

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2021-05-25

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Marques, S. H. & Vaughn, K. (2019). How international nonprofit organizations can use Facebook to build relationships with potential donors and volunteers. In Vopava, J., Douda, V., Kratochvil, R. and Konecki, M. (Ed.), Proceedings of The 14th IAC 2019. (pp. 51-60). Praga: MAC Prague consulting Ltd.

Further information on publisher's website:

--

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Marques, S. H. & Vaughn, K. (2019). How international nonprofit organizations can use Facebook to build relationships with potential donors and volunteers. In Vopava, J., Douda, V., Kratochvil, R. and Konecki, M. (Ed.), Proceedings of The 14th IAC 2019. (pp. 51-60). Praga: MAC Prague consulting Ltd.. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

HOW INTERNATIONAL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS CAN USE FACEBOOK TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH POTENTIAL DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Susana Henriques Marques; Kalen Vaughn

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL)

BRU-IUL

Marketing, Operations and Strategy Department

Avenida das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisbon, Portugal

Susana.marques@iscte-iul.pt

***Corresponding author:**

Susana.marques@iscte-iul.pt

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to investigate and discuss the applications of marketing in the nonprofit sector, among international nonprofit organizations. The paper will focus on the role of Facebook in nonprofit marketing, this study aims to investigate the connection between Facebook engagement and real world behavior – in this case, donation and volunteer activity. The goals of this investigation were accomplished through a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research backed by a thorough literature review. The content of three nonprofit organizations' Facebook pages was analyzed, and a survey was administered to the followers of these organizations. Findings revealed that a follower's perceptions of the content shared by the nonprofit organization, as well as his/her relationship with that nonprofit organization, positively influences that follower's engagement on Facebook in the form of likes, comments and shares. It was also revealed that engagement via Facebook is related to a follower's real-world donation and volunteer behavior. To achieve success via Facebook and garner donors and volunteers, international nonprofit organizations must therefore focus on sharing interesting and engaging content as well as building relationships with their followers through Relationship Marketing techniques and online interactivity.

Keywords: Marketing, Relationship Marketing, Nonprofit Marketing, Social Media, Facebook

Main Conference Topic: Marketing Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The scope of this investigation will be to identify and analyze the ways in which three well-known international nonprofit organizations are currently using Facebook as part of their digital marketing strategies, and also to examine the influences on Facebook engagement as well as the potential of Facebook engagement as a driver for real-world donation and volunteer behavior.

The importance of online engagement has been described by several authors (Kumar et al., 2010; Bowden, 2009; Bell and Esingerich, 2007), and it is the overall contention of the

literature that engagement amongst consumers is of the utmost importance when building relationships between a brand and its target audience. With the rise of Facebook as a marketing tool, it is important to understand the real value of a “like”, a comment or a share, and whether or not this engagement may be extended to or associate with real-world action such as donation and volunteering.

It is generally agreed upon in the literature that nonprofit organizations are not currently using Facebook to its full potential; specifically, they are not utilizing the platform’s full potential for two-way communication with followers (Cho, Schweickart & Haase, 2014). It is therefore important to understand how the three nonprofit organizations under analysis are currently using this tool, and identify any opportunities that may exist for building relationships using this platform.

The importance of engagement is agreed upon throughout the literature with some attention given to drivers of online engagement; however, it is also crucial to understand what influences engagement with a nonprofit organization and what nonprofit organizations can do to increase engagement. A gap has been identified in the literature as to the drivers of the three levels of online engagement with a nonprofit: likes, comments and shares. As it is the objective of a nonprofit organization to create deeper levels of engagement, the two latter behaviors are of particular importance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship marketing is an approach that emphasizes customer interaction in order to foster loyalty and long-term engagement. It is defined as “*the process of identifying, developing, maintaining and terminating relational exchanges with the purpose of enhancing performance*” (Palmatier, 2008). The goal of this process is to establish, maintain and enhance relationships with customers and other partners (Grönroos, 1994). Whereas traditional marketing strategies focus on attracting new customers, relationship marketing focuses on solidifying relationships with customers, creating customer loyalty, and serving customers (Berry, 1985). This is one of many key differences between relationship marketing and transactional marketing.

Relationship marketing strategies can benefit both the company and its clients. The company will benefit due to long-term customer relationships, and thus higher customer profitability. Consumers who are satisfied with the company may become customer advocates, thus providing increased exposure for the brand. Through open communication, the company will benefit from customer feedback and can then make necessary adjustments to better meet their clients’ needs. At the same time, customers benefit from a relationship marketing strategy in that their needs are addressed, and they feel a stronger connection with the brand (Ruiz, 2012)

Two key factors in relationships marketing are commitment and trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment exists when the consumer has the desire to maintain his or her relationship with an organization, while trust exists when the consumer has confidence in the organization’s reliability and integrity. Commitment and trust develop through effective relationship marketing, in which the organization provides superior resources, opportunities and benefits, maintains a high standard of values, communicates valuable information and avoids taking advantage of exchange partners.

A key concept of relationship marketing is trust, which has been defined as a “willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” and exists when one party is confident in the other’s reliability and integrity – the latter associated with qualities such as consistency, competency, honesty, fairness, and benevolence, among others (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Because relationship marketing has been defined as requiring a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises, trust is absolutely required, as each member of the exchange must be confident that the other will uphold its promises (Grönroos, 1994).

The concept of commitment is central to relationship marketing, and has been defined as “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it, that is, the committed partner believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As already mentioned, commitment to an organization exists when a consumer has the desire to maintain his or her relationship with an organization; the concept of commitment is thus closely related to that of customer loyalty, as well as mutuality and the foresaking of alternatives (Gundlach, Achrol & Mentzer, 1995).

Palmatier (2008) defines satisfaction as a customer’s “affective state toward a relationship”; that is, the customer should be happy with his or her relationship with the company. A customer will feel satisfied, in general, if he gets what he expects and wants from the relationship (Naskrent, 2011). It is important to note, however, that there is a significant difference between cumulative satisfaction and transaction-specific satisfaction; while the former is a general level of satisfaction based on all experiences of the firm, the latter is an immediate postpurchase evaluative judgment, or a brief emotional reaction to a recent experience with the firm; cumulative satisfaction is much more important in order to understand a customer’s relationship with a firm, and can be seen as a key mediating construct between attitudes and future intentions (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999).

Because so many nonprofit organizations are based on establishing personal contacts with beneficiaries and donors/volunteers, and require a high level of interaction, this sector is an ideal domain for relationship marketing (Brennan & Brady, 1999). The target audience of a nonprofit can benefit from relationship marketing through receiving relevant and useful information, feeling closer to the organization, enjoying interaction with the charity, having a sense of belonging, and feeling valued and respected (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005).

Social media, in particular social networking sites such as Facebook that provide users with varying levels of interaction with a firm, has enormous potential as a marketing tool. Social media has provided companies with numerous benefits, including but not limited to increased brand recognition, improved brand loyalty, higher traffic and conversion rates, decreased marketing costs, and perhaps most importantly, a richer customer experience of the brand as well as improved opportunities for customer insight (DeMers, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

From the literature regarding relationship marketing via social media in the nonprofit sector, and the characteristics of donor engagement via social media, it was possible to develop several research hypotheses concerning the influences on donor engagement and the connection between engagement and real-world donor behavior.

When considering a donor's engagement level on Facebook, there are several factors that may influence this activity. The first is the organization's brand image and how the brand is perceived by the follower. These perceptions may be influenced by the brand's presence on Facebook, but they may also be shaped by several other factors such as the brand's presence in the media or branding exercises undertaken by the brand. The literature has suggested that followers are more likely to engage with a brand on Facebook when they have positive perceptions of the brand. This led to the formulation of Hypothesis 1:

H1: A follower's perceptions of the nonprofit organization have a positive impact on his or her level of engagement with the NPO on Facebook.

The research has also suggested that a person's likelihood to engage with a brand on Facebook is directly related to their perceptions of the content shared by the brand; whether they find it interesting, entertaining and engaging (among other qualities) or not. This led to the formulation of Hypothesis 2:

H2: A follower's perceptions of the content shared by the nonprofit organization have a positive impact on his or her level of engagement with the NPO on Facebook.

Finally, research has suggested that Relationship Marketing efforts undertaken by a brand have direct influence on its followers' level of engagement. Those individuals who perceive a high level of relationship quality, represented by various dimensions including trust, satisfaction and commitment, are more likely to engage with the brand. This led to the formulation of Hypothesis 3.

H3: A follower's perceptions of his or her relationship with the NPO have a positive impact on his or her level of engagement with the NPO on Facebook.

After examining the influences on a follower's level of engagement on Facebook, it is important to understand the real value of this online engagement. Was UNICEF correct in their assertion that "Likes don't save lives," or is there a real world value to online engagement. Are those individuals who are more engaged online more likely to donate and volunteer in the real world? The research would suggest that there is a correlation between online engagement and offline interactivity with the brand, leading to the formulation of Hypothesis 4:

H4: A follower's level of engagement on Facebook has a positive impact on his or her donation and volunteer behavior.

It should be noted that the three potential influences of online engagement level could certainly be interrelated. Perceptions of the NPO due to the organization's branding activities or other factors can certainly influence a donor's perceived relationship quality, as indicated throughout the literature; however for the purposes of this study, the influences of each factor will be examined separately; this will help to understand the importance of three crucial potential benefits of social media: building a stronger brand image, reaching new audiences through interesting and engaging content, and building a relationship with the brand's target audience.

In order to better visualize and understand the hypotheses brought forth in this study and the proposed relationship between each of the variables, a conceptual map was constructed, as seen in figure 1.

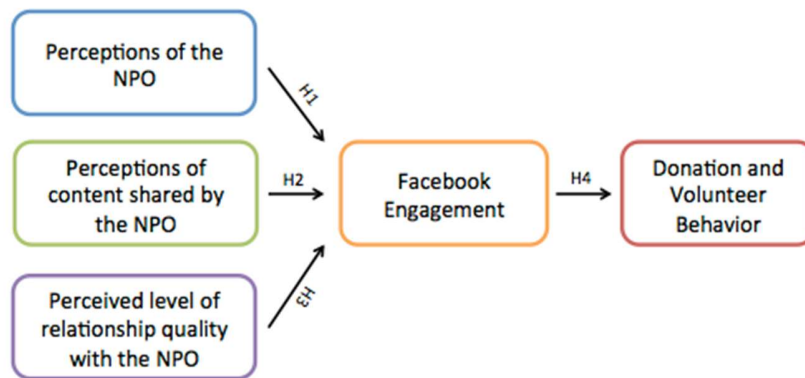


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

A second source of secondary data used in this study are a series of strategic reports and other information made public by the various nonprofit organizations under analysis. These will be used in the next section of this paper, as part of a qualitative analysis of the strategies currently being used by the nonprofit organizations on Facebook and how effectively they are engaging with their target audiences.

The first form of primary data used in this study was an observational study of the three nonprofit organizations' Facebook pages. While the intention was to use interviews with members of the organizations, unfortunately this was not possible due to unwillingness on the part of all three nonprofit organizations. Instead, a list of criteria was used to assess each of the Facebook pages, and an online assessment tool called Likealyzer used to gain valuable insight into each page, including engagement rates and response rates.

The main form of quantitative data that was used in this study was an online questionnaire. The population being analyzed in this study consists of Facebook followers of three nonprofit organizations: the American Red Cross, Greenpeace and UNICEF. The questionnaire was sent directly via private message to 4500 individuals on Facebook over a period of approximately 12 weeks. The survey questionnaire was sent to an equal number of followers (1500) for each nonprofit organization. Of the individuals who received the questionnaire, 298 responded, representing a response rate of 6.6%.

This method of sampling represents a probability sampling approach (Mooi and Sarstedt, 2011). Facebook allows an individual to search for followers of a specific organization, therefore providing a clear sampling frame for the total population, and giving each follower an equal chance of being included in the sample.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the Facebook pages of three nonprofit organizations – American Red Cross, Greenpeace and UNICEF, were examined and analyzed in order to better understand the current strategies currently being used by each organization. A list of criteria was used to guide a qualitative assessment of each Facebook page, while many other online sources provided useful insight into the organizations' social media strategies.

The first nonprofit organization analyzed was the American Red Cross, a humanitarian nonprofit organization that specializes in five key areas: disaster relief, supporting military families, collecting blood donations, health and safety services and international services. Have 684,440 current followers of their primary Facebook page, which has been active since July of 2008. This seems like a relatively low number considering that the organization is present and active in 187 countries around the world; this could be explained by the presence of several smaller chapters having their own Facebook pages.

The organization's Facebook page has an extremely low engagement rate of only .86%. According to the Likealyzer rating system, brands should have at least a 7% engagement rate. Red Cross posts on average nine times per week and receives an average of 437 likes, comments and shares per post. They allow fans to post directly to their page, but do not usually respond to these posts; in fact, the organization's response rate to messages posted on their page is only 3%. The organization provides contact information in the form of an address and phone number, as well as a website; however, nowhere on the page do they ask or encourage followers to contact them directly via phone or email. In addition to the general website link, the page also has a direct "Donate" button which enables followers to donate without ever leaving the Facebook page.

The second nonprofit organization was UNICEF, an international humanitarian nonprofit charity organization which primarily focuses on children's rights and emergency relief around the world. UNICEF has 5,262,655 followers on Facebook, and has been active since 2009. The page has an overall engagement rate of 3.7%. While this is significantly higher than the engagement rate of Red Cross, it is still lower than the target recommended engagement rate of 7%. The organization posts 4.6 posts per day on average, or 32 times per week, and posts a combination of videos, images and links. The organization receives an average of 10,192 likes, comments and shares per post.

Overall, the actions taken by UNICEF on its Facebook page support its overall strategy as laid out in the organization's 2013 Annual Report. The organization posts a variety of content including images, links, and videos. The content tends to focus on real human beings around the world. By providing content and not directly asking for donations or volunteering, the organization seems to be achieving its goal of focusing on building dialogue around the important issues rather than campaigning for action. UNICEF is also highly successful in responding to its followers' comments and questions, doing so on nearly every post, and thus demonstrating a strong willingness to build relationships with its followers.

The third and final organization to be analyzed was Greenpeace, an international environmental nonprofit organization with offices in over 40 countries, focusing on environmental activism and raising awareness about environmental issues around the world. The organization is known for its grassroots marketing techniques and controversial campaigns, as well as their activism efforts which are sometimes illegal. The Facebook page of Greenpeace International has 2,277,742 followers and has been active since 2008. They have an engagement rate of 5.83%, which is higher than that of both of the other nonprofit organizations being analyzed. The organization shares 5.98 posts per day or approximately 42 posts per week, consisting of a combination of images, videos and links.

Followers are permitted to send direct messages to Greenpeace and also to post on its timeline; however, the response rate to these posts is “catastrophic”, according to the Likealyzer report. Indeed, it appeared that in general, posts to the timeline were largely ignored by the organization.

Greenpeace avoids asking for donations and volunteer behavior via their Facebook page, though these call-to-actions are clearly displayed on their website. Rather, they focus on encouraging people to get involved in the issues by signing petitions, joining email lists and partaking in simple forms of digital activism. This supports the organization’s strategy of using social media as an initial entry point, encouraging small and simple actions to forms connections that can later be nurtured to create real action. Their relatively high engagement rate (when compared to the other two organizations) may stem from this strategy and would indicate that they are having some success in creating an online activist community.

1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Respondents were from a variety of age groups, genders, income brackets, and education levels. They were from 31 different countries; the countries most represented among the sample were the United States with 126 respondents.

The number of responses was roughly equal for each nonprofit organization under analysis. Of the total 298 responses, 81 were regarding UNICEF, 101 responses were regarding Greenpeace, and 115 were regarding Red Cross.

From an initial examination of the questionnaire results, three criteria stood out as eliciting a positive response from respondents regarding all three nonprofit organizations: engaging, informative and interesting. The lowest scores were for controversial, entertaining and challenging.

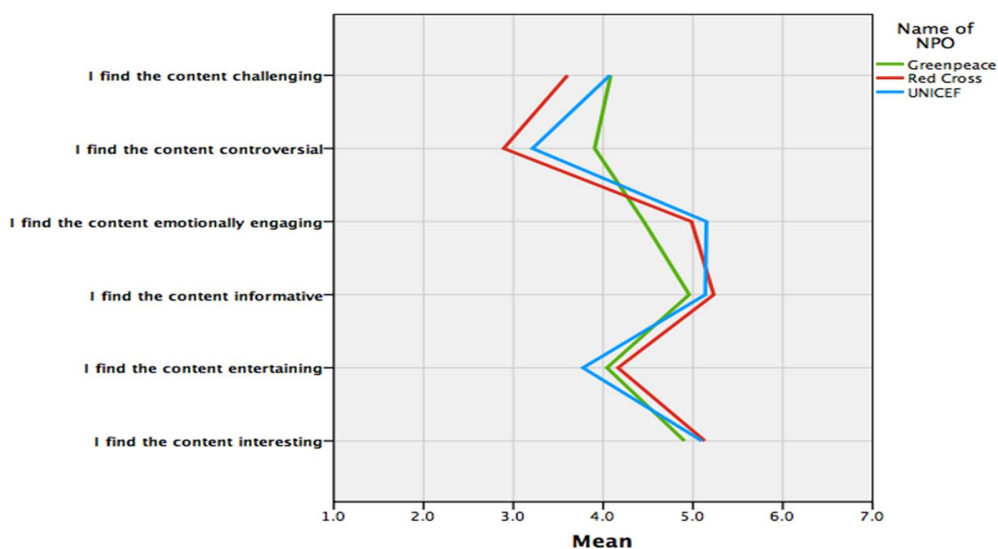


Figure 2 - Mean responses regarding perception of Facebook Content

Like is the lowest level of engagement possible on a brand’s Facebook page and was

therefore a very common behavior among respondents, as seen previously. In order to visual the connecting between “like” behavior and donation and volunteer behavior, donation and volunteer behaviors were assigned ascending numerical values and plotted on a line graph, which seemed to indicate a positive relationship between a respondent’s “like” behavior and all four types of donation and volunteer behavior (Figure 43).

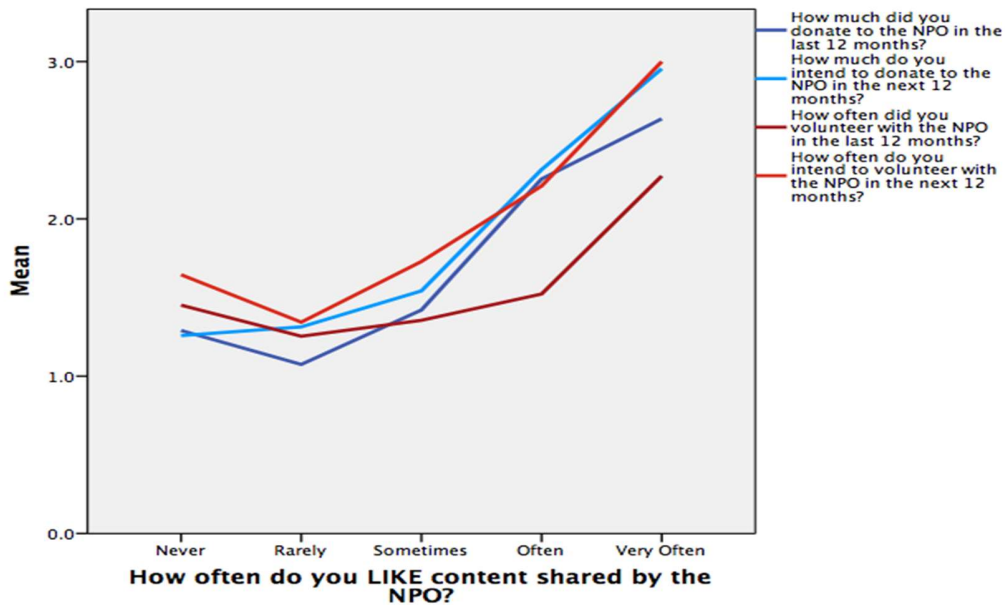


Figure 3 - Influence of LIKE behavior on donation and volunteering.

Due to the small number of respondents who answered “never” and who answered “very often,” respondents were grouped into three new groups: never/rarely, sometimes, and often/very often. Kruskal-Wallis tests were then used to compare the distribution of donation and volunteer behavior between these three groups.

All four tests yielded sig. values of .000, concluding that the distributions were significantly different for all four donation and volunteer behaviors. Mean ranks clearly suggested that respondents who “liked” content more frequently on the nonprofit’s Facebook pages donated more in the last year and felt more likely to donate in the following year. They also had a higher rate of past volunteer behavior, and intended to volunteer more over the coming year.

In general, the survey results supported the initial hypotheses proposed in this study. However, there was some deviation from the expected results.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, that a follower’s perceptions of the nonprofit organization have positive impact on his or her level of engagement with a nonprofit organization, it was found that while all dimensions of brand perception had a positive impact on an individual’s liking behavior, only perceived reliability and perceived benevolence had a positive impact on an individual’s sharing behavior. None of the dimensions had a positive impact on an individual’s commenting behavior. It can therefore be stated that **Hypothesis 1 was partially supported by the questionnaire results; brand perception has a positive impact on liking behavior.**

Hypothesis 2 predicted that a follower's perceptions of the content shared by the NPO would have a positive impact on his or her level of engagement with a nonprofit organization. Statistical analysis indicated that all dimensions of perceptions of the content had a positive impact on liking, sharing and commenting; it can therefore be concluded the **Hypothesis 2 was fully supported by the questionnaire results; perception of the content shared by NPO has a positive impact on engagement level.**

Concerning Hypothesis 3, that a follower's perceptions of his or her relationship with the NPO have a positive impact on his or her level of engagement, statistical analysis of the survey results indicated that all dimensions of perceptions of relationship had a positive impact on both liking and sharing behavior, while all dimensions *except* trust and obligation had a positive impact on commenting behavior. It can therefore be stated that **Hypothesis 3 was strongly supported; perception of one's relationship with the NPO has a positive impact on engagement.**

Finally, Hypothesis 4 postulated that a follower's level of engagement with the NPO on Facebook has a positive relationship with his or her donation behavior. Survey results indicated that all three levels of Facebook engagement – liking, sharing and commenting on posts – had a positive impact on both donation and volunteer behavior. It can therefore be said that **Hypothesis 4 was fully supported; online engagement has a positive impact on real world donation and volunteer behavior.**

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Over the last decade, Facebook has clearly established itself as a valuable tool for communication and between brands and their followers. When used effectively, this platform can play a crucial role in building meaningful and lasting relationships with followers. This study attempted to show how useful Facebook can be for nonprofit organizations, and to illustrate the fact that while it is easy to dismiss the simple act of “liking” content on Facebook as meaningless and superficial, this action represents an initial connection between brand and consumer that, when nurtured, can translate into much more meaningful action.

A qualitative analysis of three international nonprofit organizations showed that these organizations are still not using Facebook to its full potential. Both the Red Cross and Greenpeace failed to interact consistently with followers who were actively commenting on the organization's content, therefore failing to take advantage of a key act of engagement initiated by the follower. A comment represents the highest level of engagement possible on Facebook, and every attempt should thus be made to nurture that connection and form a deeper, more meaningful connection with the follower.

Results of the survey indicated that while overall perception of the brand was not a strong indicator of the level of online engagement, both the quality of the content shared by the nonprofit as well as the quality of the relationship between the nonprofit and the follower both influence the follower's level of engagement. It is therefore essential that nonprofit organizations strive to share meaningful and engaging content, and also that they partake in relationship marketing strategies in order to build relationships with their followers.

Furthermore, it was shown that there is a relationship between a follower's level of engagement on Facebook and his/her real-world donation and volunteer behavior. Followers who are engaged on Facebook are more likely to donate and volunteer in real life. Nonprofit organizations should therefore recognize the importance of online engagement and strive to increase these measures, as online engagement is just the beginning of a stronger and more meaningful connection with the brand.

REFERENCES

- Bell, S., & Esingerich, A. 2007. The paradox of customer education: customer experience and loyalty in the financial services industry. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41: 466-486.
- Bennett, R., & Barkensjo, A. 2005. Relationships quality, relationship marketing, and client perception of the levels of service quality of charitable organizations. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 16(1): 81-106
- Berry, L. 1995. Relationship marketing of services – Growing interest, emerging perspectives. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 23(4): 236-245.
- Bowden, J. 2009. The process of customer engagement: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 17(1): 63-74.
- Brennan, L., & Brady, E. 1999. Relating to marketing? Why relationship marketing works for not-for-profit organizations. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 4(4): 327-337.
- Cho, M., Schweickart, T., & Haase, A. 2014. Public engagement with nonprofit organizations on Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 40:565-567.
- DeMers, J. 2014. The top 10 benefits of social media marketing. *Forbes Entrepreneurs*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2014/08/11/the-top-10-benefits-garbarino>
- Garbarino, E. & Johnson, M. 1999. The different roles of satisfaction, trust and commitment in customer relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(2): 70-87.
- Grönroos, C. 1994. Marketing mix to relationship marketing: Towards a paradigm shift in marketing. *Management Decision*, 32(2): 4-20.
- Gundlach, G.; Achrol, R. & Mentzer, J. 1995. The structure of commitment in exchange. *Journal of Marketing*, 59: 78-92.
- Kumar, V.; Aksoy, L.; Donkers, B.; Venkatesan, R.; Wiesel, T.; & Tillmans, S. 2010. Undervalued or overvalued customers: capturing total customer engagement value. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3): 297-310.
- Mooi, E. & Johnson, M. 2011. *A Concise Guide to Market Research*. Springer.
- Morgan, M. & Hunt, S. 1994. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3): 20-38.
- Palmatier, R. 2008. *Relationship marketing*. Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute.
- Naskrent, J. & Siebelt, P. 2011. The influence of commitment, trust, satisfaction, and involvement on donor retention. *International Journal of Voluntary and Non Profit Organizations*, 22(4): 757-778.
- Ruiz, J. (2012). 5 Benefits of a relationship marketing strategy. *Strategic Marketing Solutions*. Retrieved from <http://www.strategicdriven.com/marketing-insights-blog/5-benefits-of-a-relationship-marketing-strategy/> (20 February, 2012)