

Community Organisations, Social Media, and Membership:
Exploring Facebook's Potential

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Abstract

The thesis analyses how Rotary International (RI), a non-profit organisation with a community service focus, uses Facebook to influence membership recruitment and retention; and along with user findings, presents an evidenced argument about the current lack of success.

First-hand observations, as a visitor to community organisations in the Adelaide Hills, South Australia had suggested that many had an ageing and declining membership, and thus a sustainability problem. Anecdotal evidence suggested that generational differences were making traditional club structures and communication channels less attractive to younger members, and that social media might provide the interactive format and informal context needed to recruit and retain younger members. A subsequent extensive review of the scholarly literature revealed that few were reporting on Facebook uses in community organisations.

The resulting project used staged progressive focusing with content analysis of RI district and club newsletters and Facebook pages providing sub-questions for investigation. The online survey, conducted over four months, used a restricted number of self-selected respondents from RI clubs with a Facebook page in one of the three South Australian districts. Survey responses were statistically analysed, providing details of fall-off, demographics, Facebook usage, including generational differences, social capital development, recruitment and retention.

Thirteen informants then participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, exploring key survey themes, as well as changing membership profiles, members' needs, the development of social capital, and the potential of Facebook to change recruitment and retention rates. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed using NVivo. To allow further exploration of issues relating to Facebook page content and the lack of interactivity, each informant was asked to provide Facebook export data, including all posts made over the duration of the surveys and interviews. A typology was designed to describe these posts, and used as the basis for further NVivo analysis.

The research found that the initial content analysis of each eligible club's Facebook page (n=72 in 2013), completed prior to the online survey, showed that the number of contributors and the level of interactivity were low. However, the Most Popular Age (MPA) of those engaging with their club's Facebook page, was almost 20 years younger (35–44 years), than the average club member (55–64 years), thus providing a potential source of younger members for recruitment. Most respondents noted that their club's Facebook page had no role in their own recruitment, which predated its establishment. It

was found that few clubs were using their Facebook pages in the interactive, community-building manner that might have been expected; and that the branding of organisational Facebook pages, with logos, was counter-productive, resulting in lower levels of engagement.

However, those engaged with club Facebook pages were younger than the average RI member. This study argues this group provides the potential for rejuvenation by recruitment and retention. The argument concludes with practical recommendations for future uses of Facebook in community organisations.

Statement

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Robert Edward Geary

Dated: 13 July 2015

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Glossary of Acronyms

Acronym	
CAQDAS	computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software
ER	engagement rate
IP	Internet protocol
MPA	most popular age
MPW	most popular week
NPCO	non-profit community organisation
PTAT	people talking about this
RI	Rotary International
ROI	return-on-investment
SIT	social identity theory
SNS	social networking site
SOC	sense of community
SOVC	sense of virtual community
TAM	technology acceptance model
URL	uniform resource locator
