# NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CASE OF DRUG HELPLINES

Asle Fagerstrøm[1], Hanne Sørum[1] and Ravi Vatrapu[1,2]

[1]*Westerdals – Oslo School of Arts, Communication and Technology, Faculty of Technology*
*Schweigaardsgate 14, 0185 Oslo, Norway*
[2]*Department of IT Management, Copenhagen Business School, Howitzvej 60, 2.10; Frederiksberg, DK-2000, Denmark*

## ABSTRACT

The telephone was once the main way organizations communicated with their target groups. This situation has changed considerably in recently years and it is apparent that organizations like drug helpline services must also expand their range also in order to reach their target groups. A social media survey[1] within European Foundation of Drug Helplines members resulted in 16 responses (approximately 38 percentage response rate), representing 10 different European countries. Findings indicated that most drug helplines in the survey have some experience with social media. However, few of the drug helpline use social media based on purposeful planning and clear distribution of responsibility. Social media can be used for promoting an event or a sensitizing campaign to create positive value. Facebook is the social media that in general are most frequently used for purposes such as reaching a specific audience and promotion. Additionally, findings of the survey show that few drug helplines in the survey monitor social media frequently.

## KEYWORDS

Nonprofit organizations, drug helpline, social media, survey.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Drug helplines are nonprofit organizations that usually are located in large cities around the world. They offer free and confidential telephone advice and information for those who are concerned, or have questions about drugs. The service is available to anyone, but callers are usually drug users, friends, family, colleagues or contacts of drug users. Drug helplines have long been a source of information and support but they now need to look into how to expand their influence "beyond the phone", in order to embrace social media communication such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. (European Foundation of Drug Helplines). According to the European Foundation of Drug Helplines, social media can act as a platform for drug helplines; "to learn from each other and from our colleagues in the educational field how to establish and manage social media platforms".

The use of social media gives great opportunity for nonprofit organizations to communicate with and engage the public (Nah and Saxton, 2012). The ability for any nonprofit organization – no matter size and resources – to adopt social media technologies presents substantial opportunities for crate positive value. However, in a study by Waters et al. (2009) analyzing 275 profiles on Facebook, they found that nonprofit organizations lag behind in adopting social media, and these organizations are mostly using social media to streamline management functions and educate the public. Based on this study (Waters et al., 2009), their conclusion is that nonprofit organizations are failing to use the interactive functions of social media.

Salamon and Anheier (1997) delineate five core characteristics of nonprofit organizations: 1) nonprofit organizations have an institutional frame, 2) nonprofit organizations are institutionally separate from government, 3) nonprofit organizations are not returning profits to owners, 4) nonprofit organizations control their own activities, and 5) nonprofit organizations are non-compulsory in nature and have some degree of voluntary input in either the activities or management. From these characteristics, adoption and use of social

---

[1] The survey is initiated by the Leonardo Da Vincent Partnership Project entitled "Drug helplines, online and interactive", funded through the Lifelong Learning Programme. Data was collected in cooperation with the European Foundation of Drug Helplines. Publication is permitted.

media by nonprofit organizations can be investigated by looking at three key factors (adapted from Nah and Saxton, 2012). Firstly, the ultimate strategic goal for nonprofit organizations is to achieve their social mission (Lewis, 2005). Strategies to achieve social mission goals can be fundraising, lobbying and market-based initiatives (Nah and Saxton, 2012). Secondly, use of social media by nonprofit organizations are driven by the capacity and resources that can be mobilized (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Thirdly, governance plays an important role in nonprofit organizations' adoption and use of web technologies in general (see Saxton and Guo, 2011), and it would most likely be the case for social media as well.

Based on the three key factors (strategy, capacity and governance), this study aims to explore the adoption and use of social media within drug helplines in order to better understand the opportunities and challenges for nonprofit organizations. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: First, the research method is presented, and then the findings are summarized. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of academic and organizational implications.

## 2. METHOD

In order to explore the adoption and use of social media within drug helplines participants in the present study are members of the European Foundation of Drug Helplines, which has a total of 42 members divided into 22 European countries. An online survey was designed consisting of a total of 29 questions, including both open-ended and closed questions. The questionnaire was adopted from Nah and Saxton (2012), along with valuable comments from participants in the Leonardo Da Vincent Partnership Project group entitled "Drug helplines, online and interactive". Regarding the survey design, no comments were made by the respondents on questions about the data collection process. The survey was electronically distributed in April 2014 to the email distribution list of the members. Survey Monkey was used for survey design (layout) and data gathering. Respondents that did not respond in the first place were followed up with a reminder one week after the survey was initially sent out. The survey resulted in total 16 answers, which gives a response rate of approximately 38 percentage.

## 3. FINDINGS

The finding in this study shows that the respondents represent 10 different European countries: the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Ireland, Austria, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, France and Cyprus. In total, 17 respondents answered the questionnaire and the number of respondents within each country varied from 1 to 3 organizations. One respondent was deleted due to missing data. When asking for how long the drug helpline organizations have made use of social media in order to create positive value, the findings reveal that 5 respondents answered more than 4 years, 6 respondents answered between 3-4 years, 2 respondents answered 1-2 years, 1 respondent answered less than one year, and 1 respondent answered that they don't use social media for this purpose. The finding shows that most of the participants in the survey have some experience with social media related to drug helplines.

### 3.1 Strategy

In order to investigate strategic use of social media among drug helpline organizations, we asked the respondents which areas that creates positive value. The finding (Table 1) shows that these areas in general are related to values such as promoting an event or a sensitizing campaign, reaching a specific audience, disseminate information on alcohol and drugs, and telling stories about the organizations. Areas such as fund raising and recruiting volunteers are not perceived to create positive values among the respondents.

Table 1. Areas that creates positive value by using social media. The data is presented in numbers.

| Answer options | No value now, AND no future expectations | No value now, BUT have future expectations | Value now | Don't know | Response Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reaching a specific audience | 0 | 3 | 11 | 0 | 14 |
| Promote an event or a sensitizing campaign | 0 | 1 | 13 | 0 | 14 |
| Fund raising | 10 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 14 |
| Recruiting volunteers | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 14 |
| Calls to action to contact the helpline (lowering the threshold) | 1 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 14 |
| Disseminate information on alcohol and drugs | 1 | 1 | 11 | 1 | 14 |
| Get press coverage | 1 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 14 |
| Tell stories about your organization (being transparent about your organization) | 2 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 14 |
| Change attitude (hearts and minds) of people on the issue of drug use and abuse | 2 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 14 |
| Get feedback | 1 | 5 | 7 | 1 | 14 |
| Get into dialogue with constituents | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 14 |
| Build a community around your "cause" | 0 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 14 |
| Answered question | | | | | 14 |
| Skipped question | | | | | 2 |

When asked how frequently they monitor social media, we found that 2 respondents do live monitoring (constantly), 1 monitor daily, 3 monitor 1-2 times a week, 3 monitor 1-2 times a month, and 1 monitor rarely. We followed up the monitoring question by asking about the areas the drug helplines do the monitoring. Table 2 shows the areas that most drug helpline organizations in this study monitor activities related to: Reaching a specific audience, disseminate information on alcohol and drugs, tell stories about your organization, and build a community around your "cause". Recruiting volunteers, get press coverage, and found raising rarely monitored.

Table 2. In which areas do drug helplines monitor. It was possible to give multiple answers. The data is presented in numbers.

| Answer options | Response Count |
|---|---|
| Reaching a specific audience | 6 |
| Promote an event or a sensitizing campaign | 4 |
| Fund raising | 0 |
| Recruiting volunteers | 2 |
| Calls to action to contact the helpline (lowering the threshold) | 4 |
| Disseminate information on alcohol and drugs | 5 |
| Get press coverage | 1 |
| Tell stories about your organization (being transparent about your organization) | 5 |
| Change attitude (hearts and minds) of people on the issue of drug use and abuse | 3 |
| Get feedback | 4 |
| Get into dialogue with constituents | 3 |
| Build a community around your "cause" | 5 |
| Answered question | 10 |
| Skipped question | 6 |

## 3.2 Capacity

Table 3 show that lack of resources such as economy and time, lack of understanding within the organization of the potential of social media, and lack of skills/knowledge in social media is the conditions that are most challenging regarding use of social media. Support from the IT department and knowledge about the legal aspects does not create any challenges for the drug helpline organizations in the study.

Table 3. Conditions that challenging working with social media. It was possible to give multiple answers. The data is presented in numbers.

| Answer options | Response Count |
|---|---|
| Lack of resources - economy | 10 |
| Lack of skills/knowledge in social media | 7 |
| IT department counteract social media initiatives | 1 |
| Lack of understanding within the organization of the potential of social media | 8 |
| Our advisors are not experienced in the area of social media | 3 |
| Management's lack of prioritization of social media | 6 |
| Management is profoundly "scared" about the challenges of social media | 3 |
| Lack of resources - time | 9 |
| Difficult to show tangible value of investment in social media | 2 |
| We do not know the legal aspects that social media is subject to (in relation to anonymity, etc.) | 1 |
| Answered question | 14 |
| Skipped question | 2 |

## 3.3 Governance

In addition to strategy and capacity, we also investigated how drug helpline organizations are actually working with social media. The findings reveal that 4 respondents answer that their activities are coordinated centrally, and are based on purposeful planning and clear distribution of responsibilities. Eight of the respondents answered that their social media activities are characterized by sporadic actions and are not based on purposeful planning or clear distribution of responsibilities. One respondent answered that they are currently engaging in a carefully planned test phase related to social media use, and 1 respondent answered that there are few people in the process of testing social media and that it is a bit haphazardly, without a real deadline.

Guidelines for how the organization employees shall participate in social media is essential to govern social media activities. When asking if the drug helpline organization had produced guidelines for employees, 6 answered "yes", 2 answered "no - and it is not necessary", 5 answered "no – but we should do", and 1 answered "no – but it is in progress/about to be made". In regards to the use of social media online tools we also found that Facebook is the channel that in general are the most frequently used, especially when it comes to reaching a specific audience, promote an event or a sensitizing campaign, and disseminate online information concerning alcohol and drugs.

## 4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Based on the three key factors investigated (strategy, capacity and governance) the aim of this study was to explore the adoption and use of social media within drug helplines to better understand the opportunities and challenges that nonprofit organizations have. In general, our findings show that most of the organizations in the study have some experience with use of social media. In this regard, Facebook is the social media that in general is the most frequently used in order to reach a specific audience, promote an event or a sensitizing campaign, and disseminate information on alcohol and drugs. An interesting finding concerns the low use of Twitter within drug helplines along with blogs, Google+, Photo sharing (e.g. Flicker), and Geolocation (e.g. Foursquare). This reveals a potential for improvement in online interactions and the use of online social channels in addition to facebook among such organizations. Regarding strategy and positive values, few of the drug helpline use social media based on a clear and purposeful planning and clear distribution of responsibility. Values of using social media, in relation to promoting an event or a sensitizing campaign, was mentioned as the most important. Fund rising was not perceived as an appropriate activity for the use of social media. Moreover, findings of the study show that few drug helplines in the survey monitor social media frequently. Regarding capacity, we found that lack of resources in relation to economy and time, lack

of understanding concerning the potential of social media, and lack of human resources (e.g. skills and knowledge) are the most challenging in this context.

O'Reilly (2007) emphasizes that organizations managing to embrace the potential of Web 2.0 have a competitive advantage by learning from users and encouraging participation since social media has made it possible for organizations to be available for users, get feedback and respond directly to questions and increase interaction with their users (see also Pantano et al., 2010). For example, a case study by Briones et al. (2011) of the American Red Cross shows that social media is essential to get a two-way dialogue with users, media and communities as a whole. This could also be of high relevance in the context of drug helplines and should be taken into consideration.

Regarding governance, half of the organizations answered that social media activities can be classified as sporadic actions, rather than grounded in purposeful planning or clear distribution of responsibilities within the organization. There are, however, also challenges by using social media for nonprofit organizations. In the case study of the American Red Cross, availability of human resources is highlighted as the greatest barrier to have an extended use of social media (Briones et al., 2011). This is also revealed in the present study about drug helplines use of social media. Exchange and dissemination of information in social media are independent of whether the organizations are present at the exact time of someone interacting with the organization in social media. It can therefore be challenging to have an overview of the interaction and content at all times. In that regard, clear guidelines for how the organization employees shall participate in social media are essential.

# REFERENCES

BRIONES, R. L., KUCH, B., LIU, B. F. & JIN, Y. 2011. Keeping up with the digital age: How the American Red Cross uses social media to buid relationships. *Public Relations Review,* 37, 37-43.

EUROPEAN FOUNDATION OF DRUG HELPLINES. *Drug Helplines Online and Interactive (DHOI): a Leonardo da Vinci partnership on social media in drug helplines* [Online]. http://www.fesat.org/en/. [Accessed September 02 2014].

LEWIS, L. 2005. The civil society sector: A review of critical issues and research agenda for organizational communication scholars. *Management Communication Quarterly,* 19**,** 238-267.

MCCARTHY, J. D. & ZALD, M. N. 1977. Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American Journal of Sociology,* 82**,** 1212-1241.

NAH, S. & SAXTON, G. D. 2012. Modeling the adoption and use of social media by nonprofit organizations. *New media & society,* 15**,** 294-313.

O'REILLY, T. 2007. What is Web 2.0: Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software. *Communication & Strategies,* First Quarter 2007 17-37.

PANTANO, E., TAVERNISE, A. & VIASSONE, M. Consumer perception of computer mediated communication in a social network. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on New Trends in Information Science and Service Science, May 11-13 2010 Gyeongju, Korea. 609-614.

SALAMON, L. M. & ANHEIER, H. K. 1997. *Defining the nonprofit sector: A cross-national analysis,* Manchester, UK, Manchester University Press.

SAXTON, G. D. & GUO, C. 2011. Accountability online: Understanding the web-based accountability practices of nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* 40**,** 270-295.

WATERS, R. D., BURNETT, E., LAMM, A. & LUCAS, J. 2009. Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review* 35**,** 102-106.