Cui, 2009; Hakken, 1999; Miller & Slater, 2000). While the divide between online social life and face-to-face communication was previously thought to be significant (Bargh & McKenna, 2004) many now recognise that the two worlds have blended into one (Hine, 2005; Markham & Baym, 2009; Pink et al., 2015). This hybrid world includes the use of technology to communicate, commune, socialise, express, and understand communities (Kozinets, 2015). All wall posts and comments as images for these groups were captured over a four-week period between July 21 and August 17, 2013. Due to the level of activity in these groups, a four-week period seemed a reasonable time to capture sufficient meaningful data. Additionally, online in-depth interviews with administrators of three of these closed Facebook groups occurred in late 2013 and early 2014. These three groups were chosen as interesting cases for study due to the nature and volume of posts. Six to eight participants from those three groups then participated in online focus groups (Bridges, 2016a).

### *Overview of study findings*

The data collection for the first stage of the netnography study was undertaken by following the activities of these 15 individual ABA sanctioned closed Facebook groups and capturing all wall posts and comments for these groups throughout the four-week data collection period. Data were collected on a total of 778 wall posts with a total of 2,998 comments posted into the initial wall posts. The coding scheme was developed drawing on the published study of health networking sites (Liang &



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Scammon, 2011). The analysis of the closed Facebook groups revealed the nature of support that mothers were seeking and the types of information they enjoyed sharing. The total number of posts was recorded in addition to identifying them as either support seeking (queries) or information sharing (shares) in nature. This means that participants were participating in the groups for one of two primary reasons: 1) to find information and/or emotional support or 2) to share information and/or emotional support. Wall posts were also coded by word length.

For the purposes of analysis, posts and comments were categorised into three main themes: breastfeeding (breastfeeding-related issues), parenting (parenting issues that were not associated with breastfeeding) and the Australian Breastfeeding Association (issues related to the Association and its activities). The wall posts that were support seeking (queries) were also identified as either informational queries (asking for information in the form of suggestions or personal experiences) or a combination of informational and emotional queries (asking for information and expressing emotions). Likewise for wall posts that were support sharing (shares). Furthermore, those that were identified as being a query about breastfeeding were then categorised into breastfeeding topic areas. The wall posts were also coded according to the number of comments that were posted in response to the wall posts (queries/shares) in addition to the time it took for participants to respond to the initial query or share. Further, the comments for each wall post were coded into three different subcategories: informational responses, emotional responses and informational and emotional responses. Interestingly, there were no comments identified that contained only emotion, as they were all accompanied by some element of information. Where the original poster replied to these comments, they were coded into the following three subcategories: informational comment responses, emotional comment responses, and informational and emotional comment responses (Bridges, Howell, & Schmied, 2018a).

The study found that when asking for support and when sharing information, the majority of users were seeking or sharing a combination of informational and emotional support (Bridges et al., 2018a). Support providers made comments that matched the query and featured precision, timeliness, credibility and depth. Additionally, the types of support-providing comments were significantly associated with the types of support-seeking posts. For example, here is a post from a mother who is clearly seeking informational and emotional support as she is very concerned about the prospect of leaving her baby and returning to work:

Very nervous about working next week. It is for a few hrs in Mt Waverley. I can either leave \*\*\*\* with hubby and EBM and hope for the best, leave her with hubby and formula and hope for the best, leave them with both + solids and hope something works, or have the whole family come to Mt Waverly with me so I can feed her before and after work. I really didn't imagine when I accepted this work months ago that she might not take EBM. I thought by 6.5 months she'd be set. Any ideas?

The response from one of the support providers clearly provides some practical information while reassuring the mother and providing emotional support:

She'll be fine, enjoy your day! Hubby will cope with whatever decision you make and if she doesn't take much, nothing bad will happen, she is safe and cared for! Maybe verse him on only warming up very small amounts and he could always cup

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feed it so she stays hydrated. And if she's liking solids, that could always be a backup to distract her.

The findings also indicated that the support from support providers matched the requests from support seekers, providing congruency and also relationality (Bridges et al., 2018a). In many cases, positive feedback was provided directly from the support seekers in the comments of the original post, indicating that the support provided was helpful:

My baby is nearly 7 months and it's a long story but he's had 120ml formula every evening. Two weeks ago he started fussing with the bottle and last night was the third night he hasn't had it. This morning his nappy was no where near as wet as usual. He also snacked all night when normally he only has 2-3 feeds. Do you think this is my supply trying to adjust? I don't intend to go back to the bottle. Shall I persevere? Does anyone have any thoughts? Tia :)

Several helpful responses were provided by other members of the online community, and the following day the support seeker provided this update, indicating that the suggestions from the support providers had been helpful:

Thanks all, seems bubs is back to relative norm, nappies are full again and he didn't feed til 6am this morning. He is taking 1 1/2 hours to put to sleep this week first time in his little life this has been a problem (I've been very spoiled to date so am a bit miffed!) don't know what it's about, doesn't seem to be teething, or wonder week, who knows, hope it's not permanent!

This study also identified the specific breastfeeding topics that women were seeking assistance with via SNSs such as Facebook. Of the 72 queries that were specific breastfeeding questions, 55 (76 percent) were categorised into the three topic areas of breastfeeding management, breastfeeding and health, and breastfeeding and work. These are all topics cited as some of the most common reasons for weaning, and important areas for future study. The research also found that these types of SNSs are more likely to facilitate an authentic presence and facilitative style, both recognised as the most effective methods of breastfeeding support (Bridges et al., 2018b).

A thematic analysis of the depth interview and focus group data identified the overarching theme was support, with four sub-themes that describe the nature of online breastfeeding support within the Facebook environment. The first of these sub-themes is community. Participants reported a sense of community and connectedness as a result of the peer support found within the ABA's closed Facebook groups, as demonstrated by the comment below:

It gives mums an avenue to vent and share her experiences and feelings, and connect with other mothers who are in a similar situation.

The second sub-theme discovered is that of the complementary nature of support that the Facebook groups provided. Much of the literature exploring SNSs looks exclusively at the SNS as a stand-alone intervention, and not in conjunction with other resources and forms of breastfeeding support. Indeed, the results of this study have highlighted how the online community can complement the face-to-face support network without completely replacing it:

It can be everything to everyone 100% of the time . and that's where this online group complements the F2F so well I think.

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The third theme identified was the access to a breastfeeding community . exactly when and where participants needed it. This immediacy was viewed as one of the key factors contributing to the success of the online community:

The times that I've needed support have been urgent and someone is always right there online with their experiences to help you through.

Finally, participants also described the way the closed Facebook groups met their needs for information and education about breastfeeding:

Information provided is interesting, posted often and is relevant.

The SNSs provided support from a trusted community. This support was immediate, complemented existing support or services of the ABA, and also provided practical and valuable information for its users (Bridges, 2016b).

Many mothers described the personal benefit they derive from the support gained from being a member of these online communities:

I need this group for daily shots of reassurance as I continue to bf my 2yo twins. I only have one friend (who doesn't live nearby) who has bf her children past 1yo, and none of my sisters/cousins etc have had kids yet so I need to touch base with a community of people who know that it's NORMAL and really really great for my children.

This quote from a participant who is also a volunteer administrator of one of the SNSs, describes the important contribution of these online communities:

• it has increased the sharing of breastfeeding information, increased support for breastfeeding mothers in our community, increased numbers at group meet ups & increased our membership numbers.

### Discussion

As social media is now mainstream, NFP organisations need to update their strategies and tactics to build positive relationships and increase engagement, and social capital. This case study illuminates the importance of social media for NFPs like the ABA and demonstrates how this type of organisation can achieve these goals using social media. The ABA has achieved this via the creation of online communities that not only meet the needs of their stakeholders through the provision of informational and emotional support for breastfeeding mothers, but also contribute to the broader public health aim of increasing breastfeeding rates. This study revealed that the majority of community members are not simply seeking information, typical of a one-way communication model (Grunig & Grunig, 2008), rather they are seeking informational and emotional support that can only be achieved through a two-way symmetrical dialogue as demonstrated in these Facebook communities, and as preferred by the majority of Facebook users (A. F. Clark et al., 2016). These online communities have demonstrated effective engagement, resulting in the creation of social capital for their members (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

The ABA is displaying successful dialogic social media use, demonstrating Taylor and Kent's (1998) principles. They have clearly shared accurate and useful information as indicated by the finding that the support from support providers matched the requests from support seekers, providing congruency and also relationality. The fact that community members reported the immediacy of

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the Facebook groups as being a key feature indicates that members provided frequent updates and timely information to support seekers. Frequent and timely information increases the overall impact of an organisation trying to establish relationships, achieving strategic value for the organisation (Briones et al., 2011).

This study also revealed the importance of a sense of community to the members of these closed Facebook groups, and how it contributed to positive relationships among members. Indeed, community building has been recognised as one of the most significant benefits of social media for NFP and advocacy organisations like the ABA (Campbell, 2018; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Schoenmaker, 2014). NFP organisations stand to benefit from their social media stakeholder relationship building efforts, considering the fact that strategic interaction and sustained relationships with supportive stakeholders lead to higher levels of trust in and commitment to the organisation (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Waters, 2009, 2011).

Another important finding was that of the authentic presence and facilitative style of engagement demonstrated in the ABA's closed Facebook groups (Bridges et al., 2018b). Authentic presence describes care that women felt was supportive and indicates a trusting relationship and connection or rapport between the woman and peer supporter (Schmied, Beake, Sheehan, McCourt, & Dykes, 2011). The facilitative style is defined as 'an approach to health promotion, or helping, that enables people to draw on a range of information and experience and learn for themselves' (Schmied et al., 2011, p. p.53). Furthermore, the data demonstrates evidence of authenticity and engagement which are known to be essential to the interactivity of public relations (Schoenmaker, 2014) and it is recognised that SNSs like Facebook have created new opportunities for NFPs in terms of deep engagement with stakeholders (Lovejoy et al., 2012) which can lead to collective action in the community or facilitate greater social impact via advocacy (Aaker & Smith, 2010; Ihm, 2015; Kanter, 2009).

Finally, the results of the study demonstrate how the ABA have developed online communities that are authentically meeting the needs of their stakeholders, relating back to Hallahan's (2008) concepts of measurement for OPRs in the online environment: the ABA have demonstrated their commitment to online engagement; have created online communities with high levels of interactivity; these are communities where there is a synergy between the organisation and the stakeholders with regard to the values, beliefs and interests of both parties; the closed Facebook groups are recognised as trusted environments; and the fact that the support providers offered comments that matched the original query and featured precision, timeliness, credibility and depth stakeholders are satisfied demonstrates that these groups met the needs of the online community, as peer support is universally recognised as a vital intervention to support breastfeeding (A. Clark et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2018; Thomson et al., 2011).

### **Conclusion**

The ABA is utilising closed Facebook groups to develop relationships that focus on meeting the informational and emotional support needs of their external and internal stakeholders. By providing a two-way symmetric dialogue through social media, that does not primarily focus on promoting the ABA and breastfeeding but rather providing support to its stakeholders, the ABA is able to provide an additional form of

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support that serves several important purposes. While building positive relationships that work towards achieving engagement, these online communities have resulted in the creation of social capital (Taylor & Kent, 2014). This study provides a lesson in opportunities that can be applied to any organisation aimed at providing not only peer support to mothers but peer support in general. Indeed, closed Facebook groups like those engaged by the ABA have led to public relations practice that has become more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical, and socially responsible, as Grunig had envisioned (2009).

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