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Title:

Exploring Slacktivism; Does The Social Observability of Online Charity Participation Act as a Mediator of Future Behavioural Intentions?

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Abstract:

This study investigates whether the social observability of online charitable participation influences future interactions with the same charity. The rise of 'slacktivism' contributes to the significance of this study. 'Slactivism' comprises low-risk, low-cost, online activities, used to raise awareness, produce change, or primarily grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity. Contrasting views exist about slacktivism and the effectiveness of online activities such as social-media campaigns; as to whether they yield committed supporters or are merely a method used to enhance the participants' social self-image. This study is unique in that it links together ideas about slacktivism and impression management.

The study revealed that consumers are wising up to charity campaigns on social-media, with many questioning their effectiveness. The perception of others is important although most consumers are reluctant to admit it about themselves: social pressure plays a large role in the participation of slacktivism.

Key words: Slactivism; online participation; charities; not-for-profit.

INTRODUCTION.

Slacktivism, combining the words 'slacker' and 'activism' was originally introduced as a positive term, referring to bottom up offline activities performed by young people, to positively affect society on a small personal scale (Christensen 2011). Underwood et al. (2011) note active participation in contemporary society is increasingly reliant on digital technologies, especially social networking sites. The internet has become an attractive location for people to show support for a cause, because opposed to offline channels, it offers enhanced ease, reduced risk and immediate gratification (Mano 2014). As a result, the term slacktivism is increasingly used in reference to online behaviours and is often used interchangeably with the word 'clicktivism' (Halupka 2014); signifying the ease with which individuals click on an online petition or social-media activist page and "feel like they are actually helping" (Fatkin and Lansdown 2015, p.581).

Several conceptualizations of slacktivism appear in the scholarship, but recently it has been used to negatively label activities which do not express intense political commitment, or are insufficient to achieve political goals. For example, the KONY campaign received tremendous publicity, yet Joseph Kony was never arrested, as was the campaign's aim. Morozov (2009) calls it 'activism for a lazy generation' that has zero effectiveness; while others say it is nothing but 'token support' with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change (Kristofferson et al. 2014). Therefore slacktivism is 'expressive rather than instrumental' (Schumann and Klein 2015). Fatkin and Lansdown (2015) support these criticisms, showing through content analysis of tweets on 'Giving Tuesday' and the Facebook group 'Snowed out Atlanta', that prosocial online tactics do not have significant lasting effects. Rotman et al. define slacktivism as:

A low-risk, low-cost activity via the internet, whose purpose it is to raise awareness,

produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity

(Rotman 2011).

When compared to Morozov's (2009) ideas, this definition offers no judgement on the positive or negative effects of the activity and is therefore adopted for this work.

Research in the area of slacktivism is mainly focused on political action, for example Vissers and Stolle (2014) show political Facebook participation fosters other forms of political activity. Studies regarding charity campaigns are limited (Jones 2015), therefore there is an opportunity for further research, examining motivations to participate via social-media (Christensen 2011; Jones 2015; Rotman et al. 2011).

Charitable slacktivist activity ranges from changes made to users' online representation (e.g. status or profile photo) to physical acts (such as wearing a badge in support of a cause). Social-media can also strengthen collective action through the increased speed of cost-effective communication, enabling advocacy organisations to do more for less (Obar et al. 2012). Social-media is suitable for charities to encourage user-generated content in aid of their cause. Recent challenges, tasks and nomination activities such as the 'No Makeup Selfie' supporting Cancer Research spread globally with impressive speed. However, alongside these social campaigns emerged comparable non-charitable internet crazes utilising the same nomination and content generation methods. Examples such as the 'Cinnamon Challenge' and 'Neknominate' saw social networkers taking part in meaningless activities, posting online and challenging others to do the same. Scholars argue this participation is stimulated by narcissistic motivations of attention-seeking and increasing social status (Schiller 2015); there a risk that charity campaigns are succeeding due to consumers' desire for fun, rendering the cause irrelevant.

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This subject is of current significance because the mobilising potential of the participatory internet has been called into question. The argument that slacktivist activities, such as 'liking' Facebook pages or signing online petitions exclude meaningful engagement has been explored by Schumann and Klein (2015) who argued that digital slacktivist practices may merely make users feel good about themselves and derail subsequent participation offline. Slacktivism is currently important to the third sector as advertising expenditure is in steady decline. In contrast to expensive traditional media outlets, user-driven social-media campaigns have contributed to the falling costs of online advertising (Mintel 2014).

This research investigates the issue facing charitable organisations with limited communication funds: are social-media campaigns and online participation encouraging further consumer engagement and donations?

LITERATURE REVIEW.

Slacktivism and Charity; the Changing Nature of Philanthropy.

Multiple factors have simplified consumer engagement in small token acts of support for charities or non-profit organizations, including charities' recent surge in social-media presence (Kristofferson et al. 2014). Slacktivism is becoming a common term to describe online charitable activities and high profile campaigns such as the 'No Makeup Selfies' and 'Smear for Smear'. These are seemingly low-risk, low-cost activities via the internet with the goal to raise awareness (Rotman et al. 2011). Mano (2014) showed how online behaviour can complement and reinforce offline behaviour, highlighting the internet as a viable realm of activity for promoting social causes. Lee and Hsieh (2013) offer a similar conclusion: involvement in seemingly effortless political activities online reinforces off-line engagement. Jones (2015)

found when studying KONY, that sharing online videos can prompt real-life actions, including donations and attendance at protest rallies. These studies alongside Drury and Reicher (2005), provide evidence that slacktivist actions can be positive and influential. Jones (2015) suggests that even if the action constitutes a slacktivist activity for the sharer, the impact on the sharer's personal network could result in a net positive effect, for example raising awareness of an issue to a new audience (Obar et al. 2012).

Saxton and Wang (2014) discovered Facebook users will readily promote a cause by liking or sharing something. Whilst the number of people participating in such 'viral fundraising' is substantially smaller than those donating, this is to be expected. The issue facing the third sector is that slacktivist participants are not sufficiently converting into engaged donorsas highlighted by UNICEF Sweden's 2013 'Likes Don't Save Lives' campaign. Questions remain regarding consumers' genuine reasons for participation. The nature of philanthropy is changing: from personal concern and desire to help, into a marketplace for individual gratification, without any necessary sacrifice or modesty (Schiller 2015). Schiller highlights the juxtaposition between the increasingly intertwined nature of philanthropy as self-effacing public participation 'showcasing one's special role in the world' Schiller (2015, p.518).

The narcissism within campaigns such as the 'Ice Bucket Challenge', is difficult to challenge due to its alleged altruism. However, Schiller takes a positive stance suggesting that organisations should harness rather than challenge narcissism (Schiller 2015 p.582).

Motivations for Slacktivism and Theories of Self-Image and Self-Concept.

Rotman et al. (2011) suggest possible reasons for participation in slacktivist activities: ease of access; efficiency of online media; affinity for a particular cause; observing support from

friends and peer groups; and the positive feeling about oneself generated by participation. Narcissism or self-image concerns emerge as a reason for prosocial behaviour (Bénabou and Tirole 2006); Schiller (2015) highlighting the relevance of self-concept and methods of developing and maintaining the self-image. This study draws from Rosenberg's (1986) ideas of self-concept being the summation of an individual's thoughts and feelings about them-self. Self-concept is characterised as a multidimensional asset; the 'actual self' is how a person truly perceives themselves, while the 'ideal self' refers to how one would like to perceive themselves. The 'social self' is how a person presents themselves to others and the 'ideal social self' represents the image that one would like others to hold (Sirgy 1982). Slacktivist plays into notions of 'ideal social self'.

The self-concept is complex and dynamic, people hold varied representations of themselves in the working self-concept; defining themselves in terms of their personality, relationships, or social group memberships (Sim et al. 2014). The individual self, or personal identity, refers to aspects of the self-concept that are differentiating (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). The social-self, or social identity refers to aspects of the self-concept that are shared with in-group members and differentiating from relevant out-groups (Tajfel, 1982).

Bennett (2003) notes many reasons underlying an individual's inclination to donate to charity: demographic factors; personality traits; and tendencies such as individualism or collectivism (Finkelstein 2010). Bénabou and Tirole (2006) explain that intrinsic motivations to behave pro-socially can stem from pure altruism, that is, the overall level of good to which the action contributes. Altruistic behaviour is motivated by desire to increase another's welfare (Piferi et al. 2006).

Critics of slacktivism argue these actions merely make people feel good about themselves. Lee and Hsieh (2013) and Castillo et al. (2014) show giving often causes automatic emotional responses, producing a positive mood, alleviating guilt, demonstrating that one is a morally

just person. Together these help to maintain one's self-image and personal identity. 'Warm glow giving' or impure altruism (Andreoni 1989) generate improved self-esteem and happiness as outcomes of giving (Taylor 2013).

Developing and Maintaining Self-Concept through Slacktivism.

Impression management, or self-presentation, is the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them. These impressions have implications for how others perceive, evaluate and treat them, as well as their own views of themselves (Tice 1992). Goffman (1959) refers to front and back staging as methods people use to present their private and public selves. More recent advances have established impression management in the field of behavioural studies (Jones and Pittman 1982). Impression management comprises two processes, impression motivation and impression construction (Leary and Kowalski 1990).

Impression motivation refers to how people are motivated to control how others see them. Baumeister et al. (1986) suggest people engage in impression management to construct their public identities. Through self-presentational acts, people often attempt to make their public selves consistent with their ideal selves and ideal social-selves. Inconsistency between one's desired and current social image, known as cognitive dissonance, can motivate impression management. Cognitive dissonance theory explains individuals are motivated to reduce conflict between areas of the self-concept by altering behaviour to be consistent (Festinger 1957). This would predict that participation in slacktivist activity may increase the likelihood of undertaking a related future action, because people want their subsequent behaviours to remain consistent (Lee and Hsieh 2013). Other motives for impression management are self-esteem maintenance, or social and material outcomes (Leary and Kowalski 1990). Positive social outcomes include identifying with a specific group. When this occurs, the common attitude of other members are seen as compatible with your own or worthy of emulation

(Tajfel and Turner 1986). Shang et al. (2008) find consumers can be motivated to donate by observing the behaviour of others with whom they share some basis for social identification.

Impression construction, comprises factors which determine the type of image to create. Self-concept (Sirgy 1982) plays a large role in this; impression management often involves emphasising the best features of oneself for public view. People can develop desired identities by publicly claiming attributes consistent with those identities; by first engaging in self-assessment , that is an internal evaluation of their real values, then matching behaviours to this evaluation (Bénabou and Tirole 2006). This behaviour is not necessarily deceptive, but is selective. Schumann and Klein (2015) find slacktivist behaviours appeal to individuals' sense of group membership and the desire to improve one's standing in that network. Although Schumann and Klein (2015) employed a quantitative experiment, with an unrepresentative, Belgian, student sample, their conclusions are supported by Saxton and Wang (2014). They also suggest that social factors may be pushing donors to give to more popular and "socially acceptable" causes.

Impression management can be performed through non-verbal behaviour, public attributions, group association, physical appearance and conspicuous use of material possessions (Leary and Kowalski 1990). The self-image congruence hypothesis explains how consumers purchase products or services from brands they believe possess symbolic images which complement their actual or desired self-concept (Wright et al. 1992). These images are part determined by the stereotype of the generalised or typical user (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967). Of central importance is the publicity of one's behaviour (Ariely et al. 2009; Leary and Kowalski 1990). For a product/brand to have identity associations, it must be purchased and/or consumed conspicuously (Wright et al. 1992; Veblen 1899). Self-publicising has changed the nature of philanthropy, with emphasis on the donor themselves now often central in activities presented as self-less.

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Böhm and Regner (2013) find that the primary motivator for behaving pro-socially is gaining recognition, reflecting a positive, altruistic image onto the self. The social observability aspect of image motivation has been investigated by Castillo et al. (2014), who found knowledge of peers' fundraising behaviour enhances the probability and level of contributions. Böhm and Regner (2013) identify increased pro-social activity in a public setting as an outcome of social status concerns. This theory of narcissistic motivation is supported in the literature; Kataria and Regner (2015) for example, found subjects performed better in a donation generation task when the results were made public. Several other studies including Ariely et al. (2009), White and Peloza (2009) and Tonin and Vlassopoulos (2013) provide evidence for the positive relationship between public performance and charitable participation. In contrast, further literature demonstrates a negative relationship between initial slacktivist public participation with a cause and subsequent behaviour. In an offline setting and through quantitative research, Kristofferson et al. (2014) conclude that when an initial token of charity support is highly observable to others, opposed to private, people are less likely to engage in subsequent meaningful contributions to the same cause. One critique of this study however is that was carried out across a short time period; people newly introduced to a cause's aims may initially participate passively and become more active later (Jones 2015).

Awareness of Self-Enhancement.

Bénabou and Tirole (2006) noted that when making decisions affecting another's welfare, people self-assess although they have difficulty recognising the underlying motives for their behaviour. In contrast, actions are far easier to remember, making it rational to define oneself partly through one's past behaviours. This raises the question of how aware people are when undertaking certain behaviours to enhance their social-selves. describe The self-regulatory mechanism of moral identity motivates moral action and can be a basis for social identification

that people use to construct their self-definitions (Stets and Carter 2011). Aquino and Reed (2002) link this idea to the self-concept. Kataria and Regner (2015) note status-seeking behaviour, or deceptive impression management designed to generate benefits, can be seen as a negative trait. While this behaviour may be good for one's ideal social self-image, such behaviour may challenge self-image, leading to feelings of cognitive dissonance. The method of self-deception may then be used to justify behaviour to oneself if it is incongruent with the self-concept.

Self-Concept in Computer-Mediated Environments.

Social-media are public spaces mediated by technology that have disrupted the traditional distinction between public and private behaviours (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Individuals use social-media to fulfil social needs, such as gaining social approval and recognition from like-minded individuals (Smith and Gallicano 2015). Concern for an over-reliance on social-media networks for status approval has been noted (Schiller 2015), however, social-media is often used to shape and reflect the user's identity. The online environment enables people to alter identities or produce new identities, promoting desirable traits such as altruism (Zhao et al. 2008). The Internet offers features that may influence the nature of self-presentations in important ways. For example, self-presentation in online profiles is more easily modified than offline (Ellison et al. 2006) and can be relatively anonymous. Disclosure of negative or taboo aspects of oneself holds lower risk on the internet (Bargh et al. 2002).

Such focus on self-presentation often results in selective honesty online. Zhao et al. (2008) find that Facebook prompts individuals to create what they call the 'hoped-for possible self'. That is a highly socially desirable reflection of their self-concept, which the individual aspires to have in the real world. Gonzales and Hancock (2008) find public online self-presentations are a

medium for facilitating identity construction and can generate a new self-concept based on that self-presentation. Another example is the 'true self'; a current version of the self that is not fully expressed in social life (Rogers 1951, cited in Bargh et al. 2002) but shown to be more successfully expressed via the internet than in real life. Bargh et al. (2002 p 45) suggest that belief in one's idealised qualities may become self-fulfilling. If this is the case, perhaps slacktivism to enhance one's self-identity could be a positive behaviour?

Online Charity Participation Matrix.

To provide an empirical basis for the conceptualisation of slacktivism, Schumann and Klein (2015) produced a list of digital slacktivist activities in association with Greenpeace International. This included expressive and instrumental actions and provides a basis for the typology below. These categorisations follow the definitions by Kristofferson et al. (2015, p.1150) of 'token' and 'meaningful' support for charitable causes. 'Token participation' is used here to refer to actions requiring little cost (time, money or effort) in showing support for a cause, while 'meaningful participation' indicates actions with high cost.

Previous research (White and Peloza 2009; Böhm and Regner 2013; Kristofferson et al. 2014; Kataria and Regner 2015) noted the importance of public and private actions to charitable giving and Bénabou and Tirole (2006) highlight intrinsic and image motivations for charitable participation, the element of 'social observability'. The 'online charity participation matrix' developed here (Figure-2) is divided into four sections: public - private and token - meaningful. By including participants who have experience with either/both public token and private meaningful charitable participation, the study aims to generate a variety of opinions on slacktivism.

This matrix includes additional activities to Schumann and Klein's (2015) original, such as online fundraising. Several alterations were made to the extant list: combining separate Twitter and Facebook activities into a 'social-media' category which includes participatory activities, such as " 'liked' 'favourited' or 'shared' a charity post on social-media". Alterations resulted in two segments containing a single participatory activity; however, this does not necessarily mean subsequent engagement will be low, as a large number of people may participate in these activities. Although this typology will act as a converging point for this study, it also could limit the research by placing constraints on the behaviours explored.

Insert figure 1 here

Conceptual framework.

In summary a conceptual framework (Figure-2) shows how the key concepts connect to inform the research. Leary and Kowalski's (1990) model of impression management provides a basis for understanding why and how people are motivated to control how others see them. By linking public-token and private-meaningful participation from the matrix, to elements of Sirgy's self-concept (1982), this study proceeds to explore how slacktivist and non-slacktivist charitable participation is affected by impression management and furthermore, how this mediates future behavioural intentions with the charity.

Insert figure 2 here.

Thus this paper suggests that impression management may take place when participants are undergoing public-token and/or private-meaningful participation because the participation enhances either the self-image or social self-image (Sirgy 1982). The effect of initial online charitable participation and a consequently enhanced/altered self-concept may then lead to subsequent future participation with the same charity. Possibly as a cause of cognitive

dissonance and a need to maintain a consistent self-concept (Festinger 1957), subsequent behaviours may remain consistent (Lee and Hsieh 2013). Furthermore, the generation of new self-concepts based on self-presentation can become a self-fulfilling prophecy when one truly believes they possess idealised qualities such as altruism (Bargh et al. 2002). Conversely, these charitable actions may merely be a method of improving self-esteem (Andreoni 1989; Taylor 2013; Castillo et al. 2014) and maintaining one's public image (Baumeister et al. 1986). The participant may have gained all they can from the initial act (Kristofferson et al. 2014) if they have no real affinity with the cause or the act is not consistent with their true self-concept.

Although as a visual representation of linked ideas this framework could be seen as reductionist, it sacrifices complexity for clarity and informs the research objectives and methodology.

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METHODOLOGY.

The research aims to explore whether the social observability of online charity participation mediates future behavioural intentions. It adopts a methodological approach presented in figure 3 which seeks to address four research objectives:

1 - To explore the nature of online charity participation;

2 - To investigate the possible connection between the desire to enhance one's social self-image and socially observable online charity participation;

3 - To explore which types of online charity participation motivates future behavioural intentions;

4 - Investigating the transience of Charity Social-Media Campaigns and Challenges.

Insert figure 3 here.

Research Approach.

As objectives were exploratory in nature, mixed methods were chosen to generate breadth of understanding and substantiation of findings (Johnson et al. 2007). Mixed methods have recently risen in popularity (Morgan 2014), yet the key issue of whether results are more valuable than the sum of the individual quantitative and qualitative parts remains (Bryman 2007). However there are many relevant arguments for mixed methods: fundamentally they can provide stronger inferences than a single method by offsetting the limitations of individual approaches (Creswell et al. 2003). Gorard and Taylor (2004, p.149) believe students should not be restrained by existing philosophical outlooks which might inhibit the use of mixed methods. An 'explanatory sequential design' was adopted, in which qualitative research follows quantitative, providing deeper explanations for results (Creswell 2015). Results from both strands inform the conclusions.

The pragmatist paradigm informed the study combining narrative and numeric data, and defined as:

> *A deconstructive paradigm that debunks concepts of truth and reality and instead focuses on 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation.*

> Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003, p.713).

The pragmatic approach rejects the either/or choices associated with constructivism and positivism and acknowledges that the researcher's values play a large role in interpretation of results. Pragmatism supports the view that qualitative and quantitative methods used in tandem is an advantageous technique and denies that this is epistemologically incoherent (Howe 1998). This pragmatic approach relies on moving back and forth between induction and deduction (Morgan 2007).

This study followed the pragmatist approach to axiology in that it was focused around participants' individual evaluation of charitable participation (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). The point of view and values of each participant were influential in forming their opinions, therefore any individual views that the researcher felt shaped participants' answers was recorded in each participant's profile.

Population and Sampling.

The research population comprised Internet users who participate in charitable activity online (as defined in the matrix). The sample comprised participants in one or more online activity with a charitable organisation in the past two years.

The questionnaire sample was generated using a convenience volunteer sampling method. Screening questions relating to the 'online charity participation matrix' were used to select appropriate participants. A sample of 103 screened participants was generated. It should be noted that the majority were females aged 18-24. This is acceptable as 16-24 year olds are most likely to engage with charitable causes online (Mintel 2014).

The interview strand did not aim to use a representative sample and was selected using a purposive sampling technique. Although a subjective method of sampling, purposive sampling was the most appropriate for the small sample of six (Battaglia 2008), as it resulted in candidates with the necessary characteristics to answer the research objectives (Corbetta 2003). Of those participants who completed the online questionnaire, 18 indicated that they would be happy to participate in in-depth interviews. The final sample was selected to comprise mixed age groups, levels of internet use and intensities of charitable participation.

Data Collection.

A self-administered online questionnaire predominantly included closed questions, therefore providing all participants with the same frames of reference and aids to memory (Corbetta 2003). It is acknowledged that fixed answers may not have had the same meaning for all participants and the approach may have limited freedom of expression (Corbetta 2003).

In-depth interviews were used with the aim of exploring the interviewee's individuality and insights (Corbetta 2003, p.264). Semi-structured interviews were selected to elicit detailed information from participants, regarding motivations for participating in socially observable online charitable causes (Johnson and Turner 2003). An interview guide provided consistent structure across interviews but was designed not to be constraining (Bell and Waters 2014). Pilot studies for both strands of research were carried out to test and develop the adequacy of research instruments.

Data Analysis.

Quantitative questionnaire results were analysed using SPSS, producing descriptive statistics. At the recommendation of Braun and Clarke (2013), interviews were transcribed using the orthographic transcription method providing familiarisation with the data. Thematic analysis, was used to examine the qualitative interview transcriptions with coding of the entire transcription, identification of areas of relevance to the research objectives and patterns in the data. The most relevant codes were aggregated into four themes (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Limitations.

The sample definition as 'those who have participated in one or more online activity with a charitable organisation in the past two years' gave rise to several limitations. As many of the more notable social-media campaigns took place in 2014, to reduce issues of recency and aid

memory, prompts were used in interviews as discussion points. To combat the implications of frequency of participation, the sample included only those who had participated in the above activity at least once, ensuring they had some knowledge and experience to recall during interviews. It was not necessary for all participants to have participated in more than one of the activities as sufficiently rich data was generated from these participants; possibly yielding a more varied range of opinions and experiences discussed than had only those who participate often been interviewed. The research involved a relatively small number of participants; therefore findings cannot be generalised to wider populations.

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FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.

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Objective-1: Exploring the Nature of Online Charity Participation.

Quantitative results show the most common online charitable activity carried out among participants was 'liking, favouriting or sharing a charity social-media page or post' with 57% of participants doing so in the last two years. This activity requires least effort, supporting Morozov's theory (2009) of an increasingly lazy generation of slacktivists. This was the most popular activity among the three youngest age groups (18-44), whilst older participants (45+) favoured making online donations providing further support for Morozov (2009). Although older participants were more likely to donate than any other online behaviour listed, a higher percentage of 18-44s actually participated in this way. It is possible that amongst some of the older generation, the internet is not a preferred donation channel, perhaps due to low confidence and experience with digital technology or concerns regarding privacy:

> *It's too much hassle, I can't be doing with fiddling about like that… I say too much*
>
> *hassle, too much hassle for me. I just can't be bothered to do that sort of stuff. I'd*
>
> *rather just put some money in a pot when I see it.*

Donations made at the time of participation appear to be low or non-existent, with over 50% not donating when interacting with social-media posts and 55% donating £5 or below when participating in a social-media campaign. But as noted by Saxton and Wang (2014), these 'small-gift donors' are becoming increasingly relevant in supporting charities.

Theme-1: What Good is this Doing?

The third most common online activity was taking part in social-media campaigns (50%), but when referring to these, a prominent recurring theme arose encompassing the following codes: **Questioning Effectiveness, Better than Nothing, Saturation and Negative Connotations.** When discussing the nature of online charitable participation, all interviewees queried what good they were actually doing. Some were of the opinion that social-media campaigns are saturated and ineffective, therefore refrained from participating:

> *I don't know really, it just didn't appeal to me. I just don't think people really, I don't think I showed physical support. It's faking support. Oh yeah I'll change my profile picture, I definitely support them and send out my sympathy. And yes, it was awful what happened but I'm going to have no influence on that by changing my profile picture. It's not going to influence them in any way.*

> (Vivien/Female/21)

Others agreed there was no need to use social-media to promote every cause or issue. It was highlighted that when an issue has been in the news, social-media may be one medium too many to engage with. Effectiveness of social-media campaigns was often questioned, but in many cases seen to be better than doing nothing at all.

The nature of online charity participation is shown to employ little effort by the participant, commonly resulting in low-value donations. Amid these behaviours lies the question of

effectiveness; participants are wise to the ever expanding plethora of online charity marketing and realise they may not be as effective as marketed.

Objective 2: To investigate the possible connection between the desire to enhance one's social self-image and socially observable online charity participation.

Online charitable participation was found to have limited effects on the self-concept for participants themselves, but 'self-enhancement' and 'social identity' were considered in all interviews. In questionnaires, participants were asked how taking part made them feel; in both public and private cases the most common answers were 'helpful' and like they were 'making a difference' (Figure-4).

Insert figure 4.

These emotions are seemingly related to the intrinsic motivation of pure altruism (Bénabou and Tirole 2006), the desire to increase another's welfare (Piferi et al. 2006). Interestingly, fewer participants reported feeling 'cheerful' or 'satisfied', especially after public participation. This contradicts 'warm glow giving' or impure altruism (Castillo et al. 2014, Lee and Hsieh 2013 and Andreoni 1989). This finding is consistent with qualitative analysis; there was little mention from any interviewees of improved self-esteem or happiness as outcomes of giving (Taylor 2013).

In order to explore the effects of socially observable online charity participation on social self-image, participants who carried out public activities were asked what affect they thought it had on others' opinions of them (Figure-5). The majority agreed that it made them appear like a more altruistic or unselfish person (44% agree/strongly agree). This finding implies impression-management could be an underlying reason for participation (Leary and Kowalski

1990), affecting how others perceive, evaluate, and treat them, as well as their own views of themselves as a more selfless person (Tice 1992).

Insert figure 5 here.

Results revealed older participants (over 45s) were more likely to disagree with statements regarding enhanced social self-image. A possible reason for this could be that they do not think of these charitable activities in a way that provides self enhancement. A Mann Whitney U test revealed this age group difference was statistically significant for all statements as $p < .05$, excluding 'I am more likeable to others'.

Theme-2: The Perception of Others.

Similarly, interviewees rarely exposed motivations for impression management, instead highlighting their intent to do the complete opposite:

> *I don't think it needs to be shared, it's just one of those things that's like, ok I've made my donation now, I don't need to express how much of a good person I am by saying that on social-media… Although I have done it before thinking about it. It was years ago, I think it was children in need or something, I donated then I expressed that through Facebook. And then after I was like, did I really need to say that? And since then I haven't because I feel it's just a bit like cringey and, you don't really need to say that.*

> (Alex/Male/22)

However, all participants seemed to expect impression-management of others. Therefore, this theme encompasses the following codes: **Narcissism and Attention Seeking, Social Pressure and Showing I Care.** It was often assumed participation in social-media campaigns was performed by others for narcissistic reasons and to improve social standing:

Silly as it sounds everyone is looking for, not popularity, but everybody wants to be liked, everybody wants to be seen as funny and nice and whatever. If you can post a really hilarious video and people like it, you would be like oh yes they must all think I'm really funny and you might get a sense of personal pride in people laughing.

(Danielle/Female/21)

It was suggested that people participating were seen as 'cool' 'funny' and 'popular' but some participants just saw vanity, particularly concerning the 'No Makeup Selfie'. Participants happily criticised and accused others of these motivations, even though most were involved with social-media campaigns themselves. This behaviour indicates the possibility that participants were employing the method of self-deception. That is, if participants do engage in status-seeking behaviour, but view this as a negative trait challenging their self-image, they may falsely justify their behaviour to make themselves feel at ease (Kataria and Regner 2015).

Participants noted that social pressures also motivate participation. The opinion of others is important, if they refrained from participation, perhaps they are not seen as being a charitable person.

But there is the social pressure element, absolutely. Take Facebook, if you are nominated by friends and family like I was, I think it, well I wouldn't say it looks bad but there is more pressure on you to participate really.

(Vivien/Female/21)

However in some instances, socially observable charitable participation was a way to make participants' social self-image consistent with their self-image, matching their behaviours to their real values (Bénabou and Tirole 2006). When the opportunity arises, participants are willing to engage though social-media; liking a social-media page or changing profile pictures was a way to express care and support.

The perception of others is obviously very important to the subject of socially observable online charity participation, however its effect is variable amongst participants and does not always determine participation. Participation to enhance one's social self-image is viewed negatively, yet most interviewees expect this behaviour of others. Therefore the effect of public online charitable participation on self-concept requires further investigation, particularly as age could be a contributing factor.

Objective-3: Exploring Which Types of Socially Observable Online Charity Participation Motivates Future Behavioural Intentions.

Participants who carried out any online charitable activity were likely to participate further with the same charity. Interestingly, public participation led to an overall lower rate of subsequent behaviour (55%) than private participation (62%) (Figure-6).

Insert figure 6 here.

A chi square test on the relationship between the type of public online activity participated in and the occurrence of further participation, showed statistical significance, with p.001 (Appendix-27). Kristofferson et al (2014) supports this; when the context of token support is highly observable to others, impression-management motives are satisfied, reducing the desire to engage in subsequent support. A further chi square test on private participation showed this relationship is not statistically significant as p=.146.

The majority of those who 'took part in a charity campaign on social-media' did not carry out subsequent participation with the charity (Figure-6). Only 16% of those who participated in a social-media campaign went on to donate. As well as evidencing these actions as 'expressive rather than instrumental' (Schumann and Klein 2015); this supports Kristofferson's suggestion that charities planning public token campaigns with the belief that they lead to meaningful

support, may be sacrificing their precious resources in vain (2014). Testing with larger sample sizes for the other activities is needed to confirm this.

'Expressing support for a charity in personal e-mails or blog posts' led to the highest rate of future engagement with the same charity, with 100% of respondents doing so; 40% of future participation was in the form of donations. It is interesting to note this is the only activity classed in the matrix above as 'public meaningful participation' (Figure-2); although only five participants referred to this behaviour, five is the minimum sample size required for a chi square test to be deemed reliable (Sirkim 1999, p. 402). However, this relationship requires further investigation with additional participants. Few people spoke about this activity during the interviews, but Jill *(Female/22)* indicated she would only pass on information related to a cause she had personal affinity with. While the sample size is minimal, evidence suggests personal involvement with the cause is linked to the effort put into it.

Theme-3: How Much Does it Really Mean to Me?

This theme encompasses the codes which motivate further participation: **Affinity, Cause Gets Lost, Once is Enough and Prompting Others.** Affinity drove participants to make donations, while the most commonly occurring barrier to future behavioural intent was lack of affinity with the charity:

> *The reason I didn't donate any more was because I didn't have a particular affinity with that charity. Didn't hugely understand what it did, and didn't make the effort to research it myself. But I made the effort to donate because it was all part of this campaign, and as such I just did it because I thought I probably should.*
> (Danielle/Female/21)

Deep interest in the cause also prompted further research into the campaign, including behaviours such as following up donations, sharing posts and signing petitions. This is evidence

of participants matching behaviour to personal values (Bénabou and Tirole 2006) to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957); however, in contrast to Kristofferson et al. (2014) this occurred under both public and private conditions.

Another recurring idea was that once is enough, for example, post a 'No Makeup Selfie' and move onto the next one. Participants generally took part in campaigns then forgot about them, without investigating the cause or its effectiveness. Some said that when they donated previously to a charity they were unlikely to do so again as their 'good deed is done.' This epitomises slacktivism; the act was carried out simply to feel better about themselves for doing something 'good' (Rotman et al. 2011).

Understanding was critical. If the campaign was not easily understood, participants felt it meant nothing to them. They did not follow up with the charity or campaign, sometimes even when nominated for participation, refraining from doing so.

> *Where that doesn't really relate, or that, really (pointing to prompt sheet). Even that, the no makeup, it's not really connected. It is just something they have done, it's like show me your bare foot to raise money!... Do you know what I mean? You just do it because it's there. But the ice bucket challenge has a meaning, because that is showing you how those people are affected instantly by the cold water shocking you.*
>
> (Nicole/Female/49)

Only two of four participants wholly understood the 'Ice Bucket Challenge', donations were even made to an alternative charity. This demonstrates how the cause can become diluted leading people to' jump on the bandwagon' without understanding the charities' message.

In summary having strong affinity with the cause is vital to encourage donations, future participation and following up donations. The cause repeatedly became lost in campaigns' features, often restricting success.

Objective-4: Investigating the Transience of Charity Social-Media Campaigns and Challenges.

The third most common online charitable activity carried out was taking part in social-media campaigns: 50% of people took part in one or more. Motivations for participating in both cause-related and non-cause-related social-media challenges were explored in the qualitative strand of research.

Theme-4: I Do as You Do.

The theme 'I do as you do' encompasses the idea that social-media campaigns are seen as a digital trend, and includes the codes: **Social Pressures, Celebrity Influence and Up for a Laugh**. One participant encapsulated the experience of public pressure, by explaining what it felt like when peers changed their profile photos, in solidarity with Paris:

> *I guess it's more social pressure again... One of your friends will do it then more of your friends will do it then everyone kinda jumps on and it's like oh maybe I should change it as well. So yeah, I like to think I don't follow to social pressure, but I guess sometimes it can be difficult to resist.*
>
> (Alex/Male/22)

Many participants suggested people took part in challenges and campaigns merely because they were 'jumping on the band-waggon'; this goes for celebrity participation as well.

However, participants commonly felt that celebrities are vital to the successfully spreading the campaign message (Fatkin and Lansdown 2015).

Before being prompted, Jill *(Female/22)* related the 'Ice Bucket Challenge' to 2014's 'Neknominate' craze that took over social-media. The two were viewed similarly as charitable campaigns such as this are understood to be more humorous than identifying the cause.

> *They are more funny if that makes any sense and I think that's the whole point, well that's the way I view it. They are supposed to be more humorous than identifying the cause. Getting people to see you as a funny person, that's exactly what it is about. Probably about like social status if anything.*

(Vivien/Female/21)

When discussing charitable badges and wristbands, several participants referred to them as a craze or fashion statement which were 'all the rage' when they were at school. Evidence here predicts social-media campaigns may be a passing craze, just as the wristbands were popular but soon replaced by something new. The campaigns most commonly reviewed during interviews occurred in 2014 and more recent ones were less well received by the participants. When referring to ALS's attempt to rejuvenate the 'Ice Bucket Challenge' for the second year, John clearly outlined this conclusion by saying:

> *I think it's a case of been there, done that, don't want to do it again, unless they think of something new.*

(John/Male/55).

The decreasing participation and lower interest in these recent campaigns points to the possibility that charity social-media campaigns and challenges are indeed a transient digital trend, with people getting involved because others are, to give people a laugh, or because of celebrity influences.

In summary, the need for further quantitative data collection of numerical as opposed to categorical nature was clear. This would allow deeper statistical analysis as well as observing correlations. Key findings included the lack of effort in online participation and the low value of donations. Self-concept does play a role in online charitable participation, although the exact relationship is unclear and requires additional investigation. Affinity with the cause appears to be a strong motivator for online charitable participation. The influence of celebrities and the 'bandwagon' ethos associated with online charity campaigns means that they may be viewed as transient. However both public and private participation led to more people interacting with the charity in the future than not doing so. This suggests that any kind of online charitable participation is better than none at all.

CONCLUSION.

This research aimed to explore whether the social observability of online charity participation acts as a mediator of future behavioural intentions. Given the growth in social-media driven fundraising and so called slacktivism the findings highlight valuable theoretical implications and practical recommendations.

Findings support Morozov's (2009) theory of an increasingly lazy generation of slacktivists who are not easily engaged. However findings show slacktivist acts explored in this research can encourage various types of further engagement, contradicting Morozov (2009). However, socially observable online charity participation generates sporadic and low value donations. If charities are to pursue these online and social-media techniques, action must be taken to encourage higher donations.

Qualitative results showed that having affinity with the cause leads to higher donations and increased subsequent behaviour with the same charity, including spreading charities' messages to others. A recommendation from this is that charitable organisations could aim to work with social-media advocates or influencers who support their cause, to extend the reach and lifespan of social-media campaigns and other online activity.

The study identified a link between online charitable participation and self-concept, however this relationship needs further exploration. Socially observable participation was reported by participants to have a limited impact on the self-concept for participants themselves. In contrast, participants predicted impression management behaviours of others. This brings into question the skill of the researcher when undertaking interviews and also the theory of self-deception (Kataria and Regner 2015) as to the true motives behind participants' actions.

Data demonstrated participants are becoming suspicious of campaigns' true influence and effectiveness, indeed recognising slacktivism as an issue. If charities are to continue these fundraising methods, the goal and intended outcomes must be made clear. The reasons behind the campaign must be closely linked to the campaign itself so the campaign's value is not diluted. Most interviewees have become overly accustomed to online charity marketing campaigns, with some seeing them as merely social crazes taking over the internet and disappearing altogether in a short space of time. People appear to be getting bored of these types of campaigns and looking for something new.

It is critical for the non-profit sector to keep generating new and unique ideas to engage consumers. For example, the 'Ice Bucket Challenge' was not nearly as successful the second time around, highlighting participants' 'been there, done that' attitude. The possibility that the types of social campaign discussed above may be a passing digital craze raises concerns for the non-profit organisations currently relying on them. For example, the 'Smear for Smear' campaign was solely reliant on the sharing of user-generated content on social-media. Soon

these organisations may have to generate new ways to engage supporters and encourage donations.

Limitations and Further Research.

The conceptual framework produced in the literature review (Figure-1) structured the research and analysis and provided a guide for exploration: it was not purposely designed to test/confirm these relationships and their strength. This initial exploratory research has provided indications that these concepts are indeed linked, however there is a need for further data collection to confirm any relationships between constructs in the framework. Due to the questionnaire design, the collected data was mainly categorical; numerical data would allow deeper statistical analysis as well as observing any correlations.

Further research into the link between online charitable participation and self-concept could include exploration of the variation of impression-management among different age groups. Given that the findings indicate image motivation is more important to younger generations, perhaps older people may not care as much about how they are viewed by others.

The 'online charity participation matrix' produced above (Figure-2) aided the research structure, but findings regarding the influence of each type of activity on future participation must be tested further. Results generated were unreliable due to the small sample size of some activities, such as using a charity hashtag. Sample sizes also lowered the reliability of the finding that private participation led to an overall higher level of subsequent participation than public participation. Data collection from a larger, representative sample is necessary to confirm the influence of each type of activity on future participation.

Another methodological issue was the implication of recency, when discussing social-media campaigns from up to two years ago. This may have enabled accurate measurement of

subsequent participation due to the time-delayed conversion to meaningful support found by Neumayer and Schoßböck (2011). Another proposal for future research could be an investigation on the time it takes to develop an attachment and understanding of the cause, to then follow through in a longitudinal manner.

This study would have benefitted from a third strand of research. The initially research plan included interviews with marketing practitioners, to give some grounding and reality to this study. National and local charities were contacted; including Cancer Research, Macmillan, National Trust, Dorset Mind, RNLI, Lewis Manning Hospice, War Child and Naomi House. Responses from several of these charities were received, however no interviews materialised. Contacts cancelled on several occasions due to limited availability and prioritisation of their own work above the research.

In summary, this research was useful in exploring concepts which had not previously been linked, but could not be conclusive. However, as well as prompting further research, findings from this exploratory research in charitable online participation could lead to investigations in other areas where impression management may affect future participation, such as within offline charitable participation.

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Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S. and Martin, J., 2008. Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers In Human Behavior* [online], 24, 1816-1836.

Figure 1: Online charity participation matrix

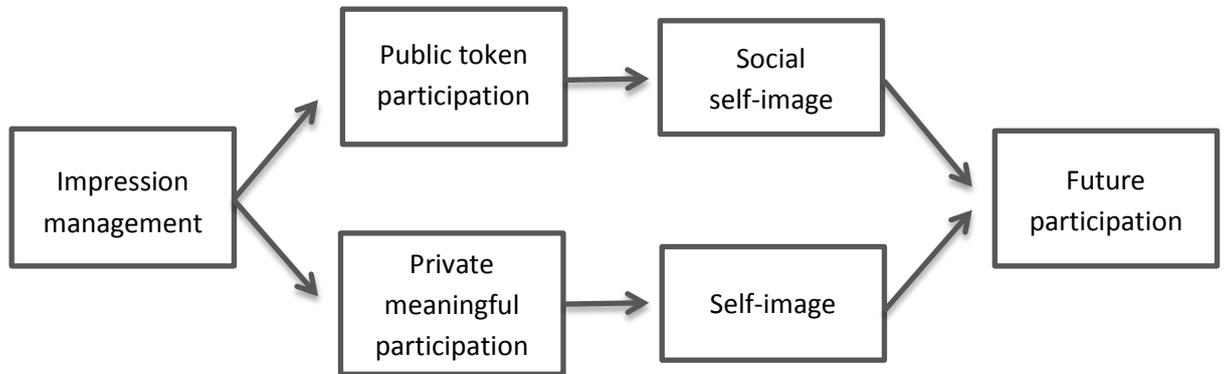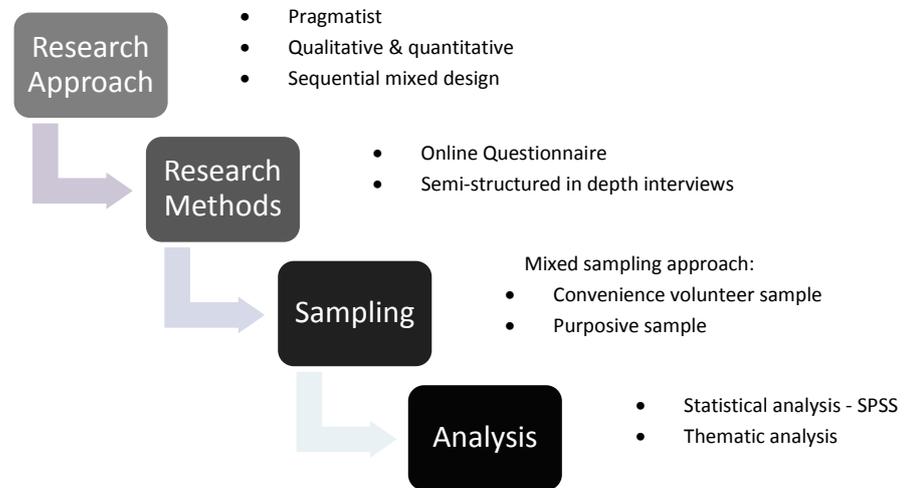|	Public participation	Private participation
Token participation Actions requiring little cost (time, money or effort) to show support for the cause	▪ Liked' 'Favourited' or 'Shared' a charity post (i.e. image, video, tweet) on social media ▪ Joined a charity social media group or page. ▪ Changed social media profile picture in support of a cause (e.g. Childhood cartoon in support of the fight against child abuse). ▪ Taken part in a charity campaign on social media which included creating content (e.g. No makeup selfie <u>photo</u> or an Ice Bucket challenge <u>video</u>). ▪ Used a charity hashtag in social media posts (e.g. #nomakeupselfie). ▪ Shared the fact you made a charitable donation via social media.	▪ Signed an online petition.
Meaningful participation Actions requiring high cost (time, money or effort) to show support for the cause	▪ Expressed support for a charity in personal e-mails or blog posts	▪ Fundraised online (i.e. asked for sponsorship through a just giving page or equivalent). ▪ Made an online donation (including monthly donation or legacy). ▪ Purchased from an online charity shop. ▪ Donated via a third party (such as ebay, amazon, John Lewis, Sainsbury's etc.)

Figure 2: Conceptual framework.

Figure 3: Methodological approach

- Pragmatist
- Qualitative & quantitative
- Sequential mixed design

- Online Questionnaire
- Semi-structured in depth interviews

Mixed sampling approach:
- Convenience volunteer sample
- Purposive sample

- Statistical analysis - SPSS
- Thematic analysis

Research Approach

Research Methods

Sampling

Analysis

Figure 4: 'How did participating make you feel?' Comparing public and private online charitable activities.
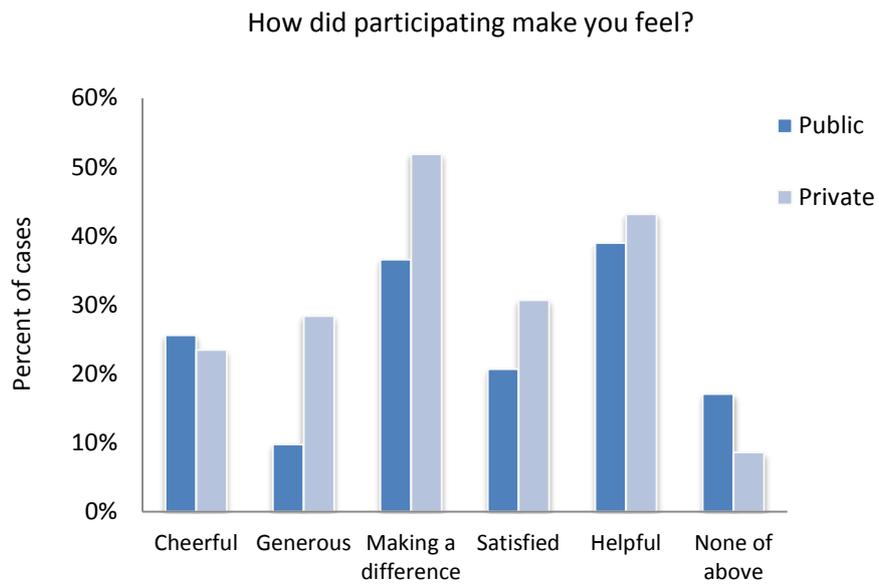

How did participating make you feel?

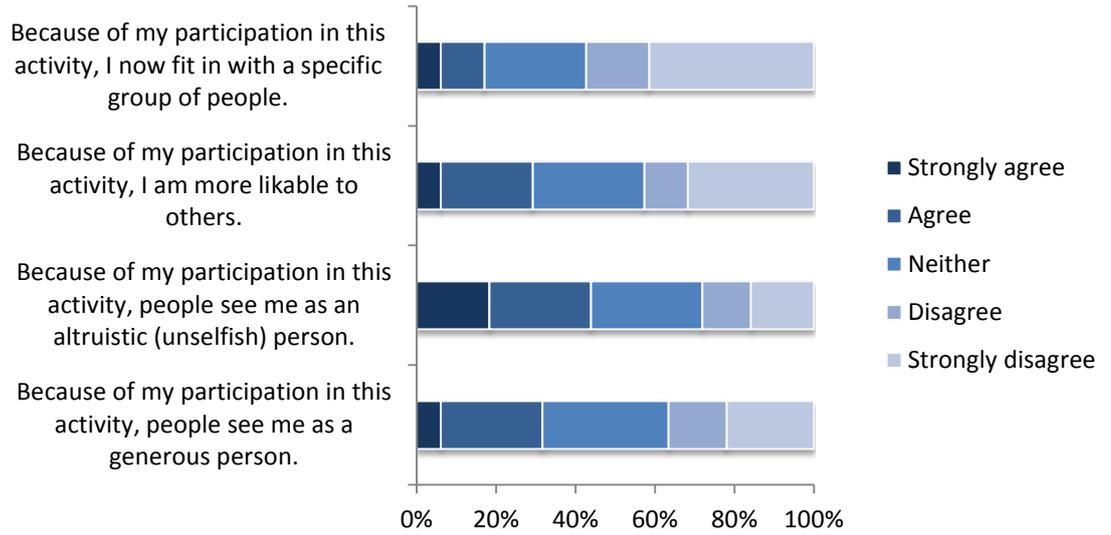**Figure 5**: Social self-concept (all participants).

Figure 6: % of participants who carried out subsequent participation with the same charity after taking part in an initial public or private online charitable activity

Social observability	Online charitable activity	% of participants who carried out subsequent participation with the same charity
Public	Liked, favourited, shared a social media post	85.7%
	Joined a social media group or page	80.0%
	Changed profile picture	57.1%
	Used a charity hashtag	33.3%
	Taken part in a social media campaign	31.6%
	Written about in e-mails or blogs	100.0%
	Shared that you made a donation on social media	33.3%
	Any public activity (Total)	**54.9%**
Private	Fundraised online	69.2%
	Made an online donation	65.7%
	Signed an online petition	72.2%
	Donated online via third party	37.5%
	Any private activity (Total)	**62.2%**