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# Social Media Marketing Strategies in Nonprofit Professional Membership Organizations

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Avis Gordon

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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

Social Media Marketing Strategies in Nonprofit Professional Membership Organizations

by

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MMPA, University of Phoenix, 2012

BS, Roosevelt University, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2017

## Abstract

The use of social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations affects how leaders communicate with members, consumers, the community, and other stakeholders. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use to keep their organizations sustainable. Data were collected from 5 social media marketing leaders representing 5 nonprofit professional membership organizations in the Chicago region. Data collection occurred through semistructured interviews, review of organizational documents pertaining to social media marketing strategies, and review of the social media sites and websites of the participants' organizations. Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. A thematic analysis of the data yielded 4 themes: social media platforms and engagement strategies, social media content, social media challenges, and brand awareness. Leaders of nonprofit professional membership organizations who want to gain a competitive edge by using the appropriate social media platforms, creating quality content, overcoming challenges, and increasing brand awareness might choose to align with the strategies identified in this study. The findings of this study could help organizational leaders use social media marketing strategies effectively for engagement and organizational sustainability. The implications for positive social change arising from the use of social media by leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations include opportunities to connect with and engage the public to build stronger communities through collaboration.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my family, especially my sisters, Rhonda, Dianne, and Gabriella. They were there for me every step of the way, pushing me to achieve the highest level of education among my siblings. Last and by no means least, my sons, Lagarius and Cedric, who understood the time I spent focusing on my homework; and my love, Stanley, who always reminded me that God was the head of my life and to put all my trust in Him to complete this journey.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The use of social media has an influence on how business leaders interact with individuals, consumers, and the public. In the current economic crises and changing times, nonprofit leaders experience challenges related to engagement and efficient communication with stakeholders (Bandyopadhyay & Dayton, 2013). Carboni and Maxwell (2015) reported that nonprofit leaders' challenges include lack of staff, resources, and knowledge for managing social media. Bandyopadhyay and Dayton (2013) posited that by using social media, nonprofit leaders have the chance to engage with their stakeholders, increase operations, and improve brand awareness by developing strategies and measurable goals. Social media use in business today can help leaders with successfully engaging with consumers and other stakeholders. In this study, I explored the strategies that business leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use to remain sustainable.

### **Background of the Problem**

Social media are changing the way in which leaders in companies communicate and do business with their stakeholders to remain sustainable. Changes in the way consumers behave online are triggering organizational leaders to rethink their strategies in their digital platforms (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Some leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations struggle to use social media tools. They have not employed social media marketing strategies effectively to engage members and other stakeholders to adapt to changes.

Marketing professionals know that social media is an important way to create sustainable word of mouth (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). The marketing professional's challenge is selecting the right social media platform, designing the right message for the audience, and engaging the right users. Marketers in organizations define an efficient social media strategy by setting objectives, assessing opportunities, and selecting the relevant form of social media to communicate with stakeholders and prospects (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). Some organizational leaders lack strategies to take advantage of the opportunities associated with using social media such as communicating and engaging with stakeholders.

### **Problem Statement**

Some nonprofit professional membership organizational leaders struggle to effectively implement social media marketing strategies to engage members (Warner, Abel, & Hachtmann, 2014). By 2013, social media use had grown tremendously, with 1 billion people on Facebook; in this environment, leaders of nonprofit professional membership organizations place organization sustainability at risk if they do not use social media marketing strategies (Weber, 2013). The general business problem is that some leaders in organizations lack social media marketing strategies to recruit and retain members to remain sustainable. The specific business problem is that some nonprofit professional membership organizational leaders lack social media marketing strategies to promote organizational sustainability.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies that nonprofit professional membership organizations' leaders use to promote organizational sustainability. The target population was nonprofit organizational leaders who were responsible for identification and implementation of social media strategies in five nonprofit professional membership organizations located in the Chicago region. The study's implications for positive social change related to the diffusion of social media in nonprofit personal membership organizations involve opportunities to connect with and engage the public in building stronger communities. Social media can keep members of the public informed about initiatives of the organization and may give them a voice in advocacy efforts (Auger, 2013).

### **Nature of the Study**

Qualitative research is the methodical assembly, organization, and explanation of recorded material derived from dialogue or conversation (Grossoehme, 2014). The intent of qualitative studies is to explore *how* or *why* a phenomenon is happening when inadequate information exists on a subject (Yin, 2014). The need to explore the use of social media strategies by leaders in nonprofit personal membership organizations determined the methodology. A quantitative method was not appropriate because, in quantitative research, the researcher gathers data for developing detailed and objective measurements using mathematical and statistical analyses to support or negate a theory (Turk & Kalarchian, 2014). In qualitative research, the gathering of information occurs through open-ended techniques for exploring common concepts or themes to understand

the phenomenon (Turk & Kalarchian, 2014). Yin (2014) noted that conducting a qualitative case study through interviews and observation allows a researcher to explore the phenomenon of lived experience. Mixed-method research requires the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand a phenomenon (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013). A mixed-method approach was not appropriate for this study. A qualitative case study was suitable for exploring the phenomenon of social media marketing strategies in nonprofit professional membership organizations.

Case study research involves exploring a case within a real-life contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2014). Specifically, the use of a multiple case study design was appropriate in this study, in that I sought to determine social media marketing strategies that nonprofit professional membership organizations' leaders use to remain sustainable. A multiple case study design or collective case study design involves the selection of several cases for replication (Yin, 2014) to develop a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of interest—in this study, social media marketing strategies in nonprofit professional membership organizations.

Other qualitative designs received consideration but were not sufficient to explore the phenomenon. A phenomenological design reveals participants' perspectives on an event or situation; in such a study, the researcher tries to answer the question of the experience (Gill, 2014). When conducting ethnographic research, a researcher observes individuals in their natural habitat over an extended timeframe (Hallett & Barber, 2013). Narrative inquiry entails gathering information to tell a story and writing a description of the experience (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013). I determined that a multiple case

study inquiry would be more appropriate for personal interaction and observation to understand the phenomenon by yielding both common and different perspectives than would an ethnographic study, phenomenological study, or narrative inquiry study (Yin, 2014). The qualitative multiple case study approach provided the opportunity to explore the phenomenon (Cronin, 2014) of social media marketing strategies in professional membership organizations.

### **Research Question**

What social media marketing strategies do professional membership organizational leaders use to promote organizational sustainability?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What social media marketing strategies do you use to promote organizational sustainability?
2. What social media marketing strategies do you use to support recruitment of new members?
3. What social media marketing strategies do you use to support retention of members?
4. What social media marketing strategies do you use to promote new products and services to members and prospects?
5. How else does your organization use social media to engage members and prospects?
6. How did you develop the social media marketing strategies?
7. How did you implement the social media marketing strategies?

8. What challenges did you encounter in implementing the social media marketing strategies?
9. How did you address the challenges in implementing the social media marketing strategies?
10. How do you measure the success of social media strategies used by your organizations?
11. Please provide additional information that you would like to add about your organization's social media marketing strategies.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study included Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory. In this study, diffusion of innovation theory facilitated my understanding of how leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use social media marketing strategies to engage members and prospects. In Rogers's (2003) description, diffusion is a process by which an innovation transfers through certain systems over a period of time among the participants of a social system. Rogers classified the four main elements that influence the spread of a new idea into four categories that included innovation, communication channels, time, and social systems. Rogers noted five factors that influence the rate of adoption of innovation: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. These factors affect the adoption of social media in organizations and by individuals (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015).

## Operational Definitions

*Facebook:* Facebook is a social media platform that permits users to transmit messages to a large audience via status updates and wall posts. The features of the tool include private chat capability (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015).

*Social media:* Social media describes low-cost online marketing technologies for sharing opinions, knowledge, and viewpoints. Social media are low-cost marketing tools that assist in the building of networks, instant distribution of information, and the encouragement of trust and confidence from the public (Gupta, Tyagi, & Sharma, 2013).

*Social media marketing:* Social media marketing involves strategies that business leaders use to participate in networks of people online (Deepa & Deshmukh, 2013).

*Social networking sites:* Social networking sites are online marketing tools such as Facebook and MySpace that promote relationship building among individuals with similar interests and activities (Walaski, 2013).

*Twitter:* Twitter is an online social networking service that allows users to exchange information using 140 characters or less (Forgie, Duff, & Ross, 2013).

*Web 2.0:* Web 2.0 is an assortment of interactive, open-source, and user-controlled Internet applications that enhance the opinions, knowledge, and viewpoints of users in a business and social process (Constantinides, 2014).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are propositions in research that considered true but are not verifiable (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2014). Assumptions are important to a study's quality (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The assumptions for my study included the following:

- The participants' perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon would shed light on social media marketing strategies in nonprofit professional membership organizations.
- *Social media* refers to social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogs.
- The participants would answer the interview questions honestly. The level of honesty by the participants would create validity and reliability.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are weaknesses in a study that may affect validity (Connelly, 2013). This study had several limitations. First, my experience and professional background working in a nonprofit professional membership organization could have influenced the research and data. Second, I used leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations in the Chicago region as participants; the results might have been different if I had conducted research in other locations. Third, the participants of the study could not provide information that was pertinent to all social media marketing professionals.

### **Delimitations**

Narrowing the scope of a study helps the researcher remain focused. Delimitations are boundaries and restrictions concerning what the researcher is not going

to do or what the study is not about (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016, p. 332). The delimitations of the study were as follows:

- The participants were all responsible for social media marketing within their organizations.
- All participants were leaders of nonprofit professional membership organizations in the Chicago region.
- The study addressed social media marketing strategies in nonprofit professional membership organizations.

Setting these boundaries was helpful in answering specific questions.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Using social media is a strategy to improve products and services, as well as to offer high-quality products and services to organizations' members (Constantinides, 2014). Therefore, leaders must effectively use social media to engage organizational members (Constantinides, 2014). However, leaders in some nonprofit organizations are struggling to use social media effectively (Warner et al., 2014). Limited scholarly information exists regarding the use of social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations and the benefits of engaging members in this way (Warner et al., 2014). The information from the findings, recommendations, and conclusions of this study could help leaders and marketers in nonprofit professional membership organizations use social media tools strategically.

## **Implications for Social Change**

With advancements in technology throughout the world, organizational use of social media has increased across industries. To remain sustainable, organizational leaders must adopt online applications such as social media to communicate and engage with stakeholders (Weber, 2013). Nonprofit personal membership organizations serve an array of social, political, cultural, sports, religious, occupational, and professional groups (Tschirhart & Gazley, 2013). Members of nonprofit online social networks connect through shared causes, such as healthcare, poverty, housing, faith, education, and the environment (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013). Using social media has the potential to engage members of nonprofit professional membership organizations with others in like professions to learn, network, and share successful practices in their professional industry that can support sustainability. The diffusion of social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations presents opportunities to connect with and engage the public in building stronger communities. Social media can keep members of the public informed by giving them a voice in advocacy efforts (Auger, 2013).

## **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The focus of this study was the exploration of social media marketing strategies that leaders use to engage people so that their organizations can remain sustainable. Specifically, I conducted a qualitative multiple case study of nonprofit leaders who were responsible for the identification and implementation of social media strategies in five nonprofit professional membership organizations, with the aim of identifying themes

deriving from the experiences of social media professionals. Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory served as the study's conceptual framework.

The literature review includes a complete, in-depth exploration and critical analysis of the phenomenon of social media strategies in nonprofit organizations. I offer a synthesis of the available literature on social media that was relevant to the conceptual framework and that addressed the marketing strategies that business leaders use. Additionally, the literature review contains analysis and synthesis of scholarship related to social media management and use in business as well as marketing strategies. The organization of the literature review is thematic. The themes covered include social media use, the application of social media to business, social media engagement, social media marketing, and social media in nonprofit organizations.

For this literature review, I sought scholarly peer-reviewed articles from various sources. I located the majority of my references using Google Scholar; I also used Science Direct, ProQuest Central, and Emerald Management, accessing each through the Walden Library. Keywords for my searches were *social media*, *social media use*, *social media marketing*, *social networking*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *diffusion of innovation theory*, and *social media in nonprofits*. I reviewed over 242 articles published from 2013 to 2017. Included in this literature review are 227 peer-reviewed references, at least 90% of which have a publication date between 2013 and 2017.

### **Diffusion of Innovation Conceptual Framework**

Diffusion of innovation is a concept that many researchers use as a framework for conducting research. In this study, diffusion of innovation theory aided in understanding

the adoption of social media and the strategies that leaders use to remain sustainable. Diffusion of innovation theory dates to the early 1900s; some researchers have used the theory to understand the diffusion and adoption of technology (Bobkowski & Smith, 2013). The most powerful and influential model of diffusion of innovation is the one proposed by Rogers (2003). *Diffusion* is the process whereby a certain community adopts and extends acceptance to an innovation (Kocak, Kaya, & Erol, 2013). The five characteristics of innovations that determine their rate of adoption are (a) relative advantage, (b) compatibility, (c) complexity, (d) trialability, and (e) observability (Rogers, 2003, p. 208).

Rogers (2003) suggested that diffusion of innovation has four elements. The first two elements are innovation and communication channels. Rogers described an *innovation* as an idea, project, or practice that receives acknowledgment as new by individuals or units of adoption. Innovations include technologies such as social media (Kawakami, Kishiya, & Perry, 2013). The second element of diffusion is *communication*. Diffusion of innovation theory is a model of change for leading technological innovations and emphasizes the significance of communication and peer networking within the adoption process (Kaminski, 2011). During the last decade, social media leaders have used social media as channels for broadcasting and disseminating information (Benthaus, Risius, & Beck, 2016). *Time*, the third element of Rogers's theory, relates to diffusion in three ways: innovation decision, innovativeness of an individual or unit, and rate of adoption. The fourth element is *social systems*. Rogers noted that social systems affect diffusion, and are the main element determining the category of adoption and the rate of

adoption. Leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations experience challenges to adopting social media and deploying various social media marketing strategies for communication and engagement with consumers and stakeholders. The elements of the diffusion of innovation concept may be helpful in explaining the adoption and use of innovations such as social media by this population.

In some organizations, the adoption of new ideas and technology by leaders is slow, which affects the business marketing strategy. Rogers (2003) noted five types of users of technology: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Barnes and Jacobsen (2013) pointed out that the compatibility of new tools such as social media provides a solid foundation for adoption, noting that implementation of these tools within an organization's existing marketing strategies is an easy process. Social media already constitute an important part of many organizations' marketing strategies (Ananda, Hernandez-Garcia, & Lamberti, 2016). For some leaders, however, the adoption of social media marketing is slow; which affects operations.

Another conceptual framework that I explored for possible inclusion in this study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In this theory, developed in 1943, Maslow identified five kinds of needs: (a) societal needs, (b) self-actualization needs, (c) psychological needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) safety needs. I considered the possibility of using Maslow's theory to guide my understanding of engagement through the fulfillment of social actualization and social needs (Maslow, 1943). Cao et al. (2013) applied Maslow's hierarchy and addressed individuals' engagement through the use of social media tools. Maslow's theory might have served to support an explanation of the needs and

motivation of individuals to use various social media tools, but it would not have addressed adoption behaviors. Thus, diffusion of innovation theory was a better fit for an examination of the adoption of social media by leaders in organizations and the social media marketing strategies they used to attract and retain stakeholders for organizational sustainability.

Diffusion of innovation theory was helpful in this research, in which I sought to understand the adoption of social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations. In business, social media is a tool that some leaders use to enhance—and, in some cases, replace—traditional marketing. As the conceptual framework for this study, the diffusion of innovation theory contributed to the understanding of marketing strategies that leaders in all kinds of organizations use to engage members and other stakeholders. Applying the diffusion of innovation theory helped with understanding the strategies that leaders deploy to maximize and diffuse innovations within businesses.

### **Social Media and Social Media Use in Businesses**

Researchers have described social media tools in many ways; common threads among these descriptions of social media are the themes of sharing and communication. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), for instance, described social media as encompassing networking sites, consumer review sites, community content sites, wikis, Internet forums, and location-based media. Crumpton (2014) defined social media as a collection of online services used to communicate and share content with stakeholder groups. Social media involve Internet-based applications built on the technical foundation of Web 2.0 (Parveen, Jaafar, & Ainin, 2015). The most popular social media tools include

applications such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Pinterest (Shi, 2013). For this study, social media include low-cost online marketing technologies used to share opinions, knowledge, and viewpoints (Gupta et al., 2013). Gupta et al. (2013) identified social media as tools that assist in building networks, achieving instant distribution of information, and encouraging trust and confidence within the public. Although the aforementioned descriptions of social media differ, each includes the idea that these tools are for sharing and communication.

The use of social technologies by leaders and marketers in Fortune 100 companies to communicate with stakeholders has increased by 87%; meanwhile, some nonprofit leaders do not have effective strategies to engage organizational members using these tools (Guinan, Parise, & Rollag, 2014). Roblek, Mirjana, Mesko, and Bertoneclj (2013) reported that Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs are the top four social media tools used by marketers. Twitter leads, with a 32% growth rate per year (Roblek et al., 2013). With usage rising, the distinctive features of social media and the ways in which these media differ from traditional marketing communication channels have caused difficulty for some organizations seeking to implement and deploy social media strategies (Valos, Polonsky, Mavondo, & Lipscomb, 2015).

Many business leaders are using social media to communicate with audiences and communities. The use of social media gives leaders the capacity to reach audiences that they would not normally access through traditional communication channels; thus, it has become a normalized practice (Henderson et al., 2017). Social media can allow organizations to communicate openly, honestly, and transparently about their activities

(Harquail, 2011). Previous research has indicated that a business's ability to communicate with a community has a direct impact on its reputation (Cuomo, Tortora, & Metallo, 2013). Floredu and Cabiddu (2016) identified social media communication strategies as egocentric, selective, conversational, open, supportive, and secretive. These social media communication strategies can be effective in harnessing a business's reputation to create valuable, ongoing relationships with customers (Floredu & Cabiddu, 2016; Floredu, Cabiddu, & Evaristo, 2014). By establishing relationships online using social media for communication, leaders can gain a competitive advantage in their markets.

Leaders use social media for many purposes. Applications of social media use in businesses include collaboration, communication, and the exchange of information (Ngai, Moon, Lam, Chin, & Tao, 2015). The use of social media technologies has allowed leaders in businesses to engage in two-way communication and interactive dialogue (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014) to spread their message (Shin, Pang, & Kim, 2015). Nah and Saxton (2013) applied Rogers's (2003) diffusion of innovation theory and noted that among nonprofit organizations, the popularity of social media had increased rapidly as a way to engage consumers and stakeholders. Social media enables involvement by consumers in the generation and distribution of content (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). Social media applications offer a way for leaders to expand awareness of their organizations.

Some nonprofit professionals use social media as a way to communicate with the community, consumers, and other stakeholders; however, they may experience

challenges in adoption of the tools if they lack an adequate social media strategy. Attouni and Mustaffa (2014) conducted a qualitative empirical study of organizations in Libya applying the media richness and diffusion of innovation concepts and concluded that social media represent an important tool used by leaders for connectivity and communication with the public. Goldkind (2015) noted that using social media is one way for nonprofit leaders to communicate with constituents; however, social media use and adoption are not as prevalent and rapid as in the corporate sector. The use of social media by some business leaders has placed a strain on bandwidth and has prevented the adoption and effective use of the tool for communication and engagement (Carim & Warwick, 2013; Go & You, 2015). Badea (2014) asserted that leaders in businesses should develop a social media marketing strategy based on the communication needs of their companies for inclusion in their overall strategic plans. However, Filipe, Tiago, Tiago, and Amaral (2014) determined that most business leaders use Facebook to achieve communication, exposure, and contact with a wider consumer base. Filipe et al. noted that most business leaders in Azorean organizations in the Portugal region expressed that the main difficulties they encountered with social media involved measuring the impact on the business, integration with other marketing initiatives, lack of resources, lack of management support, cultural adaptation, and control of the communication message. Social media professionals may face challenges in using social media for communication if they do not have necessary resources and a social media marketing strategy.

Leaders of nonprofit businesses use social media for various purposes, including solicitation of feedback in nonprofit advocacy initiatives. Auger (2013) found that leaders

auspiciously used multiple social media outlets as mechanisms for soliciting stakeholder feedback and immediate communication. Social media forums such as Facebook and Twitter gave leaders platforms for providing stakeholders with company information, soliciting feedback, and initiating one-on-one communication through direct messaging (Auger, 2013). Guo and Saxton (2014), in a study of nonprofit advocacy, examined how leaders used social media to engage with stakeholders and identified a pyramid model that included new types of social media advocacy. The model included a three stage process: (a) reaching out to people, (b) keeping the flame alive, and (c) stepping into action (Guo & Saxton, 2014). Both Auger and Guo and Saxton indicated that leaders use social media not only for feedback but also to gain support and to call stakeholders to action for positive social change. Social media has changed the emphasis on advocacy in nonprofit businesses, and leaders use these channels for feedback and two-way communication.

Since the adoption of social media by businesses, the information obtained from most studies has indicated that some leaders use social media for engagement and marketing, but not as part of a knowledge management framework. Levy (2013), using a mixed-method approach to survey and interview 34 knowledge management leaders in organizations in Israel, confirmed that social media have a connection to knowledge management through sharing information and connecting people. Bharati, Zhang, and Chaudhury (2015) suggested that social media affect social capital and knowledge management, which is an indication that the quality of knowledge in an organization is exceptional. Hemsley and Mason (2013) noted that social media increased the benefits of

improved innovation and faster knowledge transfer. Social media have uses beyond marketing and engagement in the organization; these tools may also be applied to knowledge transfer and management. The use of social media facilitates knowledge management. Several researchers have applied the uses and gratification theory (UGT) to understand the motivation for social media usage by consumers to increase brand strategy. Researchers Whiting and Williams (2013) identified 10 uses and gratifications: social interaction, passing time, entertainment, information seeking, community utility, relaxation, information sharing, stating an opinion, awareness of others, and convenience utility. Jin, Lin, Gibleath, and Lee (2017) determined that users of Instagram and Facebook tended to focus on self-status seeking, while users of Facebook and Pinterest were future-driven information seekers. Phua, Jin, and Kim (2017) examined Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat for users' levels of bridging and bonding social capital; they determined that Twitter users had the highest social bonding capital. The uses and gratifications of social media vary by consumer, and this information is useful in helping business leaders develop their social media platforms to keep pace with advertising and brand strategy.

Having a social media presence is important for businesses' ability to stay competitive and survive in an ever-changing digital business environment. Currently, those firms using social media rely heavily on Facebook and Twitter for tools of engagement (Auger, 2013). The information in the literature also indicates that the use of social media tools is slowly replacing traditional marketing and that not all businesses are using social media tools effectively (Henderson et al., 2017). Businesses that are using

social media tools should connect their social media usage to their business strategy to remain sustainable and competitive.

### **Social Media Engagement in Businesses**

The adoption of social media use has created a way for leaders in Fortune 500 companies and Incorporation 500 corporations to engage, communicate, and develop corporate brands and images. Ratliff and Kunz (2014) examined the adoption of social media among Fortune 500 businesses compared to Incorporation 500 companies and posited that leaders in Fortune 500 companies were more favorable toward the adoption of five to eight social networking sites, whereas Incorporation 500 leaders tended to use only one to three social networking sites. Barnes and Jacobsen (2013), using Rogers's (2003) diffusion of innovation theory, found that leaders in Incorporation 500 companies were more familiar with Twitter and Facebook than other social media platforms, but when leaders applied Rogers's five attributes (i.e., trialability, compatibility, complexity, relative advantage, and observability) in the adoption of social media, they were successful. Incorporation 500 companies are not only adopting social media, but also adapting to social media (Barnes & Jacobsen, 2013). The implementation of social media and social networking is an opportunity for leaders in both types of organizations to promote positive public perceptions and to connect with and engage customers by communicating in a virtual environment.

Some nonprofit human service organization leaders find the adoption and use of social media beneficial, whereas other leaders have some obstacles to overcome before successfully implementing the tools. Campbell, Lambright, and Wells (2014) explored

the use of social media in nonprofit human service organizations by leaders, the level of engagement of stakeholders, and the types of social media tools adopted. Campbell et al. found that leaders used social media to raise community awareness, to market programs and activities, and to maintain relationships with stakeholders. A study by Young (2016) noted that nonprofit human service organizations used such tools as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and blogs to reach their audience. Although these social media tools were useful in nonprofit human service organizations, leaders experienced challenges with organizational policies, client confidentiality, lack of expertise, and connecting with specific audiences. The main difficulty faced by human service organizations was a lack of vision and strategy (Campbell et al., 2014; Young, 2016). Both Campbell et al. and Young noted that nonprofit human service organizations needed goals pertaining to social media to help leaders build organizational capacity. The information contained in the literature reveals to researchers that nonprofit organizations need goals surrounding social media. Social media in nonprofit human service organizations are beneficial; however, some nonprofit human service organization leaders lack a plan and strategies on how to use social media to support organizational sustainability.

Social media is a part of some nonprofit organization's communication processes, and the use of social media includes engagement with the public through Facebook. Cho, Schweickart, and Haase (2014) used the theoretical framework of the four models of public relations proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and concluded that the public is more likely to engage with nonprofit organizations on Facebook through the model of two-way symmetry or two-communication. Cho et al. examined the three levels of

engagement on Facebook; *like*, *share*, and *comment*. Cho et al. proved in their findings that *Comment* provided more of an opportunity for the public to respond and engage. Cho and De Moya (2014) analyzed the Facebook posts of top nonprofit organizations including, the Salvation Army and Goodwill Charities, and found seven types of communication approaches: inquiries, experiences, requests, advocacy, self-promotion, grievances, and advisory. The public used these types of communications on social media to seek information, to request information on the organization, and request help or services (Cho & De Moya, 2014). Men and Tsai (2015) suggested that although engagement behaviors involved some negativity, open communication was valuable and social media provided an avenue for dialogue. Communication on social media websites, engaging in social media pages, and expressing support and criticism will lead to meaningful relationships between the business and the stakeholder (Men & Tsai, 2015). Nonprofit organizations leaders are adopting and implementing social media for communicating and engaging with interested parties, and the public and one strategy includes two-way symmetry or communication as the approach for more engagement with the public.

Social media play a major role in word of mouth (WOM) communication, but some nonprofit organizations struggle with implementation and strategic implementation of the tools. Kimmel and Kitchen (2013) noted WOM is the most powerful method of online engagement with others. Quinton and Fennemore (2013), in a study of nonprofits charities in the United Kingdom, pointed out that the spread of positive WOM is a result of commitment toward the cause, not the result of social media. This point is in direct

contrast with Kimmel and Kitchen's findings. Before this study, charities in the United Kingdom had limited involvement with social networks but concluded that leaders should include the use of social media as part of the strategy for brand building (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013). Williams and Buttle (2013), in a study of positive word of mouth (PWOM) and WOM through social networks in nonprofit organizations, applied the eight pillars of WOM model for nonprofits: (a) donor, (b) service and products, (c) communication, (d) influencer, (e), referral, (f) supplier and alliance, (g), employee, and (h) corporate organization. Williams and Buttle concluded that donors' dedication, purchase, and organizational reputation affected and influenced WOM in nonprofits using social media. Social media use creates a way for organizations to engage with consumers through WOM, but an organization's commitment to its stakeholders also drives positivity in communication.

The implementation and use of social media and social networking in nonprofit organizations have an impact on communication and engagement through electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Leaders and social media strategists' goals are consumers driven to generate positive eWOM on sites like Twitter and Facebook (Wu, 2013). Wu (2013) noted that leaders must first understand customers' motivations for using social media to create a strategy for positive word of mouth. Bataineh and Al-Smadi (2015) in a study of Jordanian leaders in nonprofit organizations determined that perceived trust in contacts and perceived usefulness stand out as factors that influenced how consumers engaged through positive eWOM. Bataineh and Al-Smadi concluded that the use of expert marketing efforts to send helpful information through social media increased

consumer involvement in eWOM on nonprofits social networking sites. Customers and other stakeholders of nonprofit organizations engagement in positive eWOM are dependent on how leaders in organizations communicate and share information with the public.

Social media tools and usage has become an increasingly important part of the overall strategy of some businesses. The information in the literature reveals that business leaders must use their available online resources to target the right audience. Social media engagement involves businesses having a line of communication with customers and stakeholders. Social media engagement in business is how leaders use Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools to market their products and services while providing a rewarding experience for the targeted audience. The success of organizational leaders to market their products and service through social media depends on the social media tools used for engagement.

### **Social Media Marketing Strategies**

The use of social media tools is changing the way marketing professionals engage with stakeholders and potential customers. Social media marketing is the new platform for engagement. Chary (2014) defined social media marketing as gaining website traffic or responsiveness through social media sites. Social media marketing is a new type of business practice used by organizations to market goods, services, ideas, and information (Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat, & Fabeil, 2014). Social media marketing is different from traditional marketing (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Social media marketing is growing and attracting the attention of leaders and marketing in organizations as a way to promote the

products and company (Whiting & Deshpande, 2014). Social media marketing consists of the efforts of marketers to develop content that attracts consumers and their ability to share it with others, thus promoting an organization's brand and sustainability (Chary, 2014). Advantages of social media marketing include cost, social interactions, interactivity, and target markets (Kaur, 2016). Social media marketing can play a vital role in replacing traditional marketing to help leaders carry out their marketing activities.

Social media is a highly effective tool in helping companies with brand identity through marketing. Social media marketing has helped many organizations establish themselves in their field and the industry (Chary, 2014). Shaikh, Siddiqui, Vasatkar, Jagtap, and Sankpal (2016) noted social media marketing is more complex than regular marketing and requires behavior changes in the economic, political, and social environment. Social media marketing strategies are the strategies leaders are using to engage with and communicate with individuals online (Deepa & Deshmukh, 2013). Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017) noted social media marketing strategies as a major component of operating a business in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Social media is a change agent for marketing professionals in organizations and a foundation of opportunity for helping leaders develop marketing strategies in the ever-changing business environment (Constantinides, 2014). Organizational leaders should implement the right strategies for usage to reach its intended target audience. The usage of social media for marketing is a great platform used by companies for differentiating themselves from the competition.

Engaging in social media platforms and developing strategies can provide leaders in nonprofit organizations the right experience with connecting with their stakeholders.

Social media is on the rise as a powerful tool to reach a wider audience to complete the mission of the nonprofit organization, but leaders must find techniques to succeed in two-way interaction and social networking by using the available tools (Krueger & Haytko, 2015). In 2014, over 90% of marketing leaders, successfully used social media and 70% expected an increase in social media marketing spending (Whiting & Deshpande, 2014). Clark and Melancon (2013) noted that using social media marketing effectively could help business leaders focus on bringing value to customers and can result in positive WOM for sustainability. Matikiti, Kruger, and Saayman (2016) found that some business leaders realized success in the use of social media marketing strategies, but Yang and Wang (2015) noted that some business leaders still need to develop their strategies.

Social media marketing in businesses comes with benefits and challenges. Rana and Kumar (2016) suggested opportunities of social media marketing include: providing a competitive advantage, brand recognition, brand improvement, opportunity to shift and adopt, higher brand authority, decrease marketing cost, rewarding customer experience, improved customer understandings, and brand development. Öztamur and Karakadılar (2014) implied that social media marketing is the opportunity to turn influencers into brand advocates. Georgescu and Popescul (2015) advised that social media marketing is a great opportunity for knowledge transfer. With many opportunities, there are several challenges in social media marketing. Rana and Kumar emphasized challenges as lack of quick feedback, lack of brand control, competition from other brands, time allocation, and content management. Moreno, Calderón, and Moreno (2016) pointed out that the adoption of social media and knowledge of use hinders leaders' use of social media

marketing strategies to engage and communicate with consumers and other stakeholders. Their research findings confirmed Rogers's (2003) diffusion of innovation theory regarding the rate of adoption of technologies. The prospects and trials of using social media marketing strategies in the organization are factors leaders must consider with social media tools.

Many customers endorse nonprofit organizations because of the warmth they show consumers through their brand pages online. Bernritter, Verlegh, and Smit (2016) hypothesized that online marketing strategies guide consumers' apparent endorsement of nonprofit brands over for-profit brands, and consumers liked nonprofit brands more on Facebook. Ashley and Tuten (2015) confirmed that creative strategies such as an image, exclusive messaging, and appeal attracted consumer engagement through social media channels. Because of the use of social media tools, an overwhelming number of organization leaders found customer engagement valuable for interacting with consumers and for brand recognition (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) indicated that leaders in organizations needed to investigate what stimulated personal engagement of brand pages to determine long-term value. Individuals responsible for brand pages of organizations on social media must identify the right strategies to attract consumers.

Social media is a staple in the culture of many businesses. However, some leaders in nonprofit organizations have challenges in using the tools and in marketing online in the digital era. Goldkind (2015) explored human service agencies use of social media and its application for maximum effect and measurability and determined that leaders

interviewed were knowledgeable of social media, but did not have a strategy in place for social media effectiveness and measurement. Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström, and Freundt (2014) introduced three challenges: talent gap, actionable metrics, and organizational design, as opportunity factors social media marketers and professionals should examine to increase organizational performance (Leeflang et al., 2014). In an organizational culture where social media is dominating, leaders must work with social media and marketing professional to adapt to the digital era and turn challenges into opportunities to keep up with the changing times.

Consumers drive the success of an organization, and some organizations marketing strategies may need revamping to compete in a digital era. Tiago and Veríssimo (2014) explained that organization leaders must build up their online marketing engagement with stakeholders and customers by concentrating and developing stronger relationships to reap the benefits of social media in a digital era. Tiago and Veríssimo noted that marketing professionals could use social media to create a bridge to customers through performing as interactive organizations and adopting the various tools for usage and digital marketing. Weber (2013) postulated that business leaders in organizations must involve internal and external stakeholders and customers to create a digital strategy through identifying key stakeholder communities, listening and analyzing conversations online, creating a vision for engagement, and operating transparently. The more an organization incorporates the social web into the organization, the more they can stay ahead of the competition (Weber, 2013). Social media is driving the competition and

dominating the marketing landscape. Organizational leaders should implement a digitally focused business strategy to remain relevant and competitive.

The travel and tourism industry is increasingly using social media as a marketing tool for their products and implementation of their business models. Bowen (2015) used previous literature to pinpoint trends that help leaders and researchers understand social media better in the travel industry. Bowen's findings identified four trends: millennials replacing baby boomers as business travelers, more use of mobile devices, pricing, and marketing dollars used for social media marketing. Nawaz and Mubarak (2015) explored the adoption of social media in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka and noted Twitter and Facebook were the two most important tools that leaders use in the tourism sector for engagement with consumers and advertisement of products. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) suggested that leveraging social media is an excellent strategy and provided new ways for organizations in the tourism industry to develop new services and market products for knowledge management. The growth and use of social media in the tourism industry has influenced tourism both economically and socially. For-profit industries' implementation and adoption of social media tools serve as a model for nonprofit leaders to engage stakeholders for growth both economically and socially.

Social media has become an important vehicle by which nonprofits, for-profits, and other businesses in various industries communicate with their customers, supporters, and the community, indicating the importance of creating a social media strategy. Khan and Khan (2012) postulated that the marketing industry faces a massive challenge and the old traditional media channels to advertise and market products and services are soon to

be obsolete and might not be as effective. DiStasco and McCorkindale (2013) advised that businesses must use social media strategically to take advantage of its benefits. Effing and Spil (2016) defined social media strategy as a planning process with specific goals for developing content for end users with internet options for a competitive position. Schulze, Schöler, and Skiera (2015) suggested that the key to successful social media marketing is tailoring the process to the business's products. Tuten and Solomon (2014) indicated that social media marketing has levels of maturity: trial, transitioning, and strategic phase, which leads to success. In contrast, Effing and Spil developed a social media strategy cone with seven elements and suggested that three levels of maturity are the initiation stage, diffusion stage, and maturity stage. Motameni and Nordstrom (2014) recommended that marketers and leaders should correlate social media marketing strategies with implementing marketing goals. Social media use and growth is rapid, and leaders must have a diplomatic strategy.

Social media marketing gives business leaders the opportunity to use social media tools to develop relationships with customers, the community, and all stakeholders. Organizational leaders must recognize that engaging in social media marketing means setting the culture of the organization for acceptance (Khan, Dongping, & Wahab, 2016). Social media marketing is only a small portion of an organization's marketing plan but must integrate seamlessly into the broader plan. The culture of an organization is an indication of organizational effectiveness and businesses with a traditional culture must be open to developing a successful social media marketing plan and may experience many challenges before success (Felix et al., 2017). Choi and Thoeni (2016) noted that

some businesses do not allocate the necessary resources to adopt and implement social media marketing. Choi and Thoeni identified four processes that will help social media marketing leaders achieve their social media marketing objectives: initiation, coordination, engagement, and measurement. The mission of the organization determines the adoption and use of innovation and the need to develop strategies (Nah & Saxton, 2013). The execution of an effective social media marketing framework begins with the culture of an organization. Once leaders identify their objective, they should implement a plan that will help overcome challenges.

Many consumers use social media as a source to engage with businesses and to share information about the company products. The components of Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter that allows human interface has a significant impact on how business leaders make decisions to engage with their customers (“Social media as a path,” 2016). Information from a content analysis of online articles revealed the themes around marketing included brand, strategy, digital, and effectiveness (“Social media as a path,” 2016). The topics on social media related to quality, sharing, content, audience, attention, and engagement (“Social media as a path,” 2016). As businesses leaders are investing more in social media, they should understand the value of their social media marketing techniques and make decisions to benefit the business. Keegan and Rowley (2017) identified stages to help leaders with decision making in engaging with consumers: confirming evaluation goals, identifying relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) defining metrics, data analysis and collection, report development, and decision-making by management (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Keegan and Rowley noted that the two key

challenges included business-client relationships and the availability of analytics tools. Social media is vital to business operations, and leaders face obstacles with finding ways to incorporate social media marketing into their overall strategy. Leaders should make decisions and the key stages identified could help with building a strategy that works.

The effectiveness of social media marketing is not limited to any specific age group, but leaders are not creative with making sure social media is beneficial for all stakeholders. The effectiveness of social media use depends on the attitudes of stakeholders toward communication efforts. Das and Subudhi (2016) noted novelty, simplicity, and convenience are the popular characteristics of social media marketing, but the intensity and extent of social media marketing activities are significant issues. However, development of a plan for inclusion is necessary. Duffett and Wakeham (2016) conducted a quantitative study of Millennials in South Africa to determine what effect social media (Facebook and Mxit) marketing communication had on the hierarchy response model attitudes among Millennials and determined that social media marketing communication has a significant influence. Belch and Belch (2015) posited that consumers go through a variety of hierarchical attitudinal stages in response to marketing, which includes the behavioral phase, the cognitive phase, and affective phase. These three stages reflect marketing communication effectiveness and the strategies developed to engage consumers (Belch & Belch, 2015). Duffett and Wakeham found that social media marketing communication has a significant influence on Millennials in South Africa, but the push to progress to a higher attitudinal stage is on the decline.

Leaders must consider a variety of social media networking tools to keep Millennials and other age groups interested, which will result in an efficient attitudinal reaction.

Social media marketing is useful in the tourism industry. Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) leaders encountered obstacles with deploying effective marketing and communication strategies for using social media tools and platforms (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Yang and Wang (2015), in a study using content analysis, explored the social media marketing strategies of DMOs overseas and discovered that DMOs have different social media marketing strategies with regard to adoption of various channels and activities. Yang and Wang explained that in comparison of the U.S. to other countries, Facebook and Twitter are not the most popular social media tools, and organizational leaders created social media channels for online activities because of governmental blocks and regulations. Mariani, Di Felice, and Mura (2016), in a study of Italian DMOs, established that each business had their discrete way of using social media strategies. In contrast, Matikiti et al. (2016) found that some hospitality businesses embraced social media tools and used social media marketing concepts to their benefit. However, as noted by Yang and Wang, DMOs need to develop social media marketing strategies to improve their marketing efforts and to meet the needs of their stakeholders. Some DMO organizations have embraced the idea of social media as a marketing tool while others struggle. Social media marketing strategies differ in the DMO industry.

The hospitality industry is another industry where leaders play a role in shaping the behavior of customers through social media marketing. Hotel operators widely

recognize the benefits of social media use and enact prodigious social media strategies to help business leaders with understanding the consumer (Radwan & Radwan, 2014) and as a whole is investing in online marketing to attract and measure activity (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). Radwan and Radwan (2014) noted that determining the number of fans and followers, the number of comments on hotel pages for engagement, measuring return on investment (ROI), and distribution of questionnaires are ways to measure success. Choi, Fowler, Goh, and Yuan (2016) found leaders in the hotel industry must engage customers and provide as much information as possible to their Facebook pages and other outlets to satisfy clients. Crawford, Deale, and Merritt (2013) explored the status of marketing in bed and breakfasts establishments and found that web-based marketing, which includes social media, is the most used strategy; but word of mouth marketing is most effective and frequently used. Kaushik and Khanna (2016) explained that social media has changed the entire concept of marketing in hotels and leaders must exercise caution in handling their guests. To remain sustainable in the hospitality industry, leaders should understand the social media behavior of their customers and use strategies around customers' needs.

Social media use is increasing, and building brand awareness online is important. Marketing leaders' development of social media marketing strategies will help with increasing brand awareness and purchase intentions. Ioanas and Stocia (2014) conducted a study of the impact of social media on consumer behavior and found that consumers' persuasion and review of a product is the result of a business's presence on social media networks, and can influence the buying power of others. Consumers can also influence a

company's reputation through the critique of their products and services, and social media marketing is an opportunity for leaders to engage with customers and prospects (Ioanas & Stocia, 2014). Karamian, Nadoushan, and Nadoushan (2015) determined that social media marketing aids leaders in the implementation of new ways to communicate for relationship building and can influence brand awareness and product perception. By using social media marketing, a company can increase communication and improve customer allegiance (Karamian et al., 2015). The development of social media marketing strategies helps leaders with organizational branding.

Organizational leaders should identify those influences that increase brand awareness online. Singh, Sao, Nagare, and Dharmarajan (2016) in a quantitative study of participants in India on social media marketing and brand building introduced five factors that participants considered when engaging in social networking sites: brand impact, brand approval, brand recognition, brand association, and brand reliability. Income, gender, and lifestyle of the participants did not have an impact on social media marketing, but education and age did (Singh et al., 2016). Momany and Alshboul (2016) noted to increase brand awareness and successful online sales; leaders must distinctly design social media marketing campaigns to create awareness and to generate revenue. As a strategic objective, leaders currently using social media marketing strategies can efficiently align their strategies and increase outreach for successful brand identity (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). Social media marketing is a way for leaders to promote their brand and business through online channels to diffuse their message. Leaders can engage in various social media marketing activities to increase brand awareness.

The healthcare industry is not exempt from the use of social media networking sites as a platform to communicate messaging with patrons. Some leaders in the field of healthcare outside of the United States are just getting into the practice of using social media to grow their practices as the traditional billboards, and yellow pages have worked well for promotion and growth previously (Laban, 2012). Syrkiewicz-Switla, Lar, and Holecki (2015) surveyed Polish Marshal Offices and found that 50% of leaders do not use social media marketing in healthcare promotion campaigns. Syrkiewicz-Switla et al. determined that leaders are participating in marketing through social networking sites, while others depend on traditional leaflets and brochures for marketing and health promotion. Some leaders in healthcare do not use social media.

The progression toward the use of social media marketing strategies is slow in some industries. Koumpouros, Toulis, and Koumpouros (2015) in a study of patients and healthcare leaders in Greece confirmed Syrkiewicz-Switla et al.'s study findings that healthcare leaders are slow in using social media tools and social media marketing strategies to engage with customers. Surveys revealed that patient's attitudes are positive toward social media networks, indicating that physicians and other leaders in healthcare need to adopt social media marketing strategies into their daily practice to improve communication in a digital environment (Syrkiewicz-Switla et al., 2015). The information on the findings of these studies indicated that social media marketing is an evolving, yet a crucial aspect in a rapidly growing environment where consumers want more. Although many obstacles are present, leaders in some foreign countries need to

take advantage of their online tools to develop a comprehensive plan to include social media marketing activities to meet strategic goals in healthcare.

Some businesses leaders are incorporating social media into their marketing communication strategy for brand loyalty. It is important for leaders to determine if social media usage influences consumer perception. For some companies, consumer loyalty toward products and services represent competitive advantage and sustainability (Nezakati, Yen, & Akhoundi, 2013). Orzan, Platon, Stefanescu, and Orzan (2016) determined that brand loyalty and trust has an influence on social media marketing communication strategies and is a directly related to brand confidence and effect. The objective of social media marketing use is for marketing communication and engagement to invoke brand image into consumer minds (Orzan et al., 2016). Balakrishnan, Dahnil, and Yi (2014) determined that the impact of social media marketing among Generation Y has an effect in promoting brand loyalty and purchase intentions. Online advertisement and communication along with e-Wom were ways to attract the Generation Y consumers efficiently. Social media plays a vital role in reaching future generations (Balakrishnan et al., 2014). This information helps marketing leaders understand the resourcefulness of social media in reaching consumers in healthcare.

Social media marketing has become important in business-to-business (B2B) companies. Cawsey and Rowley (2016) conducted interviews with marketing professional in the UK, Ireland, and the United States and found that the different levels of social media engagement differ and increasing the brand image, increasing awareness, and enhancing customer engagement are the main social media marketing objectives.

Broekemier, Chau, and Seshadri (2015) concluded that 54% of B2B enterprise leaders used social media with 46% not using social media as part of their marketing strategy and there is a clear need for leaders to learn more and to combine social media with their marketing strategy. The information from the survey results indicated that leaders in B2B enterprises underutilized social media as a marketing tool (Broekemier et al., 2015).

Michaelidou, Siamagka, and Christodoulides (2011) confirmed that usage and barriers included lack of training, perceived insignificance in the industry of the business, and knowledge of how to use social media for engagement. Some leaders in B2B enterprises understand the importance of social media marketing and developing strategies for success. B2B enterprise leaders can strengthen their knowledge of the use of social media for engagement and take advantage of using social media marketing strategies to build brand loyalty.

An evaluation of the previous literature included a review to answer the research question of what social media marketing strategies leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use to remain sustainable. The literature review included information on the value of social media use and social media marketing strategies in supporting organizational sustainability. Leaders in business can develop social media marketing strategies based on the diffusion of innovation theory to help with the adoption of social media and its use for communication and engagement with stakeholders. Social media marketing strategies should be a part of a business's overall strategy to remain sustainable. Additionally, organizational leaders can use the previous literature on the

diffusion of innovation theory to develop social media marketing strategies that promote organizational sustainability.

### **Transition**

The details of the literature review included the use of social media in businesses, uses for engagement, and the social media marketing strategies leaders in businesses use to remain sustainable. The conceptual framework of Rogers's (2003) diffusion of innovation theory helps with understanding the adoption of social media and the social media marketing strategies leaders in all types of business use to engage stakeholders and remain sustainable. Business leaders use social media as a way to enhance operations, for collaboration, communication, and the exchange of information (Ngai et al., 2015). When leaders engage through social media pages and express support, this leads to a meaningful relationship between a business and its stakeholders (Men & Tsai, 2015). Moreno et al. (2016) noted adoption of social media and its use is an obstacle for leaders, and they must deploy social media marketing strategies to engage and communicate with consumers and other stakeholders. Organizations can increase their online marketing engagement with the interested parties, create awareness, and generate revenue by focusing and developing stronger relationships to reap the benefits of social media in a digital era through strategies (Momany & Alshboul, 2016; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Developing social media marketing strategies may help leaders communicate and engage better with stakeholders and remain sustainable.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies nonprofit professional membership organization leaders use to

promote organizational sustainability. A sample population of leaders in five nonprofit professional membership organizations responded to open-end questions through semistructured interviews. The problem under study and the research questions contributed to an understanding of the social media marketing strategies leaders use to remain sustainable

In Section 2, I described my role as the researcher and the primary research instrument, in-depth details of participants, ethical guidelines for consideration, the research method and design for the study, data analysis, and the establishment of reliability and validity in the study. Section 3 includes an explanation of the data collection process. This section also includes the findings, application to professional practice, the implication for social change and recommendations.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 contains the detailed plan I followed to explore and understand the social media marketing strategies that leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use to remain sustainable. In this section, I provide an overview of my role as the researcher in the study and the role the participants played. I also address the justification for the chosen research method and design. This section includes an explanation of the data collection instrument and method, the population for the study, and the sampling technique used to choose participants. Additionally, I present the thorough plan I followed for assurance of ethical research, data organization, and data analysis, as well as the means of establishing reliability and validity of the study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that nonprofit professional membership organizations' leaders use to promote organizational sustainability. The focus of this study was the exploration of marketing strategies that leaders use to engage members and prospective members. The target population was nonprofit organization leaders responsible for the identification and implementation of social media strategies in five professional membership organizations located in the Chicago region. This study has implications for positive social change, in that the diffusion of social media in nonprofit personal membership organizations may provide leaders with opportunities to connect with and engage the public in building stronger communities through collaboration. Social media can be used

to keep members of the public informed and to give them a voice in advocacy efforts (Auger, 2013).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The qualitative method is one way of conducting research. Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) noted that qualitative research involves creating an account of individuals' lived experiences. When conducting qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument (Draper, 2016). The researcher forms a link to the study by experiencing the lives of multiple individuals and understanding reality in different ways that reflect individual perspectives (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Qualitative researchers are responsible for collecting, organizing, and analyzing data (Tong, Winkelmayr, & Craig, 2014). Parveen et al. (2015) used semistructured interviews to determine the usage of social media in organizations and the impact of social media usage on organizational performance. Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) used semistructured interviews to determine various organizations' levels of engagement with consumers and others. For this study, I chose the most suitable methodology, selected appropriate participants, and conducted semistructured interviews to explore the experiences of the participants and collect data.

I have worked in a nonprofit professional membership organization located in Chicago, Illinois for the last 24 years. My experience in a nonprofit professional membership organization was the reason for my interest in this research topic. During my tenure with the organization for the last 24 years, I have witnessed the adoption of social media, and I have watched leaders struggle to implement the proper strategies to promote

organizational sustainability. My experiences in a nonprofit professional membership organization added value to this research, in that I had an understanding of the participants' experiences. Because I had some knowledge of the phenomenon of social media, I was careful to avoid influencing the participants by sharing my personal beliefs and thoughts.

Ethics are important in research. A qualitative researcher must remain ethical and aware that qualitative research is often about participants' lives (Khan, 2014). It is important to follow ethical standards, such as those established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USHHS) in the Belmont Report, a national guideline for the ethical treatment of humans in research (USHHS, 1979). The principles of the Belmont Report include respect for humans, obtaining informed consent, and fairness in the distribution of any research benefits by minimizing any harm (USHHS, 1979). As a qualitative researcher, I followed the guidelines and adhered to the rules of the Belmont Report. I shared these guidelines with the participants. I developed strategies to mitigate bias, such as not influencing the participants in any way.

It is important for a researcher to reduce bias. Any demonstration of bias in qualitative research is considered a threat to the study's credibility (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). One way in which researchers mitigate bias is through the use of bracketing to journal their thoughts, identify potential areas of bias, and eliminate any influences (Fung, Chan, & Chien, 2013). Leedy and Ormrod (2016) noted that collaborating with others to bring in various perspectives, backgrounds, and areas of expertise may reduce potential bias.

Mergel (2013) used semistructured interviews to understand the adoption of social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. As a qualitative researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews and collected and analyzed data, such as social media website pages and marketing plans from nonprofit professional membership organizations. Like Mergel, I used an interview protocol to establish consistency and reliability during the semistructured interview process (see Appendix A). The interview protocol served as a guide to prevent deviation from the original purpose and ensure standardization (Yin, 2014). As a qualitative researcher, I followed proper interview techniques; asked specific, open-ended interview questions; and engaged in active listening. Additionally, I remained vigilant in relation to nonverbal communication; I controlled my emotions and did not display any facial expressions during the interviews.

### **Participants**

The participants are one of the most important aspects of a study. A qualitative researcher's role involves exploring a natural occurrence among individuals who inhabit a particular setting, rather than observing what happens among those randomly sampled for an experimental study (Neuman, 2014). The role of the participant is to aid in the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon of the study (Neuman, 2014). The participants for this study included leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations in the Chicago region who were responsible for the successful implementation of social media strategies. The participants were over 18 years of age and had worked in a nonprofit professional membership organization for at least 1 to 2 years. Qualitative researchers should give participants with experience special consideration in

the recruitment and participant selection process because such participants are most likely to furnish information that answers the research questions (Grossoehme, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I gained approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to guarantee adherence to the proper ethical procedures and to avoid violating human rights in the selection process.

Gaining access to and recruiting participants are essential steps in conducting research (Peticca-Harris, deGama, & Elias, 2016). Some populations are harder to access for qualitative research than others (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, & Crann, 2015). I used several strategies to access participants. One strategy that I used to access leaders responsible for social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations involved performing an Internet search for organizations in the Chicago region. The Internet search provided me with names of companies, along with contact information for potential population members. Another strategy that I used to access participants was contacting individuals via e-mail to explain the intent of my study and the criteria for participation. Jiang, Luo, and Kulemeka (2016) used emails to recruit participants for their study on how leaders evaluate social media engagement and measure engagement during a crisis. Hall-Phillips, Park, Chung, Anaza, and Rathod (2016) used emails to recruit participants to test consumer social ventures connected via social media. Moreno et al. (2016) used emails to recruit participants for their study of public practitioners, their use of social media as gatekeepers, and the impact and importance of social media. Therefore, the use of emails to recruit participants was a viable strategy for my study of social media. Leaders who agreed to participate in the study received a phone call and a

follow-up email containing a consent form before the interview.

Establishing a working relationship with each participant was important to achieving the desired outcome of the interview. The first steps were to provide a description of the study, clarify the purpose and expectations of the study, provide information regarding sharing of data, and outline any other issues of concern (Baskarada, 2014). When arranging interviews, a qualitative researcher must consider participants' schedules and convenience (Yin, 2014). Providing a relaxing atmosphere and conducting interviews at participants' desired locations help to make participants comfortable. A good interviewer does not use his or her voice to dominate the interview (Ezzy, 2010). I established a working relationship with the participants by listening to them and expressing respect for their lived experiences. Each participant agreed upon a convenient day and time for the interview and suggested a comfortable place to carry out the interview.

A qualitative researcher must ensure that prospective participants in a study meet appropriate criteria before selecting them. The selection of the participants must align with the conceptual framework of the study (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Using Robinson's (2014) four-point model for qualitative sampling (i.e., defining a sample universe, deciding a sample size, devising a sampling strategy, and recruiting participants from a targeted population) helped me to ensure that the participants met the research criteria. Additionally, I used the research questions to help in determining which data to collect, which allowed me to determine appropriate techniques to employ in the selection

process (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Selecting the right participants was vital to answering the research question.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

A researcher must select a research method that is conducive to understanding the phenomenon of interest. The research design and method serve to combine the components of research into a workable plan for exploring questions and forming a conclusion about a particular topic (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Three commonly used research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore the social media strategies that leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use to remain sustainable. The method with the best alignment with this purpose was qualitative.

The use of a qualitative method allows a researcher to study a phenomenon (Campbell, 2014). Key elements of qualitative research include research occurring in a natural setting and in-depth exploration of experiences from participants' perspective (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Qualitative researchers emphasize reality, holism, flexibility, exploration, understanding, and meaning making (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). Qualitative research offered an appropriate way to explore the social media marketing strategies used in nonprofit professional membership organizations.

I also considered the use of a quantitative method for this study. A quantitative research study involves looking for facts using numerical data to examine the phenomenon of interest (Barnham, 2015). Quantitative research entails the use of

predetermined categories that participants' answers are expected to fit; participants are not able to express their personal experiences or feelings regarding the phenomenon outside these parameters. A primary goal of quantitative research is to collect data to either confirm or reject a theory (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative research was not a good fit for this study because the method does not allow participants to share their experiences through the expression of feelings and their direct involvement with the phenomenon.

Mixed-method research is the third major type of methodology that I considered for this study. Mixed method researchers combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to answer complex questions (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013). Mixed method researchers combine both knowledge and theory (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Maxwell (2016) noted that mixed method research entails the mixing of quantitative and qualitative concepts, methods, and data. The goal of this study was to explore the personal experiences of participants, and the mixed method approach was not appropriate for this purpose.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative researcher has various research designs to choose from to answer a research question. There are several widely used qualitative research designs, including narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Kruth, 2015). Narrative research, which involves storytelling about the life of a single person or group of individuals, was not an inappropriate design to explore the social media strategies of nonprofit leaders (Muylaert, Sarubbi, Gallo, & Neto, 2014). A phenomenology design

involves exploring the lived experiences of individuals (Gill, 2014) and was also not the right approach for this study. Ethnographic research entails an exploration of organizations, groups, or cultures (Brown, 2014). This design was also not suitable for this study. Likewise, grounded theory, which involves validating the use of a theory for a particular study (Hays & Wood, 2011), was not appropriate for this research.

Selecting the best research design was important to align with the purpose of the study and answer the research question. Yin (2014) noted that a case study is an appropriate design to pose questions and to answer casual questions. A case study design allows a qualitative researcher to use multiple methods, along with multiple sources of data, to obtain a rich understanding of the subject under study (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy, 2014). A qualitative case study researcher conducts the study in participants' natural settings, and uses inductive observation, engages in abductive reasoning, and takes a holistic approach to understanding the phenomenon (Dasgupta, 2015). Yin (2013) suggested that a case study design is appropriate to answer *how* and *why* questions. A multiple case study approach was the best approach for exploring the social media strategies used by leaders in nonprofit membership organizations. I used a case study design because it aligned with this study's purpose and allowed me to answer the research question.

Data saturation is necessary in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers who use semistructured interviews for analyzing content justify their sample sizes by interviewing study participants until data saturation has been reached (Francis et al., 2010). Data saturation occurs when the researcher does not uncover new information and

the data are repetitive (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Inability to reach data saturation jeopardizes the quality of research and interferes with validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A similar study on social media was conducted using a qualitative approach, and a case study design was used to reach data saturation (Wagner, 2015). I used a qualitative multiple case study approach and continued to interview participants until I reached data saturation.

### **Population and Sampling**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media strategies used by business leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations. The sampling for this multiple case study was leaders responsible for social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations in the Chicago region with proven success in implementing social media strategies. A sample is a subgroup of the population (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). The sample size for this multiple case study was five business leaders employed by nonprofit, professional membership organizations. Deciding the number of participants or sampling in qualitative research is difficult as the researcher studying an unknown phenomenon (Baillie, 2015). Yin (2013) noted that in a case study research, there is no specific sample size and the focus is on data collection. Determining sampling size in qualitative research is purposeful for obtaining information that is helpful in understanding the phenomenon (Gentles, Charles, Nicholas, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2016). Determining the sufficient sample size was critical to the quality of the research.

The qualitative researcher must find participants who experienced the

phenomenon under study. Purposeful sampling is the technique used to recruit participants who can best explain the research question based on their knowledge of the phenomenon and the population (Delost & Nadder, 2014). A purposeful sampling includes gaining access to individuals in the field of study who can help the researcher with identifying rich information (Suri, 2011). Wagner (2015) used purposeful sampling in the study of social media and strategies for managing negative comments. Therefore, I used the purposeful sample technique in this study.

The interviewing of participants occurred for data collection analysis, to attain data saturation. The recruitment of participants occurred in large nonprofit membership organizations in the Chicago region that use social media tools. Saturation occurs when the researcher explores all questions, and the participants repeat the same information and no new themes surfaces (Cleary et al., 2014). When the researcher reaches data saturation, the sampling stops (Carman, Clark, Wolf, & Moon, 2015). Data saturation in qualitative research reflects that the information contained in the study is the quality work of the researcher (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & Larossa, 2015). As a qualitative researcher, the goal was to interview the right individuals to attain data saturation. To achieve data saturation, the plan included adding additional organizational leaders responsible for social media within nonprofit professional membership organizations until no new information, and no new themes emerged. If no new participants of the population exist, member checking would have been used to reach data saturation.

All interviews took place at the participant's nonprofit professional membership organization location, a location comfortable for each of the participants. Participants

who are in a comfortable setting are more likely to speak freely about their knowledge of the phenomenon (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Finding an interview setting that was sufficient and appropriate for the participants was important. Using a setting comfortable to the participant is suggested (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). Dikko (2016) let the participants choose a quiet location where they were most comfortable. All of the interviews for this study took place at the site of the nonprofit professional membership organization location where the participants were employed, a quiet and comfortable location convenient for the participants.

### **Ethical Research**

The selection of participants was dependent on the approval of the IRB of Walden University. IRBs are responsible for overseeing and monitoring research involving human participants, assessing risks and benefits, participant selection procedures, the informed consent process, and confidentiality and privacy (Cook, Hoas, & Joyner, 2013). The Walden University IRB approval number for this study is 06-13-17-0537876. The participants of the study received an informed consent form providing them with an explanation of the study, the requirements for participating, ensured confidentiality for participating, and my contact information to ask any questions that they might have about the study (See Appendix B). Informed consent is an important component in protecting the welfare of the individuals participating in research (Kumar, 2013). The participants received their consent form through a method convenient to them, through e-mail. The informed consent process was an element of the study that helped ensure that as the researcher, I conducted the study in an ethical manner. As a part of the process, the

researcher must provide the participant with all of the details of the study, so participants can make an informed decision about participating (USHHS, 1979). The oversight and monitoring of research by a review board helps to ensure the protection of participants. Ethical consideration for human rights is important in research.

Informing participants of their rights and noting the guidelines of the study are of the utmost importance in research. One tactic is ensuring that the participant understands that participation is voluntary and without influence as stated in the Belmont Report (USHHS, 1979). I provided participants with information regarding their right to withdraw from the study at any time by phone or e-mail using the contact details provided. The participants of this study did not receive a monetary incentive for participation but will receive copies of the completed study and the results. In a similar research project, Tripp (2013) did not provide an incentive in the study of social media. As an additional way to ensure ethical protection was adequate, I followed all the steps of the Belmont Report as stated by Rubin and Rubin (2012), by showing respect and ensuring the participants do not experience stress or harm because of participation in the study. I would have destroyed any data or notes about any participant who decided to withdraw from the study as advised by previous researchers such as (Tripp, 2013) and (Wagner, 2015). To further the ethical protection, rights, and confidentiality of the study participants, I did not use their names in the study. Wagner (2015) labeled the participants as Participant A, Participant B, and so forth until each participant had an identity tag. Wagner also labeled the companies in alphabetical order for anonymity. Any data I collected will remain in my possession for 5 years on a Universal Serial Bus (USB)

drive using scanned files. Securing the information is a way to continue to protect the rights of human subjects used in the study. I will secure the USB drive in a locked box secure from all harm until the 5-year period expires and will then destroy the drive.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The qualitative researcher must consider the various instruments for data collection. According to Baillie (2015), the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting data and dictates the analyzation of the collected data. Halcomb (2016) noted interviews, observations, and focus groups are the most common approaches to data collection to understand the participants account of the phenomenon. The selection of data collection method affects the efforts of data analyzation (Bengtsson, 2016). For example, written questions sent to participants would not have the same effect as semistructured interviews (Bengtsson, 2016). Utilization of multiple sources warrants an understanding of the phenomenon of case studies and increases confidence in the researcher's findings (Cope, 2015). Therefore, the basis of the data in this study was face-to-face semistructured interviews to collect data from business leaders responsible for the company's social media presence, and a review of its social media pages on social media activity and other documents.

When conducting semistructured interviews as a way to collect data, the researcher must consider the techniques for use in the process. Interviews are an appropriate method when recording participants responses, perceptions and feelings, and understanding the participant's account of the phenomenon (Paradis, O'Brien, Nimmon, Bandiera, & Martimianakis, 2016). Doody and Noonan (2013) noted when conducting

semistructured interviews, the questions are prepared but allow for clarification of the responses. Owens (2014) suggested that the interview process includes three kinds of questions; the main question, open-ended questions that are the probing questions, and any follow-up questions. I used the main questions to stay on target in exploring the phenomenon. I also used probing and follow-up questions to gain depth and richness as posited by Owens. Conducting semistructured interviews was a useful approach in this study. Dikko (2016) noted interview protocols as a set of guidelines, which the participants use that contain questions they will answer in the semistructured interviews. I used face-to-face semistructured interviews to explore marketing strategies used by leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations. Appendix A includes a copy of the interview protocol used for this multiple case study. In conducting the interviews to collect data, I kept in mind that establishing reliability and validity of the information was important.

Researchers establish validity in research through many methods. One method to achieve validity is through member checking. Member checking involves asking the participants to review recorded work to ensure their story is accurate (Koelsch, 2013). Harper and Cole (2015) described member checking as the engagement of participants through back and forth conversation. Morse (2015) noted that member checking affords the participants an opportunity to include information not previously noted. I enhanced reliability and validity by performing a member check for each participant. I gathered the data, transcribed the data, and performed an analysis of the findings. I contacted a select number of participants via email, phone, or in-person to ask them to review the

information to make sure it was an accurate reflection of their experience, knowledge of the phenomenon, and whether the findings are justifiable. Depending on the availability of the participants, I arranged to meet with them in a casual setting to assess my conclusions and provided an opportunity for them to include new information. Through conducting a member check, I ensured that the data collected was of value and was believable to the reader.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data collection is a major step in understanding the phenomenon. The data collection process begins once the researcher has completed background reading and research (Singh, 2014). The data collection methods for this study was in-person semistructured interviews using predetermined questions in conjunction with a review of documents on the activity of the social media internet pages and marketing plans of the selected organizations. The collection of data influenced the research and helped me understand the phenomenon.

Semistructured interviews are one source of data collection for case studies, which allows participants to express themselves through their responses. Singh (2014) noted interviews are a rich source of data for case studies. Qu and Dumay (2011) pointed out that the use of semistructured interviews has the advantage of flexibility, as it allows the researcher to modify the order of the questions, control pace, and order the style to get valuable responses. Face-to-face semistructured interviews offer the advantage of human contact, which exposes the researcher to nonverbal communication and interaction and allows active listening (Ratislavova & Ratislav, 2014). Face-to-face interviews also allow

the researcher to clarify statements made during phone interviews (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). The use of telephone interviews are more efficient for follow-up interviews or questioning as opposed to face-to-face, and aids in member checking (Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker, & Korcha, 2016). Potential disadvantages in face-to-face, as opposed to telephone interviews or emails, are cost, time, and travel (Vogl, 2013).

The preferred data collection method for this study was face-to-face semistructured interviews, which offered the advantage of human interaction and establishing a rapport with the participants. I audio recorded each interview with a digital voice recording device, such as a Sony ICD PX333 voice recorder. Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted using a recording device would ensure accuracy in capturing data from interviews. The use of audio devices decreases the likelihood of error in recalling the interview (Fernandez & Griffiths, 2007). Nordstrom (2015) asserted that recording devices are objective in qualitative research and serves to create validity. I also used the voice recorder on the iPhone 7 as the backup recording tool to capture the information in case of human error or faulty equipment. The recordings were beneficial for recollection and repetition of the interview to support reliability and validity of the study.

A secondary method of data collection was the review of documents, which cataloged the organization's social media engagement and activities along with a review of the social media pages of each organization. Qualitative researchers review documents in conjunction with other qualitative data collection methods to corroborate information (Yin, 2014). The advantage of document review is the ability to examine the documents

repeatedly for comprehension (Yin, 2013). However, Bowen (2009) cited quality and accessibility of documents as a disadvantage of the review process. As noted in qualitative research conducted by Sarma (2015), I established a rapport with the participants before asking to review any documents of public or private nature. I wanted the participants to understand the purpose of the study fully and to trust me before gaining access. After gaining access, I reviewed the documents and social media pages for correlation and in understanding the phenomenon.

I did not conduct a pilot study. Most pilot studies test a hypothesis in quantitative research (Turnbull, Parker, & Needham, 2014). Pilot studies are not necessary for qualitative research and do not always present probable challenges in conducting research (Chenail, 2011). A pilot study does not ensure that the primary study is successful (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002), and was not beneficial in this study.

The qualitative researcher must enhance the validity of the research. Member checking enhances a study's credibility (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). After using semistructured interviews to collect data, I transcribed the data and performed an analysis. I conducted member checking after data collection and shared the initial data analysis and conclusions of the findings with participants via email, phone, or in-person for review and accuracy as noted by (Al-Yateem, 2012). I conferred with the participants to confirm that the findings were within reason; and whether the themes uncovered from data collection accurately reflected their initial statements. Asking the participants to review the initial data analysis reflected precision and provided them the opportunity to corroborate the information and add any new information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Conducting a multiple case study with participant interviews requires a high level of organization. Vaugh and Turner (2016) posited that to analyze qualitative data effectively, the researcher must use a structured process for the organization of information. Qualitative researchers can gain maximum benefits from case study research by following the four principles of data collection using multiple sources, creating a case study database, maintaining a chain of evidence, and exercising care when using data from electronic sources (Yin, 2013, 2014).

In qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument. The researcher must avoid prejudice. To avoid bias, Cope (2015) noted that the researcher should keep a reflective journal during their research journey. The purpose of the journal is to compile and record data, and document the researcher's personal understandings and development of research skills (Fung & Hoon, 2013; Lamb, 2013). A reflective journal is a way for the researcher to record any pre-judgments regarding the participants and any emotional effects of the interviews (van Wijk, 2014). I used a reflective journal during the research process to record data, my personal feelings, and understandings, and to reflect upon my research experience.

During the semistructured interviews, I used a recording device and a backup recording device to record the interview data. Yin (2014) suggested storing all case study documents electronically and using categorization. Wagner (2015) labeled the participants as Participant A, Participants B, in sequence until each received a label in alphabetical order for anonymity. For confidentiality, each recorded interview received a

label, Participant A, Participant B, and in sequence until all recordings receive a label. Mealer and Jones (2014) explored ethical issues related to qualitative interviews and concluded that uploading the transcript to a secure password-coded server and deleting the audio file was ethical and protected the participants. Also, securing any physical records in a locked file cabinet and using a study number to identify participants maintains confidentiality (Mealer & Jones, 2014). I electronically converted all data, paper, and forms I collected including all interview transcripts and consent forms into scanned files. All documents will remain in my possession for five years on a password protected Universal Serial Bus (USB) drive as a way to continue to protect the rights of human subjects used in the study. I have secured the USB drive in a locked box secure from all harm and will destroy all records when the 5-year period expires.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the qualitative researcher collects and transcribes the data, the next step is analysis. Yin (2014) posited that data analysis is examining, categorizing, and tabulating the evidence to produce empirical findings. The basis of data analysis is the research question and the conceptual framework for the study (Yin, 2013). Sangster-Gormley (2013) noted that content analysis is combining data across each setting to understand the phenomenon. Performing an analysis of the data ensures accuracy and integrity.

The data collection method for this study included semistructured interviews and document review to address the research question. I used a methodological triangulation analysis. Methodological triangulation includes the use of more than one data collection

technique (Spadafino et al., 2016; Tonkin-Crine et al., 2016). Methodological triangulation is useful for the validation of findings, completion of data, increase in validity, and improvement in understandings of the phenomena (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). I used the responses from the interview questions and analysis of the social media engagement activity through document reviews and social media pages to establish methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation increased the credibility of the study. After collecting the data, I transcribed the data. Data analysis includes developing a process to analyze the data. I used Microsoft Word to organize questions, participants responses, common themes, and notes about the interviews and participants to assist with coding. Identification included labeling, using the identification code assigned to participants for individual assessment. Organization of the data is important in qualitative research.

The next step in the data analysis process was to organize the data by categorizing and coding the ideas and concepts. Yin (2014) noted that one of the most widely used techniques is pattern-matching. Data analysis in qualitative research involves a systematic coding process (Cho & Lee, 2014). Qualitative researchers are flexible in using the deductive approach in identifying patterns and themes for use throughout the analytical process (Patton, 2015). The codes helped with assigning meaning to the descriptive information collected throughout the study (Dasgupta, 2015). I read through all field notes and the interview transcript and noted key themes, issues, and patterns. I used color-coding to thematically group and categorize any related information derived from the process.

To ensure that all patterns and themes were recognized, I used a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The use of CAQDAS helped me facilitate transparency and increased data analysis possibilities in several ways (Evers, 2016). I used the CAQDAS NVivo software to key in information, which analyzed the data and created a transcript of queries and word frequency reports from the recorded interviews (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). NVivo assisted with pattern-matching, theme identification, and coding (Houghton et al., 2013). I grouped the themes by predetermined themes and emerging themes and correlated each theme with the conceptual framework for this study, the diffusion of innovation theory. The data analysis process also included reviewing the literature for newly published information for a correlation of themes and differences in the literature.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Measurement of reliability and validity is important in research. In every research design, the research instrument for collection of data must pass the test of reliability and validity as a reflection for good measurement (Dikko, 2016). Reliability and validity in research are measurement tools, defining the characteristics of the results of applying a test to a specific group as opposed to the features of the test itself (Fan, 2013). Houghton et al. (2013) described the four components of dependability and trustworthiness in qualitative research as credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability.

#### **Reliability**

Researchers must establish quality in their work. Reliability in research is the consistency in which the research instrument measures the characteristic of results and is

free from error (Ramamurthy, Danasu, & Tamilselvi, 2015). Dependability of the research occurs when replication of the data from the participants yields the same results (English, 2015). Reliability or dependability of research is uniformity or standardization in procedures with all participants of the study including the use of semistructured interviews for data collection (Colorafi & Evans, 2016).

Researchers must establish reliable information in research. One means of establishing reliability is through consistency in data collection for all participants such as using the same format for collecting data, providing a preprinted guide and asking the same questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I conducted semistructured interviews with all of the participants. Each interview was audio recorded as noted by Noble and Smith (2015), to revisit the data and check for consistent and emerging themes to accurately report the participants' account of the phenomenon. I followed the same interview protocol for each participant and asked the same questions for data collection and data analysis purposes. Yin (2014) also noted this as a type of reliability test. Consistency in data collection is necessary and establishes the researcher's information as reliable.

Member checking is another means to establish reliability and credibility. Member checking follows transcription of the data and analysis of the finding; and allows participants to review the information to ensure the accuracy of the account of their words (Houghton et al., 2013; Koelsch, 2013). When performing a member check, each participant can respond to research findings and themes to establish reliability (Noble & Smith, 2015). To reach dependability, I conducted a member checking with each

participant of this study providing via email, phone, or in person a copy of the initial findings and data analysis. I noted the emerging themes derived from data collection and asked for confirmation that the findings were within reason. I asked the participant to review the information for accuracy and note any additional information for inclusion to establish reliability and credibility.

### **Validity**

Validity is a fundamental component of quality in qualitative research. Hamilton (2014) asserted that validity in qualitative research pertains to whether the findings of the study are an accurate measurement of what the researcher intends to measure. Houghton et al. (2013) noted the credibility, transferability, and confirmability as three of the four strategies for confirming rigor in qualitative research. These aspects are important for the recognition of qualitative research as transparent, reliable, and authentic (Cronin, 2014).

The qualitative researcher must establish credibility with the reader. One way to establish credibility is through member checking. Conducting a member check is involving the participants in verification of the data collected for accuracy (Grossoehme, 2014; Kornbluh, 2015). To attain credibility of the research, I transcribed the data, analyzed the data, and made initial conclusions. Via a face-to-face meeting or a convenient method to the participant, I shared the initial findings, the data analysis, along with any emerging themes with the participants for review, verification, and accuracy as noted by Al-Yateem's (2012) study as a way to perform a member check. I conferred with participants to confirm that the findings were within reason and whether the themes uncovered were accurate. I used member checking to establish credibility through

validation of the information with the participants for an exact accounting of their responses.

A qualitative researcher achieves transferability in research through establishing that the findings of the study are useful in other situations (Yilmaz, 2013). Providing detailed, rich, clear descriptions of the findings engages the readers and helps with a determination that the information is transferable to a specified setting (Baillie, 2015; Elo et al., 2014). Transferability affords future researchers the ability to use the information of a study to gain knowledge (Yin, 2014). I provided a clear, robust detail of the findings of the study, allowing the information to transfer readily for future researchers.

Confirmability in qualitative researcher is the development of an audit trail of all decisions and the demarcation of reflexivity and rationale for practical judgment (Houghton et al., 2013). The use of triangulation ensures confirmability and decreases researcher bias (Sarma, 2015). Triangulation is achieved through the use of multiple methods of data collection to gain a different perspective of the phenomenon (Cope, 2015). Triangulation through the use of various data sources aids the researcher in studying the entire phenomenon (Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014). I established confirmability through the use of semistructured interviews to collect data along with a review of company documents noting the social media engagement from the participants of the study.

The researcher must reach data saturation to establish validity in the research. A researcher achieves data saturation when enough collected evidence replicate the study when no new information surfaces and the researcher can no longer code the data

(O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). El Hussein, Jakubec, and Osuji (2016) also noted that the qualitative researcher reaches data saturation when they are no longer hearing or seeing new information from the participants. To achieve data saturation, the sample size of the study should increase until new participants fail to provide additional information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To ensure and achieve data saturation, I coded the data carefully and appropriately until no new themes were recognized. If needed, I was prepared to add qualified individuals familiar with the phenomenon until no new information or themes surfaces.

### **Transition and Summary**

The information contained in Section 2 was an explanation of the study approach for exploring the social media marketing strategies used by leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations to remain sustainable. As the primary research instrument for the research, the information in this section is my explanation of the process for recruiting participants through purposeful sampling. The information also is an explanation of data collection through semistructured interviews and review of company records. The information included in the section contains ethical research processes and plans for organizing and analyzing data. Section 2 also includes an explanation of plans for establishing reliability and validity of the study's findings through member checking.

Section 3 includes a presentation of the qualitative findings in additions to the results of the social media marketing strategies individuals in professional membership organization use and the themes identified. In addition, the section includes the relevance

of the information to the conceptual framework defined. Section 3 includes recommendations for further actions of the research study, the implication for social change, and the conclusion.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies that leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use to remain sustainable. In addition to gathering data from semistructured interviews, I conducted a review of the participants' social media marketing plans and the websites of the participants' organizations to perform methodological triangulation. By analyzing the data from these sources, I identified four themes: social media platforms and engagement strategies, social media content, social media challenges, and brand awareness. Each of the themes was in alignment with Rogers's (2003) diffusion of innovation theory and with the findings in previous literature. The findings of the study revealed strategies that marketing leaders used to engage their audiences.

Including social media as a goal of the organization helps leaders with brand building (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013). The results of this study indicated that content on social media networking sites attracted an audience. Social media leaders should use analytical tools such as Google Analytics and Simply Measured Analytics to measure the impact of the content posted on their organization's social media pages. Social media marketing includes the efforts of social media marketing leaders to develop content that attracts consumers and influences the consumer to share the content with others, thus creating brand awareness (Chary, 2014). Leaders in organizations should also incorporate social media into their strategic plans. Including social media as part of a strategic plan addresses issues such as limited resources and bandwidth. The information in this study

adds to the limited amount of research on social media marketing in nonprofit professional membership organizations.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The primary research question for this study was the following: What social media marketing strategies do leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations use to remain sustainable? The data collection process in this research study included semistructured interviews, review of documents showing the planned social media activities of the organizations, and review of the social media pages and websites of the participating organizations. My analysis of data revealed the strategies that leaders of nonprofit professional membership organizations used to support social media marketing. I derived the themes from my analysis of the data that aligned with the conceptual framework of the study and the review of the extant literature in the field.

#### **Document and Social Media Page Review**

My review of documents provided by the participants, along with my review of the most frequently used social media pages, served as a supplementary source of data in this study. The participants also provided information regarding their social media platforms along with information about their websites. Four of the five participants shared their marketing plans as they pertained to social media. I used Microsoft Word to record and organize the data after reviewing the marketing plans to help with theme development. I also explored the websites of the organizations to determine how they used their pages to link out to their social media sites. The data I obtained revealed how the participants used social media and provided details for a comparative analysis of the

content posted on the organizations' most frequently used social media platforms to determine how the participants engaged their audiences (see Appendix C).

My collection of data from the responses to the interview questions, review of the organizations' social media pages and websites, and review of documents resulted in the emergence of four themes (see Table 1). I identified how many times the themes emerged throughout the data. I used NVivo 11 to assist in the organization of the data in the process of identifying themes. Table 1 shows the frequency with which each of the themes occurred during this multiple case study.

Table 1

*Frequency Table for Occurrence of Themes*

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E
Theme 1	10	5	14	15	16
Theme 2	27	16	14	13	19
Theme 3	10	10	10	5	6
Theme 4	9	10	13	5	5

The findings of the study revealed that the primary way for nonprofit professional membership organizational leaders to use social media effectively was to develop measurable strategies. Figure 1 shows some of the reoccurring words from the semistructured interviews, which included *social media, content, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, challenge, information, engagement, track, and audience*.



comparison to leaders in other countries, U.S. leaders were more likely to use Facebook and Twitter as social media tools for engagement. Some organizational leaders use specific social media tools more frequently than other tools. Marketing leaders who rely on social media for engagement have been found to use Facebook and Twitter (Auger, 2013).

The social media platforms used by all participants in this study were Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Participants A, B, C, and E noted Facebook as the most frequently used social media platform; however, they also used other social media platforms for engagement. Table 2 shows the various social networking platforms used by the participants of this study to communicate, disseminate, and share information. Participant D noted that although others preferred Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn were the most productive tools for engaging members and stakeholders of the organization. The information in Table 2 indicates that the participants used a mixture of social media platforms to engage with their audience.

Table 2

*Social Media Platforms Used by Participants*

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E
Facebook	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Twitter	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
YouTube	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
LinkedIn	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Instagram	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Pinterest	N	Y	Y	N	N
SnapChat	N	Y	Y	N	Y
Google+	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

*Note.* Y = yes, N = no.

Most participants recognized Facebook, one of the social media tools used by all of the participants in this study, as the most widely used tool. In 2013, Facebook had a billion subscribers (Weber, 2013). In June 2017, Facebook recorded 1.32 billion daily active users on average and 2.0 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2017). Four participants in the study used the tool successfully for engagement, whereas one participant was still exploring options to use the tool efficiently. Participant A explained that the use of Facebook served engagement purposes rather than marketing purposes. Participant A used Facebook and created podcasts and videos for engagement with members and other customers. Participant A also used Facebook Live, noting that it was more of an engagement tactic as opposed to other features. Facebook drove people back to their websites to make buying decisions. Participant D stated, “One way we [Organization D] use Facebook is to promote our meetings and events through live streaming.” However, in contrast to Participant A, Participant D noted that Twitter helped drive traffic to the organization’s events, as opposed to Facebook.

Leaders used social media in organizations to facilitate the construction of networks, distribute information, build trust, and foster confidence with the public (Gupta et al., 2013). Participant B expressed that not every platform is for everyone for sharing information, remarking, “If none of your members are using Facebook, go where they [members] are on social media.” There are many different platforms; leaders must use the most effective tools to reach and engage their audience in the most beneficial way. Both Participants D and E established that using the tools that worked best to attract the intended audience was also a social media marketing strategy. The information in Table 2

shows that each of the participants used different platforms for engagement to attract the right audience using the right tools. All of the participants also used different content, as noted by Participant D, for engagement with the brand (see Appendix C).

Social media tools and the use of these tools are essential to the strategy of an organization. Social media exemplifies the next step in assisting organizations in fulfilling their mission (Young, 2016). Participant A noted,

An organization's social media marketing strategies are rooted in how they provide value to the industry. We [Organization A] launch campaigns to get people to become a member. We [Organization A's social media team] let our board and strategic leadership shape the conversation and develop our strategies based on what worked and did not work in the previous year.

Participant B noted that by employing social media marketing strategies for the use of different tools, leaders could show individuals the value of membership in the organization. Participant E emphasized that deployment of different strategies for each tool depended on the needs of the different audiences. Participants A, C, and E all reported that they used their strategic plans as a guide and implemented strategies for the use of the various tools into each of their projects according to the activities going on. Some strategies for the use of each of the tools came from history and previous experience with using the tools.

The participants' adoption of social media platforms connected to a major aspect of Rogers's (2003) theory of how members of a social system adopt innovations. This information relates to how members of a social system—in this case, the leaders of

nonprofit professional membership organizations who were responsible for social media—adopted and implemented social media marketing strategies for engagement. Rogers posited that the rate of adoption is the speed with which social systems adopt innovations. The adopter categories represent the classification of members of a social system based on innovativeness (Rogers, 2003). Rogers's categories of adoption are early innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. According to the information revealed in this study, leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations who are responsible for social media are innovators when it comes to social media adoption. Rogers described innovators as those individuals who are inclined to experience new ideas. The participants in this study worked outside of traditional ways of marketing to members and other stakeholders and used social media tools to increase engagement.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Social Media Content**

The second theme that emerged from the data was social media content. The content that participants included on their social media pages attracted and engaged members, stakeholders, and other interested individuals. Steenkamp and Hyde-Clarke (2014) explained that consumers are involved in social media through the distribution of content by the organization. The content that social media leaders include on their platforms must be of value and meet the expectations of their audience (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). Participant A confirmed Steenkamp and Hyde-Clarke's position by expressing, "As a social media marketer, content is delivered through value proposition, storytelling, and offering content pertinent to the community of the audience." Ismail and

Khalid (2015, p. 406) stated that “content is king,” and Participant C echoed the statement. Participant C voiced an understanding of how important it is to disseminate information through social media, but outside the normal channels of information distribution. The basis of social media marketing includes creating content that attracts consumers and inspires the audience to share the information with others (Chary, 2014). Participant B noted that organizational leaders nurture their audience and those that support the organization through content, which is a huge driving force.

The content that some participants provided on social media was advice on how to stay ahead in the industry. Participant D stated, “We [Organization D] must constantly find the sweet spot of what they [users] want to hear from us [Organization D] and what topics are of interest to them [users].” The leaders understood that the main avenue for attracting their audience to their social media pages was content. The content on the participants’ social media pages included a variety of information for different audiences. Including content on social media pages to attract the desired audience to the organization was a strategy used by all social media marketing leaders in this study.

Some participants used social media for transferring knowledge. Bharati et al. (2015) posited that social media affects knowledge management. The content that the participants posted on their social media pages varied to fit the needs of the intended audiences. A review of Facebook, a tool widely used by all of the participants, showed the content that the participants posted (see Appendix C). A review of the content posted by the participants provided an understanding of what prompted users to share information and attract others to their organization. The information in Appendix C

shows how the participants used the tools and capabilities of Facebook. The information from my review of the participants' organizational Facebook pages also indicated that each participant's page contained content unique to the audience.

Facebook was just one platform that the participants used to engage their audience. My review of the content indicated that participants used each of their platforms differently. Hemsley and Mason (2013) suggested that social media improve and speed up the transfer of knowledge. Participant C used creative postings such as a "Power Phrase of the Day" to transfer thought-provoking knowledge to users. Ashley and Tuten (2015) explained that creative content could attract an individual to a brand. Some of the participants also used more of the features available on Facebook and added pages to engage their members and prospects. The transfer of knowledge through varied content for specific audiences was a strategy used by participants for the engagement of users of Facebook.

Some of the participants conducted various campaigns to transfer knowledge and engage members of the audience. Participant C used social media marketing strategies to transfer information about conferences and meetings by holding a contest among speakers who live-tweeted from various meetings about sessions and topics. The participants' content included the development of offers, promotions, and a contest that engaged the audience in conversation. Participant B explained that the main purpose of social media encompassed thought leadership and informing the audience of what is going on in the industry. Participant A said,

We [Organization A] are a resource to deliver valuable content to people to help them with their day-to-day jobs. We [Organization A] are a rich data source, there is a lot of conversation, and data is being moved around in the social media sphere. We [Organization A] listen to key conversations and communicate them [important messages] to members of our organization. We use that information to build new products or to communicate effectively. We [Organization A] use this as part of our engagement strategy. What keeps people engaged is they want information and best practices on how to do their job. We [Organization A] tailor our content to their needs by listening in the social media space and then delivering it back to them in the social media space.

The subtheme of content delivery emerged from the main theme of social media content. The participants in this study noted that once they developed content, the first step was to develop strategies for delivery. The participants had to consider the audience that was receiving the information to determine the appropriate social media platform and the method by which to deliver the content. The subtheme of content delivery identifies the strategies used to deliver the content to attract and engage the audience.

**Content delivery.** Content delivery was important to all of the participants for engagement and the sharing of information on social media. All of the available social media tools have different features and functions but have the same common goal of allowing users the ability to communicate, interact, share content, and converse on content that is user-generated and show the likes, activities, and dislikes (Penni, 2017). The participants of this study utilized the various social media tools and delivered their

content or messaging in numerous ways as part of the strategy. Participant A stated, “We depend on content marketing for delivery. We also use blogs, posts, podcasts, webinars, and advertisement through social media platforms. Twitter chat is a way to convene a community around a specific topic.” Participant B clarified that the promotion of most of their products happened through live events. For social media, in particular, the in-house social media group targeted post and blog pages and created landing pages for cross-talks. Participant C stated, “We send images of what is going on in our meetings.” The statement by Participant C is also a confirmation of Ashley and Tuten’s (2015) finding that creative strategies, such as images, attracted consumer engagement. Participant D, on the other hand, noted that Twitter use is more for engagement and that their social media team live-tweeted from their programs. Participant E said, “We [Organization E] use member testimonies and images, so the message will resonate with others. The younger audience is mostly on Instagram, and love videos and photos so we cater to the different audiences.” The participants all used various social media strategies such as posting and sharing videos, images, podcasts, and other media to deliver content. The participants all used the tool that was appropriate to send the message to the intended audience.

The participants of this study also conveyed the importance of developing a strategy to organize the content published on their social media pages. All of the participants had an editorial calendar to help with their content mix on social media. Participant A emphasized that the marketing and social media team along with the marketing and communication team in the organization develop a robust calendar, which encompasses all of the major communications throughout the organization. Once they

have the big picture, the team decides on how many times the content needs distributing. Both Participants B and E created calendars based on what is going on in the organization, and the content evolves throughout the year. Participant C noted that the use of a timetable helps with balancing the content and self-promotion on the various social media platforms. Participant D plans the organization's social media calendar on a monthly basis as opposed to planning a yearly calendar since the content constantly evolves.

The theme social media content was consistent with and related to Rogers's (2003) element of communication channels. The relationship between social media content and Rogers's element of communication channels depicts how leaders used social media to communicate with both internal and external stakeholders of their social system through various methods using the features of the social media tools. Rogers noted the channel is the means by which a message gets from the source to the receiver (p. 204). Goldkind (2015) emphasized that social media is a way that nonprofit leaders communicate with stakeholders. The participants of this study used various tools to communicate with stakeholders and different channels to deliver the messages such as photos, videos, and podcasts to reach the receiver. The participants found it necessary to organize the data and devise a plan for releasing the information as a way to communicate effectively with users. The participants developed a social media calendar that worked in correlation with the overall marketing plan of the organization to share effective and engaging communication. Understanding what to post for the participants started with a strategy.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Social Media Challenges**

The third theme that emerged was the challenges in using and implementing social media marketing strategies. All of the participants recognized success in implementing social media marketing strategies, but it did not come without challenges. Rana and Kumar (2016) noted some challenges included lack of feedback, a lack of brand control, competition from other brands, time allocation, and content management. Felix et al. (2017) explained that the culture of the organization drove organizational effectiveness and developing successful social media marketing plans comes with experiencing some challenges before success.

Not all of the participants experienced the same problems in developing strategies for the successful implementation and use of social media. Participant A noted that one challenge was from within and consisted of not having subject matter experts to close the gap between content development and distribution of the information between channels. The participants acknowledged that training staff takes a lot of time and prioritization was a challenge. Participant A validated Michaelidou et al. (2011) and confirmed that lack of training was a barrier to using social media and organizing strategies for engagement. Valos et al. (2015) recognized that the features of social media were different from traditional marketing channels and that implementation could cause problems for some leaders in organizations. When asked about mitigating those challenges, Participant A stated, “This [mitigating the challenge] is a hot button. It results in a lot of fighting for understanding from leadership.” The participants invested in analytics to show the value of social media to leadership and overcame some of the

barriers associated with the challenge. After indicating the value of social media through analytics, leadership allocated additional resources to social media.

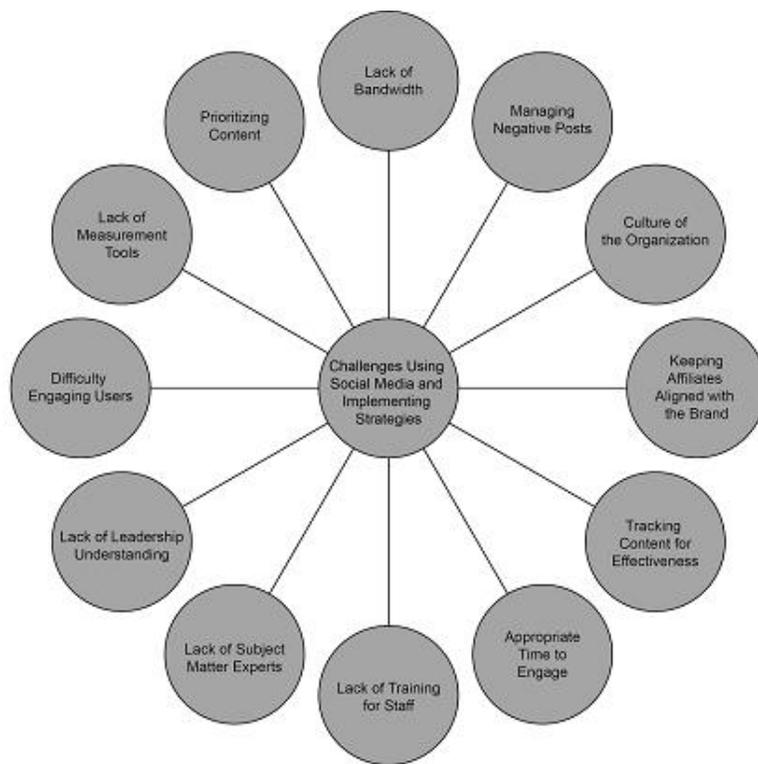
Participant B articulated that challenges included lack of bandwidth such as staffing. The participant's response was consistent with the results of a study by Carim and Warwick (2013). Carim and Warwick noted that social media placed a strain on bandwidth and the ability to adapt to and properly use tools. When asked about mitigating challenges, the participant evoked that they were trying to do more automation since staff resources were limited. The participant had one other staff person responsible for social media and automation of content would help manage the content.

Participant C noted the biggest challenge is managing negative posts, a claim that was consistent with the Rana and Kumar element of brand control. Men and Tsai (2015) pointed out that engagement behavior would include some negativity, but social media provided a medium for open dialogue. When asked about mitigating negative comments about the brand, the participants stated, "The community takes care of it [negative comments] as we [Organization C] don't do anything with it." The challenge experienced by Participant C linked back to loyalty for the brand as noted by Karamian et al. (2015) that using social media marketing strategies efficiently had an impact on consumer allegiance. Participant D noted a challenge as timing, which includes finding the time of day or the day of the week to engage with members and the audience. The challenge of finding the right time aligned with Harad (2015) who offered that daily interactions, weekly sharing, and quarterly campaigns could help with knowing where to spend the most time on what tool to gain the most influence out of social media efforts. Participant

E explained that a challenge was engaging with the members of the organization through social media use. Participant E said,

We [Organization E] post content and know they [Users] are aware of it, but they [Users] do not respond. We [Organization E] can tell they [Users] are viewing it, but will not *like, comment, or share* the content. Our [Organization E] challenge is engaging members and finding out the content they [Users] want to engage with on social media.

Khan (2017) suggested that behavior played a factor in a study using the uses and gratifications framework to examine motivation and participation on YouTube as opposed to applying Rogers's (2003) theory. Participant E took advantage of the features of YouTube as a tool to share videos and to engage users. Khan suggested that users liking videos had a relationship to the relaxing entertainment motive; sharing content had strong ties to the information giving motive, and responding and uploading videos had strong ties to the social interaction motive. Chary (2014) suggested that leaders must develop content to attract an audience and it must be information worth sharing. The findings of the study showed that the participants all created shareable content, but the audience was not inclined to share or engage with all of the content on social media. Other challenges with implementation experienced by participants were prioritizing content, keeping the affiliates aligned with brand identity, and tracking information and evaluating the usefulness of social media campaigns. Figure 2 shows the challenges related to using social media and implementing strategies as noted by the participants.



*Figure 2.* Radial cycle showing challenges faced by the participants in using social media and implementing strategies.

The theme of social media challenges connects to Rogers’s (2003) theory and aligns with the characteristic of complexity. Rogers defined complexity as “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use” (p. 15). Different from the other attributes and characteristics of adopting an innovation, complexity negatively affects social media adoption and implementation. The challenges faced by the leaders included obstacles and complexity around engagement. The social media platforms adopted by the participants were sometimes difficult to understand and to use to attract and engage the audiences.

**Emergent Theme 4: Brand Awareness**

Social media leaders used the available tools to reach their audience and to develop awareness of their brand. Karamian et al. (2015) suggested that social media marketing influences brand awareness. The participants of this study confirmed that social media use includes attracting the audience and building brand loyalty. Participants A and C both confirmed that all of their organizational initiatives focused on branding. Social media marketing use in organizations is for communication and engagement to leave the brand's image in the minds of consumers (Orzan et al., 2016). Participant C said,

We [Organization C] want to show how important we [Organization C] are to people and their successes. We [Organization C] mostly include content on social media that is self-promotion. We [Organization C] also use the strategy of other members talking about the organization.

Participant C's explanation that the organization's focus on making sure the audience had a lasting impression is a direct alignment with the study findings of Williams and Buttle (2013) that a stakeholder's dedication, purchase, and the organizational reputation affected WOM in nonprofits.

Expressing interest in an organization's products and services is a way that an audience engages with a brand. Ioanas and Stocia (2014) noted that a consumer's view of a product is the result of a business's online existence and the influence and the buying power of other consumers. Participant D noted that their organizational goal is to increase membership and increase brand recognition through social media. The goal of their social

media strategy was to show prospects and members the value of being a member. All of the participants of this study used social media to attract members and to display the benefits of the organization to get individuals to buy a membership. The participants used social media to attract an audience to the brand by highlighting the organization's educational offerings and products and services. Participant B explained that during membership dues season, they used social media to push out messages and to send regular reminders of the value-added benefits through the delivery of content. Social media marketing leaders developed social media strategies for brand awareness through every social media channel. Participant B articulated that they used social media marketing strategies to not only increase brand awareness but also to increase the purchasing powers of stakeholders. The information in Appendix C shows the content, posted on Facebook that attracts the audience to the social media pages of the participants, which results in followers, or subscribers to the brand. The information in Table 3 reveals the number of individuals that follow or subscribe to the brand for various reasons as confirmation that brand awareness is prevalent through social media.

Table 3

*Followers of or Subscribers to the Participants' Social Media Platforms*

Social media platforms	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E
Facebook	66,885	131,482	22,537	2,193	3,459
Facebook for consumers	0	0	0	0	13,377
Twitter	81,941	66,828	9,191	11,900	974
Twitter for consumers	0	0	0	0	4,066
YouTube	1,000	3,568	1,643	0	360
LinkedIn	24,782	114,207	7,761	10,523	1,330
LinkedIn for consumers	0	0	14,139	0	0
Instagram	0	2,535	0	4,209	643
Pinterest	0	2,129	207	0	0
Snap Chat	0	0	0	0	0
Google Plus	1,057	4,307	0	0	317

*Note.* The number 0 indicates that the participant's organization did not subscribe to the social media platform.

The number of followers helps the participants track the size of the audience on each of the social media platforms. Knowing the number of individuals on each social media platform helps the participants understand how many individuals engaged with the brand. The information in Table 3 also reveals that the participants all used different platforms or had more than one social media account to accommodate the different audiences. For example, some participants created separate Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts for their consumers, whereas other participants had only one account for each platform. Knowing which social media platform to use for specific campaigns helped the participants determine the content and a content delivery method that would drive users to engage with the brand.

One subtheme emerged from the main theme of brand awareness. Once the company leader developed strategies to use social media, the next step was to establish measurements for success to see what worked and did not work. Participants put different measures in place to gauge the activities of their audiences. The different methods of measurements helped participants build additional strategies. Social media metrics was a necessary step for the participants of this study to understand how their audience engaged.

**Social media metrics.** Leaders need to know how social media and the use of social media strategies contribute to the overall strategy of the organization to stay competitive and to realize growth. McCann and Barlow (2015) indicated that leaders must be able to assess the impact of social media and show how it contributes to the achievement of the overall marketing objectives of the organization. As with any strategic goal is the measurement of the success of social media strategies that leaders in nonprofit membership organizations develop and deploy for sustainability (McCann & Barlow, 2015). The participants revealed there was no exact set of reliable metrics in developing and implementing strategies that worked. When asked to identify the measurements for success, Participant A noted that measuring how many unique individuals engaged in their content was important. Knowing whether users *retweeted*, *shared*, *commented*, or *liked* the content was also important. The use of Google Analytics, Simply Measured Analytics, and Pixel were ways Participant A showed the value of social media to leadership and to measure success. Participant B said,

I think success is measured through how much traffic is driven to our website. If we [Organization B] get 10,000 views on a page and it does not register, that does not matter. I would rather see 5 views, and 5 people sign up for something. Our [Organization B] return on investment is that social media drives member retention, member acquisition, and event purchases.

Participant B's response aligns with the Mariani et al. (2016) study on what drove the success of social media on Facebook in DMOs. Mariani et al. indicated that neither the participants nor their managers were particularly interested in the number of likes and followers on social media. Participant C expressed that the biggest driver of success meant having the right people onboard. Having staff that understood social media was necessary. Participant C said, "You don't get ROI through dollars and cents, it's the followers and feedback." Participant D conveyed that measurement was through likes and shares. Radwan and Radwan (2014) also expressed that measurement of success was through determining the number of fans, followers, and comments. Participant D voiced that measurement was through different campaigns and tracking who mentioned or saw the organization's social media pages. Participant E explained that the social media team in the organizations tracked everything. The participant used the business feature on Instagram to see how many people viewed and commented through this tool. Using this feature helped manage the content. Participant E said,

The investment is just our [Organization E social media team] time. We [Organization E Leaders] do not plug a lot of money into social media and use

paid ads. The return we get is engaging with our members and getting them informed.

The participants all had different criteria for measurement of success, but some of the participant's solutions for measurement were consistent with a study conducted by Keegan and Rowley (2017). Keegan and Rowley specified that the evaluation of social media started in the decision-making process: setting assessment objectives, identifying key performance indicators, identifying metrics, data collection, report generation, and management decision-making. Keegan and Rowley supported McCann and Barlow's (2015) framework to map out social media strategies through planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The theme of brand awareness relates to Rogers's (2003) element of relative advantage. Nezakati et al. (2013) noted customer loyalty toward the brand represented organizational sustainability and competitive advantage. Rogers expressed relative advantage as economic success or other benefits. Social media marketing strategies brought business leaders and customers together in innovative ways. Using social media increases brand awareness, loyalty, and visibility for competitive advantage. All of the participants used different tactics in accessing the performance and value of the various social media tools toward brand identity and growth.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of this study indicated the need for leaders to develop social media marketing strategies for increased engagement. Social media technologies have allowed leaders to engage in two-way communications (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014).

Social media involves engagement by consumers through content (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). Leaders in nonprofit organizations use social media to raise awareness, to market programs and activities, and to maintain a relationship with stakeholders (Campbell et al., 2014). Egocentric, selective, conversational, open, secretive, and supportive strategies are effective social media communication strategies that help leaders harness a business reputation for a constant relationship with stakeholders (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016; Floreddu et al., 2014). The findings of this study could help organizational leaders use social media marketing strategies effectively for engagement and organizational sustainability. The four themes discovered in this study support the literature in the field of social media and lend to professional practice.

The first theme of this study is social media platforms and engagement strategies used by leaders of nonprofit organizations. These findings can help social media marketers select the right social media tools to interact and share content to meet the needs of their organization's various. Finding the right social media platform for engagement will help leaders build their networks and brand (Gupta et al., 2013). The second theme, social media content, signals that leaders needed appropriate content to attract an audience to their organization through social media pages. All of the participants of this study noted that providing quality content was a strategy. Providing content that is pertinent to the audience is important (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014) as is, choosing the right channel to communicate and diffuse the information as noted by Rogers (2003). The third theme encompassed the challenges leaders face when implementing social media and come with a recommendation for leaders to examine the

culture of the organization. Leaders should examine the culture to gain support from internal stakeholders through training and development and developing effective social media marketing plans that tie back to the overall strategic plan of the organization (Felix et al., 2017). The fourth recommendation relates to brand awareness by using the available tools and quality content for engagement. Karamian et al. (2015) postulated that social media marketing was a direct influencer of brand awareness in organizations. Nonprofit leaders could increase their reputation and brand image by applying social media marketing strategies to promote the products and services of the organization. Keegan and Rowley (2017) specified that the measurements to test the health of a brand identity include identifying assessment objectives, identifying key performance indicators, data collection, and report generation. Leaders must also identify metrics that signify the success of social media.

The findings of this study contributed to the limited body of knowledge available on social media marketing in nonprofit professional membership organizations. The study focused on the experience of social media marketing leaders in nonprofit organizations. The emphasis on their experiences introduced different perspectives and contributed to the existing body of knowledge. Leaders of nonprofit professional membership organizations that want to gain a competitive edge might choose to align with the strategies identified in this study and determine to use the right social media platforms, create quality content, overcome challenges, and increase brand awareness. Developing and implementing strategies around the themes of this study could result in increased engagement with the brand and organizational sustainability.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings from this study revealed that the use of social media and employing the right social media marketing strategies had a positive impact on the sustainability of nonprofit professional membership organizations. Nonprofit professional membership organizations serve an array of social, political, cultural, sports, religious, occupational, and professional groups (Tschirhart & Gazley, 2013). Social media provides nonprofit leaders with a unique opportunity for engaging the audience in relationship building and to respond and interact directly with the public (Watkins, 2017). Men and Tsai (2015) proposed that social media allows the public to directly engage with the organization and each other. The results of this study were a confirmation that leaders in nonprofit organizations can use social media for communicating and to foster relationships with stakeholders and the community. To keep programs sustainable, organizational leaders in nonprofit professional membership organizations should adopt online tools that provide quality content that engages the community.

The results of the study were a confirmation of the importance of developing strategies including identifying and using the right platform, developing quality content, overcoming barriers, and creating brand identity. Social media has the potential to engage members of nonprofit professional membership organizations with others in like professions to learn, network, and share successful best practices in their industries that can support organizational sustainability through content. Social media can keep the public informed by giving them a voice in advocacy efforts (Guo & Saxton, 2014). The potential positive social change with social media on behalf of nonprofit professional

membership organizations includes the opportunities to connect with and engage the public to build stronger communities.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this study was to explore social media marketing strategies used by leaders of nonprofit professional membership organizations. Social media marketing is a business practice used by organizational leaders to promote the company's goods, services, products, ideas, and information (Dahnil et al., 2014; Whiting & Deshpande, 2014). Organizational leaders are using social media in varied ways (Young, 2016). The emergent themes of this study included identifying social media marketing strategies for social media marketing leaders. Nonprofit organizational leaders could find the information contained in this study useful in developing strategies to engage stakeholders through social media.

Social media leaders should use the right social media platform to attract and engage the audience. As a strategy to reach the membership, stakeholders, and the public, nonprofit leaders should take advantage of the features of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other tools as identified by previous researchers and the participants of this study. Social media tools assist leaders in building networks and gaining trust from the community (Hsu, 2017). Business leaders' ability to communicate with the audience has a direct effect on reputation (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). The use of social media tools can increase two-way communication between the organization and the community.

The results of this study indicated that content on social media networking sites attracts an audience. Social media leaders should use analytical tools such as Google

Analytics and Simply Measured Analytics to measure the impact of the content posted on their organizations' social media pages. Chary (2014) noted social media marketing is the effort of social media marketing leaders' to develop content that attracts consumers and includes the customers' willingness to share the content with others to create brand awareness. Leaders must develop content that is attractive, timely, and relevant to the audience.

Leaders and organizations should incorporate social media into the strategic goals of the organization. Including social media as a goal of the organization helps leadership with brand building (Clark, Black, & Judson, 2017). The incorporation of social media into the strategic plan will address the challenges of bandwidth and resources to manage the development and implementation of strategies. The effective use of social media tools by leaders is a powerful means for brand building and customer attainment (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2017). Messages created by consumers on social media influence the behavior of other consumers to engage with the organization and their products and services (Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck, & Bijmolt, 2016). The ability to include the right content on social media pages, measure the impact, and implement and use social media effectively will give the organization an edge on the competition.

Some of the social media marketing leaders included in this study are members of professional organizations such as the American Marketing Association (AMA), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). I intend to distribute the results of the study through each organization's social media sites. In addition, this study could appear in journals such as

the *Journal of Social Media in Society*, *Public Relations Inquiry*, *Public Relations Review*, and the *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing* for social media professionals. A presentation at conferences or seminars for social media professionals is also a way to share the information.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The information and findings contained in this study provided several opportunities for further research in the area of social media marketing. This study had three limitations: my experience and professional background working in a nonprofit professional membership organization, the limiting of participants to leaders in the Chicago region, and the unwillingness of participants to share pertinent information. The participants of this study were very energetic, willing, and eager to share the social media marketing strategies they used within their organization. Not all of the participants of the study used measurement tools, such as Google Analytics, Simply Measured Analytics, Pixel, or paid advertisement, so the ability to include enhanced data analysis through figures and data was limited.

The literature on social media in nonprofit professional membership organization is limited, and future researchers can seize the opportunity to expand the body of knowledge in the area of social media marketing. I recommend expanding this study to two separate studies to obtain the perspectives of social media marketing leaders in organizations with different size memberships. In addition, I recommend expanding the research beyond Chicago to an area with a large assembly of nonprofit professional membership organizations. Researchers could lead focus groups at the conferences of

nonprofit professional membership organizations such as the AMA, ASAE, and PRSA, where social media professionals gather for education, knowledge transfer, and networking among peers. Dialogue in a setting of this nature will give leaders the opportunity to share, compare, and contrast strategies for the use of social media tools, content development, brand awareness, and challenges associated with social media use and implementation. The last recommendation for further study is to expand the research to explore what entices audiences to *like, share, or comment* on social media content posted by leaders of nonprofit professional membership organizations. Researching these measures will help add to the current literature on social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations.

### **Reflections**

When I started my DBA journey, some of the people around me did not quite understand my drive to continue my education. They did not understand why a middle-aged woman would want to go back to school instead of traveling and enjoying all the things life had to offer. They did not understand what was in it for me. However, it was not their journey to understand, but mine to conquer. When I started this DBA journey, I was unsure of the amount of class work, writing, and time involved. This journey has been challenging and intense, but also rewarding and fun. I am proud of myself for being able to overcome and endure every obstacle that got in my way.

I gained interest in the subject through my employment in a nonprofit professional membership organization and by watching the slow adoption of social media by such organizations and their affiliates, especially given the many benefits of social media

tools. My research has allowed me to understand the slow adoption rate of social media in some organizations, as well as, the many considerations such as bandwidth and expertise necessary to manage the various platforms for engagement and sustainability. This study advanced my knowledge of social media and educated me regarding the work involved in developing and implementing successful social media marketing strategies for member engagement. I am very conscious of my preconceptions and biased notions around the research problem. Social media is still in a very early stage, and leaders are continuously striving to understand its many benefits to garner organizational sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

The data collection method in this study was through semistructured interviews, the review of documents, and review of the social media pages of five social media marketing professional in nonprofit professional membership organizations in the Chicago region. The gathering of data was to understand the strategies leaders use for engagement to remain sustainable. The collection and analysis of the data resulted in the revealed four themes related to strategies for the successful implementation and use of social media in nonprofit professional membership organizations.

The results of this study confirmed that social media plays an important role in organizational sustainability and strategy is important. Organizational leaders could benefit by creating strategies for increased engagement with stakeholders for brand awareness and competitiveness. Stakeholders can contribute by communicating directly with the brand for a rewarding experience with products and services.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**Research Question:** What social media marketing strategies do professional membership organizations leaders use to promote organization sustainability?

**Interview Purpose:** In this study, the interview will contain 11 open-ended questions and additional follow-up questions to determine social media marketing strategies professional membership organization leaders use to remain sustainable.

### **Participant Selection Process:**

- Participants contacted either by telephone or e-mail.
- Participants will receive a copy of the inform consent form upon agreement to participate.
- Participant will be instructed to confirm their participation by replying back to the email, “I consent”.
- Participants receives a copy of the interview questions and interview protocol prior to the interview.

### **Interview Setting:**

- Interviews will take place in a private setting desired by the participant.
- Research will review reiterate the terms of the informed consent form and give participant the opportunity to ask any questions.
- Researcher reminds each participant of the study’s purpose and remind them that participating in the interview is voluntary and the interview is confidential.
- Participants receives reminders there is no compensation and they may withdraw at any time.

### **Recording the interview:**

- The researcher reminds each participants of the recording and receives confirmation
- The researcher alerts each participants that a journal is secondary way of capturing notes from the interview and to mitigate bias.

**After the Interview:**

- A thank-you card is sent to each participant one day after the interview along with an email
- The researcher will transcribe the recorded interview of each participant and send a copy of their interview for feed back
- Member checking will occur by contacting each participant in person or by telephone to review the recorded information for accuracy
- A determination occurs to identify the need for follow-up questions or the need for a second interview, after the translation of data occurs
- All files will be saved on a USB drive and password protected and stored in a fire proof safe for 5 years. When the 5 years expires, USB drive with be destroyed by burning of the drive.
- Each participant receives a copy of the published study.

## Appendix B: National Institute of Health Research Certificate



## Appendix C: Content Review of Social Media Pages

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E
About	Company overview Mission Products and services	Company overview Mission	Company overview Products and services	Company overview	Company overview Mission
Photos	Event photos Stakeholder photos Member highlights Speaker highlights Motivational phrases Visitor photos	Motivational phrases Event photos Stakeholder photos Member highlights	Power phrase of the Day Industry photos Meeting highlights Event photos Motivational phrases	Industry photos Meeting highlights Event photos Motivational phrases	Motivational photos Informational photos Tips for consumers
Videos	Industry videos Conferences information Industry experts messages Professional development	Member tributes CEO messages Conference information Industry videos Videos of members	Industry experts Member highlights	No videos	No videos
Postings	Organizational position statements Industry information	Industry related information	Power phrase of day Professional development tips	Organizational events Member highlights	Industry information Holiday greetings
Other	Tweets from organization Link to Twitter Stakeholder testimonials Podcasts	Job opportunities Career information Members testimonials Closed groups	Podcast Calendar of events Partnership promotions Stakeholder testimony Contest	Links to other social media channels Website information Calendar of events	Website information Twitter handle

*Note.* Data current as of September 2017