

Social Networking in Charity Advocacy

¹Diana M.L. Wong and ²Kamaruzaman Jusoff

¹Computer and Information Sciences Department, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS,
Bandar Seri Iskandar, 31750 Tronoh, Perak, Malaysia

²Department of Forest Production, Faculty of Forestry,
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract: Online charity website at present is not gaining continuous support from the community which resulted in the stagnant progress for charity work in Malaysia. The paper explores the motivation behind charity related issues and studies the influence of web integration of social networking tools in promoting charity work. The study proposes a solution of developing GiFT-a one stop charity portal with integrated social networking tools. The portal provides a gateway to connect people to charity organizations in support of charity movement in Malaysia. The motivation factor stems from the social networking tools in cultivating the sense of belonging to a community of shared interest. It is hope that the subsequent study will not limit to groups of individual users but can also be proliferated into corporate effort for corporate social responsibility.

Key words: Charity • Fund raising • Social networking • Internet technology • Social trend

INTRODUCTION

Charity is defined as the practice of benevolent giving [1] and it may come in a wide range of forms and goals. Some charity bodies aim high to raise money for research purposes while some focuses on the simple things such as raising awareness amongst the local communities. They may differ in many ways but they share one common attribute, a non-profitable organization seeking volunteers, donations or corporate sponsorship.

The revolution of charity efforts has now evolved and taken form from offline to online workings, spreading the good cause virtually which is made possible with the capability of online banking transactions. The system is however facing a stagnant point, the problem steaming from the lack of continuous support from online users. Leveraging on the social network tools that is widely available, developing a one-stop charity portal integrated with social networking tool may just be the nudge needed by these charitable organizations to start rolling again [2]. The traffic attracted by social networking tools will provide the much needed support and encouragement for charity to operate by.

The first online charity website in Malaysia was launched to put a stop on the charity syndicate carried out by bogus fundraising professionals that took

advantage on Malaysia's generous natured citizens. CharityMalaysia.com advocate human and wildlife charity organization in Malaysia [3], however, the website is not effective in delivering the visions and accumulating the targeted amount of donation needed by the charity homes. Through the CharityMalaysia.com website, the accumulated amount of money displayed according to each category is far from being successful in achieving its goals. The website is divided into two main categories- "Donation" and "Fund Raising". Although there were a lot of charity organizations that was registered under each category, there were only a couple of groups under the "Donation" category that captured the attention of donors whilst for "Fund Raising" category, there was no donation pulled through. The features available in CharityMalaysia.com are shaped upon straightforward online banking transaction and may not be user friendly for first-time visitors or new potential donors. Their failure to capture these delicate users resulted in the stagnant, diminution and non-progressing of their much needed contribution collection. Besides, using Google as the research medium within the range of Malaysian web pages, CharityMalaysia.com was not listed among the top 10 result with search keywords such as "Donation", "Charity", "Non-Profitable Organizations" or "Malaysia Charity". The lack of web visibility is yet another crucial factor affecting the success of the portal.

Charity organizations need to leverage on Internet technology and manipulate the power of social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter to attract potential donors to their websites [4]. Some existing online charity portals often provide insufficient information for donors or expect users to find out more by redirecting them to the respective organization's official homepage. Organization may lose potential donors due to this tedious process. In addition to that, while adapting to Internet technology, the charity organizations may want to consider the user groups such that different range of users may only be able to contribute different types of donation. For instance, teenagers from 12 to 20 years old may not have the capability to donate cold hard cash but they may contribute in other forms such as volunteering their time or expertise or just simply spreading the charitable good cause around. All they need is an opportunity and the correct means to do so. A one stop platform with diversified opportunities may just be the right answer.

Most charity websites share the same common setback which is lack of continuous support from their surrounding community [5]. Constant flow of donation and support would provide a large amount of help needed to appropriately manage their charitable responsibilities. The measure of a successful charity website is the support received from potential donors and other charity concerned groups. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to research influence of social networking tools and develop a one stop charity portal with integrated social networking features to encourage greater motivation for charitable related events and increase awareness to support non-profitable organizations in Malaysia. This constant flow of web-visitor is targeted to provide the continuous support needed by charity organizations to operate by. Moreover, charity organizations will also be able to promote and encourage users to contribute aside from acting as an information hub for charity organizations' ongoing events.

Literature Review: The notion of using internet to promote charity: Charity is needed to remind us of the less fortunate and to give out and sincerely share whatever portion that we have with one another regardless of their races and community background. Charity can come in forms of cash, a gesture of sympathy such as volunteering acts or to simply help raise awareness amongst the ones closest to us. Charity and donations comes hand in hand and has evolved with the changes of times from the personal face to face act of

begging to virtual online money transaction. With the rapid growth of Internet technologies, charity has been embedded into websites with a complete set of features such as secure, straightforward and time saving donations. Although these features guarantee an ethical and safe transaction, it does not however guarantee a constant flow of cash or support from online donors.

The manner of how a website is crafted can result either in a disastrous or gives an upper hand advantage towards the organization. It could be disastrous in a sense that losing a potential donor within the first two minutes of browsing thru the website or successfully convincing a donor that would not only donate but spread the word around and come back for more action. This is where the study on excellent features in a charity website comes in handy. The main highlights are on the areas where website visitors are successfully converted into dedicated donors. Nevertheless, a convincing website itself is not good enough without its complete functionalities. Features need to live up to user's average expectations as web usability is counted as one of the major attractions to the charity websites.

Another important criteria that charity organization constantly strives for is the amount of support achieved for each cause. The logical reason beyond it is that the larger the crowd of supporters, the higher the probability for the organization's survival. A convincing and working website is still considered useless without the support and encouragement from supporting groups. Since social networking tools have proven it's capability to attract a wide range of traffic, it is a wise step to integrate and manipulate its power and fuse it into charity related purposes. R. Ruby and K. Andersen [6] listed out 15 reasons as to why people donate. The motivation could stem from fulfilling personal satisfaction, religious point of view or to simply for a tax deduction. They were also emphasizing the point that charity is an act from the heart, not from the head and giving is a personal act. In Edison's research, it is noted that the "understanding donating behavior is arguably the most important step in non-profit's survival process" [7]. Based on the study of human behavior towards charity and their motivation factors, the findings can be later on adapted and molded into corresponding social networking tools that match their needs and views perfectly.

Understanding the motivation that drives organizations to participate and being a part of the portal itself is a crucial process as the organizations provide the proper direction and cause for other users to further evaluate and take part. Organizations usually have a lot

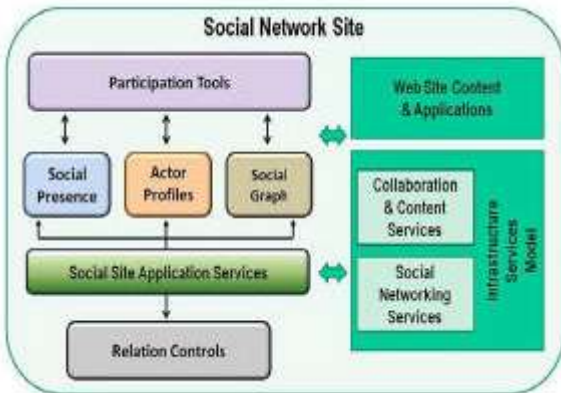


Fig. 1: Social network site architectural component

more experience and better expectations of what their goals and objectives are compared to individuals with limited time and resources. With better understanding on both the user and the provider, a more effective website can be produced that effectively captures and implements functions that meets the expectations of non-profitable charity organization and its potential users.

Leveraging Social Networking Capability: There are many advantages associated in integrating social networking tools into a website. First and foremost it is free and user friendly which counts as the major attraction to web users [8]. Second of all, social networking sites have proven themselves to be the most practical and effective form of advertisement. With a simple tag, similar related organizations are able to connect, create a beneficial alliance and cross promote each other. Subsequently, social networking has this grave capacity of being able to assemble user/follower momentarily and potentially grow a small scale event and turning it into a lively occasion over time. Apart from that, social networking tools allows organizations to get to know and build their network of community better and gain advantage over their competitors. With features such as wall, gallery and receiving tokens for supporting and involving themselves in all charity events announced in the website, supporters' motivation is easily captured and their commitment towards supporting the charity organization will continuously grow and strengthen over time.

Fig. 1 illustrates what architectural components should be included within a social networking site, the relationship between those components and how such components interact with other infrastructure services [9]. A social networking site is a web site that minimally includes the following capabilities:

Participation Tools: Participation tools connect 3 main entities in the social network site which are Social Presence, Actor Profiles and Social Graph. With the availability of participation tools, users will be able to register and establish his/her own set of profiles which acts as a representation of the users to others a.k.a Actor Profiles. Once established, the actor will find other Actor Profiles that has similarities in term of preference or educational background creating a Social Presence of one user to the other. Over time, the user will accommodate more social connections and set up his/her own online networking resulting in an increase in their social graph within the Social Networking Site.

Social Site Application Services: In order to enhance the interface and attract more users, the Social Networking Site provides other equally attractive applications such as Gallery, News Post, Forum, Chat Boxes, Quizzes and Interactive Games to ensure user's interest are intact and will always be coming back to spend more time while spreading their social connections at the same time.

Website Content and Services: The administrative section will provide users with updated events and announcements as well as new applications that are available for their users. Constant updates and continuous supervision on the site content is important to ensure the website stays on track and the user's profile is safe from online threats and corruption. The better the content and services management, the smoother and more effective the site will be as well as minimization on virtual damages.

As an example, Facebook is a social networking site that was launched in 2004 and offers developers a wide array of Facebook applications that they can integrate into an existing website or even create a whole new website using the Facebook platform and the applications therein [10]. Facebook gains massive users attraction through providing a platform to connect people-to-people through a larger network. It allows active interaction in various medium, such as personal messaging, wall posting, tagging, notes, discussion, real time chat, video sharing, creating interest groups, organizing events and various applications. Despite all the available features, Facebook offers great usability in terms that users can customize the information displayed in the interface to their personal use instead of having clustered by massive applications and information. The news feed features appearing on the homepage of the users keep them informed of the related and news and events of

the connected network. These are just some of the basic features of Facebook that attracts users to use it apart from over 10,000 other applications.

Through Facebook, users can get in touch with people to construct a conversation with people of similar interests and talk about things that are valuable to the users [11]. From this conversation phase it evolves into another personal motive which is forming a relationship that is established virtually with people you would have otherwise never met in your lifetime. With Facebook applications people are able to maintain this relationship with the available connection tools to keep in touch with family, friends and anyone else that might be interested. This form of sharing includes viewing and uploading photos, videos and stories of their everyday life. People are also attracted to use Facebook as an informal form of learning from the available links, inspiration and tips, shared by different people of different culture all over the world [12]. Facebook can also assist as a platform where business are able to raise brand awareness in the sense that the more actively your company is represented in social spaces, the more people that is aware of the company's existence, the more likely they will be the ones chosen when a need/want arises and in need of that company's services or products. Marketing and promotions of products and services can also be accomplished through Facebook features as this is a form of soft marketing strategy and is one of the more affordable ways of getting your point across [13].

Methods: Agile software development is a generic term for a number of methods using iterations to avoid the problems described above. Each iteration usually lasts from one to four weeks and optimally comprises planning, analysis, design, coding and testing. One of the main points is that evaluation is done many times during the project, which enables change in direction and/or redesign at an early stage, saving time and resources [14]. Agile methodology also means breaking down the scope into more manageable module to facilitate completion.

During the initial phase, the research focuses intensely on the problem statement identification and comes up with a generalized idea on the cases that capture the intentions of a user. This includes identifying the stagnant progress of current online donation and the causes that contribute towards these factors are further studied in order to develop the best possible solution. A user survey was conducted to gather demographic information and users' preference. There are altogether 80 respondents. The survey consisted of multiple choice questions in combination with open questions.



Fig. 2: Agile software development

The design and development follow through and thorough testing and implementation cycle are done towards the developed system to identify possible improvements and additional features needed to comply with the solution and also to ensure the portal is according to standard coding requirements. Continuous Integration Testing on a scheduled basis is done to ensure the system is fully stable and any bugs are fixed to ensure system is user friendly and smooth execution for the end-users.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire survey was conducted to identify the context of use and the users' environment. From the result gathered, website users for both male and female have a distinct difference in such that for female users, the dominating age factor is for 19 and below carrying 42% followed by the 20-29 age groups with 37%. As for the male population, the dominating male website users falls under the 20-29 age groups with 63% followed by 19 and under which is 31%. But for the 30-39 age groups, female users strive with 21% whereas the male user represents only 6% of the chart. In terms of charity organizations preference, the "Orphans" category achieved the highest votes among users followed by "Disabled", "Welfare", "Animal and "Environment" category. Besides, the survey also revealed that the community's awareness on animal and environmental care needs a big push since both of these categories carry the same importance and values as human welfare itself. Having compassion for creatures other than human shows great significance in the individual himself since animals and the environment cannot possible survive by themselves without the love and attention of human beings. User expectation from joining any charity events held is to obtain new friends followed by being able to be a part of something, making a change and also includes personal self satisfaction. From this survey, it is shown that getting to know new faces and personalities is a crucial factor and embedding

Table 1: Basic user requirements for GiFT

No.	Functionality	Description
1	Users Authentication	Users' registrations, identification and authentication to access the site.
2	Donation Submission	Accept and manage donations for various charity organizations.
3	RSS Feeds	News and notifications to users on network friends or any related activities.
4	Articles	Information sharing on charity events, charity organizations and community/environment issues.
5	Add / View Friends	Establishing network of friends.
6	Community of Interest	Create group of interest and create rapport with the connected network.
7	Add, View and Join Events	The ability to upload and categorize charity events to provide a repository for all Charity related issues according to geographic user networks based on Zip code, City, State, Region and Country.
8	Personalization	Create personal profiles and customize the information display on the site.
9	Communications	Email, instant messaging, or live chat, to communicate with friends. Ability to post status of charity involvement and receive comments/feedback from friends.
10	Discussion Forum	Story or information sharing within the community of success, services, events, or any common issues.
11	Gallery	Upload pictures and videos. Avatar to represent profile image.



Fig. 3: GiFT main interface

the portal with social networking features will definitely match up to the user preference and style. Through the questionnaire survey, a thorough analysis was done on the basis of user requirements of the functionalities and applications that are expected of the charity portal. The list of functionalities is as shown in ` 1.

Consequently, the GiFT portal is developed based on the users' perception, intention and understanding to their behavior towards charity work. For instance, younger citizens who would like to donate but is incapable in terms of financial resources will prevent their attitude from supporting any form of charity work. Hence, by understanding the behavioral intention model, it is easier to connect users' attitude as well as behavior and how to alter this belief and convert users into continuously supporting the charity portal.

The main interface of the portal consists of two main sections. The top Left Section navigates the user according to "Main Menu", "What Can I Do" and "Voluntary Work" followed by the "Member Login", "Login via Facebook" and for members with registered account, an additional section will be available to them which is the "User Menu". On the far right, a column is dedicated specifically for a poll. The center body purpose is for posting the latest announcement or invitation from member to recruit user to participate in upcoming events.

In the "Main Menu", the categories are further divided into three main divisions-"Human Welfare", "GO Green Projects" and "Animal Care and Wildlife Preservation". The functionalities are uniformed across these three categories. Upon clicking, users will be given the list of upcoming events and their specific event details

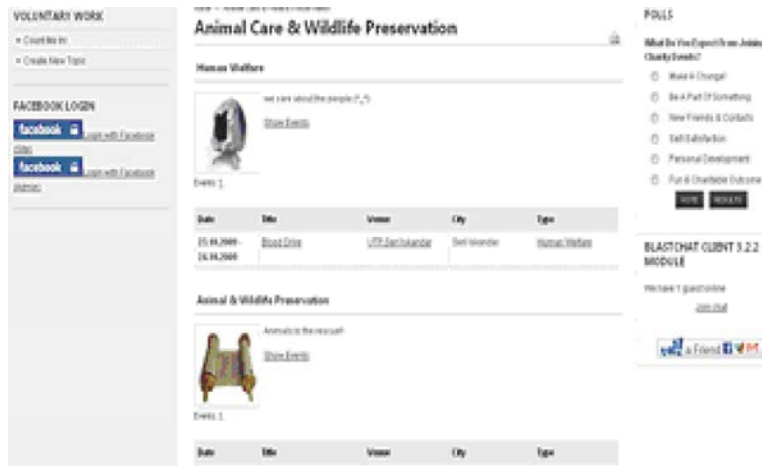


Fig. 4: Human Welfare, GO Green Projects and Animal Care and Wildlife Preservation

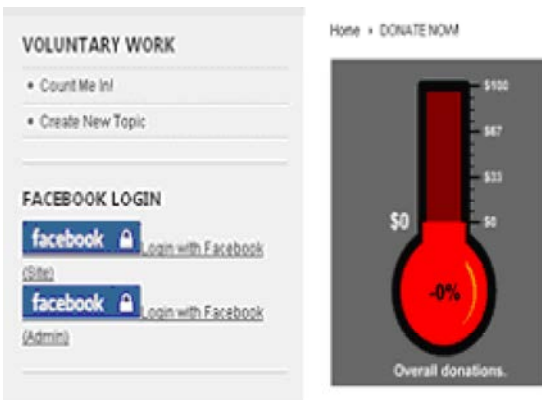


Fig. 5: Donation thermometer

such as time, venue and date. Separating the categories allows better navigation and users are able to choose and decide to join and commit to any of the events available. There is also a function for registered users whereby they are prompted with a checkbox to join the event and if user agrees to join, their name will appear alongside other members that have agreed to register earlier.

In the “What Can I Do?” tab, there is the “Charity Shopping” section. Users will be able to surf and add items into their shopping carts based on the listed items that are available for ordering. Items added in the cart will be displayed with its’ total price. Users are permitted to empty the cart or if they are satisfied, proceed to the checkout session. The “Donation Thermometer” feature in Fig. 5 indicates the accumulated amount of money that has been successfully raised before it reaches the targeted amount. The more users that voluntarily donate, the higher the level will rise. It serves as a personal donation dashboard which can also be compared with another friends’ milestone.

The “Voluntary Work” section is a forum based platform where registered users are allowed to create new forum topics as well as commenting on previous topics created by other users. This platform is meant as an approach for users to connect to users for charity-related work. Since posting of comments and new topics are strictly limited to registered users only, this foster closer rapport among users to cultivate sense of belonging to the charity portal community.

In addition to that, registered user such as individuals, corporate or charity organizations can create new events and promote them through this portal. All published events will be listed under “Human Welfare”, “GO Green Projects” or “Animal Care and Wildlife Preservation”. User can create category or folder and upload pictures accordingly. There are no limits to the maximum numbers of pictures allowed to be stored in each category. Other available functions include “Chat”, “Login via Facebook”, “Friend Identification (Who’s Online?)” and also “Tell-A-Friend”. Using the “Tell-A-Friend” Application, user can inform and spread the good cause using other platforms such as Google Talk, Yahoo Messenger and Facebook.

Through the implementation of GiFT portal, a group of 20 users were tested and the result shows overall satisfaction in terms of the web usability and the integrated social networking tools. 80% of the users agree with the layout, content, features and navigation of the site. 75% of the users also agree that the system is easy to use and each task can be performed without having too many steps involved. In terms of personalization, 85% gave good rating as they are able to create and edit their own profiles and also being able to add other registered friends. Furthermore, 85% of them agree that the system

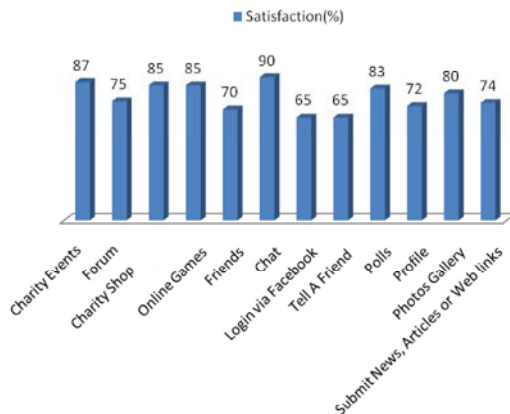


Fig. 6: Users preferred social networking tools

has good content but in order to attract and retain user's interest towards the system, there should be more improvement done on the quality of information.

Figure 6 reveals the preferred social networking features among the users. It is apparent that the interests of the users are captured through constant interaction with friends in the community through chat, community participation in charity events, photo sharing/tagging, shopping for charity events which the active contribution can be indicated by the dashboard feature. The online interactive games between registered players in the network are also among one of the highly preferred social networking tools. The online games offer not just the entertainment of playing it, but also enable users to interact with friends through competitions, expressions, or generally socializing in a game environment [15]. It is important for the users to have the sense of belonging to community of interest through active activities interaction, sharing and communicating information. Finally, 70% of users claim that the GiFT portal increases users' awareness on charity organizations and events throughout Malaysia. GiFT promotes the notion that charity may not necessarily be confined by monetary value, but one can also contribute through volunteer work. Users are able to witness and experience the joy and fun of charity work through the GiFT portal. The concept of integrating social network features into charity based website is what appeals to them the most and it is noted that there is a very high potential for the portal to mature and replace CharityMalaysia.com in the future.

CONCLUSION

Evidently, the existing charity website-CharityMalaysia.com, is inefficient in advocating for charity among the online users. A survey revealed that

most users find the website lacking in terms of its usability and motivational factor. An empirical study through using the website has presented a list of major setbacks. Consequently, the advent growth of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter trigger the notion of leveraging on social networking tools to draw traffic to the website whilst increasing awareness of charity movement. The GiFT portal is developed based on the survey outcome of what attracts users the most in the social networking sites. The portal boosts the traffic to the website while acting as an information hub for existing charity organizations. The integration of social networking tools has shown result of increased participation of users to contribute to charity organizations.

REFERENCES

1. Charity (n.d.). Wikipedia. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charity>.
2. Mankoff, J., D. Matthews, S.R. Fussell and M. Johnson, 2007. Leveraging Social Networks to Motivate Individuals to Reduce Their Ecological Footprints. 40th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS'07), Big Island, Hawaii, USA, 3-6 January 2007, pp: 87.
3. Nix, K. (n.d.). Charity Malaysia, Now You Can Donate. Retrieved from <http://www.articlesnatch.com/Article/Charity-Malaysia--Now-You-Can-Donate/168484>.
4. Boyd, D.M. and N.B. Ellison, 2008. Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1): 210-230.
5. WordSmith, 2009. Common Problems Faced By Non Profit Organizations. Retrieved from <http://www.edubook.com/common-problems-faced-by-non-profit-organizations/2674/>.
6. Ruby, R. and K. Andresen, 2008. The Secret to Getting People to Give: 15 Reasons Why People Donate. Retrieved from <http://www.fundraising123.org/article/secret-getting-people-give-15-reasons-why-people-donate>.
7. Edison, S., 2004. Why Do People Donate? A Model of Willingness to Donate. Small Business Advancement National Center, Univ. of Central Arkansas, USA.
8. DiMicco, J.M. and D.R. Millen, 2007. Identity Management: Multiple Presentations of Self in Facebook. 2007 International ACM Conference on Supporting Group Work, Sanibel Island, FL, USA, 4-7 November 2007, pp: 383-386.

9. Gotta, M., 2008. Reference Architecture For Social Network Sites (Social Networking and Collaboration). Retrieved from <http://mikeg.typepad.com/perceptions/2008/07/reference-archi.html>.
10. Facebook (n.d.). Wikipedia. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook>.
11. Ellison, N.B., C. Steinfield and C. Lampe, 2007. Benefits of Facebook Friends: Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites. *J. Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4): 1143-1168.
12. Subrahmanyama, K., S.M. Reich, N. Waechterb and G. Espinoza, 2008. Online and Offline Social Networks: Use of Social Networking Sites by Emerging Adults. *J. Appl. Developmental Psychol.*, 29(6): 420-433.
13. Goldfarb, S., 2010. Facebook for Business.
14. Highsmith, J., 2002. Agile Software Development Ecosystems. Addison-Wesley Longman Publishing Co., Inc. Boston, MA, USA.
15. Kleinman, Z., 2009. Social Network Games Catch the Eye of Computer Giants. *Technology Reporter*, BBC News. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8376392.stm>.