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MEASURING 'VALUE' IN SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES – WHERE WE'RE AT AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

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FOREWORD/INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS ‘VALUE’ AND HOW CAN SOCIAL MEDIA MEASURE IT?

There are three questions that this document addresses (in sequential sections)

- 1) What is value and what might be ‘valued’
- 2) How might we measure ‘value’ in social media
- 3) How are Third Sector organisations using social media, and measuring value

The fourth section, which is in a sense a standalone section, brings the questions together and discusses the role of social media in measuring value including:

- Using social media measures within SROI for funders, both via individual projects in action, and feedback on those projects
- The levels of ‘value’ that might be addressed, and their integration into useable formats for funders, and others.

INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF 'VALUE' AND ITS MEASUREMENT

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA, WHY DOES IT MATTER TO THE THIRD SECTOR

The 2011 White Paper 'Giving' (HM Government, 2011) made clear that the UK Government is placing increasing importance on the role of social media, social networking, and the internet in charitable activities of various kinds. These activities range from increasing opportunities for financial donations – online and via mobile use – to improved paths to volunteering which use the range of social media and networking tools – including facebook and twitter – to facilitate a rise in volunteerism in the UK.

"Evidence has shown the importance of charities being able to use the internet effectively, particularly in a climate of funding cuts across the sector. Many small charities are often slow to take up new technology. They may be losing out on the myriad benefits that effective ICT can bring them, namely in cutting costs, raising more money, increasing reach, building communities and demonstrating impact." (McMullin & Pritchard, 2011)

Or in the bolder words of the raceonline2012 pamphlet:

Technology has swept through every sector. Charities, in particular small charities, are the last in line, but have the most to gain. Technology allows you to:

• Cut costs • Raise more money • Build communities • Increase your reach • More vividly demonstrate your impact...

...As the sector enters a time of unprecedented funding cuts, of up to £5.1 billion, and with 40% of charities saying they anticipate rising demand for their services, it has never been more urgent that civil society organisations respond to the changed communications environment.

Put technology at the heart of your organisation and you can maximise your resources, raise money, communicate more powerfully and to a wider audience, and deliver services to end users more efficiently. (RaceOnline2012, 2011, p. 1)

WEB USE

These benefits are reflected in the fact that, of UK organisations surveyed, 89% felt computers and the internet were very important (McMullin & Pritchard, 2011). With another survey finding that:

Use of the Internet is common among respondent organisations. It is most frequently used for email (87 percent), followed by electronic newsletters (71 percent), fundraising (66 percent), online payments (64 percent), social networking (63 percent), and website analytics (61 percent). Online tools most frequently reported as in the planning stage are discussion groups/message boards (30 percent), weblogs (29 percent), volunteer management (29 percent), and polls and surveys (29 percent). A number indicated their organisations have no plans to use certain online tools, including advocacy (55 percent) and supporter profile updates (54 percent). The most significant change in use or planned use of online tools from 2008-2010 has occurred in the area of social networking (increasing from 71 percent in 2009 to 84 percent in 2010). (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 36)

Interestingly, within 49% of organisations the marketing/communications/public relations team control the website content and direction, and this number is rising (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 41). The picture is similar in American non-profits, where "Even the more technologically intensive house social networks are owned by Communications (17%), Marketing (13%), Fundraising (13%), Programs (12%), Executive Management (10%) and cross-departmental (owned by multiple departments equally) (11%)." (NTEN, Common Knowledge, & Blackbaud, 2011, p. 3). This seems to be focussed on marketing for brand

awareness rather than explicit fundraising as “75% and 73% of organizations report that the goal for their commercial social networks includes a marketing focus - to “engage supporters” or “grow membership”- respectively. Fundraising is a large but secondary role; 65% use CSNs to raise money, and 56% state fundraising as a goal for their CSNs over the next year.” (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 9). Given that a sample of Americans (internet users and non-users alike) found that over 60% think the internet has a major impact on the ability of a group to draw attention to an issue, and about the same the ability to impact society at large (Rainie, Purcell, & Smith, 2011) clearly the internet has an important role to play.

SOME CONCERNS

Despite the clear importance of web technologies for organisations, they tend to rate their performance at using them lower than the importance. When asked to rate the importance of items on a 10 point scale, and the organisation’s performance at using those tools, there was an average gap of 1.5 between importance and performance for ‘social media’ (6.3 and 4.8 respectively), 1.8 for ‘managing relationships with supporters’ (8.7 and 6.9 respectively), ‘showing impact of the organisation’s activities’ (8.6 and 6.7 respectively) as well as ‘recruiting new donors’ (7.9, 5.4 respectively) (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 19).

Respondents indicated the most important website activity is marketing the organisation and educating the public about the organisation’s mission (8.7 average rating), followed by communicating with supporters (e.g., hyperlink to targeted web pages) (7.5), acquiring new donors and supporters (7.1), raising funds (7.0), serving programme recipients (6.5), and promoting campaigns (6.2).

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of their organisation’s website in meeting organisational strategic Internet goals. Twenty-seven percent rated the website very effective (8 or higher on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not effective at all and 10 is extremely effective). Only 17 percent rated the website ineffective or somewhat ineffective (1-3 on the effectiveness scale). (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 38).

“It is interesting that 46 percent do not have a written online strategy given the expectations regarding increased website donations...and the importance of the website in meeting the organisation’s strategic Internet goals” (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 30), this is particularly interesting given the importance organisations place on their websites, and the gaps in some areas of performance that could be addressed via web technologies.

This may be a result of lack of staff skills, which 58% of organisations believe has been the main barrier in using the internet effectively (McMullin & Pritchard, 2011, p. 2). “Of the 170,000 charities in the UK, 125,000 have a turnover of less than £100,000. NCVO argues that the biggest skills-gap in the sector is in information communication technology. A third of small and medium sized charities say they have nobody they trust to discuss IT needs with.” (RaceOnline2012, 2011, p. 1). This concern is mirrored in social media use, where “63% believe that a lack of staff resource is the biggest barrier to using social media, and 53% cite a lack of understanding of the benefits of social media” while importantly, “72% believe that online training/resources would help to overcome barriers” (McMullin & Pritchard, 2011, p. 2).

SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Despite these barriers, 72% of organisations in that survey use social media, with 97% using it to keep people up-to-date with news and events, and 58% reporting that social media is currently important to their organisations and an encouraging 83% believing it will be very important in 12 months time (McMullin & Pritchard, 2011, p. 2). The situation in America is similar with 89% reporting a Facebook presence in 2011 (up

from 74% in 2008), and 57% a twitter presence (down from 60% in 2010), and other networks still being used (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 2)

The American survey also asked about the size of those networks, finding that the sites which are most popularly used, also offered growing networks to the non-profit organisations, with Facebook average community size up 161% to 6,376 members, from 2,440 in 2009. As with twitter uptake, numbers have somewhat stagnated with followers up 2% to 1,822 followers from 2010, but up 535% from 2009 levels (287 followers) (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 2). It is perhaps unsurprising that 82% of nonprofits find their commercial social networking efforts (e.g. facebook, twitter), valuable or very valuable.

HOW ARE ORGANISATIONS USING THE TOOLS?

According to respondents, the primary groups of people who visit their website are supporters (63 percent), programme recipients (51 percent), volunteers (32 percent), and members (41 percent). (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 39)

Given the high numbers of 'programme recipients' using websites, one would expect some resources to be targeted at those members. Within the US survey, 13% of non-profits have a 'house social network' – these are networks which are internal, rather than run through a company like facebook. Of these, 55% of nonprofits "report that the role of their community is for Program and Service delivery, eclipsing Marketing (49%.... This mirrors our anecdotal experience over the last year as we talked with increasing numbers of nonprofits looking to use their house networks for delivery of health (e.g. stop smoking), education (e.g. electronic delivery of business education curricula), advocacy (e.g. stop climate change) or best practice innovation (e.g. animal welfare shelter improvements)." (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 3)

FINANCES

One of the key benefits RaceOnline2012 raises for charities utilising social media, is financial.

- 1. Spend less money: Make your website your primary publishing channel. You'll reduce paper costs and carbon footprint, and be able to deliver video and photographic content that vividly demonstrates the change your organisation delivers.*
- 2. Raise more money: Online fundraising raises around £10 for every £1 spent on direct costs. The average online donation is £30 compared to £15 for offline. When targeted, the average online donation is £54.6. Overall charitable giving fell year-on-year in 5 months of 2010, while online giving increased during all 12 months. Only 33% of charity websites accept online donations. Justgiving.com has let more than 11 million people to raise £770 million for more than 8,000 UK registered charities since its launch in 2000. Many charities have seen donations rise as a result of posting finance and performance on their websites. (RaceOnline2012, 2011)*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, of UK charities, half actively raise funds online¹ (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 42). While email, events and direct mail play important roles in online donations, "Email to potential new donors is predicted to be a top driver by a greater percentage this year than last year" and, "Another top driver activity that respondents expect to increase over last year is social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)." (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 43).

¹ There is a discrepancy here between the report referred to by RaceOnline 2012 (nfpSynergy, 2011) which asks 1000 members of the public various questions about charities, and the Blackbaud and Resource Alliance report which sends out surveys to charities, and in 2010 received 295 of which 250 were fully complete. This may be due to the nature of the charities in question (in both surveys) – i.e. a bias in sampling, or a lack of awareness in members of the public regarding charitable fundraising in the nfpSynergy survey..

However, “When asked to rank the fundraising efforts that are the top drivers of donations to the organisation, respondents give major donor cultivation, direct mail, and special events the highest overall ratings. ...The lowest ranked fundraising activities are SMS (text messaging), social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), door-to-door collections, and telemarketing.” (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 21).

Within the US,

Fundraising on Facebook is growing but it's still a minority effort. The number of groups successfully generating a small fundraising revenue stream (\$1 to \$10K annually) has risen each year from 38% in 2009 to 46% in 2011. The number of organizations raising \$100,000 or more per year on social networks doubled this year from 0.2% to 0.4%, but obviously this still represents a critically thin slice of the sector. (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 3)

What's particularly interesting about this is that it appears organisation size doesn't matter in terms of online fundraising success.

It turns out that nonprofits of all sizes are able to scale their fundraising efforts on commercial social networks. We identified a subset (27 organizations) of “Master Social Fundraisers” from amongst the survey respondents. Master Social Fundraisers are nonprofits that raised more than \$100,000 on Facebook over the last year. Fascinatingly, the first characteristic that jumped out reversed many of our conclusions regarding organization size: 30% of the Master Fundraisers were Small organizations (\$1 to \$5MM annual budget) and 8% were Medium-sized (\$6MM to \$50MM). The average Facebook following of a Master Social Fundraiser is nearly 100,000 (99,911) members—more than fifteen times the general average. 30% of Master Fundraisers dedicate 2+ staff to managing and fundraising on their social networking presence, compared to just 2% for the industry. (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 3)

TRANSPARENCY

Social media use has also continued to facilitate the increasing transparency of many organisations, including those in the third sector. In this context, transparency should be understood as any activity which publicly provides access to income and expenditure data, as well as various measures of outputs and outcomes. A key concern in the creation of this document was addressing the fact that many organisations *will* be measuring outcome variables, but not reporting on them. However, there is a sense in which measuring outcomes is depreciated by a failure to report effectively on them, within the organisation, to beneficiaries and to funders – whether they're members of the public or larger funding organisations.

There may be perhaps unexpected, indirect impacts of reporting on transparency. For example “many charities have seen donations rise as a result of posting finance and performance on their websites.” (RaceOnline2012, 2011)

One practice the internet and social media has facilitated is open data practices which encourage organisations to post their more detailed data online in highly useable formats. This data can then be manipulated for various kinds of and be used to hold organisations to account. It allows charities to:

Better demonstrate impact: Charities face growing pressure for accountability and transparency as competition for government and private funding grows fiercer and becomes more closely tied to evidence of results. Currently only 35% of reports contain evidence to support charities' outcomes. Charities can quickly improve how they describe results by making more of the data they have to inspire and engage donors. (RaceOnline2012, 2011)

Charities are aware of this move to hold them accountable, 44 percent of respondents report that donors ask to be updated on how their contributions are spent. This is a significant increase. In previous years of the study (2007-2009), the percentage reporting that donors asked to be updated was only about 25 percent.” (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 44)

“Other practices in place include communicating proactively to donors on how donations were spent (73 percent), communicating proactively on the impact of programmes (72 percent, up from 61 percent in 2008)” (Blackbaud & The Resource Alliance, 2010, p. 46). While much of this movement is no doubt via email campaigns, some will also be via the use of social media – including open data initiatives, and the use of social media by beneficiaries to display the value of projects, and empower them within the organisations.

This relates to the third of RaceOnline2012’s key issues on social media for the non-profit sector. Social media allows organisations to:

Draw on the knowledge of stakeholders using online collaboration tools, and keep content online so partners can access materials and advice when you host fundraising events. Tell the powerful story of your work online to involve audiences – the deeper the relationships you build with them now, the stronger your networks for future fundraising or campaigning. (RaceOnline2012, 2011).

SHIFTS WITHIN THE COMMERCIAL AND NON-COMMERCIAL SECTOR

Murray et al., (2010) suggest that we are witnessing a move to a “social economy” which “melds features which are very different from economies based on the production and consumption of commodities.” Key features of which include a focus on distributed networks – such as social networks, and “an emphasis on collaboration and on repeated interactions, care and maintenance rather than one-off consumption.”. They suggest that it is characterised by:

Two themes – sometimes clashing, sometimes coinciding – give it its distinctive character. One comes from technology: the spread of networks; creation of global infrastructures for information; and social networking tools.

The other comes from culture and values: the growing emphasis on the human dimension; on putting people first; giving democratic voice; and starting with the individual and relationships rather than systems and structures. Murray et al., (2010)

They argue that this has led to a focus on consumers as active players and producers in their own right, and a kind of personalisation that we didn’t experience before. Measurement of ‘success’ has – in line with this increased complexity – also become more difficult:

Within this ‘social economy’ Measuring success in the social economy is particularly problematic. In the market the simple and generally unambiguous measures are scale, market share and profit. In the social field the very measures of success may be contested as well as the tools for achieving results. Is it good or bad to cut car use? Is it good or bad to replace professional care by voluntary care? Is a good school one that excels at exam results? Is it always a good thing for an NGO to grow bigger? The answers are never straightforward and are themselves the subject of argument, evaluation and assessment. As we show, there has been a great deal of innovation around metrics – from tools to judge the impact of a particular project or programme to meta-analyses and assessments of much larger processes of social change.

Commercial groups have also noted this shift, with some organisations arguing that the change in the nature of the web, from web 1.0 (flat, hit counters mark ‘success’) to 2.0 (community content driven, the ‘like’ and comment economy) is matched by a change in understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility too – from simple sales metrics, to those that include sociocultural and personal understandings of customers (British Brands Group, 2010, pp. 21–22). It would be strange indeed if commercial entities were engaging in this while third sector organisations were not.

ISSUES – WHAT IS ‘VALUE’, WHOSE ‘VALUE’ (AND INTERMINGLING VALUES), HOW DO WE MEASURE IT?

Companies and third sector organisations are increasingly recognising the importance of ascertaining ‘value’ in their various activities. The SROI method discussed above is one way to do this, and various other aspects of ‘value’ will be discussed throughout this document. A key consideration for funders is the measurement of outcomes they’re interested in. Funders need to decide what they’re interested in, and ensure successful means for measuring those. This may be alongside further data analysis, and this report will consider some examples of such analysis below, but the primary interest must be to measure outcomes – and these must be distinct from *outputs*.

‘VALUE’ EXISTS AT VARIOUS LEVELS – FOR FUNDERS, USERS, PROGRAM LEADERS, AND BENEFICIARIES, AND DEFINING THIS GROUPS IS NOT ALWAYS TRANSPARENT

However, there are problems with any measurement of such ‘value’, and these should be noted. A primary concern is the level at which value is measured. The risk of measuring the outcomes which funding organisations are targeting is that the resultant analysis is coarse grain, and fails to account for the personal level impacts many programs hold. Conversely, it is not clear how fine grain analysis, for example, the collection of anecdotes from beneficiaries, can contribute usefully to a meaningful debate on which programs should be funded, and which are the most effective.

To muddy the waters further, it is not always clear who benefits from some programs. For example, an organisation might set up a scheme to train and encourage volunteering to assist older people in accessing the internet. Here, the beneficiaries are both the older people, and the volunteers; who are also the service deliverers. An analysis of outcomes would likely be coarse grain, and acknowledge only the number of older people now successfully accessing the internet; but the wider contribution to the volunteers, and to communities of volunteering practice should perhaps also be accounted for.

DEFINING OUR ‘VALUES’ IS VALUE LADEN

A further concern is that, in trying to identify ‘value’ in projects, inevitably one’s own values come into play. Thus, the ‘value’ beneficiaries, program deliverers, and funders identify may well be different. Furthermore, many organisations could be described as ‘emergent social groups’ – either a group of people with some shared experience who have set up networks independently, or even subgroups who self-organise into other activities alongside programs which are being delivered. Often, analysis of ‘value’ will, by necessity, ignore these offshoot projects. However, in doing so we engage in exclusionary practices which fail to recognise the value of these projects, and to fully represent them at an organisational level². This is particularly concerning given these will often be organisations which represent those who are in some way excluded elsewhere, and particularly at the early stages of such projects, may find it difficult to represent their ‘value’ to potential funders as independent groups.

Again of course, even within the narrow scope that ‘value’ is often conceived, the ‘value’ measured is influenced by the values of those designing the measures. In particular, we might be concerned that those designing such measures, will aim for the simplest types of measure – possibly at the cost of truly understanding the ‘value’ a project represents to individuals and groups, and of course that these measures of value are more likely to represent those of the funders over those of the beneficiaries, thus enforcing a notion of ‘value’ that represents the powerful.

² See the discussion of [Savvy Chavvy](#) (Gibson, 2009, p. 121) for an example of a project which started with one aim – citizen journalism – but ended up creating a (much larger) side project – a social network for traveller communities.

Social media projects can mitigate against this to an extent by trying to open up data as much as possible – to allow users to look for their own ‘metrics’ in the data – and by trying to encourage discussion and the sharing of narratives in as broad a sense as possible. However, a concern raised by this is that some practices may be considered ‘exclusionary’.

EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES

A particular issue with the use of social media, is that it may fail to mitigate against exclusion in two ways: First, by still excluding those who are not ‘social media savvy’; second, by representing a sort of ‘populist’ notion of ‘value’ which may mirror that found in society at large – where many users will have experience of feeling excluded.

On the first, it should be noted that “26% of organisations believe that the internet and ICT are not widely used by their beneficiaries” (McMullin & Pritchard, 2011). Thus, any project which uses ICT should ensure that access is provided for users, alternative methods (postal feedback, for example) can be used, and ideally that support is given for the use of online tools. Of course organisations wish to spend wisely, and may find online expenditure is more efficient; however they should consider the social impact for those who they support in getting online beyond the impact on their own individual project.

A more specific concern on this first issue regards the fact that many may refuse to use various types of online tool for quite valid and principled reasons. For example, privacy concerns motivate many to reject large organisations, and thus many of the tools that are based on their use. While it may prove very difficult to control for this concern, without alienating those who *do* use such tools (such as facebook), organisations should consider how they can act to allay such user’s fears. It is a concern that an exclusionary artefact found on the web in general – that ‘refusing facebook has social cost’ (CBC News, 2011) – might spread into third sector organisations and their projects too.

On the second concern, while social media is a powerful tool to allow the sharing of narratives that might otherwise be unheard or voiceless, the concern is that – just as they may be offline – they will be ‘drowned out’ by other voices. This could happen in a few ways including if organisations only address the voices, for example in comments or shared blogs, of ‘big players’. Another way it could happen is if organisations only use ‘metrics’ to analyse ‘value’ – for example, looking at the most popular blog posts, videos, comments, etc. without looking further than the top examples. There is a paradox here, on the one side the ability to vote up/down, show number of hits/views/plays, count the number of replies and so on provide a good indicator of popularity and perhaps quality, and thus allow organisations to easily identify qualitative data which illustrates their value without too much ‘trawling’ or solicitation of feedback. However, on the other hand, if organisations are not careful about nurturing their community to ensure that contributions of various types are treated well, and quality is recognised in various forms, then the value of social media is largely lost precisely because the voices heard are likely to reflect the voices already heard in other forums.

SOCIAL MEDIA ‘VALUE’ IS HIGHLY COMPLEX

A final concern in the measuring of ‘value’ across social media, is the fact that various acts which represent interactions with social media platforms, can be interpreted in different – as yet, not fully understood – ways. This is in part addressed in the next section, but the concern here is that when we think about tweeting, retweeting, liking, thumbs up/down, watching and forwarding on, commenting and replying to comments, and so on, it isn’t clear what the equivalence is between these. It is also possible that the equivalence or hierarchy of importance will change depending on the individual user, and the individual project. One bit of research which suggests caution in interpretation here found that when soliciting for donations, a retweet is actually worth relatively little in a sense, because although it disseminates a message – which has obvious value – it

may often fail in its aim towards a primary 'value' of gaining donors, because people see retweeting as "their bit done".

Thus organisations should, at least in some contexts, consider how various social media acts should be understood in the context of their own projects. This should of course also bear in mind the concerns raised above – in particular that social media is scalable, and can grow and create offshoots, including offline. While these should be considered, both in order to fully represent value and in order avoid excluding people, organisations still need to think about the context of their own work and primary targets.

CONCLUSION

Organisations are trying to 'create' 'value' of various types in their use of social media – from financial to various kinds of community and support networks. They're also measuring these in various ways, as will be discussed below. These measures are varied, and although social media allows a whole host of techniques to gather data, organisations must inevitably choose a select few key indicators. For third sector organisations, the key is to consider not only the 'return on investment' – which is discussed next – but the social impact, the Social Return on Investment (SROI) created in their projects, and key indicators for this level of 'value' (discussed in the third section).

However, a concern of some is echoed by Jason Falls, the founder of Social Media Explorer – a consultancy for social media data analysis – who says of simple Return on Investment (ROI) (profit given investment) for social media: "The problem with trying to determine ROI for social media is you are trying to put numeric quantities around human interactions and conversations, which are not quantifiable." (Falls, 2008). Clearly, organisations need to consider how to both collect this numeric data, alongside stories which can be analysed in a meaningful way, and provide evidence of 'value' in the various kinds of projects third sector organisations are engaged in.

MEASUREMENTS OF 'VALUE' ACROSS THE WEB

The commercial sector has an interest in disseminating a brand, and converting brand awareness into purchases. The development of this interest has seen a shift from understanding individual product sales, to understanding how groups of products are purchased (and how we might effectively group those in physical and web shops, and in packaged products); this can be conducted at the checkout, and maintains the retail environment as the key focus. The shift then moves to trying to understand the purchasers of those products – the introduction of loyalty cards and tracking cookies on the internet marks this move, and allows for the tracking of consumers and their purchasing habits. The next, and current, move appears to place less emphasis on products and more on the groups of individuals who purchase them, and encouraging interactions between those members – targeted advertising including what is known as “collaborative filtering”, for example Amazon’s “customers who bought this also bought...” alongside the exhibition of ‘lists’ by purchasers of similar items are prime examples of this.

Considering how ‘value’ appears to be conceptualized in this progression, it appears to start with a pure sales metric, in which other things may be happening in the background, but are not being taken account of, to a conceptualisation which tries to take account of aspects of the physical environment such as product location, and likely purchasing patterns. There is then a ‘social’ shift in value to place it on consumer interaction over sales interaction on the basis that these interactions – and the narratives they produce – will hold more value for the individual customer.

Within the third sector the shift is perhaps less pronounced because many organizations have always recognized the social nature, and value, of projects. However, in relation to social media and SROI, there is a shift in how we understand the value offered. While measuring *outputs* of social media initiatives may be relatively lacking in complexity – for example looking at page hits, and active members – measuring the *outcomes* from these projects poses some interesting challenges. For the commercial sector, ‘conversion’ is important – the shift from looking (in a shop, at a website), to purchasing. The same is true for the third sector, where we wish to distinguish between a variety of outputs – such as retweeting, looking at a website, receiving training in internet use – and the output actions – actually donating to the cause you’re retweeting about, donating to the website’s cause in some form, actually *using* the internet effectively. It is to these desired outcomes that our data collection should turn. The third sector must also consider the groups of people who can be assisted via social media projects, how they can be connected and encouraged to interact as groups, and – significantly – who may be excluded in these acts; those who are “left behind”, and how an SROI analysis can account for those individuals and the support that must be given to them either online or off.³

Bearing in mind the provisos considered in the previous section regarding the difficulties when considering ‘value’ in relation to its definition, its assessment or ‘operationalisation’ to that definition, and the partitioning of it to the various stakeholders, this section will explore a number of ways that ‘value’ has been measured across commercial websites.

METRICS:

One way various organisations analyse ‘value’ – for them, their employees, and potential customers – is by using simple ‘metrics’. These are simply numeric counts of various kinds which allow an insight into the sorts of things people are looking at on their websites, and their affect towards these pages. In particular, with the rise of the ‘like’ button over the ‘thumbs up/thumbs down’ button, they’re more commonly measuring positive affect.

³ A particularly salient example is post office services, many of which are now online with no other option.

One recent study analysed the progression of these measures towards what the authors, Gerlitz and Helmond (2011), call the “like economy”. They were interested in the implications of new social metrics for understanding social media in terms of this ‘like economy’, and trace a genealogy of web periods and their metrics. This progression is presented in column 1 of Table 1 as matched against increasing notions of ‘meaning’ in the various metrics used.

Table 1 – Developing economies of web measurement, developing levels of ‘meaning’ in web measurement Gerlitz and Helmond (2011)

‘web period’	Analysis object	Measurement means
Hit Economy	Raw pages/sites	Hit counters
	Bibliographic link sets (assuming they’re well placed in search results, they may have more ‘meaning’ than the next set).	Prominence via expert gatekeepers
Link Economy	Search link results (implies status)	Position on search engine
Like economy	‘liked’, RT, thumbs up/down, +1 button, shared links, star ratings	Sophisticated hit counters
	Commenting on a link, user reviews, blogs and blog comments	Number & level of engagement & hits
	Shared links with comments; blogging & interacting with readers in the comment space	Click through, engagement, agreement?
	Sophisticated use of metric & comment based tools; e.g. the combined ‘rate and comment on’ someone else’s previous review. Voting for and commenting on other users’ “product suggestions”	

While the “thumbs up/down” metric appears above, this method tends to be used only in relation to user comments; for example on Amazon, one can mark whether a product review was useful to them or not, and the daily-mail websites includes a thumbs up/down system on its article comments. Another concern with these methods, is how we quantify the ‘value’ being created. The creation of comments may represent value, but deciding how to use a positive/negative metric has challenges – one needs to decide whether negative evaluations detract from value, whether a ‘net score’ should be used, whether in fact negative evaluations still represent a meaningful engagement of a valuable kind and so on. The beauty of the ‘like’ button over these systems, and indeed over rawer link sharing means is the indication of “affection reaction” to some information or site.

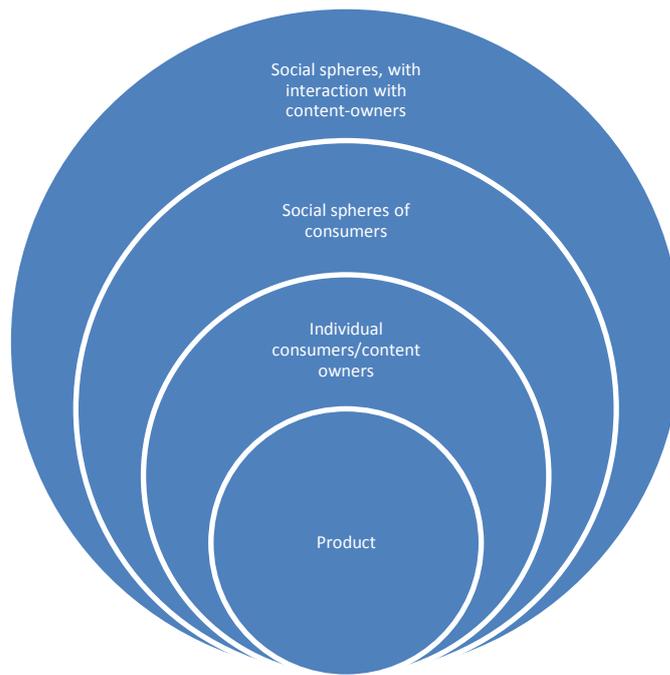
Thus, “While the hit was merely counting the number of visitors without being able to tell anything about the visitor’s attitude or affective reaction to a website, the Like button adds quality to this quantitative metric while at the same time functioning like a hit counter through embedded cookies.” (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2011, p. 21). Facebook sees the Like as a very specific type of link and at their F8 developers conference, “Facebook announced Likes as a form of “social links” -- better than a link because it’s related to a specific user” (Cashmore 2010). Liking can therefore be understood as a qualification of the link by adding it to the user’s profile, making it more personal and social (by fostering more Facebook activities). Returning to the Like as a container metric which also includes shares and comments, the Like is both more than a hit and more than a link.” (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2011, p. 13)

The ways in which the 'like' button is used by various websites will vary, but the scope for insights into social actions is fairly large. In addition, the like button allows exploration of space surrounding issues which attract a large number of comments but fewer 'likes' – as in the case of controversial issues where the display of positive affect ('like'), may not be appropriate. It also allows organisations to see that some types of content may have both high comment levels, and numbers of likes – suggesting a positive affect toward, and active engagement with, the content. Indeed a variety of other systems, including youtube's, allows this combination of rating and commenting; but as the quote above makes clear, the beauty of the facebook 'like' is that it also allows for shared linking, *and* analysis of links followed (i.e. 'hits' made) which can be tracked back both to the profile which initially shared the link via the act of 'liking' and to the subsequent users.

In that sense, the 'value' of the content is shared with the owner – they receive hits, and a wealth of information regarding their links. This information can also be displayed to users in a way that provides a notion of 'value' to them: "Like, Share and Tweet buttons also act as quantified recommenders, or reputational indicators" (Gerlitz, 2011). For example, the number of times a webpage has been Liked, Shared or Tweeted is often displayed in the buttons that facilitate those actions." (Preston, 2011, p. 8)

In these examples, the 'value' is represented in the link – the analogous situation is informing customers what your "best selling" product is. The 'value' attributed to this is higher because the information doesn't (generally) come from the owner of the content, and is from your network of contacts, people with whom you share some sort of social relation. The value this represents to the content owner is clear – they have the 'hit count', and a social means towards "quantified recommenders, or reputational indicators". Thus, another way to think about notions of value, and how they're shared is by considering the sphere they act on; for some they are user centred, for others they are based on specific products, while yet others will focus on communities – with a range of types falling in between as indicated below.

Site	Act	sphere
Ebay	Bi-directional user rating (seller and buyer). Questions on items	User-centred Product-centred
Amazon	Star rate Review Comment on review/'helpful' indicator	Product-centred Product-centred social User-centred within a tight social sphere (around a product)
Facebook	Like/share/comment, etc.	User and topic centred – posts to wall are reported, but so too are posts to groups/pages which tend to be topic linked
Twitter	Tweet/RT	Both, erring more towards topics if # present
Blogs	Blog/comment	Centred around the key poster
User forums	Search & post	Search is topic oriented, posting may be socially oriented. Some sites include more or less 'owner' interaction (i.e. replies from the business)
Get Satisfaction (see below for similar products)	Search, post & rate other's posts regarding products/companies	Highly integrated systems, oriented around products (although specific user groups may emerge, this will be an emergent property and they will remain integrated into the larger group)



REPUTATION SYSTEMS – USER REVIEWS OF USERS...AND USER REVIEWS

Whereas traditional models – including early social media models – might focus on the reviewing of primary content (an initial blog post for example), newer forms of social media and networking involve the ranking or rating of comments by other users. Thus, users may ‘like’ comments on facebook links, amazon reviews may give a binary thumbs up/down to review the usefulness of another reviewer’s review, and both ebay buyers and sellers may ‘rate’ their transaction with the other.

To promote the exchange of information on the reliability of individual traders, online business platforms, including Amazon, Cnet, Ebay, Half and Yahoo, have instituted electronic reputation mechanisms, known as “feedback” systems. Recent field studies of online auction platforms find that feedback systems have at least some of the desired economic effect in the sense that reputable sellers are more likely to sell their items (Resnick and Zeckhauser, 2001), and can expect price premiums (e.g., Lucking-Reiley et al., 1999). (Bolton, Katok, & Ockenfels, 2004, p. 1588)

Reputation systems have spread far beyond auction sites. Bizrate.com rates registered retailers by asking consumers to complete a survey after each purchase. So-called “expert sites” (www.expertcentral.com, www.askme.com) provide Q&A forums in which experts provide answers for questions posted by clients in exchange for reputation points and comments. Product review sites (www.epinions.com) offer rating services for product reviewers—the better the review, the more points the reviewer receives. iExchange.com tallies and displays reputations for stock market analysts based on the performance of their picks. (Resnick, Zeckhauser, Friedman, & Kuwabara, 2000, p. 46)

Web Site	Category	Summary of reputation mechanism	Format of solicited feedback	Format of feedback profiles
eBay	Online auction house	Buyers and sellers rate one another following transactions	Positive, negative or neutral rating plus short comment; ratee may post a response	Sums of positive, negative and neutral ratings received during past 6 months (see Section 3)
eLance	Professional services marketplace	Contractors rate their satisfaction with subcontractors	Numerical rating from 1-5 plus comment; ratee may post a response	Average of ratings received during past 6 months
Epinions	Online opinions forum	Users write reviews about products/services; other members rate the usefulness of reviews	Users rate multiple aspects of reviewed items from 1-5; readers rate reviews as "useful", "not useful", etc.	Averages of item ratings; % of readers who found a review "useful"
Google	Search engine	Search results are rank ordered based on how many sites contain links that point to them (Brin and Page, 1998)	How many links point to a page, how many links point to the pointing page, etc. (see Section 5.6)	No explicit reputation profiles are published; rank ordering acts as an implicit indicator of reputation
Slashdot	Online discussion board	Postings are prioritized or filtered according to the ratings they receive from readers	Readers rate posted comments	

Table 1 Some examples of online reputation mechanisms used in commercial websites.

(Dellarocas, 2003, p. 1409)⁴

Bolton et al., (2004) also found that these reputation markets, with a socially available 'rating' exercise, provide an important driver for buyers to buy, and to sellers to be honest in their practices. A clear element that is important in these systems is the 'honesty' of the reviewer – users wish to know they are not either 'trolling' or acting as a commercial interest under the guise of an 'ordinary' reviewer. On ebay, and other systems with buyer-seller transaction feedback (e.g. Amazon marketplace), the issue is more complicated by the notion of 'ballot stuffing' (self-promotion), and bad-mouthing of users; research on this concern suggests ensuring there is a 'transaction cost' which is appropriate to disincentivise 'faking' the system is one means to avoid the problem (Bhattacharjee & Goel, 2005).

Interestingly, both Bolton et al., (2004) and Bhattacharjee and Goel (2005) also suggest making it harder for users (in particular sellers) to change identity would attract a greater degree of honesty and reliability in ratings. This is because if users may change ID easily, they may do so after bad feedback, and continue in dishonest practice with impunity. There is a growing discussion of the importance of using real names in other areas, and it's interesting that both facebook and google+ emphasised this in their social network creation – perhaps also highlighting that the concern must be balanced with privacy concerns. Another interesting point is highlighted by Resnick et al., (2000) who point out that soliciting feedback ought to be a challenge. Their conclusion regarding the fact that many sites *do* manage to gain feedback scores, is that this is "testament to their community-mindedness, or perhaps their gratitude or desire to exact revenge" (Resnick et al., 2000, p. 48) – clearly then, these reputation management systems are valued by buyers, who recognise the need to contribute to them in order to maintain a stable community.

As well as rating each other, users may also rate other users evaluations of content (whether it's a user profile, a product or comments on a blog post, etc.). Indeed, research has found that reviews which are rated as more helpful, have a valuable impact on sales for the product – helping to drive sales particularly for less popular books, where other information may not be available (Chen, Dhanasobhon, & Smith, 2008). Reasoning about the evaluation of an opinion is fundamentally different from reasoning about the opinion itself: rather than asking, "What did Y think of X?", we are asking, "What did Z think of Y's opinion of X?" ...the perceived helpfulness of a review depends not just on its content but also but also in subtle ways on how the expressed evaluation relates to other evaluations of the same product. (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Kossinets, Kleinberg, & Lee, 2009, p. 1). Specifically, they found that for products with a positive average rating, customer reviews

⁴ This article is an excellent review of discussions and research around reputation management systems.

which were positive were also perceived as more helpful, and as a corollary, negative reviews of products with a low average rating were perceived as more useful. This suggests that, as well as review quality, people tend to expect people to rate items in roughly the same manner – suggesting an urge towards valuing ‘consensus’ in social media based reviews.

ANALYSIS TOOLS FOR SOCIAL METRICS

While the hit counter was the analytics of the hit economy, and search engine position that of the link economy, new forms of analytics have taken over as the web has progressed. Feedburner⁵ is a good example of an analysis tool which has been widely used, in particular for one form of social media – blogs. The focus of this form of analytics was more sophisticated than the ‘hit economy’ – intending to provide opportunities for specific content analysis, including how users were accessing the content, and via which other websites. This information provides value to the content owner in terms of understanding which information is popular, and how they might better cultivate access to their content, while allowing users to indicate – indirectly – what content they found valuable. The circle of focus for this type of analysis is firmly on the content provider still.

Google Analytics offers a similar kind of data – at a simple level, giving a direct computation of ROI based on conversions (to e-commerce purchases), or some other predefined goal⁶, and baseline data which the content provider may specify themselves. This is given alongside information regarding how users interact with the site, and gain access to the material (via search, other sites, etc.), as well as potentially other interactions with the company, for example phone calls or real-time online chat “a highly valuable service for helping customers, and also for learning about what their intention is”⁷. While they have an article confusingly called “qualitative measurement”⁸, it in fact lists a range of quantitative metrics regarding site use, including how often visitors return, and how many pages they look at on a site. This range of metrics does allow some interesting ‘value’ data to be collected by website owners, for example, using the ‘Website Optimizer’, designers can test out various different designs for a website which will be altered automatically for different users to allow for comparison of the metrics dependent upon specific design aspects. However, it doesn’t allow for direct interaction with customers – for ‘narratives’ of website use, and what customers find valuable, beyond conversion and other ‘usage’ metrics. The aim of the analysis is to ‘increase website conversion rates’ and ‘increase visitor satisfaction’ – the view is that companies value ROI, while consumers value easy to use websites, and that these can be addressed by the metrics provided⁹.

The feedburner homepage, after login, currently (September 2011), has the header “My Feeds need to socialize” – with guides on the right of the page on enabling social sharing, and socializing your feed with twitter. The implication is that, one aspect of exploring analytics further, is to explore how links to content – in this case blogs, in the parallel in Google Analytics, other types of links – are used in social media contexts.

One means that content providers have used to track this sort of data across social media – including blogging, and microblogging platforms (e.g. blogger and twitter respectively), social networks (e.g. facebook, myspace), and social bookmarking websites (e.g. delicious, diig) – is to use built in buttons which redirect to those services. One popular example of this feature is www.addthis.com which when embedded on a page, allows viewers of the page to click a link to send it to another service. In fact, the links they are offered are customised based on how they’ve used the ‘addthis’ button on other websites; thus those who tend to send to

⁵ www.feedburner.com – now owned by google.

⁶ Described here: <http://analytics.blogspot.com/2006/09/spotlight-on-how-to-read-roi-column.html>

⁷ See <http://analytics.blogspot.com/2009/02/two-cool-integrations-telephone-leads.html>

⁸ <http://www.google.com/support/conversionuniversity/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=77165>

⁹ It’s worth noting that some of the ‘Apps’ for Google Analytics to provide qualitative data points, for example the 4Q App gives a survey to users to assess their satisfaction with the site.
http://www.google.com/analytics/apps/about?app_id=74001

facebook, will see facebook as the first option. Again, the sorts of data collected and analysed here are based around provision of metric-based ROI, and “user friendliness” – and indeed, ‘addthis’ will integrate with google analytics to provide joined up data of a similar nature.

Facebook’s “Insights” provides this element of social analytics in a natively social environment. Insights provides, “Facebook Page owners and Facebook Platform developers with metrics around their content. By understanding and analyzing trends within user growth and demographics, consumption of content, and creation of content, Page owners and Platform developers are better equipped to improve their business with Facebook.” (facebook, n.d.). The analysis provided looks for active users – those that interact with content (like or comment), or visit the pages of the given content provider. The social element of this is term “interactions”: “The Interactions section of Insights allows you to track how your users interact with your stories, and helps you adapt your content to the preferences of your audience. For example, you can compare the engagement that each specific post generates in order to identify patterns: if you notice that asking questions to your users always generates more comments than other posts, you might decide to ask questions more frequently.” (ibid).¹⁰

Another set of tools using this sort of information tries to analyse which content sources are the most *influential* in a particular field, what we might call Influencer Identification Tools¹¹. For content-consumers this type of tool is a reflection of a combination of search engine results, and social media metrics such as retweets, hashtags and likes. The appeal of these tools to content providers is twofold, and has an interesting relationship to social media, in particular social networking. By using these tools companies can identify the competition, and means to effectively compete with them, but also identify key consumers who may be influential in their marketing, and who may be providing useful feedback on content related to their own.

“What is most valuable in this context is that each engagement can potentially create more engagement, each Like of a Facebook user is meant to produce more likes of their Facebook friends, a shared URL is meant to produce comments and likes, a comment is meant to produce a response, a tweet to produce a retweet. The value of social media activities is both situated in the present and in the futures, in the actual button count and in potential more counts. To put it in Nigel Trift words: “value increasingly arises not from what is but from what is not yet but can potentially become, that is from the pull of the future, and from the new distributions of the sensible that can arise from that change” (Trift 2007, 31). By building on the combined dynamics of the hit, link, like and share, the emerging Like economy is creating a fabric of the web that capitalizes on the value of any potential social activities.” (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2011, p. 26)

“Likers, so Zuckerberg claims (2010) are multipliers, particular users that have “2.4x the amount of friends than that of a typical Facebook user”, “click on 5.3x more links to external sites” and are thus characterized as more active and more social. Facebook considers this as valuable, as it suggests external websites that the people who will engage with the social buttons will share their social activities with larger social assemblages and thus increase the impact of their social activity. Hence, the value of a Like, a share and a retweet are connected to the size and quality of the social assemblage they enter, the bigger and the more interested in social activities, the more value does Facebook assign to a Like.” (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2011, p. 23 footnote 38)

These ‘influencers’ provide valuable feedback to content creators on both their own, and competitors content, and to consumers on the various options. They can allow for a dialogue to take place between consumer and producer, and in doing so may act as mediators and perhaps moderators for the narratives that may emerge. Identifying ‘influencers’ and their content is part of the ‘Social Media Monitoring’ process, which includes the

¹⁰ A list of facebook ‘metrics’ available via insights is here:

<http://developers.facebook.com/docs/reference/fql/insights/#Metrics>

¹¹ See e.g. <http://www.socialmediaexplorer.com/online-public-relations/influencer-identification-tools/> for a list of tools, and <http://thesocialcustomer.com/index.php?q=themaria/28799/identifying-influencers-and-measuring-influence> for another set of tools and strategy for approaching ‘influencers’.

analytics –as above – and understanding how an organisation is understood in other places, including on social media. The other simple side to this, is the creation of ‘watch lists’ to monitor for mentions of the organisation; these are simple keyword searches including any names for the company and key employees, which allow an organisation to explore their image on the web.¹²

Raj Dash (2010) summarised the top metrics being used according to one study of 2000 marketers, finding the key measures were:

1. Visitors and sources of traffic
2. Network size (followers, fans, members)
3. Quantity of commentary about brand or product

The top two of these have been discussed above in relation to analytics, and the creation of clearly defined goals. The third has been touched on – considering how content is talked about across social media, and the commenting, and (micro)blogging that goes along with content posting, where such activities are possible. Thus most organisations seem to create a combined metric of a) network size, being some metric of no. of hits and visits, number of active subscribed members, etc. and b) the social impact of the network, which is indicated by mentions on the web in other forms, including tweets, other blogs, etc.

One automated method to analyse these mentions, in particular micro-blogging mentions, is via ‘sentiment analysis’¹³. Christina Warren (Warren, 2009) mentions a few of these methods in the highly popular Mashable blog. At the simplest level, these tools analyse tweets on certain content (keywords or urls) and categorises them as positive or negative – providing the same kind of feedback as the positive affect ‘like’ button in facebook. At a deeper level, the tool provides an analysis of the types of conversation surrounding the keyterm, brandname or url of interest – allowing insights, for example, into how a product is being reviewed and which features are particularly popular, or which users’ needs are being particularly well met.

However, “the problem with trying to determine ROI for social media is you are trying to put numeric quantities around human interactions and conversations, which are not quantifiable.” (Falls, 2008). The element of this latter analysis goes beyond a simple ‘count’ of positive and negative comments, and tries to analyse the human interactions and conversations via non-metric approaches; the next section will discuss some of these approaches, and how they represent value for organisations, and users.

MOVING BEYOND ‘LIKE’ – QUALITATIVE MEASURES FOR CONSUMER AND ORGANISATION ‘VALUE’

Oglivy’s (Kamal & Bell, 2009) social media marketing group identify a set of metrics for a quantitative measure of “Conversation Impact” – the discourse that occurs surrounding any particular brand, and its impact on the brand success. The ‘sentiment analysis’ and rawer ‘share of voice’ discussed above are key indices in their ternary system – reach and positioning; preference; and action. That is, how visible a company is, how positively it is thought of, and its sales versus costs. These figures are taken both across influencers, and consumers – again highlighting the importance of the social element in new marketing strategies, and the value companies place on those sources which are influential to consumers – presumably precisely because the consumer places value in some aspect of the influencer’s nature.

Indeed it is only by understanding the content of a conversation – beyond the pagerank, number of comments, or number of participants in a conversation – that we understand how ‘interesting’ the conversation is to users

¹² See e.g. <http://www.socialmediaexplorer.com/social-media-monitoring/social-media-monitoring-made-simple/> and discussion of Radian6 below.

¹³ For examples of ‘reputation monitoring’ tools beyond micro-blogging/twitter, see <http://mashable.com/2008/12/29/brand-reputation-monitoring-tools/>

(De Choudhury, Sundaram, John, & Seligmann, 2009) – a concept which predicts activity (e.g. commenting), cohesiveness (e.g. consistently ‘conversing’ with groups of people on a particular site), and thematic interestingness (are similar topics also active by a cohesive group). Thus, while those metrics of pagerank, comment and participant numbers may be of interest to a content provider, ‘interestingness’ is likely to hold more value to consumers.

That group used a metric solution, and conjectured that people participate in conversations when those conversations are interesting, there are interesting users, and there is an observable interaction between users. They thus suggest that:

A conversation that is deemed interesting must be consequential – i.e. it must impact the social network itself. Intuitively, there should be three consequences (a) the people who find themselves in an interesting conversation, should tend to co-participate in future conversations (i.e. they will seek out other interesting people that they’ve engaged with) (b) people who participated in the current interesting conversation are likely to seek out other conversations with themes similar to the current conversation and finally (c) the conversation theme, if engaging, should slowly proliferate to other conversations. (De Choudhury et al., 2009, p. 332)

One company that’s taken a deeper look at some of these qualitative measures is Radian6 (also mentioned in footnote 13). While the Radian6 strategy is still primarily based on the production of quantitative outcomes, and they do discuss traditional ROI (Radian6, 2010c), its emphasis is more on using the qualitative data to produce this, and focussing on ‘engagement’ as a result of the outcomes, rather than more traditional metric strategies which focus on pure marketing and product placement. Although they do discuss ‘sentiment analysis’ and ‘share of voice’ (Radian6, 2010b), the examples they offer of why ‘listening’ even when your brand isn’t being mentioned, is important illustrates a deeper emphasis on going beyond metric measures. For example, they emphasise not trolling for competitor’s customers/fans but engaging them instead (Radian6, 2010e, p. 1), and that using information out there – reviews, wishlists, problems, etc. – is a great use of social media (both based around one’s own brand and competitor’s) that is ‘Bigger Than Your Brand Name’, thus *“Listening is a holistic activity with great potential to bring you intelligence, insight, and focus for your social media efforts”* (Radian6, 2010e, p. 2)

This focus on conversation is emphasised via the notion of engagement – remaining relevant to needs, in the right place (context) and with high presence (resonance), ways to access you (accessibility), and awareness (maintaining a ‘personal touch’) (Radian6, 2010a, p. 3). Radian6 thus suggest moving away from “full on product promotion” (Radian6, 2010a, p. 4), towards understanding *“association with your company [as] inherent among the chain of sharing; your brand announces its presence simply because of the value and purpose behind your content: to inform, to educate, to entertain, to empower. It’s branding by osmosis, and it works remarkably well in the social spaces”* (Radian6, 2010a, p. 4).

Crucially, and an interesting concept for the Third Sector, they highlight that:

We’ve settled for decades of single-digit response rates to our marketing campaigns, and chalked that up as “success”. But why? Most of our mass outreach efforts fail because, on a person to person basis, we’ve had the timing wrong. We’re not there when our communities need us, we’re only there when we’ve chosen to speak. (Radian6, 2010d, p. 2)

Suggesting instead, paying attention to “The Point of Need” is important:

On the social web, there is an unspoken line in the marketing sand called the “Point of Need”. On one side of this line there’s the blatant pitches, advertisements, and “cold calls”, either in response to posts or out of the blue. To the recipient, these encroachments are usually unwelcome and tuned out, ignored, deflected, or even resented. These folks have not expressed interest (let alone need), they haven’t invited anyone to be part of a discussion, and the messages are often irrelevant to them in the

moment that they hear them. Why? The messages are interruptive, and out of context. On the other side of the line, there's the idea of a sales pitch, connection, or outreach, but the perception is completely different. Over here, they are more than welcome; in fact, they are invited and often appreciated. In both cases, people may ultimately need your product. They may be on the market for what you offer. They may even be talking about you specifically, but not asking for something from you in particular. (Radian6, 2010d, p. 1)

The shift in emphasis companies like Radian6 make here is away from the use of statistically defined quantitative measures which are designed to drill down to the most successful conversion strategies – strategies where the value for the company is purely sales, and value for consumers is only really considered in terms of whether appropriate customers are “converted”. Instead, alongside these strategies they seek to understand the conversation occurring on the social web, regarding what consumers and key influencers – perhaps user curated buyer guides, or topical bloggers – find valuable in content which goes beyond the specification of a product (although of course this is noted), and into other aspects like customer support, feedback being taken account of, and unobtrusive accessibility.

One way lots of groups chose to gain feedback, and customers like to use, is via fairly traditional ‘feedback forms’ of some description. Howto.gov is a site to help American Government agencies deal with people more effectively; they offer a list of options for feedback (Flagg, 2011):

- Online, phone and mail surveys
- Post-transaction surveys (i.e. immediately after a customer service interaction)
- Focus groups
- Comment cards & feedback forms
- Usability tests
- Social Media (using methods as discussed throughout this document).

As might be expected, a variety of tools exist for doing this online. One such tool, ‘feedback ferret’ highlights the need to gather ‘Voice of Customer’ feedback, and how this can be united together from various outlets including offline, and social media sources¹⁴. In particular, they highlight (Alington, 2011b) the use of ‘open ended’ data as opposed to closed questions (which can easily be integrated into ‘metric’ approaches). A key element of ‘value added’ they claim here, is in increased response rates to this type of survey. Thus, offering access to a wider number of voices.

They claim this is useful (Alington, 2011a) because it allows companies to directly deal with concerns, and use ‘text analytics’ to deal with these *before* they reach the social media “venting” stage. Thus while clearly they see the value of social media as a platform for communication, it is also seen as a double edged sword for public discourse, where they might prefer some stories dealt with privately. These tools are again dealt with via the use of sophisticated forms of ‘sentiment analysis’ which analyses the text for themes and positive/negative affect¹⁵.

Earlier, reputation management systems were discussed in the context of ebay and amazon type systems, which allow users to ‘rate’ each other, and to rate reviews of products for their ‘helpfulness’. However, there is a concern that “...even when user opinions are attached with trust and reputation values, these measures do not provide an objective way of assessing them, for instance, by looking at the reasoning patterns that they follow to come up with specific conclusions. Thus, user opinions can be misunderstood and rated low, decreasing unfairly the trust and reputation values of their authors.” (Heras et al., 2010, p. 2). Heras et al., shy

¹⁴ <http://www.feedbackferret.com/customer-satisfaction-solutions/gathering-customer-feedback/>

¹⁵ Another prominent company doing this is Clarabridge
<http://www.clarabridge.com/WhyTextAnalytics/UnderstandingTextAnalytics.aspx>

away from metric approaches to dialogue based review systems, arguing that they do not make the persuasive element of reviews clear enough to users. Instead, they propose an approach which highlights argument structures, suggesting that this will provide valuable dialogue around products (using the examples of amazon and ebay).

The same is true of understanding feedback both from customers, and to them – metric approaches do not allow the fine grain understanding of arguments being made. A few companies are targeting in on this generally with a provision around ‘customer feedback’ – trying to move away from the somewhat negative connotations the term sometimes has. One organisation offering services to analyse this data is Get Satisfaction¹⁶ one of the slogans of which is, “Measuring value from social media shouldn’t be this hard.”

They argue that “Conversations are raw materials; it’s what you do with them that matter. Get Satisfaction was built on the idea of not simply creating conversations, but creating **value** from conversations — for both companies and customers.” (<http://getsatisfaction.com/hello/what>). By integrating support onto websites, including existing social media platforms such as facebook, Get Satisfaction aims to collect a large amount of data, which is replied to by companies and other customers in open ‘knowledge base’ systems.

Their emphasis is on what the *user* sees as valuable, and how organisations can adjust to meet those ideas of value, and advertise this negotiated stance. But a key thing is 1) reduced costs for support, 2) increase resolution (particularly initial-contact resolution), 3) create ‘intellectual capital through ideation’ – i.e., have your customers tell you ideas *and* carry out vetting of those ideas via ranking systems, all within one space which you don’t need to physically manage 4) increase web traffic and reduce SEO cost – by having presence in more places on the web, this should drive more hits?, 5) increase customer retention. In a blog post on ROI (Muller, 2010), their Director of Community Education also emphasises that as the community develops, there should be a decrease in repetitive issues, alongside a switch from employee to customer answered questions – both representing a return on investment or saving, and a strengthened community.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Getting customers engaged is the greatest obstacle to success for firm-sponsored virtual communities,⁶ and so we set out to understand how firms can foster and sustain engagement effectively in virtual communities. Our central premise is that though communities can emerge organically (i.e., managed independently of a firm sponsor), engagement often is amplified by specific, proactive efforts on the part of a firm that provides members with the appropriate resources to create value for themselves and for the firm in a community it sponsors.² (Porter, Donthu, MacElroy, & Wydra, 2011)

¹⁶ See <http://alternativeto.net/software/get-satisfaction/> for alternatives, and <http://stackoverflow.com/questions/1576935/open-source-alternative-to-uservoice-or-get-satisfaction> for discussion on free alternatives.

FIGURE 1. Various Needs that Members Fulfill via Virtual Communities

Information	Virtual community members find value in a community that provides access to information that helps them learn, solve problems, and make decisions.
Relationship-Building	Virtual community members seek to build productive relationships through interaction with others within a community.
Social Identity/Self-Expression	Virtual community members want to achieve self-awareness that they are a member of the community and are gratified by the emotional and cognitive connection with the community as a whole, as well as their ability to express such connection.
Helping Others	Virtual community members are gratified by helping others within a community, especially those with whom they have developed a personal connection.
Enjoyment	Virtual community members are gratified by achieving flow states while interacting with others by having control over their experience with a community.
Belongingness	Virtual community members desire a sense of attachment to a community, as a whole, and are gratified by having their contributions to the community respected by others.
Status/Influence	Virtual community members seek status and influence among others within a community.

FIGURE 1. Various Needs that Members Fulfill via Virtual Communities (Porter et al., 2011, p. 81).

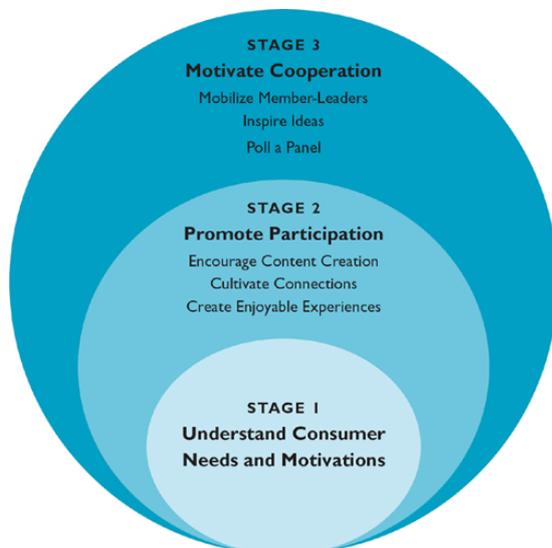


FIGURE 2. Foster and Sustain Member Engagement (Porter et al., 2011, p. 82).

Those researchers highlight that when considering company social network, and media use, 'value' may extend beyond financial value, their findings are summarised below

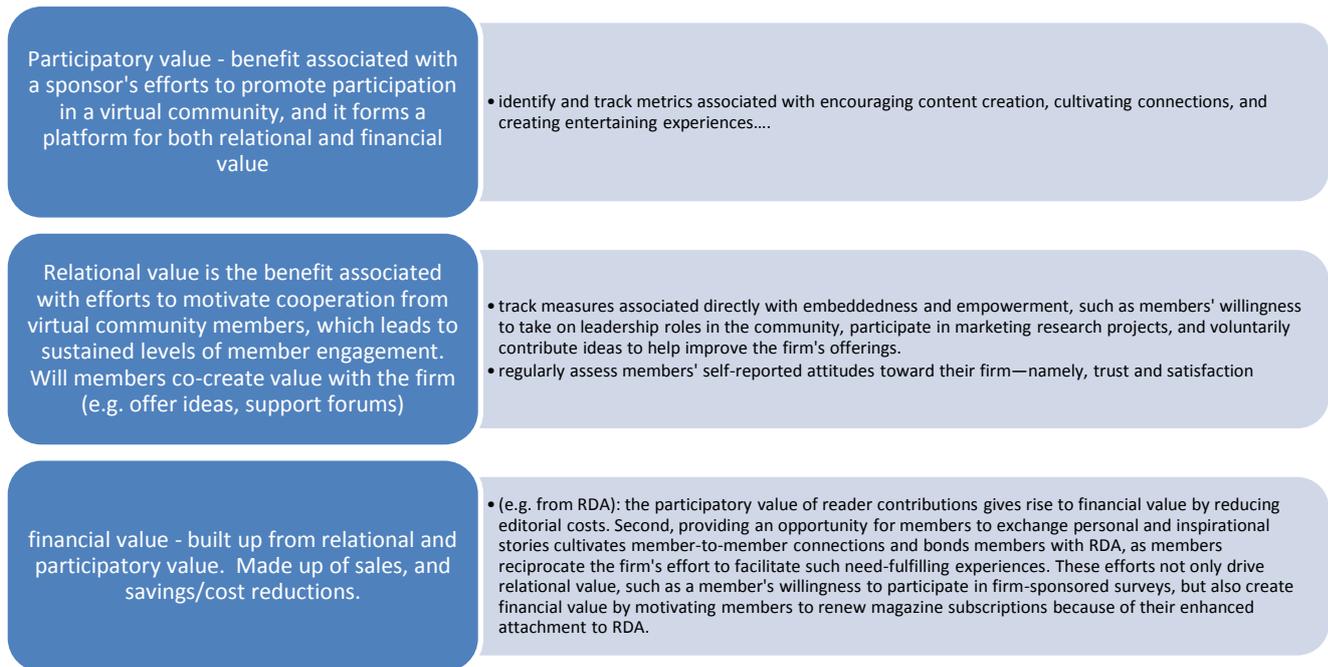


Figure x, Summarising Porter et al's (2011) findings regarding 'value' in social media use

It's important to consider how to encourage users to contribute material to sites – whether they're networked, or centred around social media content. A study which analysed behaviour of 'newcomers' on facebook found that, "...newcomers who see their friends contributing go on to share more content themselves. For newcomers who are initially inclined to contribute, receiving feedback and having a wide audience are also predictors of increased sharing." (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2009)¹⁷

Finally, it is worth considering the fact that the use of social networking is increasing dramatically within organisations, not just as a means to communicate with customers, but internally (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). That research, conducted by Microsoft, suggests that a key benefit is strengthening weak ties between colleagues, with a knock on effect on productivity. However, they highlight that not only is this difficult to measure, there are also tensions on the use of social networking in work settings, and we should aim to resolve some of these tensions as technologies develop. A study conducted by IBM (Farzan et al., 2008) of an internal social network attempted to explore the use of incentives to engage with the network, finding at least initially that a points based system did encourage participation – providing promise for encouraging on other systems – but that alterations would need to be made longer term. A way to avoid this issue has been taken up by BT, who provide extensive access to technology – so people are always connected – and utilise existing systems, including facebook, as much as possible in order to engage their employees in sharing their knowledge, understanding the various roles (and types of customer), etc.¹⁸

SUMMARY

The difficulty facing companies is how to represent a real Return on Investment in social media projects; how to match up the costs incurred – which may be fairly easily measured – with either savings, or profits made, which may be most obviously represented in rather opaque metrics. There are guides to doing this, (see for

¹⁷ There is a discussion of keeping, and engaging 'newcomers' to social networking sites here: <http://hci.uma.pt/courses/socialweb09F/3/kraut07.pdf> alongside theoretical (e.g. psychological) background, and some practical guidance here <http://thesocialcustomer.com/index.php?q=themaria/28799/identifying-influencers-and-measuring-influence>

¹⁸ See: (Goodwin, 2010; Morrell, 2009, 2010)

example Petouhoff & Herrmann, 2011), and this section has given a variety of things organisations may measure in order to understand the social media impact¹⁹.

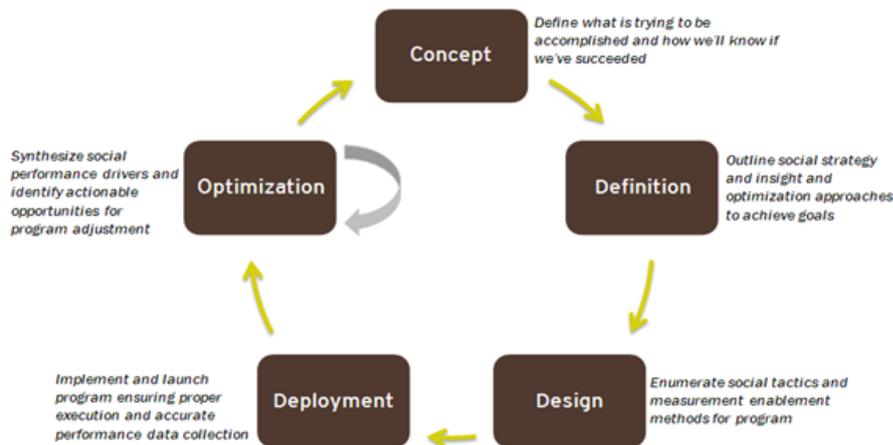


Figure 1. Social media measurement process (Murdough, 2009, p. 94)

As the cycle indicated in the figure above indicates, the next phase of definition involves analysing exactly how to measure the given outcomes. Murdough notes that ‘social activities’ play a role in all areas of the consumer-relationship, with three ‘pillars’ of social media:

1. *Reach*. How many times is the organisation mentioned, and by whom (what ‘quality’ do the authors have).
2. *Discussions*. What topics, and sentiment are being talked about and how does this relate to the desired topics/sentiment.
3. *Outcomes*. What outcomes are being sought (purchases, onboarding, etc.) and what proxies are there for these outcomes, for example those given in the figure below

Goals	Objectives	Metrics
Deepen relationship with customers	Achieve a critical mass of audience through social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of advocates (Fans, Followers, authors) • # of comments posted
	Encourage ongoing interaction with the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments/ advocate • Advocate influence profile
Learn from the community	Uncover common themes among interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rank of topics discussed • Decipher positive vs. negative sentiment
Drive purchase intent	Persuade engagement with Web site content and utility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads to ecommerce partners • Retail locator results activity • Product brochure downloads

Figure 2. Sample social media metrics framework (Murdough, 2009, p. 95)

In addition though, the values that organisations (particularly 3rd sector organisations) might be interested in represent not only a directly financial value, but value related to the creation, and continuation of, communities surrounding some particular content or practice as indicated in the table below.

¹⁹ There is a wiki <http://measurementcamp.wikidot.com/resources> with ‘open source’ data solutions for measuring metrics, although it isn’t clear how often it’s updated

Table X, capturing levels of value in social media use

Value	Measured by?	Further Examples of use
Content	Like/hits/shares	->
Reputation management (1 st order)	Number of reviews, and 'likes/hits/shares'	Basic commenting on and sharing of content
Reputation management (2 nd order)	Number of replies to and ratings of 1 st order reviews	Users commenting on or rating other's reviews
Reputation management (3 rd order)	No. of interactions between content provider and reviewers	Content provider responses to comments, and has their comment rated
Active participation	No. of active participants	->
Knowledge management, sharing, and 'Knowledge Networks'	No. of 'active' specialist groups around a shared 'meaning'	Within business & academia this might be creation of internal social networks. Could also include any 'groups' on facebook, flickr, etc. as well as the use of 'lists' and communities on Amazon and the like.
Share of Voice/visibility	Comparison with other providers	
Customer satisfaction	Measure their return rate, metrics of sales, survey measures	
Customer feels 'listened to'	Garner their ideas & feedback	
Knowledge Management	Edits (e.g. on Wikipedia), like/hit/share	
Shared community	Measures of whether those with some need (for a product/intervention, etc.) are within your community (perhaps in addition to others).	
Sales, increase in sales, etc.	Track sales over time/events	
Savings (including on advertising, but also environmental impact, etc.)	Detailed cost analysis, bearing in mind value created by investments (ROI/SROI)	

MEASUREMENTS OF 'VALUE' BY FUNDERS

HOW WIDELY USED IS SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE THIRD SECTOR?

The introductory section of this document gave some figures for UK non-profit's use of ICT systems, 89% of which feel computers and the internet are very important to their organisations, and 72% of which use social media with 97% of those using it to keep people up to date with news and events (McMullin & Pritchard, 2011, p. 2). In the US, the situation was similar with 89% of organisations reporting a facebook presence, and an average community size of 6,376 on the network (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 2).

In America, 75% of all American adults are active in some kind of voluntary group or organisation, with internet users more likely than others to be active (80% versus 56% respectively) and social media users even more likely (82%) (Rainie et al., 2011). "Interestingly, 17% of the non-internet users who also do not participate in groups say that lack of internet access is a major factor in their inactivity." (Rainie et al., 2011, p. 14).

The importance of the internet in the ability of groups to communicate with members, with 68% of Americans saying it is important, and 59% saying the internet has had a major impact on the ability of groups to impact on society (Rainie et al., 2011, p. 14).

Given the fairly common use of social media in the third sector, it is unsurprising that ROI is considered within the third sector. Many of the concerns surrounding the use of social media by the third sector were summed up nicely in an interesting online discussion on the value of social media use for social enterprise (Haro Pastor, 2011), but here too the preliminary framing was financial.

Clearly, the investment made in any new technology must be well considered, and cost benefit analysis – a sort of preliminary ROI – is likely to be part of this. However, notions of 'value' spread beyond pure monetary indices; the Social Return on Investment (SROI) measure accounts for social goods in a way that is attractive to economists – and organisations, including companies, are engaging with this measure as will be discussed below – but beyond that, many people have an underlying feeling that the 'value' of their projects cannot be quantitatively measured. For these people the 'stories' and narratives that can be created and shared via social media are a major draw to the technologies, and a way of displaying their 'value'. In contrast, others think that, just as commercial marketers can, non-profits can use existing analytics tools to track users' actions through 'behavioural funnels' – paths on a website, which lead to our target outcome (Cugelman, Thelwall, & Dawes, 2008).

Perhaps some good advice here comes from a book on the use of social media technology, for social good:

Don't underestimate how many 'unmeasurable' things can actually be measured in ingenious ways, particularly if you have money to spend. The best way to approach measuring success is to work out what, in an ideal world, you would like to measure, and then research the methods available for each one. Perhaps you'll need to add technology to your platform to collect new data; perhaps you'll need to survey your users or run focus groups; maybe you'll even need to hire a separate company to research and evaluate your impact. As long as you know how valuable each piece of information is to you, you can put a maximum price on acquiring it and either go get it, or rule it out and try something else. (Gibson, 2009, p. 85)

EXPLICIT USE OF ROI

What you measure about your technology will be determined by how you want people to use it. Do you want to engage a small group of people to do a range of things repeatedly, or a large group of

people to do something specific once? Silicon Valley startup investor and entrepreneur Dave McClure explores these issues in his excellent presentation *Startup Metrics for Pirates: AARRR!!!* He suggests five areas of user behaviour that you can usefully measure:

- *Acquisition: users come to the site from various channels (eg. new visitors per month)*
- *Activation: users enjoy 1st visit: 'happy' user experience (eg. 7% of visitors sign up)*
- *Retention: users come back, visit site multiple times (eg. 10% of users come back)*
- *Referral: users like product enough to refer others (eg. average user recruits 0.2 others)*
- *Revenue: users conduct some monetisation behaviour (eg. average value per user > £5)*

Dave also describes three kinds of users: visitors, contributors and distributors. Put simply, visitors passively consume your content; contributors create new content; and distributors tell other people about your content. Depending on your project purpose and objectives, you'll need to choose which of these are more important to you.

For example, you could measure the number of unique visitors to your website (using a web stats package like Google Analytics), but this might not mean much if your goal is to get people creating content. You could measure how many of those users come back, which might give you an idea of how much value people are getting from your platform, but that's not so useful if your tool is designed to help people perform a one-off function, like signing a petition. If your goal is to encourage awareness of a cause, you might be interested in pageviews for your own site, but also references to your project elsewhere on the internet, or how many of your users invite friends to join your site. You can even measure how many followers you get on Twitter, or the number of mentions for your project in Google. (Gibson, 2009, pp. 82–83)

The American Social Network Benchmarking Report (NTEN et al., 2011) found that:

In our sample size of 869 nonprofits who measure hard ROI, 87% of them say that fundraising is a goal of their commercial social networks compared to 56% generally. They also have Twitter followings that are about 2.4 times larger, Facebook communities about 6.5 times larger, and LinkedIn communities about 7.3 times larger than average.... Nonprofits measuring hard ROI metrics also raise more money on commercial social networks. One in ten (9.5%) who measure their Facebook fundraising revenue also brought in more than \$10,000 over the last year, compared to less than 3% of nonprofits on Facebook generally.

However, as the authors say, it isn't clear "Whether measuring ROI is the first step to raising more fundraising revenue or the reverse is true, it is clear that organizations who strive to fundraise, and who measure their progress tend to raise more on social networks than their peers." (NTEN et al., 2011, p. 24)

Regardless, there are people who believe nonprofits should calculate ROI for their social media, and there are tools available such as Justin Perkin's 'ROI calculator for Social Network Campaigns' (Perkins, 2007), as well as advice pages on calculating ROI. For example, as the net time and money saved, plus the additional money earned or donated, and other 'benefits' turned into (monetary) value (more on this in the next section) (Kanter, 2008). However many, including Beth Kanter's blog post there, think that the reason this is useful isn't just to give a headline number, and indeed, even though many call it ROI, in fact often 'value' of various other kinds is referred to, suggesting more of an SROI system. Instead, organisations should be thinking about it as a benchmark for how far they have progressed, and where they might be able to move to in terms of both savings, attracting further donations, and trying to get your voice heard – attracting new readers, new commenters, new advocates; thinking about these things, and using the *metric* approaches described in the previous section, allows organisations to think about how to use the tools cleverly to maximise exposure.

Claire Rollinson at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (ncvo) discusses these issues (Rollinson, 2009), while raising the concern that 84% of respondents in a survey of non-profits do not measure their ROI

for social media programs. Here she discusses the sorts of things people could measure, and how, including increases in website traffic, proxies for engagement such as retweeting, replies, comments and likes, and the sorts of 'listening' exercises discussed above that indicate how people are talking about the brand. She emphasises that ROI is an important consideration, however, throughout the piece it is also clear that *engagement* is important – suggesting that measuring 'Return on Engagement' might be preferable given that its *quality* of interaction not *quantity* we're likely to seek.

Clearly, just as companies do not solely use social media and networking for direct revenue funnelling and increased sales, third sector organisations also have aims beyond fundraising. This is reflected in the fact that:

“the overall (qualitative) perceived value of social networks does NOT vary much between ROI measurers and non-measurers: 89% of measurers indicate that their social networking efforts are valuable (i.e. “somewhat valuable” or “very valuable”) while 82% of non-measurers report that their social networking efforts are valuable. Presumably this is due to at least two factors: social networks for program and service delivery are rarely ROI-positive programs by their nature, and not every organization focuses on financial return – either because of intrinsic social benefit or a lack of administrative fiscal rigor. (NTEN et al., 2011, pp. 24–25)

Interestingly, an American survey of evaluation practices in the not for profit sector (Reed & Morariu, 2010) found that most organizations focus on these quantitative methods for analysis. Clearly though, many are not doing this for their social media projects. It is also difficult to understand evaluation processes without some context – for example, many organizations may report mostly quantitative data, while internally paying equal attention to the qualitative stories, and case studies that are given. While social media gives a prime opportunity for these stories to be told, many organizations may not be taking advantage of them, thus giving the appearance of giving only quantitative notions of 'value', and potentially disenfranchising some stakeholders from their own derived 'value'.

THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Looking for ways to categorise social media projects by 'aim', it is clear that there is no easy way to segment them. This is because many projects target a variety of issues, in part precisely because they are often based on user contribution, and thus the users can contribute new concerns, ideas, issues, and elements of community to the project. However, in terms of fairly broad initial aims, some attempts have been made.

One social media advisor for the third sector (St John, 2011b) splits them into:

- Changing legislation – by creating a movement, using the tools to publicise (e.g. youtube reporting),
- Changing behavior (e.g. health) - by changing norms, making the change easy, using games
- Coping with disaster - by using open access wifi to find disaster survivors, use of low-tech tweeting to organize civil unrest, etc

The Social by Social book offers 10 case studies (Gibson, 2009, p. 91), dividing them between:

- Campaigning – campaigns on particular issues, advocacy for groups
- Communicating - (e.g. on health, to enable collaboration
- Enabling – use of technology to allow people to give feedback, give them a voice

Clearly, the cross-over between these two sets of categories is fairly strong, although the latter uses slightly broader terminology, which we will adopt henceforth. It should also be noted that many projects could fit into any one of those categories. For example, Social by Social offer the case study of Genesis 'Friend or Foe' – a set of resources and a movie made to highlight the issue of fraud amongst vulnerable people, which used those vulnerable people to create the resources. Certainly there is an advocacy element here – they were speaking for change to key groups and it wasn't directly beneficiary led. However, there was also an enabling

element – empowering vulnerable people to speak up about an issue that had impacted on them, and giving them a voice that in other contexts they may not have had. There was also a communication message here – trying to ensure that vulnerable people both understand risks, and understand that they are not alone, and that many people have been victims of fraud. This cross-over highlights one of the advantages of social media use – the ability for a fairly simple static message, to take on a more active, emergent function.

Table x – summary of social media uses across 3rd sector organisations (summarised from the (the Creative Commons licensed) ‘social by social’ booklet (Gibson, 2009) unless otherwise labelled)

Type	Name	What they’re using	How using
Campaigning	ColaLife (Gibson, 2009, p. 92)	Blogs, video, micro-blogging activism, photos on flickr, social bookmarking dedicated ‘tag’ (colalife on delicious)	All the content has been generated and donated by the participants who persuaded broadcasters then Coca Cola to engage with the issue. Cola now uses its distribution channels to distribute aid throughout Tanzania.
	Genesis: ‘Friend or Foe’ (Gibson, 2009, p. 104)	Dissemination of video output from a group of beneficiaries and participants	Several dozen victims contributed as actors, scriptwriters and film crew. The experience has transformed their lives. After one year’s filming and editing the 26- minute DVD is being distributed to 300 Primary Care Trusts, mental health organisations and publicists. The video is also published online for download from popular social media.
	BRITDOC: ‘Chosen’ (Gibson, 2009, p. 108)	Two sides – 1) Online portal for film makers, grantees, etc. Funding applications are made through this site. 2) Use of specific media for each documentary. For example, ‘Chosen’ used an offline resource to funnel people to a website (with answers), journalists were solicited to write (online)	One example was a film about sexual abuse (‘Chosen’). They pre-screened this before creating the final cut, then created materials for use. “First, 10,000 postcards were distributed amongst schools, parents and child protection professionals by the London branch of the national campaign Stop It Now! The cards included 4 questions which parents can ask about the child protection policies at their children’s schools. The answers that they can expect to get back from the schools are included on the film’s purpose-built website.” Second, specific journalists were sought out and pressed for coverage around the time the film was transmitted. This resulted in numerous editorials further raising the issues and directing people to the film’s website. Third, a training edition of the film is being made available to relevant child protection agencies. The training edition includes over 2 hours of chaptered excerpts, covering the issues raised in the film in greater detail, and it is designed as a training tool for child protection professionals working with children, parents and educators.
	38 Degrees (thanks to Max St John’s blog post (2011b))	Use of a social network with campaign based blogs and materials. Forums.	“38 Degrees brings you together with other people to take action on the issues that matter to you and bring about real change in the UK.” – sign up to particular campaigns. Website has a list of ‘achieved’ aims (e.g. ban on circus animals). Members decide on campaigns via forums and social media sites.
Communicating	TuDiabetes	Social networking	Working with the free Ning platform he built a

	(Gibson, 2009, p. 113)	platform (Ning) with facebook fan pages, youtube videos, twitter and a video blog. Photo campaign	website in less than a month to give diabetes sufferers a forum for exchanging their knowledge and their feelings. A photo campaign (diabeteshandprint.com) allowed users to photo their hand with a word describing their feeling – a sharing experience, for each one of which diabetes charities received a donation from a sponsoring company.
	IDeA: Communities of Practice (Gibson, 2009, p. 118)	Social networking, online conferences, various document types (wikis, blogs, etc.)	Centred on a specially developed web platform for user-generated content. It is a freely accessible resource that enables like-minded people to form online communities of practice using collaboration tools including blogs, wikis and social networks. It encourages knowledge-sharing and learning from each others' experiences, and the fundamental aim is 'helping conversations to happen'. The users – mainly local authority officials – now number more than 30,000, 16% of whom are active participants. Between them the members have set up over 800 CoPs to allow knowledge and experiences to be exchanged between specialists and novices nationally and, increasingly, internationally.
	Savvy Chavvy (Gibson, 2009, p. 121)	A social networking site which facilitates photo and video exchange, and joint campaigning.	It started in early 2008 as a citizen journalism training initiative for marginalised communities. Funding of £82,000 was provided to enable 50 young Gypsies and Travellers to use social media, and a website using the free Ning platform was used to link the widely dispersed students with their trainers and each other. Within two months many more Gypsies had signed up to the discussions as the users themselves decided to use the site as their own private social network. These young people are subjected to racist abuse, and rather than broadcasting their stories in public, what they needed was a private space to socialise. The award-winning Savvy Chavvy site now has 2200 members – a high proportion of the Traveller community – and is widely used for exchanging photos and video clips and joining campaigns. Natural leaders have emerged who have now been trained to administer and moderate the site.
	Time to Change (thanks to Max St John's blog post (2011b))	Videos, blogs, social networking integration, user forums, social media on offline events, and provision of resources for local offline events	Provide a range of sources to a) provide information on mental health and b) build a network who are visibly affiliated with the campaign – both online (facebook group/page, etc., sharing of youtube clips and blog posts) and offline via organising events, and attending the events Time to Change organise themselves.
	Freecycle (thanks to Max St John's blog post (2011b))	Networks of geo-located groups	Based around exchange of goods ('free-cycling as related to recycling).
	Think Pig	Games, blogs,	Used to raise awareness of animal welfare via the

	(thanks to Max St John's blog post (2011b))	video sharing/rating,etc.	use of games, user and RSPCA blog and video contributions.
Enabling	Talk2Croydon (Gibson, 2009, p. 126)	A shared services hub and place for users to contribute (see right) built on content management system drupal	e-democracy with user-generated content on local issues, debates, polls, user-posted videos and games, combined with a shared intranet space for practitioners – whose details are linked into the general website as an information hub on local services.
	FreqOUT! (Gibson, 2009, p. 130)	Beneficiaries learn to use communications technologies such as mobile phones, GPS tracking and an AV edit suite with volunteers. These are can be posted to social networking sites. Recruitment uses viral text, social networking, online marketing & word of mouth.	A citizen empowerment initiative ... raise young residents self-belief and help them acquire life-skills and employability. Young people are enabled to create individual and collective art works. GPS tech showed popular and avoided areas, video and audio clips taken of local areas, and broadcast. Beneficiaries have been asked to create videos for the BBC amongst others, using their mobiles. The project's success is measured in terms of recruitment, retention, individual learning plans, opportunities created and routes to employment
	Patient Opinion (Gibson, 2009, p. 135)	A custom system to deliver feedback to NHS stakeholders, and the local MP from patients.	Patient Opinion is a platform for conversations about issues. It is not solely about feedback or data or service improvement – even though all these are an outcome.
	CrisisCommons (thanks to Max St John's blog post (2011b))	Use of open maps, crowdsource wifi/SMS, etc. blogs, microblogs, video, wiki	CrisisCommons seeks to advance and support the use of open data and volunteer technology communities to catalyze innovation in crisis management and global development. Materials are used to 1) Share knowledge in crisis and maintain contact, 2) share knowledge outside crisis zones (wikis and blogs/videos etc. educate about the practical and 'on the ground' situation respectively).

Categories help us to understand the types of value we're looking for. But, as discussed in the first section, some values are emergent, and many organisations fail to account for the various types of value that may emerge, or prevent some kinds (for example, this could have happened with SavvyChavvy had they restricted the project from growing into a social network from a citizen journalism project).

COMPARISON ENGINES

One of the other perhaps predictable outcomes of this rise in online engagement, is a rise in services to compare them. These are of interest in our context because in order to offer a comparison, they must establish criteria by which to judge them; many of these are likely to be those which funders, and members of the public, would use to judge an organisations performance. This parallels the use of comparison websites for various services and products in the commercial sector.

Again, unsurprisingly, these are being interacted with via social media. The Charity Navigator 2010 annual report says that, “supporters of charity navigator increasingly tune in to our ongoing feeds and discussions on such popular social media sites as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. Our social media efforts are allowing users to connect with Charity Navigator-as well as with each other-to share valuable information, ideas, and personal insights.” Giving the example of a comment from a user who says: "I would like you to know I am a frequent visitor to Charity Navigator and use it exclusively to decide on donations, other than to my small local charities. Charity Navigator is 4 star in my book!" (Charity Navigator, 2010)

Although these organisations have some degree of social media integration, ironically they do not allow for the sharing of stories – or any other interaction or ‘value’ indicator – on their reports on the charities, with one exception (GreatNonProfits). Great non-profits allows commenting and user generated reviews, which by signing up, charities gain better access to – including the ability to respond and view analytics such as how many reviews have been shared to facebook.

These organisations are in an interesting conundrum – they generally only base their results on publicly available data, for example, GuideStar bases their ratings on nonprofit’s reports, and 990 forms (tax exemption forms for charities). It thus seems that allowing social media integration to a great extent would extend their value to other users, and give them insights into those things which their users value.

Ironically, only one of the organisations (GiveWell) offers an extensive self-review, having a whole page (<http://www.givewell.org/about/shortcomings>) devoted to errors they’ve made in various ways. An article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, rated the raters – giving an evaluation of the three main organisations – BBB Wise giving Alliance, Charity Navigator, and the American Institute of Philanthropy. Finding that:

...the major weaknesses of the ratings agencies are threefold: They rely too heavily on simple analysis and ratios derived from poor-quality financial data; they overemphasize financial efficiency while ignoring the question of program effectiveness; and they generally do a poor job of conducting analysis in important qualitative areas such as management strength, governance quality, or organizational transparency. (Lowell, Trelstad, & Meehan, 2005)

If we include those three in the list of these comparison groups, BBB Wise Giving offer an annual report, and are clearly working towards a set of standards all charities can follow – but offer no further transparency, don’t have a high social media integration, and don’t measure their own impact. Turning to the American Institute of Philanthropy’s Charity Watch, while they go into more detail than other groups, they don’t even have online access (paid subscription only), and thus social media integration is prevented. In addition, although they go into detail for other organizations, they only offer their 990 forms and annual report on themselves – rather than the more in depth analysis Give Well offers.

In addition to the higher transparency level on ‘faults’, Give Well is also the only organization with a clear impact statement based on research²⁰. In 2008 they evaluated 83 charities, looking for formal studies of impact, and found that 62 of those charities had no formal study²¹. Their blogs on various topics are comment enabled, and clearly they have tried to engage with their users and with impact research²² – for example finding that their donations were up on a baseline, and in comparison to more established sites²³. They’re also keen to emphasise that the value they’re identifying is not just “giving more” – it’s giving “well”. Thus, although the research they conduct is expensive, because it allows for – in their definition – more efficient, and thus valuable giving, the research cost has a high return on investment.

²⁰ <http://www.givewell.org/Key-Research-Findings>

²¹ <http://givewell.org/giving101/Most-Charities-Evidence>

²² <http://blog.givewell.org/2011/09/12/why-givewell-labs/>

²³ <http://blog.givewell.org/2011/02/08/stats-on-givewells-money-moved-and-web-traffic/>

Within this context though, these organisations are still tending to focus on the sort of analytics discussed above, with less regard for other measures of value. As the Stanford article noted,

“A more democratic approach would survey donors and service recipients, or facilitate their input in a hosted environment, like Amazon book reviews or Epinions commentary. These opinions could be aggregated into a pithy user-generated synthesis, or left open source with other users asked to rank others’ feedback.” (Lowell et al., 2005)

Their suggestions towards ‘a more effective rating system’ are that:

A more effective nonprofit rating system should have at least four main components: improved financial data that is reviewed over three to five years and put in the context of narrowly defined peer cohorts; qualitative evaluation of the organization’s intangibles in areas like brand, management quality, governance, and transparency; some review of the organization’s program effectiveness, including both qualitative critique by objective experts in the field, and, where appropriate, “customer” feedback from either the donor or the aid recipient’s perspective; and an opportunity for comment or response by the organization being rated. (Lowell et al., 2005)

TRANSPARENCY

A key focus of these organizations is the transparency of the charities they’re rating. One site which focuses very specifically on this facet is ‘Glasspockets’²⁴ which uses a ‘heat map’ which links users to key sources of transparency within foundations including whether the foundation makes use of social media, has RSS feeds, has a blog, shows ‘grantee feedback and surveys, and shows performance assessment. These are directly linked from the map, but again, there is little opportunity for interaction with the data.

What’s interesting about all of these sites which attempt to ‘rate’ funders, is that it is simply not enough to *have* a strategy to measure success, nor indeed is it enough to collect feedback from beneficiaries – whether they are charities being funded by foundations, or individuals who are beneficiaries of charitable programs. A clear message from the social media age is that people expect to be able to *see* this data as well, and indeed to be able to easily access the information in order to accurately assess the value of various organizations. A further step towards this end has been the creation of a standard for publishing open data – the IATI Standard (at www.iatiregistry.org). Which allows the kind of interaction with large data sets that many areas of public and private organisations are now moving towards.

MOVING BEYOND THE FINANCIAL: MEASURING VALUE

A key point made by Gibson (2009, p. 54) is that one shouldn’t confuse money, with value. That is, that not all projects need to be paid for; many communities can rely on volunteers to solve problems and assist in the day to day maintenance, through the use of moderators, and help forums. Of course, organizations need to engage with these communities to ensure that they are listening to concerns and ideas – and ideas for how to do this were presented above using tools such as ‘get satisfaction’ – but a large role can be created for the community itself, and this may in fact encourage ownership and engagement.

In addition, Gibson (2009, pp. 54–55) highlights the importance of using video and photos to go beyond reading simple accounts, and give a feel for both the members or beneficiaries, and those within the organization. Opportunities should also be sought for ‘conversations and co-design exercises’ – by creating conversation, again as discussed in section 2, the relationships are there to understand how to engage people, and to ask them for help in creating new tools and projects to further engage and recruit. It is important, for

²⁴ www.glasspockets.org

example, to understand what things users would like to be able to do – post videos, images, etc. – and what they might be concerned about, including privacy issues. An aspect of both these things might also be integrating social media into offline events by using tools such as blogs and video. For example, the Silver Surfer Awards Day, awarded a prize by Nominet, allowed the sharing of real narratives of those getting online for the first time, and these narratives included aspects of online acts, and offline such as interviews, providing insight into the value of the project beyond that gained by online monitoring.

“Although the tools you’re using are technical and measurable, fundamentally your underlying purpose will be human, broadly unquantifiable and very difficult to prove.” (Gibson, 2009, p. 85). They suggest an aspect of this should be the use of follow up email questionnaires. Above, a range of other options – which produce quantitative data – are also presented. These would include measures of ‘engagement’ such as ‘likes’, the number of comments made and community ‘buzz’ around particular topics, whether on twitter or internally.

However, “Quantitative data is great, but the true picture of the good you are doing might be obscured by too many stats. Try to collect stories from your community about real change happening as a result of your work. Publish them on a project blog so everyone can see them, and try to get quotes from users about the impact of the platform you’ve built on their lives.” (Gibson, 2009, p. 85).

A key message from Gibson, and this document, is that many things can be measured in a variety of ways, using a range of interesting new tools. The key, and a theme throughout this document, is understanding what you would like to measure – and this should be targeted at outcomes over outputs – and then exploring ways to gather data on this. The data can be quantitative and qualitative – and the qualitative data may be ‘filtered down’ to illustrative examples to provide to funders, perhaps even by using social media metrics such as those indicating the most ‘popular’ user contributions (bearing in mind the concerns raised in section 1).

...remember that stats are useful for demonstrating scale of impact, but it is often the human stories that bring it to life and show people what you’ve achieved. They can also be very useful tools for bringing in new users, reinforcing the sense of community and the value of the project, and attracting press and blog coverage. (Gibson, 2009, p. 85)

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

Table x – Examples of measuring ‘value’ in 3rd sector social media projects

Who	What they investigated	Impact demonstrated
Crisis (crisis, 2009)	Social media increases ‘reach’ of message regarding housing issues, and success of crisis. They’ve also ran a project using SROI to demonstrate impact publicly to funders (Fradd, 2009)	Members of public concerned about impact of housing benefit cuts. Unknown – we might expect increase in engagement/ donations resulting from transparency
Newcastle City Council (see Gibson 2010, pp. 26–27)	Individual engaged positively with facebook group protesting closure of Cooperage bar in the city.	Instigated offline meetup leading to positive view of council actions and community engagement.
‘the online neighbourhood networks’ (Networked Neighbourhoods group, 2010)	Analysis of citizen-run neighbourhood websites via the use of a survey (i.e. analysis of social media without using social media)	Websites enhance sense of belonging, democratic influence, neighbourliness and involvement in the area and increased positive affect to local public agencies who engage online.
RaceOnline2012 (RaceOnline2012, 2010)	Use of social media, etc. to encourage people to ‘come online’ for the first time. They will	As yet unknown, however, impact will show number of new people

	assess progress through a counter, which captures each online registration to myguide, and ONS and Ofcome statistics to monitor access and use of the internet by target groups.	online (note it isn't clear whether this should be considered an output, or outcome).
American Red Cross (Radian6, 2010f)	Started monitoring in response to negative comments. Carried out a more detailed sentiment analysis subsequently.	Realised that people use different terms (volunteer, help, donate) than they do themselves (collecting time, money, blood) – message changed. Contact to blood donors decreased in response to their frustration at frequency. Improved sentiment.
American Red Cross' Haiti efforts (Radian6, 2010g)	Information dissemination including a video to illustrate state of the island. Social media monitoring to check information accurate and up to date. Facebook – tended to be previous volunteers discussing, blogs – posting of first hand stories/images, etc.	Understand key message people wanted to know was "How can I help?", and that with wide range of media out there, checking consistency is important (and possible, using the available tools).
International Women's Day (Radian6, 2011)	A day to share stories and campaign for women's rights particularly on social media, offering a way to analyse data based around a day. 200,000 posts, 80% on twitter.	Allowed UNDP to identify 17,000 activists on Twitter and 600 on Facebook so they can now reach out and build stronger relationships with these key activists.
Virgin Media Pioneers (not strictly third sector, but related enough) (St John, 2011a; Virgin media, 2010)	Pioneers is a social media site to encourage young people to create a) projects and b) investment in those projects, alongside the sharing of ideas. A survey ('social media capital') was conducted on members alongside key metrics (their key target was to have 900 members and an SROI <i>framework</i> in place).	SROI frame in place 959 members (2010). 550 videos uploaded Visits from 120+ countries 8000 messages sent within the community 61% of Pioneers surveyed think that being part of the community gives them ideas to start or grow their business, 52% think that being part of the community has increased their skills and knowledge, 68% of Pioneers surveyed said that being a part of the programme had improved their business networks and contacts, 27 new businesses were created by people surveyed,
GiveWell (as mentioned above) http://blog.givewell.org/2011/02/08/stats-on-givewells-money-moved-and-web-traffic/	They list their 'shortcomings' or mistakes they've made. Evaluated their own running in terms of costs. A key thing for them is doing research to encourage "giving well" rather than "giving more" - i.e. the cost of the research is outweighed by the increased impact of charitable donations because they're all going to "good" charities. The blog (including those on accounts) is commentable.	Unknown impact – increase in engagement, and sets a good example for other organisations. Donations up on a) baseline and b) in comparison to more established sites

If we look at one example in more detail – the organization ‘v’ which organises volunteering opportunities for young people. They used social media extensively, and ran a cost benefit analysis which is reported in a larger evaluation report (National Centre for Social Research, Institute for Volunteering Research, University of Southampton, University of Birmingham, & Public Zone, 2011), finding “Overall v-funded activities generate a robust SROI of around 6 to 1 in relation to direct impact on young volunteers.”

Investment	Impact
Paid searches in google	Google.co.uk (and other Google services) is also one of the top referring sites
Social media presence	20 per cent of all site visits came from referrals from other sites. One of the top referring sites was Facebook
Sentiment analysis on social media platforms	<p>☑ Young volunteers appreciated opportunities for direct contact with v, and in particular with other v volunteers.</p> <p>In terms of how successful v has been in communicating with young people and ensuring they can access information on volunteering the evidence indicates the following impacts:</p> <p>☑ Mixed awareness of v as a volunteering organisation which has risen and then fallen again over time.</p> <p>☑ Improvements to the website usability, and increased website traffic.</p> <p>☑ More positive reactions to the recent Summer of Give campaign than the earlier Big Hand and more recent Make the Team campaigns</p>
Funding of sub-projects and solicited feedback from those	Nine per cent said that their project increased young people’s engagement in the local community or local politics, that it improved young people’s social networks (for example, meeting new people), and that it gave them specific knowledge related to the project.

In particular in the case of the ‘neighborhood networks’ analysis, we can imagine conducting a sentiment analysis regarding local public agencies who are and are not represented online, alongside use of targeted questionnaires which utilize existing social networking systems, and perhaps some metrics including how popular certain websites are, whether community sites are more successful than council ones – in which case the council could redirect, or improve their own content – and so on.

Another example serves to highlight the difficulties in measurement - <http://mashable.com/2011/02/25/viral-campaigns-non-profits/> MollyTheCowWSPA how much was down to the viral (twitter + youtube) campaign, how much other things? How do we measure impact?

USING THE TOOLS TO SHOW ‘VALUE’

For many of us delivering information and support services, this is the core of our work. While it may be easy to quantify how many calls were received, how many mail-outs were sent and how many people called in to a drop-in centre, this leaves crucial questions unanswered such as:

- *Did your caller end the call satisfied with the information received?*
- *How many people read, forwarded and responded to your mail-out?*

- *How many of them went on to make donations, support a campaign or read more on your website?*
- *Did the person leave the drop-in with the information they wanted?*
- *Did your advice get put into practice, and what difference did it make to their life?*
- *How did the recipient of a grant benefit from the money they received?*

Technology can help you collect all this data. Supplementing the basic figures with quantifiable outcomes that track positive changes over time would demonstrate the real impact of your work in terms that fit into a SROI report, annual report, marketing mail-out or a news release. (Nash, 2010)

Thinking about how to match up aims with measures, both on and offline is an important consideration in this process. This includes listening – and engaging with ‘the conversation’ –

The only way to control what people are saying about you on social media is to join in the conversation, not as the voice of authority shutting things down, but as a real person engaging openly and honestly with the criticisms. By positioning yourself in the conversations to begin with, and allowing your staff to build relationships with people there, you can reduce the risk of one lone voice, or one piece of bad news, dominating the debate. (Gibson, 2010, p. 26)

One way to do this is to ensure you’re using tools like “Twitter Search (www.twitter.com/search) and Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts) and when bad news does travel, the best way to manage it is not to block it, but to engage.” (Gibson, 2010, p. 26). Other tools include the use of google analytics and similar to see what content is popular, and who is sending people to your site. Indeed within the US, a summary of charitable engagement with social media (Barnes & Mattson, 2008) found:

Sixty-six percent of respondents in 2007 and 75% in 2008 report they monitor the Internet for buzz, posts, conversations and news about their institution. Most of these organizations realize the importance of knowing what conversation might occur around their cause, their name, their location or constituents.

When engaging with these tools, you can also consider offline outcomes. For example “During its Mês da Terra (Earth Month) celebration in July 2010, Walmart Brazil utilized Twitter® to encourage customers to incorporate more environmentally preferred products into their daily lives. About 4,500 tweets were received from Internet users about what they were doing to preserve life and the environment, while 85,000 people were informed through the social media campaign. Over the course of the month, some sustainable products on our shelves registered up to a 70 percent increase in sales.”²⁵

If you’re using networks, there are ways to illustrate how this is being used, for example by looking at “the amount of information that flowed across individual connections to reflect the strength of the different parts of the network, all in a way that could be explored by the user. The result is not just something that looks pretty; it’s a way of demonstrating what the website is achieving for the people we set out to support. It also serves as a neat way of reporting success to stakeholders who won’t read a 30-page report, as well as allowing us, and the people within the network to spot areas of strength and weakness.” (St John, 2010)

One network which setups fundraising systems for charities, implemented a Get Satisfaction support network, including facebook integration (GetSatisfaction, n.d.). They found that because of the community aspect of the project with 15,000 page views, the topic management was made easier: “Most of our team has spent very little time in Get Satisfaction, which is great as it’s freed up our Client Success Team to focus directly on our nonprofit clients instead of fielding general customer service questions.”

²⁵ http://walmartstores.com/sites/ResponsibilityReport/2011/environment_products_ImprovedProducts.aspx

A particularly useful element being utilised here is again a combination of qualitative data – in this case, feedback and suggestions – alongside quantitative data allowing the organisation to target in on the most pressing or best quality material, via the use of ‘me too’ votes “The top question has over 100 “me too” votes, which means that over 100 people have had the same question and found the answer through the StayClassy customer”.

Engagement is not an add-on – it should be fundamental to your business model, technology design, marketing strategy and evaluation processes. Build it and they may well not come. Build relationships and they probably will. In this noisy ‘information age’, the biggest challenge has become attracting people’s attention. The web in particular is an interactive medium, which means people make conscious choices about what they read and watch online. Push marketing is therefore ineffective as users will simply avoid content they are not looking for, or that is not ‘useful’ to them. User tolerance for irrelevant content and functionality is plummeting, and the need for a clear understanding of what users want to do on the site, and for providing consistently relevant information and services, are paramount to building successful online content. (Gibson, 2009, p. 51)

A way to do this is to solicit stories, through video, images, audio, blogs, commenting, forum posts, private and public feedback, suggestions for improvements and so on, ideally alongside metric style social media such as ‘like’, thumbs up/down, tweet counters and so on. This combination of sentiment analysis, and shared value creation, with the ability to draw out those stories the communities find valuable allows for insight into the nature of your work which may not otherwise have been there. Organisations should be cautious about excluding people, but this was always the case – it is not clear that the practice of using social media, which encourages the creation and sharing of more narratives of ‘value’, is more exclusionary than previous practices which might have involved the selection – by organisations, not communities – of a small number, to complete pre-defined feedback sheets, in private.

Of course, tools such as ‘like’ and metrics matter because they allow for a real kind of engagement, and feedback which gives control of the content to the community. Sometimes, it might not be appropriate for this to happen, for example, the Guardian online does not always allow comments on articles – but when this happens, the reasons (along with other data) should be transparent.

Some examples of the potential of social media for various types of project were given above. The social media uses in this projects are fairly broad, and – as discussed – many don’t make it explicit where or how they are analysing the ‘value’ of their activities. However, some uses of social media are explicit in the aim of the group – e.g. nominet funds specifically internet projects, thus seeks outcomes based on internet engagement, petition sites have moved physical networks to online ones and are thus explicitly web based looking for outputs – number of petitions and signatories, and outcomes – petition success. The nature of the outcomes desired, will impact on the type of data you seek – but this should be with a view to be ambitious about encouraging the creation of narratives, and flexible about other valuable outcomes from your projects.

...because ICT is increasingly part of the work of many community service organizations, ICT also needs to be considered as an essential part of the SROI research agenda. If ICT is considered as part of the SROI ‘bundle’ this could then lead to the development of tools which offer [organisations] a way to meaningfully demonstrate the social (and economic) worth of investment in ICTs and the way in which they add value to the capacity of organizations, communities, and individuals through such things as better data management or effective, ICT-linked forms of client service. (Stillman, Kethers, French, & Lombard, 2010, p. 98)

CREATING AN AGGREGATED MECHANISM FOR MEASURING 'VALUE'

The most important thing is to identify what you need to measure in order to monitor progress and success, and this will depend largely on the aims of the project. If you are informing the public, you might want to measure how many people subscribe to your service, who reads your content, and how often it has been forwarded. If you are building a community, engagement might be more important: how many people are commenting and how often, how much user-generated content there is on the site. What you measure is defined largely by what you think is most important.

Consultant Adam Bailin has been working with The Central Office of Information (COI) to develop some common measures for all digital engagement and social media tools, and suggests the following: the number of relationships, the number of user-generated content items, and the number of referrals/ recommendations.

Yet digital engagement specialist Steph Gray is keen to stress the risk of oversimplifying: “there’s a real danger in picking a handful of measurable elements and defining – perhaps inadvertently – that that’s what counts in a publicly-funded digital engagement project in the eyes of agencies and auditors,” he says. He proposes a set of softer measures, such as how useful the policy team clients found the project to be, the actual take up of the call to action, how the participants felt about the process, whether participants stayed involved, and what the return on investment was in terms of effort/cost to useful outcomes. (Gibson, 2010, p. 30)

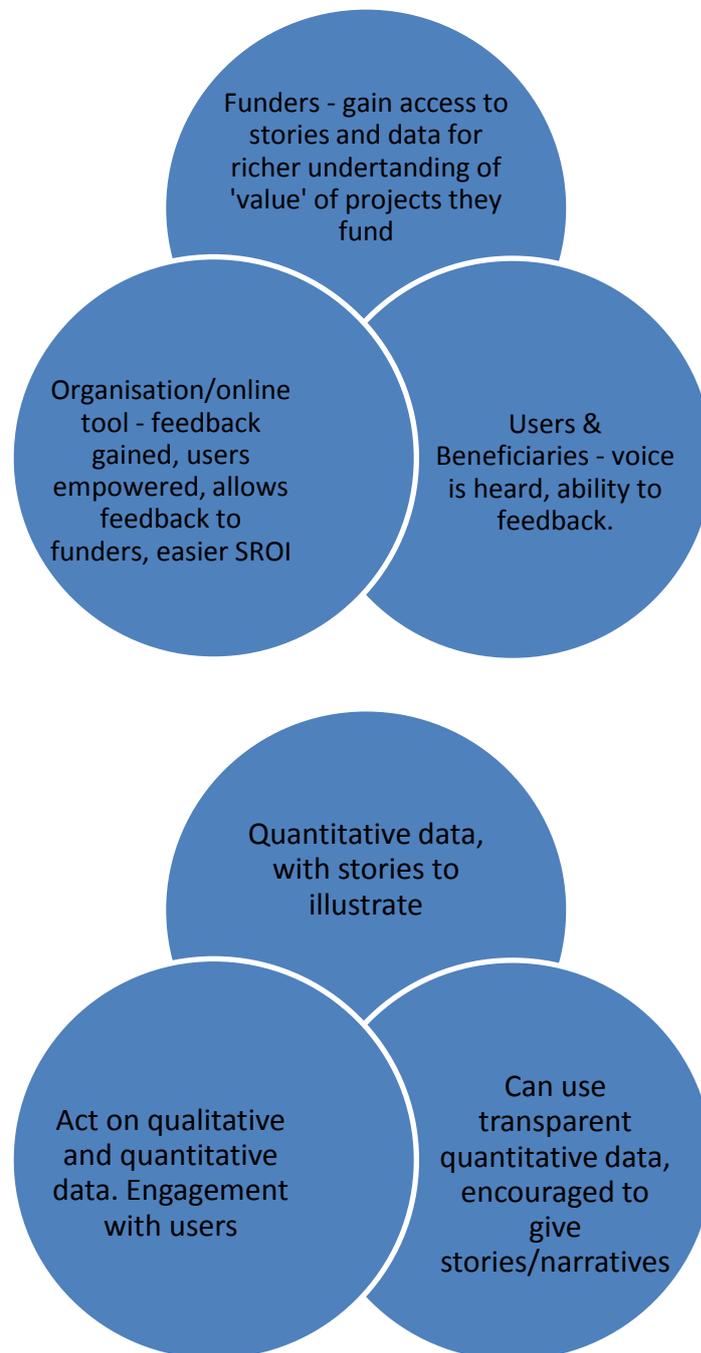
We can collect value in a variety of ways. However, providing space to demonstrate the value of projects to their various stakeholders is important not only for the measurement of that value, but for the further creation of value, and opportunities for offshoot activities which may be naturally emergent from the communities. Of course, “While the public and private sector, and grant-awarding bodies may insist on seeing cold, hard figures, your supporters and personal donors will be much more engaged by stories where the human dimension is first and foremost.” (Nash, 2010)²⁶

One of the complaints about SROI is that it fails to account for the stories people tell, the impact on the narratives provided by many organizations. Organisations share these narratives for a reason – if Amnesty only provided statistics, none of us would deny we would expect to see a drop in both donations, and activism levels.

It may be that in novel ways, narratives can both be shared with other users, in order to give them insight into their impact, and the nature of problems, and – perhaps by using the tools of social media, which highlight where networked users are “looking” – share key illustrative examples with funders too. In doing this, organizations must be cautious that they don’t fall into a kind of ‘filter bubble’ of their own, particularly given that for some organizations the narratives being voiced will be those that have been marginalized in other contexts. Here, it is suggested that by collecting narratives, allowing commenting on as much of the organisation’s materials as possible, making data transparent, and enabling various ‘metric’ measures such as thumbs up/down, a combined approach can be taken. Under this approach organisations monitor sentiment towards them using comments on pages and documents alongside social media monitoring (such as sentiment analysis for twitter), they also encourage engagement with their beneficiaries and users, who create various

²⁶ Gibson makes the same point when he says: “Finally, remember that stats are useful for demonstrating scale of impact, but it is often the human stories that bring it to life and show people what you’ve achieved. They can also be very useful tools for bringing in new users, reinforcing the sense of community and the value of the project, and attracting press and blog coverage.” (Gibson, 2009, p. 85)

types of 'value' narratives, and make suggestions. Organisations need to consider how best to ensure they filter to get the 'best' stories to illustrate their impact, and also the best types of contribution – including constructive feedback – from their users; part of this filtering at least is likely to involve voting mechanisms and the metric approaches discussed. By doing this, various types of 'value' can be integrated as illustrated:



CONCLUSIONS

- Measuring 'value' is a complex beast, particularly when using social media because:
 - Beneficiaries, users, funders, program deliverers may have different conceptions of 'value'
 - 'Value' is likely to be value laden; allowing social media use can demonstrate those things which communities perceive as 'valuable' – this may mitigate against some 'bias' on the part of the measurers

- Social media may thus mitigate against some exclusionary practices, however caution needs to be adopted to avoid a 'populist' vote. The shift is from communities needing to ensure organisations hear the right voice, to organisations needing to ensure they hear the right voice from the community – with transparent systems, this is likely to be 'fairer' and allow for higher engagement levels.
- Some may not use social media tools; organisations need to meet them on their terms.
- Organisations are using social media, widely, and in a variety of ways
- Organisation size seems not to matter in terms of online fundraising success, and in terms of community success – if they invest well in their resources, and the communities.
- The value of social media is participatory (organisation to community), relational (community to community), and – in business – financial; within the third sector this reflects any sort of 'investment' community members subsequently make, including of their own time in supporting the specific goals of the organisation.
- Organisations should thus analyse their 'reach' (who of their target audience knows about them), 'discussions' (how do people think about them, using 'sentiment analysis'), and any specific outcomes they can
- While organisations seem to focus more on quantitative methods, clearly qualitative methods play a role. By encouraging transparency in organisations this role will be better understood, as will the evaluation techniques the organisations use – this explicit, public evaluation is being rated by a variety of social media based/integrated online tools which rate funders.
- The use of video, etc. allows a real engagement from the community (to the organisation and others), with the community (from the organisation back to them), and within the community (to members of any given community).
- The combined use of metric methods, such as 'like' thumbs up/down, etc. and qualitative data, allows organisations to explore the types of content that users and beneficiaries find 'valuable' (although, see above)
- The types of 'value' analysed should be explored in the context of the specific aims of the organisation. However, organisations should be open to exploring other types of 'value' that they may be creating, and integrating these into their wider programs and data collection methods.

USEFUL LINKS

<http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/index.php?id=home> – advice on ICT for third sector, and particularly <http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/introductiontosocialmedia> - advice on using social media in third sector, and the planning guide here:

http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/fileadmin/ICT/pdf/ICT_Champ_Pubs/Social-Media-Planning-Guide.pdf and planning booklet here <http://www.lasa.org.uk/publications/computanews-guides/>

<http://www.charityinsight.com/features/strategy/the-charity-insight-debate-widening-the-net-30-06-2011>

Social by Social is a collaborative book published in whole online describing the use of social media for social good. It can be found here: <http://www.socialbysocial.com/content/download>

<http://mashable.com/2011/09/14/digital-roundup-social-good/> 70+ Essential Resources for Making a Difference on the Social Web

<http://philanthropy411.wordpress.com/2010/07/30/20-social-media-resources-for-nonprofits/> 20 Social Media Resources for Nonprofits

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