

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA: A STUDY OF HEALTHCARE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of social media in healthcare nonprofit organizations (HCNPOs). Data were collected from an online survey of 100 HCNPOs in California in 2017 and a follow-up study in 2022. Using both quantitative and qualitative analyses, we address the following research questions: (1) How does the pandemic influence the use of social media in HCNPOs? (2) Does social media improve their organizational effectiveness? Preliminary findings suggest that social media help improve HCNPOs' employee and patient empowerment. Changes in social media strategies during the pandemic will be further discussed. The research contributes to both literature and HCNPO practice.

Keywords: social media, healthcare nonprofit, patient empowerment, employee empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare nonprofit organizations (HCNPOs) are organizations whose activities focus on influencing public policy regarding health, providing consultation, training, fundraising, medical treatments, and other health-related support, and conducting research on health issues, etc. Although HCNPOs only accounted for about 13% of total number of public charities reporting to the Internal Revenue Services (IRS), their revenues and expenses represented around 60% of total public charity revenues and expenses, which made them the largest category of public charities in financial terms. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided HCNPOs with both challenges and opportunities, for example, in terms of disseminating timely information about COVID-19 and combating misinformation, addressing patients' concerns, and providing healthcare services safely and efficiently during the lockdown. The study intends to answer two research questions: (1) How does the pandemic influence the use of social media in HCNPOs? (2) Does the use of social media improve the organizational effectiveness of HCNPOs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media use for health-related purposes has received growing attention from researchers in recent years. Previous studies have summarized social media use for health-related purposes such as health interventions, health campaigns, medical education, and disease outbreak surveillance (Chen & Wang, 2021). However, most studies focused on healthcare professionals, patients, and the public, rather than from an organizational perspective. Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) bring people together to collaborate and achieve the common good, and to advocate and influence policy makers through mobilizing constituencies (Guo & Musso, 2007; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lipsky & Smith, 1990). In order to fulfill these missions, NPOs need to use advanced social media strategies to help raise money, mobilize volunteers, raise awareness, persuade decision makers, and encourage positive behavior changes (Miller, 2010). A comprehensive literature review indicates that the effectiveness of social media use by NPOs lacks systematic investigations and most studies have focused on human services NPOs. This study

intends to fill the research gaps by exploring the integration of social media into the marketing efforts of HCNPOs.

METHODS

The primary data were collected from two electronic surveys of 100 HCNPOs in California in May 2017 and January 2022. The list of HCNPOs was compiled from the Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) in 2017. The original survey consisted of 31 multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The study has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Upon gathering publicly available email addresses for executives and managers in the above HCNPOs, an email invitation was sent to 886 HCNPOs in May 2017. With four follow-up emails in May and June 2017, we received a total of 100 valid survey responses. Regression analyses were performed to examine what social media strategies affect the effectiveness of social media use in these HCNPOs. Supplemental data such as total revenue and assets of the organization (available in the NCCS database) were also used for the analyses.

To understand the impact of COVID-19 on HCNPOs' social media use, we conducted a follow-up survey of the same 100 organizations in January 2022. In addition, we plan to interview 10 survey respondents to gain further insights on their social media use. Qualitative analysis will be used to analyze the interview transcripts.

RESULTS

Preliminary results suggest that community building posts, dedicated and well-trained staff, support from public relations forms, having a social media plan, and track fundraising are important factors for effective use of social media in HCNPOs. In addition, social media have the potential to improve HCNPOs' employee and patient empowerment. The findings not only contribute to the literature, but also provide valuable resources for HCNPO practitioners to successfully implement social media initiatives and help them improve the effectiveness of their organizational performances.

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