Web Sites as a Dialogic Tool for Charitable Fundraising

NPOs: A Comparative Study

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Non-profit organizations (NPOs), which often dispose of a limited budget, can employ their Web sites strategically to communicate with important stakeholders. However, little research, especially in Europe, has been done so far exploring how NPOs are actually taking advantage of this. This study analyzes how charitable fundraising NPOs in Germany and Switzerland employ their Web sites for dialogic communication with donors and media. Results indicate that NPOs provide well-designed Web sites, yet, fail to engage publics in dialogue. New trends, such as Web 2.0, are still hardly taken into account. Whereas donor publics are often addressed, media are often neglected.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The Internet, which combines features of both interpersonal and mass communication (Morris & Ogan, 1996), provides opportunities for dialogic communication more than any other medium. Many researchers studying Internet-mediated communication have pointed out the relationship building potential of the Web (e.g., Kent & Taylor, 1998, Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001, Ki & Childers Hon, 2006). New trends of Web 2.0, such as blogs (Wackå, 2004) or podcasts (Wilcox, 2006), which enable users to participate and provide content themselves, continue to increase the potential of the Internet for dialogic communication. Catalano (2007, p. 258) supposed that "Web logs and other related media such as audio logs (e.g., Podcasts) and video logs (e.g., vlogs)" will become "a permanent, fully integrated, and vital part of the media landscape". All indications are that organizations are more and more using blogs for corporate communications and a number of Fortune 500 companies have already entered the blogosphere (Catalano, 2007).

Charitable nonprofit organizations (NPOs) active in fundraising can particularly benefit from the Internet for two reasons: on the one hand they can use the Web as a cost-effective pub-lic relations tool, which also allows for small organizations to reach a large public (Kang & Norton, 2004, Taylor et al., 2001) and to provide transparent information for important stakehold-ers (Waters, 2007a). On the other hand, charitable fundraising NPOs depend on their publics in

terms of donations (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003, O'Neill, 1984) and can thus particularly benefit from the Internet to create and strengthen relationships with new, current, and past donors. Waters (2008, p. 73) underlined "the importance of donor cultivation within the non-profit organisations-donors relationship". However, the emphasis should not be on fundraising in the first place but on building and enhancing relationships (Hart, 2002).

To date there are few studies evaluating the potential of organizational Web sites for relationship building in general, but there are even less studies exploring how NPOs use their Web sites to build relationships. However, the industry type makes "a difference in organizations' use of the relationship maintenance strategies" (Ki & Childers Hon, 2006, p. 27).

As research from the U.S. (Kang & Norton, 2004, Taylor et al., 2001, Kent et al., 2003, Waters, 2007b) and from South Africa (Naudé, Froneman, & Atwood, 2004, Naudé, 2001) indicates, many NPOs do not fully explore the potential of their Web sites for dialogic communication. However, those studies did not analyze the potential of the Web to create relationships with specific audiences.

At present, empirical evidence from European countries is still missing. The present study addresses this research gap and aims at exploring the potential of Web sites as an online-communication tool in German (DE) and Swiss[1] (CH) NPOs[2]. These countries were selected as they border on each other and partly share the same language. This way a larger population could be obtained than by analyzing only one of the countries. Web sites of NPOs from both countries are expected to perform similarly due to the cultural and geographic proximity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies that have addressed the relationship building potential of the Internet referred to the two-way symmetrical communication model of Grunig and Hunt (1984) and its extensions (Grunig & Grunig, 2008), following their argumentation that public relations is about building dialogic relationships with publics. By enfostering collaboration between the parties, public participation might be enhanced. Therefore, conflicts should be handled easier because individuals, organizations and publics should be able to adjust their ideas and behaviour to each other by applying symmetrical communication.

Grunig and Grunig (1992, p. 308) argued that the model is the most ethical way to conduct public relations and also more effective in the long run, as it produces better long-term relationships with publics than the other three models of press agentry (emphasizng only favourable publicity), public information (disclosing accurate information but engaging in no research or other form of two-way-communication), or two-way asymmetrical (emphazing only the interests of the organization and not the interests of the publics) (Grunig & Grunig 2008). However, the model has been criticized for being utopian (e.g., Pieczka, 1996, Kunczik, 1990, McKie, 2001).

Kent and Taylor (1998) employed the term of *dialogic communication* as the principle item of building dialogic relationships. They describe "the relationship between two-way symmetrical

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[1]Only the organizations from the French and German-speaking parts of Switzerland were included into analysis.

[2]According to the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) country codes (ISO 3166-1) the two countries included in this study will be abbreviated as follows: Germany: DE; Switzerland: CH.

communication and dialogic communication (. . .) as one of process and product" (1998, p. 323). In this line of thought the theoretical imperative of two-way symmetrical communication "is to provide a procedural means whereby an organization and its publics can communicate interactively" (ibid.) whereas dialogue represents "a particular type of relational interaction – one in which a relationship exists" (ibid.). The two-way symmetrical communication model by Grunig and Hunt (1984) is based on systems theory, considering communication as a process which occurs in open systems and results in the reciprocal understanding between the organization and stakeholder groups.

In summary, dialogue may be considered a product (e.g., sympathy, trust, satisfaction) that emerges (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 32) from dialogic communication. However, to establish dialogue, dialogic communication "procedures" are necessary, covering the creation of organizational mechanisms for facilitating dialogue (ibid, p. 32), e.g. by using mass mediated channels to communicate with publics. To do so, "(. . .) organizations must create Web site locations, telephone access, and public forums where the public can actually engage other human beings in discussions about organizational issues" (ibid, p. 30).

Therefore, the concept of dialogue may be used for studying mediated relationships in a Web environment (Taylor et al., 2001, p. 266, Kent & Taylor, 1998, Kent & Taylor, 2002). To evaluate the dialogic capacity of NPO Web sites, we refer to the five principles of dialogue proposed by Kent and Taylor (1998) that may guide organizations to successfully integrate dialogic public relations into Web sites. The principle of *intuitiveness or ease of interface* is based on the idea that Web sites should be designed for navigational ease and that the information relevant to the public should be easy to find. Many Internet users mainly use the Internet for information seeking (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, Flanagin & Metzger, 2001), which underlines the importance of the principle of *usefulness of information.* This principle suggests that making information available to publics allows them to participate in dialogue as informed partners.

Web sites should contain information useful to general publics as well as stakeholder-specific information (Kent & Taylor, 1998). *Conservation of visitors* states that in order to engage publics in dialogue it is important to keep visitors on the site. The principle of *generation of return visits* refers to the attractiveness of the site for repeat visits, which can be increased for example by using interactive elements within Web pages (Esrock & Leichty, 2000). Finally, the *dialogic loop* implies true dialogic communication by providing publics with access to the organization, by allowing them to ask questions and get answers from the organization.

Kent and Taylor (1998) and Taylor et al. (2001), who assessed the dialogic capacity of US activist organizations, however, did not explicitly take account of interactive devices such as chat rooms and forums or dialogic loop elements of Web 2.0. Such devices are particularly relevant for strategic communication purposes as research has shown that users judge blogs to be more credible than traditional sources (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). This study differentiates between interactive devices that actually allow a dialogue between organization and publics (such as moderated chat rooms or blogs) and those that merely have an entertainment function (such as nonmoderated chat rooms, podcasts, and RSS feeds). Whereas the first are considered part of the dialogic loop, the latter are considered elements of generation of return visits.

According to Taylor et al. (2001), the principles of dialogic communication as proposed by Kent and Taylor (1998) do not contribute to dialogic communication to the same extent. Kent and Taylor thus differentiated two clusters of dialogic principles. The *technical and design cluster* comprises all principles that are necessary prerequisites for dialogue to take place (ease

of interface, usefulness of information, and conservation of return visits). The second cluster, referred to as the *dialogic cluster*, includes the categories of generation of return visits and dialogic loop, principles that allow organization-public interaction that may lead to genuine dialogue and relationship building (Taylor et al. 2001).

Based on resource dependency theory, Kent et al. (2003, p. 70) argued that "organizations are more responsive to stakeholders who have influence over organizational outcomes." Resource dependency theory suggests that organizations are dependent on their environments and "require some transactions with their environment for survival" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 2). This idea may be applied to NPOs dependent on donors for achieving their mission. It is thus critical for those organizations to build relationships to donors on whom they depend financially. O'Neill (2007) also found that public relationships impact donor behavior.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The first research question to be addressed in this study is:

> **RQ1:** *To what extent do charitable fundraising NPOs employ technical and design features as well as dialogic features in order to engage stakeholders in dialogue?*

Different studies have indicated that NPOs often use their Web sites for information purposes and to distribute traditional public relations material and thus miss out on the opportunity of building and enhancing relationships with stakeholders (Naudé et al., 2004, Kang & Norton, 2004, Taylor et al., 2001, Waters, 2007b). However, what has to be investigated is whether the increased use of the internet in public relations might have proceeded to facilitate relationships to publics in the meantime, or if it has not reached its full potential yet. This leads to the first hypothesis:

> **H1:** Websites of Swiss and German NPOs provide the technical requirements for dialogic comminication but do not fully exploit the dialogic potential of the Web.

Furthermore, we investigate how far fundraising NPOs use their Web sites to serve important stakeholder groups.

> **RQ2:** *To what extent do charitable fundraising NPOs meet the information needs of donor publics and the media?*

Even though Web sites are likely to be visited by various stakeholders (Esrock & Leichty, 2000), they will not be optimally designed to the needs of all potential visitors. Instead, certain audiences that are strategically important for the organization will primarily be addressed (Taylor et al., 2001).

For fundraising NPOs two stakeholder groups are particularly relevant from a strategic point of view: donors, as they constitute a source of revenue, and media, which function as a multiplier and thus offer NPOs the possibility to reach a larger public and increase the degree of popularity amongst offline publics.

Profit and nonprofit organizations however, are not sufficiently using the potential of Web sites as a tool to communicate with the media (González-Herrero & Ruiz de Valbuena, 2006, Taylor et al., 2001, e.g., Callison, 2003, Reber & Kim, 2006). Therefore it is assumed that:

H2: Web sites of German and Swiss NPOs provide more information useful for current or potential donors than for the media.

The third research question addresses the link between the dialogic capacity[3] of the Web site and the actual communication behavior of the NPO:

> ***RQ3:*** *Does the dialogic capacity of the Web sites reflect the communication behavior of the organizations providing the sites?*

Naudé et al. (2004) noted that the dialogic capacity of an organization's Web site is related to its overall public relations orientation and thus communication. Furthermore, studies have found that organizations that reply to e-mail requests for information are more likely to employ dialogic features on their Web sites than organizations that do not respond (Taylor et al., 2001; Kent et al., 2003). Responsiveness may thus be considered an indicator of how effectively the organizations employ dialogic features on their Web sites (Taylor et al., 2001). Based on the aforementioned literature the third hypothesis states that:

H3: The Web sites of Swiss and German which respond to e-mail requests for information are contain more dialogic features those of organizations that do not respond.

This study also examines to what extent the organizations' attitude towards dialogue is correlated with organizational characteristics.

> ***RQ4:*** *To what extent are the dialogic capacity of the Web sites and the responsiveness of the organizations providing the sites correlated with organizational characteristics, such as total income or fundraising success?*

Different authors (Kang & Norton, 2004; Heath, 1998) referred to the potential of the Internet as a cost-effective medium of equalizing public relations performance of organizations of various sizes and funds. However, the employment of dialogic principles in Web sites also reflects a certain commitment of resources by the organizations providing the site. Therefore it is hypothesized that:

H4: The Web sites of Swiss and German organizations with higher total income are more dialogic than those of organizations with lower total income.

Goatman and Lewis (2007), who studied UK charities, noted that with increasing fundraising income charities adopt a more positive attitude towards the use of Web sites. These results suggest that there is a relationship between the degree of dependence on donations as a source of income and the employment of dialogic features on Web sites. A study conducted by Kent et al. (2003) supports this assumption. They compared activist organizations with differing levels of stakeholder dependency and assessed to what extent general dialogic capacity and responsiveness of the organizations were related. Their results demonstrate that the Internet use of activist organizations can partly be explained by their dependence on stakeholder publics. It may thus be hypothesized that:

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[3]In this study dialogic capacity refers to technical and design aspects as well as dialogic aspects of Web sites, defined according to Taylor et al. (2001).

H5: The dialogic capacity of Web sites of Swiss and German organizations with higher fundraising income create Web sites is greater compared to organizations with lower fundraising income.

In addition, Kent et al. (2003) found that the level of responsiveness towards specific stakeholder groups is influenced by the level of dependence of the organization towards those same stakeholders. They compared different types of activist organizations with varying levels of dependence on volunteers and found that organizations with a higher dependency on stakeholders were more likely to respond to e-mail requests than organizations with a lower dependency on stakeholders. Given that NPOs active in fundraising depend on donations to varying degrees the sixth hypothesis posits that:

H6: The dependency on donations oft Swiss and German NPOs is related to the likeliness of those organizations to respond to information requests from donors.

RESEARCH METHOD

Population

The fundraising NPOs comprised in the population are all certified by national accrediting bodies that monitor public interest organizations and which, if they meet the required standards of probity and integrity, will award a public certificate confirming that the organization is well-run and deserving of support[4]. Those monitoring bodies are both members of the International Committee on Fundraising Organizations (ICFO).

Certified NPOs represent different types of organizations. As a result charitable NPOs were selected using the definition of charitable NPOs proposed by Schwarz (1994), who defined them as organizations that provide charitable support services for the needy social class. Based on Viest's (2004) suggestion, the neediness in this study is defined by physical handicaps, cognitive diseases or disorders, and financial hardship. All NPOs that did not correspond to Schwarz's (1994) definition of charitable NPOs, or that visibly figured as subordinate organizations (e.g., local branches of other organizations) were excluded from the population. Organizations that did not have an active Web site at the moment of access or did not provide a profit and loss account for 2006 also were excluded. As the present study is particularly interested in how *charitable fundraising NPOs* present themselves towards donor publics, only organizations that generate at least 10% of their total income through donations were included in the population. The final population comprises 109 German and 134 Swiss NPOs. The study was conducted between August 2007 and April 2008.

Approach

Identification of organizational characteristics. For all NPOs, financial ratios on total income and income from donations were gathered from their 2006 profit and loss accounts. However, the collection of data on financial ratios proved to be problematic for several reasons.

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[4]Germany: Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen (DZI); Switzerland: ZEWO.

Accounting standards varied from one country to another and even NPOs within the same country did not edit their profit and loss accounts in exactly the same way. The *Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen* (DE) did not require accounting standards of their member organizations at all, whereas the *ZEWO* foundation (CH) required that its member associations edit their profit and loss accounts according to standards. The comparability of the data was nevertheless limited. Therefore, the total income and income from donations could not just be adopted as indicated in the profit and loss accounts but had to be calculated according to standards that were defined specifically for this study. Those standards defined which entries are included into total income and income from donations and which are not[5].

Quantitative content analysis of the Web sites. Web sites of NPOs from both countries were analyzed using content analysis, based on Kent and Taylor's (1998) five principles of dialogue. Previous studies have already operationalized some or all of those principles (Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Naudé, 2001; Reber & Kim, 2006; Taylor et al., 2001) and were thus used as a framework for the coding scheme developed. The operationalization was enhanced through literature on Web-based communication of profit and nonprofit organizations (Callison, 2003; Cooley, 1999; Ha & James, 1998; Kang & Norton, 2004; Nielsen, 2000, Potts, 2005; Viest, 2004; Waters, 2007a).

As Taylor et al. (2001) suggested the five principles of dialogue were divided into two clusters: a technical and design cluster which includes the categories of *ease of use*, *usefulness of information for donor publics*, *usefulness of information for media publics* and *conservation of visitors* and a dialogic cluster including the categories of *generation of return visits* and *dialogic loop*. Indices were built for all seven content categories. As all variables are dichotomous respectively dummy variables with parameter values of 0 and 1 (0 = No; 1 = Yes), scores for the categories were computed by adding up the values of each item comprising the category and dividing the sum over the total sum of items included into the category. This allowed obtaining interval level data even though the data were collected on a nominal level.

In order to avoid any impact on response times due to the time of access, all Web sites were accessed from the same computer — a networked computer with average speed and performance — at approximately the same time of the day, between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. during the week. Each Web site, including the front page and all pages that had the same URL[6], was coded for the presence or absence of 82 variables in content categories and eight organizational characteristics.

For Web sites that contained different language versions, the national language of the respective country was considered. As Switzerland has four official national languages (German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic), many sites were provided in several language versions. This study generally analyzed the German version as long as the structure of the site was the same for all language versions. In case the structure varied, the language version to be analyzed was chosen as a feature of the language region where the organization had its head office

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[5]Information on the standards may be requested from the authors.

[6]For several variables (e.g., the possibility to donate online, chat rooms or forums) also pages were considered which had a different URL as long as it was clear that the site was provided by the NPO itself as smaller NPOs with a lower budget would have been discriminated that way.

because it was assumed that the spatial proximity to the organization attracts donors or generally interested people.

Web sites of Swiss NPOs were analyzed by the same coder whereas Web sites of German NPOs were analyzed by two different coders. Intracoder- and intercoder-reliability were tested using Holsti's (1969, p. 140) formula:

$$C.R. = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

C.R.: Coefficient of reliability
M: Number of coding decisions which are the same for both coding waves
N_1: Number of coding decisions (first coding)
N_2: Number of coding decisions (cross-coding)

Approximately 20% of each population[7] were cross-coded with a time gap of two to four weeks after the first coding wave. For each Web site 82 coding decisions[8] were made[9]. Reliability coefficients were calculated in total but also separately for the different indices and clusters in order to determine their individual explanatory power.

For Swiss Web sites reliability proved to be best with an intracoder-reliability coefficient of .97 and index coefficients varying between .93 and .99. There were 61 disagreements out of 2,132 coding decisions. The cross-coding of the German Web sites resulted in 1,804 coding decisions with 61 disagreements. The test indicates an intercoder-reliability coefficient of .91, which may still be considered sufficiently reliable. Altogether, reliability for the two sets of data may be considered sufficient. However, it has to be noted that the reliability coefficient does not take into consideration the quality of the indicators chosen for the study, but only how accurately the indicators are measured by means of the chosen instrument.

Evaluation of the organizations' responsiveness. In order to analyze the communication behavior of the NPOs comprised in the population, fictitious information requests from donors and media were sent via e-mail, as Taylor et al. (2001) suggested. According to them, this permits evaluation of the extent to which the employment of dialogic principles corresponds to organizational communication behavior (ibid.).

Within a time space of seven days the NPOs thus received two e-mails from a person planning to donate money and a freelance journalist respectively. If possible the e-mails were sent to specific e-mail addresses or via specific contact forms provided for the two stakeholder groups in question (donors and media). Otherwise, e-mails were sent to a general e-mail address. All NPOs that responded within 14 days after the information request was sent were coded as responsive.

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[7]Germany (n = 109): 22 Web sites; Switzerland (n = 134): 26 Web sites.

[8]Ten variables addressing Web site features which are apt to change due to updating were not considered in the reliability test (C8, D1b, D9, F1, F3b, G4b, G10b, G11b, G11d, H6c).

[9]This adds up to the following number of coding decisions for each country: Germany: 164; Switzerland: 61.

Results

The first hypothesis **(H1)** posited that while the Web sites of charitable fundraising NPOs meet technical and design aspects required for dialogic communication, the dialogic potential has not yet been fully realized.

Results (Tables 1 and 2) indicate that with a mean of 52% (SD = 17%) for German and 47% (SD = 14%) for Swiss NPOs the *technical and design* cluster scored considerably higher than the *dialogic cluster* with 24% (SD = 14%) for German and 21% (SD = 9%) for Swiss NPOs. There were differences between the performance of NPO Web sites from the two countries. Web sites of Swiss NPOs scored significantly lower than Web sites of German NPOs for the technical and design cluster ($p < .05$), however the difference for the dialogic cluster was non significant ($p < .1$)[10]. Based on those results, the first hypothesis **(H1)** is thus supported.

NPO Web sites from both countries scored similarly in *ease of interface* (DE: M = 54%, SD = 21%; CH: M = 53%, SD = 21%). Most NPOs provided useful content for current or potential donors. However, with a mean index of 71% (SD = 21%) Swiss NPOs scored significantly lower ($p < .05$) than German (M = 77%; SD = 19%) NPOs.

While the NPOs analyzed catered well to donor publics, media publics seemed to be neglected. Scores for *usefulness of information for media publics* were considerably lower than scores for *usefulness of information for donor publics* (DE: 26%; CH: 15%). Here, too, Swiss Web sites scored significantly lower than German ($p < .01$) Web sites. There was hardly any difference between the two countries for the index of *usefulness of information for general publics* with index means of 53% for German (SD = 26%) and 58% for Swiss NPO Web sites (SD = 23%).

As for *generation of return visits* performance of Web sites did not vary much from one country to another and in general it can be said that Web sites did not provide many elements inciting users to return to the site later on (DE: M = 17%, SD = 15%; CH: M = 16%, SD = 9%). German NPO Web sites less often included news forums (28%) than Swiss ones (41%). Interactive and Web 2.0 features, which can play an important role in relationship building, were hardly included in the Web sites of NPOs within both countries. Entertainment features, such as games, Q&A sections or postcards were also seldom provided on the Web sites analyzed. The exception was German NPO Websites, which provided electronic postcards in 17% of cases. A reason to explain those low scores may reside in the fact that charitable NPOs do not want to entertain but rather inform publics of their activities. This is particularly relevant considering the restricted budgets of most charities. This would also explain why many more NPO Web sites frequently provided FAQ sections (DE: 24%; CH: 13%).

Surprisingly, NPO Web sites scored much better for the *dialogic loop* than for generation of return visits (DE: M = 34%, SD = 17%; CH: M = 28%, SD = 11%). However, Web sites of Swiss NPOs provided significantly less opportunities for engaging publics in dialogue than Web sites of German NPOs ($p < .01$). Swiss NPOs also were less likely than their German counterparts to provide specific contact information for important stakeholder groups. Whereas 30% of German NPO Web sites provided contact information for donor publics, only 10% of

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[10]Results of a *t*-test comparing the means of dialogic capacity of German and Swiss NPO Web sites are available upon request.

TABLE 1
Occurrence of Technical Aspects of Organization-Public Relationship Building

Clusters/Indices	Relative Number (%) of Organizations	
	Germany (n = 109)	Switzerland (n = 134)
Technical and design cluster	M = 52.38; SD = 16.56	M = 47.83; SD = 13.51
Ease of interface	M = 54.47; SD = 21.42	M = 52.61; SD = 21.35
Sitemap	40.37	36.57
Search engine box on front page or hyperlink	47.71	30.60
Major links on the front page to the rest of the site	97.25	99.25
Navigation visible on each page	97.25	94.78
Links back to home page	80.73	54.48
Choice between low and high reliance on graphics	7.34	3.73
Possibility to select language	23.85	64.93
Usefulness of information for donor publics	M = 76.88; SD = 19.28	M = 70.30; SD = 20.92
How to contribute money	97.25	96.27
Information on how the donated money is employed	37.61	16.42
Possibilities to donate online or to order deposit slips online	62.39	64.18
Logo of organization prominent on each page	91.74	92.54
Hyperlinks or headlines on the front page addressing donor publics	95.41	82.09
Usefulness of information for media publics	M = 25.28; SD = 25.83	M = 15.42; SD = 19.07
Press releases provided	49.54	40.30
Speeches	9.17	3.73
Searchable news archive	3.67	1.49
Downloadable media kits	12.84	4.48
Biographies of organizational key members	13.76	4.48
Downloadable information	33.03	21.64
Press room provided	45.87	32.84
Possibility to subscribe regular media info. via e-mail	18.35	6.72
Hyperlinks / headlines on the front page addressing media	41.28	23.13
Usefulness of information for general publics	M = 57.68; SD = 24.94	M = 52.71; SD = 23.01
Organizational history	64.22	53.73
Mission statement	46.79	50.00
General corporate facts	80.73	68.66
Information on the proportion of volunteers of the organization	18.35	20.15
Organizational publications	60.55	71.64
Annual report	53.21	76.87
Logo of ZEWO foundation	63.30	44.03
Information on the certificate of the CC (FR) / dzi (DE) / ZEWO (CH)	67.89	36.57
Conservation of visitors	M = 48.39; SD = 14.54	M = 66.79; SD = 16.16
Response times less than 4 seconds	74.31	86.36
No splash screen	92.66	96.97
Date of latest update indicated	12.84	10.61
Important information available on home page	87.16	77.27

TABLE 2
Occurrence Features Fostering Dialogue

Clusters/Indices	Relative Number (%) of Organizations	
	Germany (n = 109)	*Switzerland (n = 134)*
Dialogic cluster	*M = 23.87; SD = 13.99*	*M = 20.90; SD = 8.30*
Generation of return visits	*M = 17.1; SD = 14.69*	*M = 16.15; SD = 9.27*
Explicit statement invites users to return	0.00	0.00
Bookmark now	6.42	0.75
Calendar of events	37.61	44.78
News forums on the site	28.44	40.30
Things that can be requested by mail	34.86	53.73
Games	7.34	0.75
Electronic postcards	16.51	3.73
Q&A's	2.75	2.24
FAQ's	23.85	13.43
Links to external Web sites	51.38	64.93
Possibility for online interaction or public discourse with other users (not moderated)	4.59	4.48
Downloadable audio/video files	18.35	2.24
Podcasts	1.83	0.00
RSS Feeds	10.09	2.99
Dialogic loop	*M = 34.35; SD = 17.08*	*M = 28.28; SD = 11.04*
Contact information on first page	88.99	89.55
General contact information or contact forms	98.17	99.25
Contact information for donor publics	30.28	9.70
Contact information for media publics	31.19	21.64
Call back option for donor publics	5.50	5.22
User surveys	9.17	5.22
Possibility to subscribe regular information through e-mail	37.61	21.64
Interactive devices allowing people to voice their opinion on the organization itself (moderated)	4.59	2.24
Blogs	3.67	0.00

Swiss NPO Web sites did. And only 31% of the German and 22% of the Swiss NPOs provided contact details for media on their Web sites.

NPOs seldom took advantage of the possibility of engaging publics in dialogue by providing interactive devices such as chat rooms or forums where users can exchange communication with organizational members (DE: 5%; CH: 2%) or blogs (DE: 4%; CH: 0%). Other dialogic features such as call back options (DE: 4%; CH: 5%) and user surveys (DE: 9%; CH: 5%) were hardly included in NPO Web sites. However, NPOs recognized the possibility of creating relationships with stakeholders by providing them with the opportunity of subscribing to regular information via e-mail (DE: 38%; CH: 22%).

Almost all Web sites of Swiss NPOs are provided in German, two thirds are provided in French and one quarter in Italian and in English, whereas Web sites of German NPOs are mainly provided in the national language and about one fifth in English. This requires a certain financial

effort, which leaves less financial means for Swiss NPOs to invest in technical and dialogic devices.

The second hypothesis **(H2)** suggested that Web sites of charitable fundraising NPOs are more likely to cater to the needs of current or potential donors than those of the media. As this study indicates (Table 1), NPOs generally provide more information useful to donor publics (DE: 77%; CH: 71%), upon which they depend financially, than to media publics (DE: 26%; CH: 15%). NPOs were also more likely to provide links addressing donor publics (DE: 95%; CH: 82%) than media publics (DE: 41%; CH: 23%) on the front page, even though differences exist between the countries. This already indicates that donor publics are accorded more importance on NPO Web sites than media publics.

Only a few NPOs informed donors on their Web sites about how the donated money was employed (DE: 38%; CH: 17%). There was wide variance between Web sites provided by NPOs from different countries on information useful to media publics. Swiss NPO Web sites in particular seem to be missing out on the opportunity of catering to this important audience and provided less information addressed to the media than German NPOs. Only one third of Swiss NPO Web sites provided press rooms grouping all relevant press information, compared to 46% of German NPOs. Only 5% of Swiss and 13% of German NPOs provided media kits to download from their Web site. Even though about half of the NPOs provided press releases via their Web sites (DE: 50%; CH: 41%), many NPOs missed out on the possibility of providing media publics with regular press information via e-mail to which the recipients can subscribe.

The results described constitute enough evidence that Web sites of charitable fundraising NPOs in Germany and Switzerland cater to donor publics more so than to the media. The second hypothesis **(H2)** is thus supported.

The third hypothesis **(H3)** stated that organizations replying to e-mail requests for information are more likely to employ dialogic features in their Web sites than organizations that do not respond. Responsiveness towards donor publics (DE: 73%; CH: 74%) was about equal in both countries, just like responsiveness towards media publics (DE: 61%; CH: 68%). However, as results indicate (see Table 3, responsiveness towards donor publics was generally higher than towards media publics.

Results also indicate that German and Swiss NPOs responsive to information requests of donors are likely to provide Web sites with a higher dialogic capacity than non-responsive NPOs (see Table 4). However, the difference was only statistically significant for usefulness of information for donor publics ($p > .05$).

TABLE 3
Absolute and Relative Responsiveness of NPOs Towards Donor and Media Publics

	Germany (n = 109)				Switzerland (n = 134)			
	Donors		Media Publics		Donors		Media Publics	
Indices	Absolute	Relative (%)	Absolute	Relative (%)	Absolute	Relative (%)	Absolute	Relative (%)
0–1 days	48	44.04	50	45.87	67	50.00	66	49.25
2–3 days	24	22.02	13	11.93	17	12.69	17	12.69
4–7 days	8	7.34	4	3.67	15	11.19	8	5.97
Total	80	73.39	67	61.47	99	73.88	91	67.91

TABLE 4

Means of Dialogic Capacity for NPOs Responsive Respectively Nonresponsive Towards Donors

| | Means | | | |
| | Responsive (Donors) | | Nonresponsiveness (Donors) | |
Indices	DE	CH	DE	CH
Ease of interface	55.78	53.79	50.96	49.29
Usefulness of information for donor publics	79.75	72.73	68.97	63.43
Usefulness of information for media publics	28.33	16.61	16.86	12.06
Usefulness of information for general publics	61.56	53.79	46.98	49.64
Conservation of visitors	48.13	66.92	49.14	66.43
Generation of return visits	17.72	17.10	15.52	13.47
Dialogic loop	36.39	29.18	28.74	25.71

TABLE 5

Means of Dialogic Capacity for NPOs Responsive Respectively Nonresponsive Towards Media

| | Means | | | |
| | Responsive (Media) | | Nonresponsive (Media) | |
Indices	DE	CH	DE	CH
Ease of interface	56.90	54.53	50.60	48.55
Usefulness of information for donor publics	80.90	75.82	70.48	58.60
Usefulness of information for media publics	31.51	20.39	15.34	4.91
Usefulness of information for general publics	59.33	54.26	55.06	49.42
Conservation of visitors	48.13	66.76	48.81	66.86
Generation of return visits	18.92	18.45	14.29	11.30
Dialogic loop	37.31	29.91	29.63	24.81

The relationship between responsiveness towards media publics and dialogic capacity was also positive and strong (see Table 5) for NPOs from both countries. The differences between the means in dialogic capacity for responsive and nonresponsive NPOs were partly or even highly significant[11] for usefulness of information for donor publics (DE: $p < .05$; CH: $p < .001$), usefulness of information for media publics (DE: $p < .01$; CH: $p < .001$), generation of return visits (DE: $p < .10$; CH: $p < .001$) and dialogic loop (DE and CH: $p < .05$).

The differences in dialogic capacity of responsive and non-responsive organizations supported **H3.** Particularly interesting is the fact that NPOs that respond to information requests from specific publics also are more likely to include information relevant to those publics on their Web sites. The results answer **RQ3**, namely, that there is a relationship between dialogic capacity of the Web sites and communication behavior of the organizations.

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[11]More detailed information concerning the differences in dialogic capacity for organizations coded responsive nonresponsive towards media publics respectively may be requested from the authors.

The fourth hypothesis **(H4)** stated that organizations with higher total income create Web sites that are more dialogic than organizations with lower total income. In order to test the fourth hypothesis, the two clusters as well as the indices that comprise the two clusters were correlated using Pearson's correlation with the total income of the NPOs providing the sites. Results indicate that there is a highly significant correlation between total income of German and Swiss NPOs and the employment of technical and design features (DE: $r = .427$; $p < .001$; CH: $r = .266$, $p < .002$) as well as dialogic features (DE: $r = .422$, $p < .001$; CH: $r = .229$, $p < .01$) in their Web sites.

For German and Swiss NPOs scores of ease of interface (DE: $r = .305$, $p < .01$; CH: $r = .229$, $p < .01$), usefulness of information for media publics (DE: $r = .395$, $p < .001$; CH: $r = .226$, $p < .01$), usefulness of information for general publics (DE: $r = .323$, $p < .01$; CH: $r = .184$, $p < .05$), and generation of return visits (DE: $r = .383$, $p < .001$; CH: $r = .277$, $p < .01$) were significantly correlated with total income. For Swiss NPOs total income was not correlated to usefulness of information for donor publics and dialogic loop. However, for German NPOs a correlation was found between total income and usefulness of information for donor publics ($r = .237$, $p < .05$) as well as total income and dialogic loop ($r = .372$, $p < .001$). The index of conservation of visitors was not related to total income for NPOs of both countries. **H4** was thus supported.

The fifth hypothesis **(H5)** posited that organizations with higher fundraising income create Web sites with higher dialogic capacity than organizations with lower fundraising income. Indices and clusters were correlated using Pearson's correlation to the percentage of income that was generated through donations. Table 6 indicates that income from donations and dialogic capacity are not significantly correlated. Only Swiss NPOs were more likely to provide useful information for donor publics the more they depend on donations. It is surprising that this correlation was not at all significant for German NPOs. Based on the low levels of significance, **H5** was not supported.

TABLE 6
Correlation between Income from Donations and Dialogic Capacity

| | Correlation between Income from Donations and Dialogic Capacity | | | |
| | Germany | | Switzerland | |
Clusters/Indices	*r*	*Sig.*	*r*	*Sig.*
Technical and design cluster	−.037	.701	.101	.246
Ease of interface	−.129	.180	−.034	.699
Usefulness of information for donor publics	.116	.228	.222	.010
Usefulness of information for media publics	−.056	.563	−.057	.516
Usefulness of information for general publics	−.033	.736	.142	.101
Conservation of visitors	−.114	.237	.095	.275
Dialogic cluster	−.069	.473	−.021	.806
Generation of return visits	−.069	.476	−.096	.271
Dialogic loop	−.053	.585	.084	.335

TABLE 7
Responsiveness Towards Donors in Relation to Income from Donations

| Income from Donations in Percent of Total Income | Number of Responses According to Income from Donations | | | |
| | Absolute Number | | Relative Number (%) | |
	DE	CH	DE	CH
10–20 (D: n = 9; CH: n = 19)	8	10	89	53
21–40 (D: n = 11; CH: n = 27)	5	21	46	78
41–60 (D: n = 16; CH: n = 24)	12	17	75	71
61–80 (D: n = 17; CH: n = 21)	12	17	71	81
81–100 (D: n = 56; CH: n = 43)	43	34	77	79

The sixth hypothesis (**H6**) suggested that the more a charitable fundraising NPO depends on donations the more likely it is to respond to information requests from donors. In order to test the sixth hypothesis, clusters of NPOs were built in percentages according to the income they generated from donations. Subsequently the number of responses to information requests from donor publics was computed according to those clusters. If the sixth hypothesis is true, the percentage of responses towards donors should be higher for NPOs that depend on donations to a higher extent. As Table 7 indicates, this is the case for Swiss NPOs as the response rate grows with their dependence on donations.

For German NPOs this was only partly the case as a large portion (89%) of NPOs that generate between 10% and 20% of their income through donations responded to information requests (table 6). This is a bigger percentage than for the cluster of NPOs that generated 80% to 100% of their income though donations. The findings supported H6 in the case of Swiss NPOs, but not in the case of German NPOs. H6 was therefore partially supported.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions and Future Research Prospects

The Web sites of German and Swiss NPOs mostly provided the technical requirements for relationship building. However, they partly missed out on engaging publics in dialogue. Strategic onlinebased communication of NPOs should systematically provide possibilities of interaction between the organization and its publics in order to contribute to relationship building. Particularly new technologies such as Web 2.0, which hold a great potential for dialogic communication were hardly taken into account by NPOs from both countries. The first hypothesis was thus confirmed.

Furthermore, we found that NPO Web sites provided more relevant information for donor than for media publics, which confirms the second hypothesis. Most Web sites could be much improved with respect to the needs of the media.

The high levels of responsiveness towards important stakeholders reflect a commitment towards engaging publics in dialogue. Previous studies assessing responsiveness of activist

(Taylor et al., 2001) and corporate organizations (González-Herrero & Ruiz de Valbuena, 2006) had obtained considerably lower scores. German and Swiss NPOs had higher levels of responsiveness towards donors than towards media, which confirms again that NPOs could do more to serve the media as an important audience.

Results suggest that responsive NPOs provided Web sites with a higher dialogic capacity than non-responsive NPOs, thus supporting results of previous studies. However, as not all results turned out to be significant, the third hypothesis could only be partially confirmed.

A comparison of the dialogic capacity of NPOs from Germany and Switzerland shows that Swiss NPOs are less likely to provide elements fostering dialogic communication. This may be due to the fact that Switzerland has three national languages and most Web sites of Swiss NPOs are thus provided in different languages, which implicates elevated financial expenses. This assumption already hints at the idea that dialogic capacity may be related to the financial means of an organization.

As the results of this study suggest, NPOs with higher income were more likely to incorporate dialogic features into their Web sites than NPOs with lower income, which supports the fourth hypothesis. This puts into question the claim made in former studies that the Internet may be used as a potential equalizer for public relations performance among organizations with varying budgets.

The dependency on donations of NPOs from both countries, however, was not significantly correlated with the overall dialogic capacity of the Web sites. The fifth hypothesis was thus rejected. Results for Swiss NPOs further reveal that with a higher dependency on donations NPOs were more likely to respond to information requests from donors. However, this could not be confirmed for German NPOs and the sixth hypothesis could thus only partially be supported.

According to Kent and Taylor (2002, p. 32) dialogic communication refers to a process which constitutes the necessary basis for dialogue to emerge in order to foster two-way symmetrical relationships with publics. The present study points out to which extent NPOs provide those processes on their Web sites, which we referred to as dialogic potential. Yet, the product, thus dialogue itself, is not examined in this study. Many studies consider dialogic communication as an imperative for organizational web-based communication, however, there are no studies yet that evaluate the effectiveness of dialogic communication for dialogue to emerge. Future studies should provide insights into the effect of dialogic communication on the perception of the organization, whether it contributes to building trust, a positive image, or positive feelings towards the organization. Furthermore, sufficient research has been done to assess the demands of media publics towards Web site design and content provided in the Web sites, but few studies addressed the needs of donor publics towards Web sites of charities. Future studies should investigate the needs of donor publics suggested in this study in order to identify what content donors are actually looking for on the Web sites provided by charities and which communication channels the targeted audiences prefer.

Limitations

Results of this study are limited by the fact that accounting standards varied between the two countries and within the individual countries, which limited the comparability of financial data. Despite the fact that guidelines for computing total income and income from donations

in a homogeneous way were developed within this study, comparability remains limited as aggregation level and specification of financial assets varied between the different NPOs.

Because this paper is based on a content analysis, not much can be said about the potential effects of the Web sites on donors, the public, or the media. The present study provides a descriptive analysis of the dialogic capacity of the Web sites analyzed. However, it would be interesting to test the perception of the dialogic potential by regular Web site users and media professionals by means of a user-oriented content analysis.

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