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**Conspicuous Participation: What is it & how does it impact
communication strategies of nonprofit organizations?**

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Abstract

Conspicuous Participation: What is it & how does it impact communication strategies of nonprofit organizations?

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The following report defines the concept of conspicuous participation and it demonstrates how it impacts nonprofit marketing efforts through social media. This is accomplished through providing an in-depth theoretical background, a detailed typology describing how conspicuous participation is currently being used to promote interactions with nonprofit organizations, and through two case studies, which offer real-world examples of how nonprofit organizations are utilizing this concept. Conspicuous participation can be defined as *The act of publishing original or existing content in an online space that is visible to others, either all members of the general public or members of a private social network, in order to interact with and/or show support for a defined community or organization.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction & Research Question

As social media reaches a point of ubiquity, many researchers are attempting to determine once and for all whether it is an overall beneficial development or one that is harmful for our society as a whole. Jean Twenge, associate professor of psychology at San Diego State University and co-author of the book, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, believes that the popularity of social networking sites has engendered an epidemic of narcissism, creating a group of self-centered individuals with an inappropriate sense of entitlement. According to Twenge, "... research has shown that narcissistic people thrive on sites like Facebook, where self-centered people have more friends and post more attractive pictures of themselves."¹

While Twenge's perception may be accurate for a particular group of social media users, there is a whole aspect of social media use that directly contradicts her conclusion. Rather than simply use social media to post humiliating pictures from parties gone wrong or to share funny videos from YouTube, many individuals are using social media to raise money to find cures for diseases that impact the world and to encourage others to devote a couple of hours of their time to volunteering. Social media is beneficial for it has the power to impact the greater good of society, especially when nonprofit organizations are leading the conversation.

The near universal prevalence of social media usage and its integration into the professional world has transformed the way nonprofit organizations communicate with

¹ STUDY: Social Media is for Narcissists, *Mashable*. August 25, 2009.
<http://mashable.com/2009/08/25/gen-y-social-media-study/>

the public. Nonprofit organizations have a more powerful platform from which to educate and raise awareness for their causes and services, while supporters are able to collaborate with one another and expand the scope of their efforts (Brione et al., 2010).

According to the American Red Cross, communicating with supporters and other constituents through social media has been an effective way to engage in two-way dialogue with these parties. The American Red Cross found that through using social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter, communication barriers that once existed due to time and distance were broken down, and relations between national headquarters and local chapters improved as a result (Briones et al., 2010). As for-profit corporations and nonprofit organizations continue to test the possibilities of social media and develop social media campaigns, both types of organizations are experiencing similar positive results.

One specific aspect of social media that will be explored within this paper is the ability for people to interact with a nonprofit organization in a publically visible space, where others can see those online interactions. To illustrate, prior to the existence of social media, an individual could contribute money to an organization or participate in an event, and the only way others would know was if that individuals directly shared their experience with members of their social network, or if the action was somehow publicized by the organization. Now through social media, individuals can upload pictures of themselves at events, post status updates publicizing fundraising for an organization – in general, share any involvement with a nonprofit organization with every member of their online social networks.

Throughout this paper, this type of action will be designated as “conspicuous participation” – conspicuous in the sense that the participation or interaction with the nonprofit is made obvious to others through an update on a social media platform. The number of activities that qualify as conspicuous participation through social media is immense and is growing at a stunning rate. Therefore, this concept is still developing, and through a literature review and an analysis of current practices, this paper will define and illustrate the construct, and then create a typology, so analysis can be continued in the future.

Conspicuous participation deserves to be explored because it can be useful and gratifying for two key parties - individuals who are involved with nonprofit organizations and the organizations themselves. Potential benefits for individuals include both external and internal benefits, such as extrinsic rewards including receiving positive attention, and intrinsic rewards including improvement of self-esteem. Nonprofit organizations can experience benefits in the realms of communications, marketing, fundraising, and relations with affiliated organizations, such as the reported benefits from the American Red Cross. To help identify the benefits that individuals can experience, several theories and concepts will be examined including Uses and Gratifications Theory and the concept of Conspicuous Consumption. This specific concept will be explored in-depth to discover any parallels between consuming material goods in an obvious manner and taking part in some nonprofit activity in an obvious manner.

In order to provide a bit of context for this idea and to demonstrate the power it can wield, one recent and acclaimed example of conspicuous participation to consider is

the annual Movember campaign. With the support of The Prostate Cancer Foundation and Livestrong, Movember has grown into a worldwide phenomenon, inspiring thousands of men to grow a moustache to raise awareness and funds for preventing cancers that affect men. According to the Movember Foundation website, in 2009, Movember efforts raised over \$42 million for the cause, and 39% of the men who participated reported that their participation motivated them to seek medical advice.² This campaign is the ultimate example of conspicuous participation, as participants not only change their physical appearance throughout the month of November, but many participants share their experiences online through user-generated content.

In addition to examining positive outcomes, it is necessary to identify potential negative consequences that can result from conspicuous participation. According to a recent *New York Times* article, participating with nonprofit organizations through social media presents risks for branding, such as individuals taking it upon themselves to modify the brand appearance, and there are risks associated with making donations through intermediaries who fundraise for nonprofit organizations on social media platforms. The article points out how these intermediaries create applications on Facebook and ask people to donate to an organization of their choice, but the intermediary organization may take a larger cut than the donator realizes. There is also

² “Movember Funded Research: Movember Outcomes,” *Movember Foundation United States Website*. <http://us.movemberfoundation.com/research-and-programs/>

the concern that by participating online, individuals may feel less of a desire to participate offline.³

In the remainder of this document, we will look at the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of conspicuous consumption and identify the parallels that exist in relation to conspicuous participation. This theoretical background will be supplemented with recent studies examining how the internet has impacted group participation. In addition, this document will present findings from the primary research, which demonstrates how conspicuous participation is currently taking form. Following the primary research findings are two case studies demonstrating how conspicuous participation has been leveraged by nonprofit organizations for various purposes. These case studies will profile two major nonprofit organizations, Livestrong and the American Red Cross.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The overarching purpose of this paper is to define the conspicuous participation construct, which will include identifying types of conspicuous participation used by individuals on social media sites. This paper also seeks to determine how conspicuous participation through social media impacts nonprofit marketing and the public's involvement with nonprofit organizations online, and whether or not conspicuous participation can lead to positive outcomes for nonprofit organizations.

³ "Social networks meant for social good, but at a price," *The New York Times*.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/20/business/20charity.html>

Chapter 2: *Operational Definitions & Theoretical Background*

DEFINING NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

To alleviate any confusion or ambiguity, it is necessary to define “nonprofit organization” and “social media” since both terms are used frequently throughout the research and apply to specific organizations and networks.

The category of nonprofit organization can describe so many seemingly unrelated organizations, including museums, universities, and churches. This paper will focus solely on nationally recognized nonprofit charity organizations. With the burgeoning number of nonprofit charities that are currently experimenting with social media strategies, this subject will be both relevant and valuable to them. Because other forms of nonprofit organizations have highly specific means of participation (i.e. - attending church, donating money annually to one’s alma mater, etc.) and means of forming relationships with participants (i.e. – offering spiritual guidance, providing an education, etc.) research pertaining to additional types of nonprofits would need to take into account different variables that may be less relevant to the types of nonprofits I am most interested in examining.

Defining social media is interesting because the concept is so new and still very much in transition. Oxford Dictionary defines social media as “websites and applications used for social networking.” Because this research pertains to a more creative and personalized approach to using social media, I chose to look at recent research on social media to discover an explanation that is more robust and comprehensive.

The following definition is not only more descriptive but also relates more to the subject of this paper. In their paper “Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media,” Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (2010, p. 61). For readers who may be unfamiliar with the term “user-generated content,” this refers to “media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet,” according to Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright (2008).

Although there are now dozens of social media sites available to connect individuals in a variety of different ways (rating places of interest, bookmarking websites, posting photos, etc.), only two sites will be discussed in this paper – Facebook and Twitter. These two sites were chosen because they are two of the most widely used sites in the US, and with these sites it is possible to publish more different types of content than on other social media sites.

Created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg to connect students at Harvard, Facebook allows users to create profile pages and connect to other Facebook users by “Friending” them, which means asking them to join their Facebook network. Users can update their profiles with various forms of rich content and short personal messages, where “Friends” can be tagged. Users can also view content on “Friends” pages, as well as pages that are viewable to the public. Another Facebook term that will be used throughout this paper is “like”, as in clicking a “like” button to “like” a page. By “liking” a page, Facebook users

are publically indicating that they like the organization or company that owns the page and are following the content that populates the page. As of 2010, Facebook had over 500 million users, making it the most widely used social networking site.⁴

Twitter is a social network site where people communicate through microblogging, or blogging short messages of 140 characters or less. Users post messages to Twitter feeds that are viewable by their followers. Twitter has grown to include an entire set of specific functions, such as “retweeting” where users forward tweets to their followers and uses “hash tags,” which are statements added to the end of tweets that act as aggregators for every post with that hash tag.⁵ In a report released by the Pew Research Center, it was reported that as of 2010, 8% of all American adults online used Twitter, and the most active users were between 18 and 29 years old.⁶

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Because the concept of conspicuous participation encompasses multiple areas of study – including psychology, marketing, and communications, there is a wide array of previous research that can contribute to a rich theoretical foundation. Therefore, it is helpful to categorize theories based on an antecedent umbrella paradigm. The following paradigms will be reviewed - concepts related to Conspicuous Consumption, theories of the self and identity, theories of social learning and motivations for behaviors, theories of

⁴ “Definition of Facebook,” *PC Magazine online Encyclopedia*.
http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0,2542,t=Facebook&i=57226,00.asp

⁵ “Definition of Twitter,” *PC Magazine online Encyclopedia*,
http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0%2C2542%2Ct%3DTwitter&i%3D57880%2C00.asp

⁶ “8% of Online Americans use Twitter,” *Pew Internet & American Life Project*.
<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Twitter%u2013Update%u20132010.aspx>

media uses and gratifications, and finally, research on how the Internet has impacted group participation.

Conspicuous Consumption and Competitive Altruism

The concept of conspicuous participation is based on the related concept conspicuous consumption. As a result, it is necessary to examine the major principles behind conspicuous consumption and identify any parallels between the two concepts, which will help create a foundation for conspicuous participation.

The concept of conspicuous consumption was first described in Thorstein Verblen's book (1899), *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, has been continuously analyzed and redefined, as researchers aimed to understand consumer behavior. Verblen was among the first writers to discuss pecuniary emulation, which is the effort to equal or surpass another in status associated with wealth, and he suggested that consumption of goods had more social motives than utilitarian motives, in which members of lower classes aimed to improve social standing through consumption of luxurious goods. For an updated perspective, O'Cass and Frost (2002) defined conspicuous consumption as "the tendency for individuals to enhance their image, through overt consumption of possessions, which communicates status to others." Individuals consume certain brands, products, and services that symbolically represent this desired status. Researchers have commonly agreed upon several main dimensions of conspicuous consumption – its relation to interpersonal influence, its impact on an individual's sense of self, and its reliance on brands serving as symbols.

O’Cass and McEwan (2004) analyzed the extent of the role played by interpersonal influences and determined that the desire to identify with a reference group serves as a powerful antecedent for conspicuous consumption. A reference group provides normative standards for certain behaviors and attitudes, but an individual doesn’t necessarily need to belong to the group to identify with it. According to Veblen (1934), consuming conspicuously is not possible without the existence of “others,” who perceive certain brands and products as representing affluence. Through the public display of usage of these particular brands, individuals can appear to belong to admired reference groups and increase chances of gaining group entry, if that is a desired goal.

One study examining the antecedents of conspicuous consumption determined the central antecedent as being a need to compensate to make up for insecurity in achieving a particular identity (Braun and Wicklund, 1989). Researchers found that when individuals felt as though they were not successful in portraying a specific identity, whether due to lack of experience, expertise, or experimentally induced competence, these individuals compensated by conspicuously consuming material goods to enhance the appearance of the desired identity. The material goods would serve as symbols of the identity, such as sporting goods if the individual wanted to appear athletic. This occurrence was most notable when the individual chose the identity. There were several variables that were found to lead to compensation effects – commitment to the identity, identity-specific incompleteness, social reality (i.e. the material good chosen for compensation must symbolize the identity to others), and “changeableness” of the symbol.

In a similar vein to conspicuous consumption, researchers have developed the concept of competitive altruism, which suggests that individuals can develop and sustain altruistic reputations through visible displays of prosocial behavior (Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh, 2010). Researchers posit that in contrast to conspicuous consumption where individuals construct a high-status image through displaying their use of luxurious products, some individuals are motivated to uphold a status that is based on denying luxury by publicly performing acts that emphasize self-sacrifice.

In their paper “Going Green to Be Seen: Status, Reputation, and Conspicuous Conservation,” Griskevicius et al. (2010) argued that individuals concerned about maintaining a prosocial status will purchase and conspicuously use green products to prove to others that they can accept additional costs to ultimately benefit the environment. Researchers based this concept on Cost Signaling Theory, which also suggests that individuals participate in relatively costly activities that benefit the environment to portray a status of altruism and self-sacrifice (Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh, 2010). Therefore, conspicuous participation with nonprofit organizations can certainly be viewed as one method of competitive altruism. While the action taken on a social media site may not involve significant effort or self-sacrifice, its relation to a cause would be inherently altruistic, enabling someone to achieve a prosocial status in the eyes of members of their social media network.

Theories of the Self and Identity

Both conspicuous consumption and conspicuous participation involve two key forces that guide behavior – the individual’s motivation to maintain a certain identity and

the ability of brands to serve as symbolic communicators to support the chosen identity. Research on consumer behavior and its relation to identity, the self and self-concept is vast and multi-dimensional, creating a wide pool of theories to choose from to develop a theoretical background for conspicuous participation. To understand the relation of the self to the theory of self-concept, it would be helpful to define each rather abstract term before delving into the research.

Based on research by Sedikides and Brewer (2001), identity is constructed “inclusively,” “encompassing individual, relational and group levels of self-representation.” Identity is a fluid state of being and dependent on the context of the situation and associated social interaction processes. In addition to the situational factors, identity formation is also determined by the motivation to protect certain feelings that individuals deem to be important. Identity Process Theory says that the formation of identities on both individual and group levels is guided by the need to protect feelings of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, meaning, belonging and efficacy. While an individual may not be aware they are actively protecting these specific feelings, it is likely that the individual feels positive emotions or a positive sense of self when he or she successfully represents himself or herself in a desired light (Golledge, Scabini, Vignoles, et al, 2006).

In a study conducted by Golledge, Scabini, Vignoles, and colleagues (2006), research participants rated which identity elements they viewed as being more central to their core identities, and which feelings made them the happiest. The study found that participants were happiest with elements of identity that added to a sense of meaning,

which was also rated as highly central. Participants who felt happiest with elements that enhanced self-esteem also rated self-esteem as being most central to their self-definition. However, overall feelings of meaning were rated higher than preserving feelings of self-esteem. Identity elements that supported feelings of distinctiveness were also found to be perceived as central. Researchers concluded the study by reporting that the relative importance placed on different identity elements will change with the situation and what is required within different social contexts to achieve a particular identity (Golledge, Scabini, Vignoles, et al, 2006).

Conspicuous consumption and conspicuous participation both serve as methods of maintaining a desired identity with the ultimate goal of protecting the aforementioned identity elements. Displaying symbolic objects or participating in activities that promote the betterment of society both have the potential to increase feelings of self-esteem depending on the responses from the individual's social group. When an individual receives positive attention from an influential group or person, feelings of self-esteem increase.

Also, should that initial action grant entry into a reference group or help an individual identify with a certain group, a sense of belonging is also achieved. Exercising the ability to gain entry into a desired group while receiving reactions that enhance self-esteem facilitates a feeling of control over a situation for an individual, therefore protecting a feeling of efficacy. Finally, it is necessary to pursue experiences that enable individuals to believe that they maintain meaning in their existence. When individuals invest in a product that they perceive to be meaningful or invests their time or money in a

nonprofit organization that they apply meaning towards, the meaning motive is thus achieved as well. For those individuals who are particularly concerned about positive reinforcement from others, there is a need to publicly represent the self as having meaning, resulting in conspicuous consumption or participation.

A more complex motive that can be achieved through conspicuous consumption or conspicuous participation is the need to protect feelings of distinctiveness. According to Golledge, Scabini, Vignoles, et al., individuals are motivated to maintain a sense of differentiation from others (2006). Researchers have found that it is necessary to perceive one self as distinct in order to perceive one's existence as being meaningful. Conspicuous participation differentiates individuals from one another, for it allows users to share unique ideas and personalize content. However, individuals must share content that maintains a balance between being distinctive while not so distinctive that it alienates others who cannot relate, which could lead to negative feelings associated with self-esteem and belonging.

Transitioning to research on the self and self-concept, within the social psychology and sociology disciplines, the self is viewed as the overarching organized system of held identities (Stets & Burke, 2002). According to Ross (1971), the self can be defined as “a developmental formation in the psychological make-up of the individual consisting of interrelated attitudes which are acquired in relation to body, objects, family, persons, groups, social values and institutions.” The self-concept theory originates from the notion that people actually have multiple selves that are triggered by different situations. Many researchers who have studied self-concept theory came to the

conclusion that the whole self is composed of the following three selves – the actual self, which is how a person perceives himself or herself, the ideal self, which is how a person would like to perceive himself or herself, and the social self, which is how a person presents himself or herself to others (Sirgy, 1982).

In their research on self-concept and image congruence, Onkvisit and Shaw (1987) concluded,“ The basic purpose of all human activity is the protection, maintenance and enhancement, not of the self but the self-concept or the symbolic self.” Through the conspicuous consumption of symbolic brands or products, or the conspicuous participation with a nonprofit organization, individuals are attempting to maintain and/or possibly enhance a self-image they are interested in portraying, whether actual, ideal, or social.

Schenk and Holman (1980) articulated this idea within their discussion of the symbolic interactionism school of thought. They suggested that people wish to portray a specific self-image, which is a meaningful socially constructed image others have of an individual. The self-image is situation specific, and the means of expressing that image are dependent upon the situation. Once individuals know how they want to be viewed and what attitudes about themselves they want to signal in others, that person will find a way to express that desired self-image. With regards to the subject of this paper, if an individual wants people to view him or her as altruistic and involved in community affairs, individuals can achieve this self-image by showing others how they interact with nonprofit organizations with social media.

As previously mentioned, brands and products with perceived value are used in conspicuous consumption as symbols to communicate a particular identity or status. The notion of viewing material goods as meaningful objects did not originate with conspicuous consumption, but is actually a significant area of study within anthropological and sociological disciplines. According to Douglas and Isherwood (Braun & Wicklund, 1989),

Goods are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture. It is standard ethnographic practice to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators (p. 166).

The element of that definition that relates strongly to this research is the “social” element. It is cultural groups that define what brands represent and position those brands as symbolizing prestige, exclusivity, and a vehicle for elevating someone to a new social status or for maintaining a prescribed identity. In order for conspicuous consumption to be effective, the consumed brand must hold the same meaning for the buyer and the subgroup the buyer is trying to impact. If a reference group does not know a brand’s associated meaning or the meaning is not congruent with the group’s value system, the consumer of the brand will not achieve the goals they set forth (O’Cass and McEwan, 2004).

Theories of Social Learning and Motivations for Behaviors

One envisioned outcome of conspicuous participation is that social network users will see examples of conspicuous participation within their network and will then emulate those behaviors. To illustrate, after one Facebook user posts pictures of himself or

herself running a marathon for a nonprofit organization, a member of that user's network will be motivated to also post pictures from participating in a marathon or event held by a nonprofit organization. This outcome can be described by Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which employs a learning-through-observation system. According to this theory, when people observe the actions of others, they attend to the behavior and learn how to do it themselves (Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001).

One important variable that determines whether or not learning and replication take place is the development of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as people's perception of their abilities and levels of functioning, and how much they feel they have control over events that affect their lives (Severin & Tankard Jr., 2001). According to Bandura, "modeling influences must...be designed to build self-efficacy as well as convey knowledge and rules of behavior." The greater the amount of self-efficacy an individual feels towards a behavior, the more inclined the person will be to repeat the behavior should it be viewed as something that can be beneficial.

In terms of conspicuous participation, members of online social networks will see an instance of nonprofit participation, such as a friend on Facebook posts pictures from a fundraising event. Through viewing the pictures and any associated comments or links, social network members can build self-efficacy for participating in nonprofit fundraising events and then sharing that experience with others. While not every member will relate to this experience and desire it for themselves, the Facebook post may trigger motivations in those who have considered it before but never pursued it due to any fears or concerns from lack of experience.

In addition to the development of self-efficacy, observing friends and peers participating in nonprofit activities through social media may impact an individual's attitude towards a nonprofit organization, eventually leading to future participation in the case of a positive impact. The Theory of Reasoned Action provides an explanation for how individuals' behavioral intentions are dependent upon their attitude towards the behavior and subjective norms toward the behavior (Vallerand, Pelletier, et al., 1992).

This theory assumes that individuals are rational in choosing a behavioral intention, in which attitudes and subjective norms are deliberately assessed beforehand. Subjective norms are composed of the individual's belief about what "important others" think about how he or she should behave, and how much the individual wants to satisfy the expectations of these "others." To illustrate, although a person may have a positive attitude towards a behavior, such as volunteering for a nonprofit charity organization, that isn't totally indicative of the person's intention to perform the behavior. The person must analyze all of the relevant information they have at their disposal (Brock & Green, 2005).

Social media facilitates the formation of behavioral intentions through making relevant information more salient to individuals. Not only are individuals exposed to information about a nonprofit organization and the types of ways people can participate, which helps attitude formation, social media can help individuals get a sense of what "important others" think about the behavior. For instance, if an "important other" shares information about participating in a nonprofit event, the individual who is considering the behavior will have more information to help them make a decision.

Theories of Media Uses and Gratifications

As the antithesis to the Magic Bullet Theory, which posits that audiences of mass media are inherently passive and simply absorb the information presented to them, Uses and Gratifications Theory views the audience as an active group that consumes media in order to achieve specific goals. With this theory in mind, it can be assumed that supporters of nonprofit organizations turn to social media networks to achieve certain goals and gratifications.

When it comes to what needs audience members are trying to satisfy through consuming media, there has yet to be one clearly defined set due to the large body of research that surrounds Uses and Gratifications Theory. One of the more fundamental sets of needs, constructed by Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973), classifies the needs behind using media into five categories:

Cognitive needs – acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding

Affective needs – emotional, pleasurable, or aesthetic

Personal integrative needs – strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status

Social integrative needs – strengthening contacts with family, friends, and so on.

Tension release needs – escape and diversion [Severin & Tankard Jr, 296]

With regards to conspicuous participation, it could be inferred that audience members use social media to satisfy both personal integrative needs and social integrative needs. Individuals who interact with a nonprofit organization in a way that is visible through social media can be doing so to strengthen credibility, in the sense that they are

proving their involvement in activities that are beneficial for society and confirming an altruistic status they want to uphold in the minds of others. In the realm of social integrative needs, individuals can participate conspicuously to strengthen his or her relationship with a specific organization or a community of supporters of that specific organization.

Group Participation through Social Media and Relationship Building through the Internet

Many sociologists who study social capital and social networks believe participation with organizational groups, including religious organizations, service organizations, and charitable organizations, is declining due to a number of factors – a main one being pastimes based on the computer that increase sedentary and isolated lifestyles. Noted social scientist Robert D. Putnam had this to say on the subject in his acclaimed yet controversial book *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, “More Americans than ever before are in social circumstances that foster associational involvement (higher education, middle age, and so on), but nevertheless aggregate associational membership appears to be stagnant or declining.”⁷ However, is it possible that with the growth of the Internet, group involvement has not declined significantly, but merely transformed to include more online involvement than offline involvement?

According to a recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center on how the Internet has impacted group involvement (2011), 75% of Americans are active in at least one sort of group, as are 80% of Internet users. While the most popular type of group

⁷ Putnam, Robert D. “An Interview with Robert Putnam,” *Journal of Democracy* 6.1 (1995) 65-78.

was religious or church organizations, 22% of those surveyed reported active involvement with a charitable or volunteer organization, such as Habitat for Humanity or the Humane Society.

Of those individuals active in at least one group, a vast majority, 77%, said that the groups they are active in use the Internet to communicate with members. In fact, the Internet has become just as important as person-to-person meetings or phone meetings. Only 48% of active group members said their respective group has a page on a social media site, meaning many groups are still relying on emails and group websites mainly for online communications. However, for those group members who belong to groups with social media pages, over 60% of those individuals keep up with information on their groups' pages, and 30% of SNS users and 21% of Twitter users post updates as well. Therefore, research has found that when groups utilize social media, members who are users of the site will engage with the group.

Also, according to this study, Americans see the Internet as having a positive impact on group involvement, including group discovery and engagement. Researchers found that users of social media sites, in comparison with individuals who used the Internet but not social media sites, were more likely to join groups after discovering them online, were more likely to participate with multiple groups, and found that they spent more time participating in group activities. With regards to which social media site was the greatest predictor of group involvement, Twitter users were found to be the most active in groups and have the most positive attitude towards the Internet's impact on group participation.

In addition to this survey, past research also found the Internet to be an effective vehicle for organizations to build relationships with the general public. In their study on how the Internet facilitates two-way conversation channels between organizations and individuals, Taylor and Kent reported that communicating online led to the creation of “organizational–public relationships (OPRs),” where the public could exchange input with organizations using conversational components (Briones et al.,2010). Although this research was performed before social media sites entered the public consciousness, basic principles of building relationships online emerged from their study that are very useful for engaging in social media activities today. These principles include:

Include useful information on the site; Frequently update sites and generate new content to engage publics and encourage return visits; Make the sites easy to use and navigate; And strive to keep publics on the site (p. 2).

Building on this research, Hallahan in his paper titled “Organizational–public relationships in cyberspace” (Briones et al.,2010), created criteria for measuring OPRs online. Five areas of measurement were chosen: commitment, control mutuality, communality, trust and satisfaction. According to Hallahan, these areas of measurement can be defined as the following:

Commitment evaluates how publics view organizations as committed to online engagement, by willing to invest resources in building relationships, and making an effort to communicate. Control mutuality refers to the interactivity occurring between the organization and publics. With communality, the organization and public identify with each other and share similar values, beliefs, and interests. Trust is difficult to achieve in an online OPR. The organization must be seen as believable, competent, reliable, and consistent. Finally, satisfaction contributes to how the OPR exceeds the parties’ expectations and meets their needs (p. 2).

Therefore, the internet and social media specifically seem to have not only

increased involvement in group activities, but they provide a valuable supplement to offline events, increasing engagement and most likely, success in generating support. Rather than declining, group participation is actually transforming to take advantage of the opportunities the internet offers.

Chapter 3: *Methodology & Findings*

Both primary and secondary research was utilized in developing this study. One method of primary research was an exploratory analysis of examples of conspicuous participation on the social media networking sites previously mentioned – Facebook and Twitter. These sites were chosen because they are the most widely used sites by the general public and by organizations, making it fair to assume that they are also the most widely understood. In order to see how individuals conspicuously participate in nonprofit activities through social media platforms, a convenience sample of profiles taken from the researcher’s social network was examined on Facebook, and key search terms were used for Twitter.

As a means of organizing examples and observations that resulted from the exploratory research, multiple tables were constructed, each pertaining to a different area of focus for answering the research question. Data was categorized under the following topics – Type of platform used for each example, the origin of the posted content (user-generated vs. created by the organization vs. created by a third-party organization), necessary location of involvement (whether the example required only online involvement or both online and offline involvement), the level of effort required for the example, and whether or not the example required the participator to spend any money. These tables will be included in the appendix.

Analyzing data through most tables required simple coding, where it was a matter of checking off one of the available options and counting the checks, but one table was more complex. In order to analyze how the amounts of effort put forth towards each

example differed, it was necessary to group the examples by overarching type of action and view these types as existing on a continuum, where one end represented types of participation requiring minimal effort and the other representing examples that required maximum effort. To prevent readers from interpreting this information to mean that there are quantifiable intervals between each distinct level of effort, benchmarks were designated by letter, ranging from A-G, where A includes examples requiring minimal effort such as a click, and G represents the most costly level of effort, donating money through social media. It is also necessary to mention that the term “effort” encompasses the use of a number of resources including time, money, and skills needed for sharing content through social media.

A second method of primary research was conducting an in-depth interview with Brooke McMillan, the Online Community Evangelist for the Lance Armstrong Foundation/Livestrong Foundation. Livestrong’s social media campaign has become a model for other nonprofit organizations, as it is not only aggressive but also innovative. With multiple accounts on both Facebook and Twitter, the organization has garnered over 1,300,000 likes on Facebook and over 84,000 followers on Twitter as a result of the efforts of Brooke and other Livestrong online evangelists, raising the level of awareness and inspiring stronger support for the cause. Information gathered from speaking with Brooke was used to construct the Livestrong case study that appears later in this paper.

In addition, secondary research was conducted for the creation of the literature review as well as for the case studies and various definitions of terms. This portion of the research consisted of running Google searches of key terms and concepts and

searching the University of Texas libraries' network of databases. Information came from a variety of sources including published academic research papers and articles from trade publications, such as online magazines and well-regarded blogs.

FINDINGS

Based on the exploratory research of a combined total of about 200 Facebook and Twitter profiles, it is possible to draw several conclusions about the ways in which individuals take part in conspicuous participation with nonprofit organizations. Overall, the researcher observed 38 different forms of conspicuous participation, yet acknowledges the probability that other types exist outside the scope of the research sample. Results are presented based on the categories used for analysis.

Type of Platform Used

Of the 38 types of conspicuous participation identified, not surprisingly the most widely utilized types had the ability to be posted on both Facebook and Twitter. To view each kind of example and its associated platform, see Appendix A. The most popular forms of participation involved relatively simplistic activities, such as posting a link to an article or uploading a picture – activities that are now possible on both social media platforms. However, because some of these activities involve more involved processes on Twitter, such as posting photos requires the use of another social network made specifically for that purpose, it was more likely to see those activities only used on Facebook.

Also not surprising was the observation that for types of participation that were exclusive to one platform, the platform most used was Facebook. This can be attributed to the fact that not only are there more people registered on Facebook than Twitter, but also Facebook has more capabilities for posting rich content. Conspicuous participation featured on Facebook included multiple types of rich content, such as photos, videos, and status updates that included vivid branded imagery, while content used on Twitter was mainly limited to URL's for articles, hash tags used for categorizing content, and public messages to the organization using their Twitter handle (example: using @stjude within a Tweet to reach St. Jude Children's Research Hospital).

However, its clear that both individuals and some nonprofit organizations are working to overcome marketing limitations on Twitter by creating more visually engaging content to apply to their individual pages. The researcher observed several Twitter users who used their avatar to communicate their association with a nonprofit organization. Several individuals would use a recognizable symbol of the organization, such as the yellow Livestrong wristband or the World Wildlife Fund Panda, that was either downloaded from the organization's website, created using an image taken from the Internet, or incorporated within an image of the individual participating in an activity held by the organization. Additionally, some organizations are going as far as providing supporters with downloadable background layouts for their Twitter pages as well, such as Charity:water.

Number of Nonprofit Organizations Represented and Types of Participation

The following section will address the number of nonprofit organizations members of the sample tended to mention on their respective pages as well as the types of conspicuous participation that were observed on social media pages belonging to members of the sample. To view the data described in this section, see Appendix B. In terms of the level of participation individuals appeared to have with nonprofit organizations on their personal Facebook and Twitter pages overall, few individuals appeared to interact with several nonprofit organizations, for the majority focused their efforts on mainly one, or sometimes two organizations. However, rarely did an individual only demonstrate one form of conspicuous participation. Depending on their level of involvement with their nonprofit organization(s) of choice, participation took on multiple forms.

To illustrate, individuals who concerned themselves with the welfare of animals through participating with the World Wildlife Fund tended to limit involvement to retweeting or posting links to articles, petition requests, or news updates originally posted by the WWF on their website or affiliated social media profiles. On the other hand, individuals taking part in offline events held by a nonprofit organization, such as running a marathon, were most likely to participate in a number of forms, including posting status updates informing social network members of their intentions to run or fundraising status, posting links to organization websites built for collecting donations, and posting pictures of themselves taking part in the event. This observation leads to the assumption that the more offline activities a nonprofit organization has for supporters to participate in, the

more likely it is that participants of those events will express their support and share their experiences in multiple forms on social media.

The type of offline event mentioned most frequently was participating in a marathon, half-marathon, or 5k run/walk. With just about every individual who participated in one of these events, social media was used more for fundraising purposes than to promote the fact that the person was participating. Many of the organizations represented within the sample helped participants fundraise by designing specialized sites for which the organization provided links that the participant could simply upload to Facebook and/or Twitter.

Members of the sample who took part in this activity differed in their levels of intensity in fundraising. The majority of people who were observed participating this way posted links to sponsorship sites in addition to a short personal message once or twice prior to the event, while one individual posted over a dozen times, where posts switched back and forth between prepared status updates complete with imagery from the organization and personal posts with details of fundraising progress and shout-outs to specific donors. This individual's efforts attracted the greatest amount of attention in terms of comments and "likes" compared to others who were also fundraising. Her efforts were so successful that her fundraising goal increased by \$1500 prior to the actual event, according to her posts. However, it's unknown whether or not her success can be mainly attributed to Facebook activity.

It was also common to come across individuals who temporarily changed their Facebook profile picture to one that featured the event in some way – whether through

featuring the logo of the organization or a photo of the participating individual/team. This example of participation was seen mostly for participants of the popular Susan G. Komen for the Cure event. Some potential reasons for this observation include the great recognition and acclaim for the event as well as the potential for any image or phrase associated with the organization or event to increase the awareness surrounding Breast Cancer, a cause that has significant meaning to a large population. It could also be implied from these photos that individuals who went as far as changing their Facebook picture to signal participation were not first-time participants in the event and seemed to be personally impacted by the disease.

As previously mentioned with the Twitter example of branded avatars, this type of participation should be encouraged by organizations for a number of reasons. Avatar photos are more stable than content posted to a wall, thereby increasing awareness for the event or cause among viewers of the profile page. It also deepens the level of engagement between individuals and the organization for it gives individuals the opportunity to communicate their dedication in a space that is meant for representing themselves to the social media world. By using a nonprofit-related logo or image in the avatar space, an individual is making it clear that the organization is an integral part of their identity.

Location of Involvement needed for Participation – Purely Online or Requires Offline Activity

Out of the 38 examples of conspicuous participation noted, 33 types only required online activity, while the rest required some offline activity. The types of participation

that required offline activity were mainly event related, such as posting photos from participating in an event or asking for sponsorship donations in a status update. For a complete view of the examples and their associated location of involvement, see Appendix C.

The example of participation that may have required the greatest level of offline commitment may not be a challenging marathon or an actual event for that matter, but in fact, it is a long-term change in one's physical appearance. While this example is highly specific, as it was really only used to participate in the Movember campaign to support men's cancers causes, it was prominent through the month of November and extremely successful for organizations involved. Men who grew moustaches for the occasion were proud to show off their accomplishments through social media and motivate others to join them in the campaign. This campaign has become so popular that it would be difficult for another organization to replicate it for their specific needs, but it does demonstrate that with a meaningful cause, passionate people, and a unique method of showing support, an organization can inspire a conspicuous movement that grows to be a cultural phenomenon.

It is also worth noting that for certain examples, whether offline activity is required of the individual or not, there are certain activities that require extra work by the organization. Certainly when it comes to examples that revolve around participating in an offline event, the organization is not only responsible for putting on the event, but also for creating specialized marketing materials that can be provided to individuals for use on social media. However, there are also some activities that are done purely online that

also need work from the organization that may be out of the realm of traditional activities.

Several organizations create images that individuals can download and display on their Facebook and/or Twitter sites, and some organizations implement short campaigns to initiate conspicuous participatory behavior. For example, during the holidays, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital makes it possible to buy virtual gifts for Facebook friends in the form of badges that appear on the friends' walls. Also, the American Red Cross posted a picture to its organization's page and asked followers to create and post a caption for the photo. In the most extreme case of an organization developing a way for supporters to interact, the World Wildlife Fund created a Facebook gift center where users can "symbolically adopt" an animal after making a donation of \$25-\$250.⁸ Participants receive a donation package, which includes a certificate of adoption, a photo, and a stuffed animal, but more importantly, participants are deepening their connection to the organization in a unique manner and can share it in a visible way. Social media users can also "share" and "like" the gift center, furthering awareness of the feature and the cause.

Monetary Cost of Participation

Currently, monetary costs associated with using Facebook and Twitter are basically non-existent, with the exception of costs related to buying and sending gifts on Facebook and donating to organizations through third-party Facebook applications.

⁸ "The World Wildlife Fund Sets the Bar High for a Nonprofit's use of Social Media Strategy," *An Aperitif of NYC*. <http://elissakriezman.wordpress.com/2010/11/10/67/>

Therefore, it is no surprise that the vast majority of examples of conspicuous participation can be completed free of cost. The only two examples that require spending money are giving a virtual gift, such as with St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, or making a donation through the Facebook “Causes” application. A table with the complete set of coded data, please see Appendix D.

Origins of Posted Content

A significant majority of types of participation feature user-generated content rather than content that was originally created by the organization specifically for social media use and content created by a third-party organization that is unaffiliated with the organization. “User-generated content” is purely created by the individual posting the content, and it can be used in any type of activity, from posting an original status update to uploading pictures taken from an event held by a nonprofit organization. Therefore, although content was found to be mostly user-generated, it can often be a hybrid of original content from the user and content created by the organization. For example, status updates with links to articles related to the organization may incorporate written personal thoughts, user-generated avatars often include visual elements originally produced the organization, and publicizing events, whether through purely text or with images, is almost always going to feature some branding from the organization. It was actually more of a rare occurrence to come across posted content that was produced solely by the individual. See Appendix E for the complete set of coded data.

Content produced by the nonprofit organization for social media was somewhat limited in variety. Most often, the organizations produced Facebook and Twitter avatars

for users to upload as well as backgrounds for Twitter pages in the case of Charity:water. Some organizations also created templates for status updates and Tweets that would help individuals ask members of their social networks for donations, which were mainly utilized during the holidays and for event fundraising. It appeared as though rather than supplying individuals with materials to post, organizations were more likely to ask for a specific type of post from supporters. To illustrate, Livestrong asked supporters to share pictures of how they took part in this year's annual Livestrong Day celebration, and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital recently asked Twitter followers to tweet the name of their favorite St. Jude event to raise funds for online.

With regards to third-party organizations, this type of organization was found to mainly encompass companies that sought to raise money for a specific nonprofit organization that the company chose. The type of activities created by these organizations appeared to exist in two forms – eliciting donations for a nonprofit organization and specifically helping individuals tint their Facebook profile pictures pink during October for Breast Cancer Awareness month. It was interesting to see that for the latter form, multiple companies chose the same type of participation to support different organization that raise money to fight Breast Cancer. Both Right@Home, a home and lifestyle tip blog operated by the SC Johnson company, and TELUS, a telecommunication company based in Canada, donated money for every user that turned their profile picture pink using the company's Facebook page. This serves as evidence that a form of participation that begins as something unique and user-driven can spread to

a point of popularity where companies pick up on it and adopt it (or exploit it depending on your point of view) to ultimately improve their social activism and PR.

For donating to an organization through a social media platform created by the third-party organization, the most widely used service appeared to be the Facebook Causes application. Causes makes it possible for Facebook users to publicize their own cause or support an already established organization or cause through fundraising, campaign production, bulletin distribution, and measurement of progress. Causes is an independent company and was not developed by Facebook. According to an answer posted on the website Quora, a nonprofit will receive 93.5% of each donation made through the Causes application, with the remainder going to the Causes company.⁹

The most widely observed use of Causes is through its “Wish” feature, where users can devote a personal occasion, most often a birthday or holiday, to raising funds for an organization of the user’s choice. Causes will provide the user with templates for Facebook messages, status updates, and emails to help users reach their fundraising goal. Causes will monitor progress and will update both the user and the organization on a regular basis. When users visit the Causes or Wish main pages, they can see which of their Facebook friends have participated in the past and how much money they raised. This conspicuous feature can strengthen the motivation of someone considering using Causes and impact how individuals represent themselves to others.

⁹ Quora response - <http://www.quora.com/Facebook-Applications/How-does-the-Causes-Facebook-app-make-money-Is-it-profitable>

Level of Consumer Effort put Forth

To get an idea of how levels of effort required of participants differed among the various examples of conspicuous participation, each example was analyzed based on what resources were needed to accomplish it in terms of time, money, and amount of activity on the computer. The examples appeared to fall along a continuum that ranged from activities requiring minimal effort, as little as one click of a “like” button, to activities that ranged from a large expenditure of effort, such as creating a social media avatar using original and organizationally-created content. Each benchmark on the continuum was designated with a letter and overarching examples. The categories ranged from “liking” a page/sharing a link, posting a status update or tweet with at least some original content, posting photos/videos unrelated to an event, posting photos/videos from attending an event, applying content provided by the organization made specifically for social media use, posting rich content that is purely user-generated, and donating money. To view the coded data and the scale used for coding, see Table 5 in the appendix.

There were a couple of categories where clearly defining a level of effort was problematic. Depending on the individual’s familiarity with the functionality, posting videos or photos on Twitter may be viewed as requiring more effort than performing the same activity on Facebook because it requires the use of another network. However, because Facebook makes it possible to upload entire albums complete with tagging individuals and writing captions, some individuals can view this as requiring more effort than Twitter. To reconcile these issues, the category was placed in the middle of the continuum to accommodate the different viewpoints. It was also difficult to judge the

level of effort required for donating money as a means of participating online. While buying a virtual gift for someone or donating through the Causes application may simply involve some clicks and entering a credit card number, the increased level of investment cannot be overlooked. It may be more accurately looked at as an outlier rather than as part of the continuum of activities.

After coding each example based on the scale, it was clear that the majority of types of conspicuous participation tend to fall towards the minimal effort side of the spectrum. There were 10 examples that fell under the “status update or tweet with some original content” category and nine examples that fell under the “like an organization’s page/sharing a link” category. The results also revealed that the amount of examples related to “applying content provided by the organization” and “posting rich content that is purely user-generated” are equal, with seven examples found for each.

The categories with the least number of examples falling underneath it were forms of participation where individuals posted photos or videos from an event, posted photos or videos unrelated to an event, and activities that required users to spend money. With the first two categories noted, the explanation for this outcome is simply that the category refers to a specific activity that does not see much variation in usage. However, through posting photos or videos on Twitter, more effort is required because the user must utilize a Twitter photo-sharing website such as Twitpic, Yrog, or Twitpix, to name a few.

In terms of the category of examples that require users to spend money, two examples were discovered - buying a virtual gift from an organization and posting it to a Facebook friend’s wall, and donating to an organization through a social media

application, such as the Causes application. The reason so few examples of this category were found to exist can likely be attributed to the fact that organizations are trying to encourage participation and may view charging a fee as a potential deterrent to supporters. It is generally free to participate on social media, lowering the chances that individuals would feel favorably towards paying for an activity.

Chapter 4: *Case Studies*

To provide an in-depth look at how major internationally recognized nonprofit brands are using conspicuous participation to their advantage, two cases studies are featured. The first case study discusses how Livestrong and The Lance Armstrong Foundation cultivate a continuously active community of brand evangelists through the conspicuous participation of a dedicated group of volunteers and supporters passionate about sharing experiences with cancer. To suggest an alternative use for conspicuous participation outside the realm of day-to-day marketing, the second case study focuses on The American Red Cross and its plans to use social media specifically for communication during a crisis situation, which is highly specific to the purpose of the organization. This case study presents the steps the Red Cross is taking to create a system for responding to emergency information posted on social media platforms.

LIVESTRONG – ONGOING PROGRAM COMMUNICATIONS

In 2004, the Livestrong organization, a nonprofit brand associated with The Lance Armstrong Foundation to increase awareness for issues surrounding Cancer research and education, stimulated millions of instances of conspicuous consumption after selling millions of their small yet impactful yellow gel bracelets. Sales of the now-iconic bracelets brought in an estimated \$70 million for the organization. While the popularity of the bracelet has since decreased, the iconic image hasn't lost any relevance or meaning. In fact, over 50,000 followers of Livestrong on Twitter use the bracelet image as their Twitter avatar. Visible support for the organization offline may be less frequent, but visible online support remains prominent.

(<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/how-livestrong-raised-millions-to-fight-cancer-using-social-media/>)

The thousands of people who use the bracelet image as their avatar, or post pictures online for Livestrong Day, or announce their participation in the Livestrong Challenge marathon in a status update are taking part in conspicuous participation, regardless of the motivation behind the behavior. As a result, Livestrong supporters are spreading the message of the organization, and possibly creating even more online evangelists, which is exactly what the organization wants to see happen.

Brooke McMillan is the official online evangelist for Livestrong and is in charge of the nonprofit's social media activities. According to Brooke, there are two main goals for Livestrong's social media presence – to build a community around Livestrong and to promote events and get people involved. McMillan sees the goals as an evolution of involvement, in which individuals first become part of the online community and then join the actions of the community offline. This evolution serves both the organization and the community. Members of the community affected by cancer can receive information on services and support programs, while the community helps Livestrong grow and expand its efforts to make a greater impact.

As Livestrong continues to develop its social media strategy, McMillan has seen that using Facebook has been the most effective means for building a team of online Livestrong evangelists. “We’ve really seen that [Facebook] is a place where people provide support to each other, and a place where we can provide information on our services, and then having people then using our services because they found out through

our Facebook page,” said McMillan. Twitter has been more effective for generating participation in offline activities and advocacy efforts, said McMillan. “Twitter is actually easier to have people take an actual advocacy action and ask people to sign up for things, whether it be a contact your congressman or join a Livestrong event, something more on the ground.”

These outcomes can be attributed to the conspicuous participation of a group of individuals referred to as “Livestrong Leaders.” This group of about 350 individuals has signed up to be Livestrong advocates on the ground within their local communities, where they disseminate information on services for those affected by cancer. One way this group shares their message is online through social media. “Our Livestrong Leaders are online in force and each one has a group of individuals that are followers, not just on Twitter, and they’ve built this army of people within their local communities that help them take these actions,” said McMillan. As Livestrong Leaders retweet and report messages created by the organization, the online voice of Livestrong is amplified and echoes in communities throughout the entire nation.

In addition to the Livestrong Leaders, supporters from the general public act as online evangelists for the organization as well. Individuals affected by cancer in someway will turn to Facebook to share their stories on the organization’s page or on an individual’s personal page. The act of sharing not only empowers those affected by the disease but also helps eliminate the stigma that can be associated with openly discussing cancer. “Sharing your experiences, whether it be online or in-person, really helps demystify the cancer experience and lets people know they’re not alone,” said McMillan.

Livestrong has witnessed so much success with this activity that the organization is working to stimulate similar expressions from minority communities within the US and from international communities, currently South Africa and Mexico.

The positive impact of online evangelism through conspicuous participation has also touched Livestrong's offline events. During the most recent Livestrong Day in October of 2010, the organization asked participants from around the world to post photos and videos from Livestrong Day activities to a specially created Posterous blog page. The organization received hundreds of photos from all over the world where individuals shared their experiences and their support for the cause. Brooke and the rest of the Livestrong community viewed the initiative as a major success, for it allowed people to see how Livestrong's significance transcended geographical boundaries, helping to create one global community working together for a single cause.

Nevertheless, the substantial outpouring of support for Livestrong that has resulted from the efforts of the online evangelists will never serve as a substitute for offline participation. "I think online is great and it really does help the message spread virally," said Brooke. "But there is no substitution for face-to-face interaction with an individual wherever you are. You can be online and say that you're on a forum with 100 people, but when you meet them face-to-face, it really deepens that relationship, and that's what Livestrong is all about."

AMERICAN RED CROSS – SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION

In addition to building up support and positive associations for nonprofit organizations, conspicuous participation can also be used as a critical tool for nonprofit

organizations and emergency relief agencies during crisis situations. Social media has become a widely used tool for generating support during emergencies, whether that support comes in the form of fundraising or sharing information that will impact on-the-ground relief efforts.

To illustrate, following the recent natural disasters that struck Japan, the word “earthquake” was used in as many as 35,430 tweets per hour as news spread throughout the United States and people rallied together online to generate support, according to an article in *The Drum*, a digital marketing and media blog. While the top trending topic on Twitter involved the number needed for donating through text messaging to the American Red Cross, Facebook pages were quickly filled with posts expressing prayers and well-wishes for residents of Japan, in addition to individuals within Japan updating friends and families on their conditions.

After Haiti was leveled by a devastating earthquake and volunteers on the ground used social media to mobilize relief efforts, it has become increasingly evident to nonprofit organizations involved in emergency assistance how critical social media networks can be. These networks provide valuable communication and relief channels for those impacted by emergency situations. However, according to an article from posted by the Red Cross, “Social Media Grows Up,” organizations face several challenges in effectively handling this critical information, including how to constantly monitor it and respond in a timely manner.¹⁰

¹⁰ “Social Media Grows Up – Red Cross Emergency Social Data Summit,” American Red Cross – In the News – 2010.

To devise programs for monitoring and responding to such information, the American Red Cross recently held an Emergency Social Data Summit at its headquarters in Washington D.C. with over 150 participants including leaders and experts in government, social media, emergency response and the nonprofit sectors. In describing the ultimate goal behind the meeting, Craig Fugate, a participant of the summit and FEMA representative said, “Do not focus on the technology, the tools or the gizmos. Focus on the outcomes we are trying to achieve. Social media can empower the public to be part of the response, not as victims to be taken care of.”¹¹

In conjunction with this summit, the American Red Cross conducted a survey of 1,058 adults to get an idea of how people view using social media during emergency situations. Of the respondents who were 18 years of age and older, 75% reported that they participated in at least one social media channel; over half of this group was on Facebook and only 15% reported being on Twitter. Of the respondents who answered yes to participating in at least one social media channel, 18% of this group indicated that they had posted information and/or photos about an emergency or newsworthy event on a social media site prior to the survey; an overwhelming majority said they used Facebook to do so.

When asked about a future hypothetical emergency event, involving themselves or someone they knew, nearly half of respondents consistently said that they would use social media to share information about an emergency event and also to let loved ones

<http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.1a019a978f421296e81ec89e43181aa0/?vnextoid=fa532b019666a210VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD>

know they were safe or someone needed assistance. With regards to relief actions in response to such information, 69% of respondents felt that emergency response agencies should regularly monitor social media sites so they can respond to requests for help in a timely manner. Based on the survey, it is clear that the public views using social media for sharing emergency information favorably, but at this primitive point in the technology, there are expectations and hurdles that must be addressed for more strategic future initiatives.

Following the Summit, the Red Cross published a wrap-up white paper outlining the main challenges that were discussed, potential solutions, and future plans (2010). The key challenges listed in this paper include how to prepare for communicating and collecting information during an emergency, how to determine what agencies and organizations have custody over the information shared and who has the ultimate right to respond, how to increase accessibility for populations with limited access to information due to disabilities, language differences or socioeconomic factors, how to verify information, and how to manage citizen expectations for response. For each challenge, a set of recommendations drawn up by Summit participants is provided, with some solutions more clearly devised than others. Issues pertaining to such complex topics as governance and jurisdiction, which require the cooperation of agencies, NGOs, and government, were left with less clear solutions, but are priorities for future discussions.

There were several points that Summit participants were fervent about incorporating into future strategies for using social media during a crisis. One of the most critical actions to take, according to participants, is advance planning, because

trying to use the system during a crisis will be highly problematic. Some of the necessary activities for advance planning include building relationships with the public through these digital channels and educating them on how to use the system. It is also necessary to educate agencies on how to create constant connections between their operations network with online social networks.

Also, in developing a data collection system, the most advantageous type of aggregation system would be one that is open and centralized, facilitating a central point of contact and enabling the public to have access so individuals can support relief efforts. A hash tag or coding system is necessary so that data can be flagged and collected, and such a coding system must be adaptable for future social networking tools. Finally, in order to ensure the greatest levels of accessibility, participants agreed that a mobile component must be a major component of future strategies. Not only are cell phones the most common communication tool, but also according to Heather Blanchard, co-founder of Crisis Commons and closing keynote speaker for the Summit, cell phones are often the only way to communicate during an emergency situation.

To continue the work started at the Summit, the Red Cross created working groups that will each tackle one of the key challenges brought up during the summit. Groups will further the discussion on topics including public awareness and education, determining the next generation of emergency management tools, creating a governance structure for managing incoming data and response actions, and how to educate members of the general public on taking part in relief efforts. The Red Cross will use the Twitter

hash tag #crisisdata to share progress from the working groups as well as to open the discussions up to the community.

Through utilizing social media during emergency situations to assist others, the general public has proven that conspicuous participation has the power to save lives and alleviate suffering during an emergency. Now thanks to the American Red Cross and the other NGOs and emergency response agencies it has enlisted for help, a more organized and efficient system will be developed. Hopefully, with this future system, time taken to respond to an emergency will be shortened, the public will be more equipped to help fellow citizens, and safety will only be a Facebook post or Tweet away.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The following section will provide analyses of the findings previously presented for primary research and the case studies. These analyses will offer potential explanations for the discovered findings on how conspicuous participation is currently being used, and what that means for both social media users and nonprofit organizations.

PRIMARY RESEARCH DISCUSSION

The data obtained from the exploratory research is robust and rich in meaning, filled with reflections of how individuals use social media to the fullest to interact with nonprofit organizations and how organizations are leveraging the technology and conversation. The following analysis will explain what the data means for users and organizations, while pointing out existing opportunities and limitations.

It is clear that Facebook is the most commonly chosen social media platform for conspicuous participation due to several reasons. For example, because it has the most users of any other platform, more nonprofit organizations create social media strategies heavily based around Facebook, and the capabilities for and ease with which rich content can be published is greater than with Twitter. However, Twitter has its own advantages for organizations that Facebook cannot provide.

On Twitter, when an individual includes a tweet with an organization's Twitter handle, that tweet is automatically posted to the organization's wall. Not only does this function make it possible to share information with a greater number of people, thus strengthening the community, it also makes it easier for the organization to take part in

direct conversations with individual supporters. When an organization replies to a tweet, engagement with the organization can increase, creating more loyal supporters. While Facebook has recently made it possible to tag organizations in a status update or post, it is only possible to tag the organization if the user has “friended” or “liked” the organization beforehand.

In addition, Twitter has its own day devoted to users helping other users find interesting feeds to follow called “Follow Friday”. Every Friday, Twitter users will tweet about Twitter feeds they find most interesting and believe others should follow. Oftentimes, followers of nonprofit organizations include organizations within Follow Friday tweets, with the ultimate goal of attracting more supporters for their cause of interest. It is in the best interest of organizations to reach the most influential users of Twitter so those opinion leaders can spread the message of the organization throughout their legions of followers.

It was also observed that some organizations have realized promotional limits associated with Twitter and are providing content to users for sharing their commitment in an effortless way. Helping Twitter users conspicuously participate with a nonprofit organization can be an advantageous decision for organizations. Through offering vibrant and heavily branded images, Twitter users can communicate their affection for a cause or organization in a more lasting way than simply tweeting about it. Tweets are both short and fleeting, which limit how much of an impact they can have on people who view them. Lasting images used in an avatar or background may convey less

information, but they have the potential to impact viewers on an emotional level and result in a more memorable connection.

With regards to how many types of conspicuous participation each user takes part in, it seemed as though the more offline activities an organization held that were attended by the user, the more varied the conspicuous participation became. A possible explanation for this is that events offer more opportunities for developing content and they require a substantial investment from attendees in terms of time, possibly money, and effort. Offline activities allow supporters to physically engage with an organization, whether it involves challenging the body by running long distances or simply volunteering and interacting with others for a common cause. Participants apply personal meaning to these events, which stimulates the need to not only record the event through pictures and stories, but also to share the experience with others.

These events are especially meaningful and worthy of sharing with others if fundraising is a key component. Users who took part in fundraising were found to be frequent conspicuous participators, at least around the time of the event. The anecdote about the one user who gave specific updates on her fundraising progress can actually be of use to nonprofit organizations planning social media strategies for future fundraising events. Perhaps it is beneficial to create benchmarks that participants can share, as that information can be more motivational for potential donors.

When a person asks for an unspecified amount of money to reach an unspecified goal, supporters do not have an anchor value to help determine their donation, and the message could appear generic. However, if a person has a determined goal and informs

social network members how close or how far achieving that goal is, people may be more inclined to donate more. Not only will those supporters gain satisfaction from donating to a cause, but also value is increased because supporters are directly contributing to an individual's personal goal.

It was reported that a large majority of examples of conspicuous participation take place online without needing any additional offline activity. This observation could imply that supporters of nonprofit organizations are participating less with organizations offline and moving all interactions online, but I do not believe that is the case. Social media allows individuals to interact with nonprofit organizations in a number of ways, extending their relationship with the organization while compensating for the fact that events may be held infrequently or they may be inaccessible to supporters.

For example, a *Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure* may be taking place in a major city, but many supporters may not be able to attend because its still too far from where they reside, the registration fee is too high, or they may not have the physical ability to participate in such an event. Therefore, these individuals can still support the organization through posting related content on Facebook or Twitter.

Because it is generally free for individuals to use social media, it is expected that most activities and applications will be free of charge. While there are clear disadvantages to offering activities that require payment, such as sending a virtual gift, there are also some benefits, such as the social media user can display their commitment to the organization, while the organization earns revenue. Activities that cost money would really be most appealing to individuals who feel the strongest sense of personal

relevance towards a cause or an organization, and/or individuals who have the greatest need to demonstrate their investment and participation in a conspicuous way. Individuals can also obtain a heightened sense of distinctiveness since it is less common for people to participate in such activities. For future research, it would be interesting to see if participating online is viewed as compensatory for not making monetary donations to the organization – if helping to spread a message is seen as an equally valuable activity.

User-generated content was found to be a critical element of some of the richest forms of conspicuous participation that didn't involve sharing links or other content that was created by an organization. There are several explanations, ranging from the technical to the psychological, that can be used to justify this outcome. One technical reason is that as individuals become savvier with computers and social media, developing rich content is no longer an intimidating endeavor. Programs used for content creation that were once only mainly reserved for professionals are now less complicated and come as a standard part of computer operating systems, allowing individuals to become basic-level photo editors, graphic designers, and web designers. People are realizing that there is a new freedom in how they communicate with one another, and they are taking advantage of it. According to an article on user-generated content in *Bazaarvoice*, by 2013, it is expected that 114.5 million people will engage in creating some form of user-

generated content, which will be just about half of all Internet users in the US, based on *eMarketer* estimations.¹¹

From a more psychological perspective, sharing user-generated content can be viewed as one approach to conspicuous participation that achieves the same goals but requires more original thought, and potentially time than other approaches. One possible reason that was previously mentioned in the literature review is user-generated content can be effective for obtaining a greater sense of distinctiveness. Through sharing a message or experience in a unique and compelling way that breaks the mold of traditional means of communication, individuals stand out from one another and garner more attention for themselves and the cause.

With the ever-increasing appearance of user-generated content, more researchers are specifically examining the psychological motivations that drive individuals to create and publish such content. According to their report titled “Exploring Consumer Motivations for Creating User-Generated Content,” researchers Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008) apply Functional Theory (Katz, 1960) to describe how various attitudes drive behavior that serve at least one of four personality functions – utilitarian, knowledge, ego-defensive, and value-expressive functions. Based on Katz’ typology, the utilitarian function causes people to act in ways that elicit positive reactions from the environment and prevents negative reactions.

¹¹ “User Generated Content Beyond the Web,” Bazaarvoice.
<http://www.bazaarvoice.com/resources/stats#Beyond>

To serve the knowledge function, individuals work to acquire and organize information with the ultimate goal of gaining a better understanding of their environment. The ego-defensive function motivates individuals to act in ways that maintain and protect their chosen self-image. According to the research, individuals publish user-generated content to the web to represent themselves in a certain light, while simultaneously feeling as though they are contributing to a general societal dialogue. This function also has the potential to increase feelings of belonging in relation to society or to some influential reference group. The researcher believed this social function aspect would be a strong motivator because of the importance individuals place on entry into reference groups. (Daugherty et al., 2008)

The value-expressive function may be the most relevant to the subject of this paper, for having strong values tends to be a key necessity for supporting nonprofit causes. This function encompasses behaviors through which individuals communicate or relate concepts and causes that are important to them, which can enhance their image to those who share a similar belief system. This function leads to stronger feelings of self-esteem and validation because it allows people to share meaningful and personally relevant ideas, while increasing engagement with a community based around those ideas. (Daugherty et al., 2008)

In a separate study, researchers determined that involvement in online content creation could positively affect a person's sense of psychological empowerment. This study (Leung, 2009) found similar motivations to creating user-generated content as Katz' Function Theory typology. Researchers outlined four types of needs that drive

individuals to create content – recognition needs, in which individuals want to be positively recognized for their level of expertise and their overall identity, cognitive needs, in which users engage in content creation for the purpose of gathering or sharing information, social needs, in which users publish content to relate to a community, and entertainment needs, in which users simply enjoy diversionary content, such as humorous videos from YouTube. Results from the study indicated that perceived empowerment was strongest after individuals felt satisfaction from being recognized and from meeting social needs (Leung, 2009).

While sharing user-generated content has clear benefits for the user, organizations can benefit from this activity as well. According to the article from Bazaarvoice (2013), user-generated content is “a key to long tail user engagement.” When individuals create user-generated content, they are not only taking a brand into their own hands and molding it into something that is a reflection of their identity, but by doing so, individuals are also deepening their relationship with that brand. As engagement increases and relationships become stronger, brand equity will grow along with a sense of loyalty from consumers and activists.

The idea of allowing individuals to treat a brand as an open source for reinterpretation is a key component to the concept of scaling. When causes are looking to scale, it is advantageous to invite this type of participation because it builds awareness and strengthens the partnership between an organization and its supporters. In their report on branding social causes, Drumwright and Duchicela (2010, p. 12) include this quote from a marketing manager, “You have to learn to let go and provide flexibility so

that people can be evangelists for your organization.” Also, oftentimes brands that can be interpreted by others appeal more to younger people and can become edgier and more innovative than planned.

However, there are potential downsides that can come with user-generated content that can negatively impact an organization’s communication strategy. An individual can portray a nonprofit organization in a light that the organization is uncomfortable with, or associate the nonprofit brand with other organizations that have negative connotations in the public eye. Therefore, when devising a communications strategy, organizations need to decide how to handle such situations, such as whether or not it would be acceptable to remove content from an organization’s online space or how to respond should inappropriate content appear on an individual’s personal space.

In terms of the level of effort that was necessary for each example of conspicuous participation, it is understandable that a majority of examples required relatively minimal to medium amounts of effort. These examples, which included posting status updates and sharing links, require the least amount of time and can be performed by social media users with the least amount of skills for using the sites.

The third greatest number of examples was found in two categories - “applying content provided by the organization” and “posting rich content that is purely user-generated.” This implies that while individuals are getting creative and willing to put effort towards participating with a nonprofit organization and supporting its cause, organizations are simultaneously making it easier for individuals to do this by providing

content. Clearly, both parties have the belief that social media can be used to spread the message of the organization and rally individuals around a worthy cause.

Overall, the results indicate that conspicuous participation is taking place on a large scale, and nonprofit organizations have taken notice. It is difficult to determine how beneficial it is for nonprofits, but it can be assumed that with the sheer level of visibility of organizations that results from these actions, awareness is growing and engagement with the individual posting the content at the least is increased. However, because the individuals who displayed examples were not questioned, it is not possible to make any generalizations about their motivations and resulting gratifications from conspicuously participating.

CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

From these case studies, it is possible to get an idea of the different and practical uses conspicuous participation can have. It can be used to spread messages of hope and support to those suffering from a serious illness while building a community working for a common cause, such as in the case of Livestrong and its cultivation of online evangelists. Conspicuous participation also has the potential to aid citizens during an emergency situation through sharing critical information while mobilizing relief efforts, as the American Red Cross and numerous other emergency response agencies learned during the Emergency Social Data Summit. There are now plans in place for the creation of an organized system for sharing emergency information with the most appropriate relief agencies, while giving the public the information it needs to assist in emergency

relief operations. Overall, these case studies demonstrate how organizations can utilize conspicuous participation for meeting needs that align with their core mission.

In addition, these case studies emphasize how an organization must have a well-planned and aggressive social media strategy in place in order to leverage the conversation happening about their brand in beneficial ways. Evident from Brooke McMillan's comments as well as from the substantial amount of work that participants invested in the Summit, supporters will not automatically behave on social media in ways that have a significantly positive impact on the organization. Conversations require the engagement of all parties involved, which means that organizations are responsible for disseminating content that will inspire supporters to respond in meaningful ways. With the example of Livestrong, "Livestrong Leaders" are most effective when Livestrong provides them with information and activities that will resonate with followers. In terms of the Red Cross, relief efforts will be dependent upon how social media information is aggregated and then disseminated to the various emergency relief agencies.

Finally, it is evident from the case studies that as social media platforms continue to evolve, organizations are constantly revising social media strategies to use it in the most effective way possible. The technology is still so new that organizations must stay ahead of the trends to keep followers active and interested. However, it is most important that throughout any strategy changes, the core mission remains a guiding factor, for without out that, supporters have no reason to participate.

Chapter 6: *Guidelines & Conclusions*

From the research it is possible to generate a set of guidelines for organizations that are interested in encouraging conspicuous participation from their supporters. These recommendations can be categorized based on the proposed outcome.

TO ENCOURAGE THE SHARING OF CONTENT COMING FROM THE ORGANIZATION

- Keep all social media pages active and populated with content so supporters will have material to share with others.
- Identify types of people who would be interested in specific types of content, triggering ideas for sharing in the minds of users.
- If content is more serious in nature, such as relating to advocacy efforts, emphasize a sense of urgency when it is posted, and clarify benefits of sharing with others.
- Create avatars and backgrounds for Twitter that can be downloaded and applied by users, so that the user can express their commitment to a cause while generating awareness.
- Encourage the creation of a committed group of social media activists who will work together to implement specific social media strategies and engage with members of their respective communities.
- Specifically in the case of fundraising for event participation, provide participants with a variety of materials they could use on their Facebook page that incorporate brand imagery. As evident from the exploratory research, it

may also be beneficial to help the participant create benchmarks for fundraising and somehow publicize progress on Facebook and Twitter.

TO ENCOURAGE THE POSTING OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

- Inspire users by posting a question or prompt to the organization's Facebook page and Twitter feed.
- Try to increase the frequency of offline events, for offline participation appears to lead to richer online participation.
- To ensure that posted content is meaningful and personal, ask users for stories related to the organization's core mission.
- Create special events that supporters can recognize on social media platforms through posting creative content, such as the birthday of an organization, or in recognition of an event important to the existence of an organization. To illustrate, hundreds of people posted photos of them participating in Livestrong Day, which recognizes the day Lance Armstrong was diagnosed with cancer.
- Encourage users to change their Facebook picture or Twitter avatar to a picture that relates to the organization somehow, to create a more lasting impression on viewers while facilitating a more substantial way to display one's commitment.
- If an individual tweets a question or comment at an organization, always respond to show followers that the organization is listening and is engaged.

These guidelines serve as general ideas that nonprofit organizations can incorporate into existing or future social media strategies. However, organizations must

also keep in mind that the most effective strategies have clear targets and objectives, to which these guidelines could be tailored to be more specific. And most importantly, innovation is key. While this information serves as a starting point, nonprofit organizations should always be creative and not be afraid of trying unconventional or quirky ideas, for there is always the possibility of inspiring the next Movember-sized phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is first necessary to return to the original research question. The concept of conspicuous participation can be defined as – *The act of publishing original or existing content in an online space that is visible to others, either all members of the general public or members of a private social network, in order to interact with and/or show support for a defined community or organization.*

From this research, it is clear that conspicuous participation is a multi-dimensional concept. It has been found to encompass psychological implications for users as well as observable marketing implications for nonprofit organizations. At its most successful, conspicuous participation enables participators to represent themselves in a desired light that garners them positive reactions, while simultaneously increasing the visibility of a nonprofit organization and echoing the voice of the organization to untapped communities. Major nonprofit brands, including Livestrong and the American Red Cross, have an understanding of how to leverage this concept and are successfully doing so, enhancing the abilities of the respective organizations.

There are several topics related to this concept that can be used for future research. One possible research question that was not answered in this paper looks at how participating with nonprofit organizations through social media has impacted offline participation. Has social media led to a decrease in offline participation with nonprofit organizations or do individuals still participate with nonprofit organizations at the same rate, but now have an additional means of participating, thus extending the relationship with the organization?

An important aspect of utilizing conspicuous participation that was not significantly covered in this paper is measurement. Identifying appropriate metrics for success is key to making conspicuous participation work for an organization's needs. It is unrealistic to assume that one set of general metrics will work for every organization, since every one has different objectives for communication strategies. However, one way that every organization can get an idea of the level of effectiveness of conspicuous participation activities is to monitor how many times links, videos and other content are shared, and if possible, to analyze the content of responses.

A critical idea related to measurement is that the most valuable metrics will analyze the caliber of participation and engagement rather than more traditional metrics that look at concrete numbers of clicks, impressions, etc. Moving from pure numbers to analyzing content allows marketers and researchers to get a feeling for the general sentiment surrounding their social media activities. This emerging form of analysis

referred to as “sentiment analysis,” allows researchers and marketers to get a wide-scale view of what is being said and a general understanding of how consumers feel.¹²

Conspicuous participation can also be looked at from the perspective of other sectors to view its effects on individuals participating and the sector. For example, it would be interesting to see if conspicuous participation consisting of political content has any impact on election outcomes. In addition, the entertainment industry can look at how conspicuous participation impacts the success of films, album sales, etc. With the number of topics covered by individuals in the content they share on social media, it seems as though researchers can examine conspicuous participation from an infinite array of perspectives.

It would be advantageous to see how conspicuous participation works on other social media platforms as well. This research only focused on two platforms, leaving dozens of others untouched. Future research can report on participation on sites such as YouTube that are solely based on videos, photo-sharing sites such as Flickr or Instagram, or how organizations are starting to incorporate geo-location social media networks, such as Foursquare. With a more comprehensive view that takes into account every major social media network, organizations will have a clearer idea of how conspicuous consumption can work for them.

However, there were some limitations that impacted the richness of the results. Members of the sample who were observed to display some form of conspicuous

¹² “Social media metrics: Engagement alone is not a good metric to follow,” *Social Media Today*.
<http://socialmediatoday.com/richardmeyer/245378/social-media-metrics-engagement-alone-not-good-metric-follow>

participation were not questioned in regards to their motivations. Therefore, any conclusions made about their motivations or outcomes of the participation would have to be inferred. Future research should incorporate a qualitative research aspect to produce results of a psychological nature.

Also, a major concern associated with this topic that could present limitations for future studies is privacy of individuals posting content. Although individuals are posting content to a visible space, it isn't always visible to everyone, as social media users often keep personal pages private to people outside of their social networks. Therefore, it would be necessary to get permission from members of a sample before analyzing their profiles if researchers plan on publishing their results.

Nevertheless, this research presents an introductory view of a concept that is still undergoing transformation, and it will continue to evolve as new social media platforms emerge and widely used ones change. It is clear that conspicuous participation can be heavily based in identity maintenance and self-presentation motives, regardless of the subject matter of the content. However, in terms of nonprofit organizations, when individuals participate to express their altruistic identity, organizations and their causes can greatly benefit.

Appendices

APPENDIX A – EXAMPLES OF CONSPICUOUS PARTICIPATION BY PLATFORM

Type	Facebook	Twitter	Both
Status Update with a link to the organization's Facebook page	x		
Status Update with a link to a non-social media page for the organization	x		
Status Update without a link that is about an organization	x		
Give a virtual gift	x		
Post a video from an event			x
Post a photo from an event			x
Post a video about an organization that was created by the organization			x
Profile picture color change	x		
Branded Avatar			x
Profile Background		x	
Holiday fundraising posts created by the organization			x
Holiday fundraising post created by the individual			x
"Wishes" Functions (status updates, messages, etc.)	x		
Liking a page	x		
Following a charity		x	
Joining a group dedicated to a non-profit organization	x		
Donating to a charity through a social media platform	x		
Telling friends to donate to a charity			x
Post a link to a news story about an organization			x
Publicizing an event through a status update	x		
Publicizing an event through a tweet		x	
Urging followers to sign a petition			x
Tag a friend in a picture (holiday related example)	x		
Asking participants to create a caption for a photo			x
Posting an update, or tweet that includes a hashtag for an organization's Twitter handle			x
Asking followers to follow a non-profit organization on #FollowFriday (will require definition)			x
Facebook avatar is an organizationally created image publicizing an event	x		
Twitter photo linked to organization		x	
Creating an illustration dedicated to a non-profit organization and then posting it			x
Asking social network members to vote for organization in some contest			x
Speaking directly to specific donors in fundraising efforts			x
Posting a link to an individual's blog post pertaining to a non-profit organization			x
Listing a page as an "interest" so that it appears on the general "info" page of one's profile	x		
Facebook Avatar is from participating in a non-profit event			
Facebook avatar is user-generated and includes non-profit brand imagery			
Donating a holiday or birthday to a non-profit in a way that does not involve the "Wish" application			
Asking for sponsorship for participation in a non-profit fundraising event			
Physically altering one's appearance in support of a non-profit and then sharing it online (special for Movember)			x
	15	4	17

APPENDIX B – IS THE ACTIVITY PURELY ONLINE OR DOES IT REQUIRE OFFLINE ACTIVITY?

Type	Purely online	Requires offline activity	Requires additional action from the organization
Status Update with a link to the organization's Facebook page	x		
Status Update with a link to a non-social media page for the organization	x		
Status Update without a link that is about an organization	x		
Give a virtual gift	x		x
Post a video from an event		x	x
Post a photo from an event		x	x
Post a video about an organization that was created by the organization	x		x
Profile picture color change	x		
Branded Avatar	x		x
Profile Background	x		x
Holiday fundraising posts created by the organization	x		x
Holiday fundraising post created by the individual	x		
"Wishes" Functions (status updates, messages, etc.)	x		
Liking a page	x		
Following a charity	x		
Joining a group dedicated to a non-profit organization	x		
Donating to a charity through a platform created by a third-party especially for social media networks	x		
Telling friends to donate to a charity	x		
Post a link to a news story about an organization	x		
Publicizing an event through a status update	x		x
Publicizing an event through a tweet	x		x
Urging followers to sign a petition	x		
Tag a friend in a picture (holiday related example)	x		x
Creating a caption for a photo posted by a non-profit organization	x		x
Posting an update, or tweet that includes a hashtag for an organization's Twitter handle	x		
Asking followers to follow a non-profit organization on #FollowFriday (will require definition)	x		
Facebook avatar is an organizationally created image publicizing an event	x		x
Twitter photo linked to organization	x		
Creating an illustration dedicated to a non-profit organization and then posting it	x		
Asking social network members to vote for organization in some contest	x		
Speaking directly to specific donors in fundraising efforts	x		x
Posting a link to an individual's blog post pertaining to a non-profit organization	x		
Listing a page as an "interest" so that it appears on the general "Info" page of one's profile	x		
Facebook Avatar is from participating in a non-profit event		x	x
Facebook avatar is user-generated and includes non-profit brand imagery	x		
Donating a holiday or birthday to a non-profit in a way that does not involve the "Wish" application	x		
Asking for sponsorship for participation in a non-profit fundraising event		x	x
Physically altering one's appearance in support of a non-profit and then sharing it online (special for November)		x	

APPENDIX C – IS THE ACTIVITY FREE OR DOES IT COST MONEY?

Type	Paid-for	Free
Status Update with a link to the organization's Facebook page		x
Status Update with a link to a non-social media page for the organization		x
Status Update without a link that is about an organization		x
Give a virtual gift	x	
Post a video from an event		x
Post a photo from an event		x
Post a video about an organization that was created by the organization		x
Profile picture color change		x
Branded Avatar		x
Profile Background		x
Holiday fundraising posts created by the organization		x
Holiday fundraising post created by the individual		x
"Wishes" Functions (status updates, messages, etc.)		x
Liking a page		x
Following a charity		x
Joining a group dedicated to a non-profit organization		x
Donating to a charity through a social media platform	x	
Telling friends to donate to a charity		x
Post a link to a news story about an organization		x
Publicizing an event through a status update		x
Publicizing an event through a tweet		x
Urging followers to sign a petition		x
Tag a friend in a picture (holiday related example)		x
Creating a caption for a photo posted by a non-profit organization		x
Posting an update, or tweet that includes a hashtag for an organization's Twitter handle		x
Asking followers to follow a non-profit organization on #FollowFriday (will require definition)		x
Facebook avatar is an organizationally created image publicizing an event		x
Twitter photo linked to organization		x
Creating an illustration dedicated to a non-profit organization and then posting it		x
Asking social network members to vote for organization in some contest		x
Speaking directly to specific donors in fundraising efforts		x
Posting a link to an individual's blog post pertaining to a non-profit organization		x
Listing a page as an "interest" so that it appears on the general "info" page of one's profile		x
Facebook Avatar is from participating in a non-profit event		x
Facebook avatar is user-generated and includes non-profit brand Imagery		x
Donating a holiday or birthday to a non-profit in a way that does not involve the "Wish" application		x
Asking for sponsorship for participation in a non-profit fundraising event		x
Physically altering one's appearance in support of a non-profit and then sharing it online (special for Movember)		x
	2	35

APPENDIX D – WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF THE CONTENT?

Type	Consumer Generated	Created by the organization	Third-party generated
Status Update with a link to the organization's Facebook page	x		
Status Update with a link to a non-social media page for the organization	x		
Status Update without a link that is about an organization	x		
Give a virtual gift		x	
Post a video from an event	x		
Post a photo from an event	x		
Post a video about an organization that was created by the organization		x	
Profile picture color change	x		x
Branded Avatar	x	x	
Profile Background		x	
Holiday fundraising posts created by the organization		x	
Holiday fundraising post created by the individual	x		
"Wishes" Functions (status updates, messages, etc.)			x
Liking a page	x		
Following a charity	x		
Joining a group dedicated to a non-profit organization	x		
Donating to a charity through a social media platform			x
Telling friends to donate to a charity	x	x	
Post a link to a news story about an organization	x		
Publicizing an event through a status update	x	x	
Publicizing an event through a tweet	x	x	
Urging followers to sign a petition	x	x	
Tag a friend in a picture (holiday related example)		x	
Creating a caption for a photo posted by a non-profit organization		x	
Posting an update, or tweet that includes a hashtag for an organization's Twitter handle	x		
Asking followers to follow a non-profit organization on #FollowFriday (will require definition)	x		
Facebook avatar is an organizationally created image publicizing an event		x	
Twitter photo linked to organization	x		
Creating an illustration dedicated to a non-profit organization and then posting it	x		
Asking social network members to vote for organization in some contest	x	x	
Speaking directly to specific donors in fundraising efforts	x		
Posting a link to an individual's blog post pertaining to a non-profit organization	x		
Listing a page as an "interest" so that it appears on the general "info" page of one's profile	x		
Facebook Avatar is from participating in a non-profit event	x		
Facebook avatar is user-generated and includes non-profit brand imagery	x		
Donating a holiday or birthday to a non-profit in a way that does not involve the "Wish" application	x		
Asking for sponsorship for participation in a non-profit fundraising event	x	x	
Physically altering one's appearance in support of a non-profit and then sharing it online (special for Movember)	x		
			2, 1
	29		14 exception

APPENDIX E – LEVEL OF CONSUMER EFFORT PUT FORTH

Type	Level of Effort	Scale	A's = 9
Status Update with a link to the organization's facebook page	A	A=like/ B= status update - requires original content	B's = 10
Status Update with a link to a non-social media page for the organization	A	C= posting a picture/posting a video from an event	C's = 3
Status Update without a link that is about an organization	B	D= posting a picture/video not event-related	D's = 1
Give a virtual gift	E	F= Specially created content (i.e. - changing profile picture to special font)	E's = 7
Post a video from an event	C	G = Denoting money	F's = 7
Post a photo from an event	C		G's = 2
Post a video about an organization that was created by the organization	A		
Profile picture color change	F		
Random Avatar	E		
Profile Background	E		
Holiday fundraising posts created by the organization	E		
Holiday fundraising post created by the individual	F		
"Wishes" functions (status updates, messages, etc.)	E		
Liking a page	A		
Following a charity	A		
Joining a group dedicated to a non-profit organization	A		
Donating to a charity through a social media platform	G		
Telling friends to donate to a charity	B		
Post a link to a news story about an organization	A		
Publicizing an event through a status update	B		
Publicizing an event through a tweet	B		
Urge followers to visit a website	B		
Tag a friend in a picture (holiday related example)	A		
Creating a caption for a photo posted by the organization	E		
Posting an update, or tweet that includes a hashtag for an organization's twitter handle	B		
Asking followers to follow a non-profit organization or #FollowFriday (will require definition)	B		
Facebook avatar is an organizationally created image celebrating an event	E		
Twitter photo linked to organization	D		
Creating an illustration dedicated to a non-profit organization and then posting it	F		
Asking social network members to vote for organization in some contest	B		
Speaking directly to specific donors in fundraising efforts	B		
Posting a link to an individual's blog post pertaining to a non-profit organization	F		
Listing a page as an "interest" so that it appears on the general "info" page of one's profile	A		
Facebook Avatar is from participating in a non-profit event	F		
Facebook avatar is user-generated and includes non-profit brand message	F		
Posting a holiday or birthday to a non-profit in a way that does not involve the "wish" application	G	A's = 9	
Asking for sponsorship for participation in a non-profit fundraising event	B	B's = 10	
Physically altering one's appearance in support of a non-profit and then sharing it online (sweat for November)	F - ultimate	C's = 3 D's = 1	

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Vita

Erin Nicole Schlissel received a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, FL in 2009. Her desire to work in advertising as an account planner and her love of live music brought Erin to the University of Texas at Austin. During her two years as a graduate student, Erin followed the Account Planning track and injected her interest in marketing for the nonprofit sector into as much of her curriculum as possible. Erin plans on pursuing a career in advertising as an account planner upon completion of the Advertising graduate program.

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