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LinkedIn to Facebook and Twitter: The role of social media in developing community for non-profits

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Dedication

This Capstone paper is dedicated to my girls: Abby, Kira and Maggie, without whose strength and support I would never have made it through graduate school. From the days at SIT and throughout our RPP's, you ladies have been true friends and I am so thankful to have met each of you. I also dedicate this paper to my parents, who always loved me, believed in me and encouraged me to follow my heart. Mom & Dad, you both taught me the greatest community a person can have is family.

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Abstract

Social Media technology is providing nonprofits with a new platform for connecting to the masses. Most nonprofits are using these platforms to spread their message, fundraise and gain notoriety, but few are utilizing such sites for community building purposes. Online community building-especially on Facebook and Twitter-is an emerging concept with little existing literature and research available. Exploration in this field provides valuable information to nonprofits on effective ways to develop their accounts in a way that fosters an interactive and engaged community of participants. The question directing this study is: *How can nonprofits create, build, and develop a community, online and across cultures, using social media?* This online community would best be defined and shaped by: 1) the ways social media was connecting individuals to organizations and each other, 2) the role of social media in participating/furthering nonprofit organizations' missions and 3) the opportunities social media provides for creating social change.

The nonprofit WomensTrust was used as a case study in implementing, observing and monitoring an effective social media community building strategy. A flexible design was used for research and a mixed methods approach was used for the collection of information. Through direct observation, analysis of existing user/friend demographics, an 8 question survey to online participants, and an informal focus group data on the specific needs and challenges of a WomensTrust online community was collected. Data showed social media users were interested in the work/ programs/staff of WomensTrust, learning more about Ghana, and ways to be involved. The result of this data analysis provided a starting point for WomensTrust's social media strategy in developing their online community and can be used as a guide for other nonprofits.

Introduction

In this, the year 2012, a new kind of community has emerged in the form of social media. A decade ago when social media first appeared it was thought to be another fad; a tool specifically designed as a way for the Millennial Generation to communicate and share their lives electronically with friends. Social media is defined as: "forms of electronic communication (as Websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)" (Merriam-Webster, 2010). This definition led me to ponder the concept of "online communities"-what that means, how they work and how organizations go about utilizing them. In the world of nonprofits, research is largely focused on the topic of traditional community development. Little research has been done to examine the idea of virtual community building through sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and how that correlates to nonprofits. Therefore, I asked the question: *How can nonprofits create, build, and develop a community, online and across cultures, using social media?* Specifically, I wanted to explore: 1) the ways social media is connecting individuals to organizations and each other, 2) the role of social media in participating/furthering nonprofit organizations' missions and 3) the opportunities social media provides for creating social change. These three areas would help clarify what I wanted my online community to include and serve as achievement markers for my research and strategy progress.

The social network community I envisioned would be more than just a webpage people could like or join and merely become a number - it would act as a space where individuals interested and active in the cause or organization could virtually gather and connect with each other to share ideas, tell stories of impact and ignite social change. Although this concept may

sound like a farfetched idea, research on the development cycle of nonprofits show there is cause to investigate. "The need to change the way nonprofit organizations are structured and operate cannot be ignored. Social Media provides one kind of urgent incentive to change and embrace the news tools and rhythms of working in connected ways" (Kanter, 2010). Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have gone from being "just another internet fad" to commonplace cultural references, such as "I saw it on Facebook." Statistics show social media is no longer "just a teenage trend"; it's becoming increasingly popular across age barriers with more and more people relying on such sites for news, information and connection. "Each day, over 175 million of us log onto Facebook. Each minute, twenty hours of video are uploaded to YouTube. Each second, over 600 tweets are "tweeted" out onto the Web, to a worldwide audience" (Aaker, 2010). These facts prove social media is no longer the wave of the future-social media is the wave of *now*.

Part of the phenomenon of social media use is attributed not only to the instantaneous access it provides to other individuals, but also because of its power to ignite and spur social change. Perhaps the most widely recognized impact of social media on social change is the Arab Spring event starting in late 2010. We saw how citizens in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria have used Facebook and Twitter to mobilize for protests, organize demonstrations, and encourage the outside world to help. "In the days leading up to the protests, more than 90,000 people signed up on a Facebook page for the "Day of Revolution," organized by opposition and pro-democracy groups" (Fahim, 2011). Would the citizen demonstrations against Mubarak in Cairo & Alexandria have been as successful without the use of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to recruit and post updates in real time? Chances are slim because social media is the medium today's generation is most plugged into. "Many people said they did not belong to any particular group

and were attending their first demonstration. They included Ramy Rafat, 25, who said he learned about the protest on a Facebook page" (Fahim, 2011). This one example is a great introductory illustration as to how technology, by merely making citizens aware of the issues and options for involvement, can be used for social change.

Social change is something which is viewed and approached differently by each generation. As organizer Saul Alinksy explains, youth tend to look at previous generations-often their parent's generation-and decide they want their lives to count for something more. "Today's generation is desperately trying to make some sense out of their lives and out of the world…Today's generation says 'I don't want to spend my life the way my family and their friends have. I want to do something, to create, to be me, to do my own thing, to live'" (Alinsky, 1971). The current generation has a desire to be different than their parents-to be more advanced, open-minded and savvy. To Alinsky, this mentality fuels the "radicals"- those who are the leaders of tomorrow and bring about change in their community. Their desire to *do* different than their ancestors ignites a fire to change both themselves and the world. Social media has the ability to ignite the fire for change by exposing the user to various issues and causes occurring around the globe and providing avenues of action. For WomensTrust-the organization used in this case study- social media inspires action for change by sharing events and opportunities for individuals to get involved. These include fundraisers, community/special events, forums/seminars, cultural fairs, and requests for volunteers.

Because each person has their own unique interests and talents, their approach to social change will vary. Some will approach it optimistically, some will approach it practically and some will approach it methodically. Regardless of how an individual is inspired to create change, there remains a need to be level headed. "The basic requirement for the understanding of the

politics of change is to recognize the world as it is. We must work with it on its terms if we are to change it to the kind of world we would like it to be. Most of us view the world not as it is, but as we would like it to be" (Alinsky, 1971). You cannot bring about change while operating under a false image of reality. Nonprofit organizations can help guide the sanguine, motivated individual to exercise their passion through established channels. With a plethora of portals for change and millions of action-ready individuals dispersed around the globe, social media provides an opportune platform for connection.

> "Affecting social change is, of course, the ultimate goal for nonprofit organizations. Connecting with people and deepening engagement are important building blocks for creating friends, readers, and followers, but social change happens when these people do something on the organizations behalf. Social media plays an important part in the total social change equation and can be used to affect social change directly" (Kanter, 2010).

At the start of my RPP, I understood social networks being great agents for connecting concerned and caring people to a cause or charitable group, but I wanted to understand the difference between an NGO having a *following* versus having a *community* on social media sites. Was there a difference or was it merely based on the number of online friends you had? "Not everyone knows all of their Facebook contacts in real life, of course. And the nature of digital friendship -- even an online friend network -- takes on a different, and potentially more global, character than face-to-face networks of friends and contacts" (Sutter, 2011). Even if an organization doesn't have a personal relationship with an individual who has become a fan or friend, that is okay. The nature of these relationships is not based on a face-to-face or name-to-name association; rather it's based on a broader spectrum. So then, what *does* it mean to belong to a community as opposed to just supporting a cause?

To answer this question, the meaning of community must first be examined and defined. The best definition of community I found was from Margaret Wheatley, a management

consultant who researches organizational learning, leadership, and systems thinking. She defines community as: "People who share a common work and realize there is great benefit to being in relationship. They use this community to share what they know, to support one another, and to intentionally create new knowledge" (Wheatley, 2010). Traditionally, communities were formed as entities where bodies gathered- whether they resided there, worked there, or played there- to share their dreams with each other, discuss their needs and fears and participate in societal life together. Although traditional communities still exist in the 21st century, we are seeing many alternative forms spring up as a result of technology-communities such as World Café Community, University of Phoenix, and the Diaspora Project where individuals from all over the globe are united virtually through a common bond or purpose. "Community is a place where the individual is seen, witnessed, acknowledged, where your soul can lay bare without fear and your gifts are valued. If I know that you are a part of my community and I am a part of yours, we don't necessarily need to be in the same place" (Some, 1998).

As great as technology can be for expanding communities and creating new ones, it can also threaten them, particularly the traditional ones. There exists a certain political pressure for communities to identify themselves less by their unique and individual culture and more by a globalized sameness. Activist Gustavo Esteva articulated that the problem with creating the same cookie cutter communities is that the fiber of a community *is* its culture and culture is not universal. In order to retain and cling to collective cultural identity, the grassroots movement evolved. This effort, now often coined grassroots postmodernism, resists oppression by the majority and stems the tide of economic "global thinking", which often kills local culture and creates further class divide.

> "The challenge of grassroots postmodernism is how to 'catch up' with the latest mutations of the economy; 'updating' ancient traditions of hospitality; protecting and

cherishing them while simultaneously preventing their annihilation in the hand of 'the technological bluff': its state-of-the-art marvels hiding and carrying the virus of 'the individuals self,' the formidable killer of communities" (Esteva, 1998).

Creating a sense of self-sufficiency/local autonomy amongst collective groups is imperative for their survival in the ever increasing global market we live in. Without rooted local efforts to unite and protect individual communities, they would be swallowed up by the burgeoning appetite of globalization. The Occupy Movement, which sprang up in the fall of 2011 in major cities across the world, is a great example of a grassroots movement standing up to economic greed and globalization. This movement began to protest the social and economic inequality of big corporations and the global financial system. By the end of 2011, over 95 cities in 82 countries across the world had Occupy movements, thanks to social media sites like Facebook and Twitter which were used to coordinate events and communicate. Although the social and economic outcome of participants did not change, these protests did shift political discourse, drew attention to the spread of corporate wealth and greed and ignited a search for alternative reforms and management.

Grassroots efforts often give birth to nonprofit organizations because of their intent to provide assistance, solutions, or support for social change. "The world changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what's possible" (Wheatley, 2010). Unfortunately, what unites can also divide, especially if nonprofits and grassroots efforts lose sight of their responsibility to protect and guide communities, as the case of Haiti's earthquake relief efforts demonstrated. Many efforts and organizations sprang into action following this terrible devastation in 2010 as a way to help the victims, but without proper leadership, direction and planning, power was easily abused. The Haitians were not respected/helped/assisted in the proper way resulting in the local culture being demeaned.

Unfortunately, this kind of abuse and manipulation is fairly common in communities where help/aid are given yet no long term plan or mutual respect is in place, resulting in ill-will and disdain by both parties for the other. On the other hand, if engaged properly, communities can carry great respect for organizations and activists who establish a rapport with them. "Grassroots communities appreciate the initiatives of activists who use state laws, and norms to curb its intrusions: to stop its programs and projects, damaging the lives, cultures and environments of 'the people'" (Esteva, 1998). The socially sound actions described above by Esteva fueled my personal pursuit of a practicum. I desired to contribute to an organization whose work followed such just parameters- operating in a community they were a part of, providing needed and wanted services, and empowering individuals to become self-sustaining. An Internet search for nonprofits using the above criteria as a guide for selection led to my discovery of WomensTrust.

Organizational Background & Existing Tensions

With my academic focus being on Social Justice in Intercultural Relations (SJIR), I desired a practicum placement with an institution whose work was contributing to social change internationally in a responsible and evenhanded manner. The structure and design of WomensTrust appeased my apprehension of working with an international conglomerate whose practices could be unwelcomed or ineffective. WomensTrust (WT) is a registered 501(c) 3 non-profit whose mission is: "to empower women and girls in Pokuase, Ghana, through microenterprise, education, and healthcare, and to inspire others to do the same elsewhere". The goal of WomensTrust is to provide woman in the village with access to the pivotal resources they need in order to better their lives and the lives of their family members. They work solely in the Pokuase village, home to about 20,000 Ghanaian citizens. By staying focused on one specific village, WT is able to be more effective while create lasting relationships and building a rapport with residents in the community. Since its inception in 2003, WT has helped 1,408 women and infants receive healthcare in order to reduce maternal mortality rates; 1,175 women receive small business development training; 600 girls stay in school through awarded scholarships.

Empowering women is done through support from donors worldwide and carried out in Pokuase by a Ghanaian-staffed office and Board of Directors. The programs are: microlending for woman entrepreneurs hoping to expand their businesses (businesses like bakeries, road side stands, cloth making, tailors, etc.); scholarships for girls to stay in (local) elementary/secondary school and complete their high school education; and healthcare and clinics for mothers and babies, as well as enrollment in Ghana's National Healthcare system for all loan clients and their families. A U.S. "headquarters" office is based in New Hampshire and works in conjunction with the Ghana team to develop program ideas, provide marketing and fundraising, and handle donor

relations/development. WomensTrust's structure allows for trust building between the village and the organization, a path towards sustainability and the opportunity for Pokuase residents to lead their community. This happens through the Pokuase office being staffed with local Ghanaian's rather than sending Americans to run an office overseas. Under this system, staff members are already familiar with cultural practices, customs, and norms plus have an established bond with the community they serve. The entire organization-both offices and the Ghana Board of Directors-is overseen by the U.S. Board of Directors.

As a student of SJIR, I was intrigued by the model WT was using not only for their programs but also their organization. Often times I feel the second half of the SJIR title-Intercultural Relations- is overlooked in the emphasis of teaching and practicing Social Justice, but it *is* a vital piece of the social change and global community puzzle. In theory and on paper, the kind of intercultural/cross-cultural grassroots nonprofit WomensTrust is has all the specifications of being the perfect socially just organization working towards global change. However, we all know there are no perfect models or organizations; each magical "solution" has its flaws and underlying tensions. WT was no different and the recognition and address of these tensions were imperative to the community building process.

When a company or nonprofit's work is centered on communities in Africa, issues of colonization & imperialism, slavery, mishandled aid and the squandering of resources are all tension topics organizations-especially Western ones- *must* recognize and address as appropriate. For WomensTrust and their programs in Ghana, an underlying tension needing to be addressed was *actual* solutions to poverty. For decades poverty has been highly talked about yet little progress has been made towards actually eradicating it.

> "A discourse on poverty and the necessity of reducing its magnitude, if not eradicating it has become fashionable today. It is a discourse of charity, in the nineteenth-century style,

which is it does not seek to understand the economic and social mechanisms that generate poverty, although the scientific and technological means to eradicate it are now available" (Amin, 2003).

Many non-governmental organizations (NGO's) are labeled with words like "aid" and "relief"; their mission is to bring about provisions to "poor and afflicted" communities in Africa, yet they offer no sustainable solutions to ending this situation nor do they look at the reasons why it is a perpetual problem.

> "The poverty in question is only presented as an empirically measured fact, either very crudely by income distribution (poverty lines) or a little less crudely by composite indices (such as the human development indices proposed by the United Nations Development Program) without ever raising the question of the logics and mechanisms, which generate this poverty" (Amin, 2003).

There is a great tendency for organizations and governments to throw money at the effects of poverty or to stem its tide, rather than address and correct the core cause of the problem. It seems easier and more glamorous to swoop into a town with a big check, loads of supplies, dozens of eager volunteers and set up shop to tackle a problem rather than invest in groups already existing in the towns and villages. Additionally, many NGO's are not a part of the communities they help nor do they intend to be. Once their intended mission or project is complete, they often move on to the next town, leaving community residents dismayed and disgruntled. WT was sensitive to this and did not want to be another unwanted, intrusive NGO. Therefore, the founder waited until the Chief and village elders of Pokuase invited her to be a part of their community before establishing the organization. From its conception, WomensTrust has been focused solely on Pokuase- an integral piece to the operation's success and reception.

Even though WomensTrust was accepted as part of the physical community of Pokuase, the virtual community of WT was another story. The organization's presence on social media was still new, but few residents of Pokuase were fan and friends of it. In fact, only one or two of

WT staff in the village were connected to the organization online, even though most of them had accounts with Facebook and LinkedIn. Part of the connection gap between the two communities can be attributed to the access and availability of the internet. It is uncommon for homes in Pokuase to be outfitted with the Internet so villagers must rely on internet café's for entrance to the World Wide Web, with speed and connection being unreliable. The same applies for WT Pokuase staff- the office is wired for internet service but when it will work and for how long are constant variables. Sporadic connections make it nearly impossible for an interactive conversation and relationship to unfold between Ghanaians and individuals located outside Ghana's borders. Virtual community building is hard enough, so when access to the necessary resources is unequal between countries, the job becomes much more challenging.

Other strains between the two offices occur over funding. As described earlier, the U.S. office is in charge of fundraising for all of WomensTrust and then wires the needed money for programming and operating expenses to Ghana. Since the Ghana office currently does not raise money, they have limited knowledge and awareness over the bank account status of the organization and challenges of receiving donations during tough financial times. They do receive financial and funding reports from New Hampshire, but an informational awareness gap still exists. The gap is noticeable by the surprised reaction of Pokuase staff to the Board's announcement of critically low funds and a call to be frugal with spending. Also, it is noticeable when the U.S. Board expresses shock over explanations of personnel issues in Pokuase, how donation dollars are divvied up and the results of the annual audit. This lack of communication creates a strain between the two offices because without participation in procuring funds or an accurate awareness of the organization's financial status, there are unrealistic expectations about can take place. Under the current structure, an absence of donor dollars from the U.S. would

result in zero funds for programing in Pokuase. To prevent this from happening, responsibilities need to be shared between the Ghana and U.S. Board in regards to fundraising and giving. A strategy which outlines and implements this plan is one of the goals WomensTrust wants to accomplish this year.

Other tensions the organization continues to face are cultural barriers and issues of sensitivity/understanding. Creating a cohesive staff is difficult when each office is geographically segregated and many employees have never met their cross-continent comrades. There are no American citizens working in the Ghana office; Ghanaians run it and the Ghanaian Board of Directors oversees it. The organization tries to operate under a structure of mutual exchange. The Executive Director works out of the Ghana office while the Associate Director is in the States, creating a need for both offices to communicate constantly. WT is structured to balance the sharing of power and dispel the likelihood of one group retaining all control-a design almost mirroring the principles Esteva lists below.

> "Recognizing the unity and integrity of each people's traditions, it [political humility] calls for the otherness of the Other; with their unique ways of being on Earth. Political humility struggles for the dignity of all peoples, embracing the premise which rejects the supposed superiority of any culture, any ideology, any political position, over the others" (Esteva, 1998).

Even with the power shared in such a way to create a balance, WomensTrust's system of operation continually needs to be monitored for fairness and respect. Since the U.S. Board is deemed the ultimate governing power, there is the danger American culture could completely dominate decision making and control. There has been discussion about combining both the U.S. & Ghana Board's into one, unified Board, but to date that process has not been initiated. This is largely due to the infancy of the Ghana Board and the U.S. Board allowing them time to get established.

The separation of offices is also not without argument or problems. It has been said by critics that dividing personnel culturally is an injustice and by keeping Ghanaian staff separate from American staff, WomensTrust is still operating under some mindset of the Other. To such concerns I respond, saying the split is based on the fact neither office wants to force its employees to adapt to another culture for the sake of an intercultural experience. The Board realizes the value of having local staff who are trusted in their respective communities serve that particular office. Many of the Ghana staff have visited the U.S., while several of the U.S. staff and Board members have traveled to Pokuase, creating an interactive relationship between the two cultures. These face-to-face relationships help fashion the cultural diversity of WT, where no one group asserts itself as the "in-charge" culture. "Cultural diversity means not giving one culture's moral concept-that of human/women's rights- pre-eminence over others; bringing 'human rights' down from its pedestal; placing it amidst other significant cultural concepts which define 'the good life' in a pluriverse" (Esteva, 1998).

Due to the geographic separation of the two WT communities, a higher attentiveness to cultural diversity/ sensitivity needs to take place. The awareness and appropriate channels of handling such diversity within WomensTrust is sometimes forgotten between the staff, creating tension and causing division. Differing perspectives, cultural norms and communication habits/processes have created tensions and taken what should be one, unified WomensTrust community and divided it into two- the Ghana WT community and the U.S. WT community. One of the problems with molding two cultures and essentially two different physical communities under one umbrella community is the implied sense that because we all are a part of the same organization, we have the same visions and expectations. Although we *are* on the same team, each culture has its own opinions about processes, outcomes and achievable goals.

"One cannot talk about community and community building without, first, acknowledging existing relationships within the community and examining the myriad other relationships that develop, either consequently or intentionally, and, second, considering the various political, economic, and cultural factors that are divisive in all processes involved in community building" (Hyland, 2005).

Recognizing the existing relationships between both countries and their physical communities was vital for the creation of a new, unified community for WomensTrust. Because of the geographic separation between staff and programming, there needed to be an open space where individuals-staff, clients, donors or other interested third parties-could gather together and publicly share information/experiences with each other. When I began my practicum at WomensTrust, no such forum existed. In order to communicate with each other, staff called or e-mailed directly the one person they needed to talk to, creating very singular communication. It was about two months into my practicum before I even spoke to any of our Pokuase staff; my supervisor was the one who always handled the international communication. In order to share information about what was taking place in the village, she would verbally relay her conversations and emails to the rest of us in the office. This added to our feelings of disconnect with our Ghana comrades, our program recipients and the organization's work. In effort to re-connect both the staff and our affiliates to each other and our mission, I decided to explore the world of virtual communities and how social media networks can be used for merging two separate communities into one.

The Role & the Research

The creation of a single, physical community for WomensTrust was highly impractical

due to physical separation and cost effectiveness, yet creating this community virtually was not.

The concept of a virtual community using social media seemed feasible, not only because of the

vast popularity and access to such sites, but also because of their emerging role as connection

platforms.

> "A decade ago, it would have been technically impossible for ordinary citizens to respond publically to global events and share their opinions easily with such a wide audience…We are living in a dramatically smaller and more interconnected world. Practically anyone, anywhere, can capitalize on incredible networking tools that are both free and easy to master" (Aaker, 2010).

Our increasingly globalized world and connectedness is one of the most highly researched topics

of our millennium, while the topic of social media as platforms for change and community is not.

Very little research has been published on this emerging field and literature on the uses of social

media itself is limited to the last three years. Although quite a bit of data exists about the number

and frequency of Facebook users (which is cited in this paper where appropriate), there is little

supporting data for how nonprofits are benefiting from social media sites and how they are

utilizing such networks for community building. Therefore, the absence of data about community

building on social media is due to the lack of literature existing on this subject.

The objective of my practicum work at WomensTrust was to increase their online

presence in order to develop name recognition with a wider audience. Prior to my arrival, my

predecessor had written a social media proposal for WT to follow, outlining tentative goals for

the organization to achieve. These goals focused on broadening WomensTrust's name

recognition and increase funding and donations. However, I wanted to steer my strategy away

from fundraising because, statistically, sites like Facebook do not result in a large uptick in

donations. "Fewer than 3 percent of the 11,196 nonprofit groups that responded to the Nonprofit

Social Network Benchmark survey said that they raised more than $10,000 on Facebook in 2010" (Wallace, 2011). The survey revealed few charities were raising significant amounts of money via social networks. Not wanting to waste my efforts crafting a fundraising plan likely be unsuccessful, I decided instead to explore how social media can be used as a host for community building.

The first step was recognizing how relationships are made through social media; specifically looking at what ways social media connects individuals to organizations and each other. Already established as great interaction platforms for individuals, such sites have the power to draw and unite members together from all over the globe through the quick click of a mouse. "On Facebook, the average user is only 4.74 degrees away from any other Facebooker" (Sutter, 2011). An individual can link up with others through simple name searches or by viewing what groups fellow friends like. Twitter provides a small box on the side of your home page suggesting "who to follow" based on key words and similar interests, LinkedIn suggests groups to join and individuals you may know based on what networks you are a member of and Facebook recommends pages of interest to you. Users of social media quickly discover how these sites draw people together, but is being drawn together and virtually connected through a mere click of a button enough to create commitment to a community and cause?

At the start of this project, WomensTrust had many followers on Facebook and Twitter, but that is all they were- followers. There was no deeper connection or relationship building taking place once the individual clicked to "like" or "follow" us on the specific site. In order to transform these followers into a community, I knew I would have to select the right methods. "To be effective in community building, one must have command of each method. One must discern when to employ a particular method and how to keep all the methods balanced according

to their appropriateness to the opportunities available" (Hyland, 2005). The methods I selected to do this were:

- engaging through dialogue with current followers and friends

- analyzing and incorporating WomensTrust work/programs with personal stories

- collaborating with partners to unite our messages and create more interest in the cause.

My research was based on a flexible design, which would allow for the adjustment and development of content and conversation. Content and conversation was based on input from users, my ideas, and reactions to new implementations.

Although the bulk of my practicum was focused on community building with social media, it was not the sole attention of my work. In addition to social media strategist, my role with WomensTrust also included the Administrative Assistant position. These two job functions covered a multitude of areas, allowing me hands on experience in every area of nonprofit management in conjunction with my RPP learning goals, listed below.

Table 1	**RPP Learning Goals**
1) Continue expansion of multicultural viewpoints and multicultural sensitivity
2) Learn all functions of nonprofit management.
3) Discover the needs and expectations of community members engaged with WomensTrust & devise a strategy to meet those needs
4) Become comfortable with using & utilizing social network sites

These goals were met through performing the responsibilities of my job and the knowledge/insight I learned from each. Goal 1 was met through the interfacing with our Pokuase office and local Ghanaians involved with WomensTrust, as well as various international stakeholders with whom we corresponded. Goal 2 was rather lofty and ambitious, but I was able

to learn the essential functions of nonprofit management including handling donations & requests, donor relations, event planning/marketing and Board meetings. Goal 3 was met through my involvement with a group of local nonprofit leaders (called NP Chats); a group which gathered once a month to discuss issues they were facing, ways to be more effective, and how to engage the surrounding community. Goal 4 was met due to daily participation and activity on numerous social media sites.

NP Chats

One significant contribution to my learning about community building through social media was a series of group discussion I participated in with other nonprofit personnel, called NP Chats. This collaboration of organizations was working together to become a community of practice and help strengthen the surrounding physical community. "When separate, local efforts connect with each other as networks, then strengthen as communities of practice, suddenly and surprisingly a new system emerges at a greater level of scale" (Wheatley, 2010). Through meeting together, this network quickly realized the need for better intra-organizational communication and awareness, resulting in the idea to create an inner-organizational Google calendar.

The calendar idea stemmed from an "incident" in summer of 2011, when the Historical Society and the Fells (a historic estate) each unknowingly booked their major, annual fundraisers for the same day. New London is a small community and residents are active with many nonprofits so the double booking of two major nonprofit fundraisers on the same day posed quite a problem. Since there was limited intra-organizational communication, the error was not discovered for several weeks, at which point it was too late to switch. Both groups carried out their fundraisers as planned on the same day, but with limited success. Afterwards, it was

suggested there be an accessible place online to post events in effort avoid double scheduling as well as inform other groups about what was happening. Since many of the local nonprofits were minimally staffed with persons over the age of 55, technology was a challenge, so I quickly became known as the technology "expert." Their hope was for me to get the shared community calendar off the ground, as well as lend advice and tips on how to utilize their own organizations social media pages and technology queries.

For me, NP Chats served as an informal focus group where I could observe the variety of work other local nonprofits were doing, what challenges they were facing and how they were succeeding in connecting to the community. The Center for the Arts organization is a great example of a local nonprofit that had connected with New Londoners. The organization was founded about three years ago to highlight the artistic opportunities, events, and culture in the Lake Sunapee area. Although a small organization it quickly became an important part of the town as they took over the summertime Market on the Green- the town's Farmer's Market-and had added live music, games for kids, etc. The Executive Director, an energetic, friendly woman who was very active in the community, loved her work and connecting to other individuals and organizations in the area. However, as successful and popular as the organization and its leader was, they too struggled with low numbers at major events- a growing trend in the nonprofit world during the economic downturn. For smaller organizations like WomensTrust, observing this kind of struggle by a larger organization provided some comfort. It showed us that every organization is experiencing low participation rates and low fundraising, no matter how large their following (either online or in the physical community).

Most importantly, NP Chats gave me the opportunity to listen and learn what was taking place around me. "Whatever you hear from your community, you should endeavor to be the best

listener that you can" (Bacon, 2009). For community building and development, this is an

important piece. You cannot build without knowing the need; you cannot know the need unless

you listen; and you cannot listen if you are still talking. As an outsider entering a new

community, I relished in the opportunity hear other voices and see existing projects. Listening to

the struggles Center for the Arts was having selling tickets to its gala, hearing from the Historical

Society how the community responds to having multiple events scheduled on the same day, and

seeing how organizations like the Chamber of Commerce were utilizing social media helped

strengthen my own work with WomensTrust.

NP Chats fizzled out at the end of 2011, but I didn't view the group or my time with them

as a failure because of the meaningful relationships I made. Just because the group didn't last

doesn't mean the work they accomplished or the relationships they forged are invalid.

> "An effort may fail, then partially succeed, then falter, and so on. Since mutual trust is
> built up over a period of time, coalition organizers should avoid getting so caught up in
> any one effort as to view it as 'make or break.' Every effort prepares the way for greater
> and more sustained efforts in the future" (Brown, 1994).

If local leaders decide in the future to resurrect the group or start another collective body, they

can look back at NP Chats for structure as well as ideas for action & achievable outcomes. Since

NP Chats was a subset of my original project, its fizzling didn't dramatically change the

dimensions of my work. My main focus remained on how to use social media platforms to build

an online community for WomensTrust- a community where people felt engaged, accepted, and

involved. This after all is the foundation for society. "If there is no belonging, there is no

community" (Bacon, 2009).

Initial Insights

To create a sense of belonging and community in terms of social media, I want to know the more about WomensTrust's existing friends and followers. The organization had accounts on the three most prominent social media sites- Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter- so these were the social media sites I focus on. When I began my practicum on August 1st, 2011, the statistics for WomensTrust social media sites were as follows:

Table 2	WT Social Media Insights as of August 1st, 2011
LinkedIn-6 Members *	
	0 Discussions
	*the Founder & President of WT was not even a member of the group
Facebook-566 people "Liked" WomensTrust's page	
	Posting was sporadic and didn't follow a routine or pattern
Twitter- 361 Tweets sent	
	254 Users WT was following
	136 Users following WT

Based on this information, I began to develop an initial strategy with benchmarks to gauge its success. The first thing I realized is community is centered on communication and participation. Without these elements, a community can't grow nor will it be attractive to others to join. I wanted to grow WomensTrust's social media accounts both in numbers and participation so they would be active platforms for users who were excited about the organizations mission and involved in their own social change projects.
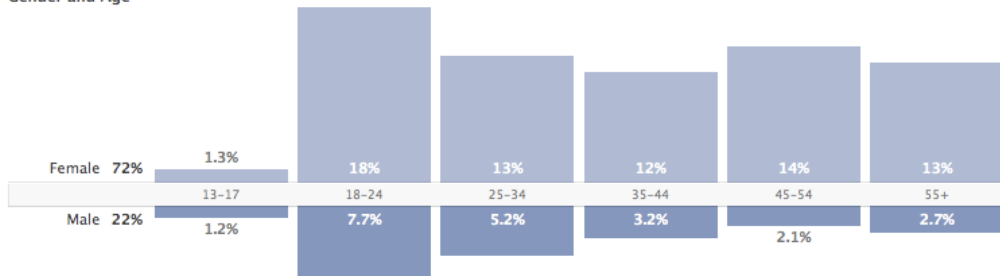
My first short term goal was to make a post or tweet at least once a day (with the exception of LinkedIn). My hope was being more active and visible on Facebook and Twitter would start to increase our online presence and draw new, curious individuals to follow and friend WomensTrust. Statistically speaking, attracting new members should be relatively easy

with social media since our lives have become so interconnected. "The average distance [between Facebook users] in 2008 was 5.28 hops, while now it is 4.74" (Sutter, 2011). Utilizing this shrinking distance in our acquaintance circles, my goal was to increase number of WomensTrust LinkedIn group members to 10, to increase number of their Facebook "likes" (Facebook pages don't have friends, they have "likes") to 700 and increase WT Twitter followers to 300 within a six month window. As WomensTrust became more active on social media, I anticipated the number of followers would increase as our presence and exposure grew. Although more friends doesn't mean more participation, it is exciting to see daily how many new individuals are taking an interest in your organization or cause!

With a numerical end goal to reach and a basic plan outlined, it was now time to begin creating a more substantial strategy of how to build this community via social media. One big question I had was: how do I go about engaging people who I have never met and who I know nothing about? The most helpful answer I found was from Gustavo Esteva: "Since we cannot know in advance the readers of what we write, we imagine some specific friends are sitting around our desk, playing the role of interlocutors. Our sense is that if our elaborations and ideas are of interest to them, there will also be others similarly drawn to this dialogue" (Esteva, 1998). This philosophy proved to be perfect for online community building. Until I was able to get to know the individuals in my "flock", I imagined they were some of my friends and shared accordingly. Although I wasn't able to instantaneously learn all interests and passions WT's friends had, I was able to collect some insight as to *who* liked us. The demographic information I collected was solely from Facebook, which had the most comprehensive compilation of data. The table below is a breakdown of who has "liked" content on WomensTrust's wall (Facebook's equivalent to an individual homepage).

Figure 1   Demographics of Active WT Facebook Friend's

Gender and Age[7]

		13–17	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55+
Female 72%	1.3%		18%	13%	12%	14%	13%
Male 22%	1.2%		7.7%	5.2%	3.2%	2.1%	2.7%

Countries[7]		Cities[7]		Languages[7]	
472	United States of America	25	Accra	572	English (US)
35	United Kingdom	18	New London	44	English (UK)
25	Ghana	14	New York	8	French (France)
24	India	13	Concord	5	Spanish
9	Pakistan			3	Turkish
8	Canada			2	Indonesian
5	Australia			2	Swedish

As the above table indicates, social media friends of WT vary in age categories and locations, meaning there is a wide range of interests. For a Social Media Marketer, this wide range makes the task of engaging viewers through content easier because there is diversity in opinion, issues, age and geographic location.

Analyzing the statistics, I noted the largest age bracket was 18-24 year-old females (18%), arguably the most prominent group on Facebook. However, the next largest "group" of followers are females in the 45-55 age bracket (14%), with both groups largely based in the United States. Since my two largest audiences could be classified as "moms and daughters", I needed to find creative ways to keep both parties engaged and active with our organization. Because these individuals chose to connect with WomensTrust, it's assumed some part of our mission resonates with them-whether it is microfinance, West Africa, health, education or women's issues. These are the *known* areas of interest, but they are not the only topics WT cares

about. The same can be said about the community members- they have more interests than just education, healthcare, microlending and Africa, so the key to developing our community was to discover and relate to the other areas. "The goal here is not to construct an enormous vacuum cleaner to suck every tiny details of your community into a graph. The goal is instead to identify what we don't know about our community and to use measurements as a means to understand those things better" (Bacon, 2009). The Young Adult group was by far the easiest to find relatable interest with. Current events (a posting about the visit by *Half the Sky* author and Pulitzer Prize winner Sheryl WuDunn to New London earned four likes and two comments), social change issues (the three ladies who won the Nobel Peace Prize received four likes and two shares by our friends), and fun facts/cultural tidbits tended to be popular and pleasing (the post about Ghana being the first home for Peace Corps Volunteers gained three comments about five likes).

The 45-54 group was a bit harder to gauge since I am not a member of that group. However, I drew upon comments and conversations from my own mother, her friends and various acquaintances who fit that demographic. Stories about health (especially children's and women's health) and education are of strong interest to this age group since many of them have school aged children. Because these two topics WT already focuses on, I wanted to find other areas of interest to engage these ladies with WT. One of the biggest questions most working, middle aged women ask is: "What should I make for dinner?" My own love of cooking and experimenting with new recipes, led me to try posting a Ghanaian or West African inspired recipe as a way to relate to this group. Utilizing recipes from a Ghanaian cookbook at the office, my own collection and offline, I started posting a different food recipe mid-week in a segment called "What's for Dinner Wednesday's." These bi-weekly recipe posts earned on average three

likes and two comments and not just by the targeted age bracket, but across the board. It became a popular feature to "retweet" on Twitter- a process where one of our followers who really likes something WT has tweeted will resend the same message to their own followers.

Online Survey

This active, somewhat structured, daily use strategy appeared to be working-the number of friends and followers was increasing daily with an uptick in the level of interaction/feedback. Although terrific and part of the greater strategy as a whole, I wanted more concrete feedback from the virtual community as to what they wanted, what they didn't like as well, and what they hoped to gain from being part of WomensTrust. An 8 question, online survey was created and the link displayed on all three WomensTrust social media accounts. The survey was posted for a three week time frame, and those who participated were eligible for a prize drawing. Throughout the course of the three weeks, reminder updates were posted about the survey. Still, the sample size was not great- only 10 individuals took the survey and 9 completed it. However, their responses helped create a much more tailored social media plan by giving me specific topics and content to include on WomensTrust's account (e.g. more stories & accounts from Pokuase, pictures, updates on new projects). This data also informed me of how I could meet the expectations of WT friends and followers and foster a great sense of community-if four responders wanted more stories from WT staff and clients then I needed to meet that need with more personal narrative posts. Taking the written responses to how WT can build a more connected community, I created a Word Cloud graph to visualize the needs of my respondents and how I could build a stronger social media community (i.e. through stories, pictures, updates).

Figure 2   **Word Cloud Survey Results**
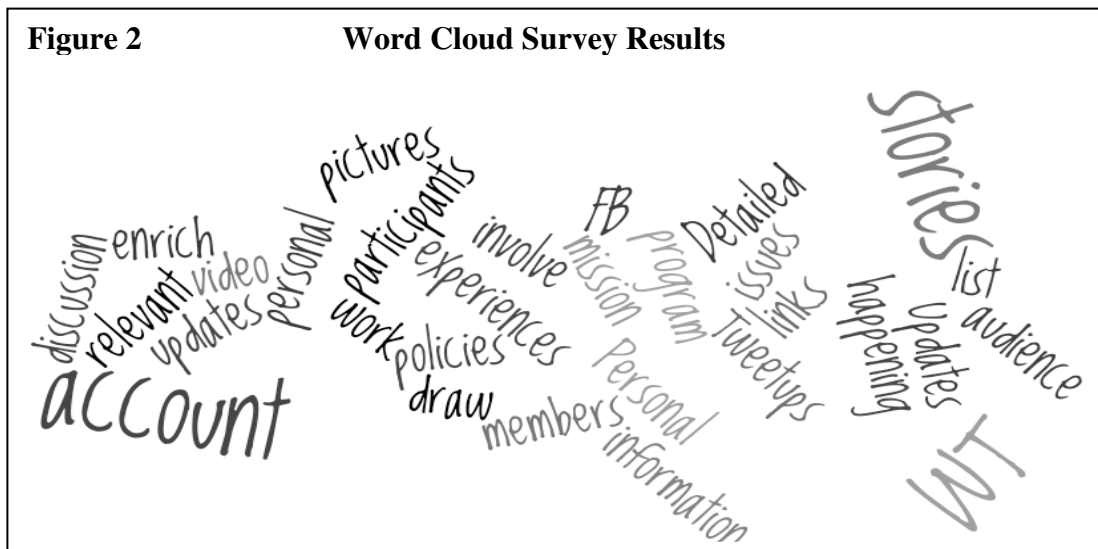
Words appearing in larger and/or bolder font had the greatest frequency of use. The complete survey and its results can be found in Appendix A.

Responses to the survey provided me with concrete individuals, expectations, and voices-my community members were no longer nameless, voiceless unknowns with whom I was disconnected. Rather, they began to emerge as friends whose interests and lives I knew. "We can no longer write or speak from nowhere to abstract audiences. We can only address real men and women, with whom we share the same social and intellectual concerns" (Esteva, 1998). I did not want my community building strategy to simply create an interest in WomensTrust and its work, but also inspire members start a conversation that could create change. Utilizing information given to me from my survey respondents, such as wanting to learn about other issues in Ghana, I would be able to start an effective conversation about how to address some of those health and poverty issues.

The Strategy

The first part of the strategy was to construct a sort of guideline calendar to be used in facilitating conversation and interaction with our online community. The weekly calendar created is as follows:

Table 3	Weekly Social Media Calendar
Day	**Social Media Content**
Monday	Photo from WT archives or excerpt from Annual Report/latest newsletter/etc
Tuesday	First Tuesday of the month: Coffee for a Cause post. Other Tuesday's: article, photos, or information on cultural issues/customs in Ghana such as music, historic places, etc.
Wednesday	Every other week: Ghanaian or African inspired recipe. On off weeks substitute with video or photo
Thursday	Post about women's issues/rights, African economy, microlending, or pertinent blog
Friday	Inspirational/motivational/thought provoking quote or fun fact.

This calendar was designed as a prompt and not a rigid schedule-creativity and spontaneity are always appreciated in community engagement and revisions should constantly be made for what is still effective. The regular posting of certain topics (such as food recipes on Wednesday's) helped engage users with WT and kept them coming back to our page to see what new things were happening and what they might have missed.

The second part of the community building strategy was geared towards physical community outreach. Prior to my practicum, most outreach done by WomensTrust was for fundraising purposes. There were very few opportunities for supporters-both financial and through interest -and staff to engage outside of semi-annual events. Also, there were virtually no

opportunities for individuals who lived outside of New Hampshire and New York City to participate in events. However, through the success of social media marketing, the number of WomensTrust events and locations increased from three or four events for all of 2010 to at least five different events in the final three months of 2011 (see Appendix B). The increase I personally was most pleased with was the increase in activity around the New London community. Interestingly, WomensTrust only moved to New London three months before I joined the staff, so it was still new and largely invisible to the physical community. As a staff, we wanted to rectify that situation by inviting our neighbors into the office to get to know us and allow us to get to know them. We decided to host a monthly open house where individuals could stop by the office, have a cup of coffee, and chat with us. This open house day was named "Coffee for a Cause."

Coffee for a Cause

The first "Coffee for a Cause" was more promotional than anything- spreading the word to other businesses in the office building about WomensTrust and what we did. In effort to keep the event as community focused as possible, we served coffee donated by local coffee roasters. In return, WT promoted their company during the open house with thank you signs, mentions/tags on event day posts as well as photos on Facebook & Twitter. Also, baked items made by volunteers were served alongside the coffee. It was free of charge, but individuals could make a donation towards WomensTrust's programs if they desired. As staff, we wanted this day to be focused less on fundraising and more on interacting with the community. Some months there were added elements to Coffee for a Cause- in November WT's Executive Director was in town; in December we sold products made by our loan clients in Ghana. The primary source of

advertising for Coffee for a Cause was done via social media by creating an event on

WomensTrust's profile to alert and invite interested parties. Although most did not actually

RSVP by "joining" the invitation online, many folks who attended say they came because they

saw it on Facebook. Seeing how successful social media was at reaching people for participation

purposes led to ask my second sub question: what role does/can social media play in furthering

the mission of WomensTrust?

Community & the Mission

The mission of WomensTrust-"to empower women and girls in Pokuase, Ghana, through

microenterprise, education, and healthcare, and to inspire others to do the same elsewhere"- is

not limited just to the gals of Ghana. As the second half of the mission states, WomensTrust

want to provide inspiration for others to work towards empowerment in the manner they see fit

and social media allows us to hear how this goal is being met. With Facebook and Twitter

allowing us to be present in so many different communities virtually, I wanted to track the

impact this presence was having around the country. The first social media empowerment

opportunity was the showcasing of the WomensTrust documentary film at the United Nations of

Orange County Human Rights Film Festival in Orange, California. The festival viewed our

documentary (which is posted on the website) and selected us to be one of eight documentaries

screened at this year's event. The theme for the festival was "Promoting Gender Equality and

Empowering Women"- a perfect fit for WomensTrust. Although our staff could not attend the

festival we were able to promote it via our social media accounts. The number of individuals

who responded to posts on these platforms was encouraging; many were happy to learn of the

festival and excited to attend, thus providing them with an opportunity to be empowered and empower others through the information and inspiration delivered at the film festival.

Closely tied to examining the role of social media in furthering WomensTrust's mission is the issue of converting inspiration into actual change and my third sub question: what are the opportunities social media provides for creating social change? Social media offers lots of opportunities to create social change whether it is by financially supporting a group working to make a difference, signing a petition on an issue a person feels passionate about, or by providing opportunities for direct involvement like volunteering or demonstrating. The internet allows us to implore others to get involved; to take action and form social change. Social media does this through its ability for users to see what their friends are doing, to see what the "hot button" issue of the day is and to learn how they can change the world. News spreads like wild fire on Facebook and Twitter: through newsfeeds, re-posting on walls, comments, likes, tags and virtual word of mouth because of how connected we are to each other. "When considering even the most distant Facebook user in the Siberian tundra or the Peruvian rainforest, a friend of your friend probably knows a friend of their friend" (Sutter, 2011). If we are just five degrees of separation away from someone across the globe, how many degrees away are we from impacting the world? Zero. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media sites have given us the ability to spread the word *and* be a part of social change. In the words of author Alice Walker, "We are the ones we ones we have been waiting for."

Specifically related to WomensTrust, social media has created several opportunities for users, fans and friends to participate in social change. The most obvious and easiest way individuals can help WT form social change is through donating to the organization, thus allowing their programs to continue changing lives through socio-economic equality and

empowerment. This can be done through links on social media sites to our website or through Apps like Facebook's Causes page, which allows organizations to set a desired goal, the ability for users to give online and then suggest this Cause to their friends. They can even request donations be made in their honor in place of gifts for holidays and birthdays.

Aside from giving money to funds programs for social change, WomensTrust has found social media to be effective in allowing individuals and groups to craft their own paths of involvement. One example is the Teens Against Poverty (TAP) club at Livingston High School in Livingston, New Jersey. This club is comprised of a dozen high school students, working towards social change through the elimination of poverty. They do this with programs, fundraisers, and educational awareness. The club's President, Becky, learned about WomenTrust online while researching poverty-reduction programs and microfinance. She immediately wanted to be involved and partner with us. Her initial contact with the organization was before my practicum started-when WomensTrust was just climbing on the social media bandwagon- so TAP helped WT create their social media accounts. A few months later, Becky contacted us again to say the group wanted to organize a pizza fundraiser for WomensTrust. The club asked the local NJ branch of a chain pizzeria to participate as hos; the pizzeria agreed saying 20% of all proceeds made during that one evening would be given to TAP. The students agreed to give *all* of the money they received from this fundraiser to WomensTrust for educational scholarships. Seeing their enthusiasm and dedication towards combating poverty, WT did what it could and spread the work via Facebook and Twitter. In the end, TAP raised over $300, providing enough funds for three girls in Ghana to attend secondary school (junior high) for one year. What started as an internet search, then led to helping WT get started on social media, has now resulted in three young ladies lives being forever changed through the power of education and hundreds of

others of lives being impacted through this stories retelling on Facebook. As Becky said: "When we saw how many of our fellow classmates and Livingstonians came to the fundraiser, we realized that we had made a fundamental impact on our school and community and not only fueled change, but also promoted awareness."

Even though the staff of WomensTrust has never met the dozen students from TAP face to face, there is still a bond- a sense of loyalty and belonging-to our organization and it is all due to the power of social media. It allows the organization to communicate what is taking place at the office and around the country on behalf of WT and inform our users about the ways they can be involved to help make change. No amount of change is too small, since they often create a ripple effect. "You never know when some small thing you do today could have an impact many years from now" (Aaker, 2010).

Learned Lessons

The course of my work with WomensTrust and the social media project provided me significant insight into the complexities, intricacies, and anomalies of untraditional community building. One of the first intricacies I discovered in online community building was how to gauge the strategy's effectiveness as it was being implemented. In order to feel like the strategy was successful, I wanted notable outcomes for the following three categories: 1) friendship/connections 2) engagement by friends with WT and its mission and 3) action for social change inspired by WT. To help mark the progress and success of WomensTrust's work in forging friendship and connection, I set a goal at the start of the project for the number of social media members WomensTrust should reach during my sixth month practicum period. The goals were: to increase LinkedIn members to a minimum of 10, Twitter followers to 300 and Facebook fans/friends to 700. At the close of six months, the totals were 10 LinkedIn members, 303 Twitter followers and 679 Facebook fans. These numbers show improvement and an increase to all sites over the period-an uptick I attributed to intentional social media engagement by WomensTrust. To visualize the steady increase in awareness and followers, the growth timeline for our Twitter account is listed below.

Figure 3   **Six Month Increase in Twitter Followers**

34
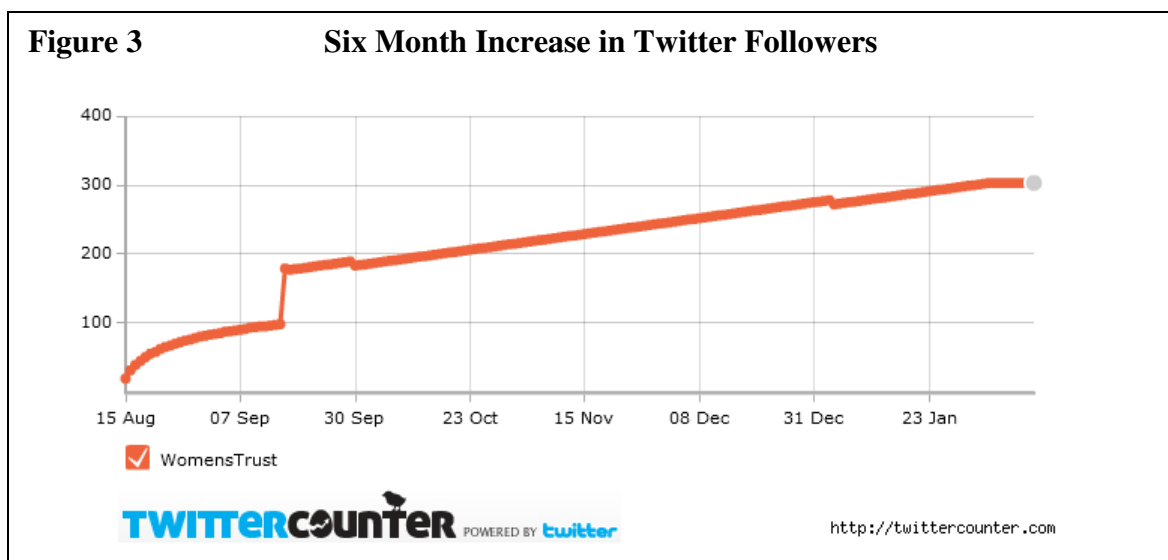
The climb in membership numbers and the fact those numbers have not decreased speaks slightly to the success the implemented social media community building strategy is having. Increased numbers are not the sole measurement of success, since they don't reflect involvement or commitment, but they do provide a positive gauge to the effect of outreach. In addition to the number of new users, other indicators for assessing the effectiveness of the community building project are: the relationships developed and deepened, the number of individual projects inspired by WT, and the continued inquiry/ interaction via social media about our work. As phases of the community building strategy were created and tested, some of the lessons learned and research gained were automatically incorporated. Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the strategy are currently in place as the strategy becomes rooted.

If I were to go back and redo this project, I would articulate more specific goals and measures of success. Increasing fans, friends and followers was one of the goals, but perhaps additional, short terms goals would be good -e.g. "I would like to recruit 3 new office volunteers through Facebook or LinkedIn" or "We hope to host events in 2 new locations through invitations from our social media community." Defined, smaller achievements could have helped me engage with community members or created dialogue with the larger audience. Even developing a forum on each social media site for peer engagement, feedback and focus group purposes would have been another good tool for evaluation.

Analyzing the sites chosen for this project at its completion, I would opt to refine my initial approach. Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter may be the most common and familiar sites, but the scope of my strategy did not work effectively with LinkedIn's setup. Originally, I assumed a universal community building strategy would work for all three sites. However, as the project progressed and I gained more familiarity with these sites, I realized a "one-size-fits-all"

strategy was likely not to work. LinkedIn is a key network to be a part of for both professional development and coalition building-it's just designed to be used differently than the other two sites. Facebook and Twitter are portals geared towards a personal, daily connection and communication. LinkedIn's structured in a more reserved, fact-finding way; a way where members are sharing less personal information and more information related to professional fields of interest. Therefore, it should have a strategy tailored towards how members use that specific site and how they interact with each other and groups. A customized strategy for LinkedIn would focus more on the achievements and efforts taking place at WomensTrust or in Ghana, and less focused on day-to-day events. The members of LinkedIn are professionals, with a higher level of education and career focus. Therefore, a good strategy for WomensTrust to employ would be to engage its community in a more intellectual dialogue about the economic disparities in West Africa, feedback on critical and current theories, and discussion about programs. This can be done through asking an intentional question to members and waiting for their responses or it can be done through the posting of articles or academic pieces and requesting reactions. Due to the volume of companies and organization utilizing LinkedIn, community building there could easily segue into coalition building. A better use of time and activity on LinkedIn for WomensTrust would be to focus on networking with other nonprofit agencies to create stronger partnerships and coalitions. "Change begins as local actions spring up simultaneously in many different areas. If these changes remain disconnected, nothing happens beyond each locale. However, when they become connected, local actions can emerge as a powerful system with influence" (Wheatley, 2010). Individually, WomensTrust can only achieve so much, but if they band together with other organizations in collaboration, together the impact of their change will be bigger and more noticeable.

One of the major complexities I encountered was the delicate balance between community building and marketing. Because the work of WomensTrust is funded through donor support, the constant outreach mindset is fundraising focused. This is not entirely bad, but can make non-fundraising outreach tricky. At the onset of my project, there were differing viewpoints between WomensTrust management and myself over the intended direction and outcome. From the start, my goal was to structure the project towards increasing WT interaction on social media sites and developing deeper dialogue and relationships. For the organization, they were focused on reaching a younger crowd to cultivate interest and donations. With an aging donor base and the popularity of Facebook and Twitter with the general public, WomensTrust wanted to capitalize on the opportunity to "recruit" new donors and increase our proceeds.

> "When it comes to philanthropic activities on social media, social networks foster-through greater transparency- closer relationships between donors and causes. Furthermore, by adding fun, personal, and accessible elements that reduce the distance between the individual and the cause, you can create powerful connections that serve as engines for action and change" (Aaker, 2010).

To some extent, both philanthropic and community development endeavors may include elements of the other, but the paths for achieving each goal are vastly different. For my project's purpose, I did not want to focus on using social media for fundraising, although occasionally we would utilize our pages to promote a fundraiser. Looking back, I see how important it is to continually stress the intent of what you are doing and why. For me, I should have laid out my plan of action, stated my desired end goal and been more explicit about my reasoning for taking this direction. Although management was very accommodating and enthusiastic about the project, several times we were operating under different interpretations about the results my work would yield. In the future, more transparency about my work's intent would be beneficial.

An equally valuable lesson I learned through this practicum was to be more rigorous in my background research of organizations. To clarify, WomensTrust is a fine nonprofit and my time was very insightful. However, the smaller the organization the more "nuts and bolts" of an operation you will be exposed to and the more turbulence you will first handedly endure. Background research and fact-finding will likely not expose all the quirks and glitches in a company, but it may yield preparatory insight. When I entered WomensTrust, it was on the cusp of transition. All organizations undergo transitions during their lifespan; some are just more turbulent than others. The transition happening at WomensTrust involved the Founder/ President moving aside to assume an emeritus position. As with any change to the power structure, the shift was delicate and bumpy. In this particular transition, the move forward was not well planned or handled smoothly, resulting in a missed opportunity for an amicable separation between the organization (i.e. staff & Board) and the Founder. Prior to entering the situation it had not occurred to me to ask about the Board's efficiency and rapport with the staff, nor how the President and Ghanaian staff engaged with the U.S. office. Through this experience, I have learned the importance of asking questions focused on the internal leadership of an organization as well as more preliminary research before entering into a work commitment.

Although I am currently unsure of my future endeavors, I know the knowledge and skills I have gained over the last six months will be beneficial wherever my career path takes me. This knowledge includes the qualities and characteristics which help build effective leaders, how to handle difficult people, ways to interact with individuals you have never met, and what management style allows me to flourish professionally. Additionally, the expertise I have gained about the uses and application of social media will be of great service in future careers.

Forward Motion

With the door of future possibilities wide open, my eyes keep noticing the number of open positions for New Media/Social Media Specialists. Before taking this placement, I hadn't paid much attention to the viability or availability of professional positions in this field. In fact, I created the social media position at WomensTrust by taking my interest in online community building and merging it with their need for a social media strategy. Little did I know at the time this is a growing field of industry. More and more, both organizations and individuals see the value in expanding their social media presence to connect to the broader population, so there is a growing demand for knowledgeable people in this field. However, companies are looking for more than just a tech savvy person. Other qualifications tend to include working with community building and/or engagement, experience with coalitions and collaborations, strong leadership, and incorporating messages and interests from a wide range of audience members. Many of these qualifications do not specifically deal with social media itself, rather transcend technology barriers and spread into interpersonal-focused areas like community building and development.

As my project unfurled, the applicability of my work to other facets of community building and life in general was astonishing. I had subconsciously limited my expectations for what skills or information I would glean from this project and how they could translate into future work. Based on my personal creation of the role with WomensTrust, part of me didn't anticipate the strategy actually succeeding. It wasn't because I doubted my work, but because I was unsure of the need and how it would be helpful. However, as time marched on I could see the very issues I was examining and trying to "solve" on social media for WomensTrust were similar issues other organizations were having. Issues like trying to stay present on a continuously updated platform, resources/ personnel/time to designate for social media,

attracting and engaging the masses when you are a smaller, unknown nonprofit and balancing the cost/effort versus the reward in building relationships which may have no monetary benefit. One of the greatest revelations of my RPP experience was realizing that just because something is not traditional, already established or defined, does not make it any less valid. Even though I created my practicum from a notion rather than taking an existing position, the value of my work or what I contributed to WomensTrust still had merit. It taught me all inklings should be explored to their fullest potential because you may be on the precipice of great discovery. If I had not pursued my interest in community building using social media, I would not have discovered the many uses of social media and how they can be applied nor would I have come to understand the many ways community can take shape. In the future, this means I will not be nearly as skeptical about my ideas and their validity or usefulness. Taking ownership of the task at hand shows initiative, pride and ambition.

A huge motivator for ambition and innovation is the knowledge that a project or program I enact or envision isn't going to end when I do. It can seem quite futile, even depressing, to know a"labor of love" won't live past the end of my involvement. On the other hand, it's quite liberating to know if this strategy is designed or implemented well, it will last long after I have left. It gives me great satisfaction to know online conversations about rural empowerment of African women and the importance of educating young girls continue to take place, even though I am not facilitating them. Retaining and reapplying the motivation to push forward and think of the bigger picture my work contributes to–who I am serving and how- will be applicable to all of my future endeavors. As for the future of this project, a "roadmap" for continuing the social media community building has been drafted and left to my successor. This roadmap includes tips for successful engagement (ways to promote WT social media sites& continue to grow), lessons

learned (a few things I have tried both online or in the community that did not fare so well) and suggestions for daily application (the social media schedule). Also, I am leaving behind strengthened relationships with partners of WomensTrust, which only expands the possibilities for our growth and community.

Another area of knowledge application was experiencing the continual process of community building; you never "finish" completely because there is always more work to be done, more voices to be heard, more room to grow. Even if WomensTrust hit a million friends on Facebook, had daily dialogues on LinkedIn or became a trending topic on Twitter, the need for continued community building would still exist. As our numbers and relationships online grew, I realized meeting a certain numerical goal wouldn't mean the end of the project. Since I was engaging people and people are never done developing/changing, there were endless opportunities to continue developing the relationship. Recognizing the longevity in relationship building can be applied to any facet of the future.

The people-focused intensity which community building work is centered on reveals the need for strong, solid leadership. Over the time of my involvement, the transitions taking place at WomensTrust revealed a lack of strong leadership at the organization. As the President moved away from her managerial role and into a figurehead position, much of the decisive leadership was left to the Associate Director and Board, where cracks were soon noticed. They lacked the ability to make firm and timely decisions, carry out a plan of action and invoke the confidence of their staff. From my relationship with WT and this situation, I gained a better understanding of the criteria for a leader. It takes a true visionary to see what the future can hold and be willing to guide/lead others towards that dream. Not everyone who assumes or is placed in a leadership position is necessarily gifted in that area, making it critically important for a checks-and-balances

system to exist. This way if there is a case where leadership needs be strengthened or changed, the issue can be addressed quickly. Distinguishing and replicating the qualities of good leadership are useful tools in *every* future industry, so the practical application of this knowledge will be beneficial many times over.

Lastly, what I have learned about the *essence* of community and community work-the collection of people- will serve me well in the future. Whether community is found through channels like the Internet and social media or down the street at a drum circle, the place is not as important as the purpose. "What happens when you define community solely as a geographic place is that there are certain neighbors that you never meet, no matter how much you chase them. That's why to create community you need to start anywhere where you can be true to your soul and spirit" (Some, 1998). For WT, community could not be defined as just in New Hampshire or just in Pokuase—it needed to include both. An online community allowed for this and also opened the doors for other individuals to join and take part in the mission. Here, Peggy, an eighteen year old Ghanaian student, sponsored by WT to finish her last two years of high school in America and has been accepted on a full ride to attend university to pursue medicine, met another high school senior Becky. Becky lives in New Jersey and is President of TAP, an anti-poverty club at the local high school working to make a difference. Becky and her friends raised funds for WT to put towards furthering educational programs to allow three students in Pokuase the opportunity to pursue their dreams. Meanwhile, a woman from Seattle named Lindsay found WomensTrust on Facebook and felt empowered to create her own change- so she partnered with a friend to start a small business selling baby products made out of 100% recycled material, while giving portions of the proceeds to various international NGO's. Lindsay found good company with Bess, another entrepreneur whose inspiration started Rain for Sahel and

Sahara, a nonprofit working in Niger to improve quality of life through schools, gardening/herding, well access, cooperatives and mentoring. All of these women, though geographically thousands of miles, found each other and a community online through WomensTrust. They are sharing their stories of change in hopes of motivating others to do the same. After all, communities prosper when individuals find fulfillment and reach out to share with their neighbor, even if it is via the World Wide Web.

In my own life, I have experienced the joys of finding community and being able to remain part of that community when I move away. Most recently it was the transition from campus life at SIT to the off-campus RPP. Leaving my "family" for the unknown, wondering if I would be accepted or rejected by this new community, whether I would be able to connect to this new community the way I did to the last, and how I would find my place- these are questions we all face when moving. To keep a support system in place as we embarked to difference places, my close SIT friends and I decided to create a group on Facebook to keep in touch, to motivate each other and to pose questions regarding some of the ambiguous or uncertain parts of our RPP requirements. What a world of difference it has made, having this community "walking" beside me on this journey and allowing us to experience the RPP together even when we are in different locations.

This project has shown me community comes in all forms. Some are more traditional- actual neighborhoods and towns you move into and develop relationships. Other communities are less conventional- by using social media platforms like Facebook. Although fellow community members may be separated by physical miles, we are not separated by interest and fellowship. These virtual gathering places allow us to go about our business yet remain close and
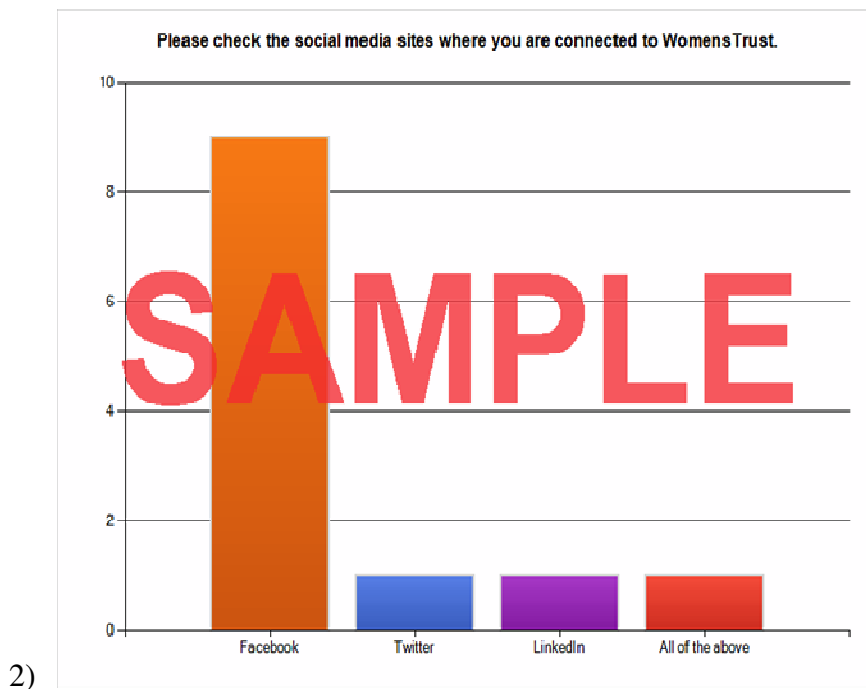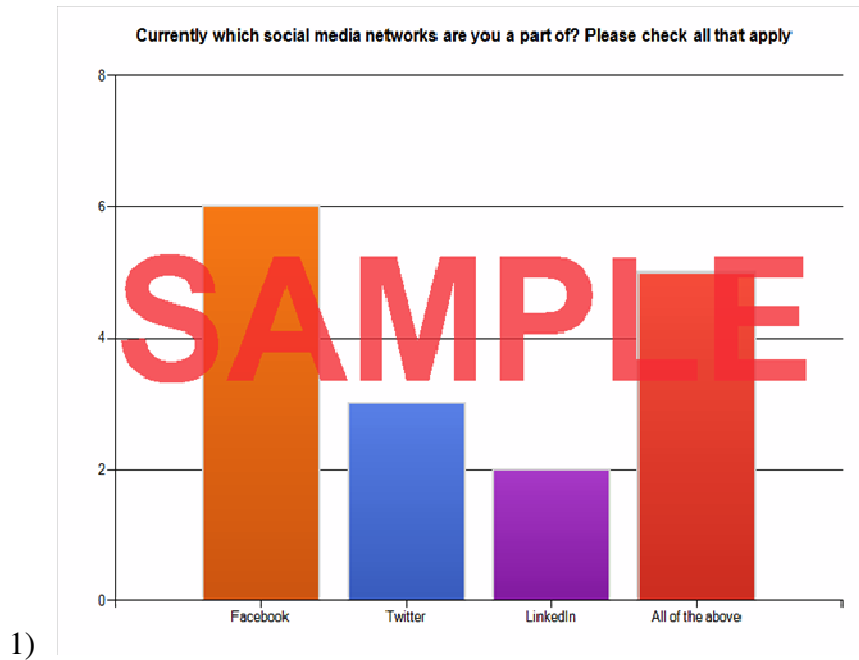
connected with those we care about. It also creates a place where we can find and engage with

like-minded strangers, form new friendships, and develop new communities.

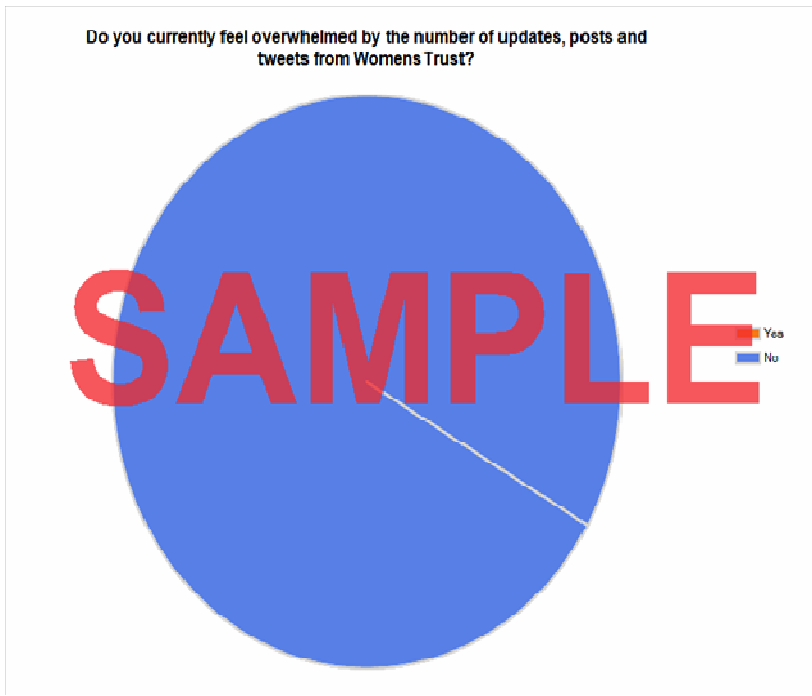# Appendix A – WomensTrust Online Survey & Results

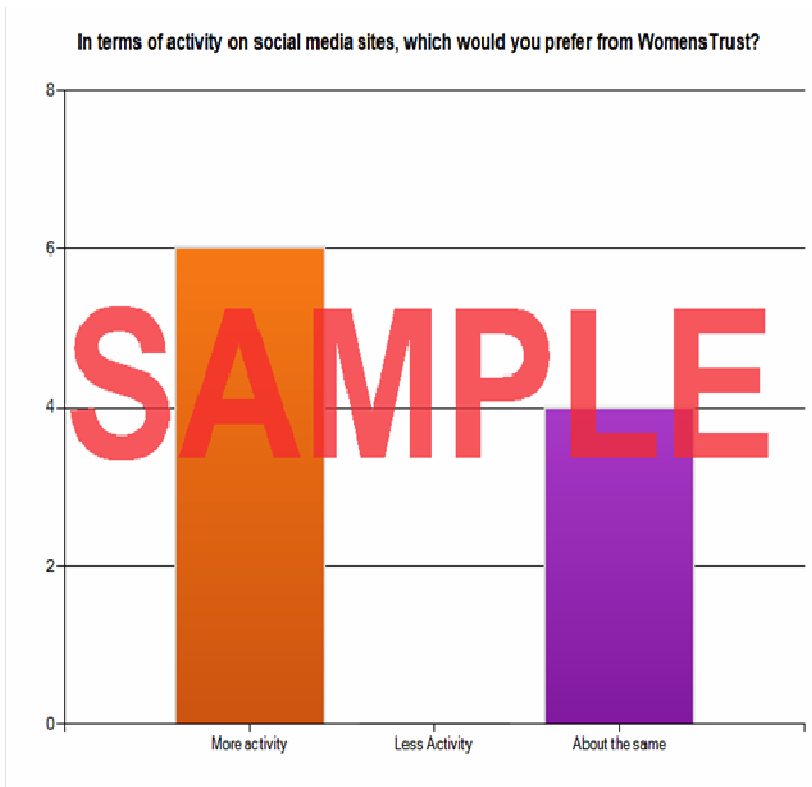**WomensTrust & You Survey**

Total Started Survey: 10

Total Completed Survey: 9 (90%)

1)

2)

Appendix A cont. – WomensTrust Online Survey & Results

Do you currently feel overwhelmed by the number of updates, posts and tweets from Womens Trust?

SAMPLE

■ Yes
■ No

3)

In terms of activity on social media sites, which would you prefer from WomensTrust?

SAMPLE

More activity — Less Activity — About the same

4)

Do you currently feel connected to Womens Trust and our mission?

SAMPLE

Yes
No

5)

6) How can we build a greater connected community with you and other online followers? (7 answers, 3 skipped question)

1)I think you guys do a great job. Keep posting pictures and updates!
2)Women's Trust should try to involve members of their fb list in discussion of issues that are relevant to its mission and policies. Such an engagement could also help WT to draw upon their various experiences to enrich their own work.
3)Just keep letting us know what is happening!
4)N/A
5)Detailed Information
6)Tweetups, personal account stories and video links
7) Here more from the women your programs are benefiting

Appendix A cont.– WomensTrust Online Survey & Results

Please indicate your gender

7)

Please indicate your age bracket

8)

Appendix B – Snapshot of Sponsored Community Events by WomensTrust

Communities where the following events were hosted include New London, NH; Short Hills, NJ; and Orange, CA.

Coffee for a Cause
Tuesday, January 10 at 8:30am
1 guest

December 2011

Pizza for Pokuase...a fundraiser for...
Saturday, December 17 at 7:00pm

Shop & Share... Coffee for a Cause!
Tuesday, December 13 at 8:30am

November 2011

What Women Want Now: The New Hampshi...
Saturday, November 12 at 8:00am
1 guest

Coffee for a Cause--Special Day & Ti...
Friday, November 11 at 8:30am
1 guest

Thursday's Child Dinner for WomensTrust
Thursday, November 10 at 4:00pm
2 guests

October 2011

UNA-OC Human Rights Film Festival
Sunday, October 9 at 1:00pm
10 guests

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