Social media, social causes, giving behavior and money contributions

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Rita S. Mano

Dep. of Human Services, University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel

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ABSTRACT

In the present study we examine the effect of online social networks on voluntary engagement, giving behavior and online money contributions. The study is a secondary analysis based on the PEW data set (2008). We draw upon a combination between pro-social theories of voluntary engagement and communication theories of the Internet and show that (a) participation in social media and networking-blogging, Face book and journaling-significantly increase both online, and offline money contributions; (b) social causes moderate the link between socio-demographic characteristics and money contributions. We conclude that social media and networking are an effective means to increase "ethical consumption" both online and offline enhancing voluntary engagement and money contributions. These results assess the social diversification hypothesis suggesting that online behavior complements, and in some cases reinforces offline behavior. Differences in the type of affiliated social cause moderate the effects of social media on online pro-social behavior and giving behavior.

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1. Introduction

The Internet plays a pivotal role in accommodating and often shaping communication to fit changing economic and socially hectic circumstances in our lives (Das & Sahoo, 2012). The functional features of the Internet enable us to reach our goals quickly and efficiently and to find satisfactory outlets in many areas of life by pursuing information, broadening horizons, shopping, social interaction and more. Social relationships developed and maintained in cyberspace (Anonymous, 2010) define the space of human connectivity and expand its limits. They promote our ability to fully participate in social life and increase our wellbeing (Hamburger, 2008), allowing us to find and connect with many others, increase the sense of "belonging" to a larger social group, and reveal previously ignored issues, of which our awareness and possibly interest were previously limited (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003).

Connecting with old friends, relatives, colleagues and people of similar interests is now an accepted global practice. Social media enhance the information flow between recipients and providers of nonprofit services (Burt & Taylor, 2003) and exposure to social causes (Waters, 2007). They also expose relevant information and news of forthcoming events to members of special-interest groups (Lee & Ma, 2012; Mooney, 2009), provide effective access to health information (Mesch, Mano, & Tsamir, 2012), and increases local community participation (Mesch & Talmud, 2010). We take special interest in the various forms of social media communication that help those who wish to be connected on the basis of some common interest, especially when face-to-face interaction is not easy or

possible. Being engaged with social media is easy, and dissolves the problems of physical participation for individuals with mobility barriers such as age, or socioeconomic constraints such as parenting, long working hours, and lower income (Lemire, Sicotte, & Pare, 2008). An interesting question is then how the Internet and its social functions facilitate the support on social causes and promote money contributions. Another interesting question is what characteristics of Internet online users that instigate online money contributions (Bekkers & Weeping, 2011).

Social media and social networking greatly affect interaction and connection between people with similar interests. Social media help also to create, transfer, retrieve and apply knowledge and provide an effective means for increasing awareness of social causes and encouraging online money donations (Bekkers, 2010; Gandia, 2011). Recent studies indicate that social networking facilitates communication both at the formal and informal level, and increases the propensity to share (Hsu et al., 2011), thereby increasing satisfaction and enhancing loyalty to online communities. Such expressions can also take the form of ethical engagement" when social causes are pursued via the internet, appealing to a wide range of individuals (Banaji & Buckingham, 2009). In these cases of "ethical" engagement, pro-social behavior and the concept of reciprocity are important because they guide offline as well as online communication and define individuals' interest in being voluntarily engaged (Molm, 2010; Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2007) and money contributions (Cnaan, Jones, Dickin, & Salomon, 2011). The Internet is certainly the medium that "encourages acts of reciprocity, negotiation and cooperation" (Cheshire et al., 2010, p. 177) that helps to shape interactions either within the limits of small local communities (Mesch & Talmud, 2010) or the larger

E-mail address: ritamano@research.haifa.ac.il

social institutions such as politics, culture and even health institutions (Capece & Costa, 2011).

Social causes, reflecting individuals' traditionally located within physical limits and expressed with physical attendance such as protests, petitions and demonstrations are replaced by virtual/remote participation. Access and use of the Internet and social media opened the possibilities for individuals to be involved without leaving their "physical" space and various expressions of ethical behavior and social presence have become possible (Shen, Yu, & Khalifa, 2010). Some examples for the multiple forms of ethical engagement are tele-mentoring, tele-tutoring, cyber services, blogs, and journals (Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008; Song & Kim, 2006). Another form of interest to this study is online money contributions (Bekkers, 2010; Cnaan et al., 2011). Online monetary contributions are expression of ethical consumption using the Internet to support a social cause (Bryant, Jeon-Slaughter, Kang, & Tux, 2003; Lu & Lu, 2011).

The present study seeks to examine (a) whether the Internet and social media (Facebook., 2010) are effective platforms for promoting online donations and (b) how individuals choosing online voluntary engagement and money contributions differ from those who prefer offline voluntary engagement and money contributions. We draw upon two areas of research: (a) social exchange and pro-social behavior (Cheshire, Antin, & Churchill, 2010) to tap into variations in voluntary engagement motivation and outcomes and (b) social diversification hypothesis (Mesch, 2007; Mesch & Talmud, 2010; Mesch et al., 2012) suggesting that Internet adds to and expands, but does not replace, existing social arrangements and behaviors. Combining these two streams of knowledge, we seek to show that social media promote online volunteer engagement (Griffith et al., 2013) and influence both online and offline donations (Cnaan et al., 2011).

2. Literature review

Social media provide opportunities for accessing, producing and disseminating new information (Lee and Ma, 2012). User-gratification theory suggests that individuals use the Internet for self-promoting goals and maximization of gains (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2005) but social media theory introduces a psychological approach to online human behavior suggesting that credibility, confidence and self-esteem are possible using the Internet (Baek, Holton, Harp, & Yaschur, 2011) refuting the classic "Ersatz" approach of online participation as a form of low esteem personalities avoiding real world social connections. Ersatz social engagement theory suggests that individuals may be drawn to technology-mediated interactions because of their ease, lack of risk, and immediate gratification, but that these interactions may be less rewarding over the long term. It proposes that: (a) the use of technological (replacement/ersatz) alternatives to real social interaction may be less conducive to the skill building and opinion formation that foster social capital; (b) ersatz activities involve fewer costs (effort, risk of rejection) than real interactions; and (c) ersatz alternatives are regularly chosen, even though real interaction is ostensibly preferred (Green & Brock, 2008). Taking a "reflective" approach social influence theory emphasizes Individuals' need to affect and be affected by other individuals either via online participation in social media and/or "real" spheres of social connectivity (Fulk, Schmitz, & Steinfield, 1990). Nonetheless, individuals often differ in their reasons and motivations to use online social networks. Some do so to comply with socially expected behaviors especially when friends, relatives, colleagues and clients recommend joining an online community. Others wish to increase their sense of identification, loyalty and satisfaction within a group setting. Others wish to increase their own level of trust characteristic of social-

media use (Hsu et al., 2011) and virtual communities (Shen et al., 2010).

The Pro-social Behavior perspective enables to examine motivations for voluntary engagement, assuming that such engagement reflects the need for belonging and self-fulfillment by helping to achieve non-egoistic goals (Cheshire et al., 2010). Formerly, this kind of exchange was maintained in face to face encounters, gatherings in which pro-social individuals met to support a cause. Regular attendance was often complicated in terms of resources such as time, distance, and expense. When such problems arose, other strategies were developed, involving different levels of effort and of communication. Indeed, according to the *Social exchange theory* voluntary engagement translates into different levels of "action" (Jones, 2006). Individuals participating in social media may choose voluntary engagement such as tele-mentoring, tele-tutoring, cyber services, blogs and journals (Song & Kim, 2006). Cnaan et al. (2011) support the notion that the Internet is an effective medium of communication in philanthropic activity because it generates a variety of voluntary engagement activities ranging from endorsing a social cause to the more active form of online money contributions. Despite differences in personality (Guadagno et al., 2008; Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012), While social exchange theory explains why individuals may chose one over the other type of voluntary engagement and the Internet is a convenient mode of communicating we do not know why one particular mode maybe favored or at what level other media are excluded. We therefore we cannot evaluate if online money contributions are a distinct form or voluntary engagement or whether they complement offline contributions and vice versa.

The social diversification hypothesis posits that individuals go online in order to expand and diversify their social networks. the Internet provides a broad platform for up-to-date and intensive connectivity, addressing the needs of many groups, especially of those with mobility restraints who wish to be involved in public life (Shim, Lee, & Park, 2008) and/or increase their public self-awareness (Lee and Ma, 2012). While it can mistakenly be assumed that virtual activity replaces similar offline activities (Green & Brock, 1993, 2008), or that online volunteering replaces "real life" volunteering (Barraket, 2005; Hargitai & Hsie, 2010), according to the social diversification hypothesis, the Internet adds venues of social interaction rather than replacing existing communication channels (Mesch, 2007; Mesch & Talmud, 2010). Thereby it supplements traditional modes of connecting and enriches them by participating in and contributing to common interests and goals (Hargittai & Hsie, 2010).

Recent information suggests that this "supplementing" effect is also effective regarding money contributions. The results of a recent study of "philanthropic crowding" show that "reinforcement" of money contributions is possible because donating at work does not replace donating outside the workplace (Nesbit, Christensen, & Gossett, 2012). Evidence presented by Willer, Flynn, and Zak (2012) from two surveys of nonprofit organizations shows that online "generalized" systems of information are better than comparable "specific" offline exchange systems because a critical mass of exchange creates positive sentiments and further contributes to the system (Blery, Katseli, & Tsara, 2010; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Yet, presence on the Facebook is different from offline social "connectedness" because Facebook use provides the opportunity to develop and maintain social connectedness in the online environment, providing an alternative social outlet associated with a range of positive psychological outcomes such as lower anxiety and higher life satisfaction. This could be a reason why online social networks are considered as "intentional" social action and assumed to have a strong effect on social influence and social presence. Similarly to the Facebook effects, according to Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) micro-blogging increases possibilities of

communication and engagement in social causes, and increases the probability of organizations promoting social causes (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011) to introduce online "virtual" platforms as an addition to participation in real-life events.

2.1. Social causes

Internet sites for promoting nonprofit issues have increased information and knowledge about the various social causes and the groups representing them. The values and purposes of ideology, faith and charity groups advance the goals of human service, shared vision, common purpose, and more (Van Dijk, 2006). Like physical space, the virtual space enables individuals to be part of a task group, and fosters identification and solidarity (Finkelstein, 2010; Willer et al., 2012). Knowing when, where and how to get involved seems to have a positive effect on voluntary engagement (Lake, 2008). Van Ingen and Dekker (2011) revealed recently that the degree of commitment to voluntary engagement depends on the degree of involvement in a cause. Suárez (2009), extending work on the promotion of social causes in nonprofit websites (Maynard, 2008), suggested that differences in affiliation to social causes determine the degree of effectiveness of online support from individuals: e-advocacy and e-democracy generate different levels of online engagement that, in turn, affect the level of willingness to contribute money (Banaji & Buckingham, 2009). Wang and Chen (2012) found that social norms facilitate member participation in online activities, increasing interpersonal trust and commitment to the community (Xu, Ryan, Prybutok, & Wen, 2012). However, according to the nonprofit literature, such social norms are not always effective (Barraket, 2005; Waters, 2007), probably because online marketing of social causes has not been effective, and nonprofit sites are poorly managed (Blery et al., 2010; Mano, 2009; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007). Nonetheless findings from empirical studies indicate that when social networks are effective, those involved in the virtual exchange are more likely to participate in the group's social life (Lee and Ma, 2012; Shim et al., 2008), mobilize online trust to support social causes and influence the likelihood of online money contributions (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Joining improves the "organization" at both the community (Mesch & Talmud, 2010) and broader social levels (Sicilia & Palazón, 2008).

2.2. Socioeconomic effects

The digital divide paradigm addresses variations in Internet access and use resulting from socioeconomic status differences (Lemire et al., 2008). One critical factor is older age. Elderly people are less likely to use the Internet unless concerns such as health are considered (Bundorf, Wagner, Singer, & Baker, 2006). Education is important too because it increases the skills necessary for using the internet for information retrieval, shopping, participating in social forums and more. High education is generally a positive factor regarding some forms of voluntary engagement and money contribution since highly educated individuals are more willing to contribute in time-consuming voluntary engagement but not online money donations (Barraket, 2005). Similarly, high earners are also more likely to participate in volunteer activities than to make money donations. In a recent analysis of intentions to donate money women, younger, and less neurotic people were shown to be more likely to respond positively to requests for money because they are more empathically concerned (Bekkers & Weeping, 2011). Variations in social media indicate that socioeconomic status and motivation differ across socio-demographic characteristics as well. Higher education has positive effects on sharing news related to entertainment and job-related content information (Baek et al., 2011). As regards gender, men's engagement in social media is task-and-achievement oriented, whereas women are likely to spend more time on Facebook (Mooney, 2009; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011), mainly to maintain interpersonal relationships (Guadagno, Muscanell, Okdie, Burk, & Ward, 2011). Stepanikova, Nie, and He (2010) suggested also that extent of Internet use reflects also personal needs such as avoiding loneliness. For this reason it is important we control for socio-demographic differences in occupational status, education, age, and social causes (Musick & Wilson, 2008).

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

The present study is a secondary analysis based on the PEW Internet and American Life Project from Princeton Survey Research Associates, released in 2008. It includes 6270 individuals residing in the USA and using the Internet. The sample was almost equally divided between women and men (49% women). 75% had a computer at home. A questionnaire related to civic activities and community involvement was administered. Of the total sample, 18.3% were engaged in ideology-related activities ($n = 1148$), 59.5% in faith-based activities ($n = 3725$), and 67% in charity work ($n = 3245$).

3.2. Measures

Online money contributions: In the last 12 months, how much have you contributed to charities and/or non-profits on the Internet?" *Voluntary engagement online:* In the past 12 months, have you: (a) posted comments on a website or blog about a political or social issue, (b) posted pictures on the Internet about a political or social issue, (c) posted a video on the Internet about a political or social issue, (d) written in your blog about a political or social issue (Cronbach Alpha = 0.741)? The measure was calculated as the total of answers to the items. *Voluntary engagement offline:* "Please tell me whether you have, in the past 12 months: (a) attended a political rally or speech, (b) attended an organized protest, (c) attended a political meeting about local, town or school affairs, (d) worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate, (e) made a speech about a community or political issue, (f) been an active member of any group trying to influence public policy or government, not including a political party, (g) participated in a walk, run or ride for a cause, (h) worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community (Combat Alpha = 0.800). The measure is the sum of evaluations on items. (3) *Social Cause:* (1) Ideology; (2) Faith; (Omitted variable: Charity = 67.0%).

3.3. Control variables

(1) *Extent of Internet use:* About how often do you use Internet or email? 5 = several times a day; 4 = about once a day; 3 = 3–5 days a week; 2 = 1–2 days a week every few weeks; 1 = not often or never (items were reversed). (2) *Scope of Internet use:* Factor analysis identified three groups of social media used: (1) Did you ever search for information or use a social networking site such as My Space, Face- book or Linked in? (2) Did you ever create or work on your own online journal or blog? (3) Did you ever read someone else's online journal or blog? (Cronbach Alpha = .689). Users of date sites only (one item) and users searching for commercial information yielded a low alpha and reliability and were excluded from the analysis. *Socio-demographic factors:* Age: years; Gender: (1 = male); Marital status: (1 = married); Employment: (1 = full time); Education: last grade or class completed in school; Parental status: parent or guardian of any children under age 18 in household.

4. Results

We first present a correlation analysis (Table 1), followed by two linear regression models, the first of which (Table 2) predicts the overall effect of the examined sets of variables on online and offline contributions. The second model (Table 3) predicts the direct effect of each independent variable from each set of variables on the dependent variables.

Table 1 findings reveal several preliminary insights into the examined hypotheses, First, voluntary engagement online is positively related to reading journals ($r = .384$), but significantly less to social networking ($r = .052$). Reading journals was positively related to social networking ($r = .339$). The results point to how Internet skills have a spill over effect on the extent of using the web. Second, the matrix correlation indicated a significant relationship between online and offline voluntary engagement ($r = .502$). This suggests that as proposed by Mesch's (2010) social diversification hypothesis the Internet complements, and does not replace, offline social interactions and behaviors. Third, there are differences in the relationship between social causes and voluntary engagement. Ideology and religious affiliation to social causes were negatively related to both online and offline voluntary engagement ($r = −.325$ and $r = −.130$ respectively). Finally, the comparison between online and offline contributions showed that Internet use – extent and scope – was positively related to offline money contributions ($r = .041$; $r = 063$; $r = .037$; $r = .139$) but not to online contributions. Social causes – ideology and faith affiliation – were positively related to online social networking ($r = .046$ and $r = .095$, respectively). The results indicate that the Internet is an arena of social engagement as expected but it adds to our knowledge an aspect of individual online behavior that has been neglected. Voluntary engagement and money contributions are two forms of social behavior that need to be explored since the virtual space is expanding individual exposure to social causes.

The findings in Table 2 suggest that almost all the examined variables contributed significantly to the prediction of both online and offline donations, with the exception of demographic characteristics and offline voluntary engagement. The lack of significant effects in the first case suggests that Internet participation eliminates the traditional sources of differences known and addressed in the digital-divide paradigm, and that Internet users are affiliated with social causes regardless of variations in their socio-demographic profiles. Interestingly, online voluntary engagement contributed to online ($R = .648$) as well as offline ($R = .458$) monetary contributions. These findings support the notion that promotion of social goals on the Internet is indeed effective.

Interesting findings also emerged with regard to extent and scope of Internet use. The findings suggest that the greater the

extent of use, the higher the level of online donations, provided that the Internet was not being used at home or at work ($B = .316$; $p > .005$). It is not clear where this facility could be, but it is possible that access to the Internet in public spaces is one of the factors affecting this trend. Conversely, frequent use of the Internet at home ($B = .256$; $p > .001$) or at work ($B = .175$; $p > .001$) increases levels of monetary contributions offline. This suggests that some of these contributions may be initiated on the Internet, but are implemented through face-to-face connections or within a group setting.

Findings about scope of use, i.e. the reasons individuals surf the Internet, suggest that those using it for group connections will modify their participation into a willingness to contribute money online ($B = 1.125$; $p > .003$). Conversely, reading a journal or blog is what prompts making offline contributions ($B = .642$; $p > .000$), which emphasizes the importance of the Internet in promoting information relevant to nonprofit goals. This finding confirms the premise that a combination of information and action reinforces the potential of the Internet in regard to nonprofit causes (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), and underlines the fact that information about a cause serves is an additional incentive for monetary contributions, even when not donated online.

4.1. Social causes

Ideology-related affiliations or causes have a positive effect on the level of online monetary donations ($B = 1.437$, $p > .001$), but have no effect, whatsoever on offline contributions. The opposite was found with regard to faith-based affiliations, i.e. faith has no effect on the level of online monetary contributions, but increases the offline level ($B = .419$; $p > .05$).

In order to examine whether the motivation behind monetary contributions is related to the type of communication employed, we distinguished between voluntary engagement offline – in face-to-face and group interactions – and online. The results are, surprisingly, the same for both. When individuals were active online, they made more online ($B = .852$; $p > .05$) and offline donations ($B = .556$; $p > .05$). In contrast, when individuals were voluntarily engaged offline, they tended to contribute less in general, whether online ($B = −.211$; $p > .05$) or offline ($B = −.202$; $p > .05$).

The results thus suggest a twofold effect of the diversification paradigm. Individuals voluntarily engaging in online activities have similar tendencies regarding monetary online or offline contributions, and can demonstrate their support for a cause through monetary donations. This trend may also reflect their education level, as well as their Internet proficiency but the general outcome is that online voluntary engagement in terms of monetary

Table 1
Pearson correlation matrix for study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Online engagement	–										
Offline engagement	.502***	–									
Internet use	.231**	.123									
Search for information	.179***	.090*	–								
Work online journal/blog	.125***	.185***	.219***	–							
Read else's online journal/blog.	.189***	.384***	.305***	.409***	–						
Social network	.052***	.148***	.232***	.322***	.339***	–					
Social cause: ideology	−.393***	−.325***	−.127***	−.041*	−.099***	.046**	–				
Social cause: faith	−.166***	−.130***	.038***	−.005	−.021	.095***	.154***	–			
Online money contribution	−.092**	.183*	−.079**	−.058	−.008	−.001	.161***	.206*	–		
Offline money contribution	−.099***	.066	.041**	.063**	.037**	.139***	.109***	212*	212*	–	

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001

Table 2
Model summary for sets of determinants predicting online and offline money giving.

	Online money contributions					Offline money contributions				
	R Square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	R Square change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Socio demographic	.428	.183	.140	1.991	.183	.349	.122	.109	2.115	.122
Internet use	.514	.264	.204	1.916	.081	.410	.168	.150	2.066	.046
Social media	.600	.360	.281	1.820	.096	.440	.193	.169	2.044	.025
Social cause	.634	.402	.323	1.767	.043	.446	.199	.173	2.038	.006
Online engagement	.648	.420	.330	1.758	.014	.458	.210	.180	2.030	.009
Offline engagement	.729	.531	.453	1.588	.112	.501	.251	.221	1.979	.041

Table 3
OLS regression coefficients for online and offline money contributions.

	Online money contributions				Offline money contributions					
	Unstandardized B	Standard. Std. error	t Beta	Sig. B	Unstandardized Std. Error	Standard. B	t Std. error	Sig. Beta	B	Std. error
Socio demographic										
Age	−.006	0.022	−.029	−.260	0.796	0.007	0.008	0.051	0.908	0.364
Sex	0.6	0.458	0.142	1.326	0.188	−.283	0.215	−.063	−1.31	0.19
Marital statue	−.068	0.097	−.078	−.702	0.484	0.088	0.063	0.088	1.394	0.164
Parenting status	1.1	0.439	0.243	2.53	0.013	0.207	0.253	0.045	0.819	0.413
Employment	0.1	0.274	0.032	0.261	0.795	0.052	0.102	0.029	0.514	0.607
Education	0.8	0.244	0.47	3.113	0.002	0.36	0.085	0.229	4.233	0
Income	0.3	0.182	0.219	1.596	0.113	0.174	0.045	0.185	3.875	0.001
Internet use										
Home	0.045	0.278	0.017	0.16	0.873	0.256	0.075	0.161	3.42	0
Work	0.02	0.115	0.017	0.176	0.861	0.175	0.051	0.2	3.45	0
no home or work	0.316	0.111	0.319	2.86	0.005	0.004	0.053	0.004	0.08	0.9
Social media										
Look for information	−.223	0.342	−.077	−.650	0.517	−.077	0.165	−.023	−.467	0.6
Creating journal/blog	−.701	0.593	−.158	−1.18	0.239	−.091	0.238	−.020	−.384	0.7
Reading journal/blog	0.216	0.421	0.058	0.514	0.608	0.642	0.182	0.195	3.528	0
Social network	1.125	0.365	0.435	3.086	0.003	−.072	0.151	−.027	−.475	0.6
Social cause[a]										
Ideology	1.437	0.492	0.336	2.92	0.004	0.296	0.266	0.06	1.114	0.266
Faith	−.266	0.525	−.053	−.507	0.613	0.419	0.137	0.086	1.766	0.058
Voluntary engagement										
Online	0.852	0.173	0.511	4.931	0	0.556	0.116	0.255	4.803	0
Offline	−.211	0.076	−.284	−2.78	0.006	−.202	0.053	−.213	−3.81	0
(Constant)	−5.67	2.628		−2.16	0.033	−0.352	1.26		−.279	0.78

[a] Omitted category: charity.

contributions indicates that the Internet and social medial supplement the individual's support for a cause.

An interesting finding was that the direction of monetary contributions depended on whether donors were involved in voluntary engagement offline or online. When voluntary engagement was offline, there was less likelihood of donating money, whether online or offline. Apparently, active engagement through personal attendance and time is considered as sufficient investment of personal resources in a cause. This finding confirms recent conclusions about forms of contribution (Bekkers, 2010; Cnaan et al., 2011) that people may choose to pursue one or the other way of being active, but not both. Since we controlled for the effect of type of cause, we cannot assess whether this is related to the cause to which individuals are affiliated, i.e. ideology or faith.

4.2. Socio-economic effects

In Table 3, the first set of variables includes socio-demographic characteristics. First, education level significantly increases the level of contributions online ($B = .760$; $p > .001$) as well as offline ($B = .085$; $p > .001$). The effect of income also increases the level of money contributed offline ($B = .760$; $p > .001$).

Combining the two types of effects suggests that while educated people are in general inclined to support nonprofit causes, the level of income may further enhance the education effect, particularly when contributions are made offline ($B = .760$; $p > .001$). It is also evident that parents of young children are more inclined to contribute money online ($B = .760$; $p > .001$), suggesting that when there is Internet at home, the chances of engaging in online activities and therefore contributing money online are higher; or that, at home, increased exposure to nonprofit causes online leads to higher monetary contributions. None of the remaining socio-economic factors had any significance whatsoever. Nevertheless, the digital-divide literature points to a strong relationship between Internet access and use, on one hand, and education and income on the other.

5. Discussion

The Internet has opened up the field of social interaction, expanding the sphere of communication from face-to-face to virtual space. Social media have increased individual connectivity with friends, relatives, colleagues and people of similar interests, introducing a new way to present ideas and connect with others to share interests. They have played a strong role in facilitating many activities, and precipitated the information flow between online recipients and providers of nonprofit services, exposing individuals to social causes. There has been increased willingness to

support online welfare causes, to provide services to less privileged individuals and/or advocate for the rights of groups facing social injustice. The Internet is thus a viable realm of activity for promoting social causes, and nonprofit organizations are highly motivated to invest in online platforms to develop effective communication with potential supporters and increase social awareness.

The present study examined the factors associated with online and offline money contributions. Our approach was comprehensive, dealing with social-exchange assumptions addressing pro-social behavior, and the social-diversification hypothesis focusing on the centrality of the Internet and social media to predict online and offline money contributions at three levels.

Our general hypothesis was confirmed. The Internet provides important communication media affecting civic engagement. The greater extent and scope of use increase the higher the level of online donations. Online voluntary engagement scored higher levels of online contributions whereas offline engagement presented much lower monetary contributions, either online or offline. Comparing online and offline contributions indicated that Internet users are active contributors both online and offline, i.e. that the social diversification hypothesis offers an adequate theoretical background for understanding the interaction between online and offline voluntary engagement and money contributions (Mesch, 2007; Mesch et al., 2012). "Reinforcement" among volunteer employees (Nesbet et al., 2012), could also take different forms and prompt different behaviors both online and offline (Cnaan et al., 2011), thereby affecting donations (Bekker & Wepping, 2011). However, it is also possible that these two theoretical directions do not properly consider some sources of "noise" or missing parameters in predicting virtual human behavior.

The first source of "noise" comes from the physical space used by the Internet user for surfing, which directly affects the type of donation. We established that when users surf the Internet at home or at work, offline monetary contributions are higher, and that when the Internet is used elsewhere, online donations increase. We can therefore assume that availability of Internet services in public spaces, including the "Internet café", is a possible reason for the prevalence of attention to social issues in such locales, which also ensure some level of privacy.

So what aspects of the Internet affect individual voluntary engagement and contributions more than others? While all forms of social media are positively related to both online and offline voluntary engagement, their direct effects on money contributions differ. Blogging enhances the level of offline contributions. Social networking increases online donations but has no effect on offline contributions.

Moreover, the results indicate the importance of considering the effects of personal preferences in the use of social media. The differences between the various social media examined in the study indicate that social networking moves individuals from "knowing" to "doing". Individuals involved in social networks are more likely to engage in voluntary activities that are somehow related to the *type* of cause. Ideological causes positively affect the level of online contributions, but have no effect on offline contributions. Conversely, those affiliated to faith-related causes make no online contributions, preferring to offer support with offline donations.

We therefore conclude that the vast extent of information accessible via the social media affects individuals' likelihood to be exposed to and influenced by beliefs. It is evident that the Internet is an effective organ for disseminating social causes, because even if individuals are not actively engaged in online voluntary activities, it does increase their level of awareness of social issues (Shye, 2010). Exposure to information about a social cause on the Internet serves nonprofit activity well, even if the donations are made offline. Our findings provide strong support for the social-

diversification hypothesis (Mesch, 2007) because they emphasize that the Internet does not alter existing social relationships, but complements and even reinforces them (Nesbit et al., 2012). While individual behaviors may be altered by the type of social cause it is still possible to claim that online interactions form and shape awareness to social and civic issues. In many ways the findings that efforts placed by the nonprofit organizations to increase the level of "ethical consumption" and voluntary engagement is now far more possible and made "easy" with the increased use of social media and social networking.

5.1. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Our results are the outcome of a secondary data analysis and are limited by the lack of information that could contribute to better understanding of the link between social media, voluntary engagement, and contributions. We were unable to identify the reason why different social causes have different effects on donations. Thus the study would benefit from an additional source of data that would enable combining individual-level information provided by the PEW survey with information about the attitudes and socioeconomic characteristics of individuals supporting a cause, and extent of organizational use of social media to promote such causes (Jones, 2006). Increasing voluntary engagement and monetary contributions may suggest missed marketing strategies (Mano, 2009). Finally, we suggest that future research should be extended to examination of whether individual motivation behind online monetary contributions is related to trust in the type of communication.

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