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Portraying Sense of Community through Communication: How to maximize the benefit of social media for a community agency

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**Portraying Sense of Community through
Communication: How to maximize the benefit of social
media for a community agency**

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Senior Honors Thesis

Western Michigan University

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Abstract

Perceptions of social media networks are changing rapidly. Their purpose, function, effectiveness, and relevance are being widely debated while their global popularity and societal influence escalate. While individuals used the networks to share, manage, and change their personal lives, organizations jumped at the chance to benefit from low-cost public relations, advertising, and market research. Many organizations speedily adjusted their communication strategies to access these low-cost resources. Due to historical marginalization many nonprofit community agencies were slower to integrate this new media costing them the opportunity to compete for audience attention on level with the private industry. Neglecting to integrate these media resources effectively has and will continue to be a detrimental oversight. Systematically aligning the core purpose of community agencies with the main functions of social media provide a platform to develop a strategy to ensure these community agencies reap all the benefits of this new media. A case-study at Lutheran Church of the Savior (LCS) contextualizes the assertions made in the respective literature. A comparison between theory and reality exposes social media limitations specific to community agencies necessitating careful integration and management of the new media. The study concludes by providing structure for an integration plan specifically designed to maximize the social media benefits for community agencies.

Key words: community agency, communication, nonprofit, social media

Introduction:

Social media networks are growing in popularity and influence rapidly around the world. While individuals use the networks to share and manage their personal lives, organizations are using the networks as a low-cost media resource for marketing, market research, and public relations. The affordability and accessibility of these networks give nonprofit community agencies an opportunity to compete for audience attention easier than ever before. Still, many community agencies are having difficulty managing the new resources and integrating them with current communication methods. The work in this paper aims to clarify the barriers that are preventing many of these agencies from reaping the full benefit of these resources and then, to propose a strategy to assist in any future transitions.

A review of past communication developments and the nonprofit sector's integration into social media will help identify and derive the source of existing barriers. Uncovering and aligning the purpose of these community agencies with the functions of social media will identify the goal of their relationship. Lutheran Church of the Savior (LCS), a small, community-serving church will serve as a case-study as they integrate the networks into their communication methods. The case-study will prompt a comparison between theory and reality exposing social media limitations which are specific to community agencies. These limitations reiterate the importance of careful integration and management of the new media. The study concludes by proposing a structure specifically designed to maximize the benefit of community agencies' integration and management of the social media networks.

Communication Developments

The ability, desire, and need for interaction are often considered defining factors of humanity. Communication scholars refer to the term *homo narrans*, coined by Walter Fischer, to describe the tendency of understanding and exploring the world through storytelling; they identify this tendency as “one of the most important human activities.” (Duck & McMahan, 2009). The instinctive use of storytelling to establish relationships, maintain connections, and discover the world makes the effectiveness of communication a defining factor in the success of a community.

Historically, this storytelling and communication could only be accomplished by face-to-face communication. However, as technology progressed, the development of instruments to create and enhance communication over distance (known as telecommunication) changed the way humans communicate and share their stories. At first, telecommunication technology was dependent upon the speed of the available transportation system; the speed of communication was limited by the speed at which the message-carrier could be transported to the message recipient- until electricity (Kayany, 2012). Electricity accelerated the development of telecommunication technology and thus accelerated the adoption of new communication methods and standards. The creation of the telegraph, telephone, television, cell phone, computer, internet, and World Wide Web distinctly altered the way humans now understand and practice communication.

This interaction between humans, technology, and communication can be understood through Anthony Giddens’s Theory of Structuration. Giddens’s (1993) proposed that the reproduction of social systems was, “an active constituting process, accomplished by, and

consisting in, the doings of active subjects.” The theory identifies structures and agents as the compelling factors in the existence of social systems: structures serve as the rules and resources, agents use these structures to perform social actions (Giddens, 1984). In this case, communication and the formation of community can be seen as the social system. The telecommunication infrastructure is the structure and humans are the agents. Giddens’s (1993) suggests that all agents have a consciousness which allows them to know what they do and why they do it; in understanding the multiple reasons behind their actions, agents experience inherent autonomy and dependence on the system. Humans, then, have perpetuated the social structure of community through communication. They have acted independently and as a dependent collective to alter the communication methods that form communities. It may be clear that humans prompted the rapid development of communication technologies but this theory expands the influence of human action to show that they have also consciously prompted the influence these technologies have had on our social systems, including communities.

Though the increased rate of technology development has provided access to populations and information that were not previously accessible, it has also generated significant disparities and challenges. The digital divide, a term describing the disparity of access to information technology, is alive and well in America (DaVinci, 2007). Access to this technology affects many different aspects of quality of life including education, employment, and health (Kasisomayajula & Leland, 2011). One report published by the American Library Association stated that having, “money to buy a computer, combined with computer training,” would lessen the divide (Metcalf, 2007). Unfortunately, that money and training is getting even more difficult to access with the increased pace of technology development.

People that do have access seem to be upgrading their telecommunication equipment and methods more and more frequently in fear of becoming disconnected- a fear which becomes extremely expensive to repeatedly subdue. Even more damaging is that the price which individuals and companies pay to stay connected is much more than the initial investment in the devices which they purchase. Service and access fees mean a monthly investment, complex equipment translates to the need for expert repair service, an oligopoly in the industry allows an inflated market, access to independent software and applications require supplemental investment, and the growing reliance on these technologies for both work and personal functions justifies untimely and inconvenient expenditures. The financial investment, however, is not the only cost. The complex programming that operates most telecommunication applications permit development corporations to offer (or require) incessant application updates, rapid design alterations, and append program functions and features. Individuals and companies must invest money, time, and personnel resources in order to participate in and benefit from the new telecommunication technologies. For this reason, disparities in the use of these technologies can be found in the general population and the economic sectors.

Social Media Integration in Nonprofit Sector

Observably, the nonprofit sector has been hindered by the expensive price tag that accompanies the ever-changing telecommunication technologies. Many nonprofit organizations lack the financial capital and human resources required to purchase and maintain the newest technologies. This is partially due to the emphasis most business schools place on profit organizations leaving little attention for the nonprofit sector (Ready, 2011). Historically, the nonprofit sector sees a disparate amount of highly qualified applicants for positions that are vital for organizational sustainability and growth. In response to this disparity many universities and

higher education institutes are offering nonprofit management and social entrepreneurship courses which, “attempt to provide students with an overview of how nonprofit organizations operate and issues they face,” (Ready, 2011). More and more graduates are considering, and preparing for, careers in the nonprofit sector and bringing with them the skills and knowledge necessary to transition nonprofits into the social media realm.

In addition to this growth in available personnel, nonprofit organizations have the opportunity to catch up and keep pace with for-profit organizations due to the rise of social media. Previously, nonprofits relied on expensive direct mailings, paid advertising, or donated marketing opportunities to communicate with their audiences. The competition for restricted resources led nonprofits to an intense transformation in communication, and specifically, public relations, practices (Broom, 2009). The limited funds marginalized many smaller nonprofits from costly opportunities and made competing for media attention with for-profit organizations an uphill battle. Social media provides an opportunity to level the field. Social media offers nonprofits a low-cost tool to develop and maintain relationships with stakeholders, raise funds and awareness, and communicate with board members, volunteers, and potential donors (Ready, 2011).

Recently, Blackbaud, Inc., the Nonprofit Technology Network, and Common Knowledge completed a survey of 3,500 nonprofits to provide an extensive look at how these organizations are using social media. Frank Barry, Blackbaud’s Internet strategy manager reported, “We are beginning to see organizations value social media as not only an engagement channel, but also an acquisition channel that can lead to fundraising.” (Society for Nonprofit Organizations [SNPO], 2012). It would seem as though a new low-cost communication tool that also provides a portal for fundraising opportunities would be uplifting the nonprofit sector, and it is- but only for those

who can implement it properly. Some nonprofits have had trouble using this new tool effectively and to its maximum benefit. In his interview, Barry continued stating that nonprofits must not limit themselves to just this new media and that, “ultimate value comes from a multi-channel approach, not just someone liking your page or following you,” (SNPO, 2012). Traditional communication methods, then, are still relevant and must not be completely replaced. Integration of new social media network communications must compliment the efforts of existing communication methods.

Thesis Introduction and Outline

At first sight, the general limitation of resources appears to be the cause for inefficient use of social and digital media communication tools. Lack of financial resources certainly contributes to the delayed possession of expensive technologies. Additionally, the sector’s disproportionately undersized population of technologically skilled personnel hinders agencies’ access to affordable and reliable servicing. Still, these sector-dictated shortcomings are neither the only, nor the most, difficult barriers to overcome.

This thesis aims to express the meaning, importance, and process of effective communication transition with a focus on social media integration within community agencies. For social media, a successful transition requires the agency to manage their social and digital media in a manner which maintains personal and communal connections while simultaneously making use of marketing and promotional opportunities. First, a look into the purposes of social media and community agencies and a review of key topics will establish a structure for inquiry. Then, a case-study will examine a community agency’s first transitional communication plan, the successes and short-comings of this specific plan, and the limitations of social media to serve

community agencies. Finally, a cross-analysis of the theoretical process to maximize the benefits against the case-study's findings will put forward a revised outline of a transitional communication plan intended to maximize the benefit of social media for a community agency. Throughout this process, a factor other than resource limitation is highlighted as a significant obstacle preventing many nonprofit community agencies from reaping the benefits associated with new communication tools and methods such as social media. This obstacle, explained in later sections, is rooted in their core purpose of creating a sense of community.

PART ONE: Structure

Review of Key Topics and Terms

There are a few vital terms within this report that require definitive explanation for the purpose of cohesive understanding. The terms community, communication, and social media will be used very frequently. Most people know what these terms symbolize but finding a definition, on the other hand, is a much harder task. Societal understanding of these terms is changing at a rapid pace which has made finding their definition a difficult task. The following introduction will define and explain these terms. It is important to note, however, that the definitions and explanations of these terms that follow are not all-encompassing and do not represent all understandings of the terms; rather, the explanations and definitions aim to express how the terms should be understood within the context of the report.

Community: Community is often described by people as the place where they live or the people they interact with near the place they live. The term typically denotes a factor of physical proximity while simultaneously connoting a 'togetherness' factor. This connotation is where the phrase 'sense of community' can be discovered and

where one realizes the depth of the term reaches far past physical proximity. The term community often possesses an indefinable, unquantifiable, all-for-one-and-one-for-all', hard-to-put-into-words factor. For this reason, this report distinguishes between the terms physical community and the phenomenon of 'sense of community'. Sense of community is a multifaceted phenomenon determined by an array of psychological, social, cultural, and geographical influences (Sarason, 1974; Gusfield, 1975; Chavis & McMillon, 1986). Physical proximity was once a defining factor for a community's survival and explains the association between the term and territorial boundaries such as nations, cities, towns, or neighborhoods (Gusfield, 1975; Gilchrist, 2004). In earlier times these physical barriers served as communication barriers thus limiting the population of a community.

Sense of Community: Over time, communication methods have rendered physical proximity into a characteristic of community rather than its defining factor. Sense of community is reliant upon communication and the formation, or perceived formation, of interpersonal relationships (Sarason, 1974). New telecommunication methods, the internet in particular, have enabled distant populations to communicate without physical interactions and create a 'sense of community' without physical proximity. An increasing number of relational-based, location-independent, communities have surfaced around the globe (Royal & Rossi, 1998). Unique and integral to this transformation has been the rise of internet technologies and social-networks (Molz, 2012). The ability to create a community has become dependent upon the ability, method, and purpose of communication. The interdependence of community and communication may seem obvious given the common root word but this organic

connection is anything but plain. Given that communication is the central component in developing a sense of community it is essential to understand the exact role of communication in developing a sense of community. Understanding the essential components of the sense of community and understand communication's role in fostering those elements will assist in the effective use of new communication methods.

The widely accepted, scholarly definition of sense of community, developed by Chavis and McMillan (1986), explains that there are four basic elements of an experienced sense of community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Breaking down the 'sense of community' into these 4 elements will help identify the integral part communication plays in establishing a sense of community.

Element 1 Membership: *Membership* requires boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol (Chavis & McMillan, 1986). Though communication plays a role in all of these requirements, its major influence appears in the requirement of a common symbol. The ability to encode and decode messages into symbols is a necessary function of communication. "A symbol is an object or idea whose meaning is more complicated than it looks," (Duck & McMahan, 2009). The process of deciphering the correct meaning of symbols requires an understanding of a culture's intention, "because symbols are arbitrary, made-up conventions for representing something, they can be different in different cultures," (Duck & McMahan, 2009). Therefore, membership in a

community requires an understanding of the community's culture and the meaning that culture places on certain symbols and language.

Nisbet and Perrin (1977) provide an analogy that conveys the importance of symbols to establishing membership, "the symbol is to the social world what the cell is to the biotic world and the atom to the physical world.... The symbol is the beginning of the social world as we know it." From this analogy one can recognize the necessity of symbol fluency to the experience a sense of community. Symbolic Interactionism Theory, a social theory that focuses on the analysis of these communication patterns, explains the foundation for this understanding. Blumer, (1969), a renowned interpreter of the theory, explains that, "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society." This means that in order for an individual to understand symbols they must interact with the culture and society which has granted the symbols their meaning. Consider that in order to be a community member an individual must be well-versed in the community's unique 'table of symbols' (like the table of elements). In addition, in order to learn those symbols' meaning, the individual must participate in the community. Therefore, in order to experience membership, an individual must continuously foster the ability to build and understand the community's symbol system and must do so by *participating* in communication with the community.

Element 2 Influence: The next element of 'sense of community' is influence.

Influence demands both the individual's influence over the community's actions, as well as the community's ability to influence the individual. Influence, in this context, demands a bi-directional relationship. Members of the community have an

opportunity to express their opinions, concerns, thoughts, etc., and the community agency has the ability to express and enforce the opinions and thoughts of the people it represents. The influence element can be fulfilled when the community, or community agency, provides an open arena of communication. This allows individuals to exert their influence through expression. Simultaneously, it gives the agency a place to take in individuals' influence while conveying its own influence. Careful selection and maintenance of this communication arena is essential to providing the influence element and therefore essential to creating a sense of community. Neglecting this communication arena can thwart an individual sense of influence, or if poorly managed can undermine the agency's influence. The portal must show the community's united influence alongside individuals'. Without this careful management of communication methods, the notion of influence may be lost, hindering the sense of community.

Element 3 Integration and Fulfillment of Needs: *Integration and fulfillment of needs* refers to reinforcement through rewards and shared values (Chavis & McMillan, 1974). The basic notion of this requirement is that the individual-group association must be rewarding for its members in order to maintain a positive sense of togetherness (Chavis, & McMillan, 1974). There are two basic ways to fulfill the need of status within the community: personal achievements, and membership within the community. Members must experience confidence in their personal involvement as well as in their association to the community. This fulfillment is enhanced by the integration within the community. People are drawn toward others who possess skills or trades which provide benefits to them in some way and when a community

provides these beneficial relationships, members will have a stronger sense of reward (Chavis & McMillan, 1974). For this element, the role of communication is to make members aware of the different skills other members offer and to provide a way to connect and form relationships which allow members to benefit from one another.

Element 4 Shared Emotional Connection: The last element in the sense of community is *shared emotional connection*. This describes an emotional connection that is partly based on shared history though it is not necessary that community members have participated in that history, they must only identify with it (Chavis & McMillan, 1974). In The Compass of Friendship (2009), Rawlins notes that, “our choices of friends are constrained significantly by our geographical and social locations, available discourses, and material conditions.” Creating a shared emotional connection in a community agency is favorable due to shared social location. A community agency can enhance the shared emotional connection of its members by making discourse among members more available. Again, this can be done by creating a specific arena for communication for the community agency and its members.

The creation and maintenance of a sense of community is dependent upon communication. The relationship between the strength of a community and the effectiveness of communication demonstrates the importance to effectively utilize all prevalent communication methods. The apparent prevalence of social media dictates that the effectiveness of its use will impact the strength of a community and thus affect the survival of any community agency. Thus, the development of a detailed plan for this transition is instrumental in ensuring that the agency maintains or strengthens the four elements of sense of community.

Purpose of a Community Agency

Community agency is an umbrella term that encompasses organizations from all three sectors that assist community members with all different needs. This term is not the same as a Community Action Agency (CAA). CAAs are under the term of a community agency, however not all community agencies are CAAs. CAAs carry out the Community Action Program, a government initiative that was part of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, while community agencies are any community organization which creates a sense of community while serving a purpose to the community. The definition is broadened when understanding the definition of ‘community members’ and ‘needs’. For the sake of brevity, consider the words ‘community’ and ‘agency’ separately. The previous section’s discussion lends the understanding that physical proximity is not necessarily a pre-requisite to community. Rather, community is present when a sense of community is created; this requires membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The word agency is a condition of being in action; consider a chemical agent: it is the substance which allows for the chemical process to happen. A community agency, then, is any organization which allows the community process to happen. A community agency’s purpose is to provide, maintain, foster, and grow all four elements of sense of community for the members they serve.

All community agencies have a central purpose to create a sense of community but this purpose is often underneath the mission, goals and objectives of the services that the agency offers. Some agencies serve business owners, like a chamber of commerce and some serve the homeless, or the sick, or the endangered. Others serve those who belong to a certain religious or political belief. A few even try to serve the entire public such as libraries. Whatever the member

base, or target membership, that comes from the services offered, a community agency's primary purpose is to create a sense of community.

Purpose of Social Media

Understanding the purpose of social media sheds light on the potential benefits it offers as well as its limitations. Before establishing its purpose, insight on the types of social media networks is necessary. Rheingold (2002) defines social media as “the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.” Most popular among these virtual networks are Facebook and Twitter; Facebook had over one billion active users in October of 2012 (Fowler, 2012) and Twitter over 500 million in June of 2012 (Lunden, 2012). Though the popularity is not debatable, the purpose and function of these networks is widely disputed.

Debate over the purpose of social media in general is affecting the impact of its use. Many users of these social networks have begun to question their importance. Jantsch (2012) wrote why social media doesn't matter anymore:

The reason social media doesn't matter is because, upon further review, it doesn't exist beyond a label. While all the categorizing, classifying and departmentalizing was going on, that which was called social media simply settled into the center of marketing and business strategy and behavior. Everything that we called social media is irrelevant and mislabeled – there's a new way of doing business and marketing for sure, but it's a behavior and focus on customer involvement that's become a new norm – and that's all there is to it.

Others have embraced this change in function. McGuire (2011) contested that social media is more important than ever:

Millions of people are creating a new conventional wisdom, highlighting the voices and trends that will move the markets. ... The calmness of Twitter on any given day could predict moves in the Dow over the next week with 87.6 percent accuracy.

Though their premises are contradictory, each of these responses indicate the same two truths about social media: (1) using social media to develop a personal, social connection is no longer the sole purpose (2) a new primary purpose of social media is for marketing and business development.

This inconsistency between general perceptions of social media networks' functions can greatly affect nonprofit and community agencies ability to effectively use this tool. This issue can be better understood by breaking down social networks into two main categories:

Commercial Social Networks (CSNs), and House Social Networks (HSNs). When using the term social media, most people are actually only referring to the sub-category of CSNs. These online networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, are characterized by a key identifying characteristic, "the large, publicly shared base of users assembled by the platform provider . . . using features provided by the platform vendor," (NTEN, Common Knowledge, Blackbaud, Inc., 2012). In comparison, HSNs are networking communities which are built, maintained, and owned by a specific organization; the organization must recruit their audience and supporters (NTEN, Common Knowledge, Blackbaud, Inc., 2012). CSNs offer a larger, broader audience for marketing and market research and more easily reaches people and companies outside an organization's existing membership. HSNs, on the other hand, offer an efficient platform for program delivery, feedback, membership engagement, in conjunction with marketing and market research.

Though both types of networks offer certain advantages to nonprofit organizations, many organizations limit their participation in social media to just CSNs. The Nonprofit Technology Network (NTEN), Common Knowledge, and Blackbaud, Inc. (2012), administered a survey in which 3,500 nonprofits responded to questions about their social media involvement; in the study, over 93% of nonprofit organizations reported using CSNs while only 13% reported using HSNs. CSNs offer a larger audience and marketing and market research opportunities to reach people and companies outside of their existing membership. HSNs, on the other hand, offer an efficient platform for program delivery, feedback, membership engagement, in conjunction with marketing and market research (NTEN, Common Knowledge, Blackbaud, Inc., 2012). In the same report, it is noted that the conflicting purposes of these social networks results in conflicting purposes and uses; the majority (76%) of nonprofit identify growing their base as a goal when CSNs where as the majority (61%) of nonprofits identify member engagement as a goal when using HSNs (NTEN, Common Knowledge, Blackbaud, Inc., 2012).

To summarize, community agencies utilizing social media networks have two difficult tasks: (1) managing social media networks to encourage personal, communal connection and (2) managing social media networks to promote and market their mission. Each of these tasks can be accomplished through the use and maintenance of both Commercial Social Networks and House Social Networks. In order to effectively use social media, a nonprofit community agency must clearly understand the functions a social media network is capable of providing and align those functions with the organization's purpose for using the network

PART TWO: Case-Study

A Place to Start

In January, I was hired as the Digital Media and Outreach Intern at Lutheran Church of the Savior. Lutheran Church of the Savior (LCS) is a quiet and welcoming church tucked off a high-traffic road in a suburban community. Most members have been attending the church for many years, even decades, and seem genuinely satisfied with their experience. After a recent change in leadership, a young and energetic Pastor is directing the church toward some justified change. “The church,” Pastor Andrew explained in a meeting, “needs more energy and more attention,” (A. Tengwall, personal communication, February 12th, 2013). To help gain access to that much needed energy and attention, my position was created. The creation, growth, and maintenance of new communication methods is expected to enlarge the church’s sense of community and inspired the creation of the Digital Media and Outreach Intern position.

Throughout the interview process, the church officials’ were open about the position’s vagueness and seemed eager to hear my thoughts. This invitation to help distinguish the position’s details made it all the more appealing. I had asked what the main purpose was for creating this position, and what the expected outcome of my work was to be for the church. The responses I received obviously and unashamedly conveyed that they weren’t really sure. Initially, the response was listing a few instructions and examples of daily tasks. Statements such as this answer *how* things are supposed to be accomplished and even then, it is still vague. I wanted to understand what I was supposed to be striving to create throughout all of my work. After visiting the church, I was given this list of objectives:

1. Coordinating the research and implementation of potential and currently utilized electronic communication mediums for both internal and external consumers (e-newsletters, blogs and social media platforms)
 2. Maintaining and developing website content for an internal and external consumer audience at lcoskzoo.com
 3. Distributing weekly sermons online to our website and through social media platforms
 4. Integrating the electronic communications mediums through the website
 5. Developing a strategy to build a captive audience and substantially increase website and social media engagement and visitors
 6. Developing processes and tools to assure the sustainability of valuable online content
 7. Proposing other digital media options to increase organizational communication
- (Praedel, personal communication, January 21st 2013)

The wording of these objectives is deceptive; in fact, even calling them objectives is deceptive. Objectives, in the traditional nonprofit strategic plan, are specific, quantified, targets that represent steps toward accomplishing the goals (Worth, 2009). This list really just provided a list of actions I was supposed to take and how or where I was supposed to do them. The action-method ratio appears to be useful and each ‘objective’ does clearly state *how* to do *what* to *whom*. Still, all seven of these neglected to tell me *why*. The reason, the purpose, the end-game, the ultimate cause, rationale, intention, point, or whatever you choose to call it is a key component to identify, especially when working with nonprofit organizations. Reflecting on ‘objectives’ 1-3 for example:

1. For what purpose will these communication mediums be used by internal and external consumers?

2. What is the end-game? Should the content increase website traffic? Entertain? Inform?
3. What do you hope to accomplish by distributing these sermons? Increase faith? Increase attendance?

Without a defined outcome, these actions can be executed and the goals met and still produce results far different than those desired. Uncovering the purpose of the internship seemed to be the first task of the internship.

Asking and critically answering these questions about the objectives I was given proved to be fundamental in the development of an effective plan. The answers emphasized the natural parallel between LCS's mission and the purpose of my position which had not been specifically defined. Without active focus on mission, nonprofit organizations can easily succumb to projects which distract or detract from the primary mission. By the nature of nonprofits, my purpose was to serve the church's mission. Frances Hesselbein, former CEO of the Girl Scouts eloquently conveys the centrality of mission within nonprofit organizations, "Mission is a star we steer by. Everything begins with mission, everything flows from mission" (quoted by Worth, 2009, p. 101). After this revitalization of mission focus, we were able to strategically integrate LCS's five organizational goals into the details of my position.

Aligning the church's mission and goals with the vague guidelines of my position helped to clarify the purpose of my position. LCS recently established their one and three year strategic plans which announced their organizational commitment to five objectives goals: to serve others, to facilitate faith and relationship growth, to increase attendance, to have a more diverse church, and to maintain and improve property to support the mission (Lutheran Church of the Savior [LCS], 2013). The effective integration of communication techniques was going to be a

prominent catalyst in accomplishing these objectives. The objectives also provided a framework for the communication plan's measurement techniques, target audience, and desired audience response. My position dictated that I would serve these objectives by managing the social media networks and communication avenues. Equipped with a detailed understanding of the church's mission, strategic plans, and objectives, I reworked the 'objectives' I had been given into a single primary purpose:

Develop and implement a communication transition strategy which will integrate new and existing communication mediums and management techniques to support and further the mission of LCS, assist in the achievement of LCS's objectives, and maintain or strengthen the sense of community LCS provides.

This purpose didn't answer everything, but it provided me with a place to start. Thus far, I had insight about the structure of the implementation actions but maintained a good amount of leniency. The lack of detail in the position description had initially indicated a sense of ambivalence on the part of its writers, but was transformed to allow more creative control. I was expected, encouraged and eager to develop an innovative plan to renew LCS's approach to communication.

The Plan behind the Plan

Intrigued and reasonably informed, I began to form a plan. LCS's transition from traditional communication methods to an integrated system would directly impact the church's sense of community. The care and caution taken during the plan's development, not just implementation, would greatly impact its usefulness. A plan that preserved LCS's current sense of community in the transition would be considered satisfactory at best. Designing a plan to

strengthen the existing connection and nurture new relationships was the aspiration. In order for my plan to reach this aspiration I had to first comprehend the effectiveness and reasoning behind the current communication system.

First, I investigated the current state of LCS's social media networks. Exploring the posting habits and activity on the networks would reveal areas lacking interaction. Information such as the amount, type, intended purpose, and actual function of the network activity would portray the networks' effectiveness. LCS had three main social media networks: a Facebook group, a twitter account, and their organization's website:

- Facebook: LCS had a Facebook Group but not a Facebook page. The group was open and anyone could ask to join but before gaining access their request had to be approved by an administrator. The Group had 51 members, 4 photo albums (all with less than 10 photos), and averaged 3 posts per week. The majority of activity came from 4 members, with few posts from other individuals far between. The post were often advertising upcoming events or requesting volunteers. The majority of the posts had between 20 and 30 impressions and few had more than one reply or comment. The staff identified their purpose for the Facebook group was to serve as a place for members to foster relationships and to recruit new members.
- Twitter: LCS had a twitter account and the feed was featured at the bottom of their website's homepage. There had been no posts from the church's twitter account in over 2 months. The most recent (past 2 months) mentions were from only the church's pastor and the church's outreach committee chair-person, totaling just under 20 mentions in 2 months. The staff categorized the purpose of

their Twitter account as a tool to build relationships with other community agencies.

- Church Website: The LCS website had a simple layout with a large amount of information on it. It featured information on the different councils and their objectives, news updates, newsletter archive, photo page, staff information, contact information, and a link to the Pastor's blog which had podcasts of past sermons. The homepage of the website featured a picture of a Christmas display at the church and information about the Christmas mass- in February. The Newsletter archive, calendar, and news update pages had not been updated since June 2012, 7 months prior. The history page contained only a single sentence stating the year the church was founded. Portals for interaction on the site consisted of a suggestion box and a Prayer Chain submission box for members to submit requests for prayers from other members. Submissions to these portals were sent to the e-mail of a person who was no longer responsible for managing this communication. The staff stated that the purpose of the website was to provide easily accessible information to current members as well as a resource for new or potential members. It was also supposed to be servicing as the delivery method for the monthly newsletter.

It became apparent that the network pages had received minimal attention over the past 6 months. The amount of activity revealed that the church had barely integrated with these networks. The type of activity that was present gave little insight into the intended or perceived function of the networks. The inconsistent amount and type of posting on these networks solidified that they were operating with little to no visible benefit.

My next task was to fully understand how effective the church was at accomplishing their intended outcomes. Granted, after seeing the pages I had a pretty good idea that they were not accomplishing anything, but my perspective was not the only that determined this. I pursued some insight from current members to help uncover other issues and potential causes that were affecting the pages' success. Studying the communication habits and preferences of members helped to identify the prominent barriers.

To understand the perspective of current members I conducted a survey. In total, 21 church members responded to a survey (appendix 1) inquiring about their personal social media network habits, their social media network habits involving the church, their perception of what the networks' purposes were for the church, their perceptions about the relevance of social media networks to the church, and their interest in expanding this network. My findings revealed a significant number of barriers between the current state of the church's social media network effectiveness and its potential value. Cataloguing and analyzing the survey results (appendix 2) highlighted the following trends and perceptions:

- Average Age: 64.8 years of age
- Average years attending LCS: 13.4 years
- Gender: 71% female, 24% male
- Facebook: 57% of respondents use Facebook; of those who said they used Facebook 58% reported they use the LCS Facebook (33% of total respondents); of those who use the LCS Facebook the majority answered that they found the LCS Facebook (1) neither interesting nor uninteresting, (2)relatively uninformative, and (3) neither active nor inactive

- Twitter: Only 4.7% of respondents use Twitter; of those 100% reported using the LCS Twitter; the ratings of the Twitter account found that it was (1)relatively interesting, (2) relatively informative, and (3) neither active nor inactive.
- E-Mail: 62% of respondents use e-mail and, of those who use e-mail, 54% check their e-mail more than once per day, 30% check once per day, and 15% check once per week
- 50% of respondents were satisfied with the church's current online presence
- 65% of respondents strongly agreed that the church's online presence was important
- 58% of respondents strongly agreed that social media could help current members feel connected
- 46% of respondents reported using LCS's website or social media pages to find information about the church when they needed it
- 62% of respondents would participate and submit photos to an online church photo album
- 70% of respondents believe that social media can increase church attendance

A look into the existing social media network and members' habits and perceptions established that communication from both the church and its audience is limited. Problems that needed to be addressed in our plan were identified. The leading barriers appeared to be inconsistent or lack of activity from the church, and lack of participation from the members. With this detailed understanding about the current state I could develop a plan that could combat the existing faults. Equipped with all of the information and insight I could squeeze out of this church, I was finally ready to design my social media network communication integration masterpiece.

The Metaphor behind the Masterpiece

Bursting with inspiration and enlightenment, I was set in front of a blank canvas, paint brush in hand, vision in mind; my masterpiece whirled around my mind expounding itself into clarity as a full set of paint sat, readily awaiting to assist in expressing my vision. In reality, I sat in front of my laptop in the church office. Yet, combing through the three stagnant network pages still resulted in bursts of inspiration and enlightenment; I couldn't help but imagine myself as a master artist. Admittedly, the metaphor is exaggerated but the parallels drawn from the comparison help to arrange the plan's development. Creating a masterpiece in this case means successfully fulfilling the purpose of my position. My canvas is the church, my brush is social media, and my paints are the opportunities, tools, and resources of social media. When I accepted the internship, all of these supplies were given to me but they were simply not enough. Attempting a masterpiece with only these few basic resources would most likely produce something rather unexceptional.

I collected the remainder of my resources while preparing to design the plan. When I studied LCS's mission and the purposes of social media to discover the purpose of my position I was developing my artistic skill. When I researched the social media habits and perceptions of the organization and its members to reveal obstacles I was clearing my work space of distractions. With all the resources in place I could mix my palette, paint the picture, and subject it to any critic to verify that my work had indeed transformed into a masterpiece.

Back in reality, all I had left was to develop, implement, and evaluate my plan. All of the background information on community, nonprofits, social media, communication, integration, the church's mission and my purpose made a strong framework:

- Purpose of Community Agency: Create a sense of community by providing the four elements: membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and integration, shared emotional connection
- Primary Functions of Social Media for Community Agencies: manage social media networks (1) to encourage personal, communal connection and (2) to promote and market the mission
- Goals of Lutheran Church of the Savior: (1) serve others (2) facilitate faith and relationship growth (3) increase attendance (4) have a more diverse church (5) maintain and improve property to support our mission
- Purpose of my position: Develop and implement a strategy to integrate new and existing communication mediums and management techniques to support LCS's mission and objectives while maintaining or strengthening the sense of community.

This incorporation of the church's mission, objectives, functions, and purposes would create a comprehensive plan. Aligning the 'objectives' I was given with this framework of purpose, I had created my plan:

Main Action: Fix, update, maintain and improve all social media networks

1. All actions must align with a purpose, they may serve more than one purpose and often will; purposes include:

- a. **Sense of Community:** Membership | Influence | Integration and Fulfillment of needs | Shared Emotional Connection

b. LCS Goals: Serve Others | Facilitate Faith and Relationship Growth | Increase Attendance | Have more Diversity | Maintain Property

c. Social Media Function: Encourage Personal, Communal Connection | Promote and Market Mission

2. Facebook Group: serves as a more private network for the members of the church to share photos, thoughts, and opportunities; activities will foster internal relationships and promote church activity; organizational actions in this group will serve to evaluate member opinion and connectedness

3. Facebook Page: serves as a more public version of the Facebook Group by eliminating the ‘request to join’ factor; activities will foster both internal and external relationships; activities will function to encourage personal connection and to market the mission.

a. Internal: Posts to increase membership and fulfillment of needs by reinforcing individual member’s statuses and the church’s status in the larger community; Reinforcing individual statuses (ex. praise, recognition, celebration) function for connection whereas reinforcing the church’s status (announcing accomplishments) functions for mission.

b. External: Post to increase attendance and have a more diverse church by advertising church events, etc. Functions to market the mission

4. Twitter Account: currently provides a very broad, disconnected audience therefore will, at the beginning, function to market the mission. Activities will also aim to transition twitter from just mission to both mission and connection.

- a. Market Mission:** twitter activity will aim to create connections with other community organizations; this can be done by sharing information about other organizations success, re-tweeting, sending out thank-yous and acknowledgements, as well as inviting other organizations to collaborate. If effective these actions would serve to increase attendance and diversity.
 - b. Future Encourage Connection:** The twitter actions will first function only as a mission marketer but will later adapt to encourage communal connection. The actions which market the organization's mission will help grow the site's popularity. Once a significant audience is founded, the actions will gradually integrate messaging to foster personal and communal connection, These messages, which are aimed at creating connections, will also serve the 'integration and fulfillment of needs' element of the sense of community. The actions will serve to promote and recognize members' statuses in the organizational community, and the organization's status in the larger community. In addition, the marketing messages will help collaborate with other organizations and could serve to provide members with more and better access to community benefits.
- 5. Website:** The website will serve to market the mission, encourage personal connection, offer elements of integration, fulfillment, and membership, represent LCS's service to others, welcoming attitude, and provide information for potential new members to participate or inquire about church activity. Web design will prominently feature titles about welcoming others and faith. Portals to submit general suggestions, prayer requests, and personal concerns will be updated and managed

properly. Increase the amount of pictures of the church and its members. Web design will be revamped with easy-to-use navigation and enhance visual appeal. Updated and changing information to encourage re-visitation; links to Facebook and Twitter.

Evaluation Methods:

1. Short Term: Monitor and compare activity on Facebook, Twitter, and Website; quantitative analysis on website and network activity, qualitative analysis of whether the actions are creating the intended responses. Personal inquiry with church members, monitor and encourage opinion submissions through e-mail, website portals, or at-church suggestion boxes.

2. Long Term: Set-up and monitor Google Analytics (or similar program) for a more in-depth analysis on activity, schedule response and opinion surveys.

Analysis: Successes and Shortcomings

The implementation of my communication strategy had almost an equal amount of shortcomings as it did successes. The plan has been integrated for two months and has shown some interesting trends in member engagement. There were two noticeable time periods which the Facebook page, website, and Twitter account saw significant increase in members as well as member activity. The first week of implementation saw the first spike in activity. At the very beginning most of the actions from the organizational standpoint were fixing faults and flaws in the existing pages, redesigning, increasing then maintaining consistent activity and fostering increased engagement from the members. In 5 days the Twitter account had doubled the amount of posts in the 6 months prior and increased its follower base by 20% and Twitter was not the only site to see this increase in activity. Stirring up the previously immobile pages had, in 5 days, brought on more posts, likes, comments, and follows than the previous 3 months combined.

The creation of a Facebook page provided mixed results. Though the page had gained 30 likes in the first week and a half there was little activity on the page that was not already happening inside the group. Though the Facebook page and Facebook group could coexist successfully, it was contingent upon the premise that they would provide different social environments. The intention was to have the Facebook Group remain a member based page to build internal relations, while the Facebook page could serve both as a connection builder and as a mission marketer. In the first few days the Facebook page only attracted engagement from members who were already active and participating in the Facebook Group. In two weeks the Facebook page had 30 likes in comparison to the established group's membership base of 51. In the weeks following, activity on the Facebook page primarily focused on mission marketing, and outreach. Though the page received a steady incline in membership and activity, it seemed as though the majority of the excitement was existing group members deciding to use a different page.

In general, the first two months accomplished many successes for LCS social media image. A revamping and re-organizing of the website made it more user-friendly. The updating of news, calendar events, and other pages missing vital information made the website more searchable. Recruiting church members to submit photos of their favorite church memories increased membership in regards to a sense of community and added a personal, relatable touch to the website. Twitter tags and mentions assisted in starting dialogue and relationships with other community organizations. Consistent activity from the organization, improved quality of that activity, reliable information, easy to find and functioning resources, and requests for feedback all proved to be great successes and ultimately opened the door for larger opportunities and gains as the successes pile up.

Although there was no blatant ‘failure’ in the integration there were definitely significant shortcomings. The investigating I had done prior to developing my plan had made me aware of a few barriers that were difficult to break. As noted in my survey, a significant amount of the membership did not utilize social media networks. In some cases this was due to lack of knowledge about how to use it, or the resources it could provide. In other cases it was due to a lack of access and in others it was simply due to a lack of interest. I had brainstormed a few ideas that could encourage or enable some members to join the networks but those projects, along with a few others, had been postponed until summer. If the original plan had considered the effect of those members not engaging, a plan might have been established to combat the missing population. The effect is not only the lesser amount of likes or re-tweets; the value of those members’ participation is much more. Their experiences, insights, personalities, etc., are part of the church and if they are not represented or involved in the social media networks then the networks are farther from being able to illustrate their sense of community.

PART THREE: Cross Analysis

Limitations Presented in Literature

The reviews on integration of social media network into nonprofits identified three main limitations which were limited personnel, knowledge on the use of social media, and multiple goals. From the theoretical standpoint limited personnel describes the limited number of technically skilled people in the nonprofit sector due to financial disadvantage. It is presumed that they are unable to afford the technically skilled personnel which are available to private organizations, and are either unable or unaware of how to use social media networks effectively.

The next limitation that was discussed was that, in general, people lack understanding of which social media tools are supposed to be used for which purpose. In addition they do not know how to achieve that purpose on social media since the style of communication differs from traditional communication methods. Then, even if they know what it is supposed to be used for and how to use it properly they still might lack the proficiency to evaluate the effectiveness of their usage.

Lastly, nonprofit community agencies pursue many different goals and objectives. They have to find volunteers, raise money, raise awareness, worry about day to day operations, collaborate, coordinate events, support and actively present their mission. Their effectiveness is limited when they attempt to achieve all of these goals through social media without a strategy. Promoting or discussing too many subjects may spread audience attention too thin and result in little to no benefit.

Limitations Demonstrated in Case-Study

The case-study identified other limitations that were not predicted. The demographic of the church's membership presented certain difficulties in the transition. The survey showed that the majority of members were seniors with little social media experience. Their lack of skill and lack of understanding could potentially be mended by providing educational workshops, explaining security or privacy features, and emphasizing the speed/convenience of social media. The limitation, however, was reinforced by ambivalence, even resentment, toward adopting the new media.

Next, the limitation of personnel presented itself again but in a different form. The church had acquired a competent, passionate, and affordable staff person (me) to manage the media. The

root of this problem, however, was not in the competence or in the lack of resources. I was trying to create the sense of community shared by the church and its members on the social media networks; a sense of community I was not necessarily a part of. In addition to integrating and managing the social networks, I had the task of integrating myself to the organization. Outside of scheduled meetings, I was at a distance from the members. I had limited chances to talk with the members on a personal or a professional level. Also, as far as communication methods go, the church was having trouble with more than just the social media networks. Contact information was available only for some staff and council members. E-mail contact lists, phone numbers, valid addresses, and other contact information was difficult to locate or nonexistent for the majority of members. Being isolated from the membership that I was trying to represent had distorted my perception of member satisfaction, usage, opinion, and other factors which may have altered the integration process.

Revealed Limitations

The complex manner in which any nonprofit runs subjects them to limitations: limitations of financial resources, personnel resources, development and growth strategy, revenue investment, etc. Community agencies have the added complexity of creating and fostering a sense of community alongside all of these nonprofit pre-requisites. This multi-faceted structure of nonprofit community agencies often provides much needed security, structure, and checks. This structure, however, is not always ideal. Often the very characteristics which prevent them from collapsing in hard times can thwart their capability to seize opportunities during good times. A comparison between theory and reality helps to identify the limitations specific to their field that necessitate the careful integration and management of the new media.

Both the literature and the case-study reported personnel as a limitation specific to nonprofits. The literature attributes the lack of funding to hire competent staff as a significant limitation. It also reveals the recent spike of interest in nonprofit management and social entrepreneurship programs across college campuses. The case-study showed that even with available skilled personnel nonprofit community agencies can still be limited by their member-serving nature. If the staff managing these influential media resources is unfamiliar with the organizational culture or sense of community the transition may harm the agency.

The review of nonprofit integration briefly mentioned the multi-channel approach and the importance of having social media methods compliment existing or traditional methods. The case-study showed how the speed and breadth of integration can be hindered by members unwilling or incapable of participating. In order to communicate effectively, management of all communication methods must collaborate to ensure messages are reaching the audiences. Even once integration has taken hold and the majority of members are utilizing the networks, traditional methods maintain their importance. Using these methods to relay changes, updates, and information about the new media can help ensure that members who decide to integrate later than most will not be left out. Offering information in the traditional form, such as mailing newsletters, can also help those without access to social media are not excluded..

Another subtle limitation has appeared many times throughout this process without being directly addressed. The importance of a sense of community to a community agency has been well established. However, my ability to show this defining element in my communication messages was severely limited. I had recognized that implied requirement that my integration plan would not upset the current connectedness of the community I had even reveled in the

realization that the integration could strengthen the community. I had not, however, realized that I lacked the one pre-requisite that could enable me to do so.

The sense of community is almost like a community agency's fingerprint. Their unique sense of community is what makes them what they are and what they aren't; it's what draws members to their organization, what maintains their organization, what inspires them to continue to work toward their mission. Witnessing this sense of community at the church was moving but it did not allow me to truly understand. Without experiencing this sense of community, without participating in the church, my ability to show this defining characteristic to the social media audience was limited. I had designed the messages in my communication plan to inform audiences about the church's structural elements (their members, staff, religion, services, location). These messages conveyed the church at surface level. My inadvertent exclusion of the church's sense of community in the social media messages was limiting the networks from serving their maximum benefit.

Sense of community is dynamic in nature as it adapts to changes in the community it transforms. There are far too many inconsistent, immeasurable, unpredictable variables in a single sense of community to define it. The breaking down of this sense into the four elements can help describe it but words do little to help people understand a sense of community. Instead, a sense of community can be portrayed, or depicted. Showing this sense of community, rather than breaking it down or defining it, can help an audience imagine what being part of the community might be like. *Showing* potential members how the four elements of sense of community are met can intrigue audience members by giving them more insight into the heart of the organization than any list of services ever could.

In summary, community agencies are limited by the difficult task of communicating the integral, defining, yet indescribable sense of community. Difficulty arises when trying to manage member relations and evoke interest from potential members on social media without this ‘fingerprint’ factor. The illustration of an agency’s sense of community through social media activity can greatly increase the agency’s benefits. The effectiveness of the media efforts, however, is dependent upon the messenger’s knowledge of the sense of community they are expressing.

Revised Communication Plan

The previous communication plan did not fully address the limitations that have now been revealed. Though the main structure of the plan can remain intact, a few adjustments must be made for the plan to be more effective. Personally knowing the members of the community I was serving could have provided great benefit to the implementation of this plan. I would add scheduling or finding face-time to communicate with the members to this plan. Actions such as attending coffee hour every Sunday after church, catching up with members at church dinners, or encouraging visitors during my office hours could be extremely beneficial. This face-to-face communication would be supplemental to the online communication and offer suggestions and feedback from the community along the way.

Next, I would revise the current plan’s first steps. Rather than jumping into the social media actions, I would first try to gather information and resources to utilize the traditional and existing communication methods. Collecting mailing addresses, phone numbers, and e-mails would give me easier access to information and even give me more opportunity for personal communication with the members. Collecting the contact information of others’ would also give

me the chance to make sure that my contact information was easily available to all of the church members. In addition, having this contact information organized in a single location would be a beneficial resource for all church member relations.

Echoing the previous actions, I would also include more actions in the plan which publicize the transition process and my goals. Operating this transition from behind closed-doors seemed to foster some insecurity and suspicion from current members. Planning how to invite and encourage members' participation, speaking often about the transition, offering more updates and opportunities to ask questions would help ease the anxiety surrounding the transition.

Outside of personal relations, I would implement stronger short term evaluation methods. Implementing activity analysis applications, such as Google Analytics, from the very beginning would provide a more inclusive examination about the plan's successes and shortcomings. Finally, I would adapt my communication actions and messages to more strongly depict the church's sense of community; rather than tell people about the church I would try to *show* people the church.

Conclusion

Integrating a new social media network or re-integrating the network can rejuvenate any community agency. Many agencies have struggled to effectively integrate, costing them access to valuable media resources. Nonprofit community agencies can shake the risk of ineffective integration by taking the time and care to develop an integration plan. The following are guidelines which provide the framework for an effective and beneficial integration plan.

Limitation Review

Identifying limitations is an important component of developing an effective integration plan. The cross analysis of literature and my case-study revealed some of the common limitations faced by nonprofit community agencies. Difficulty finding technologically competent and community engaged personnel proved to be a significant limitation. The simultaneous integration of new communication methods while maintaining traditions ones caused a few snags. Even the level of familiarity with community members slowed the integration's progress. Though these challenges will be common to many agencies undergoing this transformation, they cannot account for all.

Fortunately, many individual agency limitations can be predicted before the integration. Thoroughly engaging with the agency's membership can reveal some of the anxieties that members are feeling about the transition. Conducting a survey may reveal some access barriers which may prevent member participation. Initiating conversations prior to implementation may even provide some beneficial advice. Remember, though, that limitations may appear and reveal themselves along the way so maintaining this engagement throughout the entire process is pertinent. Researching theory and members before hand, keeping track of challenges during implementation, adapting for maintenance, and evaluating the success afterward will greatly curb the effect of unavoidable limitations.

Create a Plan

Carefully planning the integration of social media networks will greatly enhance the effectiveness of an agency's communication. There is a significant amount a preparation that must be accomplished before the plan can be designed. Preparation includes clarifying any areas of confusion, becoming familiar with the functions and culture of the networks and studying the

organization's mission and objectives. Next an understanding of the current communication methods should be established to determine the agency's current state of integration. Finally, actively engaging community members in a conversation about the transition will establish the framework for a comprehensive integration plan.

Once this foundation is established, brainstorm and clearly organize your messaging actions. This process involves sorting which type of messaging will appear on which network. Types of messaging include marketing, membership building, prompting collaborative connections, etc. At this point, it should be clear which network functions will best serve which type of messaging. Listing the general type of messaging which will occur on which networks and stating the intended or expected response will help maintain consistency and strength in your actions. Creating a timeline of these activities may also be beneficial in maintaining the plan once it is implemented.

Once the plan is made, it is time to implement it, and implement it *effectively*. Effective implementation requires simultaneous action and observation. Making use of management portals, such as Hootsuite, to schedule network activity can allow time to observe the responses and outcomes of organizational messaging. Having future messages readily available will create a buffer-zone and allow for strategic adjustments in activity. Lastly, maintain traditional communication methods to ensure *all* agency members have access to agency news and information on the integration process.

Lastly, scheduled evaluation of the integration's progress will provide insight on successes and shortcomings. A comprehensive evaluation, one that includes both qualitative and quantitative reports, should reveal not only what isn't working but *why* it isn't working. The

method and schedule of evaluation should be established before implementation. The first days and weeks of network use will provide valuable information and should be properly evaluated. Programs such as Google Analytics can help gather data on network activity and visitation statistics but do not provide a comprehensive evaluation. Deciding how to interpret statistics before receiving them will ensure a standard of efficiency. Defining what constitutes a successful integration before implementation and comparing this definition with the results of the evaluation will aid in the objective determination of an integrations success.

Defining and Aligning Purpose with Actions and Expectations

Unlike many organizations in the for-profit sector, nonprofit community agencies do not always consider funds to be their bottom line. Funds, rather, are a necessity to make progress toward their bottom line: their mission. Just as a for-profit would ensure that its media was making progress toward the bottom line, nonprofit community agencies should establish that their communication tools make progress toward their mission. Review the tools, methods, purposes, and actions that have been planned and establish that they are serving the mission in some fashion. Any part of the plan which does not serve the mission in some way should be reconsidered.

In addition, the multi-faceted structure of nonprofits has a great effect on their communication efforts. Try to keep audience attention focused and invested by reducing the amount of interests presented on a single network or network function. Too many interests, such as fundraising, volunteer recruitment, attendance, collaboration, etc., may distract, confuse or tire an audience. At the beginning of integration determining which interests to focus this media on can be difficult but a properly developed plan will allow for adjustment. In any case, a sense of

community should be identifiable in the communication; reiterating this element will strengthen the effectiveness of any messaging.

Dynamism and Allowing for Alteration

While writing the communication plan, allow for flexibility. Listing the function and intended outcome of messaging is meant to serve as a guideline. As mentioned earlier, using network management sites can help create a necessary buffer-zone. Having sufficient time to strategically respond to membership feedback, arising limitations, or unforeseen interruptions in network access will strengthen the agency's image. Preparation and continual observation during the implementation process will lessen the chance of significant problems. They cannot, however, prevent all difficulty. Setbacks will happen throughout integration but designing a flexible plan will promote its sustainability.

As social media networks continue to grow in popularity, organizations compete for the attention of the networks' accessible audience. For nonprofit community agencies, these networks are a long-awaited affordable, accessible media resource. Still, many of these agencies are struggling to integrate and manage the networks to their full capacity. This paper has established the key components of an integration plan specifically designed to assist agencies experiencing this struggle. The proposed framework highlights the importance of sense of community, mission alignment, preparation, plan development, evaluation, and flexibility in maximizing the benefit of social media as a communication resource. Motivated by personal experience, this paper has attempted to enlighten these agencies on the benefit of this media resource. Personally, I hope and, professionally, I anticipate that this paper assists in the sustainability of these valuable agencies by improving their communication techniques.

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Communication Survey

DO **NOT** PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS SHEET

1. Age: _____ Gender: _____
 2. How long have you been a member of the Lutheran Church of the Savior? _____

3. Do you use Facebook? YES NO

a. If yes, how often do you check your Facebook? (check one)

- (more than once a day)
 (Once a day)
 (Once a week)
 (less than once a week)

b. Have you been on Lutheran Church of the Savior's (LCS) Facebook page? YES NO

i. If yes, rate the page on a scale of 1-5 in the following categories

HIGHLY INTERESTING	1	2	3	4	5	COMPLETELY
UNINTERESTING						
HIGHLY INFORMATIVE	1	2	3	4	5	COMPLETELY
UNINFORMATIVE						
HIGHLY ACTIVE	1	2	3	4	5	HIGHLY INACTIVE

4. Do you use Twitter? YES NO

a. If yes, how often do you check your Twitter? (check one)

- (more than once a day)
 (Once a day)
 (Once a week)
 (less than once a week)

b. Have you been on LCS's Twitter page? YES NO

i. If yes, rate the page on a scale of 1-5 in the following categories

HIGHLY INTERESTING	1	2	3	4	5	COMPLETELY
UNINTERESTING						
HIGHLY INFORMATIVE	1	2	3	4	5	COMPLETELY
UNINFORMATIVE						
HIGHLY ACTIVE	1	2	3	4	5	HIGHLY INACTIVE

5. Do you use e-mail? YES NO

a. If yes, how often do you check your e-mail? (check one)

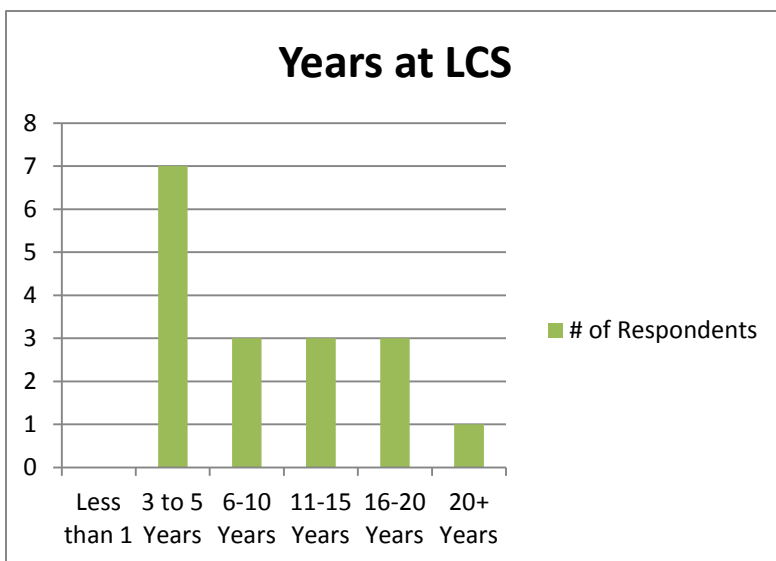
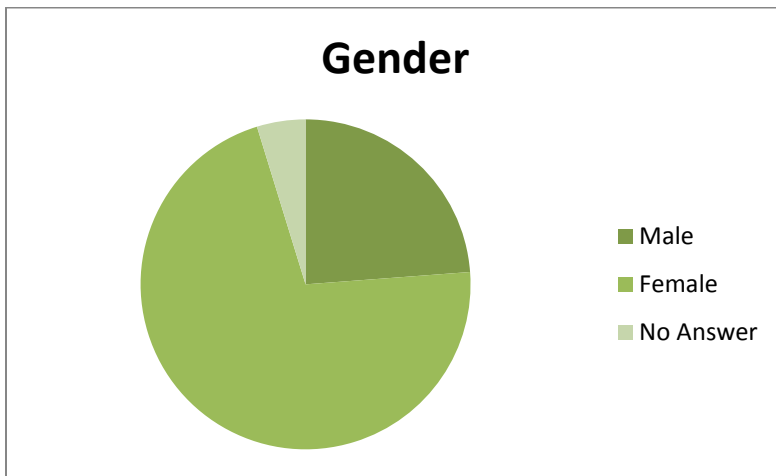
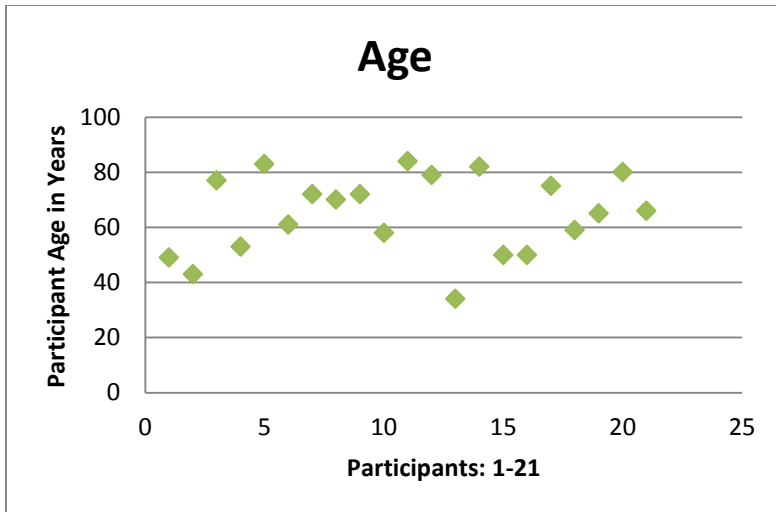
- (more than once a day)
 (Once a day)
 (Once a week)
 (less than once a week)

PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING IDEAS:

	VERY MUCH	SOMEWHAT	UNDECIDED	NOT REALLY	NOT AT ALL
I am satisfied with the church’s current online presence.					
I am interested in participating in a ‘Meet the Member’ video which would appear on the website.					
I think the church’s online presence is important.					
I would submit photos to an online photo album if the church had one.					
I read the newsletter every time it comes out.					
I am satisfied with the newsletter’s content.					
I am satisfied with how the newsletter is currently available (posted on the website).					
I use LCS’s digital media (website, social media pages) to find information about the church when I need it.					
I think social media can help bring more people to our church.					
I think social media does help current members feel connected.					
I think social media could help current members feel connected.					

Please list any ideas or suggestions you have about LCS’s communication and/or what you would or would not like to see on LCS’s social media pages/website? Ex. *LCS should have a youtube channel and post videos of members’ cats doing adorable cat things.*

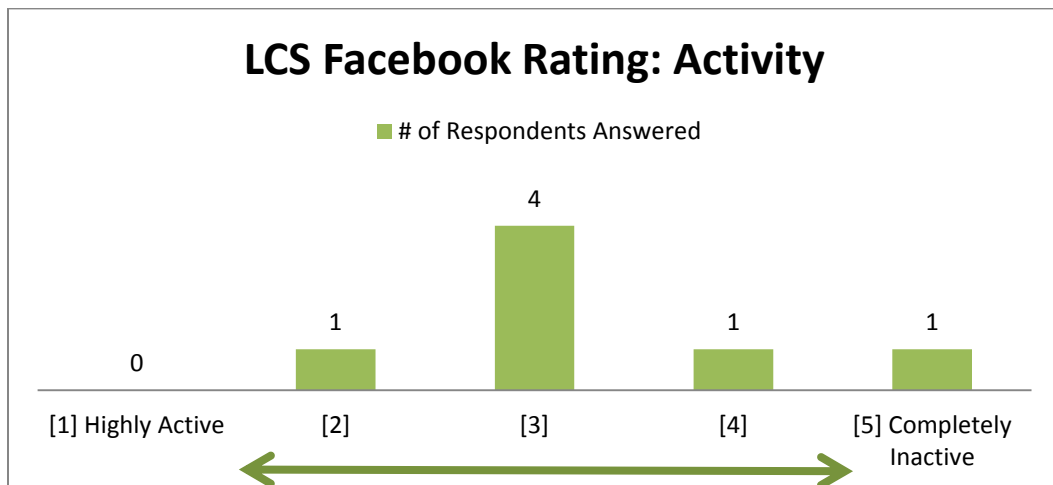
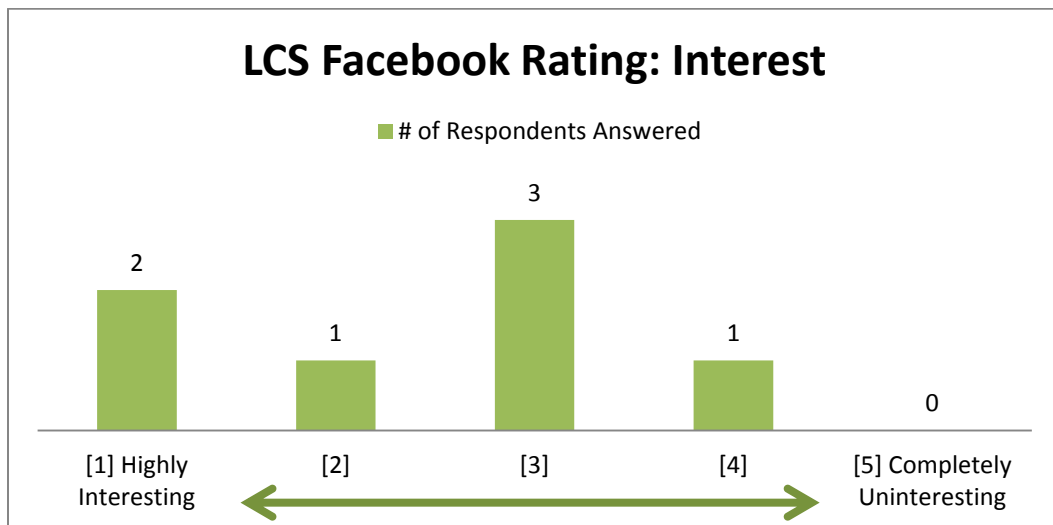
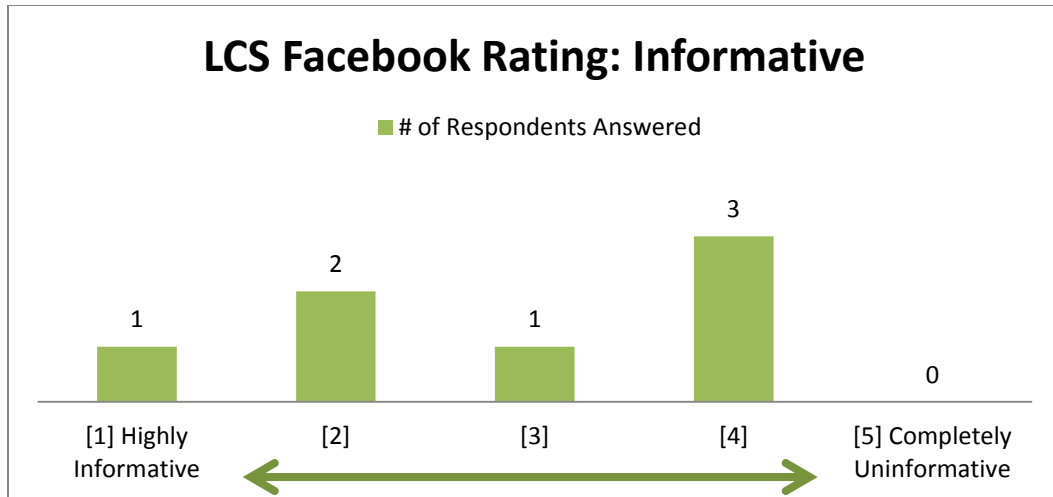
Please add any additional comments you have:

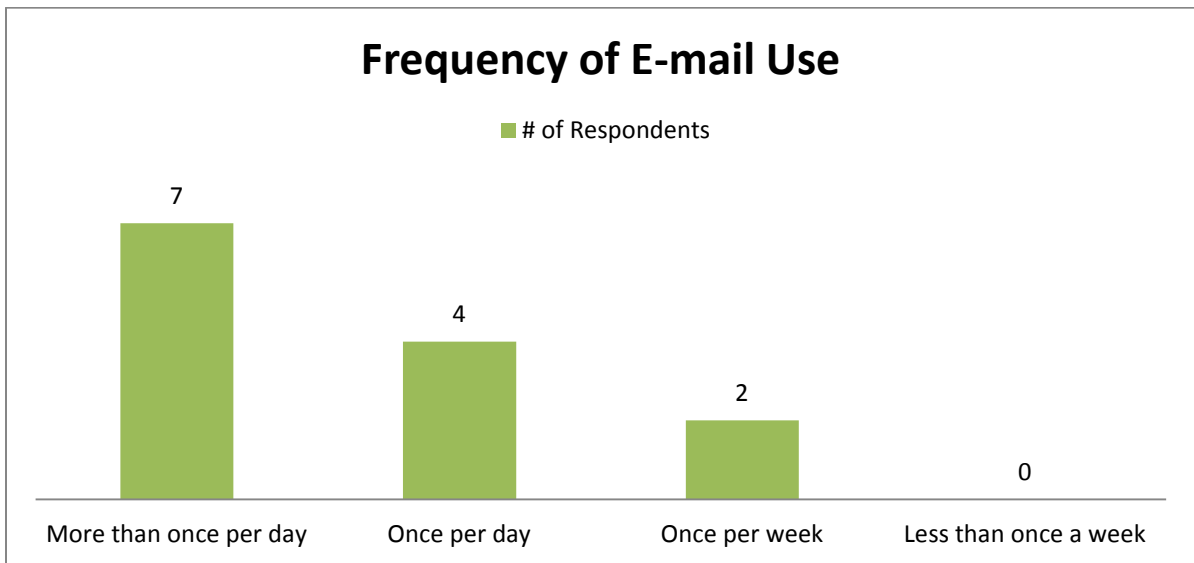
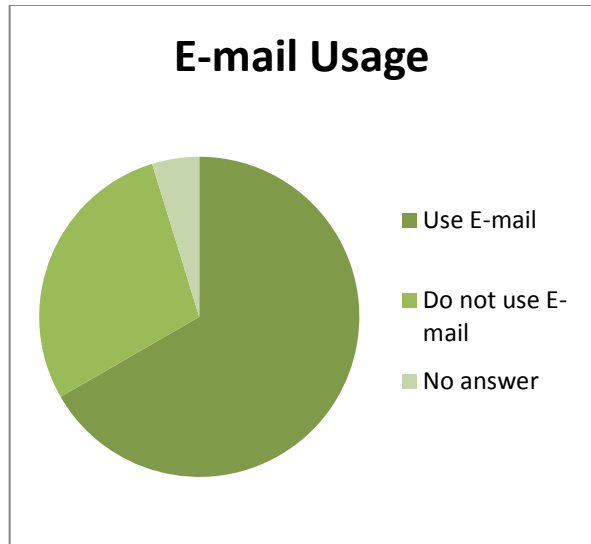
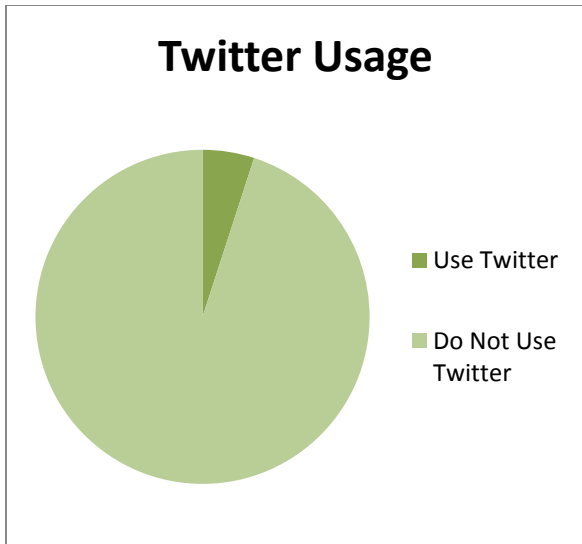


Survey Results

The following tables and charts depict the survey results. The age, gender and years attending the church are reported first. Opinions and habits involving the current media and communication methods are represented in charts on the following page.

Then the chart from the survey shows how respondents responded to the suggestions. Lastly, additional comments and suggestions are listed.





Survey Results

Surveys 1, 5, 11, 12, 19, 20 did not answer any of the questions on this chart

Surveys 3, 7, 14, 16, 17, 18 only partially answered the questions on this chart

	VERY MUCH	SOMEWHAT	UNDECIDED	NOT REALLY	NOT AT ALL
I am satisfied with the church's current online presence.	1	6	2	2	1
I am interested in participating in a 'Meet the Member' video which would appear on the website.	1	3	2	3	1
I think the church's online presence is important.	9	2	1	1	0
I would submit photos to an online photo album if the church had one.	8	2	1	0	2
I read the newsletter every time it comes out.	7	5	0	2	0
I am satisfied with the newsletter's content.	3	8	3	0	0
I am satisfied with how the newsletter is currently available (posted on the website).	3	6	0	2	1
I use LCS's digital media (website, social media pages) to find information about the church when I need it.	3	3	0	3	5
I think social media can help bring more people to our church.	4	5	3	1	0
I think social media does help current members feel connected.	5	2	3	1	0
I think social media could help current members feel connected.	7	1	3	1	0

Survey Comments

Comment 1: I love using Facebook to keep in contact with my church family. At the same time we need to be respectful of people who don't like Facebook to communicate. How can we do both?

Comment 2: No Computer.

Comment 3: I don't like cats. Updates, listed events. I do think we should have a youtube channel.

Comment 4: Click once (not twice) to get to the current newsletter. Daily Devotions (written by members) or at least weekly. Are there obvious links to N/WLMI synad and ELCA?

It is good to have the history up- but it could be much more complete. LC-MS mission (AELC -> ELCA) Name all pastors. Our redeem history.