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ABSTRACT

Similar to the majority of public authorities internationally, many non-profit organisations are considering using Web 2.0 tools to establish online interactions with their members. However, such organisations encounter practical difficulties with assessing the impact of Web 2.0 tools and aligning them with the expectations of their audience. The limited availability of relevant empirical work provides the motivation to reflect on the findings of a research survey conducted with the members of a Greek trade union organisation. Guided by the survey results, union officials are able to better consider an online engagement strategy. For example, contrasting preliminary expectations, most union members did anticipate benefits from the union's presence on Facebook and appeared willing not to draw fixed boundaries between their personal and working life. The study illustrates how research and continuous monitoring can contribute to realising the value of networking technologies within the naturally complicated socio-political environment of such organisations.

Keywords

Web 2.0, Online Engagement, Non-profit organisations, Trade unions, Social networking adoption, Facebook, Web survey.

INTRODUCTION

While still in their infancy, but given their meteoric rise in popularity, networking technologies can potentially help collective organisations obtain feedback from their members in internal decision making processes. Until a few years ago, maintaining an organisational profile on a website such as Facebook would seem inconsistent with the social networks' usually perceived leisure nature. However, today it is generally accepted that web tools create remarkable engagement opportunities for public involvement. A rapidly growing number of studies have attempted to demonstrate the impact of the Web 2.0 engagement philosophy in different settings. Research with commercial organisations has focused on the Enterprise 2.0 concept which includes both internal and external business uses of Web 2.0 tools (e.g. McAfee, 2006). In the public sector context, it has been argued that governing authorities can enable citizen participation in public decision-making by engaging with them where they are already online (e.g. Chadwick, 2009; Meijer and Thaens 2010). Furthermore, especially following the 2008 USA Presidential elections, Web 2.0 tools have been widely examined as mechanisms of political communication (Wattal et al., 2010) and also with respect to their potential for fostering civic engagement (e.g. Valenzuela et al., 2009).

An overall conclusion from those studies is that, while Web 2.0 tools are an inherent part of most Internet users' everyday activities, many organisations have a fairly ambiguous idea of their impact on traditional communication strategies. Linking theory with practice calls for up to date research on how the engagement potential of Web 2.0 tools can be realised. Particularly for membership-based non-profit organisations, what "being Web 2.0 active" actually involves remains largely unexplored by current empirical research. This paper focuses on a trade union organisation and the efforts of its management to explore the potential of an online engagement strategy. The particular motivation was to address questions such as: how do union members feel about the union's presence on social networks? Are their expectations affected by factors such as gender, age, Internet skills and offline participation?

The next section introduces the paper's theoretical background. Then, the context of this study is described, followed by the research methodology and results. The concluding discussion elaborates on the decision-making context from the union's leadership perspective.

BACKGROUND

Web 2.0 for public engagement

The 'Web 2.0' buzzword is not simply used to group current Internet tools such as social networks, blogs, data mash-ups and RSS feeds. It further denotes a set of cultural phenomena such as mass collaboration, dynamic user participation and social networking (Kim et al., 2009). Motivated by this emerging philosophy, institutional actors such as public authorities, political parties and universities have been challenged to reshape their activities in order to enable bottom-up involvement efforts by members of their public (Dutton and Eynon, 2009). Web 2.0 tools for public participation might not come to the higher ideals for a deliberative public sphere, but do entail a diverse set of valuable mechanisms for online consultations and interactions (Chadwick, 2009). Nevertheless, the use of Web 2.0 tools is in many cases hindered by conservative understanding of social media in organisations since their limited control in use seems to contradict most current organisational cultures (Kaganer and Vaast, 2010). Research has shown that online public engagement from the grassroots requires organisational configurations that progress far beyond the commonly implied on-size-fits-all approach (Meijer and Thaens, 2010).

It appears that organisations which seek to foster public engagement have to configure Web 2.0 tools to their specific needs and formulate suitable value propositions. Such efforts can become even more challenging for non-profit organisations whose adoption of new technologies tends to be slow and ideologically driven (Zhang et al., 2010; Burt and Taylor 2003). This study focuses on a specific type of non-profit organisation: a trade union or collective with the mission of protecting employees' interests.

Becoming a *'Union 2.0'*

Trade unions are membership-based organisations which provide formal mechanisms for collective representation of workers in a particular sector, industry or organisation (Hyman, 2007). Although some unions benefit from professional management, standard resources and extensive membership, they are quite different from business organisations, since they exist on the basis of legitimacy to represent colleagues (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). In the context of globalisation, unions are facing severe difficulties maintaining their traditional social power and most of them are expected to adapt to radically new labour and economic circumstances. Following this need, they have entered a process of self-transformation, aimed at sustaining their membership, fostering more collaborative ways of working and managing to leverage union skills and resources more strategically (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). Part of this project encompasses the use of new technologies which are thought to acquire a principal role in the union transformation agenda, especially in terms of enhancing interactions with members (e.g. Lucio and Walker, 2005).

One noticeable example of how Web 2.0 tools are being used by trade unions is the e-UNI campaign organised by UNI Global (2011), an international trade union federation whose affiliated members include 900 unions worldwide. A popular outcome of this campaign is the first Second Life "virtual" trade union industrial action against IBM Italy in September 2007 which attracted about 1850 participants from 30 different countries (Blodgett and Tapia, 2010). The e-UNI campaign offers specific advice to affiliated unions on how to use social networking tools (i.e. blogs, RSS feeds, Flickr, Facebook, Second Life and Twitter). The campaign gave birth to the Unions 2.0 term, emphasising the interaction between the unions and the Web 2.0 engagement culture.

Despite the promising availability of networking technologies, union adoption is not a straightforward process. The use of networking tools creates a set of challenges such as: what are the acceptable ways of using those tools in the workplace? Are members willing to engage online with their union outside of their working life? Can web tools draw an audience not easily accessible by traditional means, for example in terms of younger employees who seem to be unconnected with the labour movement (Bibby, 2008)? Such questions were addressed in a survey conducted by a Greek banking sector trade union. The details and results of this study are presented in the next section.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The union

The Greek trade union, founded in 2003, represents bank employees in a medium-sized commercial bank. It represents about 40% of the total 3000 employees. The union's management consists of a team of 11 elected members based on geographic diversity. The union's mission is to protect and promote its members' professional interests, as well as contribute to their social life quality (e.g. cultural events, sports). The union is led by a core team of relatively young officials who interact with members on a daily basis and coordinate the union's actions.

Since around 2008, this team has recognised the potential of web technologies and developed a website which is considered state-of-the-art compared to the ones maintained by associate Greek unions. Their engagement with Web 2.0 tools followed the increasing adoption of social networking and blogging applications in Greek society, as well as the immense rise in broadband adoption. In 2010, the union realised that, despite optimistic suggestions, its ability to consider an online engagement strategy was constrained by limited knowledge of members' expectations. Moreover, it was evident that the bank management desired to limit and regulate the union's online capacity. Within working hours, most union members have slow access to the union's website and severe Internet access restrictions. With the help of the authors, the union decided to conduct a member survey with the purpose of obtaining feedback about the potential of an online communication strategy. Apart from its adequate experience with online tools and willingness to obtain feedback, this collective was selected because: (1) it possessed the infrastructure to disseminate the web survey (mailing lists, organised website) and (2) its members were estimated to form an audience potentially interested in such a pilot study (e.g. young, estimated high Internet adoption). The next section describes the details of the study which was conducted in January 2011.

Survey development

The survey development was based upon the following three central questions:

1. What is the union members' Internet access and adoption of popular social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn?

2. Do union members draw firm boundaries between their personal and working life? Are they willing to communicate with the union outside their working hours?

3. For those who do wish to communicate with the union outside working hours, how is their intention to interact with the union on Facebook or social networks in general related to factors such as:

    3.1. Socio-demographics: age, gender, education and years of union membership.

    3.2. Intensity of Facebook use, intensity of Facebook groups' use and Internet skills.

    3.3. Their trust in the union's mission (union loyalty), the union's usefulness in their working life (union instrumentality) and their willingness to participate in union activities.

Table 1 shows how the questionnaire variables were operationalised. Union loyalty (UL), union instrumentality (UI) and willingness to participate (WP) were adapted from studies in Industrial Relations. In Metochi's (2002) study those variables were tested in a large survey with a Cypriot trade union, which is a context similar to the Greek union. The variables about intensity of Facebook use and Facebook groups use were adapted from studies conducted with college students (Valenzuela et al., 2009; Ellison et al., 2007). This distinction was also used here because in previous studies it gave suggestions about possible differences between intensity of Facebook use and its groups. The intensity of use for Twitter and LinkedIn was not measured in more detail because their adoption was expected to be significantly lower than Facebook. It was also a choice related to controlling the length of the questionnaire. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn were the four social networks selected because: (a) they are important components of the e-UNI campaign and (b) their adoption is estimated to be higher in the Greek society compared for example to other social networks such as Second Life and Flickr.

To measure attitudes towards the union's online presence, members were asked about the extent to which they agree with the following (on five-point Likert scales):

- "I believe the union can benefit from its presence on social networks". (BENEFIT-SN)

- "I believe the union can benefit from the Internet compared to its more traditional activities". (BENEFIT-WEB)

- "I believe the union can benefit from its presence on Facebook". (BENEFIT-FB)

Those three statements were combined in a construct named BENEFIT and were further examined independently. Members were also asked to indicate if they maintain a profile on Twitter or LinkedIn and, in case they didn't, if they were at least aware of the website. Finally, members were asked about their intentions to communicate with the union exclusively within, or also outside their working hours.

Construct	Questions	Adapted from
Union loyalty (Five-point Likert scale)	I feel a sense of pride being part of the union. (UL1) I feel I am gaining a lot by being a union member. (UL2) I tell my friends that the union is a great organisation to be a member of. (UL3) I plan to be a member for the rest of my time as employee in the bank. (UL4) I have complete trust in the union. (UL5)	(Metochi, 2002)
Union instrumentality (Five-point Likert scale)	Workers need unions to protect them against unfair practices of employers. (UI1) The union's actions are good examples of what unionism can achieve. (UI2) Real improvements in working conditions can only be achieved with the help of the union. (UI3)	(Metochi, 2002)
Willingness to participate (Five-point Likert scale)	How willing would you be to: • Be elected as a union official (WP1) • Frequently attend union meetings (WP2) • Participate in collective action (WP3) • Frequently participate in union's social events (WP4)	(Metochi, 2002)
Intensity of Facebook use (FB1 & FB2 scored by order of answer) FB3, FB4, FB5, FB6 & FB7 scored on a five-point Likert scale) (Responses were standardised to create an average)	About how many total Facebook friends do you have? (Less than 10, 10–49, 50–99, 100–149, 150–199, 200–249, 250–299, 300–399, 400 or more) (FB1) On a typical day, about how much time do you spend on Facebook? (No time at all, Less than 10 min, 10 to 30 min, More than 30 min - up to 1 hour, More than 1 hour- up to 2 hours, More than 2 hours - up to 3 hours, More than 3 hours) (FB2) How much do you agree with the following: • Facebook is part of my everyday activity. (FB3) • I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook. (FB4) • I feel out of touch when I haven't logged into Facebook for a day. (FB5) • I would be sorry if Facebook shut down. (FB6)	(Valenzuela et al., 2009; Ellison et al., 2007)
Intensity of Facebook Groups use (FBG1 & FBG5 scored by order of answer) (FBG2, FBG3 & FBG4 scored on a five-point Likert scale) (Responses were standardised to create an average)	On a typical day, about how much time do you spend reading and posting (combined) messages on the profiles of online groups you have joined on Facebook? (No time at all, Less than 10 min, 10 to 30 min, More than 30 min- up to 1 hour, More than 1 hour - up to 2 hours, More than 2 hours) (FBG1) In the past week, how often do you: • Read the profiles of online groups you have joined? (FBG2) • Post the messages in online groups you have joined? (FBG3) • Post the new discussion topics in online groups you have joined? (FBG4) Which one of the following best describes your participation in the online groups you have joined on Facebook? (Rarely visit profiles, Reads wall/discussion board, Mostly reads, sometimes write on wall/discussion board, Reads and writes on wall/discussion board, Reads, writes and starts new topics on wall/discussion board) (FBG5)	(Valenzuela et al., 2009)
Internet skills (Binary answers added to form the measure)	Have you sent an attachment with an email? (IS1) Have you posted an audio, video, or image file to the Internet? (IS2) Have you personally designed a webpage? (IS3) Have you downloaded a software program to your computer from the Internet? (IS4)	(Best and Krueger, 2005)

Construct	Questions	Adapted from

<p style="text-align: center">**Table 1. Constructs used in the questionnaire adapted from previous studied.**</p>

Survey administration

The web survey was constructed in the Survey Monkey hosting system and opened for responses for a period of two weeks. An email invitation was sent to all bank employees followed by a weekly reminder. No incentives were offered apart from the assurance that substantial participation could help the union effectively reconsider its communication strategy. This followed the advice by Archer (2007) on the importance of convincing respondents about the questionnaire's benefit in order to increase response rates. The invitation was sent to all bank employees because many of them, although not officially members, do engage with the union's social activities and regularly visit its website. In any case, it is an audience the union seeks to establish interactions with. The survey was started by 398 visitors, but due to technical restrictions by the bank's network a number of them were unable to finish (some returned and completed the survey from a home computer). The study results are based on 229 usable questionnaires. The initial response rate is around 13.3% for the 398 visitors who started the questionnaire which comes to about 16% for members with completed questionnaires (about 75% of respondents were registered members). The relatively low response rate was attributed to: the technical problem with the bank's network, the suspicion that some bank employees have blocked emails from the union (especially from the top management levels) and the lack of tangible incentives for completion.

Low response rates are not uncommon for web surveys (e.g. Evans and Mathur, 2005), but they don't necessarily suggest bias. As further indicated by Fricker (2008), in web-surveys the sampling methodology is driven by the contact mode, thus de facto making inferences to a general population difficult. This type of contact suited well the interests of this study since the survey demographics revealed an interesting characteristic. Although most control variables were representative of the bank's average statistics (years working, age and education), the survey was slightly biased in terms of men (about 65% instead of about 50%). Many studies have shown that participation in online political communities is biased by young educated males (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2009). The high participation by young males probably makes the questionnaire representative of the audience that is more likely to engage with the union online. This aspect is elaborated on in the discussion section. It was also evident that the survey attracted younger people (77.3% less than 35 years old) and single people (52.4%); however those two figures do correspond with the bank employees' average age (32 years old) and with estimations about average marital status.

Survey validation

The results were analysed with the help of the PASW Statistics 18 software. Following Straub et al. (2004), the instrument was assessed for reliability, content, convergent and discriminant validity. To ensure content validity: (1) the questionnaire was pilot tested by 15 union members resulting in small wording changes and (2) well-tested constructs were adapted from previous studies, aware of their previous context of use. Table 2 shows the validity measures for latent constructs.

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's α	Split-half correlation	Range of factor loadings
Union loyalty	5	0.87	0.75	0.70-0.87
Union instrumentality	2	0.72	0.58	0.68-0.85
Willingness to participate	4	0.83	0.70	0.71-0.80
Intensity of Facebook use	4	0.84	0.59	0.76-0.80
Intensity of Facebook groups use	5	0.88	0.79	0.74-0.86
Anticipated benefits from online presence	3	0.68	0.40	0.56-0.86

<p style="text-align: center">**Table 2. Construct validation.**</p>

Internal consistency was assessed through Cronbach's α and a split-half test with values higher than 0.60 being acceptable for exploratory research (Straub et al., 2004). For construct validity (convergent and discriminant validity), a factor analysis was conducted (Principal Component Analysis - Varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalisation). This analysis revealed that

items UI, FB1 and FB2 cross loaded on different constructs above the cut-off value of 0.40. Hence, they were dropped from the analysis. The rest of the items loaded properly on intended constructs without cross-loadings (discriminant validity) and for Eigenvalues above 1 (convergent validity). Consequently, for the items that remain, we can assume that the data coming from the instrument are reliable.

Survey results

Question 1 - Internet access and social networking adoption

The first noticeable result was related to an 86% home broadband adoption among questionnaire respondents. This of course exceeds the approximately 40% national and 60% European average (Gartner, 2011). It can probably be attributed to these bank employees being a young audience with sufficient financial status to afford it.

The adoption of social networks by the union audience revealed some clear tendencies. Facebook adoption was high at about 75% of respondents; a figure which dropped to 13% for those who had a profile on Twitter and 12% for LinkedIn users. Interestingly, 76% were not even aware of professional social networks such as LinkedIn, while 78% were aware of Twitter even though they didn't maintain a profile. As far as YouTube is concerned, 25% were infrequent visitors (less than once a week) and 72% regular visitors (more than once a week). T-tests between adopters and non-adopters of those four social networks indicated significant differences in terms of their Internet skills (p<0.05). Furthermore, those who had accounts on Twitter and LinkedIn were better educated. There was no significant age difference between adopters and non-adopters, only between more and less frequent YouTube visitors.

Question 2 - Union communication in personal and working life

The next step in the analysis was to examine differences between those who expressed interest to engage with the union outside their working hours (63%) and those who didn't (33%). Table 3 illustrates the descriptives and t-test results for the two categories, only for the variables found to have significant differences (p<0.05). No significant difference was found in terms of gender, age, marital status, education, Internet skills, Intensity of Facebook and Facebook groups. The difference was significant for those: more loyal to the union (UL), more willing to participate in its activities (WP), more supportive of the unionism idea (UI) and those responding higher on BENEFIT-SN, BENEFIT-WEB and BENEFIT-FB. Beyond statistical significance, the difference seems to be meaningful mainly for willingness to participate (WP).

Variable	Union Communication	Mean	Std. deviation	t value	df	Sig.
UL	Work only	3.71	0.66	-2.84	169	0.005
	Also personal	4.02	0.68			
UI	Work only	3.95	0.75	-3.94	218	<0.001
	Also personal	4.31	0.60			
WP	Work only	2.50	0.78	-5.17	216	<0.001
	Also personal	3.12	0.89			
BENEFIT-SN	Work only	3.62	0.69	-4.26	210	<0.001
	Also personal	4.04	0.68			
BENEFIT-WEB	Work only	3.79	0.63	-3.11	209	0.002
	Also personal	4.07	0.63			
BENEFIT-FB	Work only	3.13	0.92	-2.19	206	0.03
	Also personal	3.43	0.94			

Table 3. Significant differences for the union communication variable.

Question 3 - Perceptions towards online communication

The final analysis step was to determine the most important indicators related to the benefit statements for those willing to communicate with the union outside their working hours. Regression models using the socio-demographic factors as independent variables and BENEFIT as the dependent variable failed to predict any significant differences. The rest of the variables resulted in the model summarised in Table 4 (Entry for F<=0.5, unstandardised regression coefficients B, standard error for model predictors SE, t and F values flagged significant at *p<0.05 and **p<0.01). Although the model is significant (p<0.01), the total variance explained is about 15%. Internet skills are the most important predictor of all variables, while union instrumentality and intensity of Facebook use were also influential.

	BENEFIT		
	B	**SE**	**t**
Union loyalty	-0.45	-	-0.367
Willingness to participate	-0.37	-	-0.448
Intensity of Facebook groups use	-0.56	-	-0.654
Intensity of Facebook use	0.198	0.086	2.305*
Union instrumentality	0.293	0.131	2.244*
Internet skills	0.209	0.069	3.025**
Final R square	0.216		
Adjusted R square	0.152		
F	3.361**		

Table 4. Regressions predicting anticipated benefits towards the union's online presence.

Finally, looking at the correlations (Pearson, two-tailed) between the three components of BENEFIT and the other variables shows that Internet skills are the only one correlated with all three of them for p<0.01. Furthermore, anticipated benefits from the union's presence on Facebook are positively correlated with (p<0.05): Facebook or LinkedIn membership, intensity of Facebook use and frequency of YouTube visit.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the grounds for online membership engagement in the context of a Greek union. The findings can be interpreted in different ways contributing to this objective. The survey administration produced a sample representative of the audience upon which such a strategy can be based. The first main conclusion for the union was that a core audience to support such an effort did exist as indicated by three factors: high broadband adoption, high Facebook adoption and 63% of responders seeking communication with the union outside working hours. The later was deemed as a key finding even beyond online communications.

Furthermore, those seeking union interactions outside working hours perceive more benefits from the union's online activities and social networking presence. They also seem to be closer to the union and its ideals than their colleagues (Table 3). However, from Table 4, it is seems that, for them, important offline variables (loyalty and willingness to participate) are not important predictors of attitudes towards online benefits. This disconnection between the two traditional engagement variables and the online communications can be compared to Internet skills being predictors for all benefit statements. Furthermore, Facebook members anticipate more benefits from the union's presence on Facebook. Those two observations point to the Internet's characteristic of an experience technology (Dutton and Shepherd, 2006). This characteristic states that people tend not to appreciate web tools until they actually use them, and when they do they develop a learned trust derived from their own experiences. It can be a sign that networking tools create opportunities for engaging with members *to some extent even irrespective* of their offline devotion towards the organisation and their traditional level of participation.

Unions are of course not able to influence their audience Internet skills, but it seems that the online world and social networks in particular open an interaction field with unique features. Interestingly, the survey indicates that savvy Internet users can be

aligned with those that the labour movement seeks to principally engage with: young people with adequate Internet skills (e.g. Lucio and Walker, 2005; Bibby, 2008). Nevertheless, this conclusion also underlines the digital divide issue which warns that online engagement efforts cannot be equally as inclusive as traditional ones and need to be combined properly with traditional strategies. The implications of such integrative efforts can be significant within the broader agenda for labour movement transformation (e.g. Lévesque and Murray, 2010). However, as also reflected by the survey results, it shouldn't be implied that online communications will necessarily lead to political engagement in union actions. Research has indicated complicated relationships between social networking and variables such as political participation and social capital (e.g. Valenzuela et al., 2009; Ellison et al., 2007).

Finally, this study re-enforces Meijer's and Thaens' (2010) conclusion that, despite the global characteristics of Web 2.0 tools, a one-size-fits-all approach towards their use underestimates their potential to fit in with localised settings and achieve meaningful results. Instead, particularly given the ideologically and culturally driven nature of non-profit organisations (e.g. Zhang et al., 2010; Burt and Taylor 2003), appropriate research and monitoring seem to be a priori conditions for developing operational strategies tailored to the needs of specific audiences. Part of this effort relates to the adoption or non-adoption of promising technologies as an informed decision and not the outcome of institutional influences. For example, in the union case, using social media other than the popular Facebook would be an opportunity to demonstrate innovation, but support from members would clearly not be satisfactory.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to explore the potential of membership engagement for non-profit organisations using social networking tools. Recognising the limited empirical work on this topic, this paper reports on a survey conducted with a Greek trade union. The results indicated the existence of a core audience which could contribute to the union's online activities and also engage outside working hours. Internet skills were identified as the most important variable explaining member's perceived benefits towards the union's online presence. In contrast, certain offline variables such as traditional participation were found to have limited effects.

The study has limitations, mainly related to the particular characteristics of the medium-sized Greek union's audience, i.e. their relatively young age, high level of education and high adoption of home broadband Internet. It is a single organisation and as a bank union belongs to the category of well-resourced ones compared to most non-profit organisations globally. Not to mention that the selected variables accounted for only a small portion of what motivated those individuals to consider the union's online presence beneficial. The study was also not able to explore in equal depth networking tools other than Facebook. Future work should certainly elaborate on those factors in different settings and, when possible, examine the long term impact of online engagement strategies. Additionally, Web 2.0 tools in the non-profit context can be useful for reasons complementary to membership engagement, for example, in terms of how they foster international collaborations and enable organisations themselves to learn from each other.

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