Examining Nonprofit Strategy for Fundraising on a Social Media Platform: A Content Analysis of Top 10 U.S. Nonprofit Power Brands Fundraising Efforts on Facebook

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Abstract

Nonprofits continually seek innovative ways to connect with donors. Giving online has changed dramatically in the last decade. While giving online has been accepted by donors as a legitimate tool for giving, the use of social media as a tool for fundraising has not yet become commonplace. The current study aims to fill the gap and provide a better understanding of the fundraising efforts made by nonprofits through Facebook page. The current study applied a content analysis to examine three separate quarter samples from 2011-2013, from 10 leading U.S. nonprofit organizations in an effort to provide insight in understanding of the actual use of Facebook as a fundraising tool. Findings provide additional support that leading nonprofits have adopted the use of Facebook as a communication tool, but have not yet embraced the tool for fundraising purposes. When each attempts to fundraising through Facebook, content is most often centered around third-party opportunities or on general messages about financial need. Often, the organizations directed donors to give through events and not directly through Facebook. The current study serves as a benchmark on the evolution of the use of Facebook by these leading U.S. nonprofit organizations to raise funds.

Introduction

With the groundbreaking and possibly historic case study of the ALS Ice Bucket

Challenge, the motivation and enthusiasm to incorporate social media into nonprofit donor

asks will surely continue to grow (ALS Association, 2014). As other nonprofits seek best

practices, the current study set forth to seek answers regarding social media as a platform to

raise funds.

Nonprofits continually seek innovative ways to connect with donors. The ever-changing

landscape of social media platforms are providing countless possibilities for nonprofit

organizations to communicate and engage with target publics. No longer are questions asked

about *if* they should use social media, but instead *how*.

Giving online has changed dramatically since the turn of the millennium. Switzer (2011)

reported that in 2001 only 4% of donors had given online. His research for *The Chronicle of

Philanthropy* found that number jumped dramatically to 65% by 2011. Furthermore, although

the number of online donors has increased, those donations come after extensive online

research. A Google Think Insights (2013) report concluded 75% of donors use online resources

to look for information about nonprofit organizations. The hunt for best practices when

engaging with donors online, particularly as it relates to growing social media platforms, are

being sought by many organizations wishing to capitalize on the emerging platforms.

Schweitzer (2012) states, "The S&I 100 is an online resource that allows donors to

access vital information about an organization's current and future potential to make a

difference" (para. 3). Through a selection process the Index has compiled high-impact

nonprofits. "One of the main goals in creating the index is to help nonprofits on the platform

find the funds they need to continue growing, while also serving as a site that empowers

donors to increase the impact of their charitable giving" (Schweitzer, 2012, para. 4). As today's

donors contemplate where and who can best use their funds, outside recommendations

serving as de facto endorsements can be particularly helpful.

New ways emerge daily to connect with potential donors online. Google for nonprofits

(2013) offers organizations highly discounted or free products or tools to help locate, engage,

and lead to action by donors. Seeing a need to build strong relationships through social

mediums, *Causes.com* unveiled a program allowing nonprofits a foundation for the beginnings

of a grassroots campaign. Facebook's application *Causes* (2013) allows nonprofit organizations

to tap into their social network and raise funds through their Facebook pages. Furthermore, the

application allows the nonprofit to track the analytics of the campaign.

Corrando (2013) has found Facebook to be the number one social media tool of

nonprofits at 91% usage, a significant distance from Twitter (69%), and YouTube (65%). As a

platform used among the nonprofit community, further investigation into messaging through

Facebook can provide insightful understanding into using the tool effectively. Cho, Schweickart,

and Haase (2014) examined the different levels of publics' engagement with organizational

messages through likes, shares, and comments. The researchers found that publics were more

likely to comment on organizational posts based on two-way symmetry message strategies.

Findings are helpful to nonprofit organizations that will post to a Facebook wall, however it still

does not speak specifically to their fundraising efforts.

While the scholarly community has examined nonprofit organizations' use of social media and online giving broadly, little has been gathered to examine specific organizations use of a single platform over time. The purpose of the current study is to help fill the gap and provide a better understanding of the fundraising efforts made by nonprofits through their Facebook pages. The current study uses a content analysis methodology to examine three separate quarter samples from 2011-2013, from 10 leading U.S. nonprofit organizations in an effort to provide insight in understanding their actual use of Facebook as a fundraising tool.

Literature Review

Nonprofits Use of Social Media for Fundraising

Since 2007, the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research has studied the usage of social media by the nation's largest charities. According to the 2010 study, all of the top 200 charities are using at least one form of social media and half of the executives interviewed said using social media to generate donations was important (Barnes, 2011).

While social media fundraising is still in its infancy, raising money through the Internet is not new. As Waters (2007) notes, some of the larger nationally known charities began using online giving in the late 1990s. However, it has taken the nonprofit sector sometime to develop online fundraising as a significant outlet for giving. For example, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* (2011) published a list of only nine charities in 2011 that raised more than 10% of its total funds

online. The National Multiple Sclerosis Society raised the highest percentage, nearly 34%, of its total donations online and the American Red Cross raised over $188 million or 19% of its funds through online donations. While these numbers are significant, total donations to U.S. charities in 2010 was over $290 billon leaving plenty of room for growth (The Center of Philanthropy at Indiana University, 2011).

Even though donors are beginning to make donations through social media platforms, research has brought to our attention the disconnect that exists between nonprofit image and donations. In 2009, Cone Communications, a public relations and marketing agency, released a list of the most recognized U.S. nonprofit organizations. The Cone "Nonprofit Power Brand 100," ranked leading nonprofit organizations based on methodology that evaluated the organization's brand image, revenue, and propensity for future growth. Cone (2009) found in some specific instances a "disconnect" existed between an organization's "brand image" and their financial performance. According to Cone (2009), the disconnect indicates "Some of America's most beloved nonprofit brands may be leaving millions of dollars in unrealized income on the table" (p. 19). Additionally, Cone noted traditional fundraising methods, such as direct mail, phone solicitations, and telethons, are becoming increasingly untenable as fundraising methods, therefore many nonprofits are "turning to digital fundraising, microphilanthropy and online communities" as methods to reach new donors (p. 27).

Yet, even with data supporting the power of social media to reach donors, not all have harnessed this power. Nah and Saxton (2013) conducted research examining the adoption and use of social media by nonprofit organizations. The scholars asserted nonprofit organizations

focused on funds through external sources would be more likely to adopt and utilize technologies, such as Facebook and Twitter, to engage with a wide-range of potential donors. They were surprised to find the opposite to be true. "We found that fundraising was negatively related to how frequently the organizations actually used social media in terms of both message volume and engaging in dialogue" (p. 306).

Harnessing the potential of social media to drive donations is worthy of further study. In 2014 there are more than 829 billion active users on Facebook with more than 81% of those active users logging on daily (Facebook Newsroom, 2014). Additionally Facebook is the most successful network on which to raise funds. The online fundraising site JustGiving.com documented a 130% increase in donations pledged through Facebook from 2010 to 2011 (Kessick, 2012). The organization estimates donations driven through Facebook will make up at least 50% of its online donations by 2015.

Livingston (2009) agrees social media's potential is real and, in fact, could be expanded beyond "micro-gifts" into the realm of major donors. In his study of major donors, Livingston determined major donors, those who gave more than $1,000 to charity in the previous year, aged 30-49, participated in social media (78%), and indicated they would participate in "charity-focused" social media sites (66%).

Social Media Strategy for Online Giving

Social media has great opportunity to build powerful and lasting relationships with donors. Liu (2012) conducted a study to illustrate shared obstacles and opportunities that U.S.

nonprofit communicators face. One of Liu's key findings reported while nonprofit communicators know the importance of being a recognized brand for fundraising and social media provides nonprofits the opportunity to improve its brand recognition, there is still much room for improvement. Key messages must be presented in a resonating way, and a social media strategy can provide guidance to an organization when tackling how to best to engage with targeted audiences while having those key messages resonate.

Many experts have suggested building a social media giving strategy (Google Think Insights, 2013; Flandez, 2012; Furlow, 2011; M+R Strategic Services & The Nonprofit Technology Network, 2013; Stein, 2013). The strategy can serve as a foundational building block in recruiting and retaining donors in the fundraising effort. Furlow (2011) explains how a social media strategy can enable the organization or brand to be part of something bigger. He argues a social media strategy can allow organizations to connect with an active community in a place they find convenient. Within the social media strategy different social media platforms can be designated and aligned with the overall campaign effort. In his tips for raising donations and attracting support when engaging with social media channels, Flandez (2012) suggests creating a schedule to help align content to targeted audiences. He argues this will help provide organization and structure, particularly during a fundraising drive when things can seem a bit chaotic.

Livingston (2009) indicated a need for nonprofit organizations to provide content through social media sites that encourages donations by providing the information donors seek. Key content should include: demonstration of the effectiveness (impact) of the organization;

active action on key issues and programs; success stories and progress updates; and financial

accountability (Livingston, 2009).

In his research, Waters (2010b) speaks to accountability issues nonprofits face in regard

to key continuants. Social media platforms can serve as vehicles to engage and build

meaningful relationships with key continuants, and in return lead to greater awareness of the

organization. Research has supported social media platforms as powerful communication tools

with targeted audiences in respect of providing information, building online communities and

providing calls to action (Guo & Saxton, 2012). "Whether it be through RSS feeds, Twitter

updates, or podcasts, increasing the awareness of a nonprofit's activities will ultimately benefit

the organization in terms of increased donations, volunteers, and participants in their programs

and services" (Waters, 2010b, p. 1421).

Social media offers a valuable way to accomplish these important goals with the

potential benefit of positively affecting donations to an organization. Kaplan and Haenlein

(2010) consider social media to be imperative for organizations of all sizes, noting:

Social Media allows firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at a

relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more

traditional communication tools. This makes social media not only relevant for large

multi-national firms, but also for small and medium-sized companies and even nonprofit

and governmental agencies. (p. 67)

Kaplan and Haenlein's assertion that social media may increase efficiency is important especially in the area of fundraising. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, cultivation of major donors is a specialized area of fundraising.

Waters (2010a) found nurturing relationships with major donors needed to continue above and beyond direct solicitation. Keeping these donors in the loop with ongoing interaction helps them "understand how their donations were being used" (Waters, 2010a, p. 471). Additionally, Waters further argues by engaging donors in more conversation, each can feel appreciated, in turn encouraging a more committed relationship. Social media by its nature encourages conversation and therefore should be considered a viable avenue for fundraising activities. Auger (2013) adds social media has been used to provide thanks and recognition on Twitter and solicit feedback through a conversation on the platform with key stakeholders on Facebook. Participating in either of these engagement activities on social platforms would benefit nonprofit organizations that want to connect with donors.

Engagement with Facebook when Online Fundraising

As previously outlined, social media offers a valuable way to connect with donors for online giving. While other scholars have evaluated engagement levels on Twitter (Guo & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012) as a nonprofit social media platform for donors, very few scholars have specifically looked at Facebook as a tool for nonprofit donor engagement.

Facebook is a daily destination for millions. As noted on the Facebook Newsroom

(2014), its mission states, "Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to make the world more

open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to

discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them" (para.

1). The social media platform now boasts it has over a billion active users and is still going

strong. The platform has been used by millions of organizations, small to large, to help build

and maintain mutually beneficial relationships. As nonprofits continue to seek an edge in

gaining donor dollars, Facebook can serve as a useful platform to continue the relationship

building.

Looking for strategic ways to engage key publics continues to be at the heart of utilizing

social media to drive donor support through fundraising. Regarding Facebook, many

researchers have argued and provided research supporting more meaningful engagement can

be had on the platform by posting questions, posting visuals, asking for input, and responding

to target audiences' comments (Furgison, 2014; Stein, 2013; Zarrella, 2012). M+R Strategic

Services and The Nonprofit Technology Network (2013) reported in its annual benchmark study

that photos were the strongest way for organizations to engage with key audiences. "Type of

post had a dramatic effect on the way that users engage: Photo posts were far and away the

most popular content for users to like, share, or comment on" (p. 25).

The Humane Society capitalized on the power of pet owners and their willingness to

share picture of their pets on Facebook. Through an online photo contest pet owners were

asked to make a minimum online donation of five dollars and then urge others to vote on

Facebook for their pet. With each vote that was cast, the society received a dollar donation. Flandez (2011) explained how much the campaign had raised, "$680,000 in 3.5 years. In 2010, it raised $8,000 mainly through Facebook" (para. 1).

M+R Strategic Services and The Nonprofit Technology Network (2013) conduct an annual eNonprofit benchmark study tracking online giving divided into the categories of environmental, health, international, rights, and wildlife/animals. Their study concluded photos are largely ineffective at generating clicks to webpages beyond the confines of Facebook. "Driving traffic is most effective with Link and Share posts" (M+R Strategic Services & The Nonprofit Technology Network, 2013, p. 25).

This differed from what Waters (2013) had suggested in his research. In a study over a two-month period, Waters (2013) examined Facebook statuses of *Nonprofit Times 100* list. He randomly chose 1,000 of the 7,570 statuses to investigated what type of organizational messages elicited engagement from public. Waters concluded the public most "likes" were found in call-to-action and community-building messages and "comments" were found most on the community-building and non-publicity information sharing messages. That being said, Waters also noted that there was not much "sharing" of any message type.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The technology acceptance model (TAM) provides a helpful foundational framework for the current study. Davis (1989) posited the TAM to theorize individual behaviors to use a system (in the current study Facebook), is determined by two beliefs: perceived usefulness and

perceived ease of use. Additionally, according to the model, perceived usefulness is influenced by perceived ease of use. In 2000, Venkatesh and Davis extended the original TAM by testing and discovering that both social influence process and cognitive instrumental process significantly influence user acceptance proposing TAM2. Their extension of the model provided detailed accounts of key forces that underlie judgments of perceived usefulness.

TAM2 provides users with a foundation stating that subjective norms have a significant direct effect on usage intentions over and above perceived usefulness and perceived ease when dealing with mandatory systems, but not voluntary systems. Subjective norm in Venkatesh and Davis's TAM2 is defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) as defined as a "person's perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behavior in question," p. 302. Moreover, TAM2 suggest that individuals who gain direct experience with a system (such as Facebook) over time, relied less on social information in forming perceived usefulness and intention, but judged the system's usefulness on the potential status benefits one may obtain from using that system.

The technology acceptance model has been used as foundation framework for a plethora of studies, including those focused on the social media platform Facebook (Aharonuy, 2014; Kollmann, Kayser, & Stöckmann, 2013; Kwon, Park, & Kim, 2014; Rauniar, Rawski, Yang, & Johnson, 2014). Because it is widely accepted and has been used previously with this particular social media tool, the model will serve as our guiding framework for the current study.

Current Study

The current study uses the top 10 nonprofit brands as ranked by Cone (2009) to answer three specific questions about the use of social media for fundraising purposes. These organizations include: American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, Humane Society of the United States, Make-A-Wish America, the Salvation Army USA, Special Olympics, United Way, and YMCA. All posts on the main Facebook pages were analyzed from 2011-2013 taking snapshots of all top 10 nonprofit organizations through three separate sample quarters. As the top 10 nonprofit organizations set the standards for many smaller or more local nonprofits, findings from this study serve as a benchmark for developing social media fundraising strategies. The following research questions were advanced:

R1: *Are the top 10 brand name nonprofit organizations using Facebook as a platform to raise funds?*

R2: *If leading brand name nonprofit organizations use Facebook to raise funds, how is it done?*

R3: *If the top 10 brand name nonprofit organizations use Facebook to raise funds, how do followers respond to the messaging?*

Methodology

Cone Communications, a public relations firm based in Boston, specializes in cause branding, and serves a wide range of nonprofit organizations. In 2009, Cone partnered with

Intangible Business, a U.K.-based valuation consultancy to determine what nonprofit organizations brands are considered leaders in the cluttered and wide ranging nonprofit sector (Cone, 2009). By combining rigorous financial analysis with an appreciation of brands and marketing, Cone and Intangible Business developed the Cone Nonprofit Power Brand 100.

The duo used data from the Forbes 200 Largest Nonprofits list, the Nonprofit Times Top 100 list and the Chronicle of Philanthropy Top 100 to identify the largest U.S.-based nonprofits (Cone, 2009). The study then developed a custom methodology to run each organization through and determine a "brand value." This approach included financial analysis, took a holistic approach to the study of both financial, brand image and propensity for future growth. (Cone, 2009)

To determine brand image, the organizations conducted a nationally representative survey we conducted among 1,000 U.S. adults to measure consumer perception – both familiarity and personal relevance – for each organization. The firms also analyzed nonprofit coverage in the top 50 U.S. daily newspapers, considered geographic reach of each organization, as well as other factors such as the percentage of revenue put toward mission, volunteer support base and the growth of the organization as measured by change income year-over year. (Cone, 2009)

This methodology lent itself to a more well-rounded and market-based evaluation than simply choosing nonprofits based on income alone, which is why the current study chose to use the rankings. Further, most scholarly research on social media use by nonprofit organizations has been limited to analyzing specific components of nonprofit branding, social media use,

online fundraising appeals, etc. and has been dominated by only a few scholars. In fact, Saxton and Wang (2014) noted that at this time there are "no academic studies to date on social media-based charitable giving, little is known about what drives organizational success in this increasingly salient giving domain." (p. 3) Hence, the need for this study. Further, while Saxton and Wang take on the issue of social media fundraising, the authors limit their focus to the economic aspects of giving via social media and comparison of the motivators between donations via traditional methods and social media (Saxton & Wang, 2014).

Most of the nonprofit social media studies to date have used financial rankings as their choice for organizational analysis. However, the Cone Power Brand 100 was covered widely in nonprofit, marketing and business periodicals and therefore, may be familiar to many nonprofit marketing and communication leaders for whom the current study may be particularly relevant. In the Cone 100, 10 organizations ranked at the very top for their "brand images" among all of the top 100 nonprofits. According to Cone and Intangible Business, "these brand image leaders have considerable public presence and perception – including consumer familiarity, media coverage and volunteer base, among other factors – which are major drivers of future support" (Cone, 2009, p. 17). Cone and the media highlighted the top 10 organizations in this category. Because of the methodology, the Cone study established that these 10 are well recognized, have far reach geographically, have invested in brand recognition, and therefore, may be more likely to be innovative in both fundraising and marketing appeals through social media platforms. Since the current study is aimed at informing both practitioners and scholars, the choice to use these 10 organizations for the basis of the current study seemed reasonable.

These top organizations include: American Cancer Society, Salvation Army USA, United Way of America, Habitat for Humanity International, American Red Cross, The Y (YMCA of the USA), American Heart Association, Special Olympics, Make-A-Wish Foundation of America, and Humane Society of the United States. These organizations form the basis of the current study. As industry leaders, it is reasonable to expect them to lead in innovation, including the use of social media.

All Facebook posts from each of the 10 organizations, a total of 2618 posts, were analyzed during the time periods selected. Only the main Facebook page, as linked from the website of each organization was sampled. Some organizations have more than one distinct page. The main page was determined to best reflect the intent and credibility of the organization and was therefore chosen over any other ancillary page.

Posts were chosen for analyses over different three-month time periods in each of the three years were used to correct for potential seasonal biases on the part of any one organization. For example, The Salvation Army may post more during the winter holiday season but the American Red Cross may post more during hurricane season. To that end, posts from October through December in 2011, April through June in 2012, and January through March in 2013 were used in the analysis. Given the relative novelty of using social media to fundraise and the volume of posts for each organization, the authors determined this sampling procedure was an efficient and sufficient sample.

Content analysis, using a specific coding scheme, was used to measure the following variables: how many likes each post garnered, how many comments each post received, as well

as a detailed classification scheme to determine the main point of the post. The classification

scheme included an initial determination regarding the main point of the post (fundraising,

awareness/education, programming or other). For those posts determined to be fundraising in

nature, the type of fundraising appeal was analyzed (event participation, direct donations

through Facebook, both or other). Then posts were evaluated and categorized by the need for

funds (general need, specific event, specific program need, in honor or memory of a loved one,

third-party funding, capital expenses or a funding announcement). Finally, posts were analyzed

for primary and secondary approaches to generating funds (use of compelling story tied to

mission, use of statistics tied to need/mission, use of celebrity endorsement, use of investment

metaphor/language, use of outside validation (BBBwise Giving, Idealist.org, Guidestar.org), use

of general discussion related to philanthropy, use of general discussion related to financial need

or other).

Intercoder reliability was calculated at 88% overall. Within each question reported, the

reliability averaged 94%. The overall study attempted to determine secondary topics and those

questions did not carry enough reliability to use statistical analysis and therefore were not

reported in this study.

Posts that were found to be primarily about fundraising were further analyzed to

determine how the funds were to be raised, and the specific framing of the individual

fundraising plea. These posts were analyzed numerically as well as rhetorically to gain a clearer

understanding of the themes the organizations relied upon to make their case for funds.

Results

Research Question #1: Are the top 10 brand name nonprofit organizations using Facebook as a platform to raise funds?

Over the nine months analyzed organizations posted a cumulative 2,618 times on its Facebook page. However, only 212 posts or 8% of the total were dedicated to fundraising messages. Further, fundraising posts decreased over time as seen in Table 1.

When analyzed individually the patterns show a wide variation in the overall use of the social media platform. Posts ranged from a high of 437 posts from Make-A-Wish America to only 71 posts by YMCA. The total posts by each organization are seen in Table 1.

Use of the platform alone did not indicate an organization's preference for using it for fundraising purposes. While the Make-A-Wish foundation topped both lists, the overall distribution changed as seen in Table 2.

Though only a small fraction of the total Facebook posts, some organizations allowed or encouraged followers to donate funds directly through Facebook. Both American Heart Association and YMCA topped the list at 100%, followed by Habitat for Humanity (81%), Humane Society of United States and American Cancer Society (71%), Make-A-Wish America (26%), Salvation Army USA (18%), American Red Cross (17%), and Special Olympics and United Way that complete the list at 0%.

Overall, in 39% of the cases did the organization encourage donations to be made directly through Facebook. Based on the previous results, the following analysis offers no clear

pattern indicating confidence in Facebook as a fundraising platform. Thus, the results suggest the tool is not yet viewed as a valuable fundraising platform.

Research Question #2: If leading brand name nonprofit organizations use Facebook to raise funds, how is it done?

As noted earlier, the organizations analyzed in the current study did not use Facebook often, or consistently in order to raise funds. However, this study also sought to determine when fundraising was discussed, how it was done. By doing so, the authors intended to shed light on whether the approaches to the topic of fundraising were similar given the highly interactive and personal nature of this social media platform.

Overall, the majority of fundraising posts (42%) were related to third-party events. Meaning, the posts directed followers to another website or to purchase items from another entity through the organization that would benefit financially. For example, the American Cancer Society posted a status in collaboration with National Football League to raise funds for breast cancer. ACS asked donors to join their favorite NFL team to help end breast cancer by pledging to donate a dollar for each point their team scored for that particular weekend.

Another example includes the following post on the Salvation Army USA's page about collaboration between the organization and the *Today Show*. The Salvation Army asked donors to tune into the *Today Show* and bid on items the anchors and staff from the show donated to benefit the Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Centers.

Other posts focused on general fundraising (20%) or promoted specific events (19%). For example, Make-A-Wish America posted a simple plea for donations to support the children it serves, sharing a link to donate $5 to help grant a child's wish.

In December 2011, the American Heart Association (AHA) encouraged supporters to consider the organization when doing holiday shopping. In a suggestion post from the organization, it asked holiday shoppers to consider making a donation to AHA in honor of loved ones. With an attached link to make the donation, AHA conveys out to donors their contribution is tax deductible and can help fight against heart disease and stroke.

When analyzing specific frames of the fundraising messages, organizations focused more on general messaging (35%) discussing generalized financial need (33%). Only 12% of the messages focused on stories tied to the mission, while 11% were celebrity endorsements. An example of a mission related story: on November 2, 2011 the Humane Society of the United States discussed successful mission-related work of the organization and tied it to how supporters help raised funds from Pepsi by helping the organization win $250,000 in the Pepsi Refresh Project for its Animal Rescue Team.

Habitat for Humanity posted a twist on this theme by highlighting a news story about a unique fundraising scheme by a team of three brothers. The post highlighted the mission and provided a channel to collect other fundraising stories and donations from its followers. Below is the wording from the Habitat for Humanity October 11, 2011 post:

Three brothers are biking across two continents to raise funds for Habitat. Visit the

Habitat Word blog to read their story and leave a comment that tells us about the most

fun and creative fundraising experience you've ever heard of. We'll pick one of the responses and mail the winner a Habitat gift pack—loaded with the latest Habitat gear.

http://www.habitat.org/blog/article053.aspx

The American Red Cross' linked donations to a specific need and to results. In its post, the organization highlighted a news story regarding how many meals it served, the number of clean up and comfort kits it distributed, and mental health and health services consultations it provided. American Red Cross's post went on to make a plea for donations and a call to click on an attached link or to text a code via mobile device to pledge monetary support.

Research Question #3: If the top 10 brand name nonprofit organizations use Facebook to raise funds, how do followers respond to the messaging?

Followers on the top 10 nonprofit brand Facebook pages vary widely. The popularity of the pages' messaging varies as well. In the current study, each post was analyzed for its total number of likes and comments. This measurement helped to set the bar in order to measure how well fundraising posts fared with followers. Similar to earlier results, there was no discernable pattern or level of consistency in the individual results. Overall, the average number of likes per post ranged from a high of 2,196 likes on a Humane Society of the United States Facebook post to a low of 90 likes on a YMCA Facebook post. See Table 3.

The average number of comments per post changed the ranking order of the organizations. The disparity between the organizations varied but not as widely as that of the average likes per post. See Table 4.

After establishing the general popularity of organizational posts, all posts were ranked from most likes to least, and then analyzed to determine where fundraising posts ranked in the top 10% of the overall total posts. Only five fundraising posts found their way into the top 10%. Of those five, the American Cancer Society had two, the Humane Society of the United States had two, and the Salvation Army USA had one.

Further, all posts were then ranked from most comments to least, and then analyzed to determine if any fundraising posts received enough comments to rank in the top of all discussions. In this case, only seven posts primarily about fundraising received enough comments to rank in the top 10%. Again, the Humane Society of the United States had four posts, the Salvation Army USA had two, and Make-A-Wish America had one post in the top of all discussions.

Discussion

The authors believed the use and intentions to use of Facebook for fundraising was that, as a relatively new system to use for this particular purpose, its current use by users would have been affected firstly by their perceptions of its effectiveness (a surrogate for usefulness to donate online), and secondly by subjective norms, in this case their perceptions of the extent of its current use by the top 10 nonprofits. Yet it was found through the current study leading nonprofits have adopted the use of Facebook as a communication tool, but have not yet embraced the tool for fundraising purposes. Only 8% of the total posts even discuss the topic.

Nearly three-quarters (70%) of the organizations use the tool to discuss awareness and education or to highlight programming or support functions.

When these top 10 leading organizations do encourage donations, half of the time the Facebook page directs donors to contribute through event participation. Only 39% of the time does the nonprofit encourage donations to be made directly through Facebook in posts on its page. While this suggests the tool is not viewed as a valuable fundraising mechanism, nearly all of the leading nonprofit organizations analyzed have added a donation button directly on their Facebook page. Only YMCA, Habitat for Humanity, and the Special Olympics have not yet adopted this tactic. As noted earlier, fundraising posts over the past three years have declined. It may be in part because of the addition of a permanent donation vehicle on their page. using social media for fundraising A Interactive (2014). Or, this may indicate a maturing view on how best to capture dollars from followers. Further studies should be done to determine if this is indeed a strategy or simply an added option for donors.

As other studies have suggested (Waters, 2013), donors are not as receptive to fundraising messages as they are to other topics of discussion. This finding also bears out in the current study as only 2% and 3% of fundraising messages reached the top 10% most popular posts as measured by likes and comments. Further, when organizations did post fundraising information, the content most often included third-party fundraising opportunities (42%). Interestingly, by taking this approach the organization's may be losing an opportunity to gain direct contributions from donors. Saxton and Wang (2014) found when an organization routed donors back to their main website, "the influence of the organization's website, as indicated by

the positive coefficient on Website Reach, is significantly related to levels of charitable

contributions on Facebook" (p. 862). This finding seems to indicate donors may be more

receptive to fundraising messages when accompanied with an easily accessible link to the

charity's web page.

The current study also found that when fundraising content was organizationally driven,

it was largely unfocused on any one theme (35%) or was discussed in terms of general financial

need (33%). These findings confirm earlier studies and show that even nonprofit brand leaders

have yet to embrace the social platform as a viable fundraising tool. In fact, Waters et al (2009)

urged nonprofits to "provid(e) a listing of events to become involved with or methods to

contribute and volunteer, organizations must strive to make their sites more interactive" (p.

106) as it relates to fundraising.

While the current study reflects organizationally driven fundraising messages, use of the

platform for fundraising through an organization's supporters diverges. MDG Advertising (2012)

found when supporters posted information about their own personal donation to an

organization, their friends were 39% more likely to make a donation and 33% more likely to

repost the donation request. Saxton and Wang (2014) found a similar phenomenon. They note:

> The fundraising occurring on Facebook, GoFundMe, Crowdrise, and other social
>
> networking sites is, arguably, directed just as much by a decentralized group of
>
> individuals as it is by the organization. In the end, the role of the amorphous, loosely
>
> connected, ephemeral networks of individuals, organizations, and informal groups that

come together—even if only for one moment—are proving critical to the success of

online fundraising campaigns… (pp. 865-866).

Given the potential of Facebook as a medium for fundraising, nonprofit organizations

should experiment with messaging to take advantage of the opportunity. While fundraising

conversations successfully take place under traditional means as Saxton and Wang (2014)

discovered, the social medium should be viewed as opportunity to extend and expand that

discussion with new audiences and potentially younger audiences.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study finds highly recognized nonprofit brands use Facebook as a

platform to communicate information and discuss their mission with followers, but not as a

primary mechanism to raise funds. While anecdotal reports show some organizations are

having success raising funds via social media, industry leaders have not yet settled on Facebook

as a primary tool to use.

The current study serves as a sort of benchmark on the evolution of the use of Facebook

for fundraising purposes. It is in no way comprehensive, nor determinative of any specific

strategy or conclusion for the organizations studied. As social media platforms continue to

evolve, grow, and become more entrenched in American society, further study will be needed

to guide the nonprofit sector on the best methods to make optimal use of these important

communication tools.

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Tables

Table 1. Shows the percentage decrease over a three-year period for fundraising Facebook posts from all organizations combined.

Year	Total Posts by Organization	Total Posts by Organization dedicated to fundraising messages	Percentage of posts dedicated to fundraising
2011	850	130	15%
2012	734	54	7.4%
2013	1034	28	2.7%

Table 2. Shows the total number of Facebook posts by each organization over the time period sampled and percentage of total Facebook posts dedicated to fundraising by each organization over the time period sampled.

Organization	Total Posts	% of posts dedicated to fundraising
Make-A-Wish America	437	19%
Salvation Army USA	394	11%
Habitat for Humanity	363	10%
American Heart Association	320	2%
Special Olympics	310	2%
United Way	258	2%
Humane Society of the United States	181	4%
American Cancer Society	144	15%
American Red Cross	140	4%
YMCA	71	3%

Table 3. Shows the average number of likes per post by each organization over the time period sampled.

Organization	Total Posts
Humane Society of the United States	2196
Special Olympics	1027
Make-A-Wish America	780
American Heart Association	429
American Red Cross	369
American Cancer Society	186
Habitat for Humanity	169
Salvation Army USA	155
United Way	98
YMCA	90

Table 4. Shows the average number of comments per post by each organization over the time period sampled.

Organization	Total Posts
Humane Society of the United States	174
American Heart Association	46

American Red Cross	25
Special Olympics	25
American Cancer Society	16
Habitat for Humanity	10
Salvation Army USA	9
United Way	8
Make-A-Wish America	6
YMCA	6