

Humanitarian liking on Facebook

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"Liking" a page on the social networking site Facebook is a new form of civic engagement and humanitarian support, so concludes research published in the *International Journal of Web Based Communities*. According to the paper's authors social motives and an emotional response underpinned users' inclination to like, or follow, a page, rather than their simply seeking information and news.

Petter Bae Brandtzaeg and Ida Maria Haugstveit of Scandinavian research organization SINTEF in Oslo, Norway, surveyed more than 400 Facebook [users](#) about their habits on the site and their propensity to "like" a particular humanitarian cause or organization. . The Facebook like button was introduced as a feature in 2009 and allows users to both [support](#) and follow updates from a company or organization that has a Facebook presence. Additionally, liking a page is often a prerequisite for viewing information not made visible to non-subscribers and to be able to add one's own comments to the page. Moreover, depending on a user's account settings their liking of a given page will be visible to their friends and associates on the Facebook site. Unsubscribing from a given page to stop following its updates is referred to as "unliking"

The team asked 405 users questions regarding activity in order to answer three main questions: First, do Facebook users believe that liking humanitarian causes on Facebook really supports humanitarian causes? Secondly, what motivates Facebook users to like humanitarian causes? Finally, why do Facebook users unlike humanitarian causes?

The team found that there essentially six different liking practices

associated with humanitarian causes with a presence on Facebook: (1) socially responsible liking; (2) emotional liking; (3) informational liking; (4) social performative liking; (6) low-cost liking; (7) routine liking.

"The majority of the respondents believe such likes help in promoting humanitarian causes," the team says. Interestingly, only a few users had unliked such causes. "It is important to note that people like a cause on Facebook because they want to support it and encourage others in their network to support it as well," the team adds. "The like button not only provides an opportunity to support a cause, but also enables users to engage with the site as a self-presentation tool." There are implications for these findings in understanding the nature and function of Facebook likes as a new form of [civic engagement](#) and humanitarian support.

"Despite the controversy about slacktivism, many Facebook users in this sample believed that 'liking' a humanitarian cause could make a difference," Brandtzaeg says. "This is strengthened by the fact that socially responsible 'liking' is the most common motivation and for the perceived motivation for liking a humanitarian cause."

More information: Brandtzaeg, P.B. and Haugstveit, I.M. (2014) 'Facebook likes: a study of liking practices for humanitarian causes', *Int. J. Web Based Communities*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp.258-279.

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