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Media Literacy: How the Era of Fake News
Affects Public Service

School of Public Administration

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Storytelling: For Non-Profit Organizations

Jacquelyn Madalena

University of Central Florida

Brittaney Mericle

University of Central Florida

Dayouna Yang

University of Central Florida

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Final Guide Portion

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Jacquelyn Madalena, Brittaney Mericle, and Dayouna Yang

What is nonprofit storytelling?

Storytelling can be traced to ancient times where writing wasn't common and very few people knew how to. Yet oral storytelling was a universal language. Philosophy, knowledge, myth, superstition and religious beliefs were passed down through storytelling (Kent, 2015). In today's world, storytelling is used as a framework for non-profit organizations to convey the organizations impact, engage the public, and call individuals to actions (Bublitz, 2016). It also helps propel the brand, identity, and reputation. Regarding organizations' purpose, storytelling can illustrate the reason and meaning for their existence (Dixon, 2014, p. 6). It turns facts and numbers into an emotional and compelling message to the public. Storytelling can also serve as an emotional snapshot of how the organization has helped impacted people's lives before, during, and after (Dixon, 2014).

Everyone has their own opinion on what a story is and what makes a good story. "A story can be everything from a 140-character tweet, to a longform interactive narrative, to a six-second video on Vine" (Stories worth Telling, 2014, p. 6). For non-profit organizations, many of their stories have some common themes like transformation, personal experiences, inspirational, and emotions. These stories focus on a universal need that is met through the organization and the general reader can identify with. Most importantly, the stories must be as authentic as possible. This draws in the reader or listener and creates an emotional bridge. Also, they can relate to it much easier which results in the outpour of donations or increased publicity (Dixon, 2014).

Storytelling Methods and Techniques

Videos

Research has continued to focus on how organizations “develop their unique identity through their strategic communication efforts” (Jones & Waters, 2011, p. 248). Digital media mediums such as social media can provide opportunities for organizations to build upon their identity. Specifically, this article discusses how nonprofit organizations are utilizing YouTube as a platform to create and share videos as a way to inform their audience about several aspects of their organization. As noted by Brown, YouTube videos can serve as an effective tool for branding and identity, as they can leave a lasting impression in the minds of those who watch in comparison to words or pictures alone (as cited in Jones & Waters, 2011, p. 249). Additionally, videos can be shared across multiple platforms, such as an organization’s website, through email newsletters, and on social media websites.

Social Media

Social media has become an integrated part of society in an increasingly way and it hard to be ignored. While social media may not be seen as a traditional form, it serves as a platform that allows for an interaction between nonprofits and their audience, as well as networking (Young, 2017). Organizations cannot ignore the social media craze that has hit the world. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have captured societies internationally. “Relationships are the foundations for social networking sites” (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009, p. 102). Users want to feel a connection to other people and this is especially true for organizations. The more donors and volunteers feel connected to the organization the more they will want to give their time and money. Social media can be the perfect outlet for story telling and can be used in a variety of manners. Blogs, twitter, instagram, facebook, and other outlets allow donors to feel that they are directly connected to the

organization and the people they are serving. While you can't always tell a full story through social media, you can point people towards the story (Jensen, 2014).

Techniques

A good story transfers emotion from the nonprofit to the audience in an engaging manner. It sheds insight into the lives of people. While statistics can bore people, stories engage them. Organizations should start by talking to colleagues and getting everyone on board before they take on storytelling. Once on board they can start collecting stories and make a story database. Throughout the process organizations need to respect privacy and the wishes of those whose stories they are telling (Jensen, 2014).

Benefits and Applications

As outlined previously, storytelling evokes emotion and utilizes personal and sometimes individualized experiences. In the article, "Do Sympathy Biases Induce Charitable Giving? The Effects of Advertising Content," the authors conducted studies on approximately 185,000 prospective donors in India that focused on the connection between sympathy and donors (Cherian, Roy, & Sudhir, 2016, p. 849). These studies have concluded that emotions move donors to give more in comparison to information or facts alone. As outlined, in the article, sympathy is the specific emotion that motivates giving. There are 3 "sympathy biases" according to the article: "the identified victim effect, the in-group effect, and the reference dependent sympathy effect" (Cherian, et al., 2016, p. 849). Also, organizations can rephrase the donation into smaller favorable numbers, such as \$30 a month to \$1 a day. Using language in this way reflects effective use of the biases to help create positive emotional responses among donors (Cherian, et al., 2016). In addition to emotional responses, storytelling can play a key role in how

organizations raise funds. Because just as each donor is different, having a variety of stories can strengthen how many people an organization is able to connect with. Additionally, continually creating and sharing stories can not only appeal to prospective donors, but aid in retaining them as well (Davenport, 2014).

Another unique way that storytelling can benefit organizations is through accountability, as shown in “Storytelling: An informal mechanism of accountability for voluntary organizations” (Chen, 2012). This article focuses particularly on the Burning Man event and how the Burning Man organization utilizes storytelling as a form of accountability. In this case, stakeholders have much to gain from the use of storytelling to best meet their interests and needs as dedicated members of the organization. Members are able to share their viewpoint and experiences to influence change within the organization. Accordingly, the overarching theme of the article is “accountability in voluntary organizations” (Chen, 2012, p. 904). Traditionally, many types of stakeholders look for tangible examples of accountability, such as meeting goals and performance measures. However, other levels of accountability that need attention to better serve a variety of internal and external stakeholders. While relatively informal, storytelling can act as an expressive form of accountability that “promote(s) organizational memory and change” (Chen, 2012, p. 905).

An additional benefit that can be seen for many nonprofit organizations is the increase in volunteer recruitment. Organizations are using storytelling to create their identity, and then using these stories to connect with many stakeholders. Outside of existing stakeholders, storytelling can be used as an effective recruitment tool. In “Strength in Storytelling,” Jensen (2014) outlines a Boston Charity that recruits college-student volunteers to help low-income people connect with social services. The organization has been able to recruit 4,000 volunteers based on their story-

telling technique. While it is mentioned that they could use data alone to get their point across, they instead are using stories; more specifically, stories of the individuals they are helping and connecting the volunteers with them on a personal level. Storytelling is becoming prevalent in the nonprofit sector, so much so that the Rockefeller Foundation once made a \$4 million commitment to support storytelling support services for nonprofit organizations (Jensen, 2014).

How “Fake News” Affects NPOs: Impact, Influence, and Involvement

Disguised as News

Video news releases (VNRs) began to surface during the 1980s. VNRs in their early form were unprofessional videos recorded on tape and sent to news stations seeking for a few minutes of fame. However today, they have evolved to propagate fake news at an alarming rate. As a result, many organizations, whether for profit or nonprofit, begun to be to utilize this method to publicize their visions on television news. Public administrations and government representations have also benefited from using VNRs instead of paid sponsorship or advertising. VNRs helps boost the credibility of the news story. Other reasons news stations air VNRs are that they are quick and may document scarce footage, or VNRs fill in gaps of stories that need visual credibility. In addition, VNRs are low cost and may even bring the station some profit. A media-research group called the Project for excellence in Journalism conducted a survey to measure the usage of VNRs in news stations. It was found that 34% reported using VNRs and 10% of that number labeled the broadcast as VNRs. VNRs may be played partially and voiced over for more effect. Critics of VNRs fear that the wide usage of this media may compromise the truth of the story, thus resulting in fake news. News stations are encouraged to label VNRs accordingly and government organizations are urged to stop using VNRs for political gains (Pavlik, 2006).

NPOs Directly Targeting “Fake News”

The Sunlight Foundation is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization that aims to create a higher level of political accountability and transparency using policy analysis, access to data, and journalism. Specifically, the Sunlight Foundation hopes for a future where technology and access to information can lead to fair and effective democratic participation (Sunlight Foundation, n.d.). In the wake of the recent “fake news” movement, the Sunlight Foundation has dedicated their mission and resources to upholding democratic practices, such as free press. This organization is a direct result of the fake news movement, and represents how great the impact can be on our society. A recent article featured on their website entitled, “As the threat of ‘fake news’ to democracy grows, public trust in the media wavers” details the distrust that has grown regarding the media. The article also pinpoints how the fake news was originally used. In 2014, a BuzzFeed news media editor by the name of Craig Silverman had begun using the term to hold news outlets accountable. Silverman was primarily using the term to “describe online content that was intentionally falsified content, as opposed to inaccurate news, which is corrected or retracted” (Williams, 2018, para. 5). The article illustrates that how the term is being interpreted and defined now can depend on many factors, such as party affiliation. The increased role of technology and social media has also increased the probability of unverified information being construed as factual news. As nonprofit organizations attempt to market themselves in this era, they will not only need to pay attention to how they present their story, but also ensure that they are verifying their facts and being aware of their audience.

How Do the Latest Facebook Security Concerns Affect Nonprofits and Foundations?

While nonprofits use social media as a main source of storytelling, the executive team needs to make sure that they are upholding privacy standards in their Facebook activities. The

article also discusses how because there is a low trust in government and media partners, nonprofits can use their position as messengers to build their relationships with their audiences. People are going to be looking towards foundations and nonprofits more than government or media sectors. Furthermore, nonprofits should ensure to their current audience that they are concerned for their privacy and continue maintaining good relationships and trust within their Facebook and other social media circles (Forum One, 2018).

Negative Impact: ActionAid International

ActionAid International works all over the world with problem solvers to end poverty and injustice, both locally and internationally. They help with agricultural needs and women's rights in many countries. However, there has been "fake news" circulating that the organization's CEO Girish Menon was a member of ISIS. This has tainted the nonprofit's image and credibility; however, this claim has been refuted (Hargrave, 2018).

Nonprofit Storytelling in Action

Charity: Water

Charity: Water is a nonprofit that strives to bring clean water and safe water to the poorest people in the world. They use storytelling, videos and vivid documented pictures on their websites to stir empathy from potential donors. Scott Harrison, the founder had even convinced the director of Hotel Rwanda film to make a 60-second public service about dirty water and this video was broadcasted during an episode of the popular American Idol program. This helped his nonprofit gain needed exposure. In addition, they take advantage of every social media platform; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs etc.

Learn more about Charity: Water here: <https://charitywater.exposure.co/>

DonorsChoose.org

DonorsChoose.org allows teachers in many low-income U.S. public schools to post school supplies or items that they need for their classrooms. Once their story is shared, it's up to the donor to give any amount they feel like giving. Through DonorsChoose, donors can see what the need is in the classroom, and also where their donation is going. That creates trust and authenticity.

Learn more about DonorChoose.org here: <https://www.donorschoose.org/>

Video: [Welcome to DonorsChoose.org \(Links to an external site.\)](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

World Bicycle Relief

World Bicycle Relief mobilizes people through the power of independent mobilization. They envision a world where distance is no longer a barrier to independence and livelihood. By providing bicycles to people in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia, they are able to become more independent and self-sufficient. They use personal stories of the people they are serving to share their own experience with the organization. They let them directly talk to the audience through digital videos and helps donors feel directly connected to them and the mission of the organization.

You can view their storytelling video here: <https://worldbicyclerelief.org/en/together>

Learn more about World Bicycle Relief at <https://worldbicyclerelief.org/en/>

Save the Children

Save the Children works to help children all over the world in whichever way they need whether through health, education, natural disaster relief or feeding programs. On their website they use digital storytelling to describe each one of their projects. Furthermore, they make short films to

draw people in to invoke change and engagement. In 1995, Save the Children was in a media frenzy because they were involved in an accusation of false sponsorship of children and the money not going to where they were claiming it was going towards. The story was published on Prime Time Live and was later refuted and the claims were never 100% proven (Sagawa, 2001). This is an example of how a nonprofit was hurt by “fake news” and was able to prevail because of their own course of action taken to disprove the claims, make changes within their own organization, and use storytelling to tell their own story.

Learn more about Save the Children here:

http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpI4E/b.6146357/k.2755/What_We_Do.htm

Original Media Content for website:

Interview: Fake News/Storytelling with Dr. Jeffrey Neely

<https://youtu.be/NpmI4fXwZRw>

General FAQ:

Frequently Asked Questions about Storytelling and Nonprofits

1. What are the origins of storytelling?

Storytelling can be traced to ancient times when writing was not common and very few people knew how to, but storytelling was a universal language that could allow for an exchange of ideas and history to be told. Philosophy, knowledge, myth, superstition and religious beliefs were passed down through storytelling (Kent, 2015).

2. What is nonprofit storytelling?

In today's world, storytelling is used as a framework for non-profit organizations to convey the organizations impact, engage the public, and call individuals to action (Bublitz, 2016). It turns facts and numbers into an emotional and compelling message to the public. Storytelling can also serve as an emotional snapshot of how the organization has helped changed people's lives before, during, and after (Dixon, 2014).

3. What are some common methods and techniques of storytelling?

Organizations can use many different methods for conveying their message. Most common forms are videos and use of social media to share stories of the individuals they are serving. A good story transfers emotion from the nonprofit to the audience in an engaging manner. It sheds insight into the lives of people and can engage the audience more than statistics can.

4. How is social media used to incorporate storytelling?

Social media has become an integrated part of society and can be used to allow users to feel a connection to the organization and the people they are serving (Young, 2017). The more donors and volunteers feel connected to the organization, the more they will want to give their time and money and social media is the perfect outlet for storytelling. This can include Facebook, twitter, blogs, instagram, and numerous other sites. Even if the whole story cannot be told on social media, it can lead people to the story.

5. What are benefits of storytelling for nonprofit organizations?

Numerous studies have been done to show that emotions move donors to give more in comparison to information of facts alone. It not only draws in donors and volunteers, but can be used to retain them and help them feel connected to the organization and the overall

cause. Furthermore, storytelling can promote accountability within the organization and promote organizational memory and change (Chen, 2012). Storytelling also gives nonprofit organizations an opportunity to craft their image through the use of stakeholder accounts. It can be an inexpensive and effective way to engage their audience, and can even serve as a method to recruit new volunteers and supporters (Jensen, 2014).

6. Are nonprofits affected by “fake news”?

Nonprofits can be affected by fake news in both positive and negative ways. There have been reports of nonprofits being hurt by media attention that is filled with false claims of negligence on the part of the organization. However, it has also been shown that more individuals are looking towards nonprofits for truth and stability as government and media partners are being shed in such bad light. Nonprofits are being lifted up as messengers and can use this till to build their relationship with their audience. Storytelling is an important tool that NPOs can wield to help combat fake news claims.

7. What is the impact of fake news’ on nonprofit organizations?

Fake news has caused a decrease of trust in nonprofits among the general public. More importantly, when natural disasters like hurricanes or tsunamis occur, the information distortion represented by fake news hinders humanitarian efforts (Magee, 2018).

8. What platforms are “fake news” using?

With the increase use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google, fake news has clenched its teeth in these mediums. These platforms allow users to have personalized news feed which present users with information that they already support or have interest in. Also, the

Edelman Trust has reported a clear correlation between the increasing power of social media and the decrease of trust in the population (Magee, 2018)

9. What are the motives behind “fake news?”

Some motivations behind fake news are publicity and misinformation. However, one distinct motivation is gaining profit. For example, online platforms present a stage for fake news to draw in advertisement to receive compensation (Magee, 2018).

10. How can nonprofits fight against “fake news?”

In a world of growing technology, it is a daunting task to contain fake news. But to do nothing, can be damaging. Nonprofit organizations can push back against fake news by building strong communication methods. Also, they can implement regulations, flag suspicious articles, and training their journalists (Magee, 2018).

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Storytelling for Nonprofit Organizations

What is storytelling?

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In today's world, storytelling is used as a framework for non-profit organizations to convey the organizations impact, engage the public, and call individuals to action (Bublitz, 2016). It turns facts and numbers into an emotional and compelling message to the public. Storytelling can also serve as an emotional snapshot of how the organization has helped changed people's lives before, during, and after (Dixon, 2014).

How can you tell your story?

Organizations can use many different methods for conveying their message. Most common forms are videos and use of social media to share stories of the individuals they are serving. A good story transfers emotions from the nonprofit to the audience in an engaging manner. It sheds insight into the lives of people and can engage the audience more than statistics can.

Social media has become an integrated part of society and can be used to allow users to feel a connection to the organization and the people they are serving (Young, 2017). The more donors and volunteers feel connected to the organization, the more they will want to give their time and money. Social media is the perfect outlet for storytelling. This can include Facebook, twitter, blogs, instagram, and numerous other sites.

What are the benefits?

Numerous studies have been conducted that show emotions move donors to give more in comparison to information or facts alone. It not only draws in donors and volunteers, but can be used to retain them and help them feel connected to the organization and the overall cause. Furthermore, storytelling can promote accountability within the organization and promote organizational memory and change (Chen, 2012). Storytelling also gives nonprofit organizations an opportunity to craft their image through the use of stakeholder accounts. It can be an inexpensive and effective way to engage their audience, and can even serve as a method to recruit new volunteers and supporters (Jensen, 2014).

Can fake news impact NPO storytelling?

Nonprofits can be affected by fake news in both positive and negative ways. There have been reports of nonprofits being hurt by media attention that is filled with false claims of negligence on the part of the organization. However, it has also been shown that more individuals are looking towards nonprofits for truth and stability as government and media partners are being shed in such bad light. Nonprofits are being lifted up as "trusted" messengers and can use this till to build their relationship with their audience. Storytelling is an important tool that NPOs can wield to help combat fake news claims.

Learn more at [www. \(insert URL here\) .com](http://www.(insert URL here).com)

FAQ PDF handout:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xinCW0sV70QAmdv4HwmBjf8TlSnwrEGj/view?usp=sharing>

[\(Links to an external site.\)Links to an external site.](#)



Potential logo for NPO Storytelling portion of website