

**Communicating Compassion:
A Narrative Analysis of Compassion International's Blogger
Engagement Program**

Lisa K. Lundy, Ph.D., APR
University of Florida

Abstract

A narrative analysis of Compassion International's blogger engagement program reveals lessons for nonprofits seeking to partner with bloggers. Compassion went beyond just reaching new sponsors through blogger engagement, but also sought to retain and educate existing sponsors, equipping them as ambassadors for the organization. Compassion's blogger engagement program demonstrates the social capital to be garnered for nonprofit organizations when they partner with likeminded bloggers who can help tell their story.

Introduction

Child sponsorship programs originated as a tool to motivate individuals in wealthy countries to mobilize resources to help reduce poverty in developing countries (Wydick, Glewwe & Rutledge, 2013). While donors may lack long-term commitment in giving to nonprofit organizations, child sponsorship programs engage moral instincts to compel donors to commit to support a child over a long-term period. Americans alone give in excess of \$3 billion annually to internationally sponsored children. According to Bornstein (2001), “The personal connection—from individual to individual in relationships of correspondence—both effaces the global political-economic context that engenders sponsorship and transcends the potential impersonality of a monthly remittance” (p. 597).

Compassion International (henceforth referred to as “Compassion”) is the third-largest child sponsorship program in the world (Wydick, Glewwe & Rutledge, 2013). According to Charity Navigator, Compassion spends 84.3 percent of its budget on the programs and services it delivers. The organization has earned a 4-star rating (the highest Charity Navigator awards) for 12 straight years. Compassion serves over 1.3 million children in 26 countries (Wydick, Glewwe & Rutledge, 2013). Child sponsors pay \$38 per month to provide school tuition and uniforms, several meals per week, healthcare and tutoring. Interested in the effects of Compassion’s child sponsorship program, Bruce Wydick and a team of researchers (Wydick, Glewwe & Rutledge, 2013) looked at multi-year data for 10,144 individuals from six countries,

examining long-term impacts of child sponsorship through Compassion. They found statistically significant impacts on years of schooling, school completion and the probability and quality of employment.

Compassion uses a blogger engagement program to communicate with existing and potential sponsors. Compassion began taking blogger trips in 2008 with a trip to Uganda. Since that original trip with 15 bloggers, Compassion has taken 11 more trips with about 70 popular bloggers. Compassion pays for the bloggers' travel, but it does not offer compensation or payment for the bloggers. Compassion uses bloggers to help establish trust in the organization and its child sponsorship program. Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) characterize public relations as "the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community" (p. 21). In the case of Compassion, blogger trips are used to foster a sense of community among child sponsors. According to Wise (2014), "The underlying power in social media is not the technology. It's the power that comes from human beings connecting from all around the globe" (p. 32). Fieseler et al (2010) discuss blogs as a community forum for "micro-dialogues":

Micro-dialogues are created between an organization and highly engaged audiences in online spaces, and they deal with a previously range of topics and issues...Instead of formal hierarchies; discussions in weblogs allow any and all interested parties to read and also comment, which results in a public review process that engenders authenticity, transparency, and credibility. (p. 610)

Literature Review

Partnerships with bloggers are an attractive strategy for public relations practitioners because they often offer detailed reporting and a type of third-party credibility akin to journalism within niche networks of individuals sharing information about selected topics (Langett, 2013; Ries & Ries, 2002).

Blogs have been shown to influence consumers' purchasing decisions and, interestingly, consumers say that smaller communities are more influential than larger communities (Redsicker, 2013). This is important for nonprofits, which may lack access or financial ability to pursue partnerships with high-profile bloggers. According to Redsicker (2013), "The real value of online communities comes from discussing ideas, sharing information and learning from one another. Rarely does value come from the size of a community." In research evaluating the influence of bloggers on consumption decisions, trust has proven to be a central factor.

According to (Hsu, Lin & Chiang, 2012):

A consumer facing some degree of transaction risk turns to the other person that the consumer believes is credible and benevolent...Through reading and frequent interactions on the blog, blog readers become familiar with bloggers and the content they provide, and in turn trust is formed (p. 72).

One way to describe the role bloggers play in fostering goodwill and positive reputation for nonprofits is social capital theory. According to Adler and Kwon (2002), "The core intuition

guiding social capital is that the goodwill that others have toward us is a valuable resource” (p. 18).

The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups (Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

Public relations researchers have highlighted the potential for applying social capital theory to the study of public relations (Dodd et al, 2015). Blogger relations, a public relations strategy, offers organizations potential for two important types of social capital as identified by Putnam (2000): bridging and bonding. Individuals within a community can share and develop resources together (bonding), but they can also share and develop resources with other individuals outside their community (bridging) (Putnam, 2000). Online communities can offer opportunities for bridging and bonding, depending on the level of ideological and social heterogeneity (Norris, 2002).

According to Halpern (2005), most forms of social capital include three basic components – a network; a cluster of norms, values and expectancies; and sanctions – punishment and rewards. Networks can be characterized by how well people within know each other and the degree to which they are open to newcomers. Norms may be formal or informal and include such concepts as reciprocity, wherein those within a network look after each other with some expectation that the “favor” will be returned. Sanctions are often imposed when someone within a social network violates expected norms.

According to Dodd, Brummette and Hazleton (2013):

A social capital approach to public relations suggests that public relations professionals serve as brokers of social resources on behalf of organizations in that just as other forms of capital (e.g., financial capital) may be exchanged for organizational outcomes, so too can social resources (e.g., relationships, reputation, trust and so on) embedded in the networks of organizational publics (p. 2).

In the blogosphere, there are many different networks of bloggers. Bloggers build their audience by linking amongst themselves. When a blogger promotes a peer's content or other products (books, speaking engagements, etc.), reciprocity often manifests in the form of a similar endorsement or promotion. When a reader leaves a negative comment that is deemed "out of line," oftentimes the targeted blogger need not even reply because his/her readers take the lead in responding and diffusing the negative comment. In the same way, readers often respond to one another's questions.

One purpose of this study was to describe the content Compassion bloggers are providing during blogger trips, the response of blog readers via comments and the role these blog posts appear to be playing in recruiting/retaining child sponsors. A second purpose was to examine these blog posts through the lens of social capital theory, examining the potential for blogger engagement to generate social capital for nonprofit organizations.

Method

The researcher conducted a narrative analysis of blog posts and comments from the five most recent Compassion blogger trips. This type of narrative analysis “focuses on narratives as practice within social interaction rather than as text with an identifiable structure. . . investigating stories and storytelling as they operate within society” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 530). Data analyzed included 253 blog posts written by 36 bloggers over five blog trips to Ecuador (2011), Tanzania (2012), Peru (2012), Nicaragua (2013) and Uganda (2014). The researcher also analyzed 7,458 blog comments.

Analysis began with a round of open coding, or an initial, unrestricted reading (Strauss, 1987) through the blog posts. After reading through the blog posts and comments from two of the trips in their entirety, the researcher made notes about common themes and continued through a process of data reduction to discover key themes and concepts for further exploration. While examining the blog posts and comments, the researcher noted asides (brief notes of analysis that explanation or raise questions about data) and commentaries (more detailed notes raising broad issues) (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). These asides and commentaries, combined with highlighted portions of data eventually led to categories. These categories evolved through a constant-comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as certain words, phrases, or sentences connected in ways that prompted the researcher to generate new categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). For each category, a detailed description was noted in the codebook that would allow other researchers to understand the criteria for categorization.

Examples of categories included, but were not limited to: “pre-trip emotions/thoughts,” “portrayals of poverty,” “role of correspondence,” “reader behavior,” “organizational attributes,” and “storytelling.” A brief code was assigned to each category to allow for labeling data. According to Richards and Morse (2007), coding “leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea” (p. 137).

Results

The bloggers Compassion works with represent various types of blogs including decorating, homeschooling, cooking, photography, writing, fashion/design, lifestyle and blogs about parenting. Most (32 out of 36) of the blogs analyzed for this study had female authors. Most of the blogs analyzed were written by bloggers who had never traveled with Compassion before. They often communicated their lack of knowledge/familiarity with Compassion to their readers prior to the trip:

Just in case you don't know much about Compassion, you're in the right place because I'll be learning, too. We have just signed up to sponsor our first child as a family, a fourteen year old boy in a village that I'll be visiting. I'm going to actually go to his village, see his home, meet him and his family. – Christy, Southern Plate, Nicaragua, 2013

Several of the blogs analyzed were written by bloggers who had previously traveled with Compassion. These bloggers often prefaced their blogs with sentiments experienced during prior trips: “The most amazing thing I ever did through my blog was go on a trip with

Compassion International. I got to see first hand how awesome that organization is and tell you about it” (Kelly, Kelly’s Korner Blog, Ecuador, 2011). Several themes emerged from the blog posts and comments.

The Challenge of Storytelling

A central theme across different trips and bloggers was the challenge of storytelling. Bloggers often employed metaphors in their storytelling. Blogger Angie Smith (Peru, 2012) used a metaphor to emphasize the importance of correspondence with the children:

He tells me that one day he was walking and the duck just followed him. Whichever way he turned, the duck turned too. He wanted to keep it because it seemed to want to be with him,” the translator explains. “And so he kept it.” I look at Anibal while my thoughts chase a story. For four years he has fed, cared for, and loved an animal that made him feel like he was worth following. Ink on paper, photos of faraway dreams, hiding under torn sheets and the reality of his life. They tell him the same.

In several of the trips, you can feel the struggle of the bloggers to craft a story from the day’s events and sights. Fellow blogger and trip leader Shaun Groves recounts advising the Tanzania (2012) team: *“Where do we begin to write? So, as the bus pulls up to the hotel, I ask the bloggers what they’ll remember about this day for years to come. What one snapshot will you carry from this day? Start there.”* Other bloggers wrote about the challenging of putting the sights of the day into meaningful words for their readers:

*I started sifting through pictures and grasping for words. How do you tell a story like this and tell the truth, with tenderness and sufficient urgency but without manipulation? How do you stand up for the children who are at risk for being orphaned, or sold into prostitution, or left to fend for themselves in a drug-ravaged land? How do you help others to see when it took coming here to open your own stubborn eyes? Today, I am their voice and I crumble under the weight of it. I don't have the right words. My blindness sickens me. I come up empty, fumbling around in the dark and frustrated by my own lack of understanding (Edi, *Life in Grace, Nicaragua*, 2013).*

One storytelling device employed by many of the bloggers was rich description. These descriptions serve to draw readers in, making them feel as if they're personally experiencing the story. Blogger Shaun Groves writes about walking into a home of a sponsored child:

She opens the door and we walk through. Her house is a facade opening into a roofless courtyard. In the courtyard are laundry lines draped in grandmother's hard work hung out to dry. And a room made of scrap wood, scrap metal, scrap plastic. Inside the room are two beds where three children, mama and her husband sleep (Peru, 2012).

Readers responded (in terms of comments) to stories that ended in unexpected ways, stories which seemed to deeply impact the blogger, stories that included a frame of reference for readers, and stories that seemed honest or reflected difficult realities of the children's situations or ways of life. One blog reader commented on a post written by Shaun Groves (Uganda, 2014):

Honestly, this makes me want to support Compassion even more. I traveled to Uganda with another organization in 2010 and was so sad to see that they weren't willing to be honest or transparent, only wanted their people to share the successes.....even if to do so would require a stretch of the truth.

Posts that reflected the blogger's typical content also resonated with readers. This makes sense. Regular blog readers come to these blogs to read about a particular topic – home décor, cooking, parenting, writing, etc. To the extent bloggers were able to tie their experiences with Compassion to their typical blog content, these posts engaged readers. For example, Maggie (Gussy Sews - Tanzania, 2012) designs, sews and sells handmade bags and accessories. She also blogs about her designs and business. She blogged during the Tanzania (2012) trip about visiting the market to purchase fabric. These blog posts engaged her readers as they touched on a shared experience Maggie already has with her readers.

Everywhere, seriously - I am not making this up! Everywhere I looked I saw foot-pedal sewing machines. Scissors were clicking and the presser bar lifter were gently tapping the throat plate. So many familiar sounds in a very unfamiliar place (Maggie, Gussy Sews, Tanzania, 2012).

Another blogger, Myquillyn, usually blogs about home decorating. While blogging for Compassion, Myquillyn often wrote about the décor of homes she visited or the hospitality she experienced:

I met Hospitality today. Yep, her. I've always known the requirement for being hospitable isn't about finally getting to the place where you love where you live and can

have the most up to date flooring and look cute in the Anthropologie apron while making that delicious meal Ina Garden made on TV when Jeffrey was out-of-town. We all know that. But few of us live that (Myquillyn, The Nester, Tanzania, 2012).

This particular post resulted in 77 comments, many of them along these lines: “You’re intuition about the true meaning of hospitality has really struck a cord in me. This is a beautiful trip you’re undertaking. I can’t wait to see your next post.” Writing about the notion of hospitality struck a chord with Myquillyn’s readers who are used to visiting her blog to read about home decorating.

Painting a Picture of Poverty

While a lot of the stories the bloggers told were beautiful and inspiring, the reality is that they were there because children are living in poverty. Most of the bloggers did write about poverty during their trip. They employed visual descriptions, individual stories, numbers and statistics, comparisons and metaphors in painting a picture of the poverty they encountered. One blogger, in trying to describe poverty, described the overall goal of the blogger trips as “seeing trips”:

I’ll simply say that poverty is a complicated, multi-layered problem for which I won’t pretend to even begin to understand or have solutions. A first glance at poverty and it seems impossibly hopeless to overcome. But the deepest problem of poverty isn’t merely a lack of clothing or food or shelter, not at the core. The deepest, most enduring, most un-overcomeable part of poverty is a lack of hope. And so these blogger trips are not

mission trips or service trips but seeing trips. We will be looking for hope on a hopeless horizon, searching for shells on seemingly shell-less beach. Poverty is complex and messy and heavy and political and evil and confusing and heartbreaking. (Emily, Chatting at the Sky, Uganda, 2014)

The bloggers engaged their knowledge of their readers as parents and caregivers to paint a picture of poverty. Kelly (Minivans are Hot, Tanzania, 2012) wrote, *“I saw absolute poverty today. A mother with three small children and no family nearby to help. She gets up before the sun every day and leaves her babies alone. It’s a necessity if she wants to feed them.”*

Jolanthe (Homeschool Creations, Tanzania, 2012) offered her account of the same experience:

That same three year old led us on a 15 minute walk along meandering dirt paths to her home so that we could meet her family. {That thought alone overwhelms me, people}. The thought of my child walking around our neighborhood alone is enough to scare me and yet, she knows the way and was able to guide us to her house.

Bloggers mentioned the juxtaposition of emotions, experiencing joy and sadness in the same experiences. *“On the flip side of the joyful emotions you had the sadness that came with visiting the home of a poverty stricken family of this 3-year-old girl named Latecia” (Scott, Big is the New Small, Tanzania, 2012).* The bloggers were largely unapologetic in their stark portrayals of poverty, attempting to persuade their readers of the severity of the conditions they were seeing.

Many of the workers bring their children to the dump with them each day as they pick through the trash. The children will find old toys in the rubble to play with as their

parents work. On a good day, the workers will be able to make around a dollar a day picking through the trash (Traci, Beneath My Heart, Nicaragua, 2013).

“This compassion stuff is messy. It’ll rip your heart out,” wrote Shaun Groves during the 2014 Uganda trip. They offered child sponsorship and other forms of support through Compassion as a response for readers who want to help. *“Guilt is not an action word. Compassion is action,”* wrote Joy (Joy the Baker, Uganda, 2014).

Encouraging Behaviors

Child sponsorship is, of course, of primary importance for Compassion and many readers commented that they were influenced to sponsor a child because of a blogger’s posts.

I have a HUGE lump in my throat after reading your story. Just so you know, my family and I sponsored a little girl in the DR because of YOU. And then we had to have a little boy so we sponsored one from Kenya. I think we need to add to our family now – someone from Ecuador. Thanks Melanie! (Melanie, The Big Mama Blog, Ecuador, 2011).

This reader sponsored their first child during Melanie’s previous trip with Compassion to the Dominican Republic in 2008. There were similar comments across all of the bloggers, demonstrating the impact of the blogger program on child sponsorships. The goal for the Uganda 2014 trip was to sponsor 400 children. Compassion surpassed this goal, with 437 new sponsored children in Uganda.

In addition to sponsoring children, bloggers focused on the importance of correspondence with sponsored children. They emphasized how much the children they met seemed to treasure the letters they received from sponsors.

“These are his Compassion sponsors.” The only family he knows, right there, hanging over his bed, the only things hanging on the walls of this hut. Love is always our only art.

“These are the letters they write me.” A smile flickers. The scrawling script under the Compassion logo talks of snow and dogs and school. “I love Mr. Andrew and his family very much.” He whispers it. Love is always our only hope (Ann Voskamp, A Holy Experience, Ecuador, 2011).

They also emphasized why correspondence is an important part of Compassion’s child sponsorship program. *“Shaun shared with us that children who receive letters do much better with their schooling and vocational training, and have far better chances for success in their life” (Scott, Big is the New Small, Tanzania, 2012).* Discussion of the importance of correspondence seemed to resonate with readers, often prompting comments like this one: *“It is great to get to see a sponsor letter hanging on the wall. I have always wondered what mine do with their letters” (Amanda, Baby Bangs, Ecuador, 2011).* Emphasizing the importance of correspondence gave the bloggers a concrete action to request from their readers on behalf of Compassion.

In the very beginning I thought of my part of the sponsorship as just money. I do my part by making sure the money gets sent to my child and that is good enough. But this week what I have seen and heard from these children is quite different. For them it isn’t money from someone far away. For these children, it is a relationship, a hope and a future. It is

someone who cares enough to stand in the gap of their need (Kelly, Faithful Provisions, Nicaragua 2013).

Engaging and Equipping Readers

One advantage of mobilizing seasoned bloggers is that most of them already know how to engage readers. This is part of their blog's success. These bloggers, on many occasions, engaged their readers through responding to comments. Many comments were simply encouraging notes for the bloggers or Compassion. One of the most common types of comments entailed readers sharing their experiences sponsoring through Compassion and inquiring as to whether the bloggers would be visiting the area where their sponsored child lives. *"Our little girl, Noela Nicholas Paul {8 years old} is from Tanzania. Perhaps you will meet her. If you do, PLEASE give her a HUG from us!" (Comment to Maggie, Gussy Sews, Tanzania, 2012)* The relationships between the bloggers and their regular readers was evident in many of the comments, seeking to encourage them during the trip. *"Hope you are feeling better; Praying for your health." (Comment to Jolanthe, Homeschool Creations, Tanzania, 2012).* Also evident was reader longevity: *"How amazing and fun. I had just started reading when you went on your last trip. I can't believe how long ago that was" (Comment to Melanie, The Big Mama Blog, Ecuador, 2011 – Her first trip with Compassion was to the Dominican Republic in 2008).*

Specific questions about Compassion's programs often showed up in the comments. For example: *"Shaun - can you and the other bloggers talk about Compassion's AIDS/HIV prevention & intervention programs? I'm curious about how much of a difference Compassion makes in*

children directly impacted by HIV/AIDS” (Shaun Groves, Tanzania, 2012). There were readers who inquired about how Compassion differs from other charities/sponsorship programs: *“I sponsor a child in Africa through World Vision and I wonder how it compares to Compassion. Do you know if one is better than the other? I guess it is a moot point now because I could never stop sponsoring her” (Edie, Life in Grace, Nicaragua, 2013).*

While Compassion is a Christian organization, many of the bloggers have diverse audiences who read their blog because of their interest in the blog’s content. There were comments that reflected religious differences between readers and the bloggers.

As the nice Jewish girl, I will be cheering you on for following what you believe. My religious beliefs may be different from yours, but helping others is what matters most. I look forward to reading about your adventure and all that you do in Tanzania (Amy, Resourceful Mommy, Tanzania, 2012).

There were a number of examples of bloggers using questions posed in the comments as opportunities for engagement with their readers. This engagement indicates to blog readers that the bloggers are listening to their questions and concerns.

I have wondered about the families with multiple children who only have one of them sponsored...does this create any problems amongst the children in the family? Just curious. I would have been wobbling with you...Dramamine is my very close friend. Continued prayers for your safety and experiences while in Ecuador. (Reader comment to Sophie, BooMama, Ecuador, 2011).

Blogger Response: Joyce, I haven't seen any problems, and I think part of the reason for that is because Compassion ministers to the whole family regardless of how many children are sponsored. I'll ask about that today, though!

A few of the comments expressed negative perceptions about Compassion and similar organizations. Some of the bloggers chose not to respond to negative comments. Others took the opportunity for engagement.

*But the children whose parents are not Christian can starve? What is this group doing to help the families that are not attending an affiliated church? Not whoring them out to American women who want to feel good about their faith while making money, anyway. The Prosperity Gospel is a self-serving contrivance at best (Reader comment to Jen, *Balancing Beauty and Bedlam*, Peru, 2012).*

Blogger Response: So sorry if I was not clear in my post and there was a misunderstanding. The majority of the parents that Compassion ministers to are not Christians. It's the local church in their area that are reaching out to the unchurched, and those whose children are being ministered to do not even attend church and never have, nor does Compassion determine who they help based on church affiliation. The parents are not required to attend, but the children that are part of the program do come three times a week to the project for classes etc, so it truly is an organization that is being the hands and feet of Jesus to reaching out to all. And your comment about Prosperity Gospel, I agree. I don't ascribe to any of its sentiment.

Most of the bloggers shared throughout their trip about various attributes/programs of Compassion. This demonstrated that Compassion didn't just aim to reach new sponsors through blogger engagement, but to retain and educate existing sponsors, even equipping them as ambassadors for the organization.

Applying Social Capital to Blogger Engagement

Adler and Kwon (2002) list several benefits of social capital, all of which were evident in this study. The first benefit is information, described by Adler and Kwon (2002): "Social capital facilitates access to broader sources of information and improves information's quality, relevance, and timeliness" (p. 29). Compassion bloggers were able to provide their readers with information about Compassion's programs gleaned from program representatives and personal experience. The bloggers also had access to records and information that would be difficult for Compassion to share more widely.

Every child in the center has a folder full of health records, school records, home visits, staff notes, and questionnaires filled out by the staff and child. They invited us to look at everything and ask any questions. Wess speaks up and says, "If you lack integrity, you've got nothing" (Myquillyn, The Nester, Uganda, 2014).

Adler and Kwon (2002) describe a second kind of benefit of social capital as influence, control, and power. This refers to the power derived from linking disconnected groups to achieve common goals. One blogger referred to this power in describing his motivation for traveling with Compassion: "You don't build a platform so that people can make much of you;

you build a platform to change the world” (Jeff, Goins Writer, Uganda, 2014). A third type of benefit is solidarity or strong social norms (Adler & Kwon, 2002). For the bloggers and readers in this study, a few social norms stood out across the trips. One was the prevalence of Christian faith in writing about Compassion. Shaun Groves addressed the role of faith in one of his blog posts:

A few years ago a consultant advised Compassion International brass to change their organization's tagline: "Releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name." But Compassion International didn't remove Jesus from its tagline. Today, that tagline is in their logo. Why is Jesus so important to Compassion International? Jesus is not a word in a slogan. He is our motivation, method and mission. Mission Statement: In response to the Great Commission, Compassion International exists as an advocate for children, to release them from their spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty and enable them to become responsible and fulfilled Christian adults (Shaun Groves, Tanzania, 2012).

Many of the bloggers, including Groves, were quick to point out that *“No child must believe in Jesus in order to be loved well (Shaun Groves, Tanzania, 2012).* Another social norm was a desire to end poverty, and child sponsorship was repeatedly described as an important tool in that endeavor. *“Poverty may seem SO big and unsurmountable to most of you. But YOU can do something about it. Sponsoring just one kid is changing the world” (Kelly, Kelly’s Korner Blog, Ecuador, 2011).* For many of the bloggers and readers, a desire was expressed to impact upon the writer’s children an understanding the plight of those in poverty and the importance of taking action.

When my children turn five they begin the climb out of the American dream – upward to go outward. At five we sponsor a child in their name. This first opportunity to give is a gift to them too. Not just a pen pal halfway around the world, but a face on the refrigerator, a name slipped into bedtime prayers, a lesson in generosity, gratitude – the hard work of being family. Loose change and crumpled bills are saved and given at Christmas, letters are written and mailed and two lives are changed: sponsored child and child sponsor (Shaun Groves, Uganda, 2014).

Discussion

Bloggers have access to diverse resources because of their involvement in diverse social networks (Lin and Erickson, 2008). These resources represent social capital. The more diverse a blogger's connections and networks, the greater the potential for social capital (Hampton, Lee & Ja Her, 2011). Putnam discusses voluntary organizations (including charitable organizations) and religious institutions as two types of organizations having great potential for social capital. Compassion International is a combination of the two.

Bloggers spend years building up social capital in terms of reader respect and loyalty. They exercise discretion in deciding which organizations and brands to partner with in expending their social capital. For the bloggers in this study, they spent a week of their time traveling with Compassion and wrote exclusively about Compassion during that week, offering passionate appeals to their readers to support Compassion and sponsor children. They

leveraged their reputation on behalf of Compassion, sharing their own experiences with the organization and its programs.

One challenge for Compassion and similar nonprofit organizations in engaging bloggers is helping bloggers uncover meaningful stories for their readers. This is an important consideration in recruiting and training bloggers. Nonprofits should look to partner with bloggers that have a strong sense of identity or purpose in their blog. That way, they will be able to write about their experiences in a way that is meaningful for their unique readers. In terms of training, organizations can teach bloggers to approach each experience with the organization considering metaphors, colorful personalities, unexpected stories, stark realities and rich descriptions.

Another consideration for recruiting and training bloggers is engagement. Organizations should seek to partner with bloggers who regularly engage their readers, responding to comments and questions. For the bloggers in this study, many received upwards of 200 comments on a single post. One post received 838 comments. It's impractical for the bloggers to respond to every comment. Responding to a few of the comments and seeking to answer questions, however, shows readers that the blogger is listening. This is important.

The bloggers in this study demonstrated that a nonprofit organization can accomplish several key objectives through a blogger trip. A priority for Compassion was recruiting new child sponsors; however, the bloggers also emphasized other ways to support Compassion's efforts, namely corresponding with sponsored children. Within their readership, bloggers have readers with different levels of familiarity and/or interest in the nonprofit's mission. Therefore, it's

important for organizations to consider different communication objectives for these different audiences.

Compassion's blogger engagement program demonstrates the social capital to be garnered for nonprofit organizations when they partner with likeminded bloggers who can help tell their story.

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