Maximizing Use of Social Media to Improve Member Engagement in a Professional Organization

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The North Carolina Association of Nurse Anesthetists (NCANA) is a nonprofit professional state association that promotes and advances the practice of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs).1 The NCANA Board of Directors recognized concerns surrounding member engagement, more specifically communication between the association and the membership (P. Packard, DNAP, CRNA, former NCANA president, written communication, June 2017). Before the project, the NCANA used automated electronic mail, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, face-to-face communications, and mail delivery through the US Postal Service to communicate with the membership; access to the organization’s various social media platforms was also present on the organization’s official website (P. Packard, DNAP, CRNA, written communication, June 2017).

The American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA) serves as the parent organization to the NCANA. Results of a recent study conducted by Farina et al2 revealed that the overall membership in the AANA increased, but the membership for new CRNAs decreased over the past 10 years. Member retention and engagement are closely related. Member communication and engagement is the lifeblood of an organization and is directly related to the success of an organization’s outcomes and goals.3 This decreased membership and engagement at the national level can reflect on membership and engagement level of the state association. Therefore, low membership in the AANA can reflect on the CRNA membership of the NCANA.

Schiefer and Noll4 explain that participation in professional associations provides members with a sense of belonging, builds interpersonal trust, and strengthens core values. Communication is a key component of building trust for leaders in a team and results in increased member engagement and retention.5 The NCANA relies on proper communication and engagement from members to fulfill its purpose as an organization. The NCANA desires regular communication and increased engagement from its members to better advocate for important issues (P. Packard, DNAP, CRNA, written communication, June 2017). To improve member engagement and communication among CRNA members, the president of the NCANA expressed an interest in revamping the social media profile for the organization, specifically Facebook. The NCANA’s Facebook webpage has the greatest number of followers of the association’s social media sites; therefore, it is equipped to have the greatest amount of reach.

Conducted. Results revealed that posting content of public relations/advocacy, the feature of tagging, and the time of week was influential on audience engagement on the association’s Facebook account. The aims of the project were met. Social media allows organizations to employ various features and techniques to increase member engagement and communication. To successfully use social media to engage and communicate with members, organizations will need to continuously analyze and adjust their social media posts.

Keywords: Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, member preference, social media engagement and communication.
Literature Review

Organizations can no longer rely on face-to-face meetings to address member concerns but should use different communication styles and techniques to engage a diverse membership. Informal and supportive communication allows better discussions by promoting trust, and 2-way communication techniques allow increased audience engagement and build relationships. The use of social media allows organizations to communicate directly with members in a variety of ways, and the adoption of various social media–based techniques can allow organizations to improve member engagement. For example, asking questions on social media generates more audience activity than providing general information. Specifically, responses to audiences’ comments from organizations make the audience feel that their input is valued.

Social media posts that cause an emotional response drive followers to be actively involved with the organization. The greater the empathetic level for a cause, the more likely a member will be supportive through social media or in person. Additional tools found on social media platforms can also improve engagement when used properly. A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded with a pound sign (#) to help categorize and index the post. When the hashtag phrase or word is searched by other users, a webpage is brought up with all posts that use the same hashtag. Hashtags are a useful way to make post content accessible to other social media users who have similar interests. Another feature that social media users may use is the “tagging” feature. “Tagging” affords the individuals or organizations the opportunity to increase audience engagement by providing a sense of community. When used correctly, social media can allow engagement and communication with the public.

Although organizations, such as the NCANA, are using social media to communicate with their members, the literature has identified a substantial mismatch between what organizations are posting and what the membership wants to see posted. Social media posts that generated the highest rate of engagement include emotional posts, positive posts, surveys or question-based posts, multimedia posts, and goal-directed call-to-action posts; however, study findings showed many organizations fail to correctly use social media to deliver this content. Certain types of content accounted for the highest number of posts but had the least amount of reaction from members, whereas other types of content represented a low number of posts but generated higher member reaction. Organizations do not fully understand what the public wants from social media and what garners the best reactions on social media, leading to a mismatch in communication and engagement among participants. By understanding how to communicate with members and what content drives the highest level of engagement, organizations can use social media to increase audience interaction with the organization.

Aside from communication techniques and content, the timing of posts on social media affects audience responses. Posting days and the time of day both have an effect on social media engagement levels and depend heavily on the target audience. It is therefore essential for organizations to understand the needs and preferences of their members.

The purpose of this project was to identify CRNA member preferences for social media–based communication and engagement in the NCANA. Because Facebook was the predominant social media outlet for the NCANA with 1,040 followers, Facebook data were used for this project. This project specifically aimed to understand social media engagement by measuring activity levels based on Facebook content and features, understand the timing of social media posts and their effects on engagement levels, and provide evidence-based recommendations to increase social media engagement for the NCANA.

Methods

• Design, Setting, and Sample. To help apply research findings to practice, this project used the theoretical framework of the Settler Model of Research Utilization, which has 6 phases: preparation, validation, comparative evaluation, decision making, translation/application, and evaluation. In addition to a literature review, retrospective data from the NCANA’s Facebook account was gathered from March 2018 to October 2018 and analyzed to formulate evidence-based recommendations for the NCANA Board of Directors. The setting of this innovation was the NCANA and its Facebook webpage. Because of the nature of the project, the data do not contain protected health or personal information.

• Data Collection and Analysis. Facebook data collected for analysis included the (1) number of likes on each Facebook post, (2) number of comments on each Facebook post, (3) number of shares on each Facebook post, and (4) total activity. Total activity combines the total of the number of likes, comments, and shares to gauge engagement levels. Facebook posts were divided into 4 different categories similar to those found in the literature: (1) Continuing Education (CE) Meeting Information, (2) Congratulatory, (3) General Status/Updates, and (4) Public Relations/Advocacy. The overall sentiment of the posts was classified by the project team as positive, negative, or neutral. Two-way communication techniques, the tagging feature, and the use of hashtags were recorded. The appropriateness on the tagging feature that was used on each post was evaluated. Certain posts did not lend themselves to the feature of tagging. The posts eliminated from the analysis of tagging were those associated with the categories of CE Meeting Information and Public Relations/Advocacy. The monthly post count and the types of content posted was
recorded. Posts were further divided into the day of the week on which they were posted to ascertain whether it was a weekday (Monday-Friday) or weekend day (Saturday or Sunday). The time stamp during the day was used to categorize the post as either in the morning or afternoon. Facebook content posted between 12:01 AM and 12 PM was categorized as morning posts. Posts between 12:01 PM and 12 AM were categorized as afternoon posts.

Descriptive statistics were performed to guide recommendations for the NCANA Board of Directors. Analysis of the number of likes, comments, shares, and total activity of Facebook posts were used to inform the innovator and its committee with regard to which types of content are most engaging for members. Content analysis revealed whether mismatch of posting and audience preference exists. Analysis of Facebook features helped determine the type of features that generate maximum audience communication and engagement levels. Analysis of timing of Facebook posts determined the optimal time for the organization to post on social media to maximize engagement from its members.

### Results

The NCANA posted a total of 67 Facebook posts over the 35-week period, equating to an average of 1.91 posts per week. On average, there were 31.22 total activities per post. General Status/Updates content (n=29) appeared most frequently on the organization’s Facebook webpage. However, Public Relations/Advocacy (n=16) had the highest average total activity of 79.88 interactions per post (Table).

Posts perceived as having positive-sentiment (n=44) had an average total activity of 42.89 interactions per post compared with 8.91 interactions per neutral post. Based on appropriateness, the tagging feature was evaluated on 43 posts. When the tagging feature was used (n=16), the average total activity per post was 24.81 compared with 14.15 total activity when tagging was not used. Negative sentiment and 2-way communication techniques were not detected from the sample. The month of June (n=14) had the highest number of Facebook posts. May had the highest average total activity of 84.83 interactions per post. Most posts were posted during the weekday (n=62) and morning (n=43), with the average total activity of 32.03 and 33.58 interactions per post respectively.

### Discussion

- **Content and Features.** The primary aim of this project was to understand social media engagement through the measurement of activity levels based on Facebook content and features. At the time of data collection, the sample size lacked the use of 2-way communication method and the use of hashtags. The organization did not use all available Facebook features. This is in agreement with literature reviews of other organizations. Various studies have found that the use of 2-way symmetrical communication, such as questions and replying to audiences’ comments, increases engagement and promotes dialogue. The audience on social media prefers dialogue over information. The use of hashtags has been found to help promote an organization’s cause; hashtags are powerful in promoting participation, and they help build the brand.

Among the different content categories, the organization had a high frequency of General Status/Updates postings, but the category that had the highest activity level was Public Relations/Advocacy. This signifies a mismatch between content posting frequency and the type of posts with the highest level of activity on the organization’s Facebook page. This finding is similar to work done by Kite et al and Huang et al. Advocacy posts have higher odds of activity in other studies. Informational posts generated the least amount of activity. The General Status/Updates posts by the NCANA were informational and thus garnered low levels of activity. Event posts also generated low activity levels; CE Meeting Information posts in this project were classified as event posts.

The data analysis from the sentiment posts and the use of tagging agreed with the results of the literature review. Positive-sentiment posts were associated with higher readership and engagement. The sense of community provided by tagging can explain the higher levels of activity seen on posts that use this feature. The tagging feature draws fast responses, builds engagement, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total posts per category (percent of total posts)</th>
<th>Total likes per category</th>
<th>Average likes per post</th>
<th>Total comments per category</th>
<th>Average comments per post</th>
<th>Total shares per category</th>
<th>Average shares per post</th>
<th>Total activity per post</th>
<th>Average total activity per post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congratulatory</td>
<td>14 (20.9)</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>33.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations/Advocacy</td>
<td>16 (23.9)</td>
<td>1,002</td>
<td>62.63</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>15.19</td>
<td>1,278</td>
<td>79.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Status/Updates</td>
<td>29 (43.3)</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>10.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE Meeting Information</td>
<td>8 (11.9)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table. Categorical Analysis of Facebook Posts (N=67)
helps start conversations. Therefore, tagging lends itself to 2-way communication.

- **Timing.** By dividing the Facebook posts based on time, this project was able to address the second aim of understanding how the timing of posts by the NCANA affects audience engagement levels. Sabate et al.⁴⁴ found that the timing of social media posts has an effect on audience responses. June had the highest number of posts, but May had the highest average total activity per post. On further analysis, the low activity level for June could be due to the high frequency of General Status/Updates posts, which were previously found to have low activity levels. May had the highest average total activity per post, which could be due to the high frequency of Public Relations/Advocacy postings. Although there is no literature to support which month of the year promotes the highest Facebook activity level, this analysis further solidifies the impact of Facebook content on audience communication and engagement levels. See the Figure for complete results.

Most posts published on the organization’s Facebook webpage occurred during the weekday (n=62). The average total activity per post was higher for the weekday group compared with the weekend group. The literature on this topic is ambivalent; however, results of some studies supported weekday postings as generating more activities. The average total activity per morning post was greater than for afternoon posts. The literature does not specifically support morning Facebook posts generating more activity; nonetheless, multiple studies agree that the timing of posts during the day matters.⁴³,⁴⁵ Furthermore, the overall effect of timing on social media engagement levels depends on the target audience. The literature supports the use of social media management tools to help organizations post in a timely manner to engage their target audience.¹⁸

- **Recommendations.** The use of data analysis and literature review helped to formulate a total of 7 recommendations for the NCANA to help increase member communication and engagement on its Facebook webpage—the third aim of this project.

1. **Post content that drives maximum communication and engagement.** Through the results of the analysis, there appears to be a mismatch between what the organization is posting and the type of content the audience had the highest activity level with. Public Relations/Advocacy posts had the highest level of activity. Although the recommendation may appear to increase frequency of Public Relations/Advocacy posts, it is important to understand the concept of social media fatigue. Social media fatigue is the overposting of content and can drive member engagement in a negative direction. However, social media fatigue is hard to gauge and depends on the community that the contents are targeting. Therefore, the specific recommendation is to maintain the presence of Public Relations/Advocacy posts on the organization’s Facebook page but to increase the frequency during times when members are needed for advocacy works.

2. **Employ the use of hashtags.** The sample data did not use hashtags; therefore, this recommendation is based purely on literature review. Should the NCANA employ hashtags, hashtags should be limited to 2 per post as more than 2 hashtags associated with a post will cause decreased audience activity.¹⁹
3. Use the feature of tagging when appropriate. The use of tagging in the literature as well as by the NCANA generated more activity. For this project, tagging resulted in 1.5 times more activity level compared with posts that did not use tagging.

4. Increase the posting frequency of positive-sentiment posts. Posts that were perceived to have positive sentiment generated more activity. Results of this project demonstrated that positive-sentiment posts had nearly 5 times more activity compared with postings that were perceived to have neutral sentiment.

5. Adopt the use of a social media management tool. This recommendation is supported by the literature. Based on the data analysis, weekday and morning posts had high levels of communication and engagement. The use of a social media management tool will help the organization post content in a timely manner to ensure maximum communication and engagement opportunities.

6. Use 2-way symmetrical communication methods. Examples of 2-way communication methods include questions, surveys, and responding to audience comments. The sample lacked 2-way communication methods from the NCANA; therefore, this recommendation is purely based on literature review.

7. Adopt the use of a continuous evaluation system by the organization’s social media platform. Social media platforms have built-in analytics, such as Facebook Insights, and third-party analytic tools are also available. This recommendation is intended to help the organization with continuous analysis of content being posted and adjust content to maximize audience communication and engagement levels.

This project had some limitations. Although the overall sample size collected (N=67) was adequate to test for significance, when the data were divided among its respective categories, there were not enough postings in the different measures to support the use of a significance test. An example of this limitation is the analysis for weekday vs weekend. The weekday group (n=62) was much larger than the weekend group (n=5). Although this project did not use significance testing, the results are useful in identifying trends. Therefore, this project can be replicated with ease by state and national professional organizations to identify trends in various social media platforms to help increase audience communication and engagement.

Conclusion
Reliance on member communication and engagement is paramount for the success of a nonprofit professional organization. Various methods and techniques can be employed by organizations to help increase member engagement. The use of Facebook for brand building and organizational promotions is cost-effective. Although Facebook has been available to the public since 2004, understanding of how to maximize audience engagement is demonstrated by only a handful of studies. This project provides data analysis and evidence-based recommendations for the NCANA to increase its member communication and engagement on Facebook. The success of using Facebook to improve member communication and engagement will require continual analysis and adjustments.

REFERENCES


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DISCLOSURES

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