

Websites or Facebook Groups

What Choice for Nonprofit Organizations in Singapore?

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Abstract

In Singapore society where nonprofit organizations play a crucial role in providing welfare services to the people in need, it is important to understand how new media such as website and social network sites have been helping them engage and build relationship with the public. Some nonprofits are stepping up their online communication strategies by creating Facebook groups to connect better with an increasingly Internet savvy population; yet some still remain satisfied with what their websites have delivered so far. A content analysis of eight websites and four Facebook profiles of nonprofits in Singapore, together with in-depth interviews with representatives from three organizations in the samples showed that there is a significant difference between nonprofits using only websites and those using both platforms in terms of disclosure and deliberative public sphere, with stronger use observed in the latter group. However, a Facebook group was found not to be a determining factor because looking at the websites of the two groups, the latter also showed a stronger use of elements supporting disclosure strategy on their websites. A Facebook group, thus, could be viewed as an extension of a nonprofit's website, serving as a gateway to the website where more relationship building and public discourse engagement elements are available.

Introduction

The nonprofit sector in Singapore

Hailed as a one of the most important economic hubs in Southeast Asia, Singapore has transformed itself from a trading port to a modern city within a relatively short period of time. To achieve such a magical transformation, the government of the city-state has to prioritize its social policies that concentrate on providing essential services including housing, health, and education. The objective is to “reduce the welfare burden on the state and to preserve funds for developmental purposes” (Cheung, 1992). The fact that “welfare assistance from the state is provided only as the last resort” (Cheung, 1992) has opened up a big gap for the nonprofit sector to fill. In this sense, the role played by local nonprofits is undoubtedly crucial to the Singapore society.

As defined by Hodgkinson and McCarthy (1992), nonprofit organizations are “organizations formed to serve the public good, and income (or profits) from these organizations are not distributed to members or owners. The primary functions that

the nonprofit or voluntary sector performs...are to serve underserved or neglected population, to expand the freedom of or to empower people, to engage in advocacy for social change, and to provide services” (p. 3). Salamon and Anheier (1997), through an examination of the nonprofit sector in the U.S., the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Japan, showed that nonprofits could be defined by five attributes namely institutionalized, private, non-profit distributing, self-governing, and voluntary. Both definitions are relevant to the context of nonprofits in Singapore, whose missions are to fill up the welfare gap as mentioned earlier.

Nonprofits and online communication technologies

In order to fulfill the mission of bridging the welfare gap in Singapore society, local nonprofits have to first make themselves visible to the public, and second sustain their operations by all means. The development of the Internet has opened up a whole new communication space that can help the nonprofits further advance these two goals critical to their existence. Through a website, a nonprofit can now make itself more visible and conveniently accessible to the public, regardless of time and space constraints. Furthermore, as the Internet has evolved into the next phase – commonly known as ‘Web 2.0’ – with enhanced interactivity and scalability, the nonprofits seem to have even more means to achieve the goals. Tagged with the Web 2.0 era are social media such as blogs, podcasts, wikis, or social network sites that allow the sharing of user-generated content, collaboration, convergence of services, building of virtual communities, and most important of all, conversations. These phenomena suggest that it is sensible for nonprofits to leverage these new media to increase public awareness of their organizations, promote their causes, and garner wider support.

With more than three millions Internet users in Singapore, the penetration rate at 67.4%, and user growth rate at 158.7% as of 2008 (www.internetworldstats.com),

the need for local nonprofits to tap into the online communication space is all the more relevant. Indeed, having a website is quite common for most nonprofits here. What is interesting is some nonprofits such as Red Cross Singapore, Mercy Reliefs, Make-A-Wish Foundation, and many more have started to establish their presence on Facebook, one of the most popular and fastest-growing social network sites (SNSs) with about 200 millions active users worldwide (www.facebook.com). In its original form, Facebook is a virtual place for people to connect with long lost friends. However, overtime, it has evolved into a place not just for connecting friends and loved ones, but also for social groups to promote and advocate their causes. In this context, such move of nonprofits to leverage SNSs is understandable because they seem to be where the crowd is. The questions are how nonprofits in Singapore are doing it and to what extent a Facebook group, as compared with a website, has helped them enhance their online presence, extend their reach, build relationship with the public and engage them in the open discussion about the issues they advocate.

Within the scope of this paper, a pilot study of websites and Facebook groups of nonprofits in Singapore will be presented and discussed. The two research methods employed in this study were content analysis and in-depth interview. The rationale for such choice will be further elaborated in the methodology section. I will also discuss the challenges underlying the main limitations of the paper as well as future directions for the final study.

Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, the two main goals of nonprofits are to increase public awareness of their existence and sustain their operations. There could be many answers to how these can be achieved, but the most important of all lies with a

nonprofit's ability to build relationship with the public and engage them in open discussions about the issues it is advocating.

Kent and Taylor (1998) provided a "theory-based, strategic framework to facilitate relationship building with the publics through the World Wide Web." According to this framework, there are five principles organizations have to observe. First, a dialogic loop or feedback loop has to be available as a starting point for two-way communications. Second, the usefulness of information has to be ensured. Third, information should be frequently updated to generate return visits. Fourth, the interface should be intuitive and easy to navigate. Last but not least, it is important to conserve visitors within a website by avoiding providing links to many external sites. These five principles aim to provide a conducive and interactive environment that can foster the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships between the nonprofit and its target public through dialogues.

As maintained by Kent and Taylor (1998), "technology itself can neither create nor destroy relationships; rather, it is how the technology is used that influences organization-public relationship" (p. 324). There have been a number of empirical studies addressing the 'how' question posed here. Taylor, Kent, and White (2001) operationalized the five principles of relationship building reviewed above in an empirical study of how activist organizations were using the Internet to build relationships. From an examination of websites of one hundred environmental organizations, the authors found that "while most activist organizations meet the technical and design aspects required for dialogic relationship building on the Web, they are not yet fully engaging their publics in two-way communications" (p. 263). Such findings appear to resonate an observation made by other researchers that most content online were "generally associated with marketing activities and promote a

favorable corporate images in the public's perception (Cross, 1994; Hill & White, 2000; Ho, 2001, as cited in Jo & Kim, 2003). Hill and White (2000), from 13 in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners, found that some of them still viewed engaging the target audience through the Web as a B-list task even though they recognized the importance of having an online presence in reaching and building relationship with new audience.

Closely linked with relationship building is the effort to engage the public in open dialogues, which leads to another well-known concept of the "public sphere." As defined by Habermas (1997), the public sphere is "a domain of our social life where such a thing as public opinion can be formed [where] citizens... deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion... [to] express and publicize their views" (as cited in McKee, 2005, p. 4). In other words, the public sphere can be seen as "a space for communication, which in principle is available to all" (Hollander, 1988, as cited in Ihlen and Ruler, 2007, p. 245). Such an open and transparent space for public debates used to thrive during the Enlightenment (Kenix, 2008). However, modernization and industrialization had overshadowed the public sphere with consumerism and commercialization of the mass media (Kellner, 2006, as cited in Kenix, 2008). In this context, when the Internet came around and has become increasingly sophisticated, it also brings about the hope for a rejuvenated public sphere, where everyone can now make his voice heard again in the virtual world. Sharing of information, opinions and ideas is now can be done instantaneously and simultaneously thanks to digitalization. With Internet access, the world is now more interconnected, yet at the same time, seemingly fragmented because of the proliferation of many different topics of interest being shared and discussed online – a phenomenon that can be called multiple public spheres. This is the presumably

inherent democratizing power of the Internet as “after much debate and deliberation, these interactive public spheres then develop into public opinion” (Kenix, 2008, p. 410).

The question is to what extent all the promising presumptions above have been reflected through the actual practice of organizations as well as individuals. A content analysis of websites of nonprofits in the U.S. showed that these organizations had to pump in much more efforts to develop the Internet as a deliberative, interconnected, accountable platform for themselves and a discursive, activist space for the target public (Kenix, 2007). Qualitative findings from focus group meetings with representatives of nonprofits across the U.S. unveiled similar and somewhat more interesting insights showing that “claims of sweeping improvements in democratic participation through the Internet have not been supported” (Kenix, 2008, p. 422). Although participants of the focus groups acknowledged the value of the Internet in creating a deliberative space for public opinion to form, their daily use of this platform still followed the corporate model that focused more on generating economic returns such as donation, sales of merchandise, and sponsorship. One of the key reason for this reality was the financial constraints faced by most nonprofits which were “struggling to economically maintain their web presence” (p. 422) This finding is thought-provoking not only because it challenges the Habermasian view of online communication but also because it raises an awareness of the corporatization of the virtual world (Kenix, 2008).

Most of the literature reviewed thus far has mainly focused on websites as a ubiquitous online communication technology employed by nonprofits. What about social media such as Flickr, YouTube, Facebook and the like? The potential of Facebook and similar social network sites in terms of relationship building has started

to gain more attention from both communication practitioners and media scholars. A content analysis of 275 profiles of legally incorporated nonprofits on Facebook by Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas (2009) revealed that “nonprofits have not incorporated the vast majority of the Facebook applications available to them into their social network presence” (p. 4), and of the three relationship building strategies which are disclosure, information dissemination, and involvement, disclosure was found to be the most often used one.

Research Questions

From the literature review, we have roughly seen how nonprofits in the US have been using online communication platforms in their communication strategies. As this area is seemingly understudied at least in the Southeast Asian context, it would be worthwhile, for a start, to have a comprehensive understanding of how nonprofits here, particularly in Singapore, have been leveraging website and Facebook to engage and build relationship with the public.

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, it is imperative for nonprofits in Singapore to make themselves visible to the public, and second, sustain their operations. The recent advancements in online communication via Web 2.0 platforms as well as the increasingly Internet-savvy population in Singapore suggest that it is sensible for nonprofits to leverage these new media to increase public awareness of their organizations, promote their causes, and garner wider support. Secondly, it is commonly known that most nonprofits have to operate within a somewhat tight budget and limited manpower. Moving online appears to be a more affordable option to achieve their publicity objectives. Therefore, it is worth exploring how they have been doing this and the findings may provide useful recommendations so that such

platforms will be better utilized. This leads to the formation of the first research question as followed:

RQ1: How have nonprofits in Singapore been using website and Facebook to engage and build relationship with the public?

The second research question addresses the phenomenon that some nonprofits only use website and some have stepped up their online presence with a Facebook group. It is necessary to compare the two platforms to see to what extent they could facilitate the local nonprofits in their effort to engage and build relationship with the public. Such a comparative perspective would be greatly beneficial for nonprofits to make suitable choices of platforms that could enhance their communication strategies.

RQ2: Are there any differences in the level of engagement and relationship building between nonprofits with website only and nonprofits with both website and Facebook group?

Methodology

Rationale for choice of research methods

Content analysis and in-depth interviews were the two research methods used in this pilot study. There are several reasons for such combination. Firstly, since RQ1 and RQ2 are mainly concerned about the descriptive level of how nonprofits in Singapore have been using websites and Facebook, it is imperative to examine their respective websites and Facebook profiles to find out the answers. In this sense, content analysis is the most appropriate method.

Secondly, simply using the quantitative data from content analysis alone may not be sufficient in providing in-depth insights into the use of online communication platforms by nonprofits in Singapore. This is because what the coding scheme is concerned is whether or not a particular communication feature is used on a website

or Facebook profile of a nonprofit, which is only at a basic descriptive level. It is, therefore, necessary to use another research method to further enhance the comprehensiveness of the study as a whole. Indeed, it is often recommended that content analysis be combined with other research method to provide more holistic findings of a study.

Procedures

1. Content analysis

a) Sampling

Based on the focus of this study, the sample population includes all nonprofits in Singapore. Sampling frame is one of the main challenges, however. Although there are some directories of nonprofits in Singapore, it is really difficult to find a comprehensive one. The main reason is such lists are compiled based on a self-report or self-declaration procedure. Nonprofits that want to be enlisted could register themselves with these directories. To overcome this challenge, I used Google directories as well as Facebook's search function to find nonprofits that can meet the key criteria of the study, i.e. having/not having a Facebook group and matching in terms of social services provided.

The sampling method that I used was purposive sampling whereby researchers “select a sample on the basis knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study” (Babbie, 2004). Because I wanted to compare nonprofits that use both website and Facebook and those that only use website, I created two lists containing nonprofits that fit into these criteria. Each list has four nonprofits. Together they form four pairs, and each pair is compatible in terms of causes or social services provided (Table 1). The rationale for such compatibility was to rule out the possible argument that nonprofits with different causes or programs may have different ways of using

online communication platforms. Moreover, because the ultimate objective of this pilot study is not to generalize the findings but to test the research methods and identify unforeseen challenges for the final study, purposive sampling is a suitable choice.

Table 1

Nonprofits with website only	Nonprofits with website & Facebook group
Singapore's Children Society (SCS)	Children-At-Risk Empowerment Association (CARE)
Singapore Cat Club (SCC)	Cat Welfare Society (CWS)
Disabled People Association (DPA)	Christian Outreach to the Handicapped (COH)
Society Against Family Violence (SAFV)	Association of Women for Action & Research (AWARE)

b) Measurements and coding scheme

The measurements of this study were adapted based on the schemes developed in two studies, one by Waters, et al. (2009) which focused on Facebook profiles of nonprofits and the other by Kenix (2007), which was developed to examine nonprofits' websites. Since my study is focused on both platforms, a combination of the measurement schemes from both studies will make my own one more comprehensive. Furthermore, for comparison purpose, it is important to use the same coding scheme for both websites and Facebook profiles.

To measure how nonprofits are engaging stakeholders through Facebook, Waters et al. (2009) explored the three main strategies including *disclosure*, *information dissemination*, and *involvement*. On the other hand, Kenix (2007), in her analysis of "the use and narrative structure of Internet functionality that produced the discourse of non-profit sites" (p. 73), also developed another measurement scheme that took into account aspects such as *deliberative public sphere*, *opportunity for activism*, *advertising and fundraising revenue*, *space for marginalized voices*,

interconnected and instantaneous information, and accountability. The components of the dimensions explored in both studies are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Facebook profiles (Waters et al., 2009)		Websites (Kenix, 2007)	
Disclosure	Description, history, mission statement, URL, logo, administrators listed	Deliberative public sphere	Chat rooms, email list or listservs, newsgroups, hit counters
Information dissemination	News links, photo posted, video files, audio files, posted items, discussion wall, press releases, campaign summaries	Opportunity for activism	Volunteer information, calendar of events, name of state or federal officials, phone number of state or federal officials, postal address of state or federal officials, online petition, rally information, email protest, information about upcoming meeting
Involvement	Email to organization, phone number, message board used, calendar of events, volunteer opportunities, donate, store	Advertising and fundraising revenue	Ability to donate online, sponsorship, advertising, annual report, financial information, items for sale
		Space for marginalized voices	Sight disability option, hearing disability option, language option, bandwidth option, login requirement, guestbooks
		Interconnected and instantaneous information	Employment opportunities, mission statement, FAQs, supporting organization information, opposing organization information, government information, media information, data updated, search, function, site index, newsletter
		Accountability	Email, name of email recipient, contact name, type of contact information, phone/fax number, mission statement author, grammatical errors

Merging the above measurements, I developed one for my study. First, I kept the three dimensions of *disclosure*, *information dissemination*, and *involvement* used by Waters et al. (2009). This is because the authors maintained that they “have routinely been found to be helpful in relationship cultivation” (p. 2). Second, I started to modify and incorporate other dimensions explored by Kenix (2007). The three dimensions that I adopted from Kenix’s measurements are *deliberative public sphere*, *accountability*, and *spaces for marginalized voices* because they are almost different from Waters et al.’s ones. I also used most items under these dimensions except for the sight and hearing options under space for marginalized voices. This is due to the fact that a quick look at all the selected samples revealed no sign of such options. Therefore, it is not worth including in this pilot test with a small sample size. The language option was maintained because it is relevant to the multi-ethnic groups in Singapore. As for the bandwidth option, it was kept due to the fact not all Singaporeans have broadband Internet access.

In terms of *opportunities for activism*, it is quite similar to *involvement*, thus I incorporated the functions examined such as online petition, rally information, and email protest to this dimension. As for *advertising and fundraising revenue*, all the functions indeed could be re-grouped under either *information dissemination* or *involvement*. Specifically, under the dimension of *information dissemination*, I added annual report and financial information. These are the two items that nonprofits could choose to disseminate to the public to express transparency as well as garner more support. The other items including donation online, sponsorship, and merchandise for sale are similar to those under *involvement*, except for sponsorship. Therefore, under *involvement*, I added one more item, which is sponsorship information. Clearly, from the nonprofit’s perspective, asking for sponsorship is also a way to get the public

involved in its events or activities to promote a cause. I decided not to use the *interconnectedness or instantaneous information* dimension because its items are actually overlapping with those under *disclosure*, for example mission statement, or *information dissemination* such as media information. However, there is one item under this dimension that I selected and added under the dimension of involvement. It is employment opportunities. This is because hiring people interested in working for nonprofits is also a potentially good way to leverage their influence in their social network to spread out the messages and promote the causes of the organization.

Below are the final dimensions used to measure relationship building and public discourse engagement efforts by nonprofits in this pilot after the modification process.

Table 3

Disclosure	Information dissemination	Involvement	Deliberative public sphere	Accountability	Space for marginalized voices
Description (About us)	Photo (Album/Gallery)	Volunteer information	Chat room	Name of contact person	Language option
History	Video	Event calendar	Mailing list	Working email	Bandwidth option
Mission	Podcast	Petition	Newsgroup/Discussion board	Phone number	
Logo	Blog URL	Email protest	Feedback	Fax number	
Number of members	Announcement	Rally information	Share link (tell a friend)		
Programs/Services	News link	Employment information			
Website URL	Press releases	Merchandise for sales			
Facebook URL	Financial info (annual report)	Donation			
Management team	Campaign summary	Sponsorship			
Admin list	Success stories	Membership			

In addition to the key measures listed above, three additional variables were also included in the coding scheme. They are types of nonprofits, income source, and duration of online presence. The first two variables – types and income sources – aimed to find out some descriptive characteristics of the nonprofits examined. Types of nonprofits were measured using the categories based on the International

Classification of Nonprofit Organizations developed from the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Salamon & Anheier, 1997). As for income sources, the measures used were based on my own analysis of the financial information or annual report shared on the nonprofits' website. Generally, a nonprofit survives on various sources of financial supports, from grants (including government grants), donation, sponsorship, and fundraising activities to membership fees or service fees. The third one – duration of online presence – was introduced as a control variable to see if it has any relationship with any of the dimensions above. This was based on the assumption that the more established a nonprofit's online identity, the more likely that its use of online communication platforms will be strong in terms of the above dimensions. The measurements of duration of online presence were developed based on my own preliminary analysis of the bottom line of each website which indicates the year the website was copyrighted.

After all the variables had been conceptualized with measureable attributes, a coding scheme was created to use during the coding process. Because the focus of the study is the use of various features available for websites and Facebook, the coding scheme is quite simple with 'Yes' means a feature is available (coded as 1) and 'No' means a feature is not available (coded as 0). Simple codes were also given for the other three additional variables.

c) Coding process

There were eight websites and four Facebook profiles to be coded in total. Since the amount of samples is manageable, I did the coding by myself.

d) Data manipulation

SPSS 16.0 was used to analyze the data. After running some descriptive statistical analysis, I started creating two grouping variables for the subsequent independent

sample T-test. The first grouping variable contains two attributes. The first one is nonprofits with website only; the second one is those with both website and Facebook profile. The data for the first attribute remained the same; however, the data for the second attribute were manually manipulated. Firstly, four new cases were added to the data sheet indicating the total value of the combination of both website and Facebook profile for every single measures. The total value was determined by assessing the availability of individual functions or features on both platforms. For example, if both the website and Facebook profile do not have a language option, 0 will be entered to the respective cell because 0 means 'No'. Along this line, if the website does not have the 'Tell a friend' link, but this is available on the Facebook profile, 1 will be entered because it still means 'Yes' as a combined value.

The second grouping variable has two attributes, one refers to websites of nonprofits with website only, and the other websites of nonprofits with both website and Facebook profile. The rationale behind this grouping variable is to compare only the websites to see to what extent a Facebook profile plays a significant role in enhancing the key dimensions of relationship buildings and public discourse engagement.

After creating the two grouping variables, I computed the data for all the individual measures (except for type of nonprofits, income source, and duration of online presence) into six variables representing the six dimensions namely *disclosure*, *deliberative public sphere*, *information dissemination*, *accountability*, and *space for marginalized voices*. These were the main variables used in the subsequent statistical tests.

2. In-depth interviews

I chose the semi-structured interview method to conduct my interviews with representatives from the sample organizations. This is the most suitable method because it allows structural guidance, and at the same time, flexibility during the interview. Because there are two groups of nonprofits, one is using website only and the other using both websites and Facebook, I prepared two sets of interview questions that served as a guide during the interview process. These questions were useful in keeping the conversation focused, yet they are flexible enough to allow the interviewer to expand or probe the respondents further if they mention anything interesting or unexpected during the interviews. The questions aim to further deepen my understanding of the nonprofits' use of both platforms, particularly their motivations, concerns, and features that they find the most useful with regards to relationship building and engaging the public in online discussions.

I contacted the nonprofits examined in the study. For those that have a Facebook group, I sent them a message directly to their group's inbox. This was also a way to see how responsive they were toward communication over this new channel. Only two representatives, one from AWARE and one from CWS, accepted my interview request in the condition that I conducted the interview via phone (AWARE) and email (CWS). Interestingly, both of them are from nonprofits using both communication platforms. In the hope to make my interview findings more balanced, I tried to contact other nonprofits without a Facebook group via both email and telephone. I had an informal conversation with a representative from SCS over the phone. She did not want a face-to-face interview and cautiously answered my questions on the spot. Although the conversation was quite spontaneous, I would still report the information provided by the interviewee because it actually shed light on

the mentality and agenda of nonprofits that appear to be slower in the adoption of the new social media platform.

The interview with the representative from AWARE took place over phone as requested by the respondent. She was the creator of the Facebook group for AWARE. The interview went smoothly and ended in about 40 minutes. I checked with the respondent if she had anything else to share and thanked her for the time spent on the interview.

The second interview with the president of CWS was conducted via email. She requested for an email interview because she was busy with an annual general meeting and could not arrange time to meet with me face-to-face. I sent her the set of questions and received a comprehensive reply within a few days. No further clarification was needed and I sent her a thank you email for her participation.

Results

1. Sample profiles

Of the eight nonprofits examined, seven belong to the category of social services (81.25%); only one organization has a strong focus on civic and advocacy (18.75%). 33.3% of the organizations do not clearly indicate when the website was first set up. For those that specify, it was observed that 25% of nonprofits have had an online identity (website) for more than three years, 16.67% have been online from one to three years, and another 25% have had a website for less than a year. In terms of income sources, as observed, most nonprofits do not survive on one single source of financial support. An analysis of their financial information published on their websites showed that 87.5% of them rely on a mixed source of income – a combination of grant, donation, sponsorship, fundraising activities, etc.; and 12.5% do

not have their financial information posted on the websites, which makes them fall into the ‘unspecified’ category.

2. Having a Facebook group seems to make a difference

In order to see if there are any differences within the two types of grouping variables in terms of *disclosure*, *deliberative public sphere*, *information dissemination*, *involvement*, *accountability*, and *space for marginalized voices*, I ran two independent sample T-tests.

The first test was to compare nonprofits using websites only (Group A) and those using both websites and Facebook groups (Group B). The results show that there are significant differences between Group A and Group B, with Group B showing a stronger use of features that support *disclosure* ($p=.000$) and *deliberative public sphere* ($p=.020$). No significant differences were observed for *involvement*, *information dissemination*, *accountability* and *space for marginalized voices*.

Figure 1

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Disclosure	Equal variances assumed	-15.000	6	.000
	Equal variances not assumed	-15.000	3.000	.001
Deliberative_Public_Sphere	Equal variances assumed	-3.162	6	.020
	Equal variances not assumed	-3.162	5.602	.021
Info_Dissemination	Equal variances assumed	-.822	6	.443
	Equal variances not assumed	-.822	4.748	.450
Involvement	Equal variances assumed	-1.271	6	.251
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.271	5.149	.258
Accountability	Equal variances assumed	-1.567	6	.168
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.567	4.973	.178

The second test was to compare the websites of nonprofits that use websites only (Group C) and those using both websites and Facebook groups (Group D). The results

revealed that there is a significant difference between Group C and Group D, with Group D showing a stronger use of features supporting *disclosure* ($p=.024$). No significant differences were observed for *information dissemination*, *involvement*, *deliberative public sphere*, and *accountability*.

Figure 2

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Disclosure	Equal variances assumed	-3.000	6	.024
	Equal variances not assumed	-3.000	3.000	.058
Deliberative_Public_Sphere	Equal variances assumed	-1.477	6	.190
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.477	6.000	.190
Info_Dissemination	Equal variances assumed	-.476	6	.651
	Equal variances not assumed	-.476	5.130	.653
Involvement	Equal variances assumed	-1.549	6	.172
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.549	4.412	.190
Accountability	Equal variances assumed	-.926	6	.390
	Equal variances not assumed	-.926	5.880	.391

3. Other interesting correlations

Duration of online presence was introduced as a control variable in this study. This was due to a general assumption that the more established an organization is, especially on the virtual space, the more sophisticated its use of online communication tools will be. A correlation test was run to check if *duration of online presence* has any significant relationship with six dimensions of relationship building and public discourse engagement efforts. The results showed that no significant correlations exist, which rules out the assumption mentioned earlier.

Another correlation test was conducted for the six dimensions. The objective of this test was to find out if there are any interesting significant relationships among them. This may provide a good guideline for the final study in terms of hypothesis forming. Three slightly significant correlations were observed from the results.

Firstly, *disclosure* is positively correlated with both *deliberative public sphere* ($r=.529, p<0.05$) and *accountability* ($r=.552, p<0.05$). Secondly, *information dissemination* was positively correlated with *involvement* ($r=.696, p<0.01$). For more details, please refer to Figure 3.

Figure 3

		Correlations					
		Online presence duration	Disclosure	Deliberative public sphere	Info dissemination	Involvement	Accountability
Online presence duration	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.250	-.486	.405	.537	-.119
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.433	.109	.191	.072	.713
	N	12.000	12	12	12	12	12
Disclosure	Pearson Correlation	-.250	1.000	.529*	.278	.227	.553*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.433		.035	.297	.397	.026
	N	12	16.000	16	16	16	16
Deliberative public sphere	Pearson Correlation	-.486	.529*	1.000	.436	.308	.257
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.109	.035		.091	.245	.336
	N	12	16	16.000	16	16	16
Info dissemination	Pearson Correlation	.405	.278	.436	1.000	.696**	.476
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.191	.297	.091		.003	.062
	N	12	16	16	16.000	16	16
Involvement	Pearson Correlation	.537	.227	.308	.696**	1.000	.287
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.072	.397	.245	.003		.282
	N	12	16	16	16	16.000	16
Accountability	Pearson Correlation	-.119	.553*	.257	.476	.287	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.713	.026	.336	.062	.282	
	N	12	16	16	16	16	16.000

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. What lies beneath nonprofits' use of websites and Facebook

To further comprehend nonprofits' use of websites and Facebook, two in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from organizations using both platforms (AWARE and CWS) and one informal interview was carried out with a member of an organization that has only a website to represent itself online (SCS).

The first two in-depth interviews unveiled interesting insights into nonprofits' perspectives and approaches in terms of online communications. With regards to Facebook, the two organizations have been using this platform from four months (CWS) to one year (AWARE). The Facebook groups were created and maintained by a couple of dedicated employees. There are various reasons quoted for choosing social media such as Facebook, from keeping up with the trends, connecting with more people sharing the same social concerns or interests, enhancing brand association to cost-effectiveness. As far as IT budget is concerned, AWARE and CWS do put aside some money for their websites; however, they would keep the expenditure to the minimum. Specifically they will only pay for domain and hosting fee (CWS) and design the website in such a way that requires minimal maintenance and updating work (AWARE).

It was also found that the nonprofits often use Facebook to send mass invites to their members, post messages or announcements on the wall, or publicize their events. The key benefits they have enjoyed so far include convenience of information dissemination and generation of increasing awareness and support. Another interesting point mentioned by the interviewee from AWARE is that the Facebook group actually serves as a gateway to the organization's website. Since the website URL is available on the Facebook profile, visitors who are interested in finding out more about the organization can continue to explore further by simply clicking on the

link. This was further supported by the interviewee from CWS who pointed out that her organization uses Facebook to publicize events and send mass invites, and website to post information about the organization and important announcements.

In addition to the benefits of using Facebook, the interviewee from CWS shared her concern about the fast changing online communication tools that may isolate a group of senior citizens who are presumably less Internet savvy. In other words, despite having the organization's online presence extended to another more cost-effective platform, it does not mean that they can reach out to all social groups. This viewpoint reflects the digital divide issue that has been long discussed since the advance of information and communication technologies. The two interviewees also shared some concerns about how the 'wall' and 'discussion board' features on Facebook have been used thus far. It is difficult, in fact, impossible to manage the wall messages. As for the 'discussion board' on AWARE's Facebook group, the discussions have not been very active despite efforts to post controversial topics to stir public interest. When probed further, the interviewee from AWARE speculated that such inactive participation could be due to the fact that a lot of members may not find the topics about women's rights relevant to their real-life experiences.

In wrapping up the interviews, I asked the interviewees' opinion about social media in general. Both of them agree that these are useful platforms that are more appealing to young people, easy to set up, cost-effective, and able to generate quick responses. When asked about other popular platforms such as Twitter, the interviewee from AWARE said that not many nonprofits are using this because with new communication avenues, they need someone who can fully dedicate time and effort to updating and maintaining the profile, which is still a luxury to them. More importantly, whether or not a nonprofit can use platforms like Twitter depends on

how frequent the updates it has. For AWARE is more concerned about woman issues that appear not to have very frequent updates, especially in a small place like Singapore, she thought that Twitter might not be relevant. The other interviewee from CWS mentioned the use of Flickr to upload event photos once in a while, but emphasized that website and Facebook are still the main communication avenues for her organization.

Lastly an informal interview with a representative from SCS over the phone revealed that the website is the only avenue where visitors could find out more about SCS's programs and services. Indeed, the website was relatively well developed with comprehensive information about the organization and advanced features such as membership registration and online donation. She was aware of the fact that some nonprofits are incorporating social media such as Facebook in their communication strategies. However, she highlighted two main concerns holding back her organization's decision to adopt this new channel. The first one is the sensitivity and privacy of the beneficiaries of SCS who are young children suffering from abuses, discriminations, or bullies at home or in school. The management is afraid that these might be compromised in such an open and transparent environment like Facebook. This leads to the second concern about the ability to control information sharing on Facebook, which is similar to the one shared by respondents from AWARE and CWS. According to the interviewee, given these concerns, her organization needs more time to consider the pros and cons of this new communication channel, and in the mean time, it is satisfied with what the website has delivered so far.

Discussion

Looking at the sample profiles, it seems that most nonprofits in Singapore are generally focused on providing social services, have various sources of income, and most important of all, are quite familiar with online communication platform. Of course this observation may not be accurate due to the small and relatively homogeneous sample; however, the results do provide some referential points when a larger sample is obtained and analyzed in the final study.

The first comparison test revealed that nonprofits using both websites and Facebook are significantly different from those using only websites in terms of *disclosure* and *deliberative public sphere*, with stronger use observed for both dimensions. This implies that having a Facebook group could significantly enhance the public's knowledge of a nonprofit's identity – its history, mission, programs and services – because the communication channels are doubled. It is also interesting to notice that the finding about *disclosure* resonates what Waters et al. (2009) found in their study of nonprofits' profiles on Facebook. This suggests that the use of websites and Facebook by nonprofits is still at the publicity level. Nonetheless, the awareness generated from such use could lay a fundamental foundation for getting the public involved in the organization's activities in different ways, from simply purchasing an item to make a small financial contribution to being a volunteer, member, donor, or sponsor. Between the two dimensions, the use of features supporting *disclosure* appears to be stronger than *deliberative public sphere*. This could probably due to the fact that some websites do not incorporate features supporting online discussions such as chat room or discussion board.

It is also worth mentioning that *deliberative public sphere* emerged as a differentiating dimension between nonprofits using both website and Facebook and

those with website only. This is somewhat different from previous researches maintaining that the democratizing power of the Internet has not yet been realized through organizations' online communication strategies. The result suggests that social media, particularly Facebook, appear to be friendlier in terms of fostering deliberative democracy. In addition, it shows that the Internet should not be addressed as a whole; rather its democratizing power depends on the types of communication platform as well as organizations' communication strategies. Certainly, a larger sample needs to be analyzed to confirm the pattern, but this is undoubtedly an encouraging signal.

No significant differences were observed for other variables, specifically *involvement*, *information dissemination*, *accountability* and *space for marginalized voices*. This result suggests that the use of features supporting these dimensions are somewhat similar across the nonprofits, regardless which platform or combination of platforms they are leveraging. For dimension such as *space for marginalized voices*, obviously no features were available on both websites and Facebook profiles, which equalizes both platforms. On the other hand, features that supposedly could help spur the *information dissemination* and *accountability* such as working contact details, photo albums, blogs, press releases, and so on are either absent or available only on one platform, not the other. Consequently, this could not enhance the combined or synergistic effect of having both website and Facebook.

A comparison between websites of nonprofits using both platform (Group D) and nonprofits using only websites (Group C) yielded somewhat similar result. Stronger use of features supporting *disclosure* was still observed for Group D. This implies that a Facebook group is not a solely determining factor that enhances the disclosure level of a nonprofit. Instead, it could be viewed as part of an integrative

communication strategy. In other words, a Facebook group could be seen as an extension to the nonprofit's website; or as highlighted by the interviewee from AWARE, it serves as a gateway to the organization's website. And similar to the first test, no significant differences were observed for the rest of the variables.

These findings seem to support other researches highlighting the fact that although the World Wide Web has been around for decades and most nonprofits are no novice to this platform, the prediction of a deliberative public sphere where open discussions of social issues are fostered virtually has not realized, at least within the context of nonprofits' communication strategies. Perhaps the question here is no longer about the availability of communication features but whether or not a nonprofit wants to use them and why. The interview findings come in handy at this point to shed some lights on this issue. Incorporating a new communication channel, no matter how easy and cost-effective it is, requires extra commitment and dedication of time and effort as maintained by the respondent from AWARE. It is even truer for such a dynamic platform like Facebook whereby frequent updates and instant responses appear to be a norm. Therefore, nonprofits' use of online communication tools, constrained by shortage of manpower and budget, seems to be limited to disclosure of online identity and to some extent getting people involved with the organizations' social causes through different channels deemed more crucial to its survival – volunteer, membership, donation, sponsorship, and sales of merchandise compared to mere discussions about social issues. As shared by the interviewees, no matter what platform their organizations are using, enhancing people's awareness of the organizations and garnering their tangible supports are still the main objectives. Along this line, a Facebook group might be of some help by increasing the awareness and generating visit to the nonprofit's website.

It is also important to recognize the fact that to use or not to use social media depends on the nature of the issues a nonprofit is dealing with. As mentioned by the respondent from SCS, it appears that the sensitivity and vulnerability of their beneficiaries make them more cautious and conservative when it comes to adopting such an open, transparent, and fast-changing communication platform like Facebook. A direct link between their concern and Facebook's openness may not be obvious, especially when one can argue that the group aims mainly to raise awareness of issues such as child abuses and garner more public support, which is in turn beneficial for the organization. However, such a response could imply that firstly, websites are sufficient in meeting nonprofits' objectives in promoting awareness and generate support, and secondly, the benefits brought about by social media are still not significant enough for a wider adoption.

With regard to the correlation results, due to the insignificant correlation, duration of online presence could be ruled out as an influential factor on the six dimensions of relationship building and public discourse engagement efforts. Together with the descriptive results showing that most nonprofits are quite familiar with the virtual space, this further reinforces the importance of understanding the motivations behind nonprofits' use of online communication tools, not just how they are using them.

Next, three slightly significant correlations were observed from the results. Firstly, *disclosure* is positively correlated with both *deliberative public sphere* ($r=.529, p<0.05$) and *accountability* ($r=.552, p<0.05$). In terms of *disclosure* and *deliberative public sphere*, this means that the more a nonprofit discloses about itself, the more likely it would be open to platforms that encourage public discussions such as chat room, email, etc. and vice versa, i.e. the more a nonprofit engages in public

discussions via these channels, the more it discloses about itself, making the public understand its background, causes and missions better, which is certainly beneficial. As for *disclosure* and *accountability*, the result suggests that when a nonprofit is open about itself, it would also be more likely to make itself accessible and accountable to the public. Looking from the other way round, the more willing a nonprofit is to make itself accessible and accountable, the more visible its level of disclosure, which is, again also useful in terms of enhancing awareness. Secondly, *information dissemination* was observed to be positively correlated with *involvement* ($r=.696$, $p<0.01$), suggesting that the more information disseminated from a nonprofit, the more likely it would be able to involve interest public to donate, join as a member, be a volunteer, etc. Interestingly, the comparison tests did not show any significant differences in terms of *information dissemination*, *deliberative public sphere*, and *accountability*. Linking this with the correlation test results, it would be advisable for nonprofits to improve their use of features or functions that can enhance these three dimensions. Firstly, such enhancements will hopefully help realize the predictions about active and transparent public sphere in the context of nonprofits' communication. Secondly, this would further strengthen the level of disclosure and involvement, which are important for the nonprofits to achieve the practical objectives of promoting awareness and garnering supports critical to their existence and operation.

Lastly, the interview findings also support the quantitative results in terms of the publicity focus of local nonprofits via online platforms. To nonprofits using both websites and Facebook, engaging the public in open discussions is still a challenge; to those that are "faithful" to websites, this is more of a concern due to privacy or sensitivity issue and difficulty in controlling what is being shared in such a

transparent environment like Facebook. Perhaps more research needs to be done to identify better ways to improve nonprofits' use of online communication tools as well as to show them that the benefits of leveraging social media could outweigh such concerns.

Conclusion

The combination of content analysis and in-depth interview proves to be very effective in answering the research questions. Data generated from content analysis have provided a good overview of how nonprofits have been using websites and Facebook as well as yielded interesting relationships among variables examined. The comprehensiveness of the study is significantly enhanced with insights gathered from the interviews. Indeed, without the information shared by the interviewees, it may have been difficult to explain the findings from the quantitative data analysis process. The qualitative data also added more depth to the analysis by shedding some lights on the motivations behind the use of online communication platforms. They compliment the practical use of website and Facebook for increasing awareness and garnering financial support or volunteer services from the public by nonprofits in Singapore as identified by using content analysis.

The preliminary findings from the pilot study showed that whether or not a nonprofit is using only a website or both website and Facebook, it has not fully covered all aspects of relationship building and public discourse engagement. However, the fact that the features used strongly support disclosure and deliberative public sphere suggests that this could serve as the initial steps to building relationship with the public and engage them in further discourses online. Facebook appears to be not a determining factor in enhancing the relationship building effort. Instead, it is an extension to the nonprofits' website or part of an integrative communication strategy.

This is in line with the interviews' findings showing that the use of both websites and Facebook or just websites is largely for publicity purposes. The interviews also unveiled some concerns that nonprofits have about Facebook, among which privacy and ability to control or manage the open discussion appear to be prominent. Much effort is needed to demonstrate the benefits of social media like Facebook in terms of relationship building and public discourse engagement to make the move to incorporate this new platform a convincing choice.

Limitations & Future Directions

Firstly, with such a small and relatively homogenous sample, the findings certainly cannot be generalized to all nonprofits in Singapore. Nevertheless, differences in terms of disclosure and deliberative public sphere could still be observed among the small samples. It is, therefore, expected that more interesting or significant findings would be observed if the same methodologies are applied to study a larger sample.

Another limitation of the study is I could not secure more interviews with nonprofits that only use websites in order to provide a better-balanced discussion. The difficulties in getting access to and approval from these organizations pose a challenge to my final study. In addition, all interviews were conducted via either phone or email that are limited in terms of visual cues. Although not much clarification was needed, it is always ideal to have face-to-face interactions with the interviewees. Only in such context can I make a better sense of their answers as well as grasp opportunities to probe them further whenever possible.

For the final study, the most important improvement is increasing the sample size, including the number of respondents for the in-depth interviews. To do so, I plan

to incorporate nonprofits other Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand so that a clearer usage pattern could be observed.

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