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# The nature of online social good networks and their impact on non-profit organisations and users

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## **Abstract**

*Social good networks are online networks that connect non-profit organisations and causes with the public. A term coined by the researchers, social good networks have recently emerged as part of a larger e-philanthropy trend. With scant research on this specific area of e-philanthropy, little is known about social good networks and their potential as relationship-building tools. Using a mixed methods approach, this study examines the features and functions of social good networks, the uses and gratifications of network users, and the potential impact on non-profit organisations. The study concludes that social good networks are a viable tool for building broader, long-term relationships, but may not have a significant impact on short-term fundraising goals..*

## **Introduction**

In this ever-changing digital age, non-profit organisations have increasingly developed an Internet presence in order to further their organisational goals. One trend that has developed as a result of non-profits' use of the Internet is e-philanthropy, or charitable giving via online channels. As the Internet has progressed, this trend has incorporated emerging online practices like blogging and social networking and evolved into a new, more complex concept: social good networks. Coined by the researchers, the term 'social good networks' refers to cause-related sites that help multiple non-profit organisations connect with the public. In turn, the public can access these networks to search for information about organisations, show support for favoured non-profits, donate to causes, search for volunteer opportunities,

and engage in online conversation about causes important to them. Some examples of social good networks include Care2.com, Idealist.org, Change.com, and the Facebook Causes application.

This study aims to advance the understanding of the features and trends on social good networks, and the uses and perceptions of individuals and non-profit organisations on these sites. Since social good networks are a relatively new phenomenon, there is little previous research on the specific topic. Through a comprehensive, mixed methods approach, this research strives to provide non-profits with a better grasp of what social good networks are and what purposes they can serve for their organisations..

## **Literature review**

The literature pertaining to social good networks can be divided into three categories: content regarding e-philanthropy trends, content regarding non-profits' use of the Internet, and content regarding users' involvement with e-philanthropy. In addition, literature on public relations theory is helpful in considering the potential of social good networks as long-term relationship-building tools.

## **Online philanthropy trends**

At the onset of the online philanthropy trend, two experts on online social enterprises predicted the significance of what they call the "e-philanthropy revolution" (Austin & Wendroff, 2001). The authors highlighted the multiple functions of e-philanthropy ventures and emphasised the importance of defining where the Internet fits into non-profits' overall marketing and fundraising strategies. The trend

was further examined in a report that explored the valuable functions of the Internet for non-profit organisations (Hart, 2002). Hart argued that non-profits can not only use the Internet as a tool to raise money, but also as a channel to create and improve essential relationships with current and prospective supporters. A later study outlined some of the differences between “traditional charity” and e-philanthropy, claiming that online philanthropy is more expansive, focused, and personalised than traditional means of giving (Jillbert, 2003).

Two of the most highly regarded studies about online philanthropy trends come from the same source: the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Published in 2000, the first report described and classified 140 websites related to philanthropy, volunteering, and social change-making (Reis & Clohesy, 2000). The report outlined the major challenges and opportunities related to e-philanthropy at the time, but it did not make conclusions based on the categorisation of the sites.

A year later, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation published a second work in which researchers Reis and Clohesy (2001) noted the dramatic increase in the number of sites related to e-philanthropy and the increasing attention surrounding the trend. Through a content analysis, sites in the second study were categorised into three ‘domains of action’ – giving time and money, knowledge and capacity building, and direct online services. A survey of non-profit organisations also revealed an increasing number of organisations using the Internet, with non-profits reporting more success in recruiting volunteers than soliciting donations. Major challenges included the need for more guidance to help organisations navigate online services, the financial and time requirements needed to fully capitalise on the services, and the need to continually democratise the online space as it relates to e-philanthropy.

Another study analysed the impact of the Internet on volunteering. Based on the results of a user study from one such site, results showed that the Internet plays a critical role

in helping non-profits link up with volunteers who they would not otherwise be able to find (O’Rourke & Baldwin, 2004). Users reported overall satisfaction with the online volunteering process, indicating they were more likely to volunteer and find a satisfying opportunity.

Several publications on e-philanthropy trends focus on the particular demographic of youth. One report broke down the online civic engagement of youth into 10 categories, including volunteering, philanthropy, and activism (Montgomery, Gottlieb-Robles, & Larson, 2004). Another recent study also examined youth online civic engagement, using the site TakingITGlobal.org as its focal point (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008). The authors noted several additions to the toolbox of online civic engagement, including blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging, and social networking.

### **Non-profit organisations’ use of the Internet**

The literature concerning non-profits use of the Internet focuses on the extent to which non-profits are using the medium to its full potential. In studying how non-profits use relationship-building functions on their websites, Taylor, Kent, and White (2001) found that although non-profit sites were effective in terms of ease of interface and information dispersal, the sites did not promote user interactions and return visits, and were thus not meeting the relationship-building potential of online tools. Likewise, in a content analysis of non-profits’ websites, Waters (2007) found that organisations mainly use the medium for information dispersal rather than for interactive exchanges with online audiences. Waters suggested that by incorporating interactive communication features into their online presence, non-profits could make e-philanthropy a more significant share of their revenues.

Two years later, Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas (2009) conducted another content analysis, this time examining how non-profits use profiles on Facebook to advance their organisational missions. The results showed that the majority of non-profits have not incorporated the wealth of useful applications

available to them on Facebook. While organisations most often presented content related to disclosure on their profile pages, they largely neglected the components of involvement and information dissemination.

Two more significant studies also conducted content analyses of non-profits' websites (Kang & Norton, 2004; Yeon, Choi, & Kioussis, 2005). Yeon et al. found that donor-related online material on the sites is more prominent and more interactive than volunteer and media materials. In addition, the study found that fewer than 10% of the sites utilise interactive features. Hart (2002) also looked at how non-profits use the Internet, with an emphasis on donor relations and online philanthropy. He pointed out how the Internet has made e-philanthropy viable, but that the biggest impact can be made when organisations use the Internet to build relationships with donors instead of just soliciting money.

### **Users' involvement with e-philanthropy**

In examining giving trends among the online community, one study surveyed 426 social-media-savvy individuals to better understand the potential for soliciting donations via social media (Livingston, Diaz, & Kanter, 2009). While respondents proved to be younger than the traditional donor audience, the results showed that these donors did not generate high dollar donations for organisations. Conversely, the over-50 respondents reported greater levels of online contributions. The study also found that a considerable number of respondents prefer social networks as a method of contact with non-profit organisations, and concluded that social media platforms present non-profit organisations with opportunities to engage both younger and older audiences in conversations that could lead to donations.

Much of the recent discussion about social good networks comes from mainstream media sources. An article from the Chicago Tribune asserted that the value in social networking for non-profits is not necessarily in considerable donations, but in increased interaction and deeper engagement with the

public (Wong, 2008). Citing examples from non-profit representatives, the article discussed how organisations are being forced to rethink their approach to fundraising on the Internet based on the actions of users. Another article argued that Generation Y has an inclination for activism that goes beyond fundraising. By recognising this generational difference, organisations can connect with young activists to market their causes and create change that is "bigger than making money" (Walker, 2009, paragraph 8).

In 2007, an article in the Wall Street Journal also cast light on the increasing popularity of online philanthropy, volunteerism, and activism among the younger generation (Silverman, 2007). The trend was considered to be different from the earlier phases on online philanthropy due to its heavy reliance on interactivity and social networking. The article also noted the shift in power from non-profit organisations to the hands of the individual, with users spreading awareness for an organisation on their own. Challenges for non-profits such as the amount of time needed to update content and the lack of understanding as to how to best use the tools were also noted.

### **Non-profits and relationship building**

As e-philanthropy sites progress to more complex, social good networks, the concept of using these networks as relationship-building tools can be informed by a public relations study by Hon and Grunig (1999). The researchers identify six components for measuring long-term relationships between organisations and their publics. Two of those components are 'exchange relationships' and 'communal relationships'. In an exchange relationship, each party gives to the other expecting something in return. This is typically a marketing approach to building relationships. Conversely, in communal relationships, Hon and Grunig state that "both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other – even when they get nothing in return" (p. 3). It is pointed out that both relationships are important and that many relationships start out as exchange

relationships and then become communal relationships over time.

In regard to non-profit organisations and donations, O'Neil (2007) submits that fundraising is "less about raising money and more about building relationships" (p. 99). Using the Hon and Grunig model to study donor relationships with a large non-profit organisation, O'Neil found that, although there was not a correlation between amount donated and relationship factors, long-term relationships do impact certain donor behaviours such as years of support and intent to recommend others.

In alignment with the Hon and Grunig model, previous literature on both the users and the non-profits involved in online philanthropy seems to point to an evolution in perspective – from viewing these sites as a means of exchanging information for donations, to considering the potential of social good networks for building deeper, more communal relationships over time.

### **Research objectives and questions**

This study built on existing literature in order to take the study of social good networks to the next level. In particular, the existing literature underscored the importance of understanding all aspects of social good networks – from the features the sites offer to how both users and non-profits utilise those features. Previous literature also raised questions regarding the demographics of social good network users, how these demographics relate to differences in usage, and whether social good networks are viable tools for soliciting volunteers, donations, and building deeper relationships. This study attempted to address these issues through the following research objectives and questions:

RO1: To better understand the concept of social good networks by breaking them down into different types.

RQ1: What kinds of features do social good networks offer, and how do these features define the different types of networks?

RO2: To determine the impact of social good network usage on network users.

RQ2: Why and how do network users utilise social good networks?

RQ3: What kind of impact have social good networks had on network users?

RO3: To determine non-profit organisations' usage of, and attitudes towards, social good networks.

RQ4: Why and how do non-profit organisations utilise social good networks?

RQ5: What role do these networks play in the overall marketing and public relations plans of non-profit organisations? (i.e. promotional tool, volunteer recruitment, fundraiser, relationship-building, etc.)

### **Method**

The research was a three-phase process, involving a content analysis of 30 social good networks, a survey of individuals who use the networks, and in-depth interviews with non-profits involved with the networks. Data were collected between August 2008 and January 2009. A mixed methods approach allows the researchers to verify the findings, refine the research questions, and continually develop new research avenues (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989), while ensuring that possible bias from one approach is not duplicated in another (Axinn & Pearce, 2006).

The first phase of the research was a qualitative content analysis of 30 cause-related social good websites. Because these sites represent a fairly new trend, the qualitative approach made it possible for the identification and exploration of new concepts and patterns. Sites were selected from sources in the literature review, as well as online search techniques. Each site represented a unit of analysis and was selected in a purposive manner to comprise a wide range of services including volunteering, donations, awareness, and full-spectrum services. Though the content analysis was US-based, many of the sites had a global reach; covering areas of global concern, housing international offices, or connecting the public with specific needs in multiple countries.

Once the sample was determined, each site was analysed using the constant comparative technique, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The method involves creating initial



categories, refining categories based on what emerges, and subsequently uncovering relationships between categories to develop a logical theoretical structure. A profile of each site was developed. Aspects such as a site's purpose, features, advertising, scope of interest, and user involvement were recorded in a comprehensive document. Patterns and themes began to emerge, and categories became more defined. Relationships between those categories were then determined, and ultimately established into a theoretical framework.

A quantitative online survey of social good network users comprised the second phase of the research methodology. Questions dealt with the respondent's general Internet behaviour, Internet behaviour as it related to social good networks, attitudes regarding social good networks, and demographic information. The survey was developed using the online survey design tool, Survey Monkey.

Due to the absence of a complete sampling frame of all social good network users, probability sampling was not feasible. Thus, the survey was distributed through a more plausible, non-probability sampling approach by identifying social good sites from the content analysis that allow for postings and user messaging. The survey was distributed through user-to-user messaging on some of the sites and by posting the survey link on various cause-related Facebook groups. Together these distribution methods garnered 70 survey responses. Data were analysed by looking at the percentages, frequencies, and distribution of survey responses.

The third phase of the research involved in-depth interviews with non-profit organisations. The objective of the interviews was to determine non-profits' usage of, and attitudes toward, social good networks. In selecting the sample, the researchers contacted organisations listed on several social good networks, as well as organisations that had participated in previous studies. A \$50US donation and a copy of the research findings were offered as incentives to take part in the study. The interview process

yielded data from a volunteer sample of seven organisations.

Participants were recruited in a purposive manner to include both large and small non-profits, a wide array of causes, and a varying degree of online involvement. Five of the organisations were larger entities, and two were smaller, locally known entities. Three of the entities were multinational organisations with offices or affiliates in multiple countries. Causes included animal welfare, environmental protection, health care, historic preservation, and international aid. Five of the organisations were well into their involvement with social good networks, and two were on the verge of their involvement. Interviewees represented the organisations' communications or marketing departments in the US.

All of the interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with an audio device. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30-45 minutes. Similar to the content analysis method, data was analysed using the constant comparative technique. Again, this allowed categories and relationships to emerge from the text of the interviews.

Finally, the three aforementioned research methods – content analysis, survey, and in-depth interviews – were triangulated in a way that would extract the underlying interconnectedness of the results. Each approach built on the next and subsequently gave more meaning to previous approaches. An overarching constant comparative assessment of the three methods allowed for a cross-analysis of the findings. Patterns and categories that emerged transcended all three methods and formed a framework for the study as a whole.

## Findings

### *Content analysis findings*

RQ 1: What kinds of features do social good networks offer, and how do these features define the different types of networks?

Looking at the content analysis findings in comparison with prior research on the topic, the researchers noted an evolution of the sites. Previous literature suggests that e-philanthropy sites were initially used for singular purposes, such as volunteer matching or donating.

Today's more sophisticated sites combine all of these services into one, while also incorporating newer Web 2.0 features. Essentially these sites have undergone an evolution from simple donation portals to complex networks with multiple services and features. However, the earlier generation of simpler, one-track sites still exists.

In the Kellogg report of 2001, three major domains of action were outlined: giving time and money, knowledge and capacity building, and direct online services (Reis & Clohesy, 2001). What was clearly present at that time were volunteering and donating features, and what was emerging were news aggregates and 'social change-making' features. The content analysis showed that, while the three Kellogg domains still exist, the concepts of networking, user-generated content and peer-to-peer marketing have since emerged. It was

also found that news aggregates and social change-making functions, only emerging in 2001, have now become fully integrated into many of the sites.

By looking at the sites in this way, four major functions of social good networks began to appear, which incorporate the domains of the Kellogg study while also including the new developments. These four functions are: inform, act, create, and network. Figure 1 illustrates the features and their corresponding functions. Some features could cross over into more than one function, but each feature was placed into the function that best represents it. The sites that offer each feature are listed within the segments of the wheel. The colour wheel in Figure 1 was inspired by a similar graphic, which maps social media conversations (Solis, 2008).

**Figure 1: Social good network features and their functions**



An analysis of the sites also revealed certain patterns present on social good networks. These were observations made through inductive

reasoning that transcended more than one of the sites in the study. The most notable patterns can be found in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Emerging patterns on social good networks**

Pattern	Feature examples	Site examples
<b>Emphasis on doing</b>	Donating and volunteering Charity badges Learning about a cause	Networkforgood.com
<b>vs.</b>		
<b>emphasis on creating dialogue</b>	Blogs User profiles Discussion boards Groups	Gaia.com
<b>User-generated content</b>	Blogs Discussion boards Petitions Site feedback Instant messaging Community-powered news	Care2.com Nabur.com
<b>vs.</b>		
<b>site-generated content</b>	Donation and volunteer search engines Resource centres Non-profit directories	Universalgiving.org Volunteermatch.com
<b>Youth-oriented Sites</b>	Embedded video Celebrity news Causes of concern to youth	Youthnoise.com Dosomething.org
<b>Promoting sites across multiple platforms</b>	Links to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube	Idealist.org Oneworld.net Changethepresent.org
<b>Peer-to-peer marketing</b>	Widgets Cause badges Personal web pages 'Friend' invitations	Facebook.com Sixdegrees.org Carebadges.org Yourcause.com
<b>Rewards for actions taken</b>	Stars Kudos Ranking systems	Change.org Care2.com Razoo.com

### Survey findings

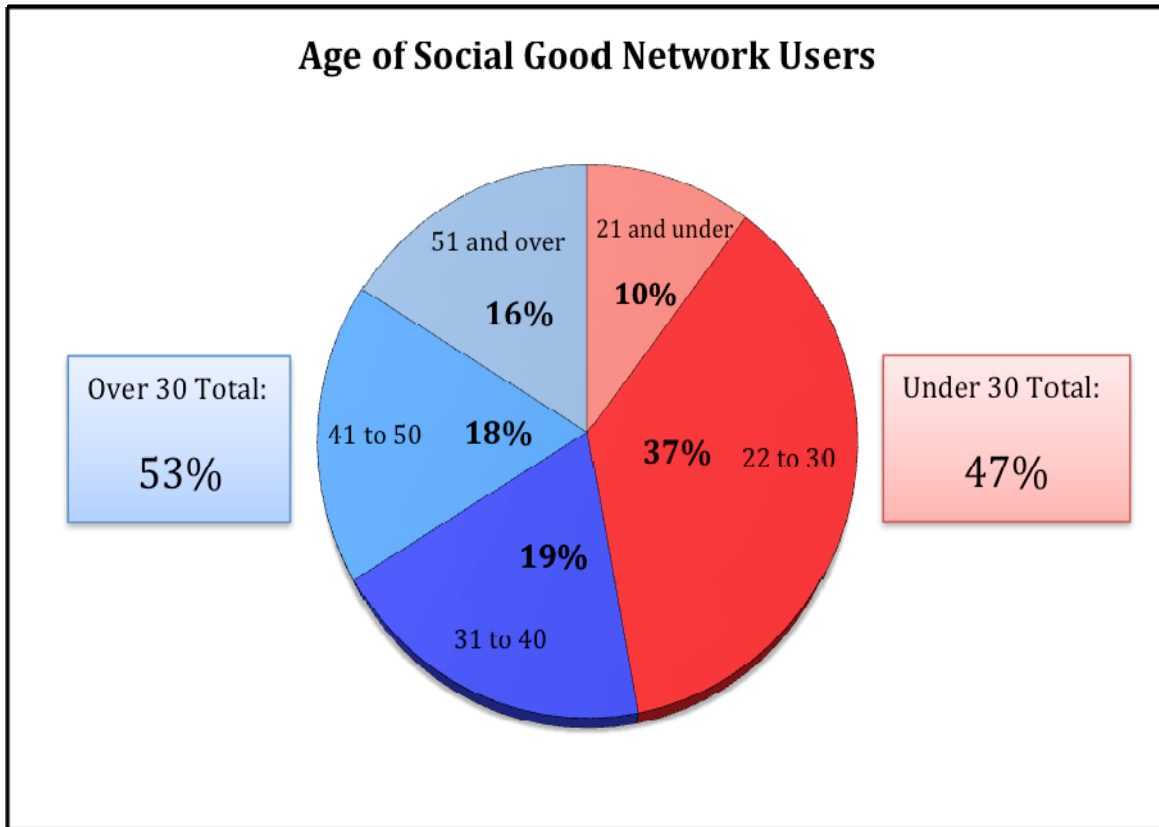
Of all the patterns that emerged, peer-to-peer marketing appears to be one of the most significant evolutions in online philanthropy. Whereas earlier sites contained static content generated by the site itself, many social good networks now allow users to create their own content, and to spread word of a site, a cause, or a non-profit to other individuals via multiple Internet platforms. Thus, control of content -- and distribution of that content -- is shifting from the hands of the non-profits and site administrators into the hands of the users.

RQ 2: Why and how do users utilise social good networks?

RQ 3: What kind of impact have social good networks had on users?

Little is known about the user base of social good networks, so it is interesting to look at the makeup of the sample. In terms of gender and race, the 70 respondents were predominantly female (64%) and white (81%). At 37%, the greatest percentage of participants fell between the ages of 22 and 30, as shown in Figure 3. When the age categories were condensed, however, the over-30 population surpassed the under-30 population, with 53% of the sample.

Figure 3: Social good network users by age



Geographic distribution also revealed some interesting findings. The survey garnered an international sample, as 21% of the respondents resided outside of the US, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. This attests to the ability of social networks to transcend geographic boundaries. The survey garnered responses from a fairly educated population, with 93% completing some college or a graduate degree. Taken together, the demographic findings help create a preliminary profile of social good network users: female, white, well educated, and global.

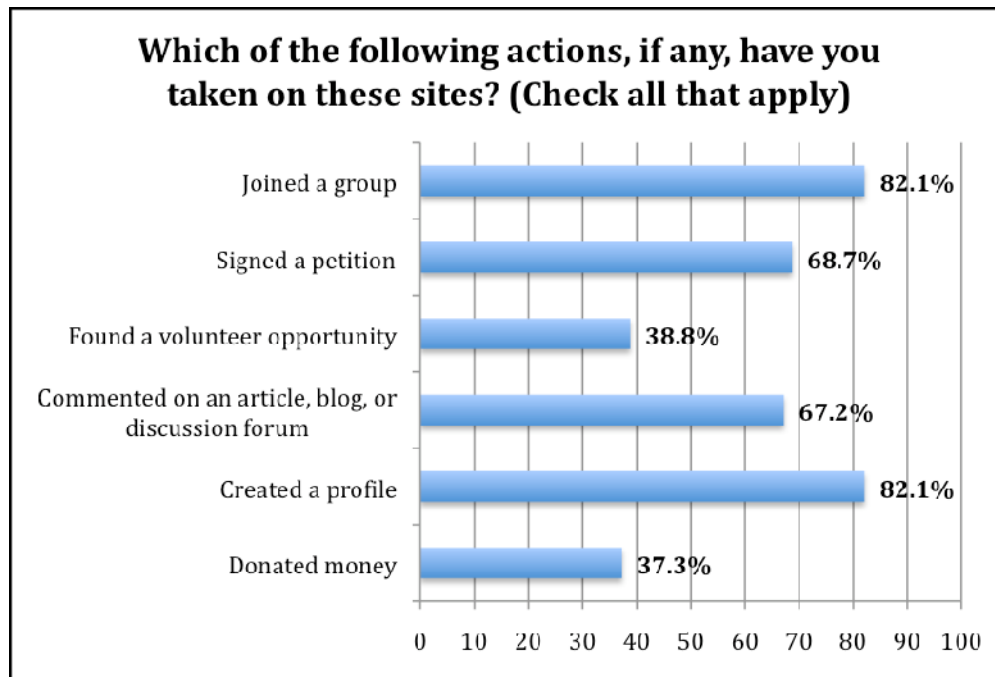
The top three ways users reported finding social good networks were through a link from another site (49%), through a peer (46%), and through a search engine (38%). Once again, the

peer-to-peer marketing trend was found to play a role in the success of social good networks. The majority of respondents (47%) first visited the site(s) looking for information about a certain cause. Once on the sites, users tend to stay regularly involved, as 68% estimate visiting them on at least a weekly basis, and 80% report involvement with two or more causes.

As shown in Figure 4, the two most common actions taken on the sites were creating a profile and joining a group, both at 82%. Signing a petition (69%) and commenting on an article, blog, or discussion forum (67%) were also relatively popular actions, whereas finding a volunteer opportunity (39%) and donating money (37%) were the least popular actions.



**Figure 4: Actions taken by social good network users**



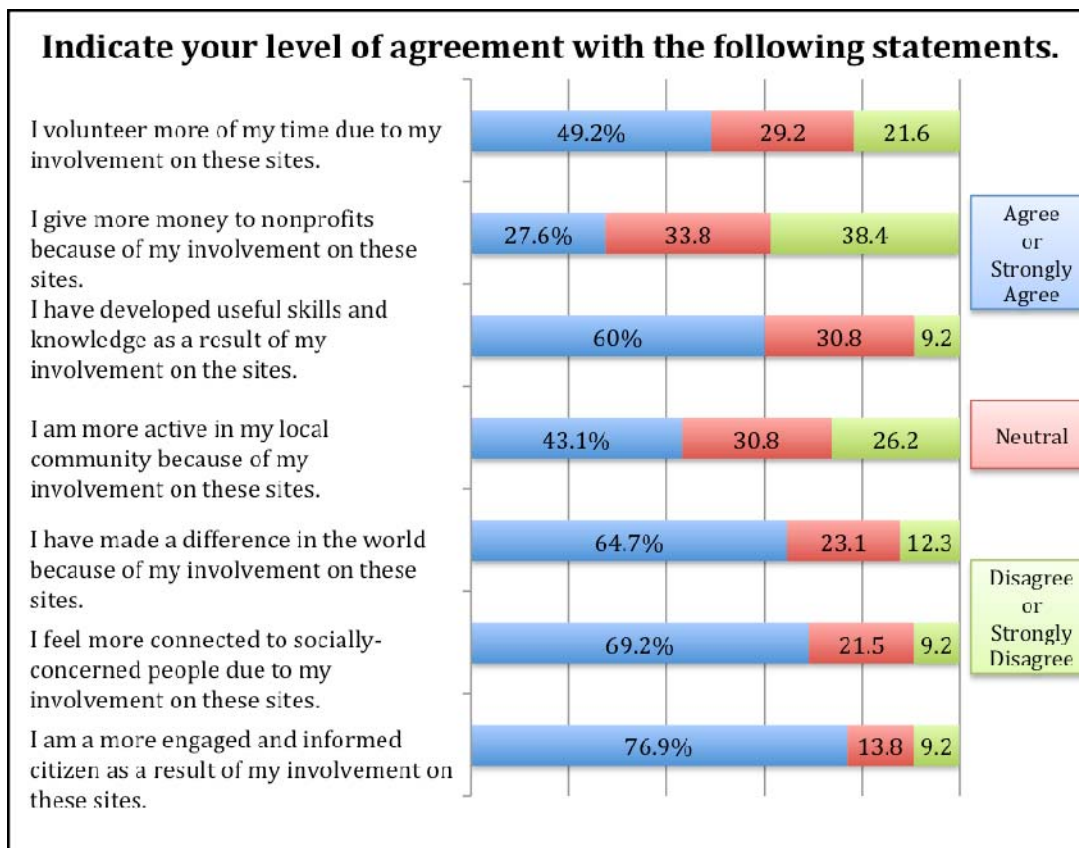
A cross-tabulation showed that different sites might be more or less conducive to certain actions. For instance, 83% of respondents who have visited Network for Good report that they have donated money, whereas 41% of visitors to Care2 and 51% of visitors to the Facebook Causes application indicate likewise. On the other hand, 91% (n=30) of visitors to the Facebook Causes application and 100% (n=14) of visitors to the MySpace Causes application report that they have recruited others for a specific cause on the site.

Respondents also reported they have spread word about a social good network by telling a friend through word-of-mouth (89%), inviting a friend to join via email or messaging (87%), sending a link (89%), or creating a badge or widget (51%). This reveals that a significant majority has helped spread word about a social good network – and use a variety of methods to do so.

When given a series of statements about social good networks, 86% of respondents indicated agreement or strong agreement that going on these sites makes them feel that they are part of a larger effort to influence positive social change. Likewise, 83% reported feeling more informed about what’s going on in the world and more connected to other socially concerned people and organisations.

When given a second series of statements, much smaller percentages, though still significant, indicated that they volunteer more of their time due to their involvement (49%) or are more active in their local communities because of their involvement (43%). Perhaps one of the most telling findings is that just 28% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I give more money to non-profit organisations because of my involvement on these sites”. These results are shown in Figure 5, over the page.

**Figure 5: User involvement resulting from social good networks**



**In-depth interview findings**

RQ 4: Why and how do non-profits utilise social good networks?

RQ 5: What role do these networks play in non-profit marketing and public relations plans?

The overarching finding from the interview data is that non-profits are using social good networks as long-term, relationship-building and marketing tools, rather than short-term fundraising tools. This notion was repeatedly supported throughout the interviews. A respondent from a national animal welfare organisation said, “I’m not sure if we’re ever going to see a real value as far as donor dollars, whereas we might see a real value with marketing”. Another respondent confirmed the notion, stating, “For us it isn’t a fundraising tool, it’s more of an advertising tool to bring people in and let them know why we are a great organisation to give to”. The interviews revealed that non-profits are shifting their perspective of social good networks from solely

an exchange relationship standpoint, to understanding these networks as a means of building both exchange relationships and communal relationships. While respondents used marketing and advertising terms to explain these relationships, it was clear that ‘long-term’ rather than ‘immediate’ was the intent of their online communications.

One reason social good networks are regarded highly for their marketing capability is because of the cost effectiveness of using these sites. “Most of these are either free or very low cost, so that opens more possibility in terms of what you’re having to put in for the sake of what you’re going to get out,” said one respondent.

Nearly all of the interviewees commented on how their involvement with these sites broadens the reach of their organisations, particularly with like-minded individuals and younger generations. One respondent from a large environmental non-profit said, “It’s

helping to expose our work and the message we're trying to get out to an audience that we wouldn't normally have access to". Another respondent stated, "Our involvement with Facebook is helping to expose us to a newer generation of activists, and that's where we are getting the most benefit". Recognising that young online audiences are not highly inclined to donating, it seems that many respondents see these sites as incubators for nurturing potential donors down the road.

Reinforcing the findings from both the content analysis and the user survey, respondents acknowledged the importance of the peer-to-peer marketing trend on social good networks. One respondent commented,

If I can have my supporters speaking on our behalf to say, 'Hey, check out this organisation', people will listen more to their friends. It's just a different method of getting that personalised message out, and it's our hope that that will be beneficial.

The uses and benefits of social good networks are also accompanied by challenges in using the sites. For large and small organisations alike, the amount of time and staff required to manage online efforts is a restricting factor. A respondent from a large non-profit said, "We see that they require a lot of tending. You can't just put up a page and go away. You actually have to give updates and engage your network, and do a lot of recruiting."

Another obstacle faced by non-profits is a lack of knowledge about the tools, their uses and benefits. "It's not necessarily a fear of the tool," said one respondent, "it's a fear of not doing it right and having to correct and having to step back and having it not look professional". To deal with this, a couple of respondents mentioned creating a plan before entering the social networking space to keep their efforts in sync with the organisational goals, messages, and mission. One respondent said:

We want to make sure that when we get involved in these things we do them in a way that maximises our expenditure of resources. So because of that what we

want to do is figure out exactly how these tools fit into our broader plan before we jump right in.

### **Discussion and implications**

The major findings of this study reveal certain implications for non-profit organisations. Three findings appear to be the most significant. The first is that the primary functions of social good networks are not fundraising or recruiting volunteers; rather they are networking and building community. Secondly, as sites have shifted from static, one-way communications channels to multi-faceted, interactive networks, it has become harder to translate online support into offline action, such as donating, volunteering, and attending local events. Finally, it is the users, not the non-profits, who hold most of the control over the social change efforts taking place on these networks. As peer-to-peer marketing becomes more prevalent, non-profits may lose control of the message, but they also gain a valuable – and credible – way of spreading that message.

The capacity of social good networks to build community is an emerging trend that has a wealth of implications for non-profits. First of all, non-profits should not view social good networks primarily as a way to increase funds. Instead, they should use these networks as a means of developing long-term, communal relationships, and gaining broader organisational reach. It remains to be seen if this will result in increased membership and donations down the road, as some non-profits predict.

Secondly, because the reliance on users to promote causes is accompanied by a certain loss of control, non-profits must make sure their organisational values and actions are transparent, and in alignment with the new audiences they are reaching. Loss of control can be compensated with the control non-profits have over their own organisational websites, which can be used to direct individuals towards donation opportunities. This means that non-profits should make sure their websites include and guide new visitors from social good networks. In essence, social good networks seem to be more about the

'cause' than about individual organisations, and this must be taken into consideration when crafting organisational messages.

One challenge faced by non-profits is converting online support into offline action. Not only did the interview data hint at this struggle, but the survey data also alluded to it. It appears that social good networks have not yet shown to be tools capable of creating a deeper level of offline engagement. This means that non-profits should not abandon traditional fundraising efforts in exchange for social good networks. Instead, they should include social good networks as part of their overall marketing and public relations plans. In doing so, non-profits should understand that these sites require frequent involvement and engagement in order for their efforts to be successful. Data also shows that involvement on a variety of sites – those in the 'inform' and 'act' quadrants, as well as those in the 'create' and 'network' quadrants – may be the most effective approach to building both exchange relationships and communal relationships.

With all of these implications for non-profit organisations, it is clear that the sector is in need of guidance regarding their involvement on social good networks. The full potential of social good networks cannot be maximised until a better understanding is attained. Consequently, there is a need for more services, workshops, and conferences to be offered for non-profit organisations that could aid them in their online efforts.

Lastly, the managers of the networks themselves also play a role in converting online networking into more tangible offline actions. While the discussions facilitated by these sites are valuable, administrators should not lose sight of non-profits' need for donations and volunteers. Those who run the networks should find ways to help organisations cultivate offline action and giving.

As these sites have moved from donation and volunteer tools to true social networks, why and how people and organisations use them has changed. Given this, the language and the way of thinking about these sites should also be re-examined. The term 'e-philanthropy', used heavily throughout earlier studies, may no

longer be the best way to describe these tools because the term is so inextricably linked to the idea of giving money. Essentially, the actions taken on these sites are geared more towards human welfare and the good of society than the financial needs of an organisation. In other words, social good networks are about just that – social good.

### **Future research**

Though this was a US-based study, the international reach of the sites, the global survey sample, and information from the organisations themselves, reveal that the results translate across cultural boundaries. The Internet is a global phenomenon; so too is the trend of social networking for the social good. Researchers in other countries should be able to build on the qualitative nature of the findings to develop future quantitative studies on network users and non-profit organisations. In particular, longitudinal studies tracking the relationship between users and non-profits over time, such as the O'Neil study (2007), would determine if involvement on these sites cultivates long-term members and donors as non-profits anticipate. Since non-profits are often hesitant to discuss explicit marketing and fundraising efforts, this type of research may best be conducted within the organisation, tracking specific involvement and the resulting benefits. Given the guidance needed by non-profits in using these sites, non-profits may also need assistance from research institutions in conducting such studies.

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