

# Chirping for Charity: How U.S. Nonprofit Organizations are Using Twitter to Foster Dialogic Communication

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## Abstract

*Social media presents numerous opportunities for non-traditional interaction. For nonprofits, social media is an inexpensive outlet that offers new ways to develop relationships with publics. The present study explored the use of dialogic communication by the highest funded US nonprofit organizations, testing the hypothesis that the majority of tweets by nonprofit organizations will employ one or more dialogic principles. Through coding organizational tweets (n= 1,652) over a two-week time frame, trends emerged for both high-dialogic and low-dialogic organizations. These findings supported a strong connection between facilitating a dialogic loop and conservation of visitors as determinants for majority-dialogic organizations. The findings from this study suggested that Twitter, as a non-traditional outlet, poses ample opportunity for relationship building through dialogic communication.*

## I. Introduction

In the past five years, social media has evolved as a popular way of staying connected, voicing opinions, reaching out to others, and above all, developing both new and existing relationships. Now that organizations and corporations are using social media, it is important to evaluate how non-traditional media is being used, and with what effect. Specifically for nonprofit organizations, social media presents a myriad of opportunities for connecting with organizational publics, both internal and external. Notably, contact through social media is less expensive than traditional media, and may foster more mutually beneficial relationships as well. The present study seeks to investigate how nonprofit organizations are using Twitter to foster a dialogue between organizations and their publics, and what forms this dialogic communication takes.

Previous research has addressed topics very similar to the premise of the present study. Researchers have studied dialogic communication on the web, social media practices of nonprofit organizations in a variety of areas, and dialogic communication by for-profit corporations on Twitter. However, the use of dialogic tactics on Twitter by nonprofit organizations is a topic critical to the successful use of social media websites by nonprofits in the future. Thus, the present research investigates how nonprofits are making dialogic use of Twitter, and what the possibilities of social media can present for nonprofits in the future. Findings from this research can be used to evaluate which dialogic principles are most and least frequently used, as well as provide a basis for future research into the implications of dialogic communication on organizational publics.

## II. Literature Review

To understand dialogic communication, the author reviewed articles on this concept, importance of

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connectivity, the power of twitters and their implication for nonprofit organizations.

### ***Understanding Dialogic Communication***

In contrast to traditional broadcast communication, which relies on a unidirectional relationship between sender and receiver, dialogic communication is based on relationship building. Before delving into the specifics of how relationships are built, it is first necessary to understand how relationships are defined. Broom, Casey and Ritchey (1997) explored this topic, and drew two major conclusions about what defines relationships:

Relationships are the dynamic results of the exchanges and reciprocity that manifest themselves as the relationships develop and evolve, but they can be described at a given point in time ... Relationship formation and maintenance represents a process of mutual adaptation and contingent responses. (p. 95)

It follows, then, that relationship building only occurs when there is some exchange between an organization and its publics. Numerous academics have defined and refined dialogic communication in recent years; however, Martin Buber is typically considered the pioneer of modern dialogic communication theory. According to Buber, dialogic communication is based on principles of reciprocity, mutuality, involvement and openness (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Meeting these principles requires recognition of an inextricable link between two bodies, and a mutual understanding of communication's purpose. Dialogue is not to be considered a means to an end; rather it is about collaboration and immediacy. Inherent in dialogic communication are skills from all parties including listening, contextualization of issues, finding common ground and consideration of long-term goals.

In its most basic form, dialogic communication is a communicative relationship based on two-way interaction. Going further, Kent and Taylor (1998) built upon relationship and dialogic communication theory by Broom, Casey, Ritchey, and Buber, and offer five principles of dialogic communication: 1. the dialogic loop, 2. usefulness of information, 3. generation of return visits, 4. ease of use/interface, and 5. conservation of visitors.

A dialogic loop is facilitated when one party involved in the communication invites the other(s) to engage, interact, act, or reply. (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). This may be an invitation to a group chat, call to action, or question prompt. Some argue that even if all four other principles of dialogic communication are met, without facilitating a dialogic loop, there is no dialogic communication.

The second principle, usefulness of information, is evaluated by whether the content (either of the message, web page, tweet, email, etc.) is relevant to the organization, its goals, and the audience. This information can come in a variety of forms, including information about the organization itself, current news stories, annual reports, upcoming events, ways to help the organizations and more (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Third is the generation of return visits principle. The same authors conclude that return visits are often generated through explicit invitations for users to return to the web page at a later date. Additionally, providing users with information that would deepen their knowledge about the organization is another method of generating return visits. The concept of propinquity theorizes that this is so because individuals are more likely to engage with organizations with which they share closeness and familiarity.

In previous research, the fourth principle of ease of use/interface has been used to evaluate web pages for multiple browser compatibility, speed of page loading, ease of navigability, availability of a site map, easily accessible home page (from other pages), making important links clearly identified, and having a website search box (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). This principle is more applicable for evaluating web pages of unique origins, rather than information communicated through a single interface (as is the case with Twitter).

According to Taylor, Kent and White (2001), organizations should attempt to keep visitors on their websites as long as possible, which leads to the fifth principle, conservation of visitors. Recently, there has been a surge in organizational presence on social networking websites. These Facebook, Linked In, Twitter, etc. pages can be categorized as organizational websites, and therefore directing the audience to these social media pages conserves visitors in the same way directing them to the traditional organizational website would. The authors refer to conservation of visitors as "stickiness." Some ways of keeping visitors on organizational webpages is to have a variety of content available and linked to from other areas of the website so visitors do not need to leave the page to find relevant information. This can include embedding relevant news stories in the organizational website, including definitions, having event picture slideshows, links to video

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pages, and more.

Each of these principles contributes to the dialogic nature of organizations that use these methods in their communications. Dialogic theory, like many theories of interpersonal relations, indicates that using these principles facilitates a more meaningful connection between both parties than is created by less dynamic and interactive relationships. These principles will be operationalized based on their use in Twitter in the methods section. It's important to note that the existence of each of these elements leads to relationship development and ongoing connection between organizations and their publics, according to the theory of dialogic communication.

### ***The Importance of Connecting***

Given the connection possibilities through dialogic communication, there are numerous reasons why relationship building is becoming increasingly important. The changing face of corporate communications now allows organizations to engage by "being human through the computer," (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010, p. 62). This digital humanity is especially important when considering the outcomes when communication is generated from a relatable source. Research has found that individuals perceive a "conversational human voice" more from blogs than from non-blog web content (websites, etc.). Because a conversational tone is more human, and therefore more relatable than formal messages conveyed through traditional media, blogs and other social media that encourage a colloquial tone are becoming increasingly prevalent methods of communication. This finding supports blog use as a tool for organizations looking to develop meaningful relationships with their publics (Kelleher & Miller, 2006).

New non-traditional connections, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc. allow both organizations and individuals to share information, initiate conversations, express gratitude, educate and raise awareness, and ask people to donate or attend an event. According to Kanter, Fine and Zuckerberg (2010), "Social media powers social networks for social changes" (p. 9). This increased personalization of major organizations generates more support than if organizations were simply to ask for donations. Additionally, the engagement of organizations with their publics fosters a sense of reciprocity and connectedness between donors and their causes (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). The fundamental outcome of organizations realizing and embracing this change in communication modes is an industrial shift from a broadcast paradigm to a dialogical one.

Further research has explored the main qualities that differentiate dialogic communications from traditional media modes. According to Kanter, Fine and Zuckerberg (2010), the hallmark of dialogic communication is immediate feedback. This is a quality traditional media cannot embody because it lacks channels that allow for fluid communication. However, Twitter allows ease of immediate feedback. For example, one tweet can spark a chain of reactions. First, potentially thousands of followers will see the tweet, and perhaps just a fraction of them will re-tweet the message to their followers. Maybe a few will click a link within the tweet to donate, and the more clicks the link receives, the higher it will appear on search engine result lists. These virtually instantaneous possibilities all add to the appeal of Twitter as a tool for more results-driven and instantaneous communication.

In addition to producing measurable results, Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) identified another important effect of connecting: the currency of trust. According to the authors, nonprofit organizations in particular operate under a currency of trust, that is, their worth is determined by how impactful and trustworthy their mission is. Therefore, it's important for nonprofits to shift from selective message dissemination to open conversation, resulting in increased transparency and greater attention to member engagement and dialogue. Boosting organizational transparency increases an organization's currency of trust, which is critical for relationship building between nonprofits and their publics.

### ***The Rise of the Twitter Empire***

With the surge in numerous social networking sites, what makes non-traditional media so crucial to the development of relationships? Essentially, social media is relevant now. Contrary to popular belief, the millennials (the generation born between 1978-1992) edge out the baby boomers as the highest populated generation. The millennials comprise almost the entire workforce under the age of 35. Unlike older generations, millennials have different (and arguably more volatile) habits when it comes to charity loyalty, engagement channels, media desires, and digital fluency. All of these tendencies necessitate organizational changes in communication style. To reach millennials, organizations need to be much more fluid and adaptive in their

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communication, because simply, traditional media is outdated for this generation (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010). Organizations have started to realize this, which has led to an increased dependence on social media as a primary communication channel for this generation.

Because of its openness as a communication forum, social networking websites like Twitter are the perfect outlet for previously unheard or ignored conversations. Whereas a private phone call to customer service can easily go unnoticed, Twitter provides a public channel for individuals to voice praises and concerns alike. Even criticism in the Twitter world is not without potential gains. Critics can be engaged so organizations become aware of opinions surrounding their image. Furthermore, when organizations refuse to acknowledge critics in public channels, they become a barrier to their own organizational growth and acceptance (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010).

Well before Twitter was even conceptualized, Clifford Christians explained the merits of the Internet as a whole: "It needs little specialized training to operate, is generally accessible to the public, conforms to the desires and purposes of users, and can become a true extension of human subjects," (as cited in Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 324). Christians' viewpoint provides an excellent summation for why Twitter has quickly become an extremely powerful communicative tool.

### ***Implications for Nonprofit Organizations***

A 2008 study found that more than 89% of the nation's 200 largest nonprofit organizations were using social media, higher than both academic institutions and corporations (Butcher, 2009). The explosion of Twitter use by nonprofit organizations is likely due to the realization of the value it holds, both economically and strategically (Butcher, 2009; Comm & Burge, 2009; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). Economist Thomas Friedman reasons that technology has made the world "flat"; accessibility to affordable technology has leveled the playing field between multi-billion dollar corporations, and organizations that rely on donors to survive (as cited in Miller, 2011). Free social networking sites like Twitter lower the transactional costs to organize and deliver information to publics. In return, followers can contribute to nonprofit growth more than just financially. By allowing dialogic exchanges, nonprofits become privy to publics' thoughts, beliefs, actions, attitudes, feedback and more (Comm & Burge, 2009).

One feature that makes Twitter a crucial tool for nonprofit organizations is transparency (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). Through open dialogue, social media enables transparency and allows nonprofit organizations to participate in the most ethical form of public relations (Kanter, Fine & Zuckerberg, 2010). The authors describe three levels of transparency, in increasing levels of desirability: fortress, transactional, and transparent. Fortress types build strong walls that create a harsh distinction between internal and external publics. Transactional types are slightly less rigid, but these organizations make decisions based primarily on a cost-benefit analysis. Transparents have no wall between their internal and external publics. They behave like sponges; anchored with clear goals, yet easily allow information to flow in and out. By creating a "learning loop," nonprofits can develop their dialogic communication. This learning loop has the possibility to develop into engaging dialogue, return on investment, and ultimately enable actual social change.

The highest measurable goal of nonprofit organizations using Twitter is action-related results. Is Twitter effectively encouraging donations, volunteering, and other contributions? According to Comm and Burge (2009), recent statistics show that Twitter users are an ideal audience for nonprofits to communicate with. Among them, 14% are considered the "stable career" psychographic (young and ethnically diverse singles in large cities), while 12% are "young cosmopolitans" (40-somethings with a household income of greater than \$250,000). These are the precise publics nonprofit organizations need to interact with, and Twitter provides an outlet to do so. And although Twitter doesn't guarantee successful and ethical communications, it increases the likelihood that nonprofits and publics will better understand and respect each other; two qualities that build a platform for future dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Despite the apparent benefits of engaging in dialogic communication, previous research has consistently found that dialogical tools are underutilized (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009). A 2009 content analysis of environmental nonprofit organizations in Canada found less than 10% of websites in the sample included dialogic features such as live chats and discussion boards. Absent elements that foster the dialogic loop, these sites appear to be locked in a broadcast paradigm, despite the availability of new media technologies (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). given as to why this may be the case. Interviews with American Red Cross employees revealed that board members are often barriers to new technology (Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011), although statistics show that social networking website use by older adults

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nearly doubled from 22% to 42% in 2010 (Madden, 2010, as cited in Briones et al., 2011). These explanations support previous research by Taylor, Kent and White (2001), that while websites have mastered some of the five elements of dialogic communication (ease of use, providing information and conserving visitors), they continue to fail at other elements (generating return visits and enabling the dialogic loop).

Interestingly, while much of the previously discussed research was conducted before Twitter's existence, it offers predictions for future web-communications similar to the type of communication Twitter enables. Moreover, it seems that Twitter may eliminate or limit many of the barriers between traditional media channels and dialogic communications. Perhaps the dialogue-based interface of Twitter will bridge the gap between informing the public and mobilizing the public. Thus, the present research aims to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: Does Twitter alleviate the limitations of traditional websites to better foster dialogic communication?

RQ2: What tweeting practices are used by nonprofit organizations to foster dialogic communication with their audiences?

RQ3: How do the tweeting strategies of nonprofit organizations that employ high-dialogic tactics differ from those using low-dialogic approaches?

In addition to answering these questions, the present study expects to find evidence that will support the following hypothesis: the majority of tweets by US nonprofit organizations employ one or more principles of dialogic communication.

### **III. Method**

The present study conducted a content analysis to thematically catalogue tweets as they relate to the previously discussed principles of dialogic communications. Content analyses are reserved for studies investigating solely messages or channels, rather than outcomes and results.

The sample set for this study was taken from the 2010 Forbes list of the 200 largest US charities, sorted by amount of private support (in millions of dollars). The sample set (n=25) included the highest privately supported charities. From this list, Twitter accounts for the organizations were found either using the search function on Twitter, or through a link to a Twitter account found on the organization's website. Tweets were catalogued for these organizations with active accounts (n=19) from March 15-31, 2011. Twitter accounts were considered active if they had tweeted two or more times per week throughout the entire month of March. Tweets (n=1,612) were then coded based on the following definitions, as adapted from the coding schemes used by Kent, Taylor and White (2001) and Rybalko and Seltzer (2010):

#### **1. Dialogic Loop**

- a. Users are invited to respond, interact, or join a group discussion (either on Twitter or through another medium with the link to the external medium being provided through a tweet)
- b. Visitors are encouraged to contact an organizational representative
- c. Users are asked clear non-rhetorical questions or given the opportunity to fill out a survey or questionnaire
- d. Users are asked to post their own content (videos, pictures, stories, etc.)
- e. Tweets include replies to followers, specifically mention followers, or are responsive retweets of followers' tweets (e.g. "Yes, that is a great idea! RT @xyz I held a bake sale at my high school to raise money for your cause")

#### **2. Usefulness of information**

- a. Tweets include information about the organization (statements about philosophy and mission, information about how to contribute, how to become a member, information about recent events)
  - b. Information is helpful or informative for visitors
  - c. Retweets of relevant information from other Twitter users
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### 3. Generation of return visits

- a. Users are invited to follow the organization's main Twitter account, or local affiliate Twitter accounts
- b. Visitors are explicitly asked to return to the Twitter page in the future
- c. Users are told about upcoming information that will be available either on the organizational Twitter or website

### 4. Conservation of visitors

Links are provided to the organizational webpage, or to the organization's other social media accounts (Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, Tumblr, etc.)

Note that the ease of use/interface principle has been omitted from the coding scheme as all Twitter accounts are essentially using the same platform, which eliminates the need to examine the interface, itself. In the case that tweets appeared to embody more than one dialogic principle, they were coded based on their dominant purposes/message.

## IV. Findings

Results from the content analysis yielded several interesting findings. As expected, all 19 nonprofit Twitter accounts engaged in dialogic communication in some manner, though not all accounts engaged dialogically in the majority of tweets. Of the 19 accounts coded, 13 accounts used two or more of the dialogic principles the majority of the time, while six accounts did not engage dialogically the majority of the time (regardless of how many dialogic principles were employed). Therefore, 2/3 of nonprofit organizations in the sample support the hypothesis. While there were six organizations that were low dialogic (the majority of tweets were non-dialogic), aggregate totals of all accounts do support the hypothesis. That is, of the top 25 earning U.S. nonprofit organizations that have a Twitter account, the majority of tweets from these accounts, when taken as a whole, are dialogic in nature. For clarity, organizations that tweeted dialogically the majority of the time will be referred to as high-dialogic organizations, whereas organizations that did not tweet dialogically the majority of the time will be referred to as low-dialogic organizations.

In total, the data show that 58.8% (n= 948) of all tweets met one or more dialogic principles. Of all tweets, 21.8% (n= 352) facilitated a dialogic loop, 10.0% (n= 162) communicated useful information, 3.4% (n= 55) attempted to generate return visits, and 23.5% (n= 379) conserved visitors through links to organization-affiliated websites. Therefore, based on aggregate totals, the hypothesis that the majority of tweets by nonprofit twitter organizations will employ dialogic principles is supported, although not every individual account supported the hypothesis.

The table on the next pages shows a sampling of how tweets were coded into the four different groups. The results show that use of dialogic principles tended to be very unbalanced. Organizations didn't tend to use all dialogic principles with the same frequency, but rather most organizations tended to favor one or two of the dialogic principles over the rest. Based on aggregate totals, the two most favored principles are conservation of visitors and dialogic loop. These principles combined account for 77.1% of all dialogic tweets, and 45.3% of all tweets, dialogic and non-dialogic combined.

The findings of the most frequently employed dialogic tactics both support and disprove previous research of dialogic communications. Past studies of dialogic communication on websites found that most websites failed to facilitate a dialogic loop. However, previous research also posited that both principles (conservation of visitors and dialogic loop) are necessary to build relationships. When organizations conserve visitors, they provide visitors with access to varied information through a variety of organizational channels (both traditional and non-traditional). In the current study, this included links to videos, blog entries, press releases, and accounts on various social media sites including YouTube, Facebook, Flickr, and Tumblr. Keeping visitors on the same organization's pages, even when they are through different social media, is important for conserving visitors. And similar to developing interpersonal relationships, the more information visitors can learn about nonprofit organizations, the greater the connection they can develop with that organization.

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Principle	Organization	Message
Dialogic loop	Boys and Girls Club	 <b>BGCA_Clubs</b> Boys & Girls Clubs The countdown has begun! Who else is jumping to help break the Guinness World Record for most consecutive jumping jacks? 22 Mar
	Nature Conservancy	 <b>nature_org</b> Nature Conservancy Write a review for nature! Give us feedback on our conservation work and tell us why you support our planet <a href="http://nature.ly/i2nfRD">http://nature.ly/i2nfRD</a> 31 Mar
	Care USA	 <b>CARE</b> CAREUSA (care.org) @Bippiesworld Thanks for spreading the word! 30 Mar ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply
Useful information	Gifts in Kind	 <b>GiftsInKind</b> Gifts In Kind Now when you buy @BabyCodes you're giving diapers through the "Changing Diapers, Changing Lives" campaign! <a href="http://ow.ly/4fC87">http://ow.ly/4fC87</a> 16 Mar
	Care USA	 <b>CARE</b> CAREUSA (care.org) RT @weareFullCircle Help us raise 1 Mil 4 @CARE - purchase coffee & chocolate. Will donate 100% of purchase bk 2 @CARE <a href="http://bit.ly/etgOPg">http://bit.ly/etgOPg</a> 31 Mar
	Boys and Girls Club	 <b>BGCA_Clubs</b> Boys & Girls Clubs Celebrate #BGCWeek11 & support Clubs: @H&M shoppers can donate to @BGCA_Clubs with each purchase 'til April 13. Shop & donate! 25 Mar
Generation of return visits	Habitat for Humanity	 <b>Habitat_org</b> Habitat for Humanity TWITTER PARTY CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERISM: 3/28 @ 8:00! Follow #POLTribute hashtag & watch 'All Together Now' on NBC! #Inspiration 28 Mar ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply
	American Heart Association	 <b>AmHeartAdvocacy</b> AHA Advocacy News RT @RWJF: Don't miss @RWJF's Twitter chat today w @Risalavizzo. Find your county's ranking the follow #healthrankings for the Q&A at 2pm ET. 30 Mar
	Map International	 <b>mapintl</b> MAP International Voting for the Community Heroes begins in two days: March 19-April 10. Follow @WashingtonCha, @InaRawati, @SusanNalepo. <a href="http://bit.ly/f8HGD6">http://bit.ly/f8HGD6</a> 17 Mar
Conservation of visitors	Nature Conservancy	 <b>nature_org</b> Nature Conservancy Nature Video of the Week: Third-grader Explains Nature's Role in Providing Clean Water <a href="http://nature.ly/hMJs13">http://nature.ly/hMJs13</a> 21 Mar
	UNICEF	 <b>UNICEF</b> UNICEF Please welcome UNICEF's newest Goodwill Ambassador...actor Liam Neeson - <a href="http://bit.ly/evWxCE">http://bit.ly/evWxCE</a> #LiamNeeson 29 Mar ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply
	American Heart Association	 <b>AmHeartAdvocacy</b> AHA Advocacy News You don't have to be a doctor to save lives, just a You're the Cure advocate. Sign up & action! <a href="http://www.yourethecure.org">www.yourethecure.org</a> 29 Mar

Additionally, while some of these channels are traditional (such as video updates and press releases), they often still allow visitors a dialogic outlet, either through commenting on the feature, options to re-tweet the link, or share it with friends on Facebook.

Arguably the most important dialogic principle for organizations to use is facilitating a dialogic loop. Even if all of the other dialogic principles are used, without creating a dialogic loop, organizations fail to explicitly welcome interaction and engagement. While previous research found that organizations were consistently underutilizing dialogic communication, the present findings suggest otherwise. Dialogic loop tweets accounted for 37.1% of all dialogic principle tweets, and 21.8% of total tweets. While this does leave room for improvement, more than one out of every three dialogic tweets, and one out of every five tweets overall, are explicit invitations to interact, or recognition of previous interaction.

Some organizations, such as Operation Blessing, proved to be particularly vigilant about facilitating a dialogic loop, and also at facilitating dialogic communications in general. Of Operation Blessing's 154 tweets during the sampling period, 92% (n= 142) embodied one of the four dialogic principles. The dialogic loop was facilitated in 56% of all dialogic principle tweets, and in 52% of tweets overall. Within a two-day period (March 15-16), Operation Blessing tweeted 24 individual thank yous to Twitter users who had re-tweeted one of their posts about the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Included were tweets such as "@Operationbless: @gangjen Thank you for RT-ing our text-to-give information to help disaster victims. Japan is in our prayers! #EQJP" and "@Operationbless: @dmquinn Thank you so much for support and sharing us with your followers! We will keep the updates coming and continue praying! #EQJP." The dialogic loop demands personalization and actual interaction, which is exactly what these tweets communicate. This connection with users, on behalf of the organization, facilitates a bond between organization and Twitter followers and strengthens their relationship. In addition to fostering a dialogic loop, the above tweet also encourages return visits ("We will keep the updates coming"), which is another dialogic tactic to build and maintain relationships.

The sample also showed numerous other practices employed by organizations in order to foster a dialogic loop. Tweets coded as facilitating a dialogic loop served many purposes, including encouraging job applications ("@WorldVisionUSA: We love our interns, hope you apply :) RT @KimmayAnn: I'm looking at internships for @WorldVisionUSA this summer. That would be a dream..."), inviting participation ("@FeedingAmerica: If you are watching webcast, send us your questions to @FeedingAmerica #MealGap"), informing users how to participate in Twitter conversations ("@FeedingAmerica: @JacksonInvolved Thanks for the mention- and just wanted you to know that there is a hashtag to follow along #MealGap"), asking users questions ("@StJude: What is your favorite @StJude program to raise funds for online? Math-A-Thon, Saddle Up, St. Jude Heroes, etc?"), prompting users to post multimedia ("@GoodwillIntl: Clean out your drawers and upload a photo for a chance to win a grand prize of \$2500. Final week!"), and more. This diverse array of tweets, which all facilitate engagement and the dialogic loop, provide support for the claim that Twitter alleviates the limitations of traditional media in terms of fostering dialogic communication. Because the Twitter interface makes engagement more accessible than traditional media, organizations are frequently using Twitter to create a dialogue with their followers, and vice versa.

Interestingly, the least-used dialogic principle is generation of return visits, which accounted for only 5.8% of dialogic tweets and 3.4% of total tweets. None of the 19 Twitter accounts in the sample dedicated more than 11% of their tweets to generating return visitors; 11 of the 19 organizations had  $\leq 2$  tweets coded as generating return visits. This is consistent with the findings of previous research, which indicated that websites failed to frequently encourage return visits. Ostensibly, this finding isn't very remarkable, because if individuals are already following the Twitter account, then they don't need to be reminded to return to the account page as it will automatically show up in their home Twitter feed. However, considering the time frame of the sample began just four days after the Japanese earthquake and tsunami (March 11, 2011), it is surprising that more of the relief organizations did not try to generate return visits at a higher frequency. Especially after a large national disaster, it seems crucial for the support of these organizations that visitors are constantly getting updates about future organizational efforts. Previous research indicates that frequent prompts of return visits are important to the development of relationships between organizations and publics, which are especially critical in times of great need. Taking this outcome into account, organizations looking to develop relationships with their publics, particularly in times of great need, should more frequently attempt to generate return visits from Twitter followers.

Regardless of type and frequency of dialogic interaction, the aggregate data demonstrates that organizations are cognizant of the need for transparency. Recalling the three levels of corporate transparency, organizations without Twitter, and that fail to start dialogue with their publics are like fortresses. These high walls don't foster relationships or closeness between an organization and its publics. Low-dialogic organizations are more transactional. This is evidence by their attempted use of communication; however, they fail to use Twit-

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ter to its full dialogic potential. High-dialogic organizations demonstrate what Kanter, Fine, and Zuckerberg (2010) deemed the highest organizational quality: transparency. By creating open and active communication channels, these transparent high-dialogic organizations are creating the closest relationship between themselves and their publics.

The present study was also guided by an attempt to understand the differences between organizations that tweet dialogically the majority of the time, compared to those that do not. An overview of the six organizations whose Twitter habits did not support the hypothesis shows no overt similarities. The organizations include medical causes, an environmental organization, and a youth nonprofit, and others. There is no trend, in which one type of nonprofit organizations tweeted dialogically less frequently than other types, or in which these organizations do employ particular dialogic principles. Notably, however, these organizations do attempt to facilitate a dialogic loop in an average of 21.6% of all tweets (when combining data from all six accounts). This is nearly identical to the frequency of facilitating a dialogic loop across all accounts in the sample (21.8%). This leads to a few preliminary conclusions about the trends of the organizations that do not employ dialogic principles in the majority of tweets. These organizations facilitate a dialogic loop nearly the same amount of time as majority dialogic organizations. Therefore, the reason some organizations do not employ dialogic principles in the majority of tweets is *not* because they fail to foster a dialogic loop, but rather that they fail to use the other three dialogic principles (usefulness of information, generation return visits, conservation visitors) at the same frequency as majority dialogic-tweeting organizations. The largest difference between majority dialogic and majority non-dialogic organizations is in the frequency of tweets coded as conserving visitors. For majority dialogic nonprofits, 31.7% of all tweets were coded for conservation of visitors, compared to only 8.0% of all tweets from majority non-dialogic organizations. Thus the reason that six of the organizations in the sample did not tweet dialogically the majority of the time is because they did not devote enough of their tweets to conservation of visitors. To improve dialogic communication these organizations don't necessarily need to invite more interaction; instead, they ought to focus on tweets that will conserve visitors.

## **V. Conclusion**

The research leading up to the present study provided many suggestions for organizations to become more dialogically engaged with their publics. Researchers proposed that the organizations be more vigilant about facilitating a dialogic loop, and giving the audience reason and opportunity to interact. Interestingly, the majority of the research surrounding dialogic communications was conducted prior to the availability of Twitter, which is why the present study suggested that the Twitter interface would alleviate limitations to dialogic communication that are present in traditional media. The findings from the present study support this theory, as well as the hypothesis that nonprofit organizations specifically employ dialogic principles in the majority of tweets.

Findings from this research indicate that not only do the majority of tweets from nonprofit organizations employ dialogic principles, but that two principles in particular are present the most often: facilitation of dialogic loop and conservation of visitors. These findings provide support for prior research suggestions that familiarity and closeness with an organization over time (conservation of visitors) are critical for dialogic engagement (facilitation of the dialogic loop). Additionally, these findings also explain the trend among low-dialogic organizations. While these low-dialogic organizations *do* follow majority-dialogic organization trends in frequency of facilitating the dialogic loop, the findings showed that low-dialogic organizations fail to conserve visitors at the same frequency as high-dialogic organizations.

Findings from this study can be used to encourage even greater dialogic interaction in the future among nonprofit organizations on Twitter. Earlier findings suggested that a frequent barrier to social media use is that often older organizational board members fail to see the value in social media. While the present findings do not enable any cause-effect relationship to be determined, they do add foundation to the belief that Twitter can be (and often is) used to foster non-traditional relationships. Future research into the impact of these relationships on public attitudes and behaviors would provide even greater insight into the results-oriented social media perspective. Conducting a survey of highly engaged high-dialogic organizations, as compared to non-engaged low-dialogic organizations would deepen the knowledge of how interaction through non-traditional media actually impacts publics. Additional research into this area would also shed light on whether non-traditional relationship building and maintenance has the same positive outcomes as interper-

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sonal relationship building, and whether social media results in the same outcome as traditional media communication.

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