

Rethinking Measurements Of Social Media Use By Charities: A Mixed Methods Approach

Christopher Phethean, Thanassis Tiropanis, Lisa Harris

University of Southampton

England, UK

{C.J.Phethean, tt2, L.J.Harris}@soton.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Increasingly, the utilisation of social media services are helping charities continue to operate, as they provide unique opportunities of low-cost, easily targeted and viral marketing that have never been seen before to this scale. However, without knowing exactly how and why they are being used, analysis of their performance that could be used to indicate areas of improvement will continue to be insufficient. An innovative mixed methods approach was followed in order to address the issue, and this paper presents the results of a study that sought to determine the reasons why charities use social media, and the strategies they employ in an attempt to succeed. Three main contributions are presented – firstly, by combining the qualitative and quantitative data it was discovered that social media are currently intended to be used primarily as relationship building tools, with little focus on fundraising; secondly, an overview of how successful charities perceive social media to be is shown and methods of measurement are mapped to a previously designed framework; and thirdly, future requirements for revising the measurement framework are discussed, demonstrating the importance of this work for grounding future developments.

Author Keywords

Social media; charities; marketing; web science

ACM Classification Keywords

J.1. ADMINISTRATIVE DATA PROCESSING:
Marketing

General Terms

Management, Measurement, Performance

INTRODUCTION

Social media are often touted as a medium through which organisations can achieve various goals and improve their overall performance and relationship with supporters [18]. In the current times of economic hardship that many UK

charities are facing, the importance of the Web – and social media in particular – for marketing, publicising their work and campaigns, and engaging their supporters through a low cost, personalised channel is undeniable.

Previous work has begun to develop a framework of measurement for analysing how successfully charities are performing in this area, but during this process it became abundantly clear that social media were being used in enormously different ways [16]. Although only two charities were sampled at the time as case studies, it was found that their activities on social media (in this case Twitter) varied substantially – the first (the Dogs Trust) appeared to be engaging in conversation with their supporters, while the second (the World Food Programme) utilised it much more as an information dissemination channel [16]. While both organisations could be measured using the framework of *awareness – engagement – action* presented in the paper, a challenge of determining whether or not either of them could be judged on their success rate arose as it was not known from simply looking at the data what they were intending to achieve in the first place [16].

Various goals such as reaching the public [7], developing relationships [23], increasing civic engagement and collective action [15] and providing opportunities for fundraising [18] are often assumed to be desired on social media. With such varied aims, it is difficult to assess the social activities of a charity without knowing how, and the reasons behind why, that charity in particular actually uses social media. Measuring all charities on their ability to utilise social media for fundraising, for example, would be irrelevant when faced with an organisation that has no aim to use social media in this way and is merely providing a platform to discuss issues with their supporters. The first aim of this paper seeks to explore the variety of aims charities have for social media, and attempts to discover whether there is any trend towards a particular desired outcome.

For charities themselves to ultimately be sure that what they are attempting to do is actually working, methods of measurement that can be used flexibly across this range of goals are required. Studies have suggested that there is a lack of understanding in charitable management around engaging through social media which – in addition to acting

as a resistor to them being more widely adopted – could mean that they are not actually being used in the way the charity intends [18]. The second aim of this paper is to determine how charities currently perceive social media to be performing, and what measurements they use to establish this.

Finally, these two aims are then brought together to provide an indication of where a revised framework based on [16] needs to focus in terms of breadth, flexibility and additional metrics. After reviewing relevant literature about previous studies into how social media are adopted by charities, a mixed methods study is described that sought to achieve these three aims. The study's importance and relevance for grounding future work is then discussed.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM: CHARITABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Previous studies into social media use by charities have revealed several interesting findings about their adoption. Notably, while Twitter is often considered an effective medium for offering customer service and engaging with an audience [19], an analysis of USA-based nonprofit organisations' tweet content discovered that Twitter was primarily used in this sector for sending one-way messages to share information [24]. An additional study of USA nonprofits categorised the organisations based on the content of their Twitter feeds and found that there were three types of organisational use: acting as an information source, building a community, and promoting to and mobilising supporters [14]. Few organisations were placed outside of the "Information Sources" category, with over half of all tweets in the entire sample classed as spreading information [14]. Despite this, the majority of organisations studied did show some form of dialogic use, which implies that engagement through dialogue may only be a small part of an overall communication strategy that, on Twitter, focuses more on spreading information [14]. However, the limitations of quantitatively analysing the discovered themes in the tweets is evident as the reasons behind *why* Twitter was being used in this way could not be declared, and it has been admitted that determining the views of social media practitioners in this field would be of use [24]. Indeed, the authors of [14] state that the correct way to use Twitter will be discovered by "understanding an organisation's needs", yet in analysing how nonprofits use this service, neither of these studies ask the charities themselves what they were wanting to achieve by using it.

Other studies have observed social media adoption across sites, rather than focusing on a specific service such as Twitter. In a study into how advocacy groups in the USA perceive and use social media, qualitative findings supplemented quantitative data to provide some explanation

of what these organisations believed social media was useful for [15]. Nearly all of the surveyed organisations perceived a benefit from using social media for assisting civic engagement and collective action, and Facebook was ranked considerably higher in terms of usefulness for facilitating this than any other social media service [15]. This appears to display a change in thinking amongst nonprofit organisations since 2009 as previous research found that Facebook was primarily used for disclosing details of an organisation, and therefore was not being utilised to its full potential – although this could have been due to the relative novelty of the site at the time [23]. A limitation noticed in [15] is that while social media applications were ranked by participants on their usefulness for certain tasks – such as communicating with the public, or facilitating engagement – it is unclear what each service was actually used for, or, what each organisation hoped to achieve by using it. While the study identified which services were perceived to be better for certain tasks, identifying what an organisation was actually using each one for would be of more use as that would then provide a goal to measure and track their success against. As each social media tool provides specific beneficial features, it is apparent that a study into why social media are used must be more granular and examine the motivation behind using each individual tool.

A qualitative investigation using interviews has also been carried out to discover the adoption of social media by charities in the UK, with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube the most widely implemented [18]. However little focus was placed on the targeted outcomes of using each social media service, so again it is difficult to attribute exactly why charities use social media [18]. Studies such as [1] into the social media use of the American Red Cross do investigate this point and aims such as discovering public perception, finding ways to improve and generating increased media attention were mentioned. However, while the authors claim that the American Red Cross can be used as a model for other organisations wishing to successfully utilise social media, a single case study will not take into account the many different strategies and subsequent approaches to using social media in this area [1]. In addition, it is possible that how charitable marketers think they are using social media does not in reality align with how they are actually using them, and so relying solely on interview data in these studies may have missed crucial insights that could determine the level of competence with which these services are adopted.

A summary of the related previous studies is presented in Table 1.

Previous Study	Research Methods	Open Issues
Waters and Jamal [24]	Content analysis of tweets	Understanding why social media was used in a particular way, and the organisations' needs. Limited to Twitter.
Lovejoy and Saxton [14]		
Obar et al. [15]	Survey (quantitative and qualitative)	Need to understand different usage of each social media service, and their associated targets.
Quinton and Fennemore [18]	Interviews	The reasons why charities use specific social media services.
Briones et al. [1]	Interviews	A case study that leaves open the question of how perceived use matches actual use.

Table 1 - Summary of previous studies assessing charitable use of social media.

A "Best Practice" For Social Media?

Many previous studies into social media use by charities provide indications of what is perceived to be the standard that organisations should be doing on these services to ensure they utilise them fully. As mentioned previously, the American Red Cross is suggested as a model for other organisations, implying that two-way communication is essential for any success on social media as this can lead to rapid community service, media attention and positive as well as negative feedback necessary to improve [1]. It is unclear however, whether this should apply to all social media technologies, or a subset of those for which it is particularly effective, as it is possible that organisations will target particular tools with specific tasks such as information dissemination, which is much more unidirectional. When generalised to social media as a whole, however, it is undeniable that this should be a key characteristic of any strategy. Additionally, if media attention is gained, social media channels should be heavily utilised to then publicise the media release – for example by posting links to a press release or story – to take advantage of and promote the awareness that their organisation is generating [4].

The recommendation in [1] builds on earlier research into relationship building on the Web. Interactivity has been found to be essential in developing productive relationships with members of the public, as it can increase the trust in an organisation [13]. Progressing from this, [23] suggests that social media sites should be more interactive, and that a lack of interactivity could potentially turn off supporters. Interactivity therefore seems to be an essential component of a social media marketing plan.

In addition to the academic literature, guides have been created for charities to follow when setting up their social media presence. The importance of relationship building is highlighted, and it is suggested that to build an emotional attachment to a supporter, social media should be used to tell the organisation's story, and not as a channel for direct advertisement [4]. This echoes the claim of Seth Godin who states that customers are too smart to be tricked into anything that appears similar to a corporate campaign, even if it is coming from a charity with good intentions [10]. To ensure an emotional attachment is possible, campaigns must be directed towards the one thing that the charity aims to do so that they are engaging to the people that will observe them [4]. Godin points out, however, that despite the low cost of social media, achieving this attachment requires a huge commitment, and a consistent effort is necessary in order to obtain the desired results [10]. This reiterates the earlier point from [23] that a lack of activity will likely fail in generating the supporter engagement that is necessary for social media success. Dan Zarrella – a "social media scientist" – has looked in more detail at interactivity and, using data from Facebook, established that pages which post once every other day generate the most Likes, representing the level of interaction that can be generated [26]. Zarrella also states that Twitter is best employed as a broadcasting channel, and therefore use of it should emphasise spreading links and obtaining a high click through rate [27]. This provides evidence that different strategies on social media can lead to hugely diverse results.

Research Aim

Building on the previous work that had been carried out in this area, and the need to better comprehend the motivations of charities behind using social media, this research sought to develop an understanding of how charities are using social media and why they are doing so. Additionally the extent to which charities believed they were succeeding, and how they measured this, was also investigated. Fulfilling these aims would allow further progress to be made in developing a measurement framework for analysing charitable performance, which is critical for discovering how effectively charities are using social media.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In order to achieve the research aims, an inductive methodology was followed whereby the views and findings elicited from the data collection were used to build theories around how social media are utilised [6]. Data was accessed from different sources that could then be analysed to fulfil the research aims. A mixed methods research approach was chosen, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods as detailed below.

Research Design

A convergent mixed methods approach was adopted for this study, in order to allow the quantitative and qualitative research to be executed in parallel and then triangulated to

produce a resulting theory [6]. In a study assessing the mixed methods approaches utilised in marketing journal articles, only twelve per cent of studies utilised mixed methods in parallel and because of this apparent lack of utilisation, no rigorous best-practice template for doing so exists [11]. In contrast to many other disciplines, marketing has focused on sequential mixed methods design, with a suggested reason being that a second data type is added as an afterthought to single method designs [11]. It is therefore apparent that concurrent approaches are not necessarily less favoured in marketing research, but the design of previous studies is often flawed and means that a second data collection method is added as a late addition to correct this. Consequentially, this study adopted a mixed methods design from the outset, based on the need to combine the strengths of each and to utilise the advantages of multiple methods for Web Science [22]. Triangulation was therefore favoured over other types of mixed methods design that tend to prioritise either qualitative or quantitative approaches, allowing rigorous analysis to be performed on both data sources [6,11].

Quantitative Approach

Objective data was required that could show how social media sites appeared to be used by charities in order to compare and contrast with the qualitative data. Rather than looking at the explicit content, it was decided that recording an overall summary of what features charities were using was more appropriate for this study as this could then determine whether or not aims such as attracting more donations were actually being acted upon by providing a facility to donate on the site.

A structured observation was therefore used to identify and record behaviour and actions on social media [5]. Following an “observation schedule”, actions and features that were present on the social media profiles of charities were systematically recorded [2]. This method has not widely been used in the past for studying the Web, although researchers have begun to adopt it (such as [25]). An observation schedule was developed based on the themes of categorisations from previous studies. In [23], three categories of items on social media were recorded that represented: organisational disclosure, information dissemination, and involvement. Lovejoy and Saxton classified tweets as information spreading, community building or promoting action [14]. In the development of the 3-M Framework, Gallagher and Ransbotham classified interactions on social media as either Megaphone (firm-to-customer), Magnet (customer-to-firm) or Monitor (observable customer-to-customer) [9]. A notable trend from these studies is that there were common categories relating to spreading information (megaphone) and attracting customers to become involved in a community and contribute to the charity (engagement). As such, the observation schedule was built around the apparent themes that incorporated these classifications (Table 2):

	Theme 1: Megaphone	Theme 2: Engagement
Waters et al. [23]	Organisational disclosure; Information dissemination	Involvement
Lovejoy & Saxton [14]	Information source	Community Building; Action
Gallagher & Ransbotham [9]	Megaphone	Magnet; Monitor

Table 2 - Themes used to structure the observation schedule.

Despite the advantages described above, the data collected from this method could not be used by itself to achieve the aims of this study. It was not planned that this data would be used to generalise to the entire population due to the realisation that the proportion of charities registered in the UK that have a notable social media presence appears to be low. Instead, this data was collected with the intention of being able to use descriptive statistics to interpret and build up an impression of how social media are used and the elements of these sites that are favoured in doing so, as a counterpart to another data source.

Qualitative Approach

Semi-structured interviews were used alongside the observation to allow a broad range of rich data to be collected directly from the charities’ employees about how and why social media are used. This permitted deep and meaningful data to be gathered which may not have been possible to elicit if other research methods had been used [3]. The entire interview transcripts were coded, with all codes then grouped into themes. After the themes were identified, they were grouped into categories (general use, reasons for use, success perception and success measurement) and used to develop theories about how social media was used, with links to the quantitative data noted where necessary.

Examining previous studies provided inspiration for designing the interview schedule for this study. The interview questions for this study revolved around eliciting why the charity was using social media, how the charity believed they were using social media, and whether they believed social media was worth anything to their organisation – incorporating a combination of themes from the previous studies [15,17,18].

Sample and Data Collection

A sample of charities was gained from a Facebook dataset provided by Headstream that had been used to construct the 2012 Social Brands 100 report [12]. Nineteen organisations from the charitable domain were extracted from the dataset, and used for the qualitative portion of the study, in addition to the Dogs Trust charity who had previously stated that social media (specifically Twitter) has been beneficial in producing tangible results for their organisation [8], and

Jeans for Genes as a much smaller, fundraising section of a genetic disorder charity. For the two charities not included in the Headstream dataset, data from Facebook was collected using the Facebook FQL language for the same time period (February 2012) that was examined in the Headstream set. Twitter data was collected separately - and therefore covered a week in January 2013 – using the NodeXL template [20] for Microsoft Excel.

Out of the twenty-one sampled charities, five (Dogs Trust, Help for Heroes, Diabetes UK, Jeans for Genes and the Woodland Trust) were chosen for interviews in order to gain the necessary qualitative data to supplement the quantitative observations. Interviews were conducted with a member of the marketing or social media department for each organisation, each lasting between thirty minutes and an hour. Thematic coding analysis was then used to code and extract the key themes from the resulting data as described above.

FINDINGS

Intended Use of Social Media

Utilising the two data sources, a theory was developed to answer the main questions about how and why charities use social media, based on their intentions for utilising the services. While the observational data by itself appeared to show that there was no solid trend in the features of Facebook that were utilised by the sampled organisations (Chart 1), a trend emerged from the interviews that showed social media were primarily seen as relationship building tools. This is supported by the quantitative results that show a willingness to allow user posts on their Facebook timelines (20/21 charities) and therefore indicates an enthusiasm to converse with their supporters. Specific ‘campaign apps’ (applications developed on Facebook that are related to the work of the charity) are popular and frequently used (18/21), which help to provide a unique experience on each charity’s profile, and offer an opportunity for the audience to engage and become involved with the charity directly through the social network. These statistics draw similarities to statements made in the interviews:

“We went into social media with the intention of engaging and for education, messaging, not necessarily overtly for fundraising.” (Interviewee 1)

“Rather than just being a marketing tool it’s about developing our personality.” (Interviewee 2)

“At the moment our goal for social media is just engagement and developing conversations basically, and raising awareness of different projects we’re working on.” (Interviewee 5)

Looking in more detail at how specific services were used, it was found that Facebook was favoured for this main task

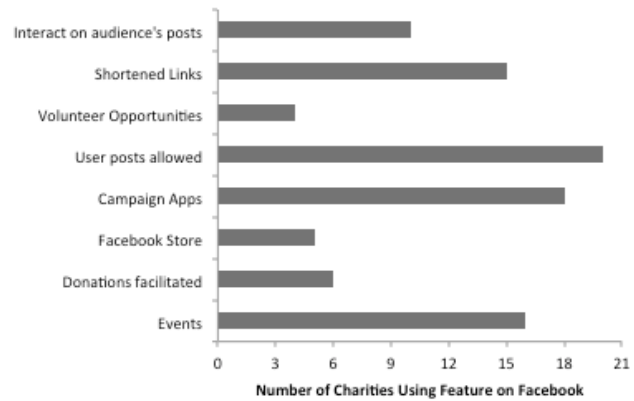


Chart 1- Use of features on Facebook profiles

– especially with regards to providing support and advice to the community (and, significantly, from it):

“The Facebook one is very much about providing support and advice for people, and creating a place where people can get that from either us as experts on the subject, or from each other as people who kind of live through that experience themselves.” (Interviewee 3)

“It’s a bit more about the people who take part, the supporters, people who’ve maybe been affected by genetic disorders ... who care about where the money goes a bit more.” (Interviewee 4)

However the overall aim of building a relationship with the audience may not be working for some charities – if indeed this aim does extend beyond those charities that were interviewed. Interaction on the audience’s Facebook posts would be crucial for developing this relationship, but 10 of the 21 charities sampled were not observed to be doing this regularly and consistently. Conversely, in some cases this may actually be beneficial for the development of the community:

“If we respond to a question, that will kind of kill the conversation, but if we leave a question open for a while so others can respond, we tend to get a lot of people replying. Being a little bit hands-off sometimes can be really beneficial.” (Interviewee 3)

This again indicates the quantitative data alone may have provided misleading results that failed to take in the bigger picture, and demonstrates the importance of integrating the two data sources.

Use for Fundraising and Financial Gain

Importantly, social media’s use for fundraising is comparatively low – generally being classed as an “incidental” or “indirect” side-effect of the other, relationship-building, work that is carried out:

“We’ve done a little bit more of it year on year and sort of most of it has been almost incidental fundraising.” (Interviewee 1)

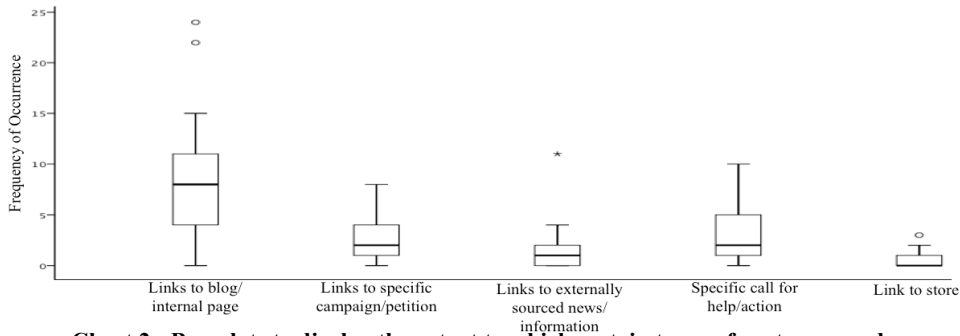


Chart 2 - Box plots to display the extent to which certain types of posts are used

The use of facilities that could be employed for gaining a financial return (such as a Facebook store (5/21) and a built-in facility for handling donations (6/21)) was low (Chart 1), especially in comparison to the popularity of allowing users to post and contribute. One interviewee did however state that they were looking to change this and that could then lead to increased use for fundraising:

“Something we would like to look at is a donate button on Facebook, or a Facebook kind of shop, potentially.” (Interviewee 5)

There does therefore appear to be a movement towards utilising the fundraising potential of social media – with Facebook appearing to be a suitable and appealing avenue for this through the features it provides – although it is evident that currently the focus is on developing a relationship with the community.

Additional Uses and Differences Between Sites

Despite the apparent trend of charities using social media primarily for relationship building, there still appears to be a huge variation in the way that these services are used, along with other additional targets. In Chart 1, shortened links appear fairly common (15/21), and allow charities to track which of their posts are providing the most traffic back to their website and reflect an aim for generating awareness. However this may be more beneficial for services like Twitter, rather than Facebook where discussions and engagement can be sustained for longer:

“Twitter is very much trying to drive traffic back to the website, so Facebook we try and keep maintained conversations on Facebook itself.” (Interviewee 5)

Twitter was mainly seen as a more successful channel to fulfil this secondary aim, and much less for providing support or generating conversation:

“On Twitter for example one of our most popular tweets ever was a very simple tweet about what to do if you see a dog in a hot car” (Interviewee 1)

“Twitter – there’s an element of support and advice but a lot more around kind of awareness of what we’re doing,

and ... our awareness campaigns seems to work, gets a better response, through Twitter” (Interviewee 3)

“Something like Twitter – we’d probably measure the effectiveness of that probably more through Google Analytics and how much more traffic it’s referring back to our main website” (Interviewee 5)

For Facebook, Chart 2 displays the frequency distributions of certain types of content in textual posts. There is a clear positive skew around low medians for the majority of types of posts, indicating that in the sampled charities, it is most common for these approaches to be used infrequently. The exception to this is the occurrence of posts that link to the organisations’ blog, website, or other kind of internally run page which resembles a more normally distributed pattern and suggests that this is something which is favoured in Facebook posts. Given the popularity of shortened links noted earlier, this also provides evidence that social media are being used to drive traffic to other websites, and facilitating the tracking of this movement. Interestingly, stores (both Facebook-based stores, and charity online shops) were seldom linked to, despite the interviews suggesting that such stores were used:

“It can be used to promote our grooming products or our catalogue.” (Interviewee 1)

“We have recently introduced discounts for our Facebook supporters for the shop.” (Interviewee 2)

Chart 3 combines two of the categories in Chart 2 – links to specific campaigns and specific calls for action – in to a further box plot for displaying the overall use of Facebook as a mobilisation channel. This shows that while still positively skewed, there is a suggestion that Facebook is being used as a method of asking supporters to help out with a campaign or related work to the charity, and this is

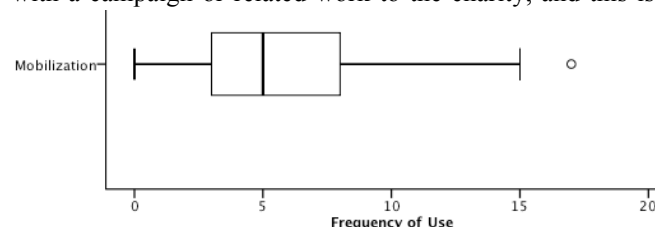


Chart 3 - Use of Facebook messages to mobilise supporters

		Measurement Category		
		Awareness	Engagement	Action
Strategy	Relationship Building	Projected Reach of posts	Audience demographics Post interactions	Response to physical campaigns Donations
	Referral Traffic	Click-through rate Google Analytics	Sign-ups	Cash value Purchase tracking
	Mobilisation		Post interactions	Offline enquiries relating to mobilisation call

Table 3 - Categories of performance measurement based on framework developed in [16]

backed up by the qualitative data:

“Probably [the] most popular type of post on Facebook is a re-homing appeal” (Interviewee 1)

The reasons behind using social media for mobilisation are described by one of the participants whose charity are seeing particular benefits from this type of post in crowd-sourcing data relevant to the charity’s work:

“I think that kind of public involvement – citizen science we call it a lot ... encouraging the public to get involved more with nature helps people understand why the preservation of it is so much more important.” (Interviewee 5)

Understandably, the extent of use of social media services by an organisation was largely determined by the resources that charities had – with the personnel that they can allocate to updating content critical to providing an interactive experience as described in the best practice section earlier. It was found that generally there was a single person who allocated part of their job to maintaining these sites. In addition, there was a tendency towards relying on any members of staff in the charity who used Twitter in particular to be responsible for providing content:

“Those stories, that message, should come from those people that are actually doing our core work because who knows it better than them?” (Interviewee 1)

How Charities Measure the Value of Social Media

Despite apparent trends in the overall aims discovered above, there was additional variation in how the charities determined the value of social media. The quantitative data indicated that the charities were receiving benefits in the form of interaction from their supporters, and various approaches to measuring these interactions were stated in the interviews and are displayed in Table 3. To tie in the previous work on social media performance measurement from [16], Table 3 groups the measurements mentioned in the interviews that relate to each of the most prominent

strategies discussed earlier around the framework stages awareness, engagement and action. This helps to understand the types of results that the charities are currently interested in measuring, which in turn suggests the kind of value they perceive from social media. Again, however, the interviews provided more details as to the value of some of these measurements, and the perception of whether they accurately portrayed social media performance:

“Interestingly, some of the ones [appeals] that go absolutely crazy on Facebook don’t get any requests at the centre” (Interviewee 1)

“It’s fine getting lots of sign-ups but they don’t mean anything to you if they don’t convert into donations” (Interviewee 4)

These two posts reflect the trouble charities currently face in attempting to track activity on social media through to meaningful action for the charity. The negativity is reflected further by one of the interviewees who stated:

“Social media is just like – it creates ‘talk-ability’ it creates buzz, it creates excitement, it’s just an add-on really” (Interviewee 4),

This was reflected in a comparatively low amount of content produced on both Facebook and Twitter. However other participants appreciated the returns they were seeing from more dedicated use:

“I think social media represents a pretty unique opportunity for really immediate personal engagement - I think it’s really difficult to get in another channel.” (Interviewee 5)

“There’s a lot of people who would shy away from us for asking for support and advice but if they can do it in that kind of social media that maybe feels slightly anonymised – even if it’s not - ... it’s a very quick and easy way.” (Interviewee 3)

“People have gone on to do things that we didn’t ask them to do ... and then they sort of egg each other on for bigger and bigger things.” (Interviewee 1)

These quotes demonstrate that there is a definite value that is recognised from using social media, but there is a trend in that charities are unable to fully determine what this value actually is. Additionally, charities are by no means able to rely fully on social media, and traditional forms of marketing are still important which indicates that these services must really be integrated in order to perform best:

“I think the one that we would really, really miss, is email.” (Interviewee 1)

“We rely a lot on face-to-face and that sort of thing as well, so, I think that’s still definitely the strongest way for us to build relationships.” (Interviewee 2)

Despite this, however, social media are generally perceived to be successful for the charities’ aims of building relationships as part of an overall marketing and PR strategy – but it is difficult to ascertain the true extent of what this success actually represents:

“Posts where we’ll just say here’s a photo ... stuff like that, that’ll do sort of 10 times the number of likes and shares than an actual post about what we do as an organisation.” (Interviewee 5)

This quote echoes a common belief that posts containing photos are the most “successful” in terms of the social media interactions that occur around them:

“Having an image or something that people can look at or watch definitely, we can see a definite increase in terms of how many people that reaches and how many people kind of engage or interact with that post.” (Interviewee 3)

Chart 4 shows that in the quantitative Facebook sample, there was a big variation in the use of photos and videos. This could be down to the domain of certain charities being more suitable for sharing engaging imagery, where that type of post would be more appropriate. Additionally, one charity was beginning to notice a reduction of success in this area as Facebook’s algorithms for displaying content have changed, which wouldn’t have been noticeable without the mixed methods approach:

“Now it’s actually text-only updates with no links, no images that get the best audience” (Interviewee 1)

Changes such as these that are beyond the control of the organisations themselves will only increase the challenges of determining the value and success of social media. In an attempt to infer a standardised financial value of what they are doing across all social media, one organisation has begun trying to track supporters who click through to their main site:

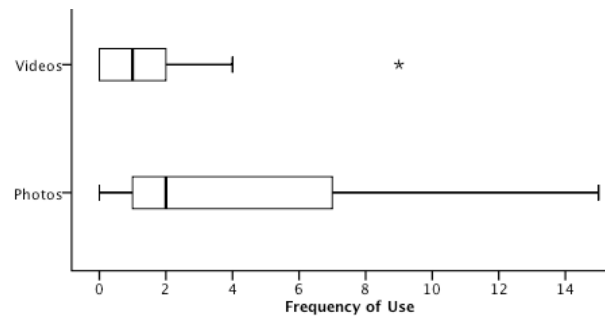


Chart 4 - Use of multimedia content in Facebook posts

“We have recently started looking at metrics as to the actual cash value of traffic referring from all social channels back to the website.” (Interviewee 5)

But they go on to acknowledge that a financial return is not their priority:

“That’s definitely still a secondary priority to actually the main levels of engagement and involvement ... but it is a useful tool for people that are still unconvinced if you like by social media” (Interviewee 5)

DISCUSSION: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

The possibilities and potential for social media use by charities are vast. The innovative methodology followed in this study has provided an important insight into how social media are currently being adopted within the charitable domain, which goes some way to addressing a lack of thorough understanding in this area.

Had this study followed a purely quantitative approach, no trend would have been noticed in the data collected to indicate any kind of common aim in social media use. While supporting the argument that the uses of social media are varied, and that each charity uses it in a different way, the qualitative findings do reveal an important detail - social media are not currently viewed as a fundraising channel, and are instead largely favoured as relationship building services. A limitation of the study, however, was the small sample of twenty-one charities (five interviewed) that meant a widespread national audit of social media use could not be carried out. As such it must be appreciated that the results here provide an indication of the types of things social media can be used for – and some of the reasons behind why – and the fact that they were so varied in this relatively small sample is noteworthy.

The implication of this is that charities should not currently be judged on their ability to fundraise, or generate financial value, on social media. As the framework for social media measurement initially presented in [16] is taken forward and revised, several considerations must be made. Firstly it was implicit from the interviews that the focus needs to be on measuring relationships and to do this determining the social capital and the network effects of their relationship building efforts is critical and requires further investigation. Current measurements that are presented in Table 3 need to

be integrated into the framework, and further metrics are required to address the lack of clarity around what true value social media provides. Additionally, charitable performance needs to be assessed separately on each social media site, as well as providing an overall assessment of their ability to build a relationship with their supporters across social media as a whole. The features of just the two services that were focused on – Facebook and Twitter – are so different and lend themselves to such contrasting strategies, that assessing the same outcomes on each would be inappropriate. Any system for measuring social media's performance therefore needs to be adaptable to the disparate ways that each platform is utilised.

Furthermore, the importance of social media within the overall bigger picture of charitable marketing must be recognised. While many charities still rely heavily on traditional forms of marketing, the role social media plays in each particular case needs to be established – an organisation who uses social media simply as an add-on to create buzz will need to be assessed in a completely different way to one who adapts to using it as their main channel of engagement. In addition there are likely to be knock-on effects from social media on other online channels – for example social media activity will lead to increased exposure in search results, and would be difficult to measure if social media were looked at independently. It seems apparent that the ideal way to utilise social media is a fully integrated approach that still takes advantage of the benefits of offline and other online forms of marketing that many of the charities mentioned as being vital to their work – especially for fundraising.

Does Charitable Use of Social Media Reflect The Charities' Intentions?

For the most part, the interviewed charities appeared to have a good perception of how they were using social media, and compared to the quantitative data, were accurate in their description of what they were focusing on. A limitation of this comparison was the nature of the Facebook data collected in that the dataset was from February 2012 and since this time there appear to have been significant changes both in terms of what charities are seeing as successful, and the approaches that they have applied in an attempt to fully utilise them. For Twitter, where data was collected in the same timeframe as the interviews, it could be confirmed that strategies such as regularly providing links to track click through rates are being followed, and this appears to be a service where charities understand its benefits and suitable ways to utilise its short message format.

Future Work

The revelations made in this study provide numerous implications for future work in this area. The overall strategy of relationship building is a broad one, and within this there is a wide range of approaches that are being used to attempt to achieve it. Classifying these approaches into a

taxonomy would be beneficial for further clarifying the ways in which social media are used by charities – and breaking this down so that it is granular enough to distinguish each different social media platform is vital to ensure its validity. Additionally, there must be an appreciation of traditional offline marketing techniques that are still highly important for charities, and the integration of social media with these will further increase the variety of online strategies that require classification.

Furthermore, the main area where this research is a stepping stone towards is producing a reliable system of performance measurement that can build on the early framework presented in [16] and also contribute to and benefit from the analytic tools in the Web Observatory project [21]. With the aims upon which the charities need to be judged now better understood, measurement can be targeted towards these in order to ensure that any future claims about how well they are performing are sufficiently grounded in the knowledge obtained here. This, in turn, will lead to a suitable and dependable framework that can be used by charities to analyse their performance and ensure that their social media efforts are as productive as possible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has provided a new methodological approach to analysing charitable use of social media by focusing on mixed methods. This methodology provided a level of understanding in this area that has been missing from previous studies – especially those that focus on either quantitative or qualitative techniques. This paper has provided three main contributions. Firstly, it has become clear from this study that charities are attempting to engage their supporters through social media in order to develop meaningful relationships, rather than using it for fundraising. Secondly, the charities themselves tend to believe that they are doing this successfully, although it must be acknowledged when looking at this area that charities are so varied – in terms of size, resources and purpose – that success and value often mean different things to each organisation and the reasons behind why success is perceived are diverse. Despite this, there appear to be enough similarities in the types of strategy and approaches that can be followed on each social media site that a system of measurement that can demonstrate what this value actually is can be a realistic ambition. This forms the third contribution, which outlines new directions for revising the initial measurement framework from [16], which will be vitally important for charities as they come to rely on the unique aspects of social media in their overall marketing strategy even more in the turbulent economic future.

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