

Abstract

The focus of this paper is communities and social media, discussing the role social media plays in the recruitment, engagement, activation, retention and recognition of volunteers and how this is necessary to grow and maintain volunteer workforces. It considers the altruistic motivation of the volunteer and explores how social media can be used to create a sense of belonging and facilitate sharing throughout the volunteer lifecycle. The challenges faced by the not-for-profit sector are acknowledged and the benefits of the relative low cost of using social media to connect with volunteers and connect volunteers with each other. Maximising opportunities to engage and activate volunteerism via social media is explored including communication with the community, the network and beyond. This includes discussion and examples of how hashtags are used strategically to help grow and maintain a volunteer workforce. Similarities with activism in terms of collective action are also considered but are not explored in- depth. The discussion encompasses activation of volunteers in terms of physical mobilisation as well as digitally via virtual communities particularly in relation to a disaster emergency. It concludes that although volunteerism existed long before the advent of social media, today's volunteer workforce relies on the immediacy and ease with which news and information can be consumed.

The vital role of Social Media in the growth and maintenance of volunteer workforces.

Kappelides et al., (2020, para.1) states that due to numerous factors that intersect and impact volunteers at different levels, such as broader socio-demographic patterns including the fragmentation of traditional community life, volunteer recruitment is an area of growing concern particularly for the not-for-profit sector. By their nature, volunteer workforces are transitional as individuals move in and out of volunteer roles. Therefore, growing and maintaining a volunteer workforce can present many challenges for organisations. Today, with the broadening of communities and networks on social media, it is critical that these organisations maximise their opportunities during the lifecycle of a volunteer via the social media platforms available to them. Social Media plays a vital role in the recruitment, engagement, activation, retention and recognition of volunteers and is necessary to the growth and maintenance of volunteer workforces and communities.

Social media has become a resource for the consumption of news by individuals, a relatively inexpensive and effective platform for promoting causes and importantly, a valuable recruitment tool of volunteers. As Kim and Um (2016, para. 6) discuss, social media has seen resource-poor nonprofit organisations have a new way to disseminate their message and communicate directly with potential supporters thereby building their social capital (Coleman, 1988 as cited in Kim & Hastak, 2018, p.87). Further, influenced by a need to belong and share in experiences, users of social media commonly share their own volunteer experiences with others via their

social media presence and this flows to the recruitment of more individuals to their volunteer communities. It is argued therefore, that organisations not taking advantage of this important resource run the risk of missing out on opportunities to recruit volunteers to grow their workforces and engage with their communities.

The resulting ease with which organisations can communicate via social media with their existing and potential volunteer communities on an ongoing basis supports the engagement of the volunteer workforce. Delanty (2018) describes community as a system of social relations that entails belonging in the sense of sharing something. At the most basic level, volunteers share altruistic characteristics and in the context of volunteer engagement, share in the experience of helping others whether that be via their physical presence or in a virtual community. The Easter Good Friday Appeal, an annual fundraising event organised on behalf of the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, Australia is a strong example of how sharing in something and creating a sense of belonging via social media contributes to the engagement of volunteers. This Appeal has a strong social media presence with a vibrant website (goodfridayappeal.com.au), a Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram accounts, using hashtags including #goodfridayappeal, #GiveForTheKids and #RoyalChildrensHospital.

When individuals choose to pledge donations or give their time to the Appeal, posting about this on their social media platforms with the hashtags noted above, it generates interest within their community thereby driving feelings of sharing and engagement with the cause. This also drives the engagement of volunteers that may be in the form of volunteering to assist with coin collections during the Appeal, to participating in other fundraising activities during the year. Without this ease of

communication via social media, organisations can suffer a significant decline in volunteer numbers who have a tendency to drop off after an event or activity because the cause is no longer top of mind, for example, the passing of the bushfire season.

As communication is a form of connection, Delanty (2018, p.221) explains that virtual communities are communication communities, making belonging more communicative. Considering this, the use of social media by organisations provides an ongoing source of messaging to volunteers, reinforcing a sense of belonging and connection be it from the organisation itself or about the organisation or cause.

Rosenthal et al., (2015, p.140) discusses the relationship organisations have with what they define as their community, network and “the crowd”. For example, an organisation such as the Australian Red Cross (ARC) has a volunteer community on a database and these volunteers are also connected on platforms such as Facebook. The individual volunteers have families, friends and co-workers, who form a network which is the ARC community’s community. The ARC cannot contact these individuals, but their volunteers can. Beyond this is “the crowd” who may receive ARC messages via the network, however, to engage and take action, it requires constant and consistent communication and messaging.

This illustrates how important it is for organisations to have an understanding of the role community, network and the crowd plays in the engagement of the volunteer workforce. Consistent and frequent messaging via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, is therefore vital to converting the individuals in the crowd and network into members of an active volunteer community. These engaged members may take action in the form of volunteering their time or registering to help.

Delanty (2018, p.221) discusses communication, or the sharing of messages as an essential feature of belonging that is facilitated by virtual communities existing on social media platforms. Whilst it is acknowledged that volunteer organisations have always had the ability to communicate, social media plays an important role in both supplementing and targeting this messaging to specifically communicate with an existing and potential volunteer workforce. This can be achieved via hashtags used across multiple social media platforms. For instance, the hashtag #CleanupAustralia was created for the Clean Up Australia Day campaign (cleanup.org.au) and is often used in addition to #volunteers, #cleanupaustralia, #saveouroceans as various groups and individuals plan and carry out initiatives throughout the year. This fosters engagement with the wider community and networks to encourage them to contribute to cleaning up Australia, not just on the day of the campaign.

As individuals use these hashtags on their social media platforms, the message underlying Clean up Australia Day is quickly and efficiently communicated. How this supports the engagement of volunteers may be explained in part by Goffman's (1959) theory as described in Papacharissi (2010, p.304) that an individual's effort to act and behave in ways that influences how an audience sees him or her is usually with the intent to create, present or maintain a favorable image. That is, social media can be a very powerful tool in engaging others in the performance of an identity an individual wishes their audience to receive. This taps into the altruistic characteristics typical of many volunteers who's audience may see them as selfless and caring.

Kim and Um (2016, para.2) investigated the Ice Bucket Challenge of 2014 that attracted world-wide attention and engagement, becoming a social media phenomenon. They explained this high level of engagement by referring to Li's

(2010, p.59) Engagement Pyramid, finding that individuals at the top of the pyramid described as “curating”, used social media because they either wanted to express their identity, to be known for the content that they post on social networking sites or to be recognised by Facebook friends. That is, they were curating appropriate content consistent with the identity they wished to convey. This recognition was suggested to have been one of a success factors of the challenge. Although identify theory in relation to volunteer management is not discussed in-depth in this paper, this example is an illustration of how messaging can reach beyond a network to the crowd, thereby creating significant volunteer engagement. The stronger the engagement the more timely and responsive the activation of the volunteer workforce.

The advent of a disaster, be it natural or man-made, results in significant activation of volunteers. These volunteer workforces often consist of an existing volunteer workforce as well as those who are motivated to help, otherwise known as spontaneous volunteers (Volunteering Victoria, 2020). In times of a bushfire emergency, earthquakes or floods for instance there exists a phenomenon that Nicholas Christakis described in his Ted Talk (2010) as an emotional contagion - a spread of emotion throughout social networks. In the previous ARC example this spread of emotion would travel from the ARC’s community to their community’s community, that is, the network and beyond. This has significant relevance to activating volunteerism.

There are some similarities that exist between the activation of a volunteer workforce and collective action in activism. Both online crowds and social movements are brought together by shared feelings and emotions (Kavada, 2015) and the role of

social media in this process is significant. This echoes Delanty's (2018, p.221) discussion about how community implies belonging in the sense of sharing something. In this case, an emotion and/or experience. Kavada (2015, para.5) discusses social media and collective action, describing people coming together to coordinate and act collectively which is very much the case in mobilising or activating volunteer workforces in response to natural disasters.

Today, social media such as Twitter and Facebook can play an influential role in disaster management by helping to propagate emergency information to disaster-affected communities (Kim & Hastak, 2018, p.1). With the ability to include photos, location details and addressivity (tagging), these social media platforms have been used to disseminate and communicate critical information. For example, the location of emergency relief centres such as those managed by the ARC during the bushfire crisis, as well as assist in the mobilisation of emergency assistance and volunteer efforts to support impacted communities.

During the bushfire emergency in Australia in 2019/2020, social media played a vital role in volunteer activation with much community-based relief effort coming about via citizen journalism (Maares & Hanusch, 2018). #savethekoala was a social media campaign where the sharing of photos on social media platforms of these much-loved creatures suffering on the razed ground resulted in what Christakis (2010) referred to as an emotional stampede – everyone wanted to help. Wildlife welfare agencies were able to provide accurate information that was shared via social media with the community regarding how to handle and care for injured animals. Volunteers were quickly activated and organised to build wildlife care facilities, volunteer veterinarians volunteered their time and community groups grew, formed virtually and

on the ground to support the plight of the impacted wildlife and their environment. Although at times social media can be responsible for the dissemination of misinformation, in this example the plight of the koala saw the creation of endless volunteer community groups coming together virtually to help, from sewing protective jumpers for injured koalas to the marketing of products in order to raise funds for their ongoing care. In this example the ongoing contribution from volunteers was significant and demonstrates how social media also plays a significant role in volunteer retention.

Boczkowski et al., (2018) describes volunteer activation as a by-product of the incidental consumption of news on social media. In their research they found that many individuals regularly consume news through their constant use of social media platforms on their smart phones. With individuals regularly consuming news in this way, it also contributes to the retention of volunteers as these users of social media can find out how their contribution to a cause is making a difference, or the progress made in a disaster relief effort that they have been a part of. This is closely related to the immediacy and ease in which messages can be shared in a community and network via social media.

In cases such as disaster response, volunteer activation can at times be described as ephemeral, however social media provides organisations with less costly and vastly more efficient tools to help retain their volunteer workforce. Organisations can cultivate the sense of belonging and sharing amongst volunteers by utilising their social media to share consistent and engaging messaging. For not-for-profit organisations, creating a social culture, by using social media as described by Kanter and Alison (2010, p.46) is of great benefit in fostering two-way conversations about

the work of the organisation and its people. By enabling casual interactions between individuals via Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter for example, volunteers can learn and share experiences on an ongoing basis.

Rosenthal (2015) describes social media as a valuable tool in volunteer retention as it empowers an organisation to create relationships with volunteers and, especially, connect volunteers to each other to build relationships rooted in a positive experience. Borgatti (2011, p.1170) in his discussion about Granovetter's (1979) theory of the strength of weak ties describes people as being homophilous. Along with possessing a sense of belonging, this term refers to people tending to have stronger ties with others who are similar to themselves. For a volunteer workforce this connection is facilitated by the immediacy of social media and is a key to volunteer retention.

Anyone can find just about anything they wish on the internet. In doing so they can also connect with others who are the same or similar, via social media. This means that through social media volunteers can connect with those who possess the same beliefs, ideals or values as they do. In view of the theories discussed above, facilitating connection between volunteers via an organisation's Facebook page or Twitter feed for example, has a very positive impact the volunteer lifecycle.

The affordance of relational persistence and sustained awareness as discussed by Hampton (2015) brought about by the widespread use of social media also contributes significantly to volunteer retention. For example, a simple photo posted on a volunteers' Instagram account showing recognition of their most recent blood donation milestone including the hashtags #donateblood, #savealife creates a

pervasive awareness that may prompt or remind others in their network to donate blood to Australian Red Cross Lifeblood service.

Whilst praise and recognition is not something altruistic volunteers generally seek in giving up their time and or expertise to a cause, they do appreciate knowing that they are valued and appreciated. Social media platforms provide a means through which organisations can express their gratitude to volunteers on an individual basis, within an organisation's network, as well as publicly. In doing so, this supports a sense of belonging.

There are numerous ways in which volunteers may be recognised on social media including the posting of a photo, tagging individuals in posts or general news items acknowledging a volunteer effort. In turn, these posts may be shared by these individuals with their community and networks, spreading the recognition far and wide. Not only does this generate recognition for the individual, it also generates positive interest in the work of an organisation or a particular cause/campaign.

Interestingly Kim and Um (2016, para.13) found that recognition via social networks can be more effective with individuals involved in a cause at a low level compared to those volunteers involved at a high level. This suggests that social recognition being the recognition of volunteers via social media platforms may be a driving motivation for these volunteers to increase and continue their involvement with an organisation or cause. In view of this, recognition of volunteers should and can be achieved throughout the volunteer lifecycle. That is from recruitment to activation, retention and eventual exit (Merrilees, 2019). The affordances of social media platforms provide both the stage and audience to achieve this goal.

This paper has presented the view that social media provides unprecedented opportunities for resource-poor organisations in particular, to grow and maintain their volunteer workforces. It is argued that social media plays a significant role in fostering a sense of belonging and is a platform for individuals to share, being essential to maintaining volunteer support. Similarities to activism were briefly explored in terms of the collective action of volunteers and examples of how volunteers may be motivated to act, particularly for emergency relief efforts were explored. It was also argued that the ease with which users of social media can consume news and information is of significant benefit to a volunteer workforce. Recognition of volunteers on social networks was acknowledged as a useful tool to express gratitude as well as promote an organisation or cause to potential volunteers. The performance of identity via social media was also considered as a motivator for individuals to engage in volunteering. Additional research into data reflecting volunteer numbers across various activities and throughout the volunteer lifecycle would provide a more extensive and detailed insight into which social media tools are most vital to growing and maintaining volunteer workforces.

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Volunteering Victoria

www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au

Marking Rubric – Conference paper

The following marking rubric provides a guide to the way your conference paper is assessed according to four major criteria (five for post graduate students): that you have provided a strong and clear argument; that your paper provides a well supported and referenced argument that is professionally presented; and that your paper engages critically and meaningfully with the stream selected. For post graduate students the additional criteria that your paper demonstrates an advanced understanding of key concepts in social media, communities and networks is also assessed. For each criterion, there is a summary of the elements that might characterize work at each grade level.

Please note: each of the marking categories below is meant as a guide, there is *not* necessarily a direct correlation between the sum of your 'grades' for each criteria and your final mark. For example, an assignment that consistently scores in the 'C' range for each might end up with a result in the high 60s or even 70s if it presented some original ideas, or used some excellent sources. An assignment that receives one or more ticks in the 'F' box is unlikely to pass overall.

The rubric is intended not only to provide a guide as to the mark assigned, but should also help you identify the areas where you could improve your paper before it is presented at the conference as well as your work for your later assignments.

Strong and Clear Argument?

Integration of knowledge

	F	The paper does not demonstrate that the author has fully understood and applied concepts learned in the unit.
	P	The paper demonstrates that the author, to a certain extent, understands and has applied concepts learned in the unit.
X	C	The paper demonstrates that the author, for the most part, understands and has applied concepts learned in the unit. Some of the conclusions, however, are not supported in the body of the paper.
X	D	The paper demonstrates that the author fully understands and has applied concepts learned in the unit. Concepts are integrated into the writer's own insights. The writer provides concluding remarks that show analysis and synthesis of ideas.
	HD	The paper demonstrates that the author fully understands and has applied and extended concepts learned in the unit. Concepts are expertly integrated into the writer's own insights. The writer provides concluding remarks that show advanced analysis and synthesis of ideas

Topic Focus

	F	The topic is not clearly defined.
	P	The topic is too broad for the scope of this conference.
X	C	The topic is focused but lacks direction. The paper is about a specific topic but the writer has not established a position.
X	D	The topic is focused narrowly enough for the scope of this conference. A thesis statement provides direction for the paper, either by statement of a position or hypothesis.
	HD	The topic is focused narrowly enough for the scope of this conference. A thesis

		statement provides strong and innovative direction for the paper, either by statement of a position or hypothesis.
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Depth of discussion

	F	Cursory discussion in all the sections of the paper or brief discussion in only a few sections.
	P	The writer has omitted pertinent content or content runs-on excessively. Quotations from others outweigh the writer's own ideas excessively.
X	C	Appropriate in-depth discussion & elaboration in most sections of the paper.
	D	Appropriate in-depth discussion & elaboration in all sections of the paper.
	HD	Appropriate and advanced discussion in-depth & elaboration in all sections of the paper.

Cohesiveness

	F	Does not tie together information. Paper does not flow and appears to be created from disparate issues. Headings are necessary to link concepts. Writing does not demonstrate understanding any relationships
	P	Sometimes ties together information from all sources. Paper does not flow - disjointedness is apparent. Author's writing does not demonstrate an understanding of the relationship among material obtained from all sources.
X	C	For the most part, ties together information from all sources. Paper flows with only some disjointedness. Author's writing demonstrates an understanding of the relationship among material obtained from all sources.
	D	Ties together information from all sources. Paper flows from one issue to the next without the need for headings. Author's writing demonstrates an understanding of the relationship among material obtained from all sources.
	HD	Ties together information from all sources. Paper flows from one issue to the next without the need for headings. Author's writing demonstrates an advanced understanding of the relationship among material obtained from all sources.

Your paper engages critically and meaningfully with the stream selected

	F	Little or no link to the conference stream.
	P	Simplistic link to the stream selected with limited broader engagement.
	C	Some key concepts discussed, with limited link to the paper's argument.
X	D	Engages with a key concept in the chosen conference stream and links this to the argument presented.
	HD	Demonstrates advanced understanding of key concepts in the chosen stream and links these to the chosen topic.

Well supported and referenced argument that is professionally presented.

	F	Major problems with written expression; numerous grammatical errors and stylistic problems which seriously distract from the points being made and/or make meaning unclear; uses no references to support argument; fails to cite sources or plagiarises; unclear or incorrect referencing style is used.
	P	Some problems with written expression; some major grammatical or proofreading errors; language may be marred by clichés, colloquialisms, inexact word choices;

		simplistic presentation of ideas; too generalised with little use of sources to support points; insufficient or awkward use of readings; incorrect or mixed referencing style.
X	C	Good written expression; may contain some unclear or awkward sentences; imprecise use of words; one or two major grammatical errors; effort to use readings to support points; some ideas and generalisations unsupported; effort to present any quotations appropriately; referencing style may have errors.
	D	Very good written expression; stylistically consistent; may make occasional problematic word choice or syntax error; minimal or no spelling or punctuation errors or clichés; presents clear major points supported with appropriate readings; effective use of sources and quotations where appropriate; correct use of referencing style.
	HD	Excellent written expression; uses sentences effectively; usually chooses words aptly; observes conventions of written English and manuscript format; makes few if any minor or technical errors; very effective use of readings and other sources, uses quotations to support points; flawless use of referencing style.

	Close to (within 10%) of the word limit
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For Post Graduate Students - Demonstrated advanced understanding of key concepts in Social Media, Communities and Networks.

	F	Little understanding of key concepts demonstrated.
	P	Simplistic discussion of key concepts, significant errors and/or omissions.
X	C	Most key concepts discussed, with some errors and/or omissions.
	D	Effective and nuanced understanding of key concepts.
	HD	Complex understanding of key concepts that goes beyond given material.

(Adapted from UC Irvine Humanities Core Course Rubric; Accessed at http://www.ajdrake.com/e240_fall_03/materials/guides/wr_rubric.htm) and Cornell College's Research Paper Rubric that can be found here: <https://www.cornellcollege.edu/library/faculty/focusing-on-assignments/tools-for-assessment/research-paper-rubric.shtml>)

Marker's Comments:

This was a very interesting read on the role of social media in volunteer workforces. You raise some really great examples, and draw on literature to support your work. However, your paragraphs currently detract from the points you are trying to make, especially where a single point is split across multiple paragraphs. Good paragraph structure will help a lot in making your analysis clear. Each paragraph should address a single idea, which should be set out in the first sentence, supported in the body of the essay, and then connected back to the question in the final sentence (which should be in your own words and not require a citation). Currently your essay jumps between different points, particularly at the end where you introduce different concepts that seem to exist on their own and do not necessarily link back to your essay argument. You also discuss similar points at different parts of your essay, which makes it come across as underdeveloped in areas and repetitive in others. Working on this would help make your argument clearer and help this well-researched piece of work to really shine. Working on this would allow this paper to be a very strong contribution to your conference stream.

Final Mark & Grade:28/40