

Can social media increase altruism?

May 20 2014



Kathleen Chell

Every day we use social media to signal our highs and lows, recommend and warn, like and share ideas, experiences, events and products, but could social media have a hand in promoting blood donations and other altruistic acts?

A QUT social marketing researcher is investigating the use of [social media](#) to build an identity as a [donor](#) to encourage lifelong donating.

Kathleen Chell, a PhD candidate at QUT Business School, said research indicated some donors, like consumers, wanted value in exchange for their contribution.

"But this doesn't make their blood donation any less charitable," Ms Chell said.

"Most donors receive some emotional value from donating such as a good feeling, or a sense of personal fulfillment.

"Some donors, however, do want to receive social value or be recognised for supporting a cause by their 'significant others' because it is an important part of who they are as a person.

"My research is looking at how online recognition such as a conspicuous virtual token that donors can put on their Facebook page or other online networks that identifies them as a supporter of the organisation."

Ms Chell is partnering with the Australian Red Cross Blood Service to find out if online recognition could not only encourage first time donors to become lifelong donors but also encourage their friends to donate.

"As we know the Blood Service does life-saving work which depends on a constant supply of people willing to give blood," she said.

"It is crucial for them to have cost-effective ways to convert their first-time donors into regular ones to keep the [blood](#) supply flowing."

Ms Chell, who volunteers with the RSPCA, said her findings would be of benefit to all non-profit organisations to inspire ongoing charitable behaviour and motivate new donors and supporters.

"The RSPCA is a non-profit organisation that is beginning to use online platforms for donor appreciation with its 'Make Your Mark' program for volunteers," she said.

"Online donor appreciation strategies which provide public recognition from the nonprofit organisation and to the donors' friends can reinforce positive feelings received from donating while, at the same time, building the person's identity as a donor," she said.

"Once volunteering or donating becomes absorbed into their identity, it is thought people are more likely to continue and also prompt others to adopt charitable behaviour."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

Citation: Can social media increase altruism? (2014, May 20) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-05-social-media-altruism.html>

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