Media Literacy: For Non-Profit Organizations

Lisa Correll  
*University of Central Florida*

Miranda Minton  
*University of Central Florida*

Amarilys Fuentes  
*University of Central Florida*

Find similar works at: [https://stars.library.ucf.edu/publicsectormedialiteracy](https://stars.library.ucf.edu/publicsectormedialiteracy)  
University of Central Florida Libraries [http://library.ucf.edu](http://library.ucf.edu)

This Guide is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Public Administration at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Media Literacy: How the Era of Fake News Affects Public Service by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

**Recommended Citation**

[https://stars.library.ucf.edu/publicsectormedialiteracy/2](https://stars.library.ucf.edu/publicsectormedialiteracy/2)
Media Literacy in Non-Profits

By: Lisa Correll, Miranda Minton, Amarilys Fuentes

University of Central Florida

PAD-6705

Professor: S.M. Zavattaro, Ph.D.
Media Literacy in Non-Profits

Introduction

Media literacy is a vital concept for all organizations and can be particularly powerful for non-profit agencies. Changing technologies and access to information has created a new type of literacy and understanding. Literacy now goes beyond just the capability of reading and writing traditional print and has moved into “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media” (medialiteracyproject.org). The ability to navigate through and process all of the sources of information is no longer a luxury, it is essential to thrive in today’s society. Because media literacy is a part of the foundation of the current educational system, non-profit organizations and agencies should also work to use these new resources to their advantage. Media plays an important role in educating communities and encouraging civic engagement.

There are advantages and disadvantages to a media literacy, and often media dependent society. Some of the advantages are being able to disseminate information quickly during times of crisis and emergency, keeping citizens informed of day-to-day operations of an organization, advertising new ideas, products or projects, and giving the ordinary person an accessible way to voice opinions, concerns or thoughts. There are also some disadvantages to media literacy. Many times, inaccurate information is distributed before all fact-checking can be done. Society has largely become dependent on instant gratification and expects to know information immediately. This can be harmful in a variety of ways, including during emergencies when inaccurate information is sent out and this can cause difficulties in crisis management, injuries or even additional fatalities. False information can now spread very rapidly because of the access to media.
Fake News Case

Non-profits are not exempt from the effects of what a bad publicity from what fake news can bring forth. There was a hoax going around in 2013 titled “Think before you Donate”. Even though the title was a good advice, the information on the different charities was false and meant for harm. The person’s intentions were to put all those charities on the hall of shame, and somehow attract donors to their “real cause” and pocket their donations. This went around social media sites and the involved charities, such as Goodwill Industries, had no choice but to pull out their fact check and redeem themselves from these wrongful accusations. The negative aspect is that many people do not check the source of information, they continue to feed the hoax, and it goes around affecting the reputations of the victims. The negative report might not even be with your organization however since a similar nonprofit got caught in a scandal in most cases it affects all nonprofits they get placed in the same category. At any given time, fake news can mean that a non-profit lose their reputation, loses the loyalty of clients, loses donors and partnerships bringing their operations to the ground and their mission to a halt.

Handling Fake News

Non-profits of any size should have a crisis team that will represent the organization. Communicating clearly is key to the success of this team. Also, designating a spokesperson that can quickly debunk any false statement or misleading information. These teams should be reachable at any given time and be properly trained to handle these situations. It is crucial that they are also advocates for the organization being extremely knowledgeable about the mission and services they provide. If the organization is faced with a sensitive topic, the organization statement should be reviewed by experts such as your legal counsel or a key member of their board to be sure that the organization is not digging themselves deeper.
Media crises involving nonprofits come in several forms. They can involve situations regarding improper spending, excessive salaries, unfortunate statements, or controversial stances that can trigger a spread of fake news. Therefore, non-profits should have proper training on how to deal with fake news and how to be media literate to avoid getting caught in a scandal that can cost the organization hardship and headaches. According to Panepento a media relations expert, there are four tips he advises non-profits should do when they are affected by the fake news. One is to debunk the lie quickly since bad news spreads like a wildfire. The faster they act to cut the fake source out and bring forth the actual truth can save them from a forever tarnished reputation. It also advises that they provide as much information as possible by providing details about the credibility of the news source, the author and sharing any information they can about the organization so that it counters their claim. Number two is to put out positive messages about the organization. Take advantage that the organization is in the spotlight and use it to highlight the good of the organization and all the positive things is doing or has done for the community. Number three advise it’s to avoid the trolls. This particular advice is for organizations not to get caught up in the social media fights over negative comments. Instead of fighting back and forth it’s better off to ignore or block those people that like initiating arguments. These trolls are really looking for more ways to get the reader deeper into the fishing net trap and getting caught in that nasty fight can only hurt the organization even further. His last advice it’s to debunk fake news quickly, and the organization should not be quick to share the fake news. Before sharing anything in public speaking or on social media sites, it is advised that sources check out to avoid being part of spreading phony news.

*Nonprofit Media*
Nonprofit news media see their work as a form of public service. Nonprofit media organizations classified as section 501(c)(3) are on the rise since the year the mid-2000s (Benson, 2017). Their purpose is to fill in the gaps of the decline in coverage of state and local affairs by focusing on news and information that is relevant for regional, state, or local communities. The Federal Communications Commission issued a report in 2011 concluding that accountability reporting, especially at the local level, has contracted dramatically, with potentially grave consequences for communities, government responsiveness, and democracy (cof.org, 2013). Therefore, nonprofit media needs to play an increasingly vital role to help meet the educational needs of citizens.

Benson (2017), states that a flaw that nonprofit media has is that when they have a foundation project-based funding, it sometimes has skewed media attention towards fashionable issues favored by philanthropic donors while ignoring a range of equally or even more urgent social problems. Also, due to philanthropic support being mostly extended to upper middle-class American journalism. They reach high economic sustainability through obtaining high education, high income, and high influence audiences to donate directly or finding political or luxury commercial organizations who will pay to reach these same elite audiences through advertising. However, this economically sustainable model is moving nonprofit media toward an increasingly exclusive mission, news by and for elites. Benson sees the possibility that foundations are as capable of non-democratic “media capture” on behalf of their own interests as they are of fostering civic benefits for society as a whole. Although nonprofit journalistic organizations have made some notable civic contributions, they fall short of offering a strong critical alternative to the market failure and professional shortcomings of commercial journalism (Benson, 2017). He suggested that a more stable solution for the issues face with nonprofit media would require
fundamental changes in foundation operations and budgeting (e.g., more long-term, non-project-based, no-strings-attached funding). To target more individual small donors such as “crowdfunding” and more effective development of modes of distribution that reach beyond elite and partisan silos. And lastly, increased funding and greater autonomy for public media. Nonprofit media could be a powerful tool to bring forth change in media literacy and impact society in a positive way.

References


Media Literacy Project: http://medialiteracyproject.org/learn/media-literacy/Center for Media
Literacy:  http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/five-key-questions-form-foundation-media-inquiry

National Telemedia Council:  https://www.nationaltelemediacouncil.org/about-us

https://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2016/10/13/is-your-nonprofit-prepared-for-a-media-crisis/


https://www.cof.org/nonprofitmedia?ItemNumber=18708