Exploring Donation Appeals in Top Not-for-Profit Websites

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ABSTRACT:	*This study explores the donation appeal strategies employed on forty-seven of the most successful nonprofit organizations' websites. Through examination of the structural elements and textual content of each site, Hypotheses linking fundraising performance to the use of active solicitation, relationship building strategies and emotion/value-based themes were tested. Based on this analysis, no specific, consistent patterns of traditional, web-based marketing oriented solicitations commonly found in for-profit sites emerged. However, when the analysis was expanded to include affective responses and value perceptions of the sites as evaluated by a panel of subjects in an attempt to capture themes depicted through pictures and other non-textual means, a link between these responses and fundraising performance was detected. Together, these results suggest opportunities exist for more direct and aggressive solicitation of donors through the web.*
KEYWORDS:	*Online Fundraising, Charities, Relationship Marketing, Emotion, Values, Donation Appeals, Not-For-Profit.*

1. Introduction

Web presence is becoming an increasingly significant source of giving and of new donor acquisition for not-for-profits. The annual Blackbaud survey of fundraising indicated that online fundraising accounted for 7% of total fundraising in 2012, growing by 10.7% compared to 2011 (MacLaughlin, 2013). More than 59% of not-for-profits using online fundraising saw an increase in online giving last year (Flandez, 2012). Interestingly, though, most organizations continue to use their websites primarily to collect donations rather than stimulate giving through active fundraising solicitations (Blackbaud, 2011a; Goatman & Lewis, 2007; Kenix, 2007; Pratt et al., 2009, Sargeant & Jay, 2003). Web-based solicitation, however, may be the logical strategy for future fundraising as a message medium as well as for reducing the cost of information search and transactions (Mummalaneni, 2005). The use of the internet by young donors in particular highlights the importance of website design to stimulate online giving (Switzer, 2012).

Traditional fundraising media make active appeals using marketing techniques to develop relationships with donors and present message content with value rich and highly emotional messages (Diamond & Gooding-Williams, 2002). Little, however, is known about the use of these appeals by not-for-profits on the web. This study explores

active solicitation attributes of the websites of not-for-profits reporting successful online fundraising. Specifically, the use of active appeals to foster relationships with the donor and produce emotion and value expression is explored.

2. Active appeals: beyond the donate button

Numerous studies examining marketing constructs and methods used in fundraising find that not-for-profits should actively solicit contributions, rather than passively presenting an opportunity to give (Bekkers, 2005; Bekkers & Weipking, 2011; Bryant et al., 2003; Desmet & Feinberg, 2003; Lindskold et al., 1977). Active solicitation seeks to effect the prospective donor's perception of need, the not-for-profit's ability to deliver benefits, and other mechanisms linking psychological benefits to contribution (Sargeant et al., 2001, 2004, 2006). These message stimuli operate through the production of emotion and the development of a link to the personal values of the donor which, in turn, motivate giving (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Merchant et al., 2010; Oppenheimer & Olivola, 2010; Sargeant, 1999; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007).

Suggestions for generating donations through the not-for profit's web site, however, generally focus more on the structure of the site (Chang & Lee, 2009; Merchant et al., 2010). "Direct appeals" for action such as "buy now" or "click here" have been shown to be an effective means of generating donation behavior (Richardson, 2008) and there is even evidence that the actual design of the donate button on the website can effect trust and intention to donate (Burt & Gibbons, 2011). The fund raising literature does provide some support for active solicitation via the website beyond the "donate button." Sargeant, West and Jay (2007) propose a relationship marketing framework with the website as an active link between the not-for-profit and donor; finding that, in addition to accessibility, the site's ability to educate and empower the donor is highly correlated with online donations.

Developing donations in the world of the internet and e-marketing requires an understanding of how not-for-profit sites may employ active appeals in an appropriate and effective manner. Active appeals go beyond donate buttons to the complex and interactive workings of relationship development, and messages which convey emotion (Bennett, 2005) and link to the recipient's values. These constructs are inherently complex and interrelated and understanding them may help move active web-based fundraising to the norm. In the next section we address relationship-developing elements, emotion-producing content, and value-fulfillment content of not-for-profit websites as a means of understanding active appeals and donation behavior. The case for the construct is developed and its application to website development presented. Hypotheses are presented from the review of the literature.

3. Relationship development and fundraising effectiveness

Relationship marketing to maintain and establish ongoing valuable customer partnerships is an extremely important strategy regardless of the format in which the relationship is formed and maintained. Organizations are urged to employ a customer-bonding model for enhancing online community relationships in which customers participate in co-production of the good or service in a manner that delivers additional value to the customer (Szmigin et al., 2005). This view may be particularly valuable to not-for-profits in developing their online relationships given the importance/value that many donors place on understanding and seeing how they are helping (Brennan & Brady, 1999; Burnett, 2002; MacMillan et al., 2005; Sargeant, 2001). Sargeant et al. (2007) describe an "e-Relationship Marketing" model that requires that philanthropic donors be seen as partners with the charitable organization participating in mission achievement and that donors not be considered only as a source of funding (Sargeant & Jay, 2004). Bennett (2005) stresses the importance of developing a fundraising website with the appropriate "atmospherics" to not only influence a potential donor's likelihood to stay on the site and make a donation but also to develop a long-term relationship with that donor. Sargeant, West and Ford (2001, 2004) and Sargeant et al. (2007) propose a relationship marketing oriented approach to understanding donation behavior contending that the donor's perception of the charity may be the key link to better understanding his/her behavior. They offer evidence that a donor's perception of a charity's effectiveness, efficiency and ability to deliver benefits to clients are related to giving. Sargeant et al. (2007) study of UK websites found that accessibility, accountability and education and empowerment were significantly correlated with online donations and new donor acquisition.

Hypothesis 1: a website's perceived effectiveness as a relationship building vehicle is related to its ability to produce donations.

4. Emotional appeals

Emotion is broadly accepted as influencing giving, message stimuli response and appeal effectiveness (Bendapudi et al., 1996; Diamond & Gooding-Williams, 2002; Dickert, Sagara & Slovic, 2011; Merchant et al., 2010; Oppenheimer & Olivola, 2010; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007). Sargeant and Woodliffe (2007) posit a model in which individual giving behavior can be motivated by feelings of empathy, fear, pity or guilt. Amato (1986) linked self-reports of shock, terror, horror or sickness with sympathy for victims and intention to help. There is also considerable evidence that messages that induce negative "emotions" including fear, sadness, anger and guilt produce empathic reactions that lead to giving (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Vitaglione & Barnett, 2003).

Like other communication vehicles, websites may produce emotional responses which have been demonstrated to effect the time spent browsing, response to promotional incentives and enhanced probability of purchasing (Deng & Poole, 2010; Menon & Kahn, 2002; Palmer, 2002; Tai & Fung, 1997). Perceptions of site usability and aesthetics produce emotional states (pleasure, arousal and dominance) which, in turn produce attitudes toward an e-store (Porat, Liss & Tractinsky, 2007). Mummalaneni (2005) found that in a generally pleasant e-shopping environment, emotion (arousal) was related to satisfaction, time spent on the site, the number of items purchased, satisfaction and intention to return to the site. Eroglu, Machleit and Davis (2003) contend that emotions experienced during shopping online are moderated by involvement and atmospheric responsiveness (one's tendency to be influenced by the shopping experience). Richard (2005) contends that sites should provide an initial level of arousal if the site asks for an immediate reaction such as purchase. Geissler, Zinkhan and Watson (2001) reported that moderate levels of webpage complexity were more effective than either low or high levels in support of Berlyne's (1960) model of arousal effects. Menon and Kahn (2002) report that initially positive (pleasant) internet shopping experiences produce a positive impact on approach behaviors and cause customers to engage in what the authors term "arousing activities." These include exploration, examination of novel products and stores and higher response to promotional activities. Conversely, an overload of stimulation of information caused customers to engage in non-arousing activities.

Recent conceptualizations of giving behavior posit the affective component of emotion as a key link between stimuli messages and the decision to give (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Dickert et al., 2011). Affect is viewed as a primary motivator of consumptive behavior (Cohen, Pham & Andrade, 2008; Erevelles, 1998) and has been demonstrated to be a superior emotional construct for predicting attitude and action (Morris et al., 2002). While many examinations of giving and emotion have explored specific named emotions, affect may provide a more useful variable for studies examining a number of messages that might express a wide range of emotions. Because emotion is a description under the individual's cognitive control and an appraisal of experience (Cohen et al., 2008) affective response provides a more fundamental construct than identifying specific named "emotions" (Hill et al., 2000). Affect has been shown to be more closely correlated to blood donation than attitudes and influences both attitudes toward blood donation and the actual behavior (Breckler & Wiggins, 1989; Farley & Stasson, 2003; van den Berg et al., 2005).

Bennett (2005) offers evidence that, like an e-tailing site, a fundraising website can produce emotional, conative and approach-avoidance responses. Similarly, Hitdonate (2002) contends that a charitable websites' "lack of emotional engagement" may be the cause for their underperformance, i.e., low online donations.

Hypothesis 2: not-for-profit websites that produce emotional responses will be more effective as fundraising vehicles.

5. Value expressive appeals

The values of a society and an individual's personal values are fundamental aspects of human behavior (Rokeach, 1973). A messages' value expressiveness and its link to the values of the recipient of the message have been demonstrated to be powerful factors in influencing behavior (Hullett & Boster, 2001). Marketers have shown that personal values are the basis for consumption decisions and are linked to purchase behavior through attitudes. Values have been linked to motives, attitudes and behavior (Taras, Kirkman & Steel, 2010) and the core of personal identity (Gutman, 1982; Hitlin, 2003; Reynolds, 1985). See Kahle and Xie (2008) for an excellent review of value research in consumer psychology. Effective communication strategies provide a link between the fulfillment of a person's values and a brand or service (Kim, Boush, Marquardt & Kahle, 2006) and value expressive appeals are postulated to function through one's self congruity with the appeal (Creswell et al., 2005; Hullett & Boster, 2001; Pitts, Canty & Tsalikis, 1985).

Significant research links value expression congruity to giving behavior. McClintock and Allison (1989) report the results of a study in which value orientation affected an individual's willingness to contribute more time to a worthy cause. Wymer (1997) found relationships between religious values and secular volunteering, and Basil (2007) linked charitable donations to national value differences between the U.S. and Canada. Kropp, Holden and Lavack (1999) linked the personal values of warm relationships, self-fulfillment, and security to attitudes toward "cause related marketing." Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) identify values as one of the eight basic mechanisms that "…drive charitable giving." Personal values have also been linked to intentions to give to particular types of charities (Bennett, 2005). In addition, donations are thought to be a function of the congruency of the prospective donor's values and the donor's perceptions of the organization's values (Bennett, 2006). Value consistency and fulfillment have been related to socially desirable activities (Alwitt & Pitts, 1996; Bagozzi & Dobholkar, 1994; McCarty & Shrum, 1994) and cause-oriented communication effectiveness (Pitts et al., 1985).

Jayawardhena (2004) contends that the value expressiveness of an online appeal provides a means of understanding and evaluating the appeal. Waters (2007) reported that many of the top tier fundraisers in the "Philanthropy 400" tended to include their mission statement on their websites, where one would expect the values of the organization to be very clearly outlined. We are unaware of prior studies explicitly examining the value expressiveness of websites and giving behavior.

Hypothesis 3: not-for-profit websites with value representation generating a perception of value consistency and fulfillment will be more effective as fundraising vehicles.

In addition there is evidence that the three constructs are interrelated. Laverie, Kleine and Kleine (1993) contend that value expressive messages may function through the activation of emotion and values and emotions may be linked and simultaneously engaged in consumption experiences.

Hypothesis 4: relational elements of not-for-profit websites will be correlated with emotion and value perceptions.

6. The current study

In the following study, the hypotheses are tested via examination of 47 of the top fundraising websites in the U.S. We first examine the sites for effects which could be associated with the not-for-profit's basic mission and for a measure of familiarity. We examine the home page of each site for active solicitation (appeals to donate). Measures of the relational characteristics indicated by Sargeant et al. (2007) and the presence of emotional and value expressive appeals are developed. The previously identified hypotheses are used as the basis for examination of the constructs and fundraising performance. Finally relationships between the model constructs are examined.

7. Data for the study

The 47 non-educational not-for-profits based in the United States raising the most funds from their website formed the basis for our study. Performance data (fundraising and online fundraising) was obtained from the Blackbaud Index of Charitable Giving (see Appendix for complete list of the not-for profits and descriptive data above for each). The Blackbaud data included the top 100 revenue producing sites from which we purposely excluded university and college sites to arrive at the 47 studied. Preexisting affiliation with the institution was seen as a prime motivator to give to the university and college group, distinguishing these along a significant dimension from other not-for-profits that could not be captured in our studies. These top sites, while only 47 in number, provide a broad range of fundraising in both dollar amount and year-to-year change. The top two sites (both of whose main focus was disaster giving) raised $360 and $189 million respectively while the next site (a peer to peer site) raised $79 million online. The amount raised online declines dramatically below the top several sites. The 21st site raised only $9.9 million and the 47th most productive not-for-profit site explored raised only

$3 million dollars online. The home page (or key appeal page) of each of the websites examined in the study was downloaded for analysis. All but six of the not-for-profits made an appeal (at minimum a donate button/link) on the home page. These six charities made solicitations one level down from the homepage and were evaluated there (Lincoln Center, Metropolitan Museum of Art, MFA Boston, National Cancer Coalition, New York Public Library and World Vision). The selected pages were converted into text files for several of the analyses. These text files were examined with the CatPac (Woelfel & Stoyanoff, 1993) procedure to determine word usage trends in the websites. CatPac is a neural network-based computer analysis system for qualitative analysis of text (Woelfel & Stoyanoff, 1993). The procedure identifies the frequency of words used in text as well as association between words that appear next to each other in the text.

The evaluative attributes (relational constructs, appeals, emotional and value expressive content) of each site were judged by a panel of 25 graduate students in a Masters of Business Administration program at a midsized university in the southern part of the United States. The panel members are representative of a fast growing segment of potential online givers (Switzer, 2012) and were active users of the internet and online retail sites. Panel member ages ranged from 22 to 33 with 17 males and 8 females. Participants viewed each of the 47 not-for-profit's web page for 60 seconds and responded to a series of questions for each of the study components. A measure of the panel members' "familiarity" with each not-for-profit was also collected.

We measured perceptions of each site's success as a relationship developing medium by adapting the "Relational Constructs" identified by Sargeant et al. (2007). "Relational Constructs" that were applicable to direct observation of the website -- accessibility, case for support, accountability, education, empowerment and interaction were examined. Mean ratings for each of the 6 constructs were derived from the individual panel members' evaluative scores for each of the not-for-profits studied.

We measured the affective component of emotion produced by each of the 47 not-for-profits in the study using the Positive and Negative Affect Scale -- PANAS (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS scale is widely applied in the consumer behavior literature (Cohen et al., 2008) as a means of measuring positive and negative valence and intensity. Likert scales of ten positive terms (active, alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, proud and strong) and ten negative terms (afraid, ashamed, distressed, guilty, hostile, irritable, jittery, nervous, scared and upset) were scored from 1 to 5 and summed to obtain overall measures of a subject's affective response to a site. The average of each of these affect item scores from the members of the panel provided data for examination. The raters' perceptions of the values reflected in each site were ascertained using Kahle's (1983) List of Values (LOV) comprised of nine

value items that are rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 representing "Not at all" and 5 representing "A lot").

8. Results

8.1 Website Characteristics

The not-for-profits analyzed were categorized as having a focus on Annual Giving, Disaster Giving or Peer-to-Peer (Blackbaud, 2011b). Means for online giving, change from the previous year, total giving and the ratio of online to total giving are shown by main focus in Table 1.

The majority of not-for-profits included in the study either focus on annual giving (n = 20) or disaster giving (n = 19). The average amount of total funds raised online by organizations focused on annual giving (approximately $4 million) was much lower than that for organizations focused on disaster giving or peer to peer giving ($42 million and $30 million, respectively). On average, however, online donations represent four percent of the funds raised by organizations focused on annual giving, six percent of the funds raised by organizations focused on disaster giving and almost twenty percent of funds raised by peer to peer giving-focused organizations. All three types of organizations saw an increase in online giving from the previous year, with disaster giving-focused organizations seeing the most substantial increase. There was no (statistical) difference in the level of rater familiarity across the focus classifications.

Table 1 Giving Performance Figures and Familiarity Level (Means)

Main Focus	N	Mean Online Donation (Millions)	Year to Year Change (Percent)	Mean Yearly Total (Millions)	Percent Online	Rater Familiarity
Annual Giving	23	$4.1	0.20	$1,110	4%	1.833
Disaster Giving	19	$42.9	2.29	$3,490	7%	2.128
P2P Giving	8	$30.9	0.13	$1,480	20%	2.035
Overall		$24.3	1.1	$2,120	8%	1.968

Note: Rater familiarity was evaluated from "not familiar" to very familiar on a 1 to 5 scale.

Significance of differences for rater familiarity with the not-for-profit by focus was f = .523 N.S.

To evaluate active appeals directly we looked for actual words or phrases in the text of the sites that would direct action to donate and the presence of a donate "button." Forty-one of the sites had a "donate button" on the landing page of the website. We applied the CATPAC system described earlier to examine the website texts for the occurrence of directional and power words that specifically direct action. We were unable to identify any systematic pattern of consistent usage of directional or power words in the text of the 47 home pages analyzed. Thus, it appears that the donate button is the direct appeal of choice for the sites examined.

8.2 Site relationship development

The sites in the study were rated highest on the elements of Accessibility, Education and Accountability (Table 2). In general the sites were rated lower on Empowerment and Case for Support.

Pearson product correlations were computed between the scores for the six measures, familiarity and the fundraising variables as shown in Table 2. Interaction and Empowerment were significantly correlated with the panel members' "familiarity" with the not-for-profit. The absolute dollar amount of the not-for-profits' "online donations" was correlated ($p < .05$) with Interaction and Empowerment. That is, those not-for-profit sites exhibiting higher levels of Interaction and Empowerment had more "online donations". No other significant relationships between the remaining relational constructs and online donations were observed. Similarly, no significant relationships were observed between the relational constructs and "year to year change" or "percentage online." Thus, we found only limited support for our first hypothesis.

8.3 Emotion

To explore Hypothesis 2, we first looked for the systematic use of key emotional words using CATPAC for analysis of the website texts and found none. We next examined

Table 2 Relational Construct Means and Correlations with Performance and Performance Factors

Construct	Mean	Correlations (Significance Levels in Parentheses)			
		Online Donation	Year to Year Change	Percentage Online	Familiarity
Accessibility	4.56	.073	.177	.133	.269
Case for Support	3.51	.007	.266	.116	.132
Accountability	4.01	-.146	.122	.004	.283 (.054)
Interaction	3.86	**.358 (.013)**	.148	.226	**.396 (.006)**
Education	4.18	.153	.202	.275	.199
Empowerment	3.26	**.336 (.021)**	.213	.171	**.364 (.012)**

perceptions of emotional content of the websites from the responses to the PANAS scale as evaluated by the panel members. Mean affective responses (the means of the positive and negative PANAS scores) are shown in Table 3 for the not-for-profit focus areas. Statistically significant differences were observed in the negative affective reactions among subjects across the three types of organizations with average negative affect highest for disaster-focused websites.

Correlations of website performance descriptors (total, change from previous year, and online giving with the positive and negative affect) are shown in Table 4. Positive affect is significantly correlated with online donations. Negative affect is significantly correlated with change from previous year amounts raised. Total donations are correlated with both positive and negative affective reactions. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported by

Table 3   Means-Emotion (Affective) Responses and Perceived Values Reflected in Websites

Main Focus	Emotion (PANAS)		List of Value Factors	
	Positive Affect	Negative Affect	F1 -- Accomplishment & Respect	F2 -- Excitement & Relationships
Annual Giving	19.082	12.906	-.268	.181
Disaster Giving	20.352	13.941	.524	-.020
P2P Giving	17.185	12.615	-.574	-.405
ANOVA F	3.214	4.299	5.556	.986
Significance	.050	.020	.007	.381

Table 4   Correlations of Emotion and Values with Performance and Familiarity

	Affect		Values	
	PANAS Positive	PANAS Negative	F1 -- Accomplishment & Respect	F2 -- Excitement & Relationships
Online	.324 (.026)	-.075 (.616)	.378 (.009)	.083 (.578)
Year to Year Change	.157 (.304)	.322 (.031)	.379 (.010)	-.124 (.419)
Total	.394 (.019)	.390 (.020)	.471 (.004)	-.005 (.976)
Ratio	-.044 (.801)	.002 (.993)	.019 (.912)	-.139 (.427)

Note. Correlations and (significance).

evidence linking emotional responses to websites effectiveness as fundraising vehicles.

8.4 Values

We first explore Hypothesis 3 by examining the site texts for value expressive words. Bardi, Calogero and Mullen's (2008) lexicon of value expressive words was used to provide the set of words used in a search of each site with the CATPAC procedure. This methodology identifies three indicants for each of ten value constructs used as search seeds for the CATPAC analysis. The 30 words capture the value constructs found in Schwartz's (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Bardi, 2002) widely regarded typology of values. We were unable to find any of the value lexicon indicators in the text of the 47 websites studied.

We next examined perceptions of the values expressed in the sites using the LOV scale data applying factor analysis to reduce the nine LOV items (Beatty, Kahle & Homer, 1991; Homer & Kahle, 1988; Kahle & Kennedy, 1989; Shim & Eastlick, 1998). Principle component analysis using a Varimax rotation converged in three iterations and explained 85 percent of the variation in the data with a two-dimensional solution. One factor is comprised of internally-oriented values and the other made up of externally-oriented values. Security, self-respect, being well respected, self-fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment make up the first dimension while fun and enjoyment in life, excitement, warm relationships with others and sense of belonging load on the second.

We found strong support for Hypothesis 3. Value perceptions (for the two sets of values, internal versus external) were computed and compared across the three focus categories (annual, disaster and p2p) as shown in Table 3. The extent to which subjects perceived sites as reflecting internally-focused values varied across the three types of not-for-profits with disaster-giving the strongest. Finally, the extent to which subjects perceived sites as exhibiting themes related to internally-oriented values is correlated with all three measures of fundraising (Table 4).

8.5 Relationship between relational factors, emotion and value expression

Finally, we turned our attention to Hypothesis 4 and the relationships between the Relational Elements examined earlier, PANAS affect measures and the LOV value factors. Pearson product moment correlations between the Relational Element evaluations from the first study and the affect and value scores are shown in Table 5. Perception of the internal-value orientation of the sites was correlated with the accessibility rating of the site as well as the empowerment level of the site. Similarly, positive affect was significantly correlated with empowerment and interaction, while negative affect was correlated with the case for support dimension.

Table 5   Relational Elements, Affect and Values

Structural Characteristic	Affect		Values	
	Positive	Negative	Accomplishment and Respect	Excitement and Relationships
Accessibility	.264 (.073)	.129 (.386)	**.318 (.029)**	.190 (.201)
Empowerment	**.411 (.004)**	.256 (.082)	**.326 (.025)**	.173 (.245)
Case for support	.099 (.508)	**.370 (.010)**	.167 (.262)	-.006 (.969)
Accountability	.118 (.429)	.051 (.735)	.164 (.271)	.042 (.782)
Interaction	**.378 (.009)**	.035 (816)	.247 (.094)	.240 (.105)
Education	.101 (.499)	.013 (.929)	.141 (.345)	.070 (.641)

Note. Correlations and (significance).

9. Discussion

The current study provides evidence of the message tools being employed by successful not-for-profit websites and examines the tools of relationship building, emotion and value expression. Overall, our results are consistent with studies indicating that, while growing, online giving still represents a relatively small revenue component for even the largest and most successful not-for-profits (Table 6). Further, the results indicate that the sites studied were not using strong, direct appeals for donations beyond the donate button. Our examination of each website's text found that even the most productive websites are still basically used to collect donations. The sites neither use message text to actively solicit donations nor try to appeal to donors using value-rich terminology. Our study of the sites, however, provides evidence of the effectiveness of relationship building and that emotion- and values-congruency links to donation are part of site effectiveness.

In support of Hypothesis 1, the examination of perceptions of the sites relationship building attributes indicated that sites with the greatest absolute dollar donations online were perceived as being more interactive and empowering. These results are in concert with pronouncements from marketing and human-computer interface researchers who have examined the factors which affect website performance as an active "sales" vehicle.

Table 6   Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypotheses	Result
H1: Relationship building → donations	Partially supported
H2: Emotional response → fundraising effectiveness	Supported
H3: Value consistency and fulfillment → fundraising effectiveness	Supported
H4: Relational elements operate with values and emotions	Supported

Web aesthetics, visual clarity and creative interest capturing content have been identified as improving response (Lavie & Tractinsky, 2004; Tractinsky & Lowengart, 2007). Basso and Goldberg (2001) found that real time interactivity increased website visitor perceptions of friendliness and trustworthiness and van der Heijden (2003) reported that use of a web portal was related to ease-of-use, usefulness, enjoyment and visual attractiveness.

However, our support for Hypothesis 1 is somewhat limited as no significant relationships were observed between the relational constructs and "year to year change" or "percentage online." Further, interaction and empowerment were significantly correlated with the panel members' "familiarity" with the not-for-profit. Overall, our results are similar to those of Sargeant, West and Jay's (2007) study of UK websites which were found to be generally good at providing information about the cause and making it easy to offer a donation, but performed less well on the remaining relational criteria. Like Sargeant et al. (2007) study, we found that the relational dimension "Case for Support" does not appear to be related to site performance. Sargeant et al. (2007) also reported similar findings and suggest that "…since individuals electing to visit a site must by definition be a priori interested in its content, it is not as necessary in the web context to overcome the barrier of disinterest with a strong appeal." The scores for "case for support," however, were among the lowest of the relational constructs examined. Thus, rather than not being an effective strategy, it may be that the strategy is so weakly applied that it is ineffective as currently used.

Our results support Hypotheses 2 and 3, suggesting that website performance is linked to the extent to which the sites induce an affective response in visitors as well as the extent to which internally-oriented values are reflected in a website's content. Although no evidence of specific terminology being used to appeal to consumers emerged, the overall evaluations of the not-for-profit websites elicited from panel participants provides evidence that the most successful of the top performing non-profit websites clearly convey emotion-inducing appeals as well as value-based appeals. Positive imagery and themes which produced affect were shown to be effective means by which not-for-profits can portray their efforts and garner support. Negative affective reactions were correlated with

year to year changes in amounts raised which is likely explained by the strong negative themes portrayed in disaster giving and the one-time, year-specific nature of these donations that can be tied to specific events. Also, in general, themes related to personal values that tend to reflect an internal focus (such as accomplishment and self-respect) were linked to greater site success.

Hypothesis 4 was also supported. Affective response among site visitors and their values (as they were perceived on the sites) were correlated with several of the structural elements. Empowering and Interactive sites apparently generate positive emotion while the Case for Support was linked to negative emotion. Apparently, Case-for-Support is being used as a negative message vehicle.

9.1 Managerial implications

E-commerce practitioners know that they must first drive potential consumers to the site and then engage them to make a sale. Our results, however, confirm the contention that not-for-profit websites are primarily used to collect donations rather than solicit them. Search engine usage makes it possible that a potential donor with just a basic interest in charities serving a particular purpose could land on a not-for-profit's homepage with little or no specific knowledge about that charity. Without consideration for this type of visitor to a page, significant fundraising opportunities are likely sacrificed. Even if the potential donor already has a predisposition to give, the site can be used to effect the size of the donation.

Although conventional not-for-profit wisdom provides little support for active solicitation, web-based solicitation may be the logical strategy for the future of fundraising. As Mummalaneni (2005) indicates, the use of the web reduces the cost of information search as well as the cost of transactions. Moreover, trends in the activities of young donors highlight the importance of website design on online giving indicating that technology is essential in establishing an actual relationship with young donors. A recent report on millennials (Switzer, 2012) indicates 65% of the respondents surveyed learned about a not-for-profit via its website. Young donors want to know how their money is used to make a tangible impact and they want to learn via the web (Berkshire, 2012). Sixty-five percent of the young adults studied indicated their preference for hearing about not-for-profits is through a website. Seventy percent of these respondents also indicated they had made online donations in 2011.

Two areas that call for improvement on not-for-profit websites are stronger integration of themes related to internally-oriented values and further development of the relationship building "case for support." While many visitors to a not-for-profit's site may already be familiar with the valuable work of the organization, many visitors may not. For

those visitors, it would seem information provided to "make the case" or bring to light the important goals of the charity would be a critical factor in a not-for-profits' conversion rate of visitors to donors. More specifically, in this study, sites invoking negative affective reactions also rated higher in the extent to which they made a "case for support." This is likely driven by the strong, negative appeals made in disaster fundraising. Similarly, not-for-profits may want to consider incorporating value-rich terminology and themes into the design of their sites. The results of the current study are consistent with other research linking visitors' emotional responses to a site and subsequent desirable behaviors. Elements that induce emotional reactions (whether positive or negative) were directly correlated with donation totals for the year examined in the study. These results indicate that not-for-profits should adopt more aggressive website strategies. These strategies should include relationship building, emotional message content and value-rich content designed to convert a browser into a donor.

9.2 Limitations and future research

Our selection of the top 47 fundraising sites provided insight into those most likely to use effective marketing techniques; however, it limited the scope of the study and our ability to make comparisons across the entire range of not-for-profit organizations. Online giving varies widely by type and size of organization (Blackbaud, 2011b). Our results are representative of the top rather than average or weak performers.

In addition, examination of the website content (through CATPAC as well as by panel members) was limited to one webpage (the homepage or key landing page). We did not explore active media on the site which might exhibit value-rich or emotion-producing content throughout the site. Had sites been examined in their entirety and panel members been allowed to explore the sites on their own, additional or contrasting results may have been revealed.

Much of our data was drawn from site evaluations by a panel of well-educated millennials. Thus, our study's results are limited to the perceptions of this cohort of potential donors. While not fully representative of the potential online giving population, this group has been identified as a key target. Further, a panel approach was deemed necessary for the complex and time consuming data collection method utilized in the study.

Finally, since this study is purely observational (in no way causal), other key factors may contribute to the success of the organizations examined. For instance, panel members' familiarity was found to be correlated with performance of the sites along with several key relational constructs. This suggests there is a possibility that participants' pre-existing perceptions related to the not-for-profit may to some extent explain their evaluations and reactions to each of the sites. Further testing of an experimental nature would be necessary

to truly explore the effect of the emotion-inducing and value-rich themes in not-for-profit websites in order to more specifically discern their impact on donors' giving behavior.

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Appendix

List of 47 NOT-FOR-PROFIT WEBSITES

1. Alzheimer's Association
2. American Heart Association
3. American Lung Association
4. American Red Cross
5. AmeriCares Foundation
6. ASPCA
7. Catholic's Charities USA
8. Catholic Relief Services
9. Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
10. Children's Hunger Fund
11. Christian Foundation for Children and Aging
12. City of Hope
13. Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston
14. Cross International Alliance
15. Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
16. Dana-Farber Cancer Institute
17. Doctors Without Borders USA
18. Ducks Unlimited
19. Easter Seals
20. Education Media Foundation
21. Feed the Children
22. Greater Chicago Food Depository
23. Habitat for Humanity International
24. International Rescue Committee
25. Jewish Federation/Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago
26. Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
27. Marine Toys for Tots Foundation
28. Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center
29. Mercy Corps
30. Metropolitan Museum of Art
31. Mission to the World
32. National Multiple Sclerosis Society
33. Nature Conservancy
34. Northern California Public Broadcasting
35. Paralyzed Veterans of America
36. Planned Parenthood Federation of America
37. Project Hope/People to People Health Foundation
38. Salvation Army
39. Samaritan's Purse
40. Save the Children
41. Smithsonian Institution
42. The Navigators
43. United States Fund for UNICEF
44. United Way Worldwide
45. World Vision
46. Wycliffe Bible Translators
47. Young Life