Interactive Communication Features on Nonprofit Organizations’ Webpages for the Practice of Excellence in Public Relations

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ABSTRACT. The main aims of this study were: (1) to examine how nonprofit organizations utilize their websites as a public relations tool, especially for media relations, donor relations, volunteer relations and their interactive communication features and (2) to ascertain whether nonprofit organizations’ revenues are positively correlated with the presence and prominence of their media relations, donor relations, and volunteer-relations efforts online. To accomplish this, a content analysis of 98 websites was conducted from the list of the NPT Top 100. Statistical analysis revealed that there were no significant relationships between revenues and usage of the web by nonprofit organizations for media relations, donor relations and volunteer relations. This study found that although most of the top 100 nonprofit organizations have website...
content for online media relations, the majority had yet to furnish journalist-friendly web content because clearly labeled online press rooms dedicated to journalists were infrequent. We also found that donors are treated as the most important stakeholders given the frequency of interactive features and prominence of content dedicated on the websites to donors in comparison with journalists and volunteers. Finally, the conceptual and practical implications of the investigation are discussed.

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KEYWORDS. Journalists, nonprofit organizations, online media relations, public relations, websites

INTRODUCTION

Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) noted that “the digital world has changed communication within organizations and between organizations and their various publics” (p. 285). Indeed, several public relations researchers have concluded that public relations and the internet are inseparably linked, offering examples of how organizations use the internet to communicate with important publics (Esrock and Leichty, 1998; Heath, 1998; Kent and Taylor, 1998; Taylor, Kent and White, 2001). For instance, websites often are among many resources in an arsenal of communication strategies for businesses and companies that include advertising, public relations, philanthropy, issues management and community relations. However, for smaller organizations, such as activists or nonprofit organizations, websites play a critical role as a primary resource for communicating with, and responding to, stakeholder groups (Taylor, Kent and White, 2001). Because the public relations personnel of nonprofit organizations generally possess only limited financial means to reach potential publics, the web offers a unique opportunity to interactively reach multiple publics without an immense sum of money (Kang and Norton, 2004).

Although previous research recognizes the potential of the internet for nonprofit organizations, many studies have focused solely on online media relations for corporate Websites (Callison, 2003; Esrock and Leichty, 1999, 2000; Hill and White, 2000; Lissauer; 2000; O’Keefe,
While those studies have found that the internet is a valuable tool for information gathering and dissemination for both journalists and practitioners in for-profit organizations, these same studies suggest that the internet has a growing potential for the online media relations efforts of nonprofit organizations. Nonetheless, little research has explored how nonprofit organizations are using their websites for media relations. Consequently, this study can provide empirical answers that previous studies have only suggested concerning the importance of nonprofit organizations’ use of their webpages as an effective media relations tool.

Moving beyond media relations, Landesman (1996) claimed that the internet could also help improve public education, fund-raising, volunteer recruitment, service delivery and communication for nonprofits. Since the early 1980s when the Reagan government cut a considerable amount of financial support to the nonprofit sector, nonprofit organizations have suffered from a persistent fiscal squeeze, and thus many nonprofit organizations generally rely on donated money and volunteer staffs to operate their programs (Young and Salamon, 2002). As such, the internet—as a cost-effective medium—can potentially help nonprofit organizations boost their volunteer, donor and fund-raising opportunities through effective website management (Kang and Norton, 2004).

In this regard, this study examined how the 100 largest nonprofit organizations compiled by the NonProfit Times use their websites for media relations, donor relations and volunteer relations by conducting a content analysis of their websites. In particular, as a unique characteristic of the internet, interactive communication features also were investigated through their webpages. Interactive communication features on the websites, which pursue two-way communications and mutual discourse, might facilitate the practice of excellent public relations (McMillan, 2002; Grunig and Grunig, 1992). Therefore, this study also tested how well nonprofit organizations practiced excellent public relations on websites by analyzing interactive communication features among three major publics in nonprofit organizations: media, volunteers and donors.

**Media Relations on the Web for Nonprofit Organizations**

Nonprofit organizations frequently struggle to overcome problems associated with funding revenues, growing competition from other nonprofit and for-profit organizations, increased demands for accountability, and accommodations to new technology (Young and Salamon, 2002). While nonprofits today are acting much like for-profit businesses, they...
still are lagging in their use of professional public relations practices (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2000; Young and Salamon, 2002). However, Kang and Norton (2004) suggest that the web offers nonprofit organizations a unique opportunity to interactively reach multiple publics, including volunteers, donors and journalists.

Journalists tend to discount the credibility of information subsidies from public relations practitioners because they believe practitioners are inclined to deceive the press by depicting news about their clients solely in a favorable light (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson and Ryan 1984; Stegall and Sanders, 1986). However, journalists’ frequent usage of websites as news-gathering materials is well documented in prior research (Callison, 2003; Gower and Cho, 2001; Hill and White, 2000; Middleberg and Ross, 2000). The Seventh Annual Middleburg/Ross Survey of Media in the Wired World in 2000 noted that most U.S. journalists (98%) have daily internet access and spend approximately 15 hours a week online for their work. The survey showed that journalists in all media agree that the internet has made their jobs easier, while also improving the quality of their work (Middleberg and Ross, 2000). In addition, the survey showed that journalists obtain most of their story ideas from press releases and sources from the websites, while 72% of the respondents identified e-mail as a key source for story ideas (Middleberg and Ross, 2000).

The potential power that the web provides for nonprofit organizations to build and maintain media relations is particularly significant considering that journalists prefer information from nonprofit organizations that has no obvious self-serving economic purpose (Cameron, Sallot and Curtin, 1997; Curtin, 1999; Pincus, Rimmer, Rayfield and Cropp, 1993; Turk, 1985). Websites can be effectively used as a primary communication resource for smaller organizations with a limited budget, such as those that are activist or nonprofit (Taylor, Kent and White, 2001). Coombs (1998) also suggested the internet could be a potential equalizer for activist organizations because it offers a low-cost, direct, controllable communication channel that can extend their efforts and create linkages with other like-minded stakeholders.

Given this potential, it is necessary to examine how nonprofit organizations use their websites for media relations. Previous studies conducting analyses of corporate webpages for media relations suggest that dimensions of media relations on the web might be also applicable to analyses of nonprofit organizations’ websites, as is the case in this study (Callison, 2003; Esrock and Leichty, 1999, 2000).
Esrock and Leichty (1999) investigated how corporate websites meet the needs of the media. They sampled 100 sites posted by companies in the 1997 Fortune 500 and analyzed them for the presence of content that related to customers of the organizations and the news media. Specifically, they scrutinized news releases, release archives and media contact information. The researchers found press releases on 88% of the sites; however, only 60% of the sites had media contact information and just 36% organized the releases by topic area. The researchers concluded that corporate websites were not media-friendly because the information in news releases might be of interest to multiple audiences, and the media information was not centralized but located on different pages within the sites (Esrock and Leichty, 1999).

In a subsequent investigation, Esrock and Leichty (2000) revisited their previous content analysis by coding again the 100 sites pulled in the 1997 sample. They found that much lower priority was given to media relations (22%), while shareholders, prospective employees, and customers were the intended beneficiaries of more than 50% of the home-page hyperlinks. The researchers again concluded that journalists are perceived as less important on the websites, based on the lack of navigational tools on the home page aimed at the media.

Callison (2003) sampled Fortune 500 company websites in 2001 and coded for the presence of clearly labeled press rooms. Among the companies that housed clearly labeled press rooms, the study also investigated the types of press rooms and media materials within them. Callison found results consistent with past studies in that the majority of companies have yet to centrally locate and label materials that may be of interest to the media. There also is no standard term for press rooms, which are frequently labeled either “News Room” or “Press Room.” It would be better if the majority of press rooms were labeled with the same term to facilitate journalists’ seeking of information, which is the essence of the popularity of the web as a research tool (Esrock and Leichty, 1999, 2000).

In addition, Callison (2003) observed that nearly two-thirds of the sites with press rooms included links to the press room on the home page, indicating that the sponsors of these sites regarded journalists as a key public, in contrast to the previous studies’ findings that journalists were perceived as less important (Esrock and Leichty, 1999, 2000). Moreover, Callison’s analysis revealed that top-tier companies among the Fortune 500 had press rooms with more items than the press rooms in the lowest tier.
Because previous research investigated only corporate websites (Callison, 2003; Hill and White, 2000; Lissauer, 2000; O’Keefe, 1997; Settles, 1996; Esrock and Leichty, 1999, 2000), Esrock and Leichty (1999, 2000) suggested that future research should look at the way smaller businesses, government and nonprofits are using the web. One research study did investigate nonprofit organizations’ use of the web, but not how their sites intersect with the needs and desires of media and editorial organizations (Kang and Norton, 2004).

Based on the prior literature review showing that no study has yet investigated nonprofit organizations’ use of media relations on the web, this study tested the following research questions.

*RQ1*: What are the media relations items used by the top 100 nonprofit organizations on their websites in the press room?

*RQ2*: What percentage of the top 100 nonprofit organizations’ websites has clearly labeled press rooms?

This study used all of the 100 largest nonprofits (2004 *NPT* Top 100) of 2004 as the research sample. Previous analyses of corporate websites assumed it was plausible that organizations with higher revenue would be more able to commit resources to their websites and thus create more media-useful/friendly sites (Callison, 2003; Esrock and Leichty, 1999, 2000). Accordingly, this study also tests following hypotheses:

*H1*: Press rooms are more frequent on the websites of higher-ranking nonprofit organizations than they are on the websites of lower-ranking nonprofit organizations.

*H2*: Higher-ranking nonprofit organizations have more media relations items on the websites than lower-ranking nonprofit organizations.

Although the quality of media relations probably does not increase exactly in line with the NPO rankings, it can be assumed that the higher-ranking organizations would spend more resources and efforts on developing media-related webpages with more items than lower-ranking organizations. A press room with many items based on Callison’s explication (2003)—press/news releases, executive photographs, company fact sheets, editorial stories written by company staff, broadcast release, etc.—would be seen as more media-friendly and useful than a press room with fewer items.
Donor Relations and Volunteer Relations on the Web for Nonprofit Organizations

Although almost 40 million volunteers work in the nonprofit sector, the number of volunteers and donors are seldom enough to meet the increased demand for nonprofit organization’s services (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2000). Because the overwhelming majority of nonprofit organizations are small, community-based groups that rely on volunteers, they need to actively and continually make themselves known in the best and most proactive manner that their existing financial means will allow (Kang and Norton, 2004). Websites are particularly effective and efficient communication tools for nonprofit organizations to promote their philanthropic causes and attract potential donors and volunteers. Gattuso (1996) virtually found that all nonprofit organizations have Websites. Nevertheless, not much attention has been paid to whether or how the internet can help nonprofits increase their strategic value and provide any competitive advantages among their donors and volunteers (Lee, 2001). As a consequence, it is necessary to examine how the internet as a cost-effective communication tool helps nonprofit organizations actively build relationships with their key publics.

Based on the existing literature, the following research question and hypotheses are posed:

RQ3: What percentage of the top 100 nonprofit organizations’ websites has webpages for donors and volunteers?

H3: Donor-related pages are more frequent on the websites of higher-ranking nonprofit organizations than they are on the websites of lower-ranking nonprofit organizations.

H4: Volunteer-related pages are more frequent on the websites of higher-ranking nonprofit organizations than they are on the websites of lower-ranking nonprofit organizations.

Interactive Features of Nonprofit Organizations’ Websites

One of the unique advantages of the internet is its ability to be interactive. The rise of the Internet as a communication tool may satisfy web users’ demand for two-way symmetrical communication because the integration of interactive features enables users to become active participants in communication exchanges with organizations. Thus, the
quality of websites as public relations tools cannot be discussed without considering their interactive communication features.

In the past decades, scholars in mass communication have examined the nature of interactivity in computer-mediated communication. According to Rafaeli, “interactivity is an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions” (1988, p. 111). However, the definitions of interactivity vary among scholars; the reason the definition of interactivity is still in doubt and inconsistent can be attributed to it being studied by researchers from a variety of disciplines. Kiousis (2002) attempted to explicate interactivity by thoroughly incorporating relevant literature when writing the following:

Interactivity can be defined as the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many), both synchronously and asynchronously, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third-order dependency). With regard to human users, it additionally refers to their ability to perceive the experience as a simulation of interpersonal communication and increase their awareness of telepresence. (p. 372)

Given its high interactive potential, the internet might be the ideal medium for public relations practice because the audience’s power is heightened for better two-way communication and relationship building (Marken, 1998). Public relations scholars and practitioners have stressed that using two-way communication between organizations and publics is a major attribute of “excellent public relations” (Grunig and Grunig, 1992). Grunig and Grunig (1989) also suggested that excellent public relations departments model more of their communication programs on the two-way symmetrical model than on the other three models.\(^1\) The two-way symmetrical model is designed to foster mutual understanding with publics (Grunig and Grunig, 1989). This model is based on research and uses communication to manage conflict and to improve understanding with publics. Its intended function is to bring symmetrical balance to two opposing interests. Although several scholars have criticized the two-way symmetrical model as an idealistic and normative framework (e.g., Cameron, Cancel, Sallot and Mitrook, 1997; Leichty and Springston, 1993; Murphy, 1991; Pearson, 1989), Grunig
and Grunig (1989) argued that the two-way symmetrical model is not just an unrealistic ideal, but one that can be practiced with effectiveness. Based on their argument (Grunig and Grunig, 1989), McMillan (2002) attempted to adapt Grunig and Grunig’s four models of public relations (1992) to her study of interactivity by testing a feature-based model that may hold greater promise as a tool for site developers who seek to incorporate appropriate levels of interactivity in their websites. She designed a method to explore the applicability of a four-part model of cyber-interactivity by analyzing 108 health-related websites, using both perception-based and feature-based measures of two primary dimensions–direction of communication and level of receiver control over the communication process (McMillan, 2002). In her investigation, she found that the features that fuel two-way communication on the websites are e-mail, registration, survey, bulletin board system (BBS), order forms and chat rooms, while features that facilitate receiver control of communication are search capabilities, viewer choice, curiosity devices, games, etc. (McMillan, 2002).

Furthermore, she broke down the two primary dimensions into four subdimensions: 2 (one-way direction of communication and two-way direction of communication) × 2 (high level of receiver control and low level of receiver control). The presence of receiver control of communication and two-way communication features might help stimulate two-way symmetrical communication.

Thus, this study will examine how nonprofit organizations use interactivity on their websites through the research questions stated herein.

**RQ4**: How do the top 100 nonprofit organizations present interactivity features on their websites?

In addition, this inquiry also examined which website areas are better utilizing interactive communication features per each area, media relations, volunteer relations and donor relations (Grunig and Grunig, 1992):

**RQ5**: Which website area among the top 100 nonprofit organizations has more interactive communication features, media relations, volunteer relations and donor relations?

It might be possible that organizations with higher revenue would make more efforts to use two-way symmetric communication-oriented features.

**RQ6**: What is the relationship between the number of interactivity features and the 100 largest NPO rankings?
Interactivity was judged by the number of receiver-control items—search, choice, curiosity, game, etc.—and direction of communication items—e-mail, registration, BBS, order, chat, etc.—based on the explanation of McMillan’s model (2002). In addition to the items from McMillan (2002), blogs were also added for this investigation. Blogs are unique forms of interaction in which message receivers or web users can have the highest control without any interference from web developers because blogs are regarded as the “unedited, published voice of the people” (Winer, 2003). Thus, blogs are categorized as an item which can facilitate two-way communication.

Esrock and Leitchy (1999, 2000) suggested that the prominence of information on websites is crucial for guiding stakeholders; consequently, they asserted that information targeted for primary publics is presented on the front page of sites. Based on this rationale, this study also examined which stakeholder group is regarded as the most important public to nonprofit organizations in their websites by analyzing on their level of prominence on the websites:

RQ7: How much prominence do the top 100 nonprofit organizations’ websites give to different publics (journalists, donors and volunteers)?

METHODOLOGY

Selection of Method

The main aims of this study were: (1) to examine how nonprofit organizations utilize their websites as a public relations tool, especially for media relations, donor relations, volunteer relations and their interactive communication features and (2) to ascertain whether nonprofit organizations’ revenues are positively correlated with the presence and prominence of their media relations, donor relations and volunteer-relations efforts online. These objectives were achieved by conducting a content analysis of the websites of the NPT Top 100 in the United States (as determined by the 2003 Federal 990 tax form) compiled by the Non-Profit Times.

Sample and the Unit of Analysis

NonProfit Times, a business publication for nonprofit management and organizations, annually reports the 100 largest nonprofit organiza-
tions in the United States, the so-called NPT Top 100, determined by the previous year’s federal 990 tax form. For this study, the websites of all 2004 NPT Top 100 nonprofit organizations were used as the research sample. The list of NPT Top 100 nonprofit organizations is available at the Website of NonProfit Times (http://www.nptimes.com/Nov04/sr_npt100.html).

In order to find organizations’ websites, a simple web search using google.com was performed. The unit of analysis was each organization’s Website. Websites that were under construction or would not load during the coding period were excluded from the sample.

**Coding Instrument and Coder Training**

In order to analyze the relationship between media relations and organizational rank, each site was coded for the presence of media relations content, including a press room, news room or equivalent, and the presence of collateral materials within the press room or news room based on Callison (2003). Moreover, to analyze how nonprofit organizations handle their volunteer relations and donor relations on the web, each site was coded for the presence of volunteer and donor relations items on the organizational webpages. An analysis of the interactive features for the whole website was completed on the home page, and an analysis of the interactive features for donor relations, volunteer relations and media relations was coded within donor-related, volunteer-related and press room pages respectively for the presence of e-mail, BBS, blog, search function, etc. (McMillan, 2002). In addition, this study measured the level of prominence for each area by searching links not more than 3 layers deep: 1 = front page, 2 = 2 layers deep from the front page, and 3 = 3 layers deep from the front page.

**Pretest and Coding Procedure**

Two coders, one of the authors and another coder (who was not familiar with this study), conducted a pretest independently with 10% of the research sample to test the coding sheet. The pretest sample was randomly selected from the pool of the top 100 nonprofit organizations’ websites. Scott’s Pi formula (1955) was calculated for the purpose of testing intercoder reliability of the pretest, and every part of pretest intercoder reliability reached more than 0.90. Then, the main researcher distributed the top 100 nonprofit organizations’ websites evenly among
two coders, and the coders coded the websites independently from March 2, 2005 to March 23, 2005.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 12.0 for Windows) was utilized in this study for statistical computer analysis. Cross-tabulations with Chi-squared tests, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) and repeated-measures ANOVA were used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. Based on the list, sites representing nonprofit organizations were grouped so that the top 25 sites ranked first, 26-50 ranked second (24 were actually measured because one site was down during coding), 51-75 ranked third (again, 24 were researched because one site was down during coding), and 76-100 ranked fourth, respectively. At the time of this study, 98 sites were available for coding, and two sites were down during coding.

The Chi-squared test measured whether two variables—the organizational income/rank and the presence of a press room, donor-related pages and volunteer-related pages—were associated. One-way ANOVA tests were used to help analyze mean values among four groups based on their ranking. In addition, the repeated-measures ANOVA examined differences among three different areas on the websites: media relations, donor relations and volunteer relations.

RESULTS

RQ1 asked what media relations items are used by the top 100 nonprofit organizations on their websites in the press room. Eighty-two sites that had press rooms were analyzed for this question. Table 1 details the media relations items in the press room. The data showed that press releases were the most common among the 82 sites. The average number of the items included in the press room was 9.45 (SD = 3.67) in a page.

RQ2 asked what percentage of the top 100 nonprofit organizations’ websites has clearly labeled press rooms. Of the 82 sites with press room or its equivalent, 20 (24.4%) were labeled “Press Room.” Another 20 sites (24.4%) were labeled “Media Room.” The other 42 sites (51.2%) had information sections targeted at news media and journalists, that is, “For Journalists,” “Journalist Page” or “Media ______.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Number of the websites possessing the item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press/News releases</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material presented in archived text document</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual reports/Financial</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature stories written by organization staff</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization fact sheets</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive bios/Profiles</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for press personnel to register</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive photographs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization history</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News published or aired about organization</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material presented in archived video</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media kits</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News alert service for media</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization mission statement</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization profile material presented in archived video</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAQ section aimed at media</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization staff speeches/Presentations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product or organization-in-action photos</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press release search engine</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization logos for use in publication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service evaluation report from service beneficiaries</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal service review/Evaluation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization vision statement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material presented in archived audio</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization perspective pieces on current issues/Trends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization value statement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast release</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization backgrounder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material presented in real-time video</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial stories written by organization staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material presented in real-time audio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly reports/Financial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast release search engine</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore, fewer than 50% of the sites with press rooms had them clearly labeled with consistent terms.

H1 considered the relationship between the NPT Top 100 ranking and the use of web press rooms. To answer the hypothesis, the presence of press room or its equivalent was compared among four grouped websites based on the ranking. The data analysis revealed that the top 25 sites contained 21 press rooms. The second tier had 20; the third tier had 21; and the final 25 sites had 20 press rooms. The nonsignificant test statistic of Chi-squared tests suggested that the relationship between the press room presence and the ranking is weak; thus the proposed hypothesis is not supported.

H2 explored the relationship between the NPT Top 100 ranking and the number of media relations items on the websites. The ANOVA \( (F(9, 82) = 2.86, p < 0.05) \) and post hoc comparisons revealed that press rooms in the top and second tier of the NPT Top 100 rankings have significantly more items than press rooms in the third and fourth tiers. Therefore, H2 was supported.

RQ3 asked what percentage of the top 100 nonprofit organizations’ websites has webpages for donors and volunteers. This analysis included the number of websites containing relevant pages. Among 98 of the NPT Top 100 organizations, 90 (91.8%) utilized their websites for donor relations. In addition, 67 (68.4%) organizations did this for volunteer relations.

Chi-squared tests were used to analyze H3 and H4. There were no significant association between the revenue of nonprofit organizations and the presence of either donor-related pages or volunteer-related pages.

RQ4 asked how nonprofit organizations present interactive features on their Websites to help pursue two-way symmetric communication. Tables 2 and 3 detail the total number of websites containing interactive communication-featured items.

**TABLE 2. Total Number of Sites Possessing Receiver-Control Feature Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, the descriptive analysis of the receiver-control features revealed that 82 websites had search engines; 24 sites included viewer choice, such as selection of languages and fonts; 27 sites included curiosity items, such as brain teasers or quizzes; six sites featured games; and 23 sites included ways to facilitate receiver-control, such as regional selection items. Another 11 sites had none of these receiver-control features.

Second, the descriptive analysis of two-way communication feature indicated that 50 sites have e-mail contact addresses, 61 have registration items, eight have surveys, 27 have order forms, four have chat rooms, 33 have other means to facilitate two-way communication (such as feedback items without e-mail addresses), and only one site had a blog link. Another five sites had none of these two-way communication-featured items. Out of the 98 sites, an average of 3.38 (SD = 1.98) items were found. Ninety-seven sites had at least one interactive communication feature and an average of 3.62 (SD = 1.64) items, and 83 sites had more than one item per each communication feature, with an average of 3.9 items (SD = 1.46).

RQ5 asked which website areas had more interactive communication features. Repeated-measures ANOVA tests showed significant differences in the usage of interactive communication features among three different areas—media relations, donor relations and volunteer relations (F (2, 194) = 12.806, p < 0.001). Bonferroni post hoc comparison and descriptive analysis test revealed that donor-related pages have more interactive communication features than volunteer- and media-related pages.

### TABLE 3. Total Number of Sites Possessing Two-Way Communication Feature Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, 90 sites containing donor-related pages included an average of 2.76 (SD = 0.77) receiver-control items, 1.54 (SD = 0.78) two-way communication items, and 4.3 (SD = 1.25) total interactive communication-featured items within donor-related pages; 86 sites (95.6%) had more than one item per feature. Second, 67 sites possessing volunteer-related pages contained an average of 1.42 (SD = 0.84) receiver-control items, 1.66 (SD = 0.9) two-way communication items, and 3.07 (SD = 1.32) total interactive communication-featured items on those pages; 55 sites (82.1%) had more than one item per each feature. Finally, 82 sites with media-related pages had an average of 0.94 (SD = 0.6) receiver-control items, 1.73 (SD = 0.83) two-way communication items, and 0.77 (SD = 0.42) total interactive communication-featured items; 63 sites (76.8%) had more than one item per each feature.

In general, most organizations (91.8%) utilized their websites for donor relations, and 95.6% of the donor-related pages had both types of interactive communication features. Therefore, it could be concluded that donor relations pages are utilized best by nonprofit organizations for two-way symmetric communication in the NPT Top 100.

RQ6 considered the relationship between the NPT Top 100 rankings and the interactivity. As mentioned earlier, interactivity was judged by the number of items included in the websites. Four ANOVAs were conducted to analyze whether different rankings influenced the number of receiver-control items, the number of two-way communication items, the total number of all interactive feature items and the number of sites containing both interactive feature items.

All four ANOVAs revealed no significant differences. Therefore, there is no valid relationship between interactivity and the 100 largest NPO rankings.

RQ7 asked how much prominence nonprofit organizations’ websites gave to different publics (journalists, donors and volunteers). The Web links for donor relations were the most frequently located on the front pages; the second most were for media relations; and links for volunteer relations were the least frequently located on the front pages. Repeated-measures ANOVA tests found significant difference among all three areas [F (2, 112) = 11.179, p < 0.001]. Bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that while donor-related pages were most prominently located, volunteer-related pages were least prominently embedded.

First, of the 90 sites with donor-related pages, 72 (83.3%) had the links located on the front page. Another 14 sites (15.6%) required two clicks to enter donor-related pages, and one site (1%) required three clicks. An average of 1.18 (SD = 0.41) clicks was needed to enter donor-related pages.
Second, of the 82 sites with media-related pages, 62 sites (75.6%) had links located on the front page and 20 sites (24.4%) required two clicks to enter press rooms. An average of 1.23 (SD = 0.43) clicks was required to enter press rooms. Third, of the 67 sites with volunteer-related pages, 34 (50.7%) had links located on the front page and 33 sites (49.3%) required two clicks to enter volunteer-related pages. An average of 1.51 (SD = 0.5) clicks was required to enter volunteer-related pages.

**DISCUSSION**

This study explored how nonprofit organizations utilize their websites for donor relations, volunteer relations, and media relations. In addition, it explored how they provide interactive features to three critical publics: donors, volunteers and journalists to take advantage of the benefits of the Internet as a potential two-way symmetrical medium. Previous research has argued that the best way to create a journalist-friendly website is to have a stand-alone, and clearly labeled, online press room (Bransford, 2001; Callison, 2003). This study tested how many of the top 100 nonprofit organizations have clearly labeled online press rooms dedicated to journalists. In addition, the prominence of press rooms was tested by whether press room links were located on the front pages, as another indicator of a journalist-friendly website. The statistical analyses revealed that 83.7% of the organizations had press rooms and 75.6% of press rooms were located on the front page. However, fewer than half (24.4% as “Press Room” and 24.4% as “News Room”) were clearly labeled; therefore, it is not yet clear that nonprofit organizations provide journalist-friendly websites. Overall, organizations need to use consistent terms to indicate media-related information on the Websites in order to avoid confusing journalists.

Moreover, the press rooms were assessed by the number of materials included in them. News releases, archived text materials, and annual reports were the most commonly placed materials in press rooms, and the average number of items in a press room was 9.45 among the organizations that have press rooms. Higher-ranking organizations provided more materials (Mean = 10.5) in their press rooms than did lower-ranking organizations (Mean = 8.4). It is possible that higher-ranking organizations received better media coverage, and had more abundant information and materials from off-line practice that cost considerably more money; thus, they had more materials than lower-ranking organizations on the Websites.
The analyses for donor relations and volunteer relations showed no significant difference between organizations with the highest revenues and organizations with lowest revenues. The nonprofit organizations under this study had donor-related pages (91.8%) more frequently than for volunteer-related pages (68.4%), and they gave the highest prominence to donor-related pages (83.3%) on the front pages than to volunteer-related pages (50.7%). Even compared with media relations pages (50.7%), the donor relations pages had the highest prominence on most organizations’ websites. That is, most examined organizations regarded donors as the primary public, more important than the other two, volunteers and journalists.

The websites were additionally measured for interactive features. Among webpages for donors, volunteers and journalists, the donor-related pages had the highest number of interactive communication features. The results showed that most organizations of this study located the highest number of interactive communication features on the donor-related pages, and they put both receiver control and two-way communication features together most frequently (95.6%) on those pages for donor relations. It is possible that most organizations regarded donors as the most important public in comparison with volunteers and journalists, so they tended to provide more donor-friendly webpages with interactive qualities, as well as with prominence of location.

In contrast, the results also could support the claim that public relations in the nonprofit sector is often encroached upon by the fund-raising department, just as the public relations department is often influenced by the marketing and advertising departments in for-profit organizations (Hill and White, 2000; Kelly, 1993). That is, volunteer relations might be encroached upon by the excessive attention paid to fund-raising activities. Therefore, nonprofits should increase their efforts in volunteer relations to come up to par with their efforts in donor relations.

Moreover, statistical analyses also suggest that, compared to media relations and donor relations, webpages for volunteer relations (68%) are the least actively utilized aspect of the nonprofit organizations’ websites. There might exist more volunteer-relations links beyond the three layers of research mentioned here; however, the prominence of location is also important for attracting potential volunteers. Assuming that volunteer-relations links exist in all of the studied sites, even beyond three layers deep, more than two clicks are required to enter most volunteer-related pages (65.3%), according to these findings. Therefore, more nonprofits should proactively locate their website sections.
for volunteer relations on the home page, to compete with fellow non-profit entities, as well as with their business counterparts.

There are three primary contributions from this study to the field of public relations. First, this study tested how nonprofit organizations utilize their websites to benefit from media relations. This study found that although most of the top 100 nonprofit organizations maintain online media relations, there is still inconsistency over terms for online materials.

Second, this study attempted to examine how nonprofit organizations use the Internet and the web for other stakeholders, such as donors and volunteers, which had been previously neglected by researchers. Only one study previously examined how nonprofit organizations utilized ease of interface, information provider functions and relational communication to reach their public relations goals (Kang and Norton, 2004). We found that donors are treated as the most important stakeholders given the most frequent interactive features and highest prominence dedicated to donors in comparison with journalists as well as volunteers.

Finally, another critical contribution of this study was to measure how well the top 100 non-profit organizations attempt to practice two-way communication online through the use of receiver control and two-way communication interactive features (McMillan, 2002). Both dimensions are required to pursue mutual discourse and two-way symmetrical communications online for the practice of excellent public relations (McMillan, 2002). Ultimately, this study found that the more importantly organizations deemed their primary publics (donors in this study) to be based on their website prominence, the more they attempted to practice excellent public relations by utilizing the interactivity of the Internet to accomplish their goals.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The key drawbacks of the study include that the sample size was somewhat small, and it only analyzed large leading nonprofit organizations in the United States. Future studies should study nonprofits in different countries, as well as different types of nonprofit sectors, because different cultural, societal and industrial factors might affect the development and usage of websites. For example, the Boy Scouts of America’s primary goal to help young people live a sound and healthier life is far different from that of the Salvation Army’s efforts focusing on fund-
raising activities for disadvantaged people; therefore the Boy Scouts may produce less website content for volunteers and donors than the Salvation Army.

Moreover, future studies should factor in the questions of visitors’ needs, impressions, etc., because this study measured user-friendly web usage only with the level of prominence of items and interactive communication features. Consequently, future studies should investigate how journalists, donors and volunteers evaluate the easiness of finding relevant information on the websites.

Overall, this study provides a glimpse of empirical answers concerning how nonprofit organizations utilize their websites to communicate effectively with some of their critical publics: donors, volunteers and journalists. This study focused on two-way communication to investigate how nonprofit organizations practice excellent public relations through interactivity items on their websites. Although the investigation only examined two-way symmetrical communication, this is considered a major part of the excellence theory perspective (Grunig and Grunig, 1992). Therefore, future research should monitor how nonprofit organizations use their websites for the practice of excellent public relations with other characteristics of excellence theory. Such research is crucial for adding greater depth to our limited knowledge of how nonprofits use the Internet to support their various public relations efforts. It is hoped the current study can serve as a stepping stone for future work in this area.

NOTE

1. Grunig and Hunt (1984) described four models of public relations using two basic criteria. One is the nature of communication (one-way communication vs. two-way communication). The other criterion is the purpose of communication (persuasive or asymmetrical vs. mutual understanding or symmetrical). Grunig’s four models include press agentry (one-way asymmetrical), public information (one-way symmetrical), two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical.

REFERENCES


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