

THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS ON POSITIVE YOUTH  
DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF 4-H FACEBOOK PAGES  
AND 4-H'ERS' POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

by

AH RAM LEE

J. SUZANNE HORSLEY, COMMITTEE CHAIR  
KIMBERLY BISSELL  
LANCE KINNEY

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## ABSTRACT

With the hope of raising children and adolescents to become responsible and active citizens with upstanding values, many scholars and educators are paying more attention to youth organizations. Many youth-related organizations have focused their efforts on providing quality programs and opportunities to encourage early participation in civic engagements. These efforts are expected to contribute to positive development of youth and future civic engagements. In order to play a significant role in educating the next generation, youth-related organizations have actively engaged in social media to connect with youth. Social media are believed to promote learning opportunities and communications with youth and educators, which will eventually facilitate positive youth development.

Therefore, this study is designed to (1) examine how youth-related organizations communicate with young members through social media in order to educate them, and (2) examine how their young users perceive the effect and impact of such communication on their development. This research consists of a two-step study to enhance understanding of the communications and its effects on positive youth development. The first step analyzed communication patterns of the national 4-H Facebook page through content analysis of posts from 2009 to 2014. For the second step, in-depth interviews were conducted with recent 4-H alumni, who used 4-H Facebook during the period of analysis, in order to find out their perceptions on the 4-H role in positive development. The results show that 4-H Facebook posts increase the organization's interaction with its young members by building more connections and by somewhat facilitating positive development of youth. These findings suggest some insights

for youth-serving organizations, providing that strategic communications through social media can increase interactions with youth and potentially impact the development of positive traits that will aid them in becoming more active and responsible citizens.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Youth and Social Media**

##### *Youth, A Critical Period*

Youth is a critical period in terms of physical and mental development, and a time for learning important qualities and values in order to become a responsible citizen or future leader. The importance of this stage is described well in a famous metaphor: Suppose that the whole lifetime of an 80-year-old person could be presented in 24 hours. The time of Youth, which is normally defined as being from the age of 9 to 24, would equate to the time between 2:42 and 7:12 in the morning (Kim, 2010). Figuratively speaking, youth exists in the gray of daybreak when people accumulate energy preparing to thrive in the forthcoming day and dream for the future. This view closely reflects the expectations and beliefs that many people have about youth.

Youth was often viewed as a troublesome period in 19th century, when adolescents are vulnerable to risky behaviors and juvenile delinquency (Lerner et al., 2013). However, unlike former negative views regarding youth, positive perspectives on youth have been valued since the 1990s (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins, 2004; Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, 2013). Youth is seen as a time when people prepare for their future by learning and establishing important foundations of their lives, such as personality, attitudes, and value systems (Fraley, Roisman & Haltigan, 2013; Lee & Cole, 2009). Those who establish a good set of virtues during this period often are active civic participants, sustain positive attitudes,

and undertake responsibilities that indicate their possibilities as future leaders in society (Schmidt, Shumow & Kacker, 2007). The foundational traits built in youth serve as strong determinants of future behavior. Therefore, corresponding to the belief and expectation of youth education, developing positive qualities in young people has been a critical task among educators across the globe.

Many societies around the world have focused enormous attention and resources on youth education. Specifically, the United States has invested its resources for youth education in order to teach young people proper democratic values and civic responsibilities. Numerous education specialists and researchers in diverse disciplines have made efforts to devise and search for the best ways to educate young people. As an effective information dissemination vehicle, new media has received particular attention for its significant role in communicating educational messages, especially with young people. In order to inculcate a positive mindset and value system among young people, it is imperative to reach them frequently and effectively. Because of its exponential increase in popularity among young people since the late 1990s, social media have moved to the forefront among appropriate educational medium (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010).

### *Social Media, Inextricable Media for Youth*

Among the various media affiliated with young people, social media have been recognized as particularly crucial. Social media are perceived as desirable media among the young generation due to innovative functions and interconnectivity derived using the latest technologies. In this era of fast changing technology, youth, who possess great abilities to learn and absorb new technology, have naturally become the primary consumers or users of social media (Laing, Commins, & Duffy, 2010; Lusk, 2010). Geared up with various smart

technologies, youth are enabled to constantly tap into social media through various applications, making it an essential part of their daily lives (Basat, 2010; Kushin, 2009). According to the *Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project 2012*, 81% of online teenagers were already engaged in different types of social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and the number continues to increase. Sixty-five percent of teenaged social media users have more than 600 friends on Facebook and check their social networking sites several times daily. These statistics show that young people are actively consuming social media and spending a long time doing so every day. This implies the increased potential of social media as influential media for youth interaction and education.

### **Nonprofit Organizations' Communication through Social Media**

#### *Nonprofit Organizations' Social Media Usage*

Young people are not the only group who are drawn to the merits of social media. Several characteristics of social media, which facilitate interaction among users, renders itself an appealing communication medium for public relations practitioners of diverse fields. Social agents like governments (Avery et al., 2010; Kavanaugh et al., 2012), educational institutions (Crews & Stitt-Gohdes, 2012), and corporate organizations have quickly adopted social media to maximize their communication effects. Nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations (NGOs and NPOs) have also been enthusiastic users of this new media, which requires relatively low cost and has the potential to exert significant influence on people (Pew Research Center, 2013; Waters & Jones, 2011; Water & Lo, 2012).

Numerous NPOs have incorporated various social media in their communication strategies in an attempt to build closer relationships with their publics, to educate the public

about their environmental or philanthropic concerns, and to foster public engagement and dialogue regarding their campaigns and issues. For example, Invisible Children created a YouTube video called “The Kony 2012,” which exposed the cruelty of youth military service in Uganda. It increased awareness of the issue and generated International actions to capture Joseph Kony who was the main culprit behind the brutality (Bresciani & Schmeil, 2012). The American Red Cross also used Twitter after the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti in 2010 in order to understand the realtime information of the situation and to gather international support for relief funds and volunteering (Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011; Smith, 2010). There are a number of NPOs, social organizations, and community groups that have achieved success through effective social media communications (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Lo, 2012).

#### *Youth-Serving Organizations’ Social Media Communications*

These potential impacts of social media have strongly appealed to youth-related nonprofit organizations as well. Youth-serving organizations such as 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Habitat for Humanity, and Girl and Boy Scouts maintain a substantial online presence in the social media sphere. Since social media are deeply ingrained in these organizations, whose main stakeholders are youths, they naturally entered the domain of social media in order to successfully interact and work with their young membership. Their communicative efforts through social media have contributed to building closer and friendly relationships with youth, influencing youth development in significant ways. Social media allow these organizations chances to provide youth information about social issues, educate them about values, and offer opportunities to help address social issues (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

## **Youth-related Organizations and Positive Youth Development**

### *Positive Youth Development*

Considering the effective and positive functions of social media communications of youth-serving organizations, social media can be a critical communication channel for Positive Youth Development (PYD). Positive Youth Development is a framework that was originally used to prevent risky behaviors of teenagers (Schulman & Davies, 2007). Recently, it has been refocused as a model that emphasizes the importance of providing opportunities and services to youth in order to draw positive outcomes and developments for youth (Park, Rodgers & Stemmler, 2011). Previous literature suggests six positive traits as indicators of positive youth development, which are also described as characteristics of a “thriving youth”—competence, confidence, connection, character, caring or compassion, and contribution (Little, 1993; Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2013). This model shows that a youth developmental program helps young people develop these positive traits by educating and encouraging participation in their community and society. Social media are expected to facilitate the development process by empowering youth and communicating with them.

### *4-H Research regarding Positive Youth Development*

4-H, which is one of the oldest and largest youth groups in the United States, has conducted annual research on the effects of organizational programs in facilitating Positive Youth Development since 2002. This longitudinal research is titled *The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* led by Richard M. Lerner, Jacqueline V. Lerner and other researchers from Tufts University. The 4-H report proposes “4-H formula for success” (2013, p.2), which explains the linear process of 4-H youth development. It says that 4-H programs encourage five traits (competition, confidence, connection, character, and compassion) of Positive Youth

Development, and these characteristics lead to an increase in contribution to society and a decrease in risky behaviors.

The 4-H research has consistently revealed a positive impact of the 4-H programs, which provide out-of-school learning, leadership experiences, and mentoring to their youth members, 4-H'ers. These programs are found to increase youth civic engagement, achieve academic improvement, and help promote healthy life habits. According to the 2013 research, 4-H members who are in grades 7 through 12 show approximately four times more civic engagement and contributions to their communities. The 4-H young people are nearly two times more likely to participate in science programs and to make healthier life choices. Furthermore, they are observed to possess higher levels of key characteristics of Positive Youth Development, which denote future successes.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study attempts to examine the potential of youth-related organizations' social media communications in Positive Youth Development. Abundant studies in the literature support the significant role and function of social media in the communication of nonprofit organizations. They are believed to provide an important space for people, especially youth, to communicate with the world, engage with others, learn about societal issues, and possibly develop certain values to perform responsible behaviors. In accordance with scholarly findings, most youth-related nonprofit organizations in practical and professional fields have extended their communication and marketing tools to social media. These organizations, whose members are young and mostly avid social media users, have actively engaged in diverse social media, with

the anticipation of fostering the positive development of their young members, as well as influencing their members' civic engagement in philanthropic works and societal issues.

However, little has been established regarding how youth-related organizations are using social media and how those communications impact youth development. These organizations' social media communications have hardly been measured, evaluated, or studied. With the increasing role of youth-serving organizations educating youth and facilitating positive youth development, it has become more important to analyze how these organizations communicate with youth through social media and determine the outcomes of their communicative efforts. Therefore, this study attempts to enhance understanding of how youth-serving organizations' social media communications might influence Positive Youth Development.

This study chose to examine the social media communication practices employed by 4-H, a youth-related organization that has more than 7 million members between the ages of 8 and 18. To understand the role of social media in promoting positive youth development, the researcher analyzed posts on the 4-H Facebook page and interviewed its users. In Study I, a content analysis was conducted to explore what and how 4-H communicates through Facebook by analyzing the posts of the national 4-H Facebook page during 2009-2014. Study II was designed to conduct in-depth interviews with recent 4-H alumni who had used the 4-H Facebook page when they were members of the organization. The interviewees were asked to share their experiences with the 4-H Facebook pages and their perceptions of the possible impact it had on their positive development. Through investigations of social media usage patterns by the youth-serving organization and its possible impact, the research is expected to provide insights for public relations practitioners of other nonprofit organizations, and for-profit sectors as well, in terms of valuable and practical ways to use social media for youth civic engagement.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Impacts of Social Media on Youth**

##### *Youth*

“Youth” is defined similarly by many organizations. According to UNESCO, an international organization that is actively engaged with the youth of the world, “Youth” is defined as “a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of . . . interdependence as members of a community” (UNESCO homepage, Youth section, paragraph 1). The United Nations (UN) provides a universal definition based on statistical consistency across regions that is used for most international or regional forums and activities across the world, which is that youth are “those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years” (Youth section, paragraph 5). UNESCO and other organizations under the UN have adopted the UN’s definition when implementing their youth programs. Following the UN’s definition, youth is generally understood as a group of people from early teens to mid or late 20s, who are in the phase of changing and learning in order to transit from childhood to adulthood by establishing their own identities. Considering age, and regional and cultural contexts, this research follows the definition of youth provided by the UN. The definition allows for flexibility, considering distinct features of different regions.

Youth is a group that possesses unique characteristics, but also a fluid group, swiftly changing its external and internal features based on surroundings. They exhibit characteristics

such as quick adoption of new environments and fast learning of new things, as well as susceptibility to the influence of environments, cultures, and people (Koh, 2009). Compared to older age groups, they are in the major stage of actively developing their physical and mental abilities, so they are sensitive to what they are exposed to, and easily affected by it. These particular aspects of the nature of youth have bestowed a unique identity on today's youth, extending their leverage in the fast-changing digital world.

Today's youth, who at the time of this research were born after 1990 and have grown up with ready access to the Internet, are often described as "digital natives," distinguishing them from the older generation of "digital immigrants" who were not familiar with new media technologies from childhood (Prensky, 2001). Today's youth, also called 'millennials' (Howe & Strauss, 2004), were born and raised surrounded by a plethora of digital technologies. This 'net or web generation' (Hartmann, 2003, p.2) appears to have developed different language, cognitive and information processes. They are depicted as "active, experiential learners, natural multitaskers, using a range of digital devices and platforms simultaneously to drive their own informal learning agendas" (Bittman, Rutherford, Brown & Unsworth, 2011, p.161).

They play a major role as "early-adopters" in the online sphere by exploring new technologies with repeated adoptions and trials. For example, social media have constantly and quickly shifted in its formation and design. Equipped with advanced new functions and technologies, it was hard for older generations to follow and use, as they typically require a certain amount of time to learn and adapt to new technology. Youth, on the other hand, exhibit qualities that enable them to appreciate the fast-changing new media, and they have quickly become the primary consumers of social media. By soaking up new technologies like a sponge, through use of these special attributes, youth are increasingly important assets and contributors to

a society that will continue to rely more heavily on those who are equipped with innovative technology skills.

### *Social Media*

Social media present a great range in terms of its definition and types supported by ubiquitous online technologies. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p.61). Social media encompass diverse sorts of Internet-based media, and youth have been regularly engaging in different types of social media. Damodar (2012) and Lusk (2010) broadly divide social media based on its characteristics.

- Collaborative web-based projects (content communities that constantly evolve based on the information that people contribute, such as Wikipedia, Pinterest, and Reddit);
- Social networking sites (SNS; Facebook, Myspace);
- Blogs (Blogspot, Wordpress, Xanga) and microblogs (Twitter);
- The creation and sharing of photos (Instagram, Flickr, Photobucket), videos (Youtube, Vimeo, Viddler), audio (Podcasts, Blog Talk Radio), and artwork (Pinterest, Tumblr) on sites; social voting (Digg), social bookmarking (Delicious), lifestreaming (Friendfeed)
- Online Gaming (World of Warcraft);

- Virtual worlds, which are online communities wherein the participant creates an identity and interacts with other community members, usually in a game-type format (Second Life, Zora)

Different types of social media can share similarities to some extent, and some can be simultaneously defined in multiple categories. Among them, social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook and Twitter, have earned the strongest popularity attracting millions of people. The term “social networking sites” is interchangeable with “social network sites,” which also indicates social media that is used to build relationships online. Since the release of the first SNS, SixDegrees.com, in 1997, the growth of these online communities has skyrocketed. Initial studies of Facebook use among college students suggest that individuals also develop more social capital in these online communities (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007).

SNSs provide hundreds of services that cater to a variety of populations (Boyd, 2008), and mediate a vast array of communication among adolescents. Recently, the most popular social media among youth are micro-blogging sites like Facebook and Twitter and sites that enable them to create and share photos, images, videos, and audio, like Youtube, Instagram, and Pinterest. Facebook has been recognized and studied as an influential tool by many scholars from diverse fields. According to a survey conducted by an investment bank and asset-management firm, Piper Jaffray, Twitter and Google+ have grown in popularity since the fall of 2012. Along with the overall popularities of each social media, the number of research studies on the effect of Twitter has been surging (Marketing Charts, 2013).

The popularity of social media has been substantially supported by new media technologies. As technological innovations occur rapidly, many people have easy access to high technology products such as computers, smart phones, and tablets that can grant people access to

the Internet at any time or place. With the introduction of innovative products by Apple, the world started to show interest in “smart phones,” which combine the function of a cellular phone and the merits of a personal digital assistant (PDA) to provide highly functioning access to the Internet and various convenient applications. Today, various makers produce smart phones and smart gadgets that meet a wide range of price points, which means that the devices are no longer exclusively for the wealthy.

According to a report on cell phone activity by Pew Internet & American Life Project (2012), out of the 5 billion mobile phone users in the world, 1.08 billion are smartphone users. In the U.S., more than 91.4 million people possess smart phones. Only 10 years ago, people with average income levels could not afford the expense of living in the smart world, but now, with the relatively reasonable prices and plans offered by mobile phone companies, many people, especially youths, are able to own smart phones and other devices. In addition, under efforts to establish high technology infrastructures throughout the world, many countries, including the United States, European countries, Korea, and Japan, are quickly transforming into societies where technology is ubiquitous. Those societies are highly connected with increasing interactions among users via smart devices. Such wide-spread technologies contribute to increasing attention to social media, particularly among the young generation.

### *Facebook*

Facebook, which was initially launched by Mark Zuckerberg for social networking among university students, has become the most popular social media across generations. Facebook is utilized more by various publics compared to other popular social media, and showed the least difference among publics based on demographic variables, such as gender, urbanity,

race/ethnicity, education attainment, and household income (Pew Research Institute, 2012). For instance, groups of people with different income levels exhibit no significant difference in number of Facebook users. However, the one variable that shows significant determination of Facebook use is age, and the younger generation is the predominant user group on Facebook. Facebook has been well established as an attractive social media for communication purposes, such as a creative communications platform, and a public relationship tool for corporate and nonprofit organizations. In addition, it has attracted people by presenting its potential for educational purposes (Aydin, 2012). It is an interface that enables rich-informational environments and extended interactions among students in and out of classrooms. Facebook's rapid growth has been fueled by its being recognized as the most influential social media among youth.

### *Youth & Social Media*

Among all the new different types of online technologies that youth are known to utilize, the most important has been social media, and it has garnered tremendous attention. Since its introduction in the early 1990s, social media has been in the spotlight as a new medium for social interaction, entertainment and education, attracting millions of users, especially young people. Social media has been constantly and quickly shifting its form, functionality, and design. Equipped with new advanced technologies, social media was slow to attract the old generations, who typically require a certain amount of time to learn and adapt to new technology. Youth, on the other hand, exhibit the requisite qualities to adopt and appreciate the fast-changing new media, and have quickly become the primary consumer of social media (Palfrey & Grassler, 2008; Prensky, 2001).

Their intimacy with new technology has developed more as smart gadgets emerged as essential items. Today's young generation is fully equipped for the various advanced wireless technologies, such as personal computers, notebooks, smart phones, and tablets (Basat, 2010; Kushin, 2009). In the United States, ninety-six percent of 18-29 year-olds and three-quarters (75 percent) of teens now own a cell phone, a significant increase from previous years (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2011). Most of these cell phones owned by young people in this contemporary digital world are smart phones, which provide direct access to the Internet and innumerable applications. These smart technologies gear youth up with powerful resources anytime and anywhere they want them, becoming deeply incorporated in the everyday life of young people (Pew Internet Research, 2013).

By adopting advanced wireless technology from early childhood, today's young people are more empowered to establish a strong identity and presence in the online world. This plays a significant role in youth life, functioning as a useful window for them to learn, play, and interact with others. Kushin (2009) said people start accessing the Internet from the age of five on average and become more adept at dealing with it than any other age group (Basat, 2010). Today's teenagers and children are identified as the first cohort to grow up in this highly wired and technologically rich environment, with almost unlimited access (Laing, Commins, & Duffy, 2010). The overall trend among youth of owning smart gadgets and their abilities to appreciate new technologies proliferated the use and popularity of social media among young people.

The majority of the youth population in the United States constantly taps into the world through social media more than any other medium, including traditional and direct interactions with the world. Youth integrates hundreds of social media channels into their daily lives, utilizing them for a wide range of interests and practices (boyd & Ellison, 2008). The Nielsen

research report revealed that young adults in the United States spend 121.58 minutes checking their social media every day, which is an absolutely significant amount of time compared to time spent doing other daily activities on average. According to the five-year interval studies conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation from 1998 to 2009, young people are found to spend considerably more time with entertainment media, especially online. Today, children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend 7 hours and 38 minutes on average per day using entertainment media like Internet games and videos.

Social media serve as critical tools for youth, increasing their leverage and abilities in diverse aspects. Social media allow young people to create content, share it with others, and participate in instant conversations with anyone, regardless of restrictions of space and time because of its affordable and easily accessible technologies. Teenaged users of social network sites appear to be adept in a variety of other technologies, such as blogging and multimedia production. Social media also allow youth to communicate and connect with their peers and to engage with the outside world (Jenkins, 2003; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010). In addition, young people can be empowered to exert their influence as critical citizens through social media.

As the primary user group of social media platforms, youth create new trends and culture that is fun, personalized, dynamic, fast-moving and perplexing. The critical role of youth in this new media environment has been recognized in many societies, drawing the attention of diverse organizations. Many organizations have been trying to reach the youth population through social media with the aim of promoting youth interaction and education. Especially, nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations have actively involved social media in an attempt to educate

youth to prepare them as important contributors for societal and technological development in the future.

## **NPOs' Social Media Communication**

### *NPOs' Social Media Usage and Benefits*

Evolutionary developments in technology dragged nonprofit organizations out of the Web 1.0 era into the Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 phases (Mansfield, 2011). During Web 1.0, when communications were executed exclusively through traditional media such as TV commercials, newspapers, and radios, nonprofit organizations, with generally tight budgets, had very limited access to the public. In order to reach potential donors and volunteers without huge expenses, nonprofit organizations have forcibly been in the position to be creative, early-adopters of new technology. Some nonprofit organizations quickly jumped into the Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 environments, which offer reasonable and creative communication tools such as social media. Social media is an effective, low-cost media, raising the influence of nonprofit organizations and their supporters.

Notwithstanding the positive anticipations of this new media, many nonprofit organizations seemed to fail to capitalize on their early lead in using social media as communication. Social media communication has not been easy in terms of exploiting its full effect, accepting and utilizing it in proper ways, or investing in this new media within tight budgets. Many researchers revealed that nonprofit organizations showed limited use of social media, failing to reach its full potential (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). However, the philanthropic interest and expectation in new media technology continuously increases (Perlstein, 2011).

Today, social media is situated as an essential media for nonprofit organizations' public relations strategies. The impact that social media created in the nonprofit sector has also been revolutionary. As social media are valued as important tools among NGOs and NPOs, a great number of scholars have investigated the functions and impact of social media usage by nonprofits organizations (Bresciani & Schmeil, 2013; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Such research has indicated several affirmative functions of social media as central vehicles for communication and education, civic and political engagement, and consequently, social change (Auger, 2013; Damodar, 2012; Gladarev & Lokila, 2012; Murthy & Longwell, 2012; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

First, social media functions as a communication tool, which allows creative and affordable avenues for information dissemination and public participation. Social media technologies enable lowering of the transaction costs associated with delivering messages and providing information and services. This new media empowers, not only the nonprofit organization itself but also its publics, to actively produce and share information with others. Many nonprofit organizations provide their members an open platform through social media, offering more opportunities to be a part of communication and information sharing (Aitamurto, 2011). McPherson (2007) revealed that donor engagement of nonprofit organizations can be spurred by allowing them to create and control information dissemination.

Social media is also welcomed by public relations practitioners of NPOs for its positive role in organizational branding and relationship management. Waters and Jones (2011) noted that Youtube video clips of nonprofit organizations can play an important role in constructing organizational identities. The positive functions of social media, which basically stand on the basis of active interactions and engagement, lead publics to be more attached to the organization,

which positively affects organizational relationship management. Social media, particularly for nonprofit organizations, plays a critical role in building and managing sound relationship with publics, by allowing an organization to directly reach out to existing and prospective supporters, and to interact with them by sharing campaign information, having conversations, or receiving feedback from their public.

Secondly, social media serve as a user friendly medium for education. Even though many social media were not intentionally designed for academic use (McEwan, 2012), a variety of existing social media receive credit for educational applications and potential. For example, Facebook was perceived as an interactive educational tool in that it allows students and educators to share information, exchange feedback, and conduct casual and active correspondence. Students also can benefit from similar functions through Twitter, while also learning various things and accessing additional information through unique functions such as hashtags (#), retweets, and at (@). Youtube and Flickr are also important platforms where prodigious audio and visual content is shared by millions of users.

Social media have been adopted by more and more faculty members at universities in order to build closer relationships with students, share information and class materials, and provide diverse learning opportunities and engagement (Blumberg, Blades & Oates, 2013; Grosseck, 2009; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Wang, Lin, Yu & Wu, 2013). These new media are proven to be more motivating than traditional educational materials. Mazman and Usluel (2010) explored the possibility of Facebook as a pedagogical tool and suggested that three dimensions of Facebook, which are communication, collaboration, and resource and material sharing, have positive effects for its educational usage. Blumberg, Blades and Oates (2013) examined the possible educational benefits of online game play for children development in their

contemporary research, and called for the need to investigate the cognitive and educational effects of games. Grosbeck (2009) pointed out the helpful function of blogs for improving writing skills and fostering feedback among and between peers and faculty.

In addition, social media has proven its potential to encourage civic and political engagement beyond personal gratification and entertainment in the literature. The potential of social media has been confirmed by the phenomenon of increased social media usage by federal agencies. Many governments and affiliated organizations have implemented social media to communicate with publics, manage relationship, and encourage civic and political engagement. Nonprofit organizations also engage in social media that often serves as a platform where people can mobilize collective action for social change at a larger level. Interactions through social media contribute to building stronger relationships with publics and augmenting the achievements of grassroots movements and organizations (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001; Norman, 2009).

These functions eventually are expected to benefit the democratization of our society. Halpern and Gibbs (2013) argue that “social media has some democratic potential to integrate diverse sectors of the population, especially tools with greater affordances of identifiability and networked information access such as Facebook” (p.1167). Auger (2013) demonstrated that nonprofit organizations’ social media contribute to a democracy by expanding opportunities for public voices and democratic debates. Kent (2013) also shared the potential of social media technologies to connect publics and encourage democracy and civic participation in our society.

## *Youth-Serving Organizations' Social Media Communication*

Various anticipated positive functions of social media usage have been carefully contemplated by youth-related organizations whose members are mostly avid social media users as well. The proven impact of social media communication suggests its great potential as a tool for youth interactions and education by NGOs. Therefore, it has been a critical task for nonprofit organizations, particularly youth-related organizations, to enter the domain of social media for efficient communication and education (Auger, 2013; Saxton, Guo & Brown, 2007). They attempt to educate youth as important contributors to future societal and technological development.

Youth-serving organizations have exhibited relatively better adaptations and more effort regarding social media communications. Since social media as a multiple-functional tool is deeply ingrained in the daily lives of youths, organizations whose main stakeholders are youths, have naturally entered the domain of social media to successfully interact and work with young people. For example, 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA) and the Girl and Boy Scouts, have developed a substantial prominence in online presence and interaction through social media. As an active youth organization, they have positively utilized social media as their main communication tools to connect with their young members. In addition, many other nonprofit organizations and international organizations, such as the United Nations, Red Cross, and Habitat for Humanity, engage in social media communication for their youth programs.

These communicative efforts have led social organizations to build and strengthen relationships with youth, exerting great influences on youth development in significant ways (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). Social media allow nonprofit organizations to give youth sound information about social issues, let them share the news with their peers, educate them with good

values, and offer them opportunities to contribute to addressing social issues through online interactions. Therefore, nonprofit organizations, through their social media communications, are likely to influence young people in their life journeys to be active and socially responsible adults.

## **The Influence of Youth-related Organizations' Social Media Communication in Positive Youth Development**

### *Youth Civic Engagement and its Impact*

The definitions of civic engagement cover a broad range, sharing a universal core value, which is the “rights and duties of citizens” to participate in a democratic society (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011, p.113). A variety of types of civic engagement encompass all prosocial activities that are intended for the good of the society, such as community works, volunteering, donations and political engagement. Previous literature mainly discussed civic engagement within political boundaries, including political participation in a democratic society, such as voting in elections and supporting certain candidates or campaigns.

Since WWII the continuous decline in civic and political engagement among young people has been one of the major concerns for the United States. The phenomenon has been prevalent in other democratic societies as well, including the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden (Carpini & Michael, 2000). Compared to older generations, young people have been much less inclined to participate in politics and government events. This inactivity in the political process and civic efforts has been viewed as a serious problem for the future of effective democracies (Bennett, Wells & Freelon, 2011). To address the concern, numerous websites were created offering new opportunities to volunteer, vote, and take part in political activities (Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi, 2008).

Online platforms supported by technological developments have drastically widened the breadth of civic engagement, especially for young people who are closely connected to the online sphere. The intersection between technology and civic engagement produced a huge potential for young people to become engaged with their communities. For example, 4-H'ers can share stories about fundraising events through their social media and encourage their friends to donate money for the event. They can also help design the event by sharing ideas, skills and talents online. These processes and experiences are proven to impact similar future activities.

The importance of early civic engagement has been emphasized by several researchers as a mechanism to promote youth development. Youth civic engagement through educational institutions and communities is proven to have positive influence on youth psychological and social development, personal and academic accomplishments, and future civic engagement as responsible citizens (Balsano, 2005). Early experiences in socially responsible activities, such as protecting the environment, helping people in need, and involvement in community events or works are considered valuable influencers for youth to establish forthright values and attitudes, and to be able to identify certain societal issues as concerns. This experiential education is likely to lead young people to join in more civic engagement, and eventually, the positive process is believed to contribute to building a healthy society and sound democracy (Balsano, 2005).

### *The Potential of Youth-related Organizations' Social Media Communications in Positive Youth Development*

There are some researchers who have investigated the possible effect of social media in civic engagement, driven by nonprofit organizations. Curtis et al. (2010) revealed that public relations practitioners of nonprofit organizations use Facebook more actively as their medium.

Interviews conducted by Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar (2014) with twelve activists revealed that activists utilize Facebook to establish and foster online civic engagement. The activists reported that online activism can be performed in five forms through Facebook; collection of information, publication of information, dialogue, coordinating actions, and lobbying for decision makers. Such benefits of using social media seem valid and could be maximized when applied to youth-related organizations.

Researchers and practitioners in diverse areas expect that youth-related nonprofit organizations or youth-serving organizations can take a leading role in establishing and encouraging civic engagement for young people by providing formal and informal programs and venues to learn and participate in societal issues (Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi, 2008). These organizations have been trying to educate youth to obtain upstanding values and engage them in various activities and programs, which might encourage positive development. By primarily working with young people, these organizations will likely provide more opportunities for early civic engagement for their young members.

These youth engagements and experiences through various social media are believed to facilitate the cultivation of positive traits among youth. The continuous and friendly communication efforts of youth-related organizations will lead youth to learn crucial values and traits. Social media can enable this learning process by building closer relationships between youth and the organizations. James Comer, the Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center said “No significant learning can occur without significant relationships” (n.d.). This implies the potential of social media use by youth organizations in positive youth development and their future engagement.

## **Limitation of Previous Research**

The current social media literature has lacked in analysis of communication effects with emphasis on youth-serving organizations. Regardless of the potential benefits and active involvement in various social media, a large part of these communications has yet to be explored.

Today's active online communication environment also poses challenges for NGOs to get on the bandwagon and fully utilize new media tools. Many nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations have not been able to fully utilize these new media nor implement effective social media strategies in general. These failures have been attributed to a lack of organization commitment, the allocation of limited resources for social media strategy and expertise, limited understanding, and insufficient research and implementation (Kanter & Fine, 2010; Levine & Zahradnik, 2012; Waters & Jones, 2011). More importantly, the overall communicative efforts of nonprofit organizations in targeting youth for interaction and education have been relatively scarce. Academic discussion and research have also rarely focused on the effects of the social media communication of nonprofit organizations regarding positive youth developments.

The purpose of this research is to enhance understanding of the relationship between social media communications of youth organizations and its perceived influence on developing positive traits in youth. The research is expected to provide some insight into how to effectively engage youth through social media and how the social media communication affects their members' positive development. By examining the 4-H Facebook page, this study will contribute to broadening the comprehension of actual social media communications by youth-related organizations and how these communications possibly help maximize positive youth development of their youth members. It will be able to shed a light on the role and potential of

social media communications of youth-serving organizations and also propose better ways for them to use social media effectively.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORY

#### **Positive Youth Development**

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a perspective that suggests that all adolescents possess the potential for positive, successful, and healthy development. Rather than looking at negative and risky aspects of youth such as social, emotional, and behavioral problems that they might likely create or face, this model instead emphasizes the promising potential of youth as problem solvers and tries to help youth develop their capabilities (Ersing, 2007). The Oklahoma City Community Foundation (OCCF), a nonprofit organization, defined Positive Youth Development as “a policy perspective that emphasizes providing services and opportunities to support all young people in developing a sense of a competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment” (p. 1). Additionally, Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins (2004) provided an operational definition, saying Positive Youth Development is an approach that seeks to promote bonding, resilience, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, positive identity, and belief in the future. It includes developing social, emotional, cognitive competence, behavioral, and moral competence. It also offers recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for pro-social involvement.

Positive Youth Development has frequently appeared in research areas such as child development and educational psychology. It also has been utilized to assess the effects of programs supported by youth-related organizations. Since the 1990s, many youth programs of organizations like 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, and community and church youth programs have

increasingly considered and implemented principles of Positive Youth Development (Ersing, 2008). These youth-related organizations emphasized the importance of youth programs that satisfy the developmental needs of youth. Children achieve personal and social development through participating in relationships, experiences and opportunities. These processes prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors and stimulate positive youth development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma, 2006; Bruyere, 2010).

Positive youth development allows children to build capacities to thrive in their schools, communities and societies, and show leadership and gratitude. Lerner, Dowling and Anderson (2003) described this thriving process as “adaptive developmental regulation which results in young people who move beyond their own self-interest and place value on, and commit to, action supportive of a social system promoting equity democracy, social justice, and personal freedom—leads to prospering” (p.22). These children tend to develop values for diversity and empathy, showing a willingness to help others and contribute to addressing issues around them. They often exhibit resilience, gratitude and leadership, trying to accomplish positive results for everyone. These characteristics are regarded as the hallmark of Positive Youth Development, leading youth to become upright citizens who contribute to and are responsible in their societies. Positive Youth Development is a critical model, which can explicate possible ways to channel youth as valuable future leaders and citizens.

A variety of factors are considered influences on Positive Youth Development in positive or negative ways. The Search Institute introduced 40 developmental assets in 1990, which are related to skills, experiences, relationships, environments, and behaviors that help youth develop into successful and responsible adults. The assets are largely identified as external and internal assets, including family support, whether community values youth, family boundaries, creative

activities, achievement motivation, caring, planning and decision making, and personal power. A majority of these assets are related to PYD. In addition, Positive Youth Development is affected by environmental conditions. For example, healthy communities and families without poverty positively influence PYD, whereas, child abuse or maltreatment, violence, or racism hinder PYD process (Bruyere, 2010). Participation in faith-based activities and mentoring programs are also good predictors of PYD, preventing negative juvenile behaviors (Dowling, Gestsdottier, Anderson, von Eye & Lerner, 2003).

### **Five Cs of Positive Youth Development**

Little (1993) proposed four Cs that are theoretical constructs of Positive Youth Development: Competence, Confidence, (positive social) Connection, and Character. Additionally, Lerner, Dowling and Anderson (2003) and several other researchers, such as Eccles and Gootman (2002) and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), suggested a fifth C, Caring or Compassion, with an attempt to enhance understanding of youth development encouraged by youth programs. These five Cs are prominent terms used by many practitioners, adolescents involved in youth development programs, and the parents of these adolescents in describing the characteristics of a “thriving youth.” When a young person manifests the Cs across time, he or she will be on a life trajectory towards an “idealized adulthood.” These five Cs are considered as indicators of reflective, constructive, valued, and healthy developmental behaviors in childhood and adolescence, leading to the sixth C, Contribution. According to the 4-H Report on the Positive Development of Youth (2013), contribution is the outcome of PYD, together with reduced risky behavior among youth. These six Cs are a way of conceptualizing PYD.

An annual report by Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development (2013) conceptualized these Cs in detail. First of all, competence, according to the 4-H annual report, is “a positive view of one’s action in domain-specific areas including the social and academic domains” (p.17). Confidence can also emerge in areas such as cognition, health, and vocation (Bottomley, 2013). Bandura (1997) and Schunk (1982) defined competence as an achievement of personally or socially desired outcomes determined by an individual ability to use two kinds of resources: those that are unique to the environment and those that are unique to the individual. This concept is often expressed with words like knowledge, skill, talent, expertise, proficiency or ability, or capacity to perform certain things. Bottomley (2013) offered examples of different types of competence—interpersonal skills like conflict resolution (social competence); cognitive abilities like decision making (cognitive competence); academic performance like school performance including grades, attendance and behavior (academic competence); knowledge and abilities regarding nutrition, fitness and rest (health competence); and work habits and career exploration (vocational competence). Competent individuals have a sense of self-confidence in their abilities to obtain valued outcomes and exercise self-control and self-regulation.

Confidence refers to “an internal sense of overall positive self-worth, identity, and feeling about one’s physical appearance” (p.17). It also reflects the self-efficacy to do certain things. Confidence can be interchangeable with the words like belief, trust, faith, credence, and a feeling of relying on oneself. People with confidence basically believe in themselves and envision a positive future. Connection involves “a positive bond with people and institutions that are reflected in healthy, bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship” (p.17). The concept, character, can be defined as “respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for

correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity” (p.17). Character can be seen as the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual, and synonyms of the term are personality, nature, disposition, temperament, temper, and mentality. Compassion or caring was verbalized as “the degree of sympathy and empathy, i.e., the degree to which participants feel sorry for the distress of others” (p.17). The common definition of the term is “sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others” (p.17). There are various words that also indicate similar meaning, such as fellow feeling, concern, solicitude, sensitivity, warmth, love, tenderness, mercy, leniency, tolerance, kindness, humanity, and charity.

Contribution is considered the final goal of youth-serving organizations, which is the outcome of PYD. According to the model developed by Lerner and colleagues (2013), when five Cs are present in a young person, a sixth C, contribution, emerges. Contribution can take place in diverse ways. Traditional contribution can include physical, intellectual and emotional contributions in traditional ways. Contributions require people to share time, ideas, knowledge, skills, and other things. Bottomley (2013) describes some examples of youth contributions, such as completing house chores, teaching other family members how to use technologies, and suggesting ideas and new perspectives regarding issues in communities and societies. Theoretically, contribution is the outcome of the development of the five Cs, and youth who are equipped with the five PYD components are able to contribute to self, family, community, and civil societies. These young people are believed to present ideological and behavioral contributions by acting to serve their civic duties out of their own moral beliefs (Lerner, Dowling & Anderson, 2003). They will likely engage in such integrated contributions in support of their schools, communities, and societies when they become adults.

## **The 4-H's Positive Youth Development Research**

The 4-H Club has been an active agent in utilizing the model to examine the impact of the 4-H programs on youth members. 4-H has released an annual report called *The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* since 2002. This report aims to assess the long-term impact of 4-H programs on intellectual and civic performance and development of youth. According to the 4-H Positive Youth Development Research page (2010), it has surveyed more than 7,000 youth members from 42 of the 50 states. The youth members, who were in the fifth grade when they participated in the first research, have repeatedly taken part in this longitudinal study. They showed excellent performance in many areas compared to their non-4-H peers.

The results of the 2013 4-H Positive Youth Development research reveal that 4-H'ers obtain significantly higher scores in Positive Youth Development compared to non-4-H youth, especially in grades 8 and 11. In general the 4-H youth are extensively more likely to contribute to their communities, achieve higher Active and Engaged Citizenship (AEC) and academic competence, manifest healthy habits with fewer risky behaviors, and participate more in Science, Engineering and Computer Technology (SECT) programs ("Research-Positive Youth Development", n.d.).

Based on their research, 4-H shares a linear model of how its programs influence positive youth development and lead to contribution. Figure 3.1 shows its basic structure and logic, which were established by twelve years of empirical research. Positive youth development is spurred through the combination of three elements: long-term caring of committed adults, skill-building, and leadership. When young people are provided with these conditions they will show positive developmental outcomes regarding competence, confidence, connection, character, and

compassion. The overall well developed outcomes will eventually generate more contribution and less risky behaviors among the youth. This formula for success contains the overall process of positive youth development by the 4-H, by adding the variables that impact the development and consequences that those youth present.



**Figure 3.1: The 4-H Formula for Success/Youth Impact Model**  
*Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development (2013) 4-H Positive Youth Development research*

### Hypothesis & Research Questions

In this study, Positive Youth Development is used as a measurement to evaluate the communication content of youth related organizations through social media. It is also utilized to examine how those communications are actually perceived to contribute to facilitating positive youth development by young users. The advent and use of social media, especially Facebook pages among youth members, is proven to be closely related to their development and education. Yet, there is no empirical research that supports whether social media communications facilitate

and influence Positive Youth Development. Therefore, in this research, the 4-H Facebook pages are tested for validity and potential within the process of PYD.

Numerous previous studies reveal that social networking sites, especially Facebook, can offer diverse learning opportunities and resources for education. They function not only as direct educational sources, but also as a means to promote learning experience through close relationships. As James Comer, a leading scholar in child psychology, emphasized “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship” (class lecture, 1995). Relationships play an important role in the learning process, especially for children and youth. Social media are proven to increase the quality of interactions and relationship among users by sharing social and emotional support, and bonds with other people who work, study, and live around them (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011).

These functions of social media are expected to contribute to Positive Youth Development. Bers (2010) claims that technologies can be critical epistemological tools for youth education by introducing a new framework, Positive Technological Development (PTD). He reveals the potential of PTD as a pedagogical guide in creating a youth’s personal improvement and contribution to society. The integration of digital technologies and education connotes innovative and influential ways to impact youth developments. In addition, previous literature regarding the positive impacts of social media use by NGOs and the relationships between online media use and youth civic engagement have supported these hypotheses. Social media communications possess sufficient potential to aid in promoting positive youth development and consequently, future civic engagement. This argument led to the following hypotheses:

H1. The 4-H Facebook page's communications encourage Positive Youth Development for its youth members.

H1a. Use of the 4-H Facebook pages is positively related to an increase in competence.

H1b. Use of the 4-H Facebook pages is positively related to an increase in confidence.

H1c. Use of the 4-H Facebook pages is positively related to an increase in connection.

H1d. Use of the 4-H Facebook pages is positively related to an increase in character.

H1e. Use of the 4-H Facebook pages is positively related to an increase in compassion/caring.

H2. The 4-H Facebook page communications are positively related to an increase in youth civic engagement and civic contribution in adulthood.

In addition, communications and interactions through social media, targeting youth members, can be different from other generations. Young people use social media in a very different way based on their unique online characteristics. In order to interact with them, many youth-serving organizations have actively communicated via social media. They need to show an online presence in the social media sphere and also disseminate content that will capture youth interests. Considering these conditions, youth organizations' social media communications might possess certain content and patterns in order to attract their youth members. The research questions below are designed to determine whether youth-related organizations employ different and unique ways to communicate with their youth members:

RQ1. What is the 4-H Club and how does 4-H communicate online in general?

RQ2. How has 4-H been utilizing its Facebook pages? What is the primary message type of the posts? (frequency, pattern, formality, and primary message of the 4-H Facebook posts)

RQ3. What kinds of communication strategies are primarily used by the 4-H Facebook pages?

RQ4. What kinds of PYD traits are promoted by the 4-H Facebook posts?

## CHAPTER 4

### METHOD

#### *Research Subject and Study Design*

This study is designed to investigate the influence of social media communications by youth-related organizations on their members' positive development. In order to achieve meaningful data and results, many youth-related organizations were initially checked, such as the FFA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and the like. The 4-H Club was selected among the organizations in consideration of its comprehensive activities and large scale. 4-H has organized and provided a variety of programs, covering agricultural science to civic activities, for young people for the last 112 years. More than 7 million youth and adults have been involved in the organization as members. It is widely regarded as a leading youth organization in the United States and has a significant impact on youth, as well as people of all social strata. Considering the characteristics of the organization, it was perceived as an appropriate subject for the study.

Among the various social media of the organization, the 4-H Facebook page was studied because it has been the most invested one among social media by 4-H and the most popular social media among 4-H'ers. Numerous 4-H Facebook pages and groups exist based on the users' residential locations, ages, and activities. Among them, the 4-H national chapter Facebook page was chosen to be analyzed because the national level page has been the main communication tool by 4-H and serves as an important source for the local 4-H Clubs' social media accounts. Many lower level pages, such as state and county level Facebook pages, share the same content, excluding local news and activities.

This research consists of two complementary studies. Content analysis and interview were used to investigate the possible relationship between the social media communications and positive youth development. The first part of the research focuses on examining 4-H Club's social media communications practices through analyzing 4-H Facebook page's posts. The analysis aims to learn how 4-H communicate with youth and how it could facilitate positive youth development through the Facebook page. Then, for the second phase, recent 4-H alumni who have actually used the posts during their memberships were interviewed. They shared actual experiences of using the 4-H Facebook page and their perceptions of the impact.

In the first study, the overall social media communication practices of the 4-H were examined. This analysis includes the type of online communication channel, the number of users or followers or subscribers, joined or launched year, and the total number of posts. All posts of the 4-H Facebook page between 2009 and the first quarter of 2014 were extracted for content analysis. These posts were coded based on a coding scheme that covers the basic information of a post, communication strategy, including organizational disclosure, information dissemination, and involvement, and elements of positive youth development used in a post.

The second part of the research investigated the actual experience of 4-H'ers with the 4-H Facebook page and its impact on positive youth development. In-depth interviews with the recent 4-H alumni were conducted. Seven interviewees were aged between 19 and 23 and were mostly freshmen or sophomores in college. They also utilized 4-H Facebook pages when they were active members. These college students or graduates were asked to share their past experiences with the 4-H Facebook page and their opinions of how those experiences might have impacted their positive youth development.

### ***Study I: Content Analysis of the 4-H Social Media and the 4-H Facebook Pages***

The coding scheme employs two primary categories, which are “General Social Media Communication Information of the 4-H page (Category 1)” and “The 4-H Facebook Page Analysis (Category 2).” Category 1 analyzed social media presence and practices. All social media channels were examined by looking at the number of users, followers or subscribers; joined or launched year; and the total number of posts. Category 2 is comprised of five parts—organizational disclosure, information dissemination, involvement, basic information of a post, and positive youth development. See Appendix A for the coding sheet.

The coding variables for the first three parts—organizational disclosure, information dissemination, and involvement—were mainly employed from the previous literature regarding online communications of nonprofit organizations and corporate sectors (Brightman, 2012; Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009). These three parts were modified when applied to social media content analysis in order to determine the communication strategies used through the 4-H Facebook pages. Organizational disclosure was examined based on the inclusion of a description of the 4-H; programs or activities of the 4-H; history; mission statement; organizational links or URL; 4-H logo; and whether a post mentioned local clubs, partners, sponsors, or alumni. Information dissemination was assessed by determining whether a post included the following: a photo, video, links, hashtag (#), at (@), tag, and source of press release (online or offline news media). Involvement was evaluated when a post contained information regarding program participation, volunteer opportunities, donations, names of stores, and encouragement of online interaction.

Additionally, basic information and characteristics of each post were collected and coded. This part examined target, tone, form, visual characteristics, and interactive features of a post.

Corresponding to the research topics, the coding scheme was developed by including the last part, Positive Youth Development. This part evaluated whether a post encouraged PYD traits: (1) competence, (2) confidence, (3) connection, (4) character, (5) care/compassion, and (6) contribution. In addition to these 6 Cs, Comic or Conviviality, was added based on the observation of the 4-H posts. Comic/Convivial-related posts are designed to amuse and entertain an audience with funny factors, forming a positive atmosphere. In order to develop a coding scheme for PYD traits, definitions of six PYD traits were first identified from the 4-H's annual report on Positive Youth Development (Lerner, Bowers, Geldhof, Gestsdóttir & DeSouza, 2012; Park, Rodgers & Stemmler, 2011; Waters & Jones, 2011). Whether a post contained or encouraged the development of a trait related to these seven elements was determined based on the definitions.

First, competence was believed to be encouraged among youth when they received opportunities to practice skills and accumulate knowledge. For example, young people who are informed about nutrition will gain competency to maintain a healthy and balanced diet. When youth were exposed to information about certain activities and opportunities they would have a chance to gain competence in related matters. Second, confidence in oneself or in performing certain things can be increased by obtaining competence and opportunities, receiving positive feedback and direction, observing peers' successes, and encouraging others to try out new activities or programs. Third, connection can be enhanced by improving or maintaining positive relationships. It can include promoting participation and involvement in certain work of a group, exposure to peers' work, developing relationship skills like interpersonal communication skills, and receiving feedback from others. For instance, when youths are volunteering or attending community activities they can feel more connected to the community.

Fourth, character is about building value systems and morality. It can be developed through questions and encouragement regarding certain personal beliefs or societal and cultural rules. By learning through a model that exhibits sound character and being constantly exposed to upstanding values and morality, young people can develop character. The fifth C, compassion or caring, is basically the ability to understand others' feelings and situations and a willingness to help them. These traits can be improved through learning stories of those in need and observing models who exhibit this value. This can also be cultivated through volunteering, participation in certain experiences with difficulties and using kind words. Lastly, youth can be encouraged to make contributions online and offline. Contribution in a traditional sense would include monetary donation and volunteering for communities and the 4-H programs. Online contribution can cover much more actions such as liking, commenting, sharing, and response to TBT or trivia.

Approximately 150 posts were initially analyzed to test whether the newly developed coding scheme could be applied to the entire analysis. After several revisions, the overall coding scheme was set, and the total of 495 posts uploaded from January 2009 to March 2014 were coded during the spring semester of 2014. The content analysis of wall posts was applied to those displayed on the main page of the national chapter 4-H Facebook page.

### ***Intercoder Reliability***

In order to assess reliability for the content analysis, two coders, including the researcher, were trained for about 4 hours to code posts from the 4-H Facebook page. Forty-nine posts, which is approximately 10% of the total 495 posts, were coded in common by the two coders. The detailed information regarding the coding instrument, procedures, and instructions are attached in Appendix A. The random sample posts were drawn from January 2012 (17 posts) and

January 2014 (32 posts). The Kappa was utilized to test reliability, and resulting score of .958 exceeded the standard suggested by Bachen, Raphael, Lynn, McKee & Philippi (2008) of .80. Each of the four categories exceeded acceptable levels using the Kappa formula, presenting .928 for the basic post category; .975 for the organizational disclosure/category 1; .967 for the information dissemination/category 2; .958 for the involvement/category 3; and lastly, .924 for the positive youth development variables.

Regarding intercoder reliability for each category, basic post information (category 1) shows high reliability. Reliability for the main visual characteristics of post was .906; sentence form of post was .917; tone of the post was .921; sources of post was .860. Intercoder reliability for Organizational Disclosure appeared to be high. Test results for organizational description was 1.000; program activities kinds was 1.000; history was 1.000; mission statement was 1.000; organizational link was .946; logo was .916; partners or local administrators was 1.000; and alumni was .851. For the Information Dissemination category, intercoder reliability for photo was .878; links was .878; press release was 1.000; hashtag (#) was 1.000; at (@) was 1.000; and tag was 1.000. The involvement category also showed high intercoder reliability, with program participation (.876), store (1.000), and online interactivity (1.000). Finally, each variable in the positive youth development category was assessed as reliable. Reliability for competence was .832; for confidence was .831, connection .790, character .830, compassion 1.000, contribution 1.000, and conviviality .921. A few variables were not computed with Kappa, such as target, video, and donation.

## ***Study II: In-depth Interviews of the 4-H Alumni***

Study II was designed to examine the actual effect of the 4-H Facebook communications through interviews with recent 4-H alumni who had used the 4-H page. The participants were restricted to recent 4-H alumni who had used the 4-H Facebook pages during their membership and were 19-23 at the time of the interview.

Multiple methods were used to recruit participants. First, the 4-H extension specialists and alumni were asked to recommend recent 4-H alumni. The referrals of 4-H extension specialists of Madison, Lee, Jefferson, and Tuscaloosa counties in Alabama were the main sources of the recruitment. On local and national chapter 4-H Facebook pages, recruiting posts were also uploaded and a flyer was uploaded for advertising as well (Figure 4.2). Second, the Institute of Communication and Information Research (ICIR) shared research information for the College of Communication and Information Sciences participant pool website. Third, the Department of Advertising and Public Relations delivered the research invitation via its social media.

Seven participants who were undergraduate or graduate school students agreed to participate in the research. Kvale (2007) stated that the optimal number of interviews depends on the research topic, but the recent trend is to have fewer interviews with more time and preparation. Those participants were a convenience sample contacted through email or Facebook messages to receive screening questions and detailed information about the research. Two participants who are students of The University of Alabama were asked to have an in-person interview in a campus seminar room. The other five interviewees were from other cities and states and were interviewed over the phone. For approximately for 45-60 minutes they shared their perceptions and thoughts through in-depth interviews. The interviews were recorded on a

smart phone device and later transcribed into separate documents. The use of mixed methods compensates for the small number of interviews, strengthening the findings.

In the interview, they were asked to share their basic demographic information, such as sex, age, ethnicity, college, major, and family socioeconomic status. They also shared their general Facebook usage patterns such as the number of hours spent on the 4-H Facebook pages or groups, number of logins, and number of postings per day and week. The level of engagement and experience with 4-H Facebook pages were investigated. While sharing their past experience, the participants were asked to share their perception of the influence of the 4-H Facebook pages on their positive development. In other words, the interviewee talked about how the 4-H Facebook pages impacted the development of each trait of Positive Youth Development. Their current civic engagement and community activities were also examined in order to determine possible connections between the 4-H Facebook pages and future impact. See Appendix B for the interview guide.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### **The 4-H Club and its Communication**

*RQ1. What is the 4-H Club, and how does 4-H communicate online in general?*

The general information pertaining to 4-H was analyzed in order to enhance the understanding of the organization and its communications. First, several categories including the origin, goals, mission, main research areas, programs, main target audience and demographics of members were gathered. Second, the basic communication practices of the organization were examined, focusing on 4-H's communication efforts through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

#### *The 4-H Clubs*

The foundational background of 4-H was built on the realization among researchers in the late 1800s that adults in rural areas were not readily accepting new farming techniques and ideas ("The Birth of 4-H Programs," para. 3). Seeking a breakthrough by educating young people who were open to new ideas, agricultural technologies, and sharing their experiences with adults appeared to be a promising way to facilitate youth development and community advancement. There had been efforts to connect public education to country life by building community clubs that could contribute to addressing agricultural challenges. The forerunner of 4-H was created in the middle of the movement.

In 1902 A. B. Graham, who was a school superintendent, established a youth program named either "The Tomato Club" or the "Corn Growing Club" in Clark County, Ohio. Jessie

Field and O.H. Benson, who were supervisors of youth clubs in Iowa county schools, contributed to establishing early 4-H programs (“The Birth of 4-H Programs,” para. 5). These pioneers provided young people with education about advanced agricultural and homemaking knowledge and designed exhibitions where students could share their own products. The exhibitions attracted sponsors and expanded the contests to include various crops like corn, tomatoes, and oats. Later, exhibiting farm animals and home management skills such as gardening and cooking were added. Similar local youth programs and clubs were formed throughout the country. These clubs organized nationally and in 1912 took the name of 4-H Clubs.

The 4-H Club has cooperative relationships with the federal, state, and local governments, as well as social organizations in diverse fields. Among the various groups, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has most closely partnered with the 4-H Clubs from its beginning. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established a Country Life Commission that called for rectifying deficiencies in rural areas through practical education in agriculture and housework. The USDA has supported the Cooperative Extension System, a partnership of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) within the USDA, connecting resources and expertise from 109 land-grant universities and more than 3,000 county offices in the United States (The Birth of 4-H Programs, para. 7; 4-H History Timeline, n.d.). This network helps 4-H Clubs by enabling nationwide educational programs and research. 4-H has become one of the largest youth-related organizations in the United States with nearly 7 million members. According to the National 4-H Headquarters CSREES, USDA data, 4-H youth development programs have spread to 70 countries around the world (“The 4-H Cause Marketing Opportunities,” n.d.).

The 4-H organizational mission is to “empower youth to reach their full potential, working and learning in partnership with caring adults” (“4-H Mission, n.d.). The vision of 4-H is to create a world in which youth and adults learn, grow and work together as catalysts for positive change. The four H’s represent Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. Each H contains values that youth members must pursue through 4-H programs. Head refers to managing and thinking, while heart indicates relating and caring. Hands symbolize giving and working, and health pertains to living a healthy life. The current emblem of the 4-H, the green clover with an H in each leaf, was designed in 1910 (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014).

4-H has a complex structure containing a number of subgroups and teams designed for different missions and purposes. For example, the *National 4-H History Preservation Program* releases monthly newsletters providing digitalized documents, photographs and instructional materials regarding 4-H from its beginning. This program is executed in close collaboration with the national 4-H headquarters at USDA, National 4-H Council, State and County 4-H programs, and the 4-H History Preservation Program (National 4-H History Preservation, n.d.). The *National Association of Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA)* is one of the largest associations with nearly 3,600 educators and professionals working for youth development. Numerous sub-organizations serve as building blocks or important cogwheels for the entire organization (National Association of Extension 4-H Agents, n.d.).

#### *The 4-H Clubs’ Online Communication Efforts*

The second part of the basic information regarding 4-H contains the organization’s overall online communication practices. 4-H’s national website contains a rich trove of information and resources related to 4-H organizations and its activities. It has different links that serve as a liaison between different interested groups such as 4-H’ers, 4-H alumni, education

professionals, sponsors, and investors. These groups are allowed to have their own websites for their activities and tasks, and are regularly informed with updated news through periodicals or newsletters. In addition to the website, 4-H has been a fervent user of various social media compared to other nonprofits or social organizations. Social media seem to serve as the primary form of media in communicating with their members, which is apropos considering the unique characteristics of their youthful members.

4-H took its first step into the social media sphere in 2009, starting with Facebook. According to the data retrieved on March 19, 2014, the 4-H Facebook page has been the most popular one among 4-H's social media, and currently has 489,734 likes with 41,470 followers. The 4-H Twitter account is the next most commonly used social media, and has 8,270 tweets and 16,800 followers at the moment. 4-H created its Instagram account on January 10, 2013, and uploaded 124 posts. Since the increased popularity of Instagram among young people, it has become a popular media form where people share their 4-H photos. The 4-H Instagram has 1677 followers and follows 20. The 4-H YouTube channel, which was introduced on Aug 24, 2010, shares 212 videos with 112,638 total views and has 394 subscribers. The 4-H Pinterest consists of 11 boards, and there are 247 pins and 54 likes. 4-H also joined LinkedIn and Google+, which are relatively dormant. A Blog called "4-H Today" is another online communication channel where 4-H'ers and 4-H professionals share their experiences and news about the organization. Multiple writers are engaged in the blog providing posts under different topics such as science, citizenship, healthy living, partnerships, pledge to youth, and 4-H professionals ("4-H Today", n.d.).

Each of the 4-H social media outlets has been utilized in different ways based on the unique functionality that each possesses. The number of users or followers is different for each

social media. While Facebook has shown the most interactions and popularity among the 4-H'ers and other stakeholders, other 4-H social media have provided varied types of opportunities for its audience, attracting them with distinctive communications. The 4-H's communication efforts through these diverse social media are perceived to facilitate the aggregation of small individual actions online and offline into meaningful collective results.

### **Study I: The 4-H Facebook Communications**

Among the online communications through various social media, 4-H Facebook is unchallenged as the primary communication medium. Facebook has achieved recognition for its usefulness and value as an effective medium that encourages interactive communication and online participation. The 4-H Facebook pages have the largest contingent of fans and the most feedback from 4-H'ers about its online content.

#### ***Characteristics of 4-H Facebook Posts***

*RQ2: How has 4-H been utilizing social media? What is the primary message type of the posts?*

The frequency of 4-H Facebook postings and interactions has been on the increase. From when it launched through the end of March 2014, 495 posts were uploaded on the 4-H Facebook pages. Figure 5.1 and 5.2 show the average number of posts by year and quarter. The total number of posts uploaded every year has steadily increased. About every three months from 2009 to 2013 there is a similar increase, ranging from 19 to 33. However, a dramatic increase occurs in the first quarter of 2014 reaching 102, which is more than three times the average number of postings per quarter through 2013 (20.68).

Figure 5.1 The Number of Posts by Year

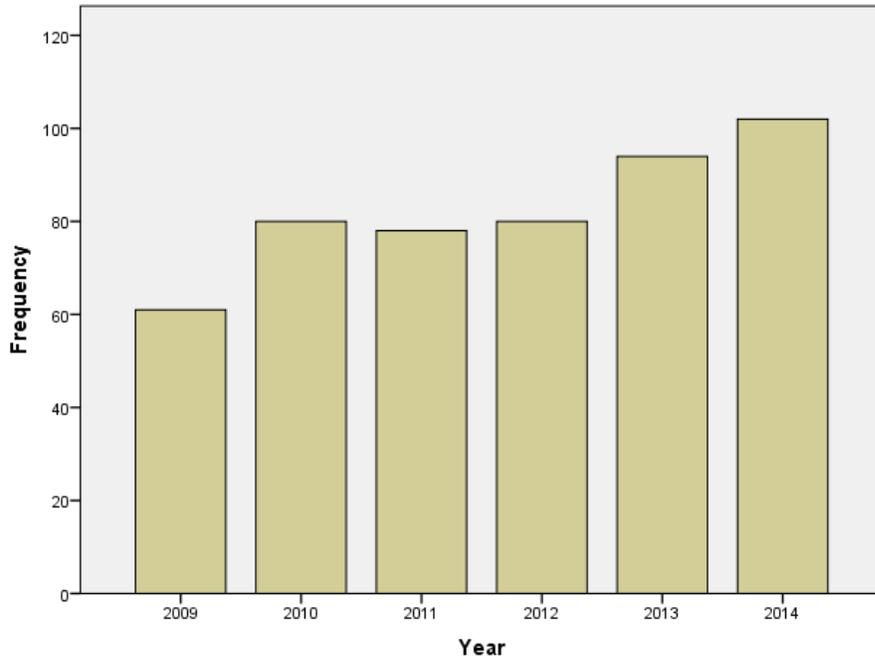
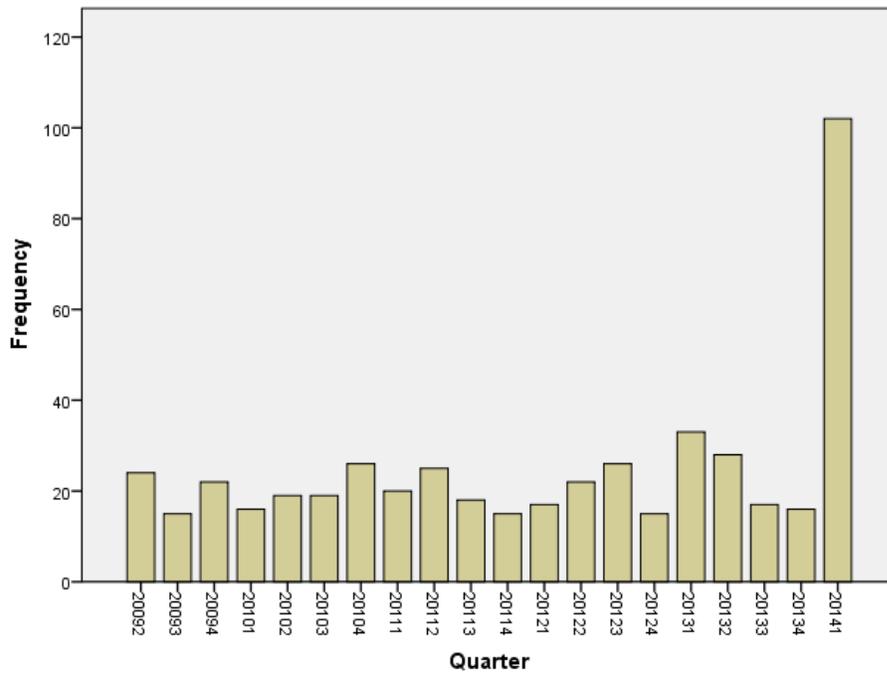
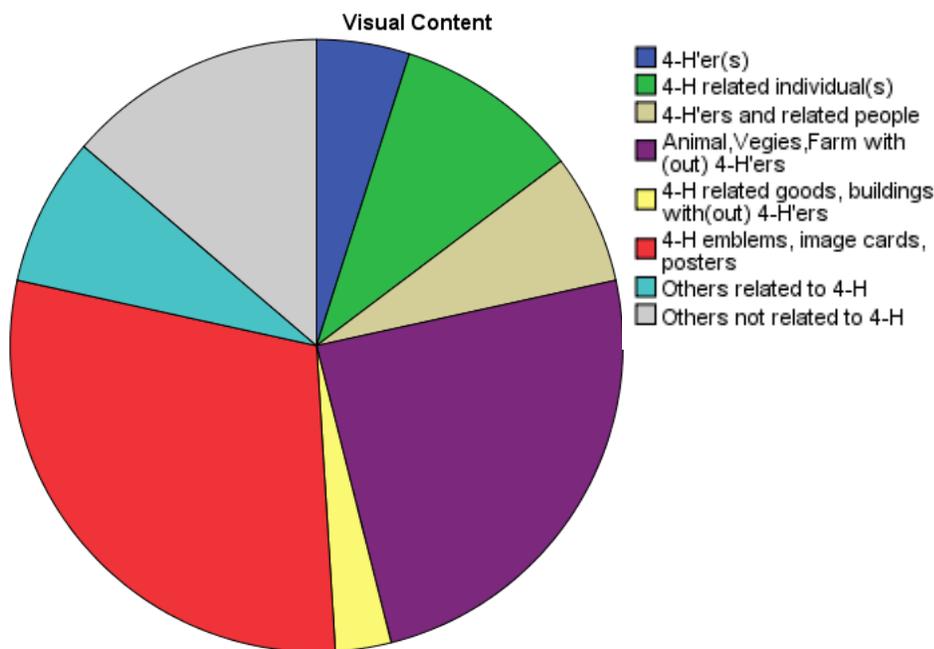


Figure 5.2 The Number of Posts by Quarter



There are 68.9% of total posts that contain some kind of visual image. Overall, the most often used type of visual content is 4-H emblems, image cards, or posters that can be shared with others. For example, for Mother’s Day, 4-H uploads image cards that can be used as thank-you cards for mothers. 4-H also often shares cover photos that display 4-H symbols and mission statements. These promotional pictures were uploaded the most (16.4%). The next popular subject for visual files is photos of 4-H’ers. For example, 4-H shares images of 4-H’ers who might have participated in a fair, of their Clover ribbon awards, of fundraising events, or of science projects. The third most common visual image is categorized as Others, meaning things related to 4-H such as poll results, or 4-H characteristics cut into a corn field (9.5%). Images of 4-H related individuals like partners, alumni, and mentors are next (7.5%), followed by pictures of animals, vegetables, or farms with or without 4-H’ers visibly present (6.3%), 4-H’ers and relatives (5.5%), and 4-H related goods or buildings with or without 4-H’ers (4.2%). Generally, the proportion of posts without a picture was in significant decline. Other kinds of pictures have been increasing, especially posts with animals, vegetables, farms, and 4-H emblems.

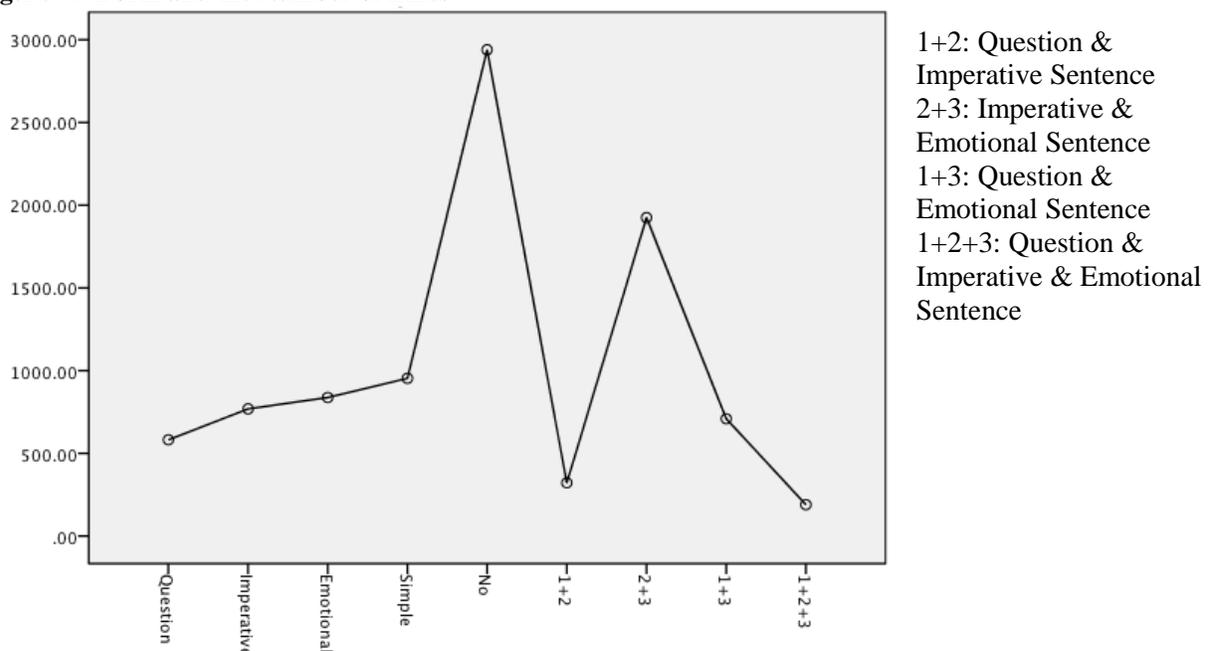
**Figure 5.3 Visual Content Composition**



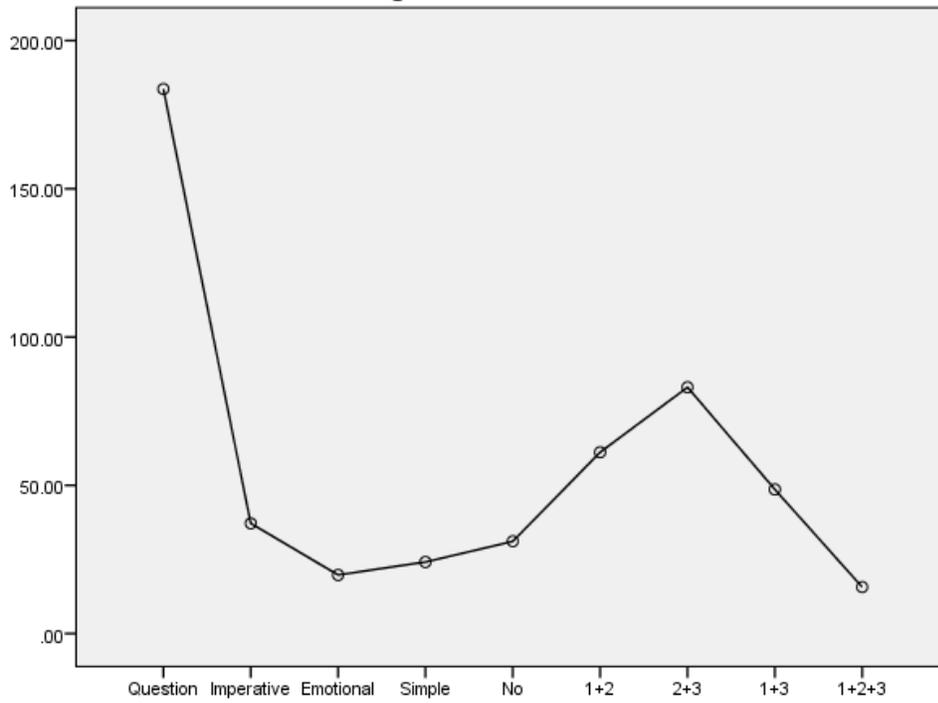
Over half of the posts were open to a general audience (50.1%) and 35.6% were intended specifically for 4-H'ers. Among the total posts, 46.3% have sources or links, and the primary source is the 4-H main website (12.5%), followed by the 4-H partners or sponsors including corporations, educational institutions or government (e.g. USDA, universities) (8.9%), and social media like Instagram, Redditor, or Storify (7.7%).

The language used for the 4-H posts is mostly conversational using emotional and personal sentences. Eighty-three and a half percent of the total posts have either question mark or exclamation point. Imperative sentences appeared the most frequently (53.4%), while the question mark was used often (35.7%). Rather than simple sentences, the posts with question marks or exclamation points appear to generate more interactions with users. Posts that contain question marks got more comments (Figure 5.4). There seems to be no relationship between any certain form and the number of likes and shares. However, Figures 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 show that posts that contain only visual files without sentences were liked and shared the most. Posts with a combination of imperative and emotional sentences also received high attention in likes, comments, and shares.

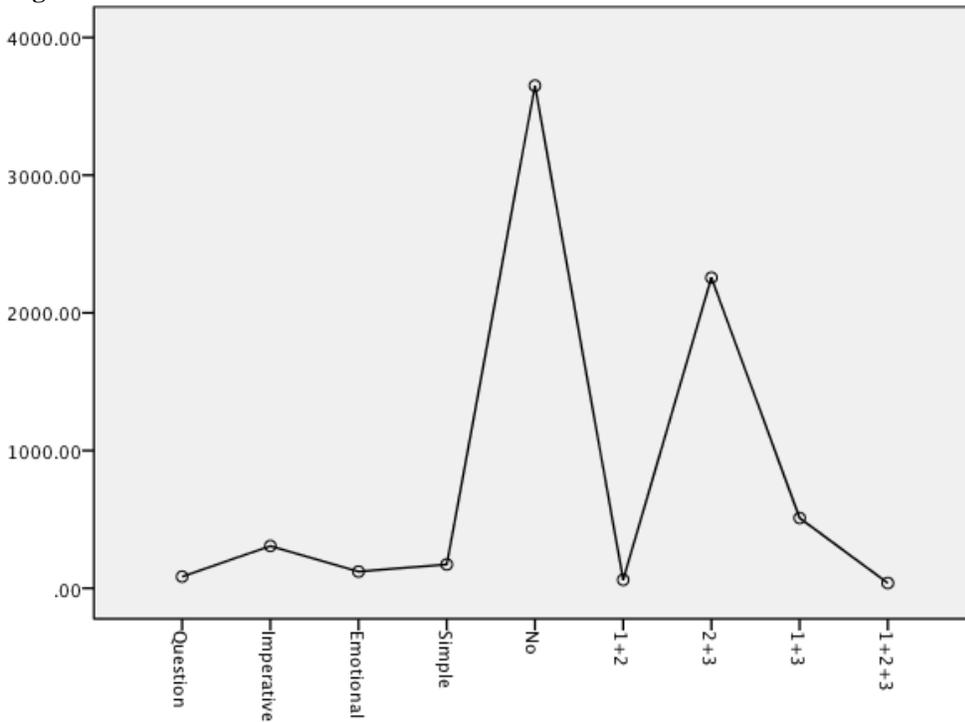
**Figure 5.4 Form and the Number of Likes**



**Figure 5.5 Form and the Number of Comments**

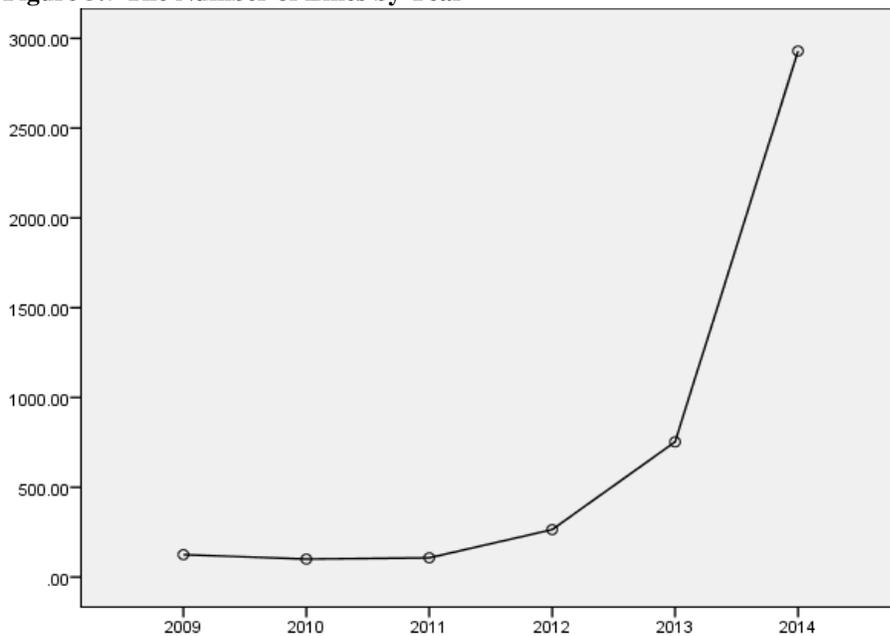


**Figure 5.6 Form and the Number of Shares**

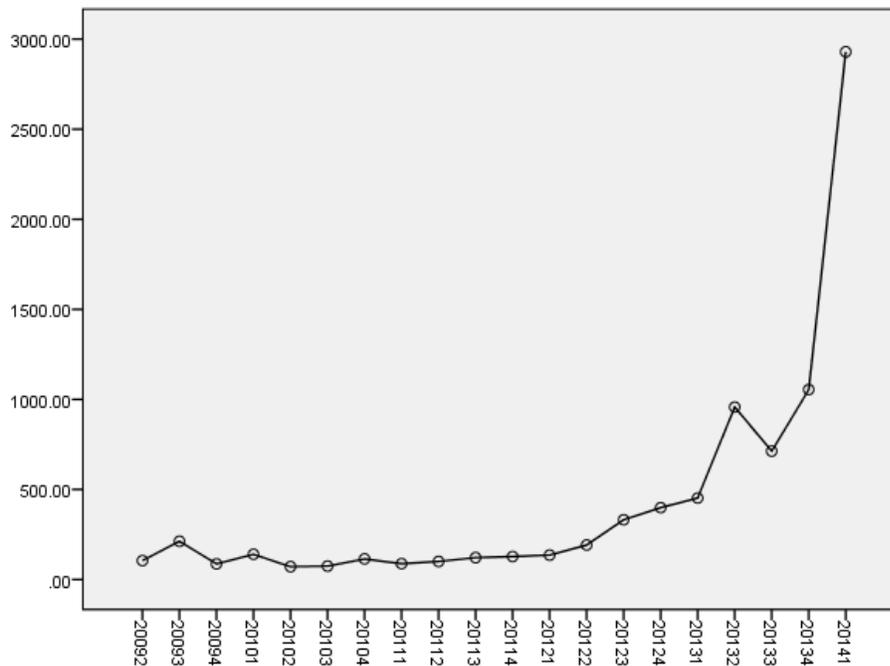


The interactive features of the 4-H Facebook pages can be shown through the frequency of “likes,” “comments,” and “shares.” Figure 5.7 illustrates that all three variables have been on the rise over time. The means of these interactive figures also have soared during the first quarter of 2014. Compared to the averages of likes (288), shares (51), and comments (45) of previous quarters, the first quarter of 2014 shows approximately 2,929 likes, 1,869 shares, and 141 comments per post.

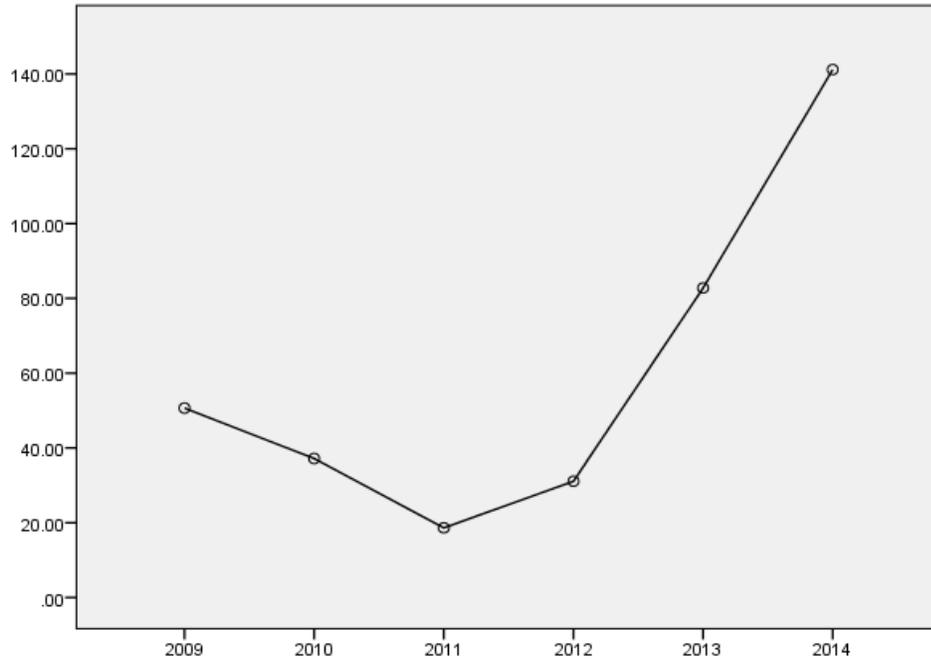
**Figure 5.7 The Number of Likes by Year**



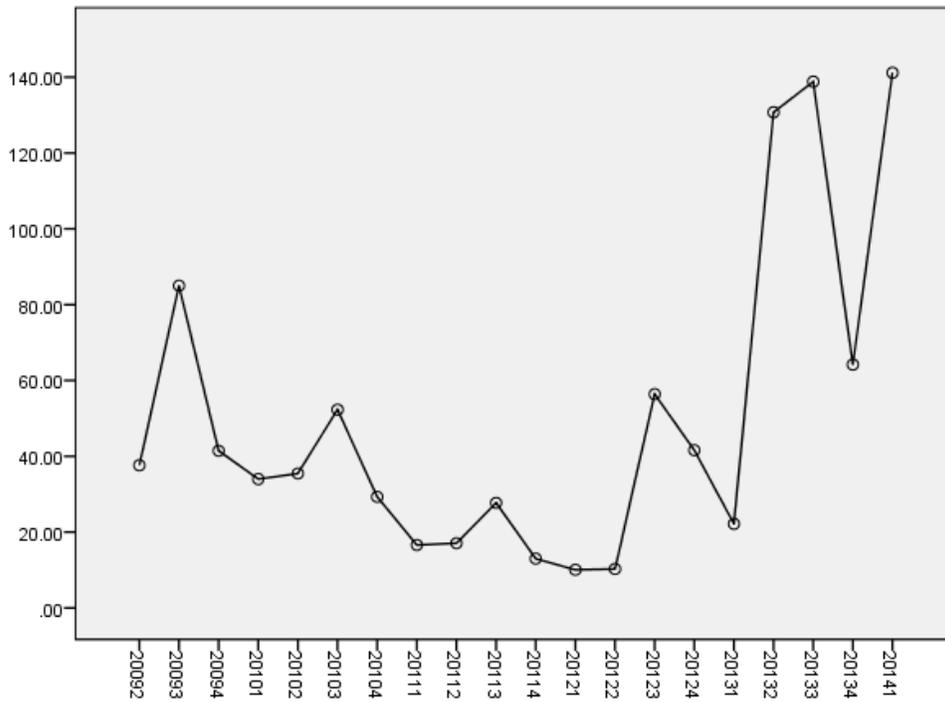
**Figure 5.8 The Number of Likes by Quarter**



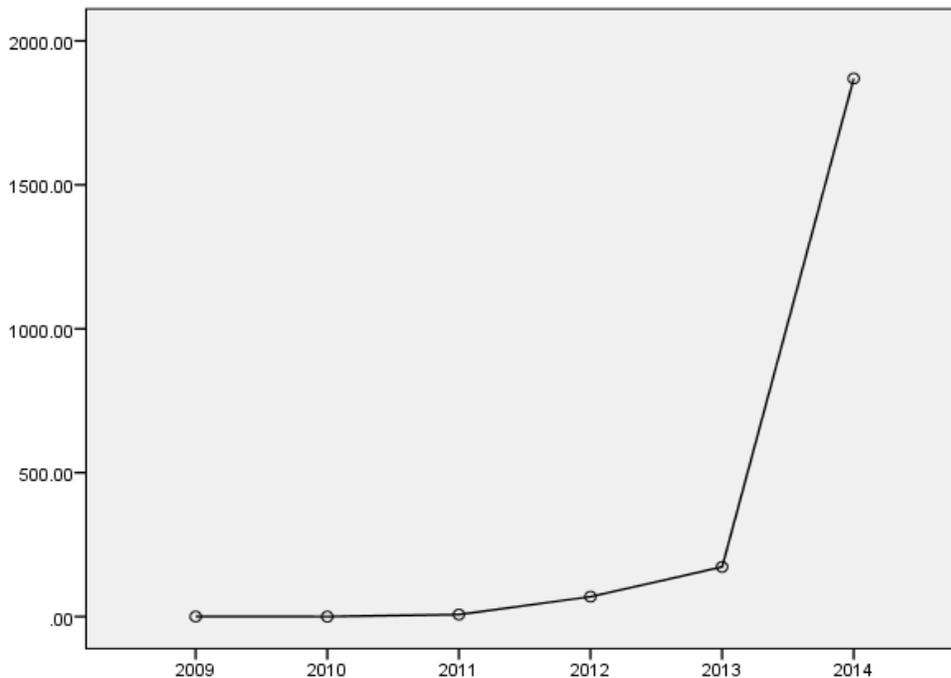
**Figure 5.9 The Number of Comments by Year**



**Figure 5.10 The Number of Comments by Quarter**



**Figure 5.11 The Number of Shares by Year**



These dramatic increases in interactive features in the first quarter of 2014 can be explained with specific characteristics of the posts in 2014. ANOVA analyses suggest that there are some significant differences between the number of interactive features, visual images and the content of posts. Nearly all posts in 2014 have a visual image, and a significant relationship was established between visual images and the number of likes (df 1, 493,  $F=24.359$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The mean number of likes for a post with visual image is 1184.99 (sd=2592.91), whereas a post without a visual image has 219.15 likes on average (sd=395.20). Among visual content, a post with pictures of animals, vegetables, and farms were liked the most ( $m=5278.64$ ,  $sd=5904.28$ ), followed by 4-H emblems and image cards ( $m=1184.92$ ,  $sd=1934.33$ ), Others not related to 4-H ( $m=920.17$ ,  $sd=1418.36$ ), and 4-H related Individuals ( $m=676.62$ ,  $sd=792.58$ ).

In addition, posts that contain certain content such as non-4-H programs ( $m=2415.65$ ,  $sd=4531.81$ ) and art ( $m=2170$ ) have significantly high numbers in likes (df 12, 482,  $F=5.118$ ,  $p<.05$ ), whereas posts of 4-H Questions and Trivia received the most comments on average

( $m=174.69$ ,  $sd=359.12$ ,  $df 12, 482$ ,  $F=3.738$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Figure 5.10 shows that for every third quarter the number of comments increased by a somewhat substantial proportion. During that time most posts were about 4-H promotions, 4-H trivia/Throw Back Thursday, and 4-H history, events, news, and the like.

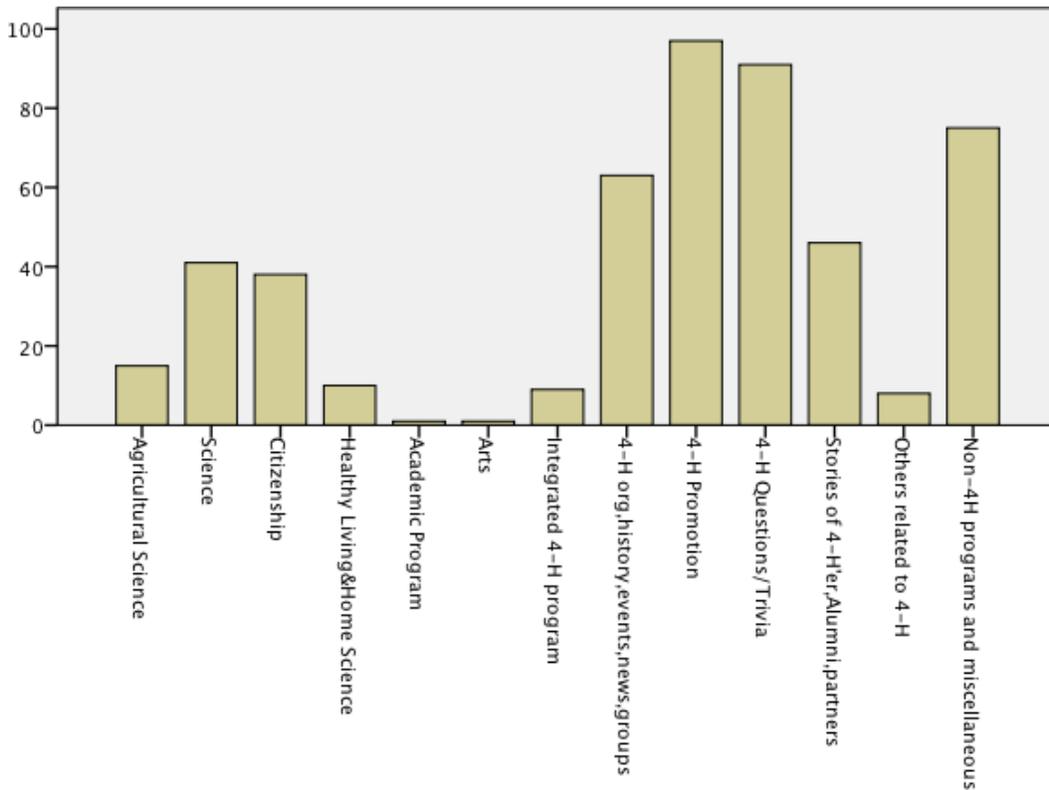
### ***Communication Strategies of 4-H Facebook posts***

*RQ3. What kinds of communication strategies are primarily used by the 4-H Facebook pages?*

There are three categories that present the communication strategies of the 4-H Facebook pages, which are organizational disclosure, information dissemination, and involvement.

*Organizational Disclosure* The organizational disclosure was analyzed through 4-H descriptions, history, mission statement, organizational URL or links, 4-H logos, local 4-H Clubs, 4-H partners, or sponsors, and 4-H alumni. There were 84.8% of posts ( $n=420$ ) that contained descriptions of 4-H, organizational programs, activities, and events. Among these posts, content related to the 4-H promotional events was shared most frequently (19.6%,  $n=97$ ), followed by 4-H Trivia and questions (18.4%), 4-H history, events, news and the like (12.7%), stories from 4-H'ers, alumni or partners (9.3%), science (8.3%), and citizenship (7.7%). There were also posts that portrayed other content such as agricultural science (3.0%), healthy living and home science (2.0%), integrated 4-H programs (1.8%), other 4-H related things (1.6%), and academic programs and arts (0.4%).

**Figure 5.12 Frequency of Post Content**



Some of the posts were uniquely designed for online purposes. First, there are question posts that are aimed at increasing interactivity with members, such as Throw Back Thursday, Speak up Saturday, 4-H Trivia, occasional random questions regarding 4-H, and commemorative questions for special days. Secondly, there were content providing posts, which intend to distribute 4-H related images and data for promotional purposes. This type of post includes cards or images related to 4-H, timeline cover photos, and online cards for special days like Mother's day. These posts are tailored for online media, making full use of the strengths of online media.

Thirty-four posts (6.9%) contained photos or stories about organizational history. Posts that included mission statements of 4-H like “I pledge my head, health, hand, heart...” were at 67 (13.5%), and the 4-H mission statements were mainly delivered through images that could be used as a cover photo. Twenty-nine and a half percent of total posts (n=146) contained

organizational URLs or links that led to other informational or interactive pages, while 37.8% (187 out of total posts) led to 4-H related pages such as the 4-H main website, subgroup webpages, partners, blogs, and 4-H campaigns or program pages. The 4-H main website was most frequently linked (n=62), followed by 4-H partners (n=44), and 4-H subgroup webpages (n=24).

The 4-H logo was found in 176 posts (35.6%) in mainly two ways. First, the 4-H emblem appeared on clothes or goods made by 4-H, on 4-H buildings, and on images on cards created for special days. Activities or names of local clubs and 4-H partners or sponsors like JC Penney and Tractor Supply Company (TSC) were mentioned in 40.2% of posts (n=199), and 11.9% of posts (n=59) contain stories about 4-H alumni who received awards or performed significant works in certain areas.

*Information Dissemination.* Compared to other 4-H social media like the 4-H Pinterest and 4-H Instagram that mainly deliver certain types of messages and content, or the 4-H Twitter that restricts content length and form, the 4-H Facebook offers flexible ways to deliver messages and information to an audience. Sixty-four percent of posts (n=317) contained photos and 5.5% (n=27) had video files or links to YouTube, while 51.1% (n=253) had links to other webpages, and 4.2% (n=21) were drawn from online news media, such as ABC, the Chicago Tribune, New York Times, Huffington Post Live, and Today Show. Posts containing hashtag (#) accounted for 11.9% (n=59), while only 4 posts had at (@) (0.8%). Thirty-three posts were tagged either through text or photos (6.7%).

The average number of likes and shares for a post with a photo was much higher than for posts without a photo file. Similarly, posts with video files or links received a high number of

likes, comments, and shares. In contrast, a hashtag (#), at (@), or tag did not make a meaningful difference in number of likes, comments, or shares.

*Involvement.* Posts that shared information about 4-H programs or volunteering opportunities made up 69.1% of the total (n=342). These posts encouraged participation by checking a box or providing information in response to a question.

Six and a half percent of posts (n=32) contained donation information or results. Fifty-two posts included names of stores/sponsors that help with 4-H fundraising events. Most of the posts, 383 out of 495 (77.4%), encouraged online interactivity by requesting feedback or online participation. Posts that elicited online interaction had high averages for likes, comments, and shares.

### ***Positive Youth Development Traits Encouraged by 4-H Facebook Posts***

*RQ4. What kinds of PYD traits are promoted by the 4-H Facebook posts?*

*Positive Youth Development.* Posts on the 4-H Facebook page can play a large role in encouraging and reinforcing each of the traits associated with Positive Youth Development, maximizing the effects of organizational programs and education for their youth. Considering the fundamental functions of social media, it is logical to see that connection has been the most emphasized trait through the 4-H Facebook page. Ninety-six percent of total posts (475) seem to contribute to youth connections with other youths, adults, communities, and the organization itself. Next, contribution to society and online participation was addressed through 416 posts (84%). Sixty-three percent of posts (312) encouraged confidence in youth users, while 50.7% of posts (251) were related to building competence, and 21.2% (105) were meant to facilitate

compassion. Development of character was encouraged the least via Facebook posts (67 posts, 13.5%). The last element, conviviality, was represented in 60 posts to generate fun for youth users (12.1%).

## **Study II – Perceived Effects of 4-H Facebook Pages on Positive Youth Development**

To test the hypotheses regarding the possible effects of the 4-H Facebook page on members' positive youth development, seven recent 4-H alumni who used 4-H Facebook pages during their membership period were interviewed. In establishing the test of Hypothesis 1, they were asked to share how they perceived the role of 4-H Facebook in developing certain traits and about their experiences and opinions as related to their 4-H Facebook use. In addition, their current civic engagement and social media experience were also determined to test Hypothesis 2.

### ***Informational National Organization vs. Interactive Local Chapter or Group***

Since 2009, when 4-H launched its official national Facebook page, the role of Facebook has increased and diversified. Beyond the national chapter 4-H Facebook page, numerous 4-H Facebook pages were created for different purposes. There are different levels of 4-H Facebook pages formed by varying units, such as regional, local, county, state, and national chapters. There are also 4-H Facebook groups created for certain projects such as national 4-H conferences or limited personal networks like alumni groups. All interviewees talked about the different purposes for different 4-H Facebook pages use and consistently commented that smaller or more local level 4-H Facebook pages were the most influential for them.

They stated that the 4-H national and state level pages were mainly for informational sources. Interviewee 6 said: “The 4-H Facebook page helped me stay on top of events and also

participate.” Facebook pages for groups, counties or individual 4-H chapters were mainly used for strong connections and active interaction for planning. Interviewee 1 said: “My county 4-H Facebook page is the most interactive.” Interviewee 3 said: “I still enjoy using the 4-H national pages and Alabama pages, because I can see what’s happening in a larger scale, but for my use it’s better to have the smaller 4-H groups.” Interviewee 1 showed motivations to use different 4-H Facebook pages, saying “It’s more the national 4-H pages liking things, telling you innovations that they are doing, whereas the local one is more about communication purposes.”

Corresponding to these two different functions, most of interviewees were involved in several 4-H Facebook pages and groups to complement their needs in keeping updated with organizational events and to be connected with their friends within 4-H Clubs. Interviewee 4 said:

I was not actually participating in 4-H Facebook pages (during my membership). There is not as much back and forth. But, you can communicate better in groups, because everyone can post a little bit more easily. But I still enjoy using 4-H national pages and Alabama pages, because I can see what’s happening in a larger scale, but for my usage it’s better to have 4-H groups.

### ***Empowering Youth-led Activities as a Useful Tool***

Before Facebook became a popular tool among 4-H’ers, the main ways to communicate with other 4-H’ers were through emails, chat rooms or phone calls. Participants primarily used newsletters, the national 4-H website, or monthly meetings as information sources. The interview participants had been members of 4-H for ten years on average. They were able to use the 4-H Facebook pages or groups for only their last two to four years of membership. There were

personal and environmental differences when it came to adaptation of the new tool. However, no matter how fast they adapted to the 4-H Facebook pages, all participants became more involved with the 4-H Facebook. All participants mentioned that they followed and used the 4-H Facebook pages or groups the most compared to other social media run by 4-H. Interviewee 7 said: “After I graduated (from high school and 4-H Clubs) I started using the 4-H Facebook posts more actively to help monitor stuff or other 4-H alumni.”

Many interviewees mentioned that they have used or currently use the 4-H Facebook pages and groups more actively since they had graduated from 4-H. For example, the “4-H Collegian Group” was also a group for college 4-H alumni who wanted to get involved with current 4-H’ers. In the group, 4-H alumni from all over Alabama shared county events and programs. The posts, like their newsletters, calendars, and agendas, provide good information and opportunities to volunteer and collaborate. “Order of the Link” is the name of 4-H alumni Facebook group used nationwide. It serves as the most active online media that facilitates communications among the members and alumni, provides information, and promotes events. Interviewee 2 from Alabama stated:

We used the state council page daily in order to accomplish the job. It was the most influential because it helped us as a council become close, knowing that we could contact each other when we needed help on a project or just words of encouragement from fellow 4-Hers and advisors.

In particular, the 4-H Facebook groups empower young members to actively plan, organize, lead, and participate in programs by themselves. Since 4-H is a youth-led organization, the role of the 4-H Facebook page has appeared to be great by providing more opportunities for 4-H’ers and alumni to take the lead for their works and activities. By enabling continuous group

works and interactions across the nation, the 4-H Facebook serves as useful communication tool to talk and plan their own activities and keep up with others. Interviewee 3 described her experiences and opinion about the 4-H Facebook group, saying: “We primarily used it just to accomplish the task. We used it as semi-social networking to communicate via technology rather than trying to have a face-to-face meeting. We were all spread out throughout the states. In the long run, by planning through the group, we actually built better relationships that we hold on to after we got out of 4-H.”

The 4-H Facebook pages and groups were mainly run and managed by youth. These opportunities help them learn more by designing and creating posts. Interviewee 1 said, “A lot of the postings and contributions are from youth. Youth have to provide information for the 4-H Facebook pages or groups.” It helped them to be more creative and active on this unique online sphere. Interviewee 5 said, “for state council page, when we were trying to build things we posted different things, different ideas we had. It’s interesting to see what other 4-H’ers can come up with and how creative they are and how different we all are.”

#### *Special Connections among 4-H’ers, 4-H Alumni and Organization*

All participants agreed that the 4-H Facebook pages and groups have been very helpful to expand and manage their personal networks. Their main motivation to utilize the 4-H Facebook pages or groups was for their connections. Interactions through 4-H Facebook allow them to build and maintain relationships with people they met during their membership across the state, nation, and world, even until today. Interviewee 3 said: “I have communicated extensively with people from all the way in south Alabama up into the north side (through my 4-H Facebook group).” In addition, they keep increasing their interactions with advisors and adults who were

also part of the 4-H Facebook community. Interviewee 6 said, “My advisors and adults were part of Facebook so we could contact through it. Mainly message to discuss certain projects. There were people if they needed to ask questions or get help on Facebook.”

As a friendly and easily accessible media, the 4-H Facebook page has planted itself as the main communication tool among the 4-H’ers. The characteristics of Facebook made 4-H’ers feel enjoyment when they were communicating through Facebook. It also allows more vivid and frequent interactions among them, which eventually affect long lasting and deeper connections.

Interviewee 1 said:

The connections that I made with 4-H are something that are really going to last for a lifetime. It’s surprising that you feel still close with them after five or six years. That’s what Facebook has done. You can use phone, text message, which I do, but with Facebook you get to see pictures of what they are doing. You just feel more connected, even though I have not seen them in person in four years.

Some posts of the 4-H Facebook pages positively bind 4-H’ers together. For example, posts that contain pictures of animals and farms bring about friendly memories and connections among 4-H’ers who raised livestock. Interviewee 4 said, “Through animal posts 4-H’ers found something in common. It was like bridging the gap, because we shared common interests (like raised a sheep). I absolutely think it’s definitely very effective to connect them to the organization, 4-H.” These posts also remind them of their connections to family and hometown communities. Posts about 4-H trivia and Throw Back Thursday (TBT) about 4-H history and camp songs connect all people who were related to 4-H back to the organization.

The 4-H Facebook page also enables 4-H’ers to interact with 4-H alumni across the generations. The parents’ generation who participated in the camp decades ago is also

communicating through alumni pages or separate 4-H Facebook groups. They share information and plans to help out current 4-H'ers. Interviewee 1 said, "(Watching the 4-H Delaware Camp Alumni FB page) I went to a camp and became a good friend of her son. It's a cool thing like that. Generational thing. I am happy that these people who went to a camp 35 years ago are just as close as I am."

### *Encouraging Positive Youth Development Traits*

In either indirect or direct ways, all interviewees think that the 4-H Facebook communications have helped them develop positive traits as a well-rounded citizen. Some interviewees perceived that the 4-H Facebook communications indirectly facilitate their positive development by providing an effective communication tool and encouraging more participation in diverse programs, where actual development happened. Interviewee 4 said, "The biggest role of the 4-H Facebook is keeping people connected through open lines of communication. Those things (traits of Positive Youth Development) were built on a local person-to-person level. My opinion is that Facebook has contributed to that on a small scale, because I really think the personal relationship and face-to-face contacts are really what makes a difference building those elements." In contrast, other participants shared their perceptions of more immediate effect of the 4-H Facebook on their development.

*Competence.* They believe that the 4-H Facebook experiences led them to build competence in some skills, such as planning events, management, group work and leadership. Some informational posts offered online and offline workshops to help them improve their leadership and communication skills. They also found some posts helpful to gain more information and knowledge. The information was naturally delivered through the newsfeed function. The information receiving process was perceived to be more fun through Facebook, compared to

through emails, newspapers, and even the 4-H website. Interviewee 7 said, “When I was in the collegian group, it was helpful because I used management skills, scheduling to submit for different things going on in my county. I also could develop planning and management skills, which definitely helped me in college.”

*Confidence.* The 4-H Facebook communications were perceived to encourage confidence among users by sharing stories of alumni and 4-H’ers who contribute to society. Those posts make the 4-H’ers and alumni proud of their group and also inspire them to participate in similar actions. Interviewee 3 said, “When we see examples of other people in our age groups and what they are capable of in your state, local communities, counties, it gives you little bit of confidence to try something that you might not do.” The 4-H Facebook page boosted confidence by helping them develop certain skills to do something. Positive feedback on posts also hearten them to partake in similar programs or activities.

*Connection.* The positive trait that the 4-H Facebook page is believed to influence the most is connection. Interviewee 2 said that she thought the 4-H Facebook posts were helpful to improve her character, saying, “By engaging myself in socially responsible behaviors and connecting me with others that were a positive influence, it affected my life in a positive way.”

*Compassion.* Some participants also consider that the 4-H Facebook page played a role in building their compassion and caring. Interviewee 6 said, “The 4-H Facebook page has been always posting what’s happening within our community and about other people and neighbors. Everyone feels compassion (through them).” Interviewee 7 said, “When we were talking about helping out our county 4-H camp, hearing from others in my age group wanting to help out definitely encouraged me to want to help out too.”

*Contribution.* Contribution was also encouraged among 4-H'ers by receiving information about volunteering and community works. Interviewee 6 said, "When they post about fundraising I am trying to help out." Interviewee 1 shared an example, saying, "Being a college student from home, I am 16 hours away from home. They (people in my county) are putting up things like 'Hey, we need volunteers in the future' during the summer when I am home. I can say 'yep! I will do it.'"

Several participants thought that the experiences with the 4-H Facebook pages might have helped their current engagement in the social media of other nonprofit organizations. They learned how to effectively use Facebook pages or groups for their new endeavors and also refer to the 4-H posts for their current organizations' social media. Interviewee 2 said, "The 4-H Facebook page was one of the first pages I was involved in, and it helped me create online etiquette that I now have." Interviewee 7 also said, "In using 4-H Facebook pages and groups I kind of knew how to post things, how to comment and so on."

### *Summary*

Study I provided the communication patterns of the 4-H Facebook pages based on analysis of all posts. The posts showed certain characteristics such as visual images, text form, and content that attract young users. The posts of the pages are interpreted to encourage some traits of Positive Youth Development, mostly connection, confidence and contribution. Study II revealed how young users of the 4-H Facebook page actually perceived the functions of the social media and influences on their positive development. All interviewees considered that the 4-H Facebook pages and groups have different purposes. The 4-H Facebook pages are resourceful to obtain up-to-date information on the organizational and societal events, while the

4-H Facebook groups are more intended for networking and organizing their own activities.

Interviewees also believed the 4-H Facebook pages or groups played a significant role in their development in either direct or indirect ways, mainly by increasing their connections to others, growing confidence, and encouraging contributions.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this two-step research present the critical potential of 4-H social media, especially the 4-H Facebook pages and groups...to promote positive youth development. 4-H has shown actively exceptional efforts and involvement in Facebook. It has utilized the 4-H Facebook pages for regional and national levels by providing useful and up-to-date information to its young members. Youth also have been involved in a number of 4-H Facebook groups for their own connections and activities. The Facebook pages and groups have become the most critical tool among its youth members. However, 4-H has not yet fully utilized the potential of the 4-H Facebook pages and groups as a facilitator of Positive Youth Development. The 4-H Club mission is to provide educational opportunities and civic engagement to youth and to help their positive development. However, unlike their programs, which were designed to support PYD, the 4-H Facebook pages and groups do not seem to be part of its grand goal. The following discussion draws conclusions of this research and multiple implications on the effective social media strategies of youth-related organizations for positive youth development.

#### *Communication Strategies of this Youth-related Organization*

The results of content analysis of the 4-H Facebook page demonstrate the organizational communication pattern and unique characteristics. 4-H has increased the number of postings, and the number of followers and interactive features has been on the rise. Particularly from the beginning of 2014, both the number of postings and interactive features drastically increased. It

started posting more fun and interesting visual images that people might like and share. In addition, there are more trivial, entertaining posts that encourage more responses from users. It frequently uses visual images, conversational sentences with question marks or exclamation marks, posts about 4-H Trivia and TBT, and promotional sources. By communicating through friendly visual and content characteristics, its posts gathered positive response from young members. These posts remind them of their happy memories and group identities, and also build positive relationships among youth and organizations. The 4-H Facebook page has explored various communication types for the last five years and established effective communication strategies.

Furthermore, the number of young users who can actually appreciate and utilize the 4-H Facebook pages and groups is increasing. Now, the number of 4-H Facebook page followers (around 500,000) is very small compared to the total 4-H membership (7 million); However, the number of 4-H Facebook page users is increasing over time. Unlike the early stage when 4-H just launched the Facebook page, current young people are well aware of how to use the Facebook page and group for their own purposes. The 4-H alumni, who had not used Facebook during their membership, also become accustomed to a variety of functions of the social media. However, there is a possibility that many people did not follow the national chapter focusing on their local pages or groups. Many interviewees said they overwhelmingly used their local chapters' or groups' pages and occasionally visited the national chapter's page. The communication efforts put on the national 4-H Facebook page is somewhat inefficiently used by many young members as opposed to my initial anticipation.

All participants said that the most beneficial function of the 4-H Facebook pages was abundant information ranging from organizational events and programs to scientific knowledge.

Their motivation to use the page was to keep updated about what is going on within 4-H and society. However, the trend of the current 4-H Facebook page is leaning to funny, casual and conversational content rather than informational sources. This seemed to help increase the number of interactive features, however, deeper connections and interactions are expected to be on the 4-H Facebook groups. The 4-H Facebook groups allow individuals to be active agents to organize, plan, run, and participate in activities. In addition, it allows smaller, but more interactive networking among peers. Considering these different functions, optimizing the functions of different 4-H Facebook types may be better to achieve the 4-H mission.

#### *Social Media, Potential Facilitator of Positive Youth Development*

Positively, the results of the content analysis and the findings of interviewees clarified the potential of the 4-H Facebook pages or groups to be facilitators of Positive Youth Development. The posts and interactions of 4-H Facebook possibly conveyed messages that were related to six traits of Positive Youth Development. Interviewees also perceived the 4-H Facebook pages and groups contributed to develop some of the traits such as connections, confidence, and contribution. This could be helping to achieve the organizational goal to encourage positive development among the 4-H'ers. Therefore, being aware of the potential of social media tools can fulfill their goals more effectively. The communication tools aligned with the organizational goals will possibly spur organizational accomplishment.

Posts of the 4-H Facebook pages contained diverse content, which were attributed to increase certain traits of PYD. Stories of 4-H alumni or 4-H'ers who contribute to their societies or are examples of 'Revolution of Responsibility' spur audience confidence to perform similar things as well as compassion and contribution. Some posts such as trivia, questions, or TBT

regarding 4-H encourage connections through group identities and commonly shared experiences. Strategic design of posts may have more impact on promoting PYD traits.

### *Education and Practice for Youth Civic Engagement*

The results of interviews imply the critical function of social media in educating youth and increasing youth civic engagement. Interviewees said that their experiences with the 4-H Facebook pages and groups provided them opportunities to build up knowledge and skills for certain areas. They were also encouraged to partake in organizational or local programs. Most interviewees who have actively been involved in 4-H Facebook communications and activities are more actively involved in current civic engagement. They also perceived that those experiences helped them appreciate their current online engagement for nonprofit organizations or local communities. These suggest meaningful implications for PYD and increasing their future interests and participation in political and civic engagement through social media among young Americans.

The analysis of social media communications of the 4-H Club, which is the largest youth organization in the United States, will possibly provide guidance and direction for other youth organizations. It would also suggest some ideas for nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations that intend to engage young people in their work. Looking at 4-H's social media strategies can be helpful for them to develop effective communication strategies regarding how to communicate with, appeal to, and educate the younger generation.

### *Communications and Developmental Science*

This study may contribute to expanding boundaries of child development studies, especially the discipline of developmental science by adding a communication perspective. Through an attempt to investigate the influences and relations between positive youth development and communication content, the research integrates the communication field into developmental science, which is “the study of individuals across the life span” (Damon & Lerner, 2006, p.4). This multidisciplinary field encompasses different subjects such as biology, neuroscience, psychology, sociology, anthropology, medicine, nursing, education, law, social work, engineering and computer science, economics, geography, ecology, the arts, and history. Psychology plays a central role in the interplay of various fields, and the communication discipline can be further developed by enlarging their potential to closely affect each other.

## CHAPTER 7

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

I examined the role of technology in constructing a moral and ethical set of values for adolescents. The results show that technologies can encourage young people to become fully engaged members of their communities and the society. However, the research contains several limitations that need to be addressed in future research, and also has room to develop further.

First of all, Study I needs to extend further by including not only the 4-H Facebook page national chapter as research subject, but also other various 4-H Facebook local pages and groups. According to the interview results, 4-H youth are more engaged in a variety of 4-H Facebook groups where they interact and utilize the most. 4-H'ers also seem to use their local chapter page more compared to the national chapter. Therefore, the analysis of 4-H Facebook groups or local pages will provide opportunities to learn practical communications characteristics and their impact by expanding this current research.

It would be necessary to examine social media practices of other youth-related organizations. The pioneering role of 4-H in the social media realm will be accurately analyzed when it is compared with other youth-related organizations' social media practice. For example, whether there are differences between 4-H and other youth organizations in their communication content, the number of interactive features and active users, and functions can allow us more practical and better insights from the research.

Many researchers have revealed conflicting results regarding the effects of social networking sites used in youth education and development. Technology presents both opportunities and challenges to adolescents as they accomplish these tasks (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011, p.103). The downsides of Facebook use by youth related organizations are not investigated here. Possible negative effects also can be considered in later research.

Furthermore, this research provides the limited anecdotal evidence of perceived effects of social media communication on positive youth development. Interview, a qualitative research method, has had issues regarding “whether the results are primarily of local interest, or whether they may be transferable to other subjects and situations” (Kvale, 2007, p.126). Another limitation would be that the interviewees were all college students, and those in college may exhibit different characteristics of PYD than those who don’t go to college. The participants also might not be able to represent the general 4-H population because they are likely to be especially enthusiastic members. In order to reduce these limitations and saturate the research purpose by producing valuable findings, future research will need to conduct a larger scale qualitative research. The process will possibly reveal universal patterns, benefits, effects, and limitations of the social media communications beyond anecdotal evidence.

In addition, careful and comprehensive research will be looked for in order to find out whether each element of PYD can grow more through social media communications. Many interviewees were not sure that their 4-H Facebook usage has helped to develop certain elements like character. This phenomenon can be attributed to the 4-H’s communication practices through the Facebook page. According to study I, PYD elements like character seemed not to be emphasized through the 4-H Facebook posts. Interviewees who participated in study II also did not think that the 4-H Facebook pages helped develop those elements. The limitation was also

caused by the limitation of social media. It is possible that online communications are basically limited to appeal to certain characteristics among young people.

This research made the first attempt to examine the social media content based on the traits of Positive Youth Development as analysis criteria. Because it is an exploratory study, some parts of the measurement used in the study need to undergo additional testing in order to obtain legitimacy and validity. There is a need to develop a measurement tool that can analyze the communication messages of those organizations through social media, and the measurement needs to be verified by scholarship.

In addition, it is important to apply the measurement to different youth-related organizations or nonprofits and even other social media to check its applicability. To see whether it can be utilized in different context, future efforts will be needed to use the measurement to evaluate other organizations' communication practices, which are related to different subjects, such as arts, sports, or academic achievements. Future research should attempt to modify and use the measurement in other social media. Although Facebook is one of the most actively used social media by nonprofit organizations, and the 4-H Facebook pages are the most active social media channel among others, youth-related organizations are often engaged in other types of social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. For some youth-related organizations, other venues are more actively utilized, but other social media were not examined in this research.

Finally, the research contains the limitation of accuracy, because the research was conducted with 4-H alumni. These participants were asked to recall their past experience and how they perceived those experiences helped their development. Even though the participants were informed of the research topic and given several interview questions in advance, some

people had a hard time recalling their social media use about 2-5 years ago. Longitudinal research will solve this issue by tracking participants' social media usage and development annually.

As some participants mentioned, the role and effect of the 4-H Facebook pages on positive youth development is limited. There also might be too many determinants that can affect youth development as an active, responsible citizen. Determinants such as their internal and personal factors, environments, and special experiences need to be considered. An important question for scholars is to find out how strong an influence social media can be in regards to youth development. Additional research would shed more light on the impact of social media communications in positive youth development.

## CHAPTER 8

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 4-H

I believe this research has great potential to develop further, and 4-H will possibly gain the most beneficial implications from this study. As one of the most influential youth organizations across the world, 4-H has to pay more attention to how and what they communicate with youth. Its communication practices represent a great potential to facilitate the organizational mission and activities, and it is crucial to improve its communication strategies through thorough and repeated examinations.

4-H has passionately studied the impact of 4-H programs and activities on positive youth development with longitudinal research. According to the results, 4-H activities play a large role in encouraging positive youth development, and my research, *The Effect of Social Media Communications on Positive Youth Development: An Analysis of 4-H Facebook Pages and 4-Hers' Positive Development*, shows that 4-H's communications through social media can expand the effects of 4-H on affirmative development among young people. It seems that it is necessary for 4-H to be aware of the potential role of its social media efforts on positive youth development and to channel them to facilitate it.

4-H should to analyze its communications practices via social media by doing assessments. Currently, there is no measurement and analysis of its communication practices. In order to obtain more accurate data and results, it would be helpful to start collecting data with new members and track their development over time. The long-term research results would allow 4-H to manage its social media communications and maximize their impact. The communication

strategy that is intimately connected to the organizational mission would spur positive development of youth and their future behaviors as responsible citizens.

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## APPENDIX A

### Codebook for the 4-H Facebook Page Content Analysis

#### Introduction

This is an instructional codebook for analyzing the 4-H Facebook pages of 2012 – 2013. Posts on the 4-H Facebook feed are analyzed with 27 categories based on a coder's observations according to this codebook. Most of the categories will require little thought in determining the correct notation to make, but some are more subjective.

#### Coding Variables:

##### Category 1: General Social Media Communication Information of the 4-H page

For Category 1, the organizational communication practices through all types of online media are analyzed. The information includes the type of online communication channel, the number of users or followers or subscribers, joined or launched year, the total number of posts.

##### Category 2: The 4-H Facebook Page Analysis – Basic Information

In the Category 2, simple and relatively explicit information of a post on the 4-H Facebook page will be collected, such as the author, time, target, tone, interactive features, extra channels and source of each post.

(If an album or a number of photo are shared, the whole photos and texts is regarded as one post)

##### 1. Author of Post

The identity of author or writer who uploaded a post.

1=4-H organization

2=4-H'ers/family/alumni/related personnel

3= Unknown (including Non-4-H members)

##### 2. Time and Date of Post

The time (followed by a.m. or p.m.) and date (MM/DD/YY) of each post.

##### 3. Target Audience of Post

The target audience is the intended target who would benefit from the post and for whom the organization aimed to write the post.

1=4-H'ers

2=4-H related individuals (e.g. family, alumni, teachers, partners)

3=Both

4=All/General (including non-4-H demographic) (e.g. questions not exclusive intended for 4-H'ers)

5=Unintended (self-expression, etc.)

#### **4. (Visual Files) Main Character(s) of Posts**

The main character of post that has visual files embedded is analyzed.

1=4-H'er(s) alone or with 4-H activities

2=4-H related individuals (e.g. alumni, teachers, partners, receivers, etc.)

3=4-H'ers and related individuals

4=Animals, Vegetables and farm landscapes with or without 4-H'ers

5=4-H related goods, buildings with or without 4-H'ers

6=4-H symbols, posters, image cards, etc.

7=Others (Things or persons related to the 4-H and its activities. e.g. a poll result image, poll word cloud, a picture of the National 4-H Council, a chart or graph related to the 4-H activities, 4H emblem on corn farm, clover emoji, etc.)

8=Others (e.g. things or persons not related to the 4-H and its activities)

9=No visual file

#### **5. Text Form & Tone**

##### **5-1. (Text) Form of Post**

The form of post is determined by which types of sentences were mainly utilized in a post. A post can be marked with multiple options.

1=Interrogative Sentence/Questions (Thought-provoking, Asking for agreement, Trivia/Quiz, etc.)

2=Imperative sentence (with or without Exclamation mark/Suggestions, Recommendation, Urge for an action)

3=Exclamatory Sentence (with or without Exclamation mark/Praising, Encouraging, Wishing, Thanking, Welcoming, Excitement, etc.)

4=Simple Declarative Sentence

5=No Sentence (A post without any text)

##### **5-2. Tone of Post**

The atmosphere of the language used in the post determines the tone of post under three categories. Texts are mainly analyzed, but the photos also are considered to decide the overall tone of the post.

1=Positive 2=Negative 3=Neutral 4=No Text (None)

#### **6. Source of Content/Link**

The source of posts or shared URL is analyzed.

1=The 4-H Main Website

2=The 4-H Subgroup Website (e.g. NAE 4-H, 4-H Mall, local 4-H etc.)

3=The 4-H Partners or Sponsors including Corporations, Educational Institutions or Government (e.g. USDA, Universities)

- 4=The 4-H or others' Blogs
- 5=The 4-H or others' Social Media (e.g. Youtube, Instagram, Redditor, Storify, etc.)
- 6=The 4-H Programs or Campaign or Report
- 7=Other Youth-related organizations or community
- 8=(Non-partnership) Organizations, communities, institutions with Educational resources
- 9=Others or link with broken pages
- 10=None (without source/link)

## 7. Interactive features

Interactive features can be seen through the number of likes, comments, and shares of each post

**7-1. The number of Likes = #**

**7-2. The number of Comments = #**

**7-3. The number of Shares = #**

## Category 3: The 4-H Facebook Page Analysis –Post Content

Category 3 deals with the organization's public relations strategies through its Facebook posts. A post is analyzed by determining whether they contain information or form below, and marked either 1 (yes) or 2 (No) for each element. All links in a post are also checked to examine the overall content delivered by the post. The overall message and atmosphere will be considered for analysis including photos contained in a post. For a few categories, multiple answers will be marked.

## 8. Organizational Disclosure

For disclosure, the coder examines whether the following items were present in the organization's posts: a description of the organization's programs and services, an organizational history, the mission statement, the organization's Web site, the logo, and a listing of the administrators.

**8-1. Description:** Whether a post provides description of the 4-H or its histories, programs, services, activities, campaigns and events, etc. For example, posts that contain information of 4-H Summits, 4-H National Youth Science Day, National Mentoring Programs, 4-H Mall products and services will be marked. A post that mention the name/title of the 4-H program will also be counted.

**8-2. Programs/Activities:** Whether a post introduces information about the 4-H programs/materials or related activities which audiences can either participate in or use is marked. (A post can have multiple information)

1=Agricultural Science

2=Science (basic science, engineering, technology, STEM, etc.)

3=Citizenship (leadership and personal development, community action, communication and expressive arts. e.g. community engagement, environments, Mentoring program, 4-H Youth Ag-Summit, NAE4-HA Conference, etc.)

4=Healthy Living (childhood obesity, substance abuse, and physical safety, etc.) & Home Science (Knowledge related to family ecosystem. For example, food and nutrition, apparel and textiles, family management, pet training, etc.)

5=Academic program

6=Arts (e.g. 4H Pinterest, 4H Trend Spotters, etc.)

7=Integrated 4H activities, programs, and results (e.g. The 4-H Summer Camp, the 4-H Youth program, the 4-H Youth Development Research, 4-H Today E-newsletter, etc.)

8=The 4-H related news and organizational event (e.g. new leadership, anniversary, 4H Facebook fan number, National 4H Week, etc.), Alumni Community, 4-H Mission & Commitment (e.g. I pledge my,,,), history

9=4H Promotion, Awards, Contest for fundraising (e.g. Fair Ribbon Awards, TSC, lucky draw, sharing images for timeline cover photo or 4H cards/images for special days, 4-H emblem image on farm, etc.)

10=Trivia, Quiz, 4H related Question, and TBT

11=Stories of 4H'ers/Alumni/family/Peers

12=Others related to 4H

13=Non-4H programs or activities (Special Day/Event, programs of other groups, etc.)

**8-3. History:** Whether a post has textual or visual information about the organization's history and legacy. For example, a post with an old black and white photo of the 4-H activity, campaign, events or of ordinary lives of alumni will be counted. A post that contains photos of alumni or poster in the past is marked.

**8-4. Mission statement:** Whether a post represents or emphasizes organizational missions and goals. (e.g. I pledge my Head to something.)

**8-5. Organizational URL/Links:** Whether a post has a link to the organization's webpages, such as the main 4-H website, 4-H subgroup webpages, and other social media of the 4-H.

**8-6. 4-H Logo:** Whether a post has the organization or its program's emblem/logo in its photos, illustrations or video clips.

**8-7. Local administrators/Partners/Sponsors:** Whether a post shares information about representatives of local or state 4-H Clubs, partners, sponsors, and their works. Whether a post shares information about representatives of local or state 4-H Clubs, partners, sponsors, and their work. For example, a post that shows a picture of a meeting of representatives of local 4-H Clubs or U.S. Department of Agriculture is marked.

**8-8. Alumni:** Whether a post shares information about representatives of local or state 4-H Clubs, partners, sponsors, and their works.

## 9. Information dissemination

Information dissemination section was evaluated by determining whether a post has photographs, video files, links to organizational news items or related partnership, press releases, hashtag (#), at (@), and tags of text or photo.

**9-1. Photo posted:** The presence of an embedded picture in a post is analyzed. Any visual image including illustrations, photograph, and graphics is counted.

**9-2. Video files:** Whether a post has embedded videos linked to certain corresponding websites (youtube.com, etc.). Any type of filmed or live event or animation would be considered a "video."

**9-3. Links:** A link will be denoted by blue text within the post that opens another window or tab in the web browser. Even if the web site fails to load properly or seems to be down, note the presence of the link itself.

**9-4. Press releases:** Whether a post provides a link to news media article.

**9-5. Hashtag (#) in post:** Whether a post contains Hashtags.

**9-6. At (@) in post:** Whether a post contains At.

**9-7. Tag of Text or Photo:** The number of people tagged/shared a post with.

## **10. Involvement**

Involvement category is examined by determining whether a post contains methods to participate in a 4-H or non 4-H work, donate for their campaign, and volunteer for the organization. A post that encourages online interactivity also falls under Involvement category.

**10-1. Program Participations/Volunteer opportunities:** Whether a post shares 4-H program participation opportunities or asks for volunteering for certain project. A post that encourages to check information of youth development programs or a local community engagement is considered to promote participations and volunteering. A post which shares stories of 4-H'ers' involvement in certain programs fall under this category as well. Asking questions related to 4-H, "Throw Back Thursday (TBT)," or "4-H Trivia" are also considered to encourage participations.

**10-2. Donate:** Whether a post shares information about how to participate in donation, donation, fundraising results, etc. A post that contains information of donation event and result of it is marked.

**10-3. Store:** Whether a post introduces 4-H goods or links to the 4-H Mall webpages. A post that has names of sponsors/partnered corporates which support the 4-H or its activities through fundraising and their products are marked.

**10-4. Online Interactivity:** When a post encourages and suggests to like, comment, share the content with others the post is marked as online interactivity. For example, a post that shares a funny picture and asks to click "Like," "Comment" or "Share" if they like it is regarded as encouraging online interactivity. A post under this category might invoke conversation, visit a link, ask to read certain information, throw a quiz/question to be answered, ask for participating in online contest, etc.

## **11. PYD Promotion**

For PYD Promotion category, the coder must determine whether a post is aligned with any of six components of Positive Youth Development, which are Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Caring/Compassion, and Contribution. In addition to the six components, Comic (Entertainment) is also used to categorize a different type of post. This category can easily be understood as "theme or topic of Post" related to encouraging PYD components. The coder will determine whether a post was intended to encourage any component by an organization. This type of post has information that directly help to foster one of the components or leads to certain information that is helpful to develop the components. (A post possibly has multiple components of PYD with various purposes.)

**1=Competence** – Competence-related posts are encouraging a positive view of one's action in domain-specific areas including the social and academic domains. Contents itself can be helpful

for gaining knowledge or skills for certain actions or a post can share educational resources/material/message that lead to develop certain knowledge or skills. For instance, a post containing the 4-H programs' details can foster competence to participate in the program or to perform related-activities. A post might provide links to the 4-H programs information. Sometimes, a post can encourage competence directly by embracing certain words, such as knowledge, skill, talent, expertise, proficiency or ability, capacity, etc. A post that has one of these words is marked as a competence-related post as well.

**2=Confidence** – Confidence-related posts encourage “an internal sense of overall positive self-worth, identity, and feeling about one’s physical appearance” or “a positive view of a possibility of participating in certain programs of the 4-H.”

This type of post provides detailed information or convenient access to 4-H programs and positive view of the program. A post that shares individual’s and models (the 4-H’ers or alumni) participating in the 4-H programs successfully or performing certain things is interpreted to spur other members’ confidence. In addition, the 4-H mission statement, motivating message and quotes fall under the confidence category. A post that emphasizes confidence can have words like pride, self-belief, trust, faith, credence of oneself, etc.

**3=Connection** – A post which attempts to encourage and emphasize a positive and special bond with members and the organizations is regarded as a connection-related post. This type of post reflects healthy, bidirectional exchanges between audience (4-H’er) and other 4-H’ers/peers, family, schools, communities as well as the 4-H-related organizations.

Connection-related posts foster special identity and inclusion as 4-H’ers through positive posts about the 4-H Club, its programs/activities and members. Sharing stories of other 4-H’ers, photos of 4-H’ers participating in certain programs can make the members have special bonds with each other. A post that asks to think or talk about the 4-H, mission statements, and other 4-H’ers and related people is regarded to contribute to build closer relationships with them. Furthermore, celebrating special events of the 4-H Clubs, holiday greetings (e.g. Mother’s Day and Father’s Day), praising the 4-H members or alumni, promoting conversation and online interactions among the audiences through “Like,” “Comment,” “Share” is regarded as a post which emphasizes senses of family bonds, fellowship, community and connectedness.

**4=Character** – A post that stresses respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity. Character related posts talk about upright values, goodness, just, righteousness, conscientiousness, responsibility, ethics that would possibly influence development of audiences’ mental and moral qualities. A post emphasizes the 4-H mission statement/commitment of 4-H’ers is also perceived to influence on developing Character component. (E.g. I pledge my Head, Heart, Hands, Health to something.)

**5=Caring/Compassion** – A post that is about morality and emphasizing sympathy and empathy, pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. There are various words that also indicate similar meaning, such as fellow feeling, concern, solicitude, sensitivity, warmth, love, tenderness, mercy, leniency, tolerance, kindness, humanity, charity, and responsibility. A post that contains one of these words or similar meaning is noted as related to Caring/Compassion.

**6=Contribution** – A post that motivates participation in organizational programs or urges to contribute to societal issues. Contribution aimed posts is promoting events, appealing for donation, calling for volunteers, asking to buy organizational goods for good cause, throwing a

thought-provoking question and asking for online participation such as sharing materials, clicking “Like,” leaving comments, visiting a link, asking for “follow,” etc.

**7=Cheerfulness/Conviviality (Entertaining and Positive Message)** – Cheerful/Convivial posts contain friendly, funny/interesting messages or picture.

This type of post can contain amusing and entertaining elements related to the youth programs, such as USDA’s MyPlate, etc.

**8=Others** - miscellaneous, uncertain type.

## APPENDIX B

### **In-depth Interview Guide**

The Interview questions will be broad and flexible to cover the details and unexpected findings, and additional questions will be used to lead each interview to meet the research topic and purpose.

Before the interview starts, the interviewees will receive verbal explanation about the purpose of this research and interview, the overall interview procedure and structure, interview question categories. They will be also notified about their rights and audio recording, and how all the files will be handled. All these information are based on the consent form, which was already provided to the participants through email in advance.

In addition, participants, who are doing an interview online or over the phone, will be asked to give a verbal consent by saying statements in the consent form in order to express their intention/agreement to participate in this interview.

Then, interview questions below will be followed.

#### **1. Demographic & Basic Questions**

- Sex:
- Age (year of born):
- Ethnicity:
- Major/ College/ University:
- Original State:
- How often do you use Facebook? How many hours, log in, posting per day and week?
- How many years have you been participating in 4-H?

#### **2. 4-H Facebook Usage**

- What type of 4-H social media was the most influential when you were a member of 4-H and Why?
- What kind of 4-H Facebook pages did you use the most and Why? (e.g. The national 4-H Facebook chapter, local or county Facebook page, Camp page, Order of the Link, etc.)
- How often did you use the 4-H Facebook page? (frequency of like/comment/share, posting, etc.)
- What type of the 4-H Facebook messages was the most influential and why? (Please share the most interesting and influential experience with the 4-H Facebook pages during your membership)
- What kind of 4-H works/programs/activities did you engage in through the 4-H Facebook page and why?

### 3. Perceived Impact of 4-H Facebook on Positive Youth Development (6Cs):

- ✚ **Competence:** a level of achievement, knowledge and ability to perform programs and activities of the 4-H or others
- ✚ **Confidence:** the belief of degree of certainty individuals possess about their internal and external ability and the positive view of participating in the 4-H programs or events
- ✚ **Connection:** a measure of the quality of relationships and degree of interaction with peers, mentors, and organizations
- ✚ **Character:** the engagement in socially responsible behaviors and avoidance of antisocial behaviors
- ✚ **Compassion/Caring:** the degree of interests and care for certain social issues, such as issue regarding to the homeless, the impoverished, wars, environment
- ✚ **Contribution:** the willingness of participating in solving certain social issues. E.g. donation, volunteering works, and communications

- **Competence** - Do you think that the 4-H Facebook page usage helped you improve your competence and Why?

What kind of competence (knowledge, skill, achievement) did you have through the 4-H Facebook?

Do you remember any post that exceptionally helped to achieve any kind of competence?

- **Confidence** - Do you think that the 4-H Facebook page help you increase your confidence and Why?
- **Connection** - Do you think that the 4-H Facebook page help you increase your connection to others and Why?

How did the online connectedness with other 4-H'ers/4-H related people or organizations influence offline relationships with them?

- **Character** - Do you think that the 4-H Facebook page help you improve your character and Why? How do you think the 4-H Facebook page helped you develop righteous values and virtues as a responsible citizen?
- **Compassion** - Do you think that the 4-H Facebook page help you increase your compassion/caring for others?
- **Contribution** - Do you think that the 4-H Facebook page help you increase your contribution to society?

Did the 4-H Facebook page influence you act/participate in any campaign or volunteer work?

- Do you think the 4-H Facebook pages impact your development in any way?

- The most impressive/memorable posts that actually influenced you?
- How powerful/influential/helpful did you think the 4-H FB is during your membership?
- Were you 4-H'er when the 4-H Clubs did not have the FB pages? Can you compare what difference the 4-H FB created?

**4. Current Civic Engagement:**

- What kind of nongovernmental organization (NGO), nonprofit organization (NPO), philanthropic work or community efforts do you engage in?
- Do you think that the experience with the 4-H Facebook pages has helped you engage in current or future nongovernmental organization (NGO), nonprofit organization (NPO), philanthropic work, community organization, etc. and why?

## APPENDIX C

### A Letter for IRB Approval

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
R E S E A R C H

April 7, 2014

Ah Ram Lee  
Dept. of Advertising and Public Relations  
College of Communication and Information Sciences  
Box 870172

Re: IRB # 14-OR-111, "The role of social media communication in 4-H clubs"

Dear Ms. Lee:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on April 6, 2015. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP  
Director & Research Compliance Officer  
Office for Research Compliance  
The University of Alabama



358 Rose Administration Building  
Box 870127  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127  
(205) 348-8461  
FAX (205) 348-7189  
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066

## IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

You are being asked to participate in in-depth interviews to share your 4-H Facebook page usage. This study is called "The Role of Youth-Serving Organizations' Social Media and Its Impact: Analysis of 4-H Facebook Use and Positive Youth Development." This research is being directed by Ah Ram Lee, a master's student of advertising and public relations, and guided by J. Suzanne Horsley, Ph.D., associate professor of advertising and public relations, at The University of Alabama.

### **What is this study about?**

This study is about the impact of social media communication on positive youth development. It aims to investigate how the 4-H club, a youth-related organization, used Facebook from 2012 to 2013. In addition, this study will examine how the 4-H Facebook pages influenced youth development.

### **Why is this study important—What good will the results do?**

The findings may help expand understanding of how the 4-H Facebook page communications influence positive development of its members. This may help youth organizations to improve their communication strategies, which may help young people's positive development.

### **Why have I been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been asked to participate in this research because you are a recent 4-H alumnus, you are between 19 and 22 years of age, and you used the 4-H Facebook pages during your 4-H club membership.

You may have responded to notices from the C&IS CARP Pool at The University of Alabama or to advertising messages posted on either personal pages or the Advertising and Public Relations department's Facebook or Twitter accounts. You also may have been recommended by 4-H alumni who participated in this research.

### **How many other people will be in this study?**

The investigator plans to interview about 20 people.

### **What will I be asked to do in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, the investigator will interview you about your experiences with 4-H Facebook pages. You will be asked to share how you used 4-H Facebook pages and how that has influenced your life. You also will be asked to share your current engagement in similar organizations.

### **How much time will I spend being in this study?**

The interview should last about 45-60 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share.

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**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

**Will I be compensated for being in this study?**

In appreciation for your time, all participants will receive a \$5 Starbucks card after the interview.

**What are the risks (problems or dangers) from being this study?**

There are no foreseeable legal, social, economic, academic, emotional or medical risks associated with this research.

**What are the benefits of being in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to participating in this research. In appreciation for your time in participating in the interview, you will receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You may be interviewed in the privacy of a seminar room on The University of Alabama campus or in another place that is convenient for you. The interview may be conducted over the phone, Skype, or via electronic chat, depending upon the convenience of the interviewee.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in Dr. Horsley's office, which is locked when she is not there. For participants who want to do an interview online, they will be asked to give a verbal consent. The verbal consent will be recorded separately from an interview and will be kept in the investigator's password-protected laptop.

When I record the interview, I will not use your name, so no one will know who you are on the tape. Furthermore, all responses will be presented numerically and the true names will not be written in the final research paper. Only the researcher would be able to associate data with an identity, and it will never be available to anyone outside of the researcher and advisor.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study?**

The only alternative is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant?**

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to participate at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. However, the gift cards will only be awarded to participants who complete the interview as a token of appreciation for their time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationships with The University of Alabama.

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The interviewer would like to tape record the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be taped, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may review the study records if they wish. This is to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now. If you have any question about this interview, you can contact Ah Ram Lee, (786) 925-8350, [alee45@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:alee45@crimson.ua.edu). If you have questions or complaints about your rights as a research participant, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make a suggestion, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach Website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online there, or you may ask Ah Ram Lee for a copy of it. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

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**For participants who will do an interview from a distance, you will be asked to give a verbal consent when we start an interview. You are not required to sign this consent form.**

**For participants who will do an interview in person, you will be asked to sign this form before the interview starts. You will provide written consent by putting your signature, and date below.**

Please sign below if you agree to participate in this research.

*I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions.*

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Signature of Research Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*I agree to have this interview audio recorded.*

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Signature of Research Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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