TWEETING IN GREEK:
HOW NATIONAL FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES USE TWITTER

Zachary Taylor and Arianne McArdle,
University of Texas at Austin

No extant research examines fraternity and sorority use of social media. This study examines official Twitter accounts of national fraternities and sororities (n=135) and their Twitter usage from July 2016 - July 2017 (n=47,705 tweets). Findings reveal fraternities are less likely to use hashtags, user tags, and URLs to engage their followers than sororities, while both fraternities and sororities rarely release official statements promoting positive behavior of their members or condemning negative behavior of their members, potentially contributing to a sense of "constant media scrutiny" suffered by Greek organizations (Kingkade, 2015). Implications for advisors and future research are addressed.

A large body of research has demonstrated the positive social, economic, and academic benefits of fraternity and sorority membership (Nelson et al., 2006; Pike, 2000; Walker, Martin, & Hussey, 2015). However, an equally large body of research has illustrated the many negative perceptions of fraternity and sorority membership (Grasgreen, 2012; Harris & Harper, 2014; Wells & Corts, 2008), including fraternity- or sorority-related social problems such as alcohol abuse (Soule, Barnett, & Moorhouse, 2015), hazing (Cimino, 2016), eating disorders and poor body image (Averett, Terrizzi, & Wang, 2017), and irresponsible or lewd on- and off-campus behavior (Hevel, Martin, & Pascarella, 2014). As a result, national-level fraternity and sorority organizations have mobilized their public relations and communications offices to mitigate the damage of such research and negative public perception.

For instance, according to the North-American Interfraternity Conference (2017), fraternity chapters' public relations units have charged themselves with sophisticated communication efforts to "counteract the popularized social media platforms" and "constant media scrutiny" which "damages the reputation of fraternities and drowns out fraternities' unified powerful voice" (Kingkade, 2015). Ultimately, in a reaction to this sense of "constant media scrutiny" and the negative public perception of fraternity chapters and members, national Greek organizations have formally pledged to counteract this negative public perception. However, no extant research exists that examines how fraternities—or sororities—at the national or local level use perhaps the most efficient and effective tools to communicate directly with the public: social media outlets, namely Twitter, which longitudinal research has supported is an especially effective medium for users to share news instantly with a large, global audience (Al-Rawi, 2017; Armstrong & Gao, 2010; Bruns & Burgess, 2012).

Since its inception in the March 2006, Twitter has amassed more than 328 million unique daily users with over 1 billion unique visits monthly to sites with embedded Tweets (Twitter Inc., 2017). For colleges and universities, Twitter use is nearly universal, as countless colleges and universities across institutions types have been using Twitter (Kimmons, Veletsianos, & Woodward, 2017) since its introduction to the public, recognizing Twitter's ability to efficiently and effectively communicate with a wide variety of educational stakeholders and the general public. However, fraternity and sorority use of social media remains a large, important gap in

the literature.

Although social media wields incredible social currency and communicative ability, it is unclear how fraternities and sororities use these technologies, and furthermore, it is unknown whether fraternities and sororities use these technologies to release formal statements to communicate positive events and happenings or comment upon and condemn negative occurrences, thus potentially improving their public perception(s). Therefore, this study examines the official Twitter accounts of 135 national fraternities and sororities associated with six of the largest umbrella organizations in the United States: the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC), National APIDA Panhellenic Association (NAPA), and the North American Inter-Fraternity Conference (NIC). To fill the gap in the research, this study answers three questions pertinent to the public relations efforts of fraternities and sororities across the United States:

1.) Do national fraternities and sororities use Twitter?

2.) What types of information do national fraternities and sororities share on Twitter?

3.) Do these organizations use Twitter to promote and advertise positive behavior and/or condemn negative behavior performed by fraternities and sororities, thus working to improve their public perception?

4.) Do these organizations use hashtags, user tags, and URLs to engage and grow their follower base to communicate with a larger segment of the public?

Entering the study, it is our hypothesis that national fraternities and sororities do not use social media—primarily Twitter—to its utmost capability to promote a fraternity's or sorority's overall positive image and impact on their local or national community. Furthermore, as the researchers of this study have experience in fraternity and sorority membership and local chapter leadership, we hypothesize that national organizations primarily use social media to share internal news, including highlighting prominent alumni, bestowing organizational awards, and announcing memorials for alumni who have passed away, as were the practices in our prior experiences at the chapter level.

The findings of this study will greatly inform public relations and communications practices as to how fraternities and sororities and their advisors can positively leverage the power of social media to connect with a much larger audience and share the many good deeds and positive behaviors exhibited by fraternities and sororities across the country.

Literature Review

Because this study is the first to examine fraternity and sorority use of social media, this literature review will focus on how various higher education stakeholders use social media and how public and private organizations use social media to promote or comment upon organization-specific events and stories, both positive and negative. Furthermore, these literature reviews are not meant to be exhaustive; the amount of research focused on social media in higher education is voluminous and exceeds the purpose of this study. Instead, these reviews highlight trends in higher education social media use—primarily Twitter—and how social media can be leveraged by nonprofit organizations to promote organization-specific news and initiatives.

Social Media and Higher Education

Since Twitter was founded in 2006, research in higher education has focused primarily on its usage by three groups of educational stakeholders: students, faculty, and institutional marketing and communications professionals.

Students. Jacquemin, Smelser, and Bernot (2014) found college students prefer to use

Twitter for socializing rather than academic purposes, with graduate students demonstrating a strong, negative perception of Twitter's ability to facilitate conducive classroom discussions. However, Tiernan (2014) found that when used during lectures to elicit responses to questions, Twitter was an effective learning tool that for shy, introverted college students to share their opinions and ideas, with related studies demonstrating the positive effects of Twitter usage and academic engagement (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). Social media also plays a crucial role in college student development, as Dabbagh and Kintsantas (2012) learned Twitter has a capacity to bolster a student's sense of self-regulated learning. Yet, Twitter has also been shown to facilitate racialized microaggressions and race-driven hostility that perpetuates the negative experiences of marginalized populations on college campuses across the country (Gin, Martínez-Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon, & Hottell, 2017), as well as serve as a platform for college students to make inappropriate, immature references to drugs and alcohol (Moreno, Arseniev-Koehler, Litt, & Christakis, 2016).

Faculty. Studies have shown that faculty are less likely to incorporate social media—including Twitter—into their courses due to a lack of training on how to do so (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008), and that faculty are likely to decline social media friend requests from students because of the dangers of crossing unprofessional or inappropriate boundaries (Metzger, Finley, Ulbrich, & McAuley, 2010). Many faculty also report there being too many cultural, pedagogical, and/or institutional restraints in an academic setting to integrate Twitter and other social media into their curricula and classrooms (Manca & Ranieri, 2016).

Faculty also tend to prefer traditional modes of communication (email and office visits) over Twitter, as extant research finds that a majority of faculty members have no plans to incorporate social media—including Twitter—into their classes, yet faculty members and instructors who did use Twitter in their classes reported a having a positive experience (Jacquemin, Smelser, & Bernot, 2014). Furthermore, Veletsianos' (2012) study found that higher education scholars (n=45) frequently and primarily use Twitter to share information related to their professional interests and about their students and courses, with a later study finding that higher education scholars (n=237) participation on Twitter varies wildly from person to person and professors are more likely to use Twitter as a social justice and personal scholarship platform than graduate students who primarily share information relevant to the graduate student experience (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2016).

Institutional marketing and communications professionals. Kimmons, Veletsianos, and Woodward's (2017) study of institutional use of Twitter is largest and most recent examination of the medium, comprising 2,411 unique Twitter accounts and over 5.7 million tweets of U.S. institutions of higher education. Their study found that a majority of institutions of higher education use Twitter to disseminate information instead of eliciting action, while preferring to refer users and followers to internally-hosted web content, such as tweeting links to an institution's .edu website. Like U.S. institutions, Canadian public institutions of higher education also use Twitter primarily as a tool to share institutional news and broadcast positive representations of institutional life, making it difficult for prospective students and faculty to accurately assess campus culture and climate (Veletsianos, Kimmons, Shaw, Pasquini, & Woodward, 2017).

An examination of elite institutions of higher education and their Twitter use found that structural relationships and geographic location had a larger impact on network size and popularity than an institution's global ranking, speaking to the notion that institutions ought to prioritize Twitter content and the attracting of engaged audiences to ensure the success of their social media initiatives (Shields, 2016). Furthermore, related studies suggest that Twitter

is especially effective in recruiting students if institutional Twitter use generates a large number of followers, yet successful institutional use of Twitter is interpersonal and interactive, portraying an image of a popular but socially-accessible institution of higher education (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016).

Social Media as a Nonprofit Public Relations Tool

Because national fraternity and sorority organizations are not institutions of higher education but are large, nonprofit, 501(c) organizations, it is important to understand how these types of organizations use social media to share news with internal and external stakeholders and promote the organization's culture and societal impact.

Echoing much of the research focused on Twitter use by institutions of higher education, recent studies suggest that large nonprofit organizations also use Twitter primarily as an organizational newsfeed instead of engaging users on a personal level to build social networks and maximize the effectiveness of the medium (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Similarly, a study focusing on nonprofit human services organizations in a six county area surrounding New York City found that nonprofits primarily used Twitter to communicate with current constituencies, market organizational events and activities, and raise community awareness of the organization (Campbell, Lambright, & Wells, 2014). However, emerging bodies of research suggest that non-profit organizations have demonstrated greater organizational interaction through Twitter versus traditional forms of media such as organizational websites, television commercials, and print media, suggesting that growing a nonprofit's online presence should be prioritized on social media over other outlets (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Focusing on the impact of nonprofit organization social media use as it pertains to social justice and change, Guo and Saxton (2014) found that many nonprofit tweets serve primarily two purposes: calling stakeholders to action and building community around a particular issue relevant to the community. More particularly, effective nonprofit tweets use content-relevant hyperlinks and hashtags to reach a wider audience on Twitter, while simultaneously composing tweets that specifically engage a nonprofit's core constituency and follower base:

> Save for the public education and coalition-building tactics, the ultimate advocacy goal involves mobilizing supporters. At this stage, advocacy is mainly a mobilizational practice, with the organization's tweets being used to facilitate public events, direct action, and grassroots lobbying, though perhaps to a more limited extent than might be expected. Tools such as hyperlinks and hashtags are frequently used in conjunction with mobilizational messages at this stage. (p. 73)

Analyzing these uses of hyperlinks and hashtags produced what the researchers defined as a "three-stage pyramid model of social media-based advocacy: reaching out to people, keeping the flame alive, and stepping up to action" (p. 74). Most relevant to national fraternity and sorority Twitter use, Guo and Saxton (2014) articulated that nonprofits communicate with followers in a way that educates the followers into becoming "public education foot soldiers" for the organization's cause, making it critical that nonprofits build their follower base and strategically use hyperlinks and hashtags to portray the organization in a positive light and highlight organizational successes (p. 76).

However, no extant research addresses the paradox facing national fraternity and sorority organizations, primarily the necessity for these organizations to both promote the positive behavior and condemn the negative behavior of its members: this study seeks to fill this gap in the research to inform both fraternity and sorority organizations as well as nonprofits.

Method

This study employs Riffe, Lacy, and Fico's (2014) quantitative content analysis of social media messaging through holistic coding (first round) and subcoding (second round) strategies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) to analyze national fraternity and sorority Twitter use. Per Riffe, Lacy, and Fico, holistic coding and subcoding are appropriate strategies for a quantitative content analysis of media messages as coder reliability is increased by the coder or a larger research team first defining concepts that emerge from the text (holistic) and reaching consensus on each concept that emerges thereafter (subcoding).

As the research team has experience with fraternity and sorority advising, these concepts were made much easier to understand, as the Data Analysis section of this paper outlines. Quantitative content analysis is also appropriate for this particular project as the media of a single tweet is inherently multimodal: a tweet can contain text, an image, a video, or a combination of all three, including social media messaging tools such as URLS, hashtags, and user tags via the "@" symbol followed by the user's Twitter handle. Therefore, having the flexibility to first define concepts (holistic coding) and then redefine concepts as necessary (subcoding) allowed the researchers to appropriately use their prior knowledge to define fraternity- and sorority-related concepts which were then empirically verified through observation and analysis of the Twitter data.

Population and Sampling Frame

To maximize reliability and generalizability, the researchers identified the population of national fraternity and sorority organizations associated with six of the largest umbrella organizations in the United States: the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC), National APIDA Panhellenic Association (NAPA), and the North American Inter-Fraternity Conference (NIC). This search produced 145 organizations, with 135 having official Twitter accounts. After a small pilot study, the researchers agreed that one calendar year of Twitter data would serve as an appropriate sampling frame, as tweets were collected from July 1st, 2016 until July 1st, 2017, producing a total of 47,705 tweets across 135 Twitter accounts. The researchers justified a one-year sampling frame, as this time period allowed national fraternities and sororities to tweet through all major, yearly events such as summer leadership and awards conferences, pre-school recruitment events, rush weeks, on-campus social activities and gatherings, major fundraising initiatives, and both fall and spring graduations.

Data Gathering

The researchers used RStudio and the *twitteR* package to scrape all 135 national fraternity and sorority organizations' Twitter accounts. RStudio is a free and open-source development program that allows users to write their own software, which can then be used to connect with various social media application programming interfaces (APIs). Social media platforms, such as Twitter, grant researchers access to their API, allowing these researchers insight into how users are generating content on the social media platform. For this study's purposes, the research team employed *twitteR*, an RStudio package with access to Twitter's API in order to access publicly-available Twitter account data, such as handles, user descriptions, dates of access, and tweets.

During this data gathering process, the research team learned that 97% of national fraternities (76 of 79 fraternities) had a Twitter account, with 92% maintaining an active Twitter account (70 of 76 fraternities). For sororities, 100% of national sororities had a Twitter account, with 98% maintaining an active

account (57 of 58 sororities). An active Twitter account was defined as having tweeted at least once over the past year and at least once per year since 2006. Account-specific data included Twitter handle, profile description, tweet count, follower count, favorite count, friend count, URL, and location. This information details the entire Twitter history of the account, dating back to each account's creation, ranging from March 2006 to July 2017. Once this data was extracted from all 135 accounts, the researchers created an Excel database to organize this descriptive information, which can be found in Table 1 of this study.

Using RStudio and the *twitteR* package, the researchers then set a sampling frame of July 1st, 2016 until July 1st, 2017 to scrape every tweet from all 135 Twitter accounts, producing a data set of 47,705 unique tweets. Twitter accounts were coded as inactive if the account had not updated their Twitter status during the sampling frame. From each tweet, the following data was scraped and sorted into an Excel spreadsheet: Twitter handle, tweet text, date, tweet URL, total favorites, total retweets, and total activity (favorites+retweets).

Data Analysis

Using a holistic coding approach, the researchers first coded all tweets blind, then reviewed all tweets collaboratively, producing a double-blind coding procedure to ensure accuracy of the coded tweets. After this collaboration process, the researchers performed a round of subcoding to discover more specific themes of the data. The researchers individually identified—and then collaborated to reach consensus upon—five different types of tweets made by national fraternity and sorority organizations:

1.) Internal news addressing organizational members (i.e. notifying members that an alumni has passed away, alerting members to a change in conference programming)
2.) Advertisements for jobs, scholarships, and fundraisers (i.e. directing members toward a scholarship application and including a hyperlink, urging followers to donate to a particular fundraising initiative)
3.) Official branding (i.e. tweets that include a picture of fraternity and sorority members socializing, broadcasting a fraternity or sorority motto or logo)
4.) Personal interaction (i.e. retweeting a follower's tweet, thanking a follower for following the organization's Twitter account)
5.) An official public statement on a positive or negative event or activity (i.e. releasing an official statement regarding the Black Lives Matter movement, condemning gender-related violence against the LGTBQA+ community)

After the round of subcoding, official public statements were identified as falling into four categories:

1.) Official statements promoting positive fraternity- or sorority-specific behavior (i.e. announcing the achievement of a major fundraising goal)
2.) Official statements condemning negative fraternity- or sorority-specific behavior (i.e. criticizing hazing, reprimanding members' alcohol abuse or criminal activity)
3.) Official statements promoting social justice not directly related to the organization (i.e. voicing support for undocumented immigrants vying for access to citizenship)
4.) Official statements condemning criminal activity outside of the organization (i.e. the terrorist attacks in Paris, police shootings in Minnesota)

Per Guo and Saxton (2014), the researchers then employed a binary coding strategy (1=yes, 0=no) for each official statement if the statement used a URL, hashtag, or user tag, as these messaging techniques serve to bolster the impact of the tweet within the Twitter community, effectively making the message more visible

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis of Twitter Accounts of National Fraternities and Sororities (n=135 Organizations) from March 2006 to July 2017

Sample	
# of national fraternities	76
# of national sororities	58
# of national coeducational organizations	1
Total	135
National fraternities:	
With Twitter accounts	97%
With active Twitter accounts	92%
Average # of tweets per account	3,317 tweets
High tweets	16,409 tweets
Low tweets	7 tweets
Average # of followers per account	4,342 followers
High followers	21,388 followers
Low followers	8 followers
Average # of friends per account	541 friends
High friends	4,973 friends
Low friends	0 friends
Average # of favorites per account	801 favorites
High favorites	6,603 favorites
Low favorites	0 favorites
Average favorites per tweet	0.16 favorites per tweet
National sororities:	
With Twitter accounts	100%
With active Twitter accounts	98%
Average # of tweets per account	4,565 tweets
High tweets	16,409 tweets
Low tweets	23 tweets
Average # of followers per account	9,066 followers
High followers	31,084 followers
Low followers	39 followers
Average # of friends per account	1,048 friends
High friends	9,037 friends
Low friends	9 friends
Average # of favorites per account	1,943 favorites
High favorites	26,033 favorites
Low favorites	1 favorite
Average favorites per tweet	0.43 favorites

to a larger number of users, regardless if the users follow the fraternity or sorority or not. For instance, a user with zero followers could include the hashtag "#hazing" with the message, "Work with your fellow fraternity brothers to say no to #hazing this fall on your campus!" Even though this message would not be seen by any followers, the message would appear in Twitter's network search results underneath "#hazing," which would be visible by the entire Twitter community, comprising 328 million daily users. Here, for the purposes of this study, it is important to learn whether national fraternities and sororities are leveraging the power of Twitter's network—through the inclusion of hashtags, hyperlinks, and user tags—to share positive news and condemn negative news related to their respective fraternity or sorority, thus working to improve the public's perception of these organizations.

Delimitations

There are three primary delimitations of this study: population size, sample size, and changes in social media technology. This study does not analyze individual chapters' tweets, nor does this study analyze individual fraternity and sorority members' tweets: both of these areas represent areas of research that would inform fraternity and sorority advisors as to how these stakeholders use social media and if strategies could be implemented to improve the impact of positive fraternity and sorority related news shared through these media. However, because many social media outlets such as Twitter and Instagram do not require the user to use their real name or include personally identifying information on a public or private account, future researchers may want to explore qualitative projects in order to identify active fraternity and sorority stakeholders and examine how these stakeholders use social media to share fraternity- and sorority-related news, both positive and negative in nature.

The research team also acknowledges that not all national fraternity and sorority organizations are represented in this study, however, the data gathering and analysis procedures for the 135 organizations produced over 47,000 unique units of text, representing a rigorous and original contribution that works to fill the gap in literature regarding how fraternities and sororities use social media to project a public image and potentially improve the public's perception of fraternity or sorority membership and/or involvement. Future research should focus on a larger sample size, perhaps considering a five- or ten-year longitudinal study of social media use across multiple platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, or other popular social media outlets.

Finally, since the completion of this study, Twitter announced a new, 280-character limit for all tweets, beginning in November 2017. Although the research team believes the current study's sample size is strong, Twitter's decision to change the length of a tweet provides ample opportunity for future research. Those interested in the social media tendencies of fraternities and sororities could investigate how Twitter's character limit change affected how these organizations used Twitter from November 2017 to the present. Moreover, because 280-characters allows a Twitter user to literally "say more" with each tweet, fraternity and sorority researchers could examine how Twitter's longer character limit could allow these organizations to release longer, more detailed statements regarding positive or negative publicity received by the organization.

Findings

A descriptive analysis of Twitter accounts of national fraternities and sororities (n=135 organizations) from March 2006 to July 2017 can be found in Table 1.

Although 76 fraternities and only 58 sororities comprised this sample, data reveal sororities maintain much more active Twitter accounts

than fraternities do. For instance, the average sorority Twitter account has over twice as many followers, nearly twice as many friends, and over twice as many favorites as average fraternity Twitter accounts do. Furthermore, the average follower base for sorority Twitter accounts are nearly three times as active as the average follower base for fraternity Twitter accounts: fraternity tweets average 0.16 favorites per tweet, whereas sorority tweets average 0.43 favorites per tweet. Sororities also tend to tweet more than fraternities do, as the average sorority Twitter account tweeted 4,565 times since the account's inception, whereas fraternities only tweeted 3,317 times.

The sole co-educational organization data was not presented in Table 1. However, this organization tweeted 2,977 times, averaging 0.21 favorites per tweet. This organization also had 1,018 followers and 390 friends: both numbers are markedly lower than fraternity or sorority account data.

A descriptive analysis of Twitter usage of national fraternities and sororities (n=135 organizations, 47,247 tweets) from July 2016 to July 2017 can be found in Table 2 on the next page.

Data reveal that sororities are better at engaging their follower base than fraternities are: fraternities averaged 9.9 activities (favorites + retweets) per tweet, whereas sororities averaged 24.6 activities per tweet. Fraternities are also less likely to use hashtags, user tags, and URLS in tweets than sororities, potentially revealing why fraternity tweets experience less activity than sorority tweets. However, fraternities and sororities use Twitter to share much of the same content, as both fraternities and sororities predominantly use Twitter to share internal news and hold personal conversations: internal news and personal conversations represent roughly 55% and 30% of all fraternity and sorority tweets. Fraternities and sororities also use Twitter to brand their organization and advertise for position openings at a similar

percentage, with less than one percentage point differentiating the two types of tweets.

In terms of making official statements, data in this study suggest fraternities and sororities use Twitter to release official statements in largely the same fashion, however, sororities are nearly twice as likely to tweet to promote social justice not related to the organization than fraternities: 3.5% of all sorority tweets promoted social justice unrelated to the sorority, whereas 1.8% of all fraternity tweets promoted the same type of social justice. Furthermore, fraternities were five times as likely to condemn negative fraternity-specific behavior (0.5%), compared to sororities (0.1%), even though these percentages were easily the smallest subset of any tweet type coded in this study.

Discussion

Ultimately, this study answered all four of the research questions, while also affirming our hypothesis prior to the study.

First, national fraternities and sororities are active Twitter users: nearly every organization in the sample maintained active Twitter accounts. In fact, all national sororities in the sample had Twitter accounts, with 98% of these sororities maintaining active accounts. These percentages were slightly lower for national fraternities, but the data in this study suggest that Twitter is indeed a viable source of national fraternity- and sorority-related information given the high percentage of active Twitter accounts for these organizations. Subsequently, future research should address fraternity and sorority social media use across other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and others to learn how these organizations use these platforms to support and grow their follower base and organization in general.

Second, data in this study also partially confirm and partially deny a pre-study hypothesis while echoing much of the research focused on Twitter use by large nonprofit organizations

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Twitter Accounts of National Fraternities and Sororities (n=135 Organizations, 47,247 Tweets) from July 2016 to July 2017

National fraternities	
Total tweets:	25,091
Favorites per tweet	7.6
Retweets per tweet	2.3
Total activity per tweet	9.9
Percentage of tweets	
Using hashtag (#)	53.1%
Using user tag (@)	62.8%
Using URL	68.5%
Internal news	58.9%
Personal	30.1%
Branding	3.9%
Advertising	1.1%
Official statement	6.0%
Promoting positive fraternity-specific behavior	1.9%
Condemning negative fraternity-specific behavior	0.5%
Promoting social justice not related to fraternity	1.8%
Condemning criminal activity outside of fraternity	1.8%
National sororities:	
Total tweets:	22,156
Favorites per tweet	17.1
Retweets per tweet	7.5
Total activity per tweet	24.6
Percentage of tweets	
Using hashtag (#)	64.2%
Using user tag (@)	69.1%
Using URL	88.3%
Internal news	52.6%
Personal	33.9%
Branding	4.5%
Advertising	1.9%
Official statement	7.1%
Promoting positive sorority-specific behavior	2.2%
Condemning negative sorority-specific behavior	0.1%
Promoting social justice not related to sorority	3.5%
Condemning criminal activity outside of sorority	1.3%

(Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Prior to the study, our hypothesis held that fraternities and sororities often use Twitter to share internal news. Similar to large nonprofits, national fraternities and sororities tend to use Twitter as an organizational newsfeed before any other purpose: 58.9% and 52.6% of fraternity and sorority tweets were focused on sharing internal news. However, both fraternities and sororities also frequently use Twitter to engage users on a personal level, potentially strengthening their organization's social network, supporting best practices articulated by Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton (2012) and Waters and Jamal (2011). Here, data in this study reveal that Twitter usage of national fraternities and sororities are similar to that of large nonprofits, yet fraternities and sororities tend to personally engage their follower bases more frequently than large nonprofits do. Distinguishing the social media behavior of a large nonprofit from national Greek organizations is important, as national Greek organizations may want to consult the social media best practices of other types of organizations given their potentially unique follower base comprised of former students, current students, alumni, organizational leaders, members of the general public, and others.

Data in this study also reveal how national fraternities and sororities may view the purposes and functions of social media for their organizations. Around 10% of tweets of both national fraternities and sororities were focused on branding, advertising, and making official statements, indicating that these organizations likely use other methods of communication— including other social media platforms—to articulate these organizational needs, messages, and values with their constituents. Furthermore, data in this study suggest that the Twitter follower bases of national sororities are more engaged than the Twitter follower bases of national fraternities. Although beyond the scope of this study, future research should address how fraternities and sororities build their social media follower bases,

articulating best practices to engage these bases and maximize the communicative potential of various social media platforms. National sorority tweets (24.6 activities per tweet) were nearly three times as active as national fraternity tweets (9.9 activities per tweet): this discrepancy should be examined in further detail.

Answering our third research question, national fraternities and sororities rarely release official statements of any kind, with only 2.4% of all fraternity tweets and 2.3% of sorority tweets specifically promoting or condemning fraternity- or sorority-related positive or negative behavior. Most frequently, national fraternities promoted positive fraternity-specific behavior (1.9% of all fraternity tweets) and national sororities promoted social justice not related to the sorority (3.5% of all sorority tweets). Because the data suggest these organizations rarely release official statements on Twitter, it is possible that national fraternities and sororities are not using the medium to promote the positive behavior of their members or condemn the negative behavior of their members, both working to improve these organizations' public perception. Consider this tweet composed by "Theta_Phi_Alpha" on March 27th, 2017:

> @lukeswinney We're aware of the allegations, take this matter very seriously and strongly condemn any such behaviors https://t.co/04nJ0yXja1

Here, this national sorority addressed a single user to release an official statement condemning the negative behavior of their members. Surely, condemning the negative behavior of organizational members is an admirable effort, yet these types of tweets were very rare in this study, and it is important to note that this particular tweet did not engage a larger Twitter user base by incorporating a hashtag into the message itself. Likewise, consider this tweet composed by "officialsigep" on November 3rd, 2016:

> We want to provide an update on the allegations against our chapter at the

University of Nebraska Lincoln: https://t.co/nnVEKbwy0v

Again, condemning negative behavior is admirable, but data in this study suggest that official statements could be composed in a fashion that reaches a larger Twitter audience by incorporating a user tag or hashtag in the message. Consider this tweet composed by "DeltaSigmaPhiHQ" on November 2nd, 2016:

"…it is on us, as brothers in Delta Upsilon, to help end sexual violence on college campuses." #ItsOnUs #Justice https://t.co/dgBjWmXzne

We coded this tweet as internal news addressing organizational members, yet it is important to note how this national fraternity used hashtags to reach a larger Twitter audience outside of their follower base. A search of Twitter hashtags reveals that thousands of users employ the hashtag "#Justice" every day, generating an immense Twitter feed. Granted, there is nothing to indicate this tweet is an official statement, but including relevant, impactful hashtags in tweets could help improve an organization's public perception by introducing organizational values and beliefs to a much larger Twitter audience.

Consider this tweet composed by "alphasigs" on June 22nd, 2017 regarding an anti-hazing initiative:

Hazing hurts everyone. ATO doesn't haze, #ATOLeads. #NHPW16 @PreventHazing https://t.co/0AKdfrHti2

Here, Alpha Sigma Phi used a combination of hashtags and user tags to amplify their message. Although this tweet had only received eight "favorites" during the data collection process of this study, the user tag @PreventHazing has over 7,500 followers, a thousand more than the @alphasigs account. In addition, @PreventHazing is the official Twitter account for www.hazingprevention.org, a large, national, nonprofit organization committed to preventing hazing in fraternity, sorority, athletic, and extracurricular settings. As a result, @alphasigs may have amplified their message to reach a much larger audience—while promoting a just and worthy initiative—by simply adding a few characters attached to both a hashtag or user tag.

Finally, to answer our last research question, national fraternities and sororities include URLs in their tweets more often than hashtags or user tags—68.5% of fraternity tweets and 88.3% of sorority tweets followed this practice—echoing the research of Kimmons, Veletsianos, and Woodward (2017) who found that institutions of higher education are most likely to include institutional URLs in their tweets to communicate with constituents. Consequently, the national fraternity and sorority practice of including URLs more frequently than hashtags or user tags may be limiting the communicative power of Twitter. Only 53.1% and 64.2% of fraternity and sorority tweets included a hashtag, while only 62.8% and 69.1% of fraternity and sorority tweets included a user tag. Not only does including a hashtag or user tag increase the impact of a tweet by reaching a larger audience, but it is notable that not a single official statement released by a national fraternity or sorority included a user tag of any large, national news source such as NBC, the *New York Times*, or *The Huffington Post*. Seemingly, national fraternities and sororities are missing opportunities to promote positive behavior and condemn negative behavior of their members and amplify their tweets by including hashtags and user tags in these messages.

Ultimately, data in this study imply that national fraternities and sororities do not heed the best practices for nonprofit social media use offered by Guo and Saxton (2014), while mirroring institutional use of Twitter in higher education (Kimmons, Veletsianos, & Woodward, 2017). Guo and Saxton (2014) asserted that nonprofits should communicate with followers in a way that molds a follower base into "public education foot soldiers" for the organization's cause (p. 76). In this study, national fraternities and sororities rarely promote positive member behavior or condemn negative member behavior

to mobilize their follower base or improve their organization's public perception, instead choosing to share internal news and connect with users on a personal basis akin to institutions of higher education (Kimmons, Veletsianos, & Woodward, 2017). Furthermore, this study suggests that national sororities are more likely to use amplifying messaging techniques such as including hashtags or user tags in tweets than their national fraternity peers, yet both types of organizations could use these strategies to compose Guo and Saxton's (2014) notion of "mobilizational messages" to increase and engage follower bases (p. 73), while working to improve their organization's public perception.

Implications for Advisors of Fraternities and Sororities

Data in this study reveal a number of implications relevant for fraternity advisors and sorority advisors hoping to improve their public image and share the good deeds performed by their organizations with a larger audience.

First, advisors should adopt best practices of nonprofit social media use by engaging users on a personal level to build social networks and maximize the effectiveness of the medium (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011) while composing "mobilizational messages" to promote their organization's values, beliefs, and social causes (Guo & Saxton, 2014, p. 73). Furthermore, advisors must advocate for the use of social media to promote positive happenings of their organizations, paying a special attention to the use of hyperlinks, hashtags, and user tags to amplify the message far beyond a fraternity's or sorority's follower base. Fraternity and sorority advisors should simultaneously sustain their follower base and work to grow it. Although it is admirable to share good news with current followers, fraternity and sororities must work to improve their public image by addressing much larger audience: using hyperlinks, hashtags, and user tags would likely broaden the impact

of any positive news or official statement shared on social media, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and others.

While far from a guaranteed strategy, fraternity and sorority advisors should encourage their members to share positive news and user-tag mainstream or local news outlets in hopes that these outlets pick up on the positive news and distribute the news to an even wider network available to these news organizations. Consider this tweet promoting the positive behavior of fraternity members composed by "AEPi" on August 12th, 2016:

> We are thrilled to announce that we've raised $300,000 for philanthropy this year! #AEPi16 #AEPiGivesBack

Here, this national fraternity could have used a more broad hashtag, such as "#fundraising," to increase the audience of the tweet, potentially building the fraternity's social network and growing awareness of the fraternity's good deeds. Furthermore, this tweet could have user-tagged a major news source, such as "@nbc" or "@foxnews" or a local news outlet closer to the headquarters of the national fraternity in hopes of that news outlet retweeting the tweet or connecting with the fraternity to compose a news story. This strategy can be employed by either individual members, an organization's advisor, or the organizational professional charged with social media communications.

Finally, national fraternity and sorority advisors should consider using social media to release official statements meant to speak on the behalf of fraternity and sorority members. This study suggests that around 10% of all fraternity and sorority tweets included an official statement, with a fraction of this percentage condemning negative member behavior. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) asserted that non-profit organizations experience greater organizational interaction through Twitter versus traditional forms of media, rendering social media outlets attractive spaces for making official statements and reaching large, international audiences

through the strategic use of hashtags, user tags, and hyperlinks. Advisors should harness the great power of social media—including Twitter—and use it to the advantage of fraternity and sorority members who may be unfairly maligned by the public's often-negative perception of fraternity and sorority involvement. However, advisors should use social media to condemn negative behavior of fraternity and sorority members to amplify organizational values and positively shape the public's perception of the organization.

Conclusion

When the North-American Interfraternity Conference (2017) announced that fraternity chapters' public relations units have charged themselves with sophisticated communication efforts to "counteract the popularized social media platforms" and "constant media scrutiny" which "damages the reputation of fraternities and drowns out fraternities' unified powerful voice" (Kingkade, 2015), perhaps these organizations need to address their detractors, naysayers, and opponents where they are: social media. Both fraternity and sorority advisors should re-evaluate their social media strategies to ensure that they are following best practices articulated by extant nonprofit research (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011) and higher education research (Kimmons, Veletsianos, & Woodward, 2017). By effectively using hashtags, user tags, and hyperlinks while informing one's current follower base and working to grow that base, fraternities and sororities will be better able to share the immeasurable positive impact these organizations have on their local, national, and global communities.

References

Ajjan, H., & Hartshorne, R. (2008). Investigating faculty decisions to adopt Web 2.0 technologies: Theory and empirical tests. *The Internet and Higher Education, 11*(2), 71-80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2008.05.002

Al-Rawi, A. (2017). News organizations 2.0: A comparative study of Twitter news. *Journalism Practice, 11*(6), 705-720. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1195239

Armstrong, C. L., & Gao, F. (2010). Now tweet this: How news organizations use Twitter. *Electronic News, 4*(4), 218-235. https://doi.org/10.1177/1931243110389457

Averett, S., Terrizzi, S., & Wang, Y. (2017). The effect of sorority membership on eating disorders, body weight, and disordered-eating behaviors. *Health Economics, 26*(7), 875-891. https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3360

Bruns, A., & Burgess, J. (2012). Researching news discussion on Twitter. *Journalism Studies, 13*(5-6), 801-814. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.664428

Campbell, D. A., Lambright, K. T., & Wells, C. J. (2014). Looking for friends, fans, and followers? Social media use in public and nonprofit human services. *Public Administration Review, 74*(5), 655-663. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12261

Cimino, A. (2016). Fraternity hazing and the process of planned failure. *Journal of American Studies*, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875816001924

Dabbagh, N., & Kitsantas, A. (2012). Personal learning environments, social media, and self-regulated learning: A natural formula for connecting formal and informal learning. *The Internet and Higher Education, 15*(1), 3-8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.06.002

Gin, K. J., Martínez-Alemán, A. M., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Hottell, D. (2017). Racialized aggressions and social media on campus. *Journal of College Student Development, 58*(2), 159-174. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2017.0013

Grasgreen, A. (2012, March 13). Perceptive Greek programming. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/03/13/naspa-consortium-survey-finds-varying-student-perceptions-value-greek-life

Guo, C., & Saxton, G. D. (2014). Tweeting social change: How social media are changing nonprofit advocacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 43*(1), 57-79. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012471585

Harris, F., III, & Harper, S. R. (2014). Beyond bad behaving brothers: Productive performances of masculinities among college fraternity men. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 27*(6), 703-723. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.901577

Hevel, M. S., Martin, G. L., & Pascarella, E. T. (2014). Do fraternities and sororities still enhance socially responsible leadership? Evidence from the fourth year of college. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 51*(3), 233-245. https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2014-0025

Jacquemin, S. T., Smelser, L. K., & Bernot, M. J. (2014). Twitter in the higher education classroom: A student and faculty assessment of use and perception. *Journal of College Science Teaching, 43*(6), 22-27. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43631755

Junco, R., Heiberger, G., & Loken, E. (2011). The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 27*(2), 119-132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2010.00387.x

Kimmons, R., Veletsianos, G., & Woodward, S. (2017). Institutional uses of Twitter in U.S. higher education. *Innovative Higher Education, 42*(2), 97-111. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-016-9375-6

Kingkade, T. (2015, December 2). National fraternity group plans to keep up lobbying efforts. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/nic-continue-lobbying_us_565e1bb8e4 b079b2818c4e68?ncid=tweetlnkushpmg00000056

Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17*(3), 337-353. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x

Lovejoy, K., Waters, R. D., & Saxton, G.D. (2012). Engaging stakeholders through Twitter: How nonprofit organizations are getting more out of 140 characters or less. *Public Relations Review, 38*(2), 313-318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.01.005

Manca, S., & Ranieri, M. (2016). Facebook and the others. Potentials and obstacles of Social Media for teaching in higher education. *Computers & Education, 95*, 216-230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.01.012

Metzger, A. H., Finley, K. N., Ulbrich, T. R., & McAuley, J. W. (2010). Pharmacy faculty members' perspectives on the student/faculty relationship in online social networks. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 74*(10), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.5688/aj7410188

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Moreno, M. A., Arseniev-Koehler, A., Litt, D., & Christakis, D. (2016). Evaluating college students' displayed alcohol references on Facebook and Twitter. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 58*(5), 527-532. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.01.005

Nelson, S. M., Halperin, S., Wasserman, T. H., Smith, C., & Graham, P. (2006). Effects of fraternity/sorority membership and recruitment semester on gpa and retention. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors, 2*(1), 61-72.

North-American Interfraternity Conference. (2017). Fraternity stats at a glance. Retrieved from North-American Interfraternity Conference website: http://nicindy.org/press/fraternity-statistics/

Pike, G. R. (2000). The influence of fraternity or sorority membership on students' college experiences and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education, 41*(1), 117-139. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007046513949

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., & Fico, F. (2014). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Rutter, R., Roper, S., & Lettice, F. (2016). Social media interaction, the university brand and recruitment performance. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(8), 3096-3104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.025

Shields, R. (2016). Following the leader? Network models of "world class" universities on Twitter. *Higher Education, 71*(2), 253-268. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9900-z

Soule, E. K., Barnett, T. E., & Moorhouse, M. D. (2015). Protective behavioral strategies and negative alcohol-related consequences among US college fraternity and sorority members. *Journal of Substance Use, 20*(1), 16-21. https://doi.org/10.3109/14659891.2013.858783

Tiernan, P. (2014). A study of the use of Twitter by students for lecture engagement and discussion. *Education and Information Technologies, 19*(4), 673-690. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-012-9246-4

Twitter, Inc. (2017). Twitter: It's what's happening. Retrieved from https://about.twitter.com/company

Veletsianos, G. (2012). Higher education scholars' participation and practices on Twitter. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 28*(4), 336-349. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2011.00449.x

Veletsianos, G., & Kimmons, R. (2016). Scholars in an increasingly open and digital world: How do education professors and students use Twitter? *The Internet and Higher Education, 30*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2016.02.002

Veletsianos, G., Kimmons, R., Shaw, A., Pasquini, L., & Woodward, S. (2017). Selective openness, branding, broadcasting, and promotion: Twitter use in Canada's public universities. *Educational Media International, 54*(1), 1-19. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2017.1324363

Walker, J. K., Martin, N. D., & Hussey, A. (2015). Greek organization membership and collegiate outcomes at an elite, private university. *Research in Higher Education, 56*(3), 203-227. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-014-9345-8

Waters, R. D., & Jamal, J.Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review, 37*(3), 321-324. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002

Wells, B., & Corts, D. P. (2008). Measuring attitudes towards sorority and fraternity members: Indication of implicit, ingroup favoritism. *College Student Journal, 42*(3), 842-847.

Author Biographies

Zachary W. Taylor is a Ph.D. student studying linguistics and higher education at The University of Texas at Austin. He has published work in the Journal of College Student Development, Higher Education Quarterly, and Philanthropy & Education, among others.

Arianne McArdle is a Student Development Specialist in Sorority & Fraternity Life in the Office of the Dean in Students at The University of Texas at Austin. She received her M.Ed. in Education Leadership & Policy from The University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests include hazing behaviors, volunteer advisors, and intent to participate in Sorority & Fraternity Life.