
Raising money on the Web: Relationship-building features that contribute to non-profit fundraising success

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Abstract

Research suggests that Americans' commitment to philanthropy remains strong, and the Web has provided an immediate and easy means to express support. As such, it is important for scholars and practitioners alike to understand how to better develop online philanthropic-based relationships. To do this, the co-creational public relations literature is examined and the concept of stewardship is advanced as a theoretical framework through the theoretical lens of dialogue. Using a content analysis methodology, the author found a relationship between the number and types of Web features used and amount of money raised. In addition, a theoretical model for studying donor stewardship on the Web is proposed.

Introduction

The United States and its citizens have a long philanthropic history and proud tradition of giving to charitable causes and people in need (Bremner, 1998; Cutlip, 1990; Hall, 2006; Zunz, 2011) and, notably, stand in good company when comparing philanthropic trends on an international level (Charities Aid Foundation, 2013). While equating charitable behaviour across cultural and regional differences is difficult (not only does philanthropic giving differ from global region to region, but also from country to country), *fundraising*, the term generally reserved for bringing about philanthropic exchanges, can be found in almost all countries today (Kelly, 2013).

Although Botan and Hazelton (2006) agree that fundraising “is a historically and socially important area of professional practice in public relations,” they find that “it has received far too little attention” (p. 148). Kelly (2013) agrees, noting that despite the fact that fundraising is

one of the highest paid specialisations in the public relations field, it remains “one of the least understood” (p. 374). Even with the proliferation of professional articles and ‘how-to’ publications, a search of the scholarly literature in public relations reveals that fundraising is an underrepresented area of study. According to Kelly, however, “scholars and practitioners increasingly are drawing from public relations to build a body of knowledge that informs fundraising practice and education” (p. 378).

Yet as knowledge about fundraising slowly grows, the relationship between charitable organisations and their donor publics is rapidly changing as a result of the accessibility and sophistication of the Web (Waters, 2007). As a point of reference, Morris & Horrigan (2005) found in their investigation for the Pew Research Internet Project that prior to September 11, 2001, online donations were said to account for less than 1% of U.S. charitable giving; yet, as individuals sought an immediate means to express their support as a result of the 9/11 attacks on U.S. soil, donors turned to the Web. While online giving now exceeds \$20 billion annually in the U.S. (MacLaughlin, 2014), overall gifts received via the Web still represents less than 10% of total charitable giving (Kachuriak & Davies, 2014).

As American philanthropy evolves to incorporate an online culture, scholars and practitioners alike seek to understand how to develop better philanthropic-based relationships on the Web. This study helps to fill the gap by examining how non-profit organisations are using relationship-building features on their websites to increase online giving.

Literature review

Scholarly research and theory development in fundraising are credited almost exclusively to Kelly (1991, 1998). According to Kelly (2013), “[c]ontrary to popular belief, the purpose of fundraising is not to raise money, but to help organisations and donors fulfill mutual philanthropic interests” (p. 374). While Kelly’s early work (1991) set out to study fundraising and develop a theoretical framework to describe the fundraising function, what emerges from her later work (1998) is a fundraising model that Kelly calls ROPES, an acronym for: (a) research, which includes research of the organisation, the opportunity, and the publics; (b) objectives, which are specific and measurable fundraising objectives that flow directly from the organisation’s goals; (c) programming, which are activities planned and implemented to accomplish set fundraising objectives; (d) evaluation, which involves measuring and comparing outcomes to set fundraising objectives; and (e) stewardship, which when added to the model completes it by providing an essential relationship-building loop back to the beginning of the fundraising process.

Of particular interest to this study is Kelly’s (1998, 2001) theoretical conceptualisation of *stewardship*. According to Kelly (1998), stewardship anchors the fifth step in the fundraising process in ethical practice. More specifically, she states that stewardship consists of: (a) reciprocity, which is expressed by some as the essence of social responsibility, and is used to strengthen the relationship between the organisation and the donor by cultivating mutual respect through the expression of gratitude; (b) responsible gift use, which simply means that gifts should be used for the purpose they are given; (c) reporting, which builds on the element of responsible gift use, in that donors are informed of how their gift was used; and (d) relationship nurturing, which requires that organisations accept the importance of donors and keep them in the forefront of the organisation’s consciousness through information and involvement that flows naturally from the organisation’s work (e.g., involvement in legislative affairs, updates of

major news announcements, and invitations to special events, recognition activities, lectures).

In 2001, Kelly advanced stewardship beyond the context of fundraising and embraced it as a way to define the entire practice of public relations. She notes that the process of stewardship explains how relationships with all publics “are and should be managed” (2001, p. 280). As such, stewardship emerges as a comprehensive relational framework that embraces a co-creational paradigm. Kelly (2001) argues that by incorporating stewardship into a comprehensive theory of public relations, scholars will find greater congruency with emerging research findings centred around a co-creational approach where relationship building through communication becomes the primary purpose of public relations.

Botan and Taylor (2004) highlighted the importance of the shift in the growing body of public relations research from a functional perspective, in which communication activities (such as persuasion, media relations, or agenda setting) were used to accomplish organisational goals, to a co-creational perspective, in which communication activities focus on shared meanings and interpretations to build relationships that go beyond organisational goals. While Kelly uses a co-creational approach to relationship building in conceptualising stewardship, a theoretical framework for studying donor stewardship on the Web is advanced here by synthesising two dominant co-creational paradigms.

Advancing stewardship from a symmetrical communication/excellence perspective

Kelly (2001) draws on scholars such as Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997), Ferguson (1984), Grunig (1992), and Ledingham and Bruning (1998) to solidify her argument that ROPES is a comprehensive theory of relationship management in public relations. Certainly, L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Ehling’s (1992) description of public relations as a co-creational process, in which public relations contributes to organisational effectiveness by “building quality, long-term relationships with strategic constituencies” (p. 86), is at the very heart of stewardship. The four elements of stewardship (reciprocity, responsible gift use, reporting, and

relationship nurturing), can also be contextualised in the excellence literature and its key relationship concepts of control mutuality, trust, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000). Studies such as those by O'Neil (2007) and Waters (2009) draw on these lines of inquiry by advancing a framework for the organisation-donor relationship.

Rhee's (2007) research, which builds on the conclusions of the Excellence Study, explored the nature of interpersonal communication as an element of symmetrical communication. Although Rhee's study did not draw on Kelly's (2001) work, it does identify effective cultivation strategies for organisation-public relationships that are applicable to ROPES, in particular programming and stewardship. Rhee found that from the public relations practitioner's standpoint, these cultivation strategies include: visible leadership, listening, responsiveness, continued dialogue/patience, openness, and networking. From the public's standpoint, these strategies include responsiveness, access, respect, and sharing of tasks. Collectively, these strategies describe an engaged, mutually beneficial relationship and can easily be used as strategies by an organisation seeking to steward a donor public.

While from the symmetrical communication/excellence perspective stewardship embraces the organisation-public relationship perspective and its building blocks, it does little to advance a comprehensive theoretical framework for studying online fundraising relationships. Thus, it is necessary to advance Kelly's (2001) conceptualisation of stewardship as a continuous process through the theoretical lens of dialogue.

Advancing stewardship from a dialogic perspective

In 2002, Kent and Taylor advanced dialogic theory as an important theoretical shift in public relations, asserting its value in terms of providing an ethical framework for practice. According to Kent and Taylor, dialogue "change[s] the nature of the organisation-public relationship by placing emphasis on the relationship" (p. 24).

To better understand the theoretical principles of dialogue, Botan (1997) explains that "traditional approaches to public relations relegate publics to a secondary role, making them instruments for meeting organisational policy or marketing needs; whereas, dialogue elevates publics to the status of communication equal within the organisation" (p. 196). When considering the ethical consequences of dialogic communication, Day, Dong, and Robins (2001) note that, in particular, "philanthropic efforts would be better guided" by dialogic communication between organisations and community members (p. 408). Providing additional insight, Anderson, Baxter, and Cissna (2004) argue that dialogue offers an opportunity to broaden the discussion within communication research to include values and ethics, relationships, reflexivity, mutually engaged performances, community, and responsibility.

Of particular interest to this study, however, is Kent and Taylor's (1998, 2002) conceptualised framework for studying dialogic relationships fostered through the use of mediated channels such as the Web. According to Kent and Taylor, "The Internet is one place in particular where dialogue can inform relationship building" (2002, p. 31). To advance Kelly's (2001) conceptualisation of stewardship as a continuous process, as well as to fully operationalise and examine mutually beneficial organisation-donor public relationships on the Web, employing the theoretical framework of dialogue becomes critical.

Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed a theoretical framework for building relationships on the Web that advanced five feature strategies that public relations professionals could use to create dialogic relationships with Web-based users. The first three features are found within a technical and design cluster: intuitiveness/ease of the interface, usefulness of information, and conservation of visitors. The fourth and fifth features are found within a more important dialogic cluster: the generation of return visits and the dialogic loop. In subsequent studies, Kent and Taylor applied the dialogic principles to examine how organisations use the Web to

build relationships with their online publics (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Taylor & Kent, 2004).

Numerous researchers have replicated Kent and Taylor's original methodology in different Web contexts: from community college websites (McAllister & Taylor, 2007) to Chinese ENGOS' websites (Yang & Taylor, 2010) to *Fortune 500* mobile websites (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2012) as well as from weblogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007) to Facebook (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009) to Twitter (McCorkindale & Morgach, 2013), to name just a few.

In an attempt to fill some of the void in the fundraising literature, Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) sought to examine the potential of websites as relationship-building tools for Swiss charitable organisations using Kent and Taylor's (1998) five dialogic features and organisational fundraising data. The study found that organisations place greater emphasis on technical and design features rather than dialogic aspects of their websites and thus, as a result, do not use dialogic features to their fullest extent. Furthermore, while Ingenhoff and Koelling found that an organisation's total income is correlated with dialogic capacity of the website, total income from fundraising donations was not significantly correlated with the dialogic capacity of the website. Because of the uniqueness of this study's application of dialogic fundraising relationships, it is an important focus in the methodology of this research.

Kent and Taylor's (1998, 2002) operationalised features lend themselves well to this research because of their previous application to studying the Web in a public relations context. Kelly's (2001) research, in which she describes in detail ROPES as a theoretical perspective, does nothing more than to acknowledge the potential of the Web primarily because of the Web's infancy at the time of her research. However, since dialogue is a key concept inherent to the concept of stewardship, operationalising Kent and Taylor's dialogic principles as part of the theoretical framework of ROPES represents an important connection for this study.

Advancing stewardship on the Web

Kelly's (2001) conceptualisation of stewardship as a continuous process is advanced here as a comprehensive theory of relationship management in public relations and, more specifically, a theoretical model for studying donor stewardship on the Web. Stewardship embraces the co-creational paradigm and has been informed by research found in both the excellence and dialogic literatures.

To study stewardship on the Web, this study draws primarily on Kent and Taylor's (1998, 2002) research that operationalises dialogue as a co-creational model in an online context. As a theoretical model, dialogue has been used as the framework to study relationship building within a Web context for more than a decade, thus offering a methodological tool that has been accepted among scholars as having a high level of validity.

From the symmetrical communication/excellence paradigm, stewardship is informed by Rhee's (2007) research, which identifies unique cultivation strategies for studying organisation-public relationships. She draws directly from the Excellence Study, explaining that in order to produce long-term relationships with publics, organisations must employ a two-way, symmetrical model of public relations that places emphasis on interpersonal communication. Specifically, she found the following dimensions important to the organisation-public relationship: openness, networking, visible leadership, listening, responsiveness, and continued dialogue/patience.

From the dialogic literature, Ingenhoff and Koelling's (2009) study provides a unique extension of Kent and Taylor's methodological tool to study the websites of Swedish non-profit organisations engaged in fundraising online.

Thus, by drawing from both the excellence and dialogic research found in the public relations literature, this collective co-creational perspective creates a contemporary framework for studying stewardship in a new context: the Web.

Research question and methodology

This study provides an exploratory examination of donor stewardship on the Web and addresses the following research question:

RQ: Do non-profit organisations that raise more than US\$1 million online employ more relationship-building features overall on their websites than non-profit organisations that raise less than US\$1 million online?

The question involves an assessment of the extent to which a sample of websites produced by non-profit organisations that engage in online fundraising, incorporate design features that facilitate stewardship. To address the research question, a content analysis was conducted of 50 websites produced by U.S. non-profit organisations that engage in online fundraising.

The sample for the content analysis was drawn from *The Chronicle of Philanthropy's* 11th annual survey of online fundraising (Barton, 2010). The *Chronicle's* sample represents organisations from its 'Philanthropy 400', which ranks American non-profits that raise the most money from private sources.

Each of the organisations included in the sample is designated under the United States' Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax code as a 501(c)3 organisation, more commonly called a *charitable organisation*. Charitable organisations are defined as a type of non-profit organisation that has philanthropic goals, and may engage in other activities that serve the public interest.

For this study, the 50 organisational websites represented organisations across six organisational missions: health, youth, social service, environmental and animal welfare, arts and cultural, including public broadcasting, and international non-profits headquartered in the United States. The sample was further divided based on money raised online. Using an arbitrary figure of US\$1 million, half of the

organisations content analysed raised *more* than US\$1 million and half of the organisations raised *less* than US\$1 million, thus providing a further basis for comparison.

To develop the methodology for this study and to bolster the reliability of the data and validity of the study's results, a pilot study was conducted. For the pilot study, two independent coders were trained to code the websites of six non-profit organisations not included in this study's sample. After the data were coded, Cohen's kappa was employed as a statistical measure to establish intercoder reliability prior to the analysis and interpretation of the data. The agreement kappa of the overall data collection was .878.

Units of measure

To construct the content analysis, Kent and Taylor's (1998, 2002) and Taylor et al.'s (2001) operationalised features of dialogue served as the cornerstone for analysis, but were expanded through a synthesis of the literature drawn primarily from the research of the following: (a) Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) who conducted a study replicating and expanding many of the originally operationalised dialogic features of Taylor et al. (2001), (b) Rhee (2007) who explored relationship-building using the principles of symmetrical communication/excellence theory, and (c) Kelly (1998) who established the importance of relationship-building in fundraising through her model of stewardship. In total, 31 categories were coded for each of the 50 websites for a possible total number of feature categories present or absent, equalling 1,550.

Technical and design cluster

The first three features comprise the technical and design cluster, which is considered a prerequisite for dialogue (Taylor et al., 2001). (See Table 1).

Table 1. Technical and design cluster

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|--|
| Ease of interface |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major links to the rest of the site • Search engine box |
| Usefulness of information |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational logo on homepage • Donate link on homepage • Formatted organisational information on website • News stories on website |
| Conservation of users |
| Trust |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible leadership • Graphic: how money is used on homepage • Graphic: third party endorsement on homepage • Graphic: secure site on homepage • Annual report • Graphic: how money is used on donate page • Graphic: third party endorsement on donate page • Graphic: secure site on donate page |
| Stickiness |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multimedia format • Organisational blogs • Games, postcards, and other activities • Organisational merchandising/online stores |

Ease of interface. This first feature is equated to the formation of an interpersonal relationship based on interaction. As in an interpersonal relationship, it assumes that both parties are open to an interaction and are approachable. Coders recorded for ease of interface by reading the organisation’s homepage and looking for the presence or absence of two categories developed by Taylor et al. (2001) and replicated by Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009): (a) major links to the rest of the site indicated by a variety of tabs and (b) a search engine box.

Usefulness of information. Once a website user finds a site that is approachable and easy to use, he or she may take the next step and begin interaction or relationship formation. In this second feature, usefulness of information,

the user must find information that is useful in getting to know the organisation better.

Based upon the categories developed by Taylor et al. (2001) and replicated by Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009), coders recorded on the homepage the presence or absence of: (a) an organisational logo and (b) an easily accessible link to donate to the organisation; and when searching the entire site, the presence or absence of: (c) formatted organisational information (e.g., mission statement, organisational history, general organisational facts, and/or questions and answers), and (d) news stories.

Conservation of users. The third feature, conservation of users, is equated to the stage of an interpersonal relationship in which a bond is developing between the user and the

organisation and, thus, brings the user back to the site repeatedly. The bond is based on trust and allows for the relationship to grow through ongoing and continued dialogue. The two-fold feature is evidenced by both mutual *trust* and *stickiness*.

Trust. Mutual trust creates a bond between the organisation and its users and, in this study, is the primary focus of conservation of users. The first category, a) *visible leadership* emerges from Rhee's (2007) research. She found that community members place interpersonal communication with leadership as a key to not only cultivating an effective relationship, but also as a demonstrable commitment by management to the relationship. Coders were instructed to look for the presence or absence of messages from individuals with titles such as chairman or chairwoman, president, chief operating officer, as well as key volunteer positions. In addition, when searching for signs of trust, coders were instructed to look for quick, visible graphics as signs of trustworthiness: (b) *visible graphic: how money is used*, (c) *visible graphic: third party endorsements*, and (d) *visible graphic: secure site*. Each of these categories is primarily drawn from Kelly (1998) and is interpreted to fit an online environment

(although, how money is used is also based upon Ingenhoff and Koelling's (2009) and Rhee's (2007) research). The last category under *trust*, (e) annual report, explored if there is some level of transparency at the organisation, drawing on the research of Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) and Kelly (1998).

Stickiness. To conserve a user means that a website tries to keep its users on the site through a concept known as stickiness. When coding for stickiness, coders were instructed to look at the organisation's homepage for evidence of (a) multimedia format, as well as the presence or absence of (b) organisational blogs; (c) games, postcards, and/or other activities; and (d) organisational merchandising/online stores. The category *organisational blogs* emerged from the research of Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) and Rhee (2007), and the category *games and electronic postcards* was introduced by Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009).

Dialogic cluster features. The last two features represent a dialogic cluster, which is considered to be the essence of dialogue where real exchanges between the organisation and its online users take place (Taylor et al., 2001). (See Table 2).

Table 2. Dialogic cluster features

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|--|
| <p>Generation of return visits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homepage is updated within the last 14 days • Offers to subscribe to email • Links to membership opportunities |
| <p>Dialogic loop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational contact information on homepage • Contact information for donor publics on donate page • Communicate preferences on donate page • Networking via social media • Events • Sharing of tasks • Opportunities for acknowledgement • Opportunities to direct gifts • Donor incentives/premiums • Gift recognition |

Generation of return visits. In this feature, generation of return visits, organisations and users are engaged in the relationship as users return to the site on a regular basis. The dialogic feature suggests that an interpersonal relationship has been established and both parties seek repeated interaction. Through repeated interactions, relationships grow and thrive. Coders were first instructed to determine whether or not the information on the (a) homepage is current (updated within 14 days), and then code for the presence or absence of (b) offers to subscribe for ongoing information through email and (c) links to membership opportunities. These categories were developed by Taylor et al. (2001) and replicated by Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009).

Dialogic loop. This is considered the most important feature of the dialogic website based on the incorporation of interactivity. The feature dialogic loop allows for two-way communication and, to be dialogic, the organisation and users must respond to the thoughts and concerns of each other.

To create a website that is dialogic, Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) created the category (a) organisational contact information on homepage. This category was included in this study representing a willingness and open opportunity to establish two-way communication, and supports Rhee's (2007) research that found access to the organisation was considered important to community members. Similarly, Ingenhoff and Koelling's (2009) category (b) contact information for donor publics on the donate page represents the same opportunity to establish two-way communication and is embodied in Kelly's (1998) notion of stewardship. The category (c) communicate preferences on the donate page emerges from the work of Rhee (2007) and Kelly (1998). When coding for evidence of a dialogic loop, coders were instructed to search the site by reading the organisation's homepage, using the pull down menus on the tabs, and/or using the search box to look for the presence or absence of (d) networking via social media, (e) events, and (f) sharing of tasks.

The dialogic loop also embodies Kelly's (1998) concept of stewardship of donor publics.

Four separate categories were coded: (g) opportunities for acknowledgement, (h) opportunities to direct gifts, (i) featured incentives and/or premiums provided to donors as a result of a gift, and (j) information on recognition opportunities as a result of a major gift.

Results

The results of the content analysis found that non-profit organisations that raised more than US\$1 million online exhibited 70.1% of the features coded, whereas the non-profit organisations that raised less than US\$1 million online exhibited 57.42% of the features coded. The results are statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 1550) = 29.16, p < .0001$).

The data was explored further to examine if the differences between the number of relationship-building features and the amount of money raised differed between what Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002) call the dialogic cluster and not the technical and design cluster.

Technical and design cluster. Three features are categorised as part of the technical and design cluster, which is considered a prerequisite for dialogue (Taylor et al., 2001). Each feature, as noted below, was coded as present or absent on the organisational homepage or website.

The first feature, *ease of interface*, was coded on the homepage for: (a) links to the rest of the site and (b) the presence of a search engine box. It was found that the relationship between the feature ease of use and amount of money raised was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 0.260, p = .6098$). The organisations that raised more than US\$1 million and those that raised less than US\$1 million used nearly the same number of categories coded as ease of use.

The second feature, *usefulness of information*, was coded on the homepage for: (a) a visible organisational logo and (b) a visible link to donate to the organisation; and was coded on the entire website for: (c) formatted organisational information and (d) news stories. It was also found that there was no relationship between the feature usefulness of information and amount of money raised. The organisations that raised more than US\$1

million and those that raised less than US\$1 million used the same number of categories coded as usefulness of information.

The third feature, *conservation of users*, was divided into two primary categories: *trust* and *stickiness*. For *trust*, the homepage was coded for: (a) visible leadership, (b) a visible graphic of how money is used, (c) a visible graphic of third party endorsements, and (d) a visible graphic that the site is secure; and the entire website was coded for: (e) an annual report. For *stickiness*, the homepage was coded for: (a) a multimedia; and the entire website was coded for: (b) organisational blogs, (c) games, postcards, and/or other activities, and (d) organisational merchandising/online stores. It was found that the relationship between the feature *conservation of users* and amount of money raised is statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 600) = 18.28, p < .0001$). In analysing the feature *conservation of users* further, both *stickiness* and *trust* are statistically significant indicators of amount of money raised, with *stickiness* ($\chi^2(1, N = 200) = 16.40, p < .0001$) appearing to be a somewhat more important factor than *trust* ($\chi^2(1, N = 400) = 5.74, p = .0166$).

Dialogic cluster. The last two features are categorised as a dialogic cluster, which is considered to be the essence of dialogue where real exchanges between the organisation and its online users take place (Taylor et al., 2001). It is made up of *generation of return visits* and the *dialogic loop*. Each feature was coded as present or absent on the organisational homepage or website.

The first feature, *generation of return visits*, was coded on the entire webpage for: (a) offers to subscribe for ongoing information through email, (b) evidence that the site had been updated within the last 14 days, and (c) links to membership opportunities. It was found that the relationship between *generation of return visits* and the amount of money raised is statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 7.88, p = .0050$). The more categories coded within generation of return visits, the more money was raised.

The second feature, *dialogic loop*, was coded on the homepage for: (a) organisational contact information on the homepage, (b)

contact information for donor publics on the donate page, (c) communication preferences on the donate page, (d) networking via social media, (e) events, (f) sharing of tasks, (g) opportunities for acknowledgement, (h) opportunities to direct gifts, (i) featured incentives and/or premiums provided to donors as a result of a gift, and (j) information on recognition opportunities as a result of a major gift. The relationship between the feature *dialogic loop* and the amount of money raised is statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 500) = 6.89, p = .0087$). As with return visits, the more categories found within dialogic loop, the more money was raised.

Discussion

Non-profit organisations that raise money online should be incorporating key relationship-building features into their organisational websites to increase philanthropic donations. Based on the data gathered, the organisations that raised more than US\$1 million online had more relationship-building features present on their organisational websites than organisations that raised less than US\$1 million online. This was especially true in the features conservation of users–trust, where visible leadership and indicators of secure donate pages were found; conservation of users–stickiness, where the incorporation of blogs, games, as well as online shopping for organisational merchandise were present; generation of return visits, especially sites that have been updated within the last 14 days and offer on-going communication through email; and finally, the dialogic loop, where donors are encouraged to share in tasks, such as advocacy efforts, and offer incentives as a form of reciprocity for an online gift.

While it is important that fundraisers insist that their organisational websites offer adequate technical and design features, such as ease of interface or usefulness of information, these are the same features that most good Web designers have been incorporating into site construction as evidenced by the inclusion of the features on the vast majority of the sites in this study. The data suggest, however, that fundraisers that seek to raise money online

must find additional ways to incorporate relationship-building features into their websites. These features may or may not be incorporated based on the advice of a Web designer. Furthermore, once a website is created, sufficient staff must be dedicated to maintaining the site, regularly updating its contents, and responding to users' interactions.

Advancing a framework for studying donor stewardship on the Web

Based on the data yielded from this study, a new framework for studying donor stewardship

on the Web is necessary for non-profit organisations engaged in online fundraising. As such, rather than coding two primary features—a technical and design cluster and a dialogic cluster—the overarching clusters should be reconceptualised into three primary features: a *technical and design cluster*, a *relationship-building cluster*, and a *stewardship cluster*. The three clusters form the basis of a new tool for studying donor stewardship on the Web and serve as a cornerstone for future research (see Table 3).

Table 3. Theoretical model for studying donor stewardship on the Web

| Cluster | Feature | Category |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Technical and design | Ease of use | Links on the homepage ^{1,2} Search engine box ^{1,2} |
| | Usefulness of information | Logo visible on homepage ^{1,2} Formatted organisational info ^{1,2} Links to news articles ^{1,2} Links to donate ^{1,2} |
| Relationship-building | Trust | Visible organisational leadership ³ Responsible gift use ^{2,3,4} Third party endorsements ⁴ Secure site ⁴ Links to annual report ^{2,3,4} |
| | Stickiness | Multimedia format ^{1,2} Organisational blogs ^{2,3,4} Games ² Merchandising |
| | Generation of return visits | Offers to subscribe through email ^{1,2} Updated within the last 14 days ^{1,2} |
| Stewardship | Involvement | Organisational events ^{1,2} Sharing of tasks ³ Contact information ^{2,3,4} Networking—social media ³ Membership links ¹ |
| | Donor acknowledgment | Recognition ⁴ Incentives ⁴ |
| | Donor directives | Gift acknowledgement preferences ⁴ Opportunity to direct gifts ⁴ Communication preferences ^{3,4} |

Category originated from the research of:

1. Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001
2. Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009
3. Rhee, 2007
4. Kelly, 1998

The newly conceptualised technical and design cluster retains two of the original features from the design of this research project: *ease of interface* and *usefulness of information*. This cluster remains identified as a collection of basic Web features that serve as a prerequisite for more advanced cluster features. The feature ease of interface identifies a website as having user-friendly categories, including *links on the homepage* to the rest of the website indicated by a variety of tabs, and the ability to search the site via a *search engine box* on the homepage. The feature usefulness of information provides users with a familiarity to the organisation: a *visible logo on the homepage*; identifiable *links to packaged organisational information* such as mission statements and/or fact sheets; *links to current news articles* related to the organisation; and quick *links to donate* in which donations can be made.

The newly created relationship-building cluster borrows from both the original technical and design and dialogic cluster features. This new hybrid cluster recognises the importance of relationship building between the organisation and its publics, but also recognises that not all communication is dialogic or symmetric in nature. This cluster represents important asymmetric communication features that extend beyond basic technical and design features but cannot be considered truly dialogic. The cluster therefore comprises the following features: *trust*, *stickiness*, *generation of return visits*, and a new feature labelled *involvement*.

The features ‘trust’ and ‘stickiness’ were originally part of a feature called conservation of users but are viewed here as independent in nature. Trust creates a bond between the organisation and its users. It emerges when there is *visible organisational leadership* on the site and when *third parties endorse* the organisation and its mission. In addition, it is created through a sense of transparency as demonstrated by an *annual report* or graphic display of *responsible gift use*, as well as visible signs that the *site is secure* when making a gift. On the other hand, stickiness creates opportunities to keep users engaged with the site, and therefore the organisation, by presenting information in ways that stimulate a

variety of senses by using a *multimedia format*, telling on-going stories through formats such as *organisational blogs*, providing users with opportunities to be entertained through *games*, sending e-cards or downloading wallpaper, or by shopping the site through opportunities to purchase *organisational merchandise*.

The feature ‘generation of return visits’ establishes an opportunity for ongoing relationship-building between a user and an organisation through repeated interaction. Ongoing *email communication* from the organisation, a *regularly updated website*, and *membership programmes* all create opportunities to remind users that there are reasons to remain engaged.

The new feature ‘involvement’ borrows categories that were coded as dialogic features in the original design of this study. Users become involved with organisations by participating in *organisational events*, by *sharing in tasks* such as advocacy activities, by *networking* with the organisation and its friends on social networking sites, or by accessing readily available *contact information* to seek information. Each of these activities, where publics are encouraged to become involved in the organisation, is documented in the literature as an important relationship-building activity.

The final cluster, *stewardship* is the very essence of this theoretical model and is constructed in a way that is parallel to the concept of dialogue as a cluster feature in this study’s methodological tool. Instead of dialogue, however, the co-creational perspective is embraced in the form of stewardship where relationship-building through communication becomes the primary purpose of the fundraising process. Two features are included in this cluster: *donor acknowledgement* and *donor directives*. The first, donor acknowledgement, recognises a relationship that has come full circle, from basic introduction, to information gathering, to a full meeting where a meaningful exchange has been made between the donor and the organisation through an online donation. The organisation responds with a visible form of *recognition* and perhaps *incentives* thanking the donor for the gift. The second, donor directives, asks the donor for *gift acknowledgment*

preferences, specifically if the donor would like anyone acknowledged as a result of the gift; provides an *opportunity to direct gifts*, perhaps to certain programmes or projects, and allows for future *communication preferences* that the donor may have in continuing the relationship with the organisation. Through donor directives, an organisation is engaged in an important form of listening to the donor, thus strengthening the relationship and preparing for the next stage.

Future research

Scholarly attention to fundraising, particularly in an online environment, is currently an underrepresented area of study in public relations. As donors increasingly seek to express their charitable support through the Web, public relations scholars and practitioners alike need to understand how to develop better online philanthropic-based relationships. In response to that need, a new methodological model for studying donor stewardship on the Web has been advanced here and should be considered a powerful tool for professional practice and future scholarly research. The model's strength emerges from a careful culmination of the co-creational public relations literature and the results of this exploratory study. Future research is needed to test the applicability of this new model and its ability to describe the relationship-building features among a larger sample of non-profit organisations. While the possibilities are numerous, further investigation related to online stewardship, new Web technologies, and international philanthropy should be considered.

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