A Multimethod Approach to Evaluating Social Media Campaign Effectiveness

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Abstract

This study reports data from the website monitoring tools Google Analytics and Sprout Social and an online survey for a child welfare social media campaign on three social media platforms—a blog, Facebook, and Twitter. This study has two purposes: (1) to identify characteristics of visitors to cause-related social media platforms and (2) to examine factors associated with the campaign’s behavioral goals. Our data produced two key findings. First, there were different visitor patterns across the three platforms in terms of visitor characteristics and engagement. Second, factors positively related to behavioral outcomes were frequency of social media use, interactivity, perceived campaign credibility, and emotional engagement.

1. Introduction

Social media are challenging conventional wisdom and traditional theories about how public issues are framed and public agendas are set. But existing literature on social media falls within a limited range of types. One type informs about general concepts and principles of social media strategies [1,2]. Another type describes how professionals use social media. The latter tends to be based on interviews and surveys of practitioners, and its topic is either what kinds of social media they use or how they use them [3]. Missing from both types of literature, though, is a systematic attempt to understand how organizations’ use of social media can achieve specific communication and practical goals.

Various tools have been developed to monitor social media websites, such as Google Analytics and Sprout Social. But a thorough review of relevant literature reveals a continuing scarcity of research that uses these tools to monitor and assess practitioners’ social media activities. Undertaking this effort, the current study introduces and evaluates a social media campaign for child welfare. The campaign was called Every Child Is Yours, and it was sustained on three social media platforms that have been widely used by organizations to engage and mobilize their audiences: a blog, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account.

To monitor the traffic and assess the outcomes of this campaign, Google Analytics and Sprout Social were used, as well as a survey conducted among the people who visited the campaign’s blog, Facebook page, or Twitter account. By combining these two methods, we can understand better what the visitors’ characteristics are, and what makes them engage in the social media platform and take actions for the promoted cause. Thus, this study has two purposes: (1) to identify characteristics of visitors to cause-related social media platforms and (2) to examine factors associated with the campaign’s behavioral goals. The key factors are drawn from traditional and online media effects theories, and they include frequency of social media use, interactivity, perceived campaign credibility, and engagement [4-7].

Our study findings illuminate several practical considerations and challenges that campaign planners should consider when they develop and disseminate a cause-related communication strategy through social media to a targeted public. Specifically, there were mixed findings for the campaign's effectiveness across the three platforms. The blog platform was a partial success in that almost half of its visitors were frequent visitors, one third of them returned to it, and few left the website after viewing only its entrance page. On the Facebook page and Twitter account, the content attracting the most attention and responses was related to promotional activities such as contests. However, the campaign failed to achieve its numerical goals for acquiring Facebook and Twitter visitors, friends, and followers. Important implication of this failure are that campaigns on social media alone may not be sufficient to reach a large enough audience, and that such campaigns may need to continue for longer than half a year. Finally, findings also indicate that different social media platforms play different roles in a campaign, and that practitioners need to be aware of these roles when they decide which platforms to use to achieve different kinds of goals.
2. The Child Advocacy Social Media Campaign, Every Child Is Yours

The Every Child Is Yours social media campaign had two primary purposes, one to educate and the other to mobilize. The educational purpose, which was to be achieved mainly through the blog, was to raise public awareness about the findings of the ongoing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)[8]. This research consists of more than 60 medical studies that have connected the maltreatment of children with subsequent adult emotional and physical health problems. The campaign’s second purpose, mobilization, was to use social media websites—the blog, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account—to recruit volunteers for local organizations (defined as those located in three adjacent counties) that either promote child welfare or try to prevent child abuse.

The Every Child Is Yours campaign aimed to target local members who belong to the Millennial Generation. The decision to aim for this target audience was supported by the sponsoring organization, a [STATE] chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. Justification for this choice comes from the findings of a national 2010 Pew Research Center study showing that this age segment of 50 to 80 million American adults (roughly ages 18 to 30) have several characteristics that differentiate them from other segments [9]. They are technologically savvy, open-source and crowd-source oriented, educated, ethnically diverse, supportive of a progressive social agenda, highly attuned to helping others in need, and pragmatic about solutions to social problems. Another relevant characteristic is that most Millennials have not yet entered a settled life. The social fact of this extended young adulthood puts members of the Millennial Generation at a unique pivot point for reframing attitudes about society’s responsibilities to children.

In consultation with a social media marketing firm hired to develop and maintain this campaign, the researchers proposed a set of tentative goals to be achieved for the Facebook page and Twitter account. These goals were intentionally ambitious, but they were informed by the researchers’ and marketers’ shared knowledge about the Millennial Generation, the local community, the community’s traditional and new media communication vehicles, and the communication challenges typically involved in efforts to mobilize volunteers. As of July 2011, the goals projected for these three social media platforms were the following: by September 30, 2011: 500 Facebook fans and 1200 Twitter followers; by December 31, 2011: 1000 Facebook fans and 2000 Twitter followers.

3. The Current Study

3.1. Social media visitors’ characteristics and their visiting patterns

To the investigators’ knowledge, there is little to no research that evaluates how people visit and respond to an actual cause-related campaign appearing on various social media platforms. While the concept of social media tends to be used broadly and loosely, it is necessary to acknowledge that different types of social media and social media platforms may have different functions. For example, a blog typically serves as an online journal in which one or more authors can write about topics of shared interest and can feature relevant content from other social media sites. By contrast, Facebook and Twitter are social networking sites where users can connect with a variety of close and loose personal and professional ties, send messages, and share content with other users who typically have some similarity to themselves. In a slightly different capacity as a microblogging site, Twitter allows users to join an ongoing conversation by interacting with their followers and posting updates about either themselves or shared interests, two activities that aid in building relationships. Given some of the differences and unique characteristics across these social media platforms, it is important to understand how various types of visitors used and interacted with the Every Child Is Yours campaign on one or more of its three platforms. Thus, we ask the following research question:

*RQ1. What are the characteristics of the campaign’s visitors and their visiting patterns across the three social media platforms (blog, Facebook, Twitter)?*

3.2. Factors associated with behavioral goals

The effectiveness of this social media campaign was to be assessed according to three behavioral goals. The first is the extent to which visitors actively engaged with and responded to each of the three social media platforms; we call this “social media behavior.” The second is the extent to which visitors communicated with other people about the campaign offline; we call this “offline communication behavior.” The third concerned how much the visitors were mobilized to support the child welfare organizations featured on the blog and perform volunteer work for them; we call this “helping behavior.” Understanding what factors are associated with achieving these
behavioral goals can help develop a more effective cause-related social media campaign. Based on existing literature, the key factors examined were frequency of social media use, interactivity, perceived campaign credibility, and visitor engagement.

3.2.1. Frequency of social media use. Social media research has found that Facebook use is positively associated with civic participation and political participation [10]. The current study was informed by three basic premises from Social Cognitive Theory/Social Learning Theory that are related to media use [4]: first, that people learn from and observe role models; second, that they respond to the environment provided by media; third, that a major function of the media is to provide learning and socializing experiences to people who use them. To apply these premises to the current study, we expect that the more frequently people use social media related to child advocacy, the more they will learn about the topic, get interested in it, communicate about it with others, and eventually engage in helping behavior. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Frequent use of the child advocacy campaign’s social media platforms will be positively related to three behavioral outcomes (social media behavior, offline communication behavior, and helping behavior).

In addition to how frequently people use social media, it is also important to understand people’s experiences and their level of engagement with those media. To analyze the kinds of experiences consumers expect and get from social media, a suitable approach is Uses and Gratifications (U&G). Assuming that people are active and motivated media users, this approach has explained what people expect and get from traditional media such as television. The basic needs or motives of people’s media use have been labeled in various ways, but they commonly include (1) information seeking (learning new things and facts), (2) entertainment (escaping problems and relaxation), (3) social integration (sharing feelings and communicating with others), and (4) personal identity (reinforcing people’s own values and identifying themselves with other identities portrayed in media) [7]. From recent studies on why people use new media platforms, several typologies of people’s motives for using the Internet have emerged. These typologies include equivalents to the four major motives described above [11], except that they also include “convenience.” For example, through a pilot study and a field study testing people’s motives for using a website, it was found that they prefer websites that are easy to navigate, entertaining, credible, and high in information value [12]. In sum, the factors that determine media user preferences can be summarized as interactivity, credibility, and information value that leads to consumer engagement.

3.2.2. Interactivity. The way social media users experience and engage in the features and content of social media platforms may determine how effectively a campaign on those platforms can achieve its behavioral goals. An important element in giving users easy and comfortable experiences is interactivity, which refers to communicators’ more or less synchronous actions on each other and on a message by way of a medium [6]. Interactivity on the Web has been defined using multiple processes, functions, and perceptions and by including elements such as direction of communication, user control, and time [13].

In social media settings, interactivity can be conceived as the degree to which users can easily navigate through a website or Internet platform and interact with both its message providers and other users. Unlike users of traditional media, users of an interactive medium have much more freedom in controlling the messages they receive and customizing those messages according to their preferences. Also, a higher level of (perceived) interactivity is related to positive outcomes, for example attitude toward an online ad, memory of its contents, and purchase intention [14]. Based on this empirical evidence, we propose the following hypothesis.

H2: Perceived interactivity will be positively related to the three behavioral outcomes.

3.2.3. Perceived campaign credibility. The degree to which people perceive a campaign on social media to be credible and trustworthy is a critical indicator of how favorably they respond to it. Visitors’ “perceived campaign credibility” refers to their beliefs that a campaign will perform in expected ways.

In new media contexts such as online communication and Internet advertising, perceived credibility has been an important factor because of platform-related issues like uncertainty, privacy, and anonymity [15]. For example, in the context of e-commerce advertising campaigns, the more consumers perceive that an online campaign is credible, believable, and/or trustworthy, the more likely they will engage in e-commerce, intend to buy something online, and form favorable attitudes toward an ad and the content provided by a website [16]. For e-commerce websites, an important criterion for perceived credibility is transaction-related privacy or security, and significant cues for trust are third-party certifications or “trustmarks” [17].
4. Methods

The first part of this section describes how the Every Child Is Yours social media campaign was managed. The second part describes how data about the campaign’s social media platforms were collected by using two web monitoring tools (Google Analytics for the blog and Sprout Social for Facebook and Twitter) and by conducting an online survey among the people who visited the three platforms.

4.1. Social media campaign management

Between July and December 2011, a social media marketing firm was hired to develop, manage, and monitor the campaign’s social media platforms. The firm was selected because it was a locally based online marketing company that had both a professional track record managing social media and existing relationships with local organizations. There were three platforms: a blog, everychildisyours.org; an Every Child Is Yours Facebook page; and an EveryChildIsYours Twitter account (the full name EveryChildIsYours was unavailable). The purposes of the blog were to provide information about the Centers for Disease Control’s studies on the serious social consequences of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and to direct readers to a [STATE] chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America. To avoid order effects that would result in more clicks for the organizations that appeared at the top of the list, the buttons were rotated weekly throughout the campaign. The blog also featured links to the campaign’s Facebook page and Twitter account so that visitors to the blog could also go directly to the campaign’s other social media sites.

On the blog were posted a total of 39 articles, which can be categorized according to the information they provided about the following topics: the project itself (including project goals, contests, surveys) (9); research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and child abuse and neglect (17); opportunities at volunteer organizations (6); and ACEs-related events, meetings, webinars, etc. (7). In addition, a contest with a prize was hosted to get visitors to contribute personal stories about how an adult’s positive intervention in their life during childhood helped relieve their own adverse childhood experiences.
A total of 37 messages with topics similar to the blog’s were posted on the Facebook page. To achieve the campaign goals, tactics used on the Facebook page included the following: generate compelling content; provide an even mix of informational and entertaining content by incorporating facts, contests, and questions concerning the ACEs initiative; start a conversation and keep it going; engage with individual fans by asking questions and providing status feedback; interact with non-profit organizations that already have a presence on Facebook; and encourage partner organizations to share and post their news, events, and photos on the Facebook page.

A total of 372 messages were sent through the Twitter account. To achieve the campaign goals, tactics used were similar to those for the Facebook page. But additional tactics specific to a Twitter campaign included the following: engage other users by following back those that followed EveryChildIsURs (when appropriate); push out important CDC research information and links to increase follower awareness about the long term public health problems of ACEs; and follow relevant tweeters who were affiliated with local businesses, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and entertainment outlets.

4.2. Monitoring the social media platforms

To track visitor patterns and behavior, one tool used was Google Analytics, a free service offered by Google that allows website owners to track data on frequency and duration of visits, total number of visitors, unique visitors, traffic, sources of traffic, page views, average time on the website, bounce rate, and where visitors came from (referrers) and went out to. One estimate is that, because Google Analytics is a free service, it has been used on about 57% of the 10,000 most popular websites, or almost 50% of the top one million websites (Wikipedia). To the authors’ knowledge, only a few published academic studies have used Google analytics to track and monitor web visitors [19, 20].

During the time these data were collected, Google Analytics did not monitor social networking sites. The program used for that purpose was Sprout Social, which monitors platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Foursquare. It provided the following information: for Facebook, number of active users and fans, number of content “likes,” number of fans, number of wall posts, and fan demographics; for Twitter, number of mentions, number of messages sent and received, number of clicks on links and retweets (as well as the content for both), number of followers, and follower demographics (age and gender).

4.3. Online survey

Survey participants were recruited on each of the three social media platforms (blog, Facebook page, Twitter account) in exchange for two incentives: (1) $5 donation to a local child advocacy organization and (2) one random drawing to win a $100 Amazon gift card. On the blog, the announcement was placed in the top right corner. Through Facebook and Twitter, survey announcements were updated and repeatedly promoted. After a few cases were removed because they had numerous missing values or were outliers, a total of 73 cases were usable for final analysis. Among the survey participants, 71.2% were females and 86.3% were whites with a mean age of 37.17 (SD = 13.93, Min = 20, Max = 68) and 14.66 years of schooling (SD = 4.19). About a half of the participants were married and another half had one or more children; 42.5% lived in the state where the campaign took place; and 16% worked at a job related to child advocacy.

Once people agreed to participate in the survey, they were asked about their history and amount of social media use, personality traits, and past experiences with child advocacy. Then they were asked specifically about their frequency of visiting the three social media platforms, their experiences with them, and their behavior interacting with them. Lastly, they were asked about their demographic information.

4.4. Measures

The dependent variables include various social media use behaviors, offline communication behaviors, and helping behaviors. The key predictors include the following: (1) frequency of visiting the Every Child Is Yours social media platforms; (2) perceived interactivity of those platforms; (3) perceived campaign credibility; and (4) visitor engagement— civic mindedness, utilitarian, social facilitation, inspiration. These variables were constructed, after Cronbach’s alpha reliability was checked, by averaging the respective multiple question items drawn from existing literature [5, 6, 12, 16].

For the three dependent variables, the following multiple question items (yes or no) were summed to construct the respective construct: Social media behavior—(1) Commented on the blog? (2) Clicked the “Like” button on the Facebook page? (3) “Invited” your friends to the Facebook page? (4) “Tweeted” about the issue or the campaign? (Mean = 1.14, SD= 1.50, alpha = .85); Offline communication behavior— (1) Sought more information about the child abuse issue? (2) Spread the word about the website with your friends and family? (Mean = .73, SD = .87, Interitem
correlation = .62); Helping behavior—(1) Given help to abused children? (2) Volunteered for any of the listed organizations? (3) Reported someone whom you suspect of child abuse? (Mean= .73, SD= 1.10, alpha = .82).

Social media was asked as follows: “On average, how frequently have you visited each of the three social media platforms—blog, Facebook, and Twitter?” (5-point scale: 1-less than once a month; 2-once a month; 3-a few times a month; 4-a few times a weeks; 5-several times a day). Each of these three frequency questions was multiplied by whether or not respondents visited the respective media platform: frequency of blog use (Mean = .84, SD= 1.29), frequency of Facebook use (Mean = 1.05, SD= 1.46), frequency of Twitter use (Mean = .81, SD= 1.46).

Interactivity was asked by averaging the following three question items: How much do you agree with each of the following statements about the Every Child Is Yours social media campaign? (5-point scale: 1-Strongly disagree to 5-Strongly agree) (1) I felt that I had the freedom to go anywhere on the Every Child Is Yours website, (2) Interacting with the Every Child Is Yours website was easy, (3) The Facebook or Twitter messages were posted in a timely manner; Mean = 3.80, SD = .78, alpha = .78.

Perceived campaign credibility was measured by averaging the following three question items: “I think the Every Child Is Yours social media campaign is (5-point scale: -3 to +3), (1) Unbelievable–Believable, (2) Unconvincing–Convincing, (3) Not credible–Credible (Mean = 1.44, SD = 1.34, alpha = .94).

Consumer engagement was measured with multiple dimensions, drawn from the existing literature [5] to modify to this study: Civic mindedness—(1) Becoming acquainted with the campaign makes me feel like a better citizen, (2) Becoming acquainted with the campaign makes a difference in my life, (3) This site reflects my values, (4) It makes me more a part of my community, and (5) I am a better person for using this site (Mean = 3.60, SD = .78, alpha = .91); Utilitarian— (1) The campaign provides information that helps me make important decisions and (2) I give advice and tips to people I know based on things I’ve read on this site (Mean = 3.33, SD = .96, Interitem correlation = .80); Social facilitation—(1) I bring up things I have seen on this site in conversations with many other people, (2) This site often gives me something to talk about, and (3) I use things from this site in discussions or arguments with people I know (Mean = 3.31, SD = .88, alpha = .87); Inspiration—(1) It inspires me in my own life, (2) This site makes me think of things in new ways, and (3) Some stories on this site touch me deep down (Mean = 3.81, SD = .76, alpha = .88).

Control variables include demographics (age, gender, race, years of education, residence, job relevance), psychographics (altruism and opinion leadership), and past behavior (past experience in child advocacy or abuse issues, social media use). A substantial amount of literature has documented that these variables are related to people’s prosocial behavior, their attitudes toward the specific topic of child advocacy, and social media effects [10, 21]. By controlling these variables, we can more clearly examine how the key predictors determine the key dependent variables. To test H1-3 and RQ2, bivariate correlation analysis was performed. Then, to control for demographic and psychographic variables, partial correlation analysis was performed.

5. Results

The first research question asked who visited the three social media platforms and what their visiting patterns were. We report below the summary of the relevant Google Analytics metrics for the blog and Sprout Social metrics for Facebook and Twitter, which provide slightly different categories of information across the three platforms.

The blog had 1,170 total visits with 807 unique visitors. Visitor traffic was classified according to three types of sources from which it emerged—referral, direct, and search. “Referral traffic” refers to visits from a link on another site that lands on one’s own site, and it is a possible indicator of social media marketing success; about 45% of the visitors were referred from the campaign’s Facebook page, Twitter account, or other sites where the blog was promoted. “Direct traffic” refers to visits made by people who went to the blog by typing its URL into a browser’s address bar, by clicking on a bookmark, or by clicking on a link in an email or SMS; about 22% of the blogs visitors accessed it in one of those ways. “Search traffic” refers to visits from search engines such as Google, Bing, Yahoo!, or similar; about 33% of the visitors came to the site in that way.

Another important traffic pattern is the amount of time visitors spent on or within the blog site. Altogether, the 1,170 visitors viewed a total of 4,269 pages for an average of 3 minutes 21 seconds. The percentage of single-page visits is referred to as “bounce rate,” and it indicates the number of times a visitor left the site immediately after viewing the entrance page without browsing around on other parts of the site. The conventional wisdom is that this bounce rate should be low, because a high bounce rate indicates relatively little interest in the website’s content. The blog turned out to have a low bounce rate...
of only 3.68%, which may indicate another social media marketing success because 97% of the visitors clicked to other pages on the website rather than just leaving after seeing the entrance page.

For the engagement metrics, about 33% of the visitors returned to the site. Among them, 45% had high royalties with more than 15 visits and up to 100 visits. “Outbound” traffic shows that a majority of visitors among 1,170 total visits left the site for other sites related to the Every Child Is Yours campaign. For example, 38 visitors among 1,170 total visits went to the Facebook page, while 90 visitors among 1,170 total visits went to websites of the child welfare organizations associated with the campaign.

The Sprout Social traffic metrics for the EveryChildisURs Twitter account were number of followers, messages sent, and messages received. The account had 90 followers, about 75% of whom were male. Age group distributions were as follows: 55% were 25-34 years old; 22.5% were 35-44; 9% were 45-54; and 13.5% were 55 or older. A total of 372 messages were sent and 164 messages were received.

The engagement metrics for the Twitter account were retweets, @mentions, clicks on links, tweeting behavior, and popular tweets. In the current context, a “retweet” refers to an occasion when one of the followers of the EveryChildisURs Twitter account distributed one of its tweets to his or her own followers, thereby extending the campaign’s reach on Twitter beyond the “tweeters” who were directly following it. There were 163 @mentions reported, indicating that other tweeters mentioned the EveryChildisURs account name in their own tweets and drew attention to it as a keyword by putting the @ sign in front of it. In addition, there were a total of 311 clicks on the links that were occasionally supplied in EveryChildisURs tweets.

To measure the account followers’ tweeting behavior, “conversation” tweets were compared with “update” tweets, and new contacts were compared with existing contacts. A conversation tweet is one that a user sends as an @reply to a different Twitter account, and an update tweet is one that a user sends to his or her own followers. Accordingly, if the EveryChildisURs account had a higher number of conversation tweets, that would indicate a higher number of reply messages to others’ tweets. When a Twitter user (or “tweeter”) sends a reply to another tweeter for the first time, it is counted as a new contact. Existing contacts, by contrast, are other Twitter users whom a tweeter has previously engaged with and contacted again. In terms of conversation behavior, if the EveryChildisURs account reached a higher percentage of existing contacts than new contacts, that would suggest that the account had more frequent conversation with existing contacts. With respect to these two comparative metrics, frequent users of the Twitter account seemed to have been highly engaged because there was a higher percentage of conversation tweets (73%) than update tweets (27%) and a higher percentage of existing contacts (77%) than new contacts (23%).

The EveryChildisURs tweets that were most popular provided information on events related to the campaign’s affiliated child welfare organizations. The popularity of these messages was ranked according to the number of users reached. When the follower retweeted the message, popularity was counted as the sum of the number of followers plus the followers' followers.

The Sprout Social program’s metrics were also used to measure traffic for the Every Child Is Yours Facebook page. There were a total of 293 visitors with 236 fans. Three quarters of the visitors were females, and age group percentages were 30% for ages 18-24, 30% for 25-34, 15% for 35-44, 8% for 45-54, and 12% for 55 and over.

Facebook page engagement was measured by determining the number of comments and “likes”; there were only 4 comments and 9 likes. Summing the number of comments and likes for each post determined which ones were most popular. Those posts were about gifts and raffles, promotional events, and videos.

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<th>Table 1. Partial Correlation Analysis</th>
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<td><strong>Main Predictors</strong></td>
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Note: Control variables that were partialled out include age, race, gender, years of education, residence, child advocacy-related job, married, altruism, opinion leadership, past experience, and social media experience.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the more frequently people visited the three types of social media platforms, the more likely they engaged in the three behavioral goals of social media use, offline communication, and helping. Table 1 reports the partial correlation results. This hypothesis also predicted positive relationships between each of the frequency of
social media use variables (frequency of blog use, Facebook use, and Twitter use) and each of the behavioral outcome variables (social media use behavior, communication behavior, and helping behavior). After controlling for the demographic and psychographic variables, the relationships between the frequency of blog use and each of the three behavioral outcomes became non-significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted the more people perceived that the three social media platforms were interactive, the more likely they engaged in the three behavioral goals of social media use, offline communication, and helping. The partial correlation results show that perceived interactivity was significantly and positively related to offline communication and social media use behaviors, but not to helping behavior.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the more people perceived the social media campaign platforms to be credible, the more likely they engaged in the three behavioral goals of social media use, offline communication, and helping. The results support this hypothesis because perceived campaign credibility was significantly and positively related to all three behavioral outcomes, even after controlling for demographic and psychographic variables.

Research Question 2 asked which types of visitor engagement and behavioral outcomes are significantly related. As shown in Table 1, utilitarian engagement was significantly correlated only with offline communication behavior. Civic mindedness was significantly related to offline communication and social media use behaviors even after controlling for the demographic and psychographic variables. Inspiration seemed to be the most consistent predictor in that it was significantly correlated to all three behavioral outcomes, even with all the control variables taken into consideration. Lastly, social facilitation engagement seemed significantly related only to offline communication behavior.

6. Discussion

The overarching goal of this study was to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of a social media campaign. To do so, we developed the Every Child Is Yours campaign on a blog, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account, and we analyzed it using social media monitoring tools in combination with an online visitor survey.

To begin with, data from the Google Analytics and Sprout Social monitoring tools revealed important visiting patterns and different functions of the three social media platforms. For example, the blog data suggest some success of the campaign in that almost half of the blog’s visitors were highly loyal and frequent visitors to the site, one third of them returned to it, and overall the blog had a low “bounce rate” of visitors who left the website after viewing only its entrance page. In particular, the 44% referral rate indicates the blog’s main role in linking it to the other social media platforms.

In addition, the Sprout Social audience metrics show noticeable similarities and differences between the Every Child Is Yours Facebook page and the EveryChildisURs Twitter account. For the similarities, the content attracting the most attention and responses was related to promotional activities such as contests. As for the differences, Facebook users are generally younger than Twitter users. The data also indicate that more males used Twitter than females, while the opposite is the case for Facebook. However, campaign planners should note that gender proportion may not be reliable information because social media users, including private ones but particularly those who represent organizations, may often overlook changing the default indicator of user gender, which was set as female in Facebook and male in Twitter.

On the negative side, the campaign failed to achieve its numerical goals for acquiring Facebook and Twitter visitors, friends, and followers. This failure suggests that one possible miscalculation behind this campaign was that it used a “long tail” social media strategy with a target audience that was too small for it to work [22]. This failure to achieve the campaign goals may indicate challenges that should be anticipated by practitioners who are planning social media campaigns for local rather than national audiences. Cause-related social media campaigns, particularly when they have been newly launched, are likely to have limited reach toward and engagement with target audiences—unless they also work in conjunction with traditional media. For example, media campaign literature differentiates between the “push” reach of traditional media and the “pull” reach of the Internet [23].

As for the effort to reach the intended target audience, it may be true that the Millennials are more conscious of and actively concerned about social causes. But our findings do not confirm that they are exceptionally more attentive to social causes than other age groups are. This outcome should temper campaigners’ optimistic expectations of being able to connect with a segment of the population simply because it uses social media more than other age segments do. In addition to choosing an appropriate media platform for reaching a target audience, it is still necessary to develop substantive and persuasive strategies to explain why that audience should care...
about a particular cause. Even if Millennials are relatively more concerned about social causes than other population segments are, another potential problem is the fit between their needs and interests and the type of social cause under consideration. If many in the Millennial generation see themselves in the stage between childhood and parenthood, they may not find an issue such as child welfare or the social impact of adverse childhood experiences immediately relevant to themselves.

Although not presented in Table 1, our bivariate correlation analysis indicated that age in this case was not a significant predictor of any of the three behavioral outcomes—social media use behavior, offline communication behavior, and helping behavior. Instead, the variables that seemed more significant were frequency of visitors’ social media use, perceived interactivity and campaign credibility, and consequences of visitors’ engagement with the social media platforms.

Notable among the different kinds of engagement that social media users are likely to have was emotional engagement (i.e., inspiration), which plays an important role in predicting behavioral outcomes. But because this finding may be specific to the topic of child advocacy, future research should replicate it to confirm whether emotional engagement is important across different types of social issues, or whether it is specific to issues such as child abuse rather than, say, urban planning or bank regulation.

In addition, visitors’ perceptions whether a social media campaign is credible and trustworthy also determined how much they would engage with the campaign’s social media platforms, communicate about the campaign, and perform helping behaviors such as volunteering for child welfare organizations. These findings imply that campaigners should design their social media sites to include “trustmarks” or other cues that enhance credibility, such as endorsements by public figures and independent organizations, disclosures about sources of information, and regularly updated information [17, 18].

Lastly, frequent use of Facebook and Twitter was significantly related to helping behavior, which was the campaign’s ultimate behavioral outcome, while frequent use of the blog was not. This disparity indicates that the three types of social media platforms play different roles, and that campaigners should determine which purposes and goals they would serve most effectively.

Several limitations should be noted. First, because this social media campaign ran only for a short time (July to December 2011), we were not able to monitor and assess its effectiveness for promoting actual helping behavior—in this case, how many of the visitors actually donated money to the affiliated organizations, did volunteer work for them, or reported cases of child abuse. If the campaign had lasted for longer than half a year, some of the engagement measurement on the social media platforms, such as the Facebook page, might have been more meaningful.

Also, a longitudinal survey along with analysis of the web monitoring tools would provide useful information on the visitors’ social media use and subsequent behavior patterns over the long term. Second, because the sample size for the online visitor survey was rather small, we were not able to perform multivariate analysis such as regression, and the results may have weak statistical power. On a related point, the data’s local nature may have limited generalizability. Future research should replicate the findings in other locales and for other topics, but it will also need to develop strategies for recruiting more visitors and participants.

Despite these limitations, this study is one of the first to assess the effectiveness of an actual cause-related social media campaign with web monitoring tools in conjunction with an online survey. Using the social media monitoring tools provides information that cannot be collected through other methods, including the amount and duration of visits, basic demographics of the visitors, linkage between the blog and its attendant social media, and types of content that prove most popular and get most responses. Combining such measurements with a survey method allowed us to understand better what the visitors’ characteristics are, as well as what make them engage in the social media platform and take actions for the promoted cause. For example, the multi-method approach helped assess audience engagement in different ways.

The findings may also suggest that communication campaigners are likely to have limited results if they rely predominantly on social media, especially if they are focusing on a specific age group like Millennials. Campaigning through social media may be a long tail strategy, and such a strategy may not work in a local context such as a community with moderate population density and particularly over a brief time period. Also, in any setting, consumer engagement is important for achieving behavioral goals, particularly emotional engagement directly related to the topic of child abuse prevention and child advocacy—although the type of experiences and engagement that prove most important may differ across topics. Future research should be developed to produce more insights on how social media campaigns can achieve their goals by using novel methodologies like web monitoring tools.
7. References


