

How Millennials are Engaging and Building Relationships with Organizations on Facebook

Tina McCorkindale, Marcia W. DiStaso & Hilary Fussell Sisco

Abstract

More than half of Facebook's 900 million active users in the U.S. consist of the Millennial generation (ages 13 to 29). With more organizations taking advantage of the site's reach, determining how organizations are interacting with Millennials on Facebook is important. This study used qualitative focus groups and a quantitative survey to examine how Millennials preferred to interact and engage with organizations on Facebook. Results found participants were not opposed to interacting with organizations on Facebook, but were very specific in terms of how, with who, and why they wanted to engage. While Millennials did want updates and other information depending on the type of organization or group, they also wanted discounts or other benefits. Millennials identified reasons why they would actively terminate the relationship with an organization.

The Millennial generation is defined as the children of Baby Boomers, born between 1981 and 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2010). As of March 2012, Facebook had more than 900 million active users (who logged in at least once in the past 30 days) with

Tina McCorkindale is an Associate Professor at Appalachian State University. Marcia W. DiStaso is an Assistant Professor at Pennsylvania State University and Hilary Fussell Sisco is an Assistant Professor at Quinnipiac University. Correspondence can be directed to McCorkindale at mccorkindaletm@appstate.edu.

more than half the users in the United States between the ages of 13 and 29 (Verde, 2011). In addition, nearly three-quarters of online 18- to 29-year-olds use a social networking site, with Facebook being the most prolific (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2010).

For-profit as well as nonprofit organizations and groups create profiles within social networking sites, such as Facebook, to take advantage of the high consumer ratings these sites attract (Orrell, 2009; Roberts & Roach, 2009). In addition to the traditional uses of Facebook to stay in touch with friends, family, and coworkers, the site can be used as a strategic marketing tool for companies to promote products, solicit donations, support causes, and interact with publics (Orrell; Roberts & Roach). Utilizing social media not only provides another medium to communicate, but it delivers messages in a format that encourages engagement resulting in relationship development. Facebook is also a viable option for corporate and educational institutions looking to cut costs but still reach their target audiences (Ganster & Schumacher, 2009; Papp, 2009).

The Millennial generation has grown up with technology, so much so that according to Phillips (2010), “digital media so pervades their lives, they cannot imagine living without it. Digital content and communication literally enables their social lives” (§ 3). According to Abraham (2011), Millennials’ “digital prowess also makes them more likely to start trends, be engaged with pop culture, try new products and share them with friends and family” (§ 3).

Because the Millennial generation is one of the most commanding publics in terms of purchasing power and influence, and due to their pervasive use of Facebook, it is important to understand how they engage with organizations on this social networking site. By gaining a better understanding of how and when Millennials engage, organizations can more appropriately plan and execute successful social media campaigns with this very important public.

This study used qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how adult Millennials engage with organizations, what motivates these relationships and what their reasons are for maintaining or terminating these relationships. Focus groups were used to determine what adult Millennials believe companies should and should not do with their Facebook accounts and examples of companies they follow. A quantitative survey analyzed how Millennials define these organization-public relationships, how they engage with organiza-

tions, and how they prefer to interact with organizations.

Literature Review

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site as defined by Tredinnick (2006) because it is driven by user participation with user-generated content. Founded in 2004, it has quickly grown into one of the most popular websites in the world. According to Alexa.com (2012), Facebook is currently the second most popular site in both the United States and the world, with users spending approximately 24 minutes each visit.

Although there is controversy over the true founding of Facebook, most agree that it was launched by Mark Zuckerberg, a then 19-year-old Harvard sophomore, and his college roommates. Originally it was only available for students at Harvard, then Stanford and Yale, and soon it was available to students nationwide (Yadav, 2006). As Facebook continued to flourish, it was soon opened to high school students and ultimately to anyone over 13.

The Facebook registration process for organizations became available in April 2006, and more than 4,000 organizations joined within two weeks (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). Currently, the average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events (Facebook, 2011). Facebook entries (called pages) can be created for free (Facebook). The average user has 130 "friends," who may include people, organizations, groups, or objects. Friends can include those a user may or may not have met or interacted with offline (Shear, 2010). Facebook users can also create and join groups and "like" pages (previously called "fan" pages, until April 19, 2010), many of which are maintained by organizations. "Liking" something requires the simple act of clicking the "like" button on the Facebook page.

Engagement with Publics

Some ways organizations are using Facebook include marketing, customer service, fundraising, information dissemination, and stakeholder engagement (Orrell, 2009; Roberts & Roach, 2009; Waters et al., 2009). The type of organization may influence whether an organization adopts social media. Barnes (2010a) found 56% of the Fortune

500 was on Facebook while 29% had neither a Twitter nor Facebook page. Similarly, 71% of the Inc. 500 had a Facebook page, with 87% of Inc. 500 respondents claiming to be “very familiar” with Facebook (Barnes, 2010b). Moreover, more than three-fourths said Facebook had been successful for their organization though it was unclear how these organizations defined “success.” U.S. charities seemed to be more involved in social media with 93% of the respondents indicating they were on Facebook (Barnes & Mattson, 2009). More than three-quarters of charities indicated that social media technologies held at least some importance to their organization.

The goal for organizations using social media is to incorporate it into their existing strategies to improve communication. Using social media as strategic communication tools involves more than delivering a message. Listening and participating in conversations with transparent communication can lead to improved credibility and relationships (Holtz & Havens, 2009).

In an interview about Facebook, Marketing Director Randi Zuckerberg, suggested whenever a person clicks “like” or joins a cause, they are building awareness of that message among their “friends” by “aligning themselves with a particular issue” (Vericat, 2010, p. 177). However, research has not yet investigated the true meaning of a “like.” A study by ExactTarget (2010) found that almost 40% of consumers “like” companies on Facebook to publicly display their brand affiliation to “friends.” Facebook also allows an opportunity for publics to give their opinions via “likes” or by posting comments on an organization’s wall. Henderson (2010) suggested organizations should respond to comments on sites because it will encourage the user to post again. This also shows the organization is listening and responding to issues, which encourages others to interact.

One of the major challenges in interacting with publics on Facebook is for the organization to maintain an authentic persona (McCorkindale, in press). According to Bulmer and DiMauro (2009):

Companies should be mindful that a primary reason professionals participate in social networks is to collaborate not to be sold to. Marketers should develop social media strategies that do not break or breach the social contract that professionals have when working within their social networks – by avoiding overt sales and marketing campaigns... Those that embrace transparency are

the conversations that customers desire. (p. 5)

Another challenge for some, though, is convincing management of the importance of creating an online presence (Ganster & Schumacher, 2009). Smith (2010) contends most research has examined efforts the organization makes, but little research has focused on how the public engages or becomes active communicators with the organizations. Therefore, investigating how publics such as Millennials interact with organizations is important.

Millennials

Also referred to as the Y Generation and Echo Boomers (children of Baby Boomers), the Millennial generation is on track to be the most educated generation in history (Pew Research Center, 2010). According to a Pew Research Center report conducted in January 2010, 75% of Millennials ages 19 to 29 have a profile on a social networking site (compared to 41% of the general population). Although they are considered to be a generation with very high buying power, Millennials are reported to be less concerned with consumerism than previous generations, as they are found to be less likely to own a car or buy a home and more likely to do volunteer work (Casserly, 2011).

Millennials on Facebook

Previous studies have indicated Millennials primarily use Facebook to maintain their existing group of friends, including those with whom they share weak or distant ties (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Few Millennials actually make new friends on Facebook, and many prefer to carry out their interactions in a public forum, such as on their Wall. Moreover, while Millennials may join groups, they interact with those groups infrequently (Pempek et al.). This, though, may be changing as Facebook groups are becoming more popular.

Few researchers have delved into the motivations and uses of Facebook groups. In a study of political Facebook groups, Woolley (2010) determined people are using groups to gather rather than share information, or to simply show support. Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) determined the following were reasons why students join Facebook groups: to obtain information about activities; to socialize with friends; to seek self-status; and to find entertainment.

They also found underclassmen were more motivated to use groups to engage in political and civic activities compared to upperclassman, attributing this finding to increased stress and busier schedules.

Organizations are taking advantage of Facebook to help build relationships, such as universities creating groups based on students' interests in an effort to enhance their interaction with them (Santovec, 2006). Organizations should take caution, though, because many Millennials admit they do not present an authentic persona online, but rather have "highly socially desirable identities individuals aspire to have offline but have not yet been able to embody for one reason or another" (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008, p. 1830).

Vorvoreanu (2009) is one of the few scholars who has conducted research concerning Millennials' interaction with organizations on Facebook. She conducted focus groups with Millennials and found several themes. First, the participants did not think Facebook was an appropriate medium for communicating with corporations and would rather use telephone, e-mail, or the company website. Incentives and customer service, though, were two reasons why the Millennials would interact. Second, they were more likely to "friend" and interact regularly with small businesses and nonprofits than large corporations. Third, they were hesitant to interact with organizations due to potential spam, viruses, and invasion of their personal communication space. Last, their interaction with nonprofits and supporting causes should be taken with a grain of salt due to social desirability bias. The Millennials in her study said they felt guilty when they did not express support, but they did not really use Facebook to donate. Vorvoreanu concluded, "Relationship cultivation strategies and dialogue are not always appropriate and organizations need to choose wisely the contexts and channels for engaging with publics" (p. 80). Therefore, it is important to determine the motivations the Millennial generation has for interacting, and how best to engage them.

Relationship Building

Relationships are what Facebook was built for with the goal of helping "people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and coworkers" (Facebook, 2011, ¶1). Bruning and Ledingham (1999) identified three possible types of relationships between an organization and its key publics: professional, personal, and commu-

nity. Organizations in professional relationships maintain a business-like manner, deliver services that meet a business need, and show a willingness to financially invest in the relationship. In a personal relationship, organizations engage in actions that build trust, and show a willingness to invest time, energy, and emotions taking a personal interest in the relationship and individual needs. A community relationship is based on the organization being open and engaging by actively supporting or sponsoring important community events. According to Kent and Taylor (1998), “technology itself can neither create nor destroy relationships; rather, it is how the technology is used that influences organization-public relationships” (p. 324). Organizations need to be savvy in how they communicate with various publics, especially the Millennial generation.

Uses and Gratifications

The uses and gratifications approach (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973) provides a useful framework for understanding Millennials’ motivations for using Facebook. Uses and gratifications theory is based on the notion that the media cannot influence an individual unless that person has some use for that media (Rubin, 2002). The theory suggests that Millennials are making a conscious choice about what they want to receive when they log on to Facebook. The highest motivator for Millennials most likely lies in what McQuail (2005) defined as the need for integration and social interaction. They are able to connect with family and friends, are able to maintain regular conversations despite distances, and they can reinforce their sense of belonging to peer groups. Further, Facebook can provide Millennials with information about their friends, about their interests and current events (Hargittai, 2007). Similarly, Facebook provides Millennials with seemingly hours of active entertainment. In addition to social contacts, Facebook includes a plethora of games, applications, videos and music that can interest this generation. Valenzuela, Park & Kee (2009) found that, in addition to the reasons stated above, “Facebook helps with personal identity construction—one of the key motives for media consumption—by enabling multiple channels for interpersonal feedback and peer acceptance” (p. 882). Millennials are active audiences on Facebook and catching their attention and keeping it is vital for many organizations. Little research has explored how

Millennials perceive and interact with organizations on Facebook. Based on the above literature, the following research questions are posited:

RQ1: How are Millennials using Facebook?

RQ2: What motivates Millennials to enter into a relationship with an organization or group through Facebook?

RQ3: How do Millennials interact with organizations and groups on Facebook?

RQ4: What do Millennials expect from their Facebook relationships with organizations and groups?

RQ5: What type of relationship (professional, personal, or community) are organizations or groups establishing with Millennials?

Method

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed in this study to examine Millennial–Facebook relationships. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods offers more description and detail to ensure validity in the findings (Van Zoonan, 1994).

Focus Groups

A series of focus groups were performed to determine how Millennials engage and interact with organizations on Facebook and to investigate the relationships Millennials have with brands on Facebook. First, three in-person focus groups were conducted to initially determine how Millennials engaged and interacted with organizations on Facebook. Thirty Millennials participated in one of three one-hour focus groups led by a trained, student moderator who led each group using a semi-structured moderator's guide and round-robin method. E-mails, in-class announcements, and on-campus fliers were used to recruit participants at a western, diverse public university for a nonprobability, convenience sample. Participants included 18 females and 12 males, ranging in age from 18 to 29, who were all members of Facebook. The Millennials were advised they could decline to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable.

In addition, three online focus groups were conducted to in-

investigate what organizations and brands Millennials connect with on Facebook and why. A trained moderator led each group using a semi-structured moderator's guide and posed questions for online discussion. All participants were required to be members of Facebook. There was a total of 75 Millennial participants in three different groups of 18, 28 and 29.

Survey

After receiving IRB approval, an online survey was emailed to 1,600 graduate and undergraduate students at three universities: two in the Northeast and one in the Southeast. In addition, requests for participation were sent on Facebook and Twitter, and a \$25 gift certificate was offered as an incentive. Participants were asked about their activities on Facebook, their interactions with organizations through fan pages and their interactions with Facebook Groups as well as demographic questions. A total of 414 participants completed the survey—a 26% response rate. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 29, and two-thirds of the respondents were female.

Results and Discussion

Focus groups

The purpose of the focus groups was to determine how Millennials interact with organizations on Facebook. Overall, the focus group participants used Facebook for personal reasons to keep up with current friends, coworkers, and family members. No one used it to make new friends, as is consistent with previous research (Steinfeld et al., 2008; Pempek et al., 2009). Most of the participants used Facebook for entertainment and as a distraction, while a few used it for event tracking. One female said, "I use it to see events. PRSSA posts events that are coming up and I also like to chat with friends." Another said, "I use it for my club on campus and to post events. I also like keeping in touch with friends."

Participants were asked about their reasons for "liking" organizations on Facebook. Participants revealed that if they were not personally vested in the organization or group, they were more likely to become "friends" or "fans" if there was an incentive or benefit. Some participants provided examples about their relationship experiences with organizations and groups in which they were not personally

vested. One female said, “I’m actually a fan of [the clothing store] H&M and they posted a special about if you come in early you’ll get a discount so that was pretty cool.” One male participant offered an example of an “up and coming” designer who offered discounts to anyone who became a “friend” of his Facebook site, which he said definitely encouraged him to become “friends” with the designer. Other reasons why Millennials “liked” organizations included celebrity endorsements, giveaways, the ability of the organization to “respond within a timely manner,” and the content posted.

On the other hand, a couple of participants said they see the discounts but do not print them out or do anything about them. Others felt that what is offered is not enough of a motivator to establish a relationship and suggested organizations and groups should have “good” deals exclusive to Facebook fans. A few participants, though, indicated incentives would not be worth what they considered to be an “abundance” of requests and e-mails from the company.

Becoming a “friend” with an organization or a group seemed to be viewed as more risky to the participants than becoming a “fan” or “liking” their page because friends have access to other friends’ profiles. While most focus group participants indicated they had received “friend”/“fan” requests from organizations or groups, they said they rarely clicked on them and more often than not would ignore the request. When they did accept the “friend” request, they did not mind being contacted as long as it was not “repetitive” or “annoying.” Those who were actually “friends” with organizations or groups also disclosed they were more likely to friend or accept a friend request if they worked for the organization directly or if their friends recommended it. For example, one participant both “friended” her sorority and became a member of their page.

Regarding their interaction with organizations, one participant discussed how she had “raised and donated money for Breast Cancer Awareness,” and how the site sent her a pink ribbon “badge” to wear online to show her support. Another female participant said she was a “fan” of a cause for diabetes, but it was actually a specific site for a friend of hers that raised money for her friend not for diabetes as a whole.

Furthermore, many focus group participants agreed they would be more likely to donate to a cause if their friends recommend it,

indicating the importance of word of mouth and the influence of peer groups. A couple of focus group participants mentioned they would be more than willing to donate if they knew a person who was affected by the cause or if they knew the person who started the Facebook cause page demonstrating the impact of relevancy and close ties. If a friend was in need or cared enough to create a Facebook page for something, these participants indicated that they would likely become involved as well.

The Millennials said they paid attention to updates from the organizations and groups in their news feed, but most said they would not actively seek out information. As one male said, "I don't mind the organizations contacting me if I actually care about them." For example, one female said she was a "fan" of Go Green and she would read about them in her news feed, but she would not go out of her way to look up more information about them. One male said he liked to be notified of club premieres. However, once he began to receive excessive notifications he started to ignore them all. As he said, "I used to get notified when there are party promotions around the area and it was a cool aspect that was useful. But now it is just plain annoying so it is ignored." This seemed to be a common theme with the Millennials, indicating a threshold for notifications. When the messages were perceived as excessive, the participants stated they deleted the messages without reading them, "defriended" the organization, or even contacted someone to complain. For example, one male talked about his experience, "I was getting like five messages a day from one organization and it was bothering me. I actually messaged the guy back to stop sending me the messages. I was so annoyed by that." Although the topics of the messages were important, the participants were more concerned with the quantity of messages.

In addition, the Millennials mentioned they would often "break-up" with organizations if the Facebook page did not engage them or if they engaged them too much. Participants also mentioned disliking when an organization's Facebook "page is basically the same as their website," and when some organizations "don't allow posts or don't respond to comments."

The focus group Millennials were not opposed to interacting with organizations or groups on Facebook, but were very specific in what they wanted. They were most likely to "friend" or join pages if

they were a member of that organization or group offline. Millennials who were “fans” or “friends” of an organization or group appreciated getting information from them as long as they were not contacted excessively, or made to feel as if they were being “sold to” using overt marketing campaigns.

Focus group participants had concerns with the credibility of information on Facebook pages for organizations and groups. Many said they would be more likely to visit the company’s website than their Facebook page to get information because they viewed the website information to be “more credible” and “reliable.” Previous research (DiStaso & Bortree, 2012; Fussell Sisco & McCorkindale, 2011; Rawlins, 2009) has stressed the importance of online transparency and credibility in building relationships with publics. Plus, some participants appeared to be rather wary of organizations and groups trying to lure them in or obtain their personal information. This may be a result of increased media attention on privacy or fake social media accounts (a.k.a. brandjacking). Although the most publicized social media brandjacking was H.J. Heinz (see Werch, 2010) and BP (see Whaling, 2010) on Twitter, it has also happened for companies on Facebook as was the case with the pharmaceutical company Sanofi-Aventis (see O’Brien, 2010).

Survey

Survey respondents reported an average time spent on Facebook that ranged from two minutes to five hours, with an average of 63 minutes. Forty-four percent reported spending less than 30 minutes on Facebook in an average day (n=180), while only 25% spent more than an hour (n=102), and approximately 10% spent more than two hours (n=40).

The vast majority of respondents (86%) checked their Facebook account every day (n=356), while 9% checked their account a couple times a week (n=38). More than half (57%) had a Facebook application on their cell phone or tablet (n=225). Most respondents rarely or never accepted friend requests from people (83%, n=329) or organizations (91%, n=356) they did not know.

Overall, as was found with previous research, the Millennials typically used Facebook to maintain current relationships. Although the individual amount of time spent on Facebook varied, it was seen

as an easy way to stay in touch with friends. Frequently cited open-ended reasons as to what spectator behaviors respondents engaged in on Facebook include “browsing,” “stalking,” “checking” or “creeping” on others’ profiles. Active behaviors included chatting, updating statuses, “checking” their messages/notifications/timeline, uploading photos or other content, playing games, and keeping in touch with their friends, especially long-distance ones.

Three-quarters of the respondents were fans or “liked” organizations on Facebook ($n=312$) while fewer than half (45%, $n=185$) were fans of products. This was contrary to the online focus group findings, in which many participants said they were not really “fans” of organizations, but more “fans” of products or had casual interests in some organizations or groups. Concerning the frequency of visits to an organization’s Facebook page, the majority rarely or never visited the page once they became a “fan” (69%, $n=210$). Others made weekly (15%, $n=47$) or monthly visits (14%, $n=44$). Very few (1%) made daily visits ($n=4$), and typically reported they did only if they were managing the organization’s page. Most respondents who were fans did not send fan suggestions to their friends (82%, $n=252$).

As to what type of organizations they had “liked,” respondents frequently cited sororities and fraternities, nonprofits (including religious organizations), sports teams, local organizations, college organizations (both as current students and alumni), and bands. Corporations were mentioned less frequently. Others could not recall what organizations they “liked,” or responded there were too many to count. Frequently cited reasons as to why respondents became fans of organizations included: their membership in the organization; their “liking” or passion for the organization; their need to be kept updated; promotions/discounts; and the existing membership of their friends. Some respondents said they “liked” them just for fun or because someone asked them to.

The Millennials who were passionate about certain causes had better recall regarding the organizations or groups they supported. This passion has led to solid relationships resulting in interest and action. Almost half (44%, $n=169$) of respondents had donated to a cause, supported or joined a cause, or recruited people to support a cause on Facebook.

Similarly, respondents said they were more likely to “like” an

organization if it offered discounts (56%, n=231) or product samples (40%, n=166). Also, close to one-third said they would be more likely to “like” an organization if it sent events (28%, n=89) or a personal invitation (27%, n=87). Respondents were not as motivated to “like” an organization because of games or “fun applications” (14%, n=43). Many Millennials indicated they would not actively seek out an organization or group to “like” unless they worked for them or were actively involved. One survey respondent said, “I’m not going to go search for organizations to make them my friends and I really haven’t had any requests from organizations [to be my friend].” Overall, the main reasons Millennials in both the survey and the focus groups stated they would add an organization or group as a “friend” were for incentives, if it was convenient, or if they were already an offline fan of that organization or group. Not surprisingly, the personal relevancy of the organization as well as the importance of the organization to their network seemed to have the biggest impact on their willingness to support the organization.

Facebook Groups and Organizations

The vast majority (91%, n=367) of survey respondents were members of Facebook groups. The most common way respondents learned about groups on Facebook was from a friend or from an invitation sent from the group (66%, n=243). More than half suggested a friend’s existing affiliation with the group (53%, n=195) was another way they learned about the group. Less often, respondents took an active role by searching for the group (22%, n=81) or stumbling upon the group (28%, n=102). Several respondents reported they had actively created the group (n=9).

Relating to how organizations contact the group members, event invitations (60%, n=220) and messages (71%, n=261) were most frequently cited. Status updates/notifications in the live feed (44%, n=162) and wall posts (39%, n=143) were also listed methods, but not viewed as frequently. Finally, few groups interacted with the participants via Facebook chat (8%, n=29).

Several reasons why respondents liked having organizations contact them on Facebook included: convenient communication, staying informed, networking opportunities, and promotions/discounts. However, 42% of respondents had actively left an organization’s

group or page (n=165). Overwhelmingly, respondents open-endedly reported the reason for departure was annoying or excessive notifications (n=80). Other listed reasons included: "I was cleaning my Facebook account;" "I was no longer interested in the group;" "I no longer belong to the group [offline];" or "I disagreed with some of the content and didn't want to be affiliated anymore."

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine how Millennials engage and build relationships on Facebook. According to Argenti (2011), "embracing social media is no longer a strategic business option, but a necessity, and a huge opportunity" (¶ 2). This is because as was found in this study, social media does allow organizations and groups to engage and build relationships. The Millennial generation has grown up with technology and considers social media like Facebook an integral part of their lives. This, along with their sheer number and buying power makes them an ideal public for organizations and groups to utilize Facebook for relationship building. The Millennials in this study expressed interest in becoming long-term, engaged "friends" or "fans" with organizations and groups given the right circumstances.

Given the tone and conversations about the use of Facebook by organizations, the Millennials in both the focus groups and the survey would probably identify their relationship as professional. However, this would be clouded logic and just a reaction to the more passionate conversations about excessive communication that can be perceived to be meeting business needs. While some organizations probably did attempt to engage in only professional relationships with the Millennials in this study, most of the conversations indicated that organizations wished to engage in a more personal relationship, especially in the case of small businesses or student groups.

Some of the focus group and survey participants had received requests from organizations to be "friends." The act of having a Facebook page with "friends" as opposed to "fans" can be viewed as an attempt to establish personal relationships, given the two-way relationship implications of a friendship versus the one-way status of being a "fan." However, some participants were not comfortable with becoming friends with organizations because the organization would

then be able to view their personal profile, which is not the case with “fan” relationships. Because not all the Millennials in this study were receptive to engaging in a personal relationship with organizations, especially larger ones, without some incentive or advantage, their relationship would be best identified as a quasi-personal relationship.

For organizations, Facebook can be viewed as a community site with the purpose of engaging in community relationships. Facebook applications allow organizations to engage in community relationships where the organization can post events and activities to “improve social and economic aspects of the community” (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, p. 165). However, according to the participants in this study, not all of the organizations they have relationships with were using this aspect to its full advantage. Some organizations were engaging in community relations while others were not. In their experience, student groups and small businesses were more likely to engage in developing community-type relationships with Millennials.

While the benefits of using social media can be high, its use comes with many challenges as well. In Facebook, the sharing of content and engaging in conversations creates more informed publics but can also be a slippery slope of disclosing too much or too often. By creating a Facebook page, organizations and groups provide the opportunity for people to “like” them or their cause. The act of “liking” an organization or a group gives individuals an opportunity to become involved and to bring awareness by showing their “friends” the affiliation. Having Millennials as a “fan” is also less risky than a “friend” relationship, while organizational updates will still appear in the Millennials’ news feed. However, it is important to keep in mind the message threshold and post enough to engage but not so much to where the Millennial “un-likes” the organization.

Similarly to Vorvoreanu (2009), this study found that the best way for an organization to encourage friendship with Millennials is through contests or by offering discounts and products, suggesting a “what can you do for me” attitude. Providing relevant information and responding to Millennials is also important. Organizations and groups should not underestimate their “fan’s” willingness to tell their story. The more tools Millennials have to do this, the more passionate they will become and the easier they can spread awareness. For example, becoming a “friend” of XYZ Company on Facebook can result in

receiving a free download for a badge like the pink ribbon for breast cancer awareness. This can be placed on a variety of things including profile pictures in Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter along with other social media sites, helping to further spread the message. This is especially important with Millennials because as this study found, most Millennials start relationships with organizations or groups because they see that their “friends” have relationships with them.

Overall, Millennials were more likely to engage with smaller organizations or nonprofits they had some sort of relationship or connection with. While Millennials did want updates and other information depending on the type of organization or group, they also wanted discounts or other benefits. Similar to the tenets of social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), if the costs outweighed the benefits such as excessive notifications, then Millennials would actively terminate the relationship. Other Facebook peers were also influential in establishing and maintaining this relationship.

As with all research, this study had limitations. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to represent all Millennials but can only represent the thoughts, beliefs and opinions of those who participated in the focus groups and survey. Also, due to access limitations, this study was conducted with participants ages 18 to 29 on college campuses, but this does not cover the full range of Millennials who are between the ages of 13 and 30. Future research should be conducted with a greater range in this age group.

Future research should also be conducted to explore the threshold for postings by organizations and groups. At what point and with what type of content are Millennials turned off? Is there such a thing as a magic number of posts per day or week? Most likely, there is not, but this should be explored. Future research should be conducted to explore the use of incentives in initializing relationships between organizations or groups and Millennials. Because credibility of the Facebook pages of organizations and groups was a concern identified in this study, future research should analyze what influences perceptions of credibility.

Given the quasi-personal relationships that organizations and groups established with the Millennials in the survey and focus groups, there is room for improvement in building relationships with

this important demographic group. One area of research that can be conducted is identifying where the line for conversation exists. As previous research has shown (see McCorkindale, 2010), organizations often post status updates on their walls and fans will comment. The type of organization and comment will determine if Millennials respond.

Finally, social media tools are beneficial for organizations interacting with Millennials if, and only if, they fit into the strategic goals of the organizations. Organizations need to be savvy with how they engage with Millennials on social networking sites, such as Facebook. This relationship needs to be authentic and transparent, but also reciprocal, meaning there is a desire to engage on the part of the user. Therefore, organizations need to conduct research to determine the most appropriate method to engage and create dialogue with this important public.

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