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Online Transparency: How Social Work Can Function Better in the Spotlight

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Ethan Koekemoer^{a*} and Yvette Richardson^{b+}

^aSchool of Business and Innovation, Barton College, Wilson, NC, USA

^bSchool of Education and Social Sciences, Barton College, Wilson, NC, USA

*Student author, +Faculty mentor

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Abstract

Social work originated with a primary focus on addressing immediate physical needs for individuals experiencing challenging life circumstances, including access to housing and basic care. Over time, the profession has expanded to encompass broader social conditions that perpetuate inequality, including systemic injustice, stereotyping, and structural barriers. Contemporary practice reflects this dual focus, integrating direct service provision with efforts to challenge and transform the social structures that sustain these unmet needs. Central to this approach are relationship building, community engagement, and meeting individuals and families within their lived contexts. The increasing use of social media by social work organizations has introduced debate regarding the role of digital transparency. Questions persist about whether online representation reflects authentic organizational values or serves as performative engagement. While some perspectives emphasize the potential of social media to enhance visibility, build trust, and broaden outreach, others highlight concerns related to misrepresentation, ethical boundaries, and the potential diversion of attention from direct service

delivery. Examination of these contrasting perspectives suggests the possibility of a balanced approach in which social media transparency is applied both ethically and strategically. Consideration of this issue through a business-oriented lens further indicates that intentional transparency may support organizational sustainability while maintaining a commitment to community-centered practice. Strengthening the impact of social work within communities requires critical engagement with these competing viewpoints. Recognizing and navigating the tension between visibility and authenticity may provide a more effective framework for leveraging social media to address immediate needs and contribute to long-term social change.

Keywords: social work, relationship building, community engagement