

2013-05-08

Nonprofit Organization Adopts Internet-Based Communications for Relationship Cultivation—Case Study of a Charity Bike Ride Event

Yi Ji

University of Miami, yji5@umiami.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_theses

Recommended Citation

Ji, Yi, "Nonprofit Organization Adopts Internet-Based Communications for Relationship Cultivation—Case Study of a Charity Bike Ride Event" (2013). *Open Access Theses*. 415.
http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_theses/415

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION ADOPTS INTERNET-BASED COMMUNICATIONS
FOR RELATIONSHIP CULTIVATION—CASE STUDY OF A CHARITY BIKE RIDE
EVENT

By

Yi Ji

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2013

©2013
Yi Ji
All Rights Reserved

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION ADOPTS INTERNET-BASED COMMUNICATIONS
FOR RELATIONSHIP CULTIVATION—CASE STUDY OF A CHARITY BIKE RIDE
EVENT

Yi Ji

Approved:

Wanhsiu Tsai, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Advertising

M. Brian Blake, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Don W. Stacks, Ph.D.
Professor of Public Relations

Shannon B. Campbell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Public Relations

Ji, Yi

(M.A., Public Relations)

Nonprofit Organization Adopts Internet-based
Communications for Relationship Cultivation —
Case Study of A Charity Bike Ride Event

(May 2013)

Abstract of a thesis at the University of Miami.

Thesis supervised by Professor Wanhsiu Tsai.

No. of pages in text. (51)

The purpose of this case study is to provide knowledge of how various stakeholders respond to online communications, including both information contents and distribution tools, of a fundraising event. While organizing a charity bike ride fundraising event, Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida utilized the Internet as a primary public relations tool to cultivate relationships with cyclists, volunteers and sponsors. By adopting qualitative content analysis and one-on-one interviews, this study offers important implications on how the best practice of public relations can be integrated in a fundraising event to cultivate relations via the Internet with key stakeholders. The results will also benefit the online public relations management for local NPO chapters in organizing athletic fundraising events.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	iv
Chapter	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1 st Annual Pedal 4 Kids Charity Bike Ride	3
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	6
3 METHODOLOGY	13
Sampling and Recruiting.....	14
Interview	16
4 INTERPRETIVE FINDINGS.....	17
Content Analysis.....	17
Pilot Interview.....	19
Interview Analysis	19
Online Communication	32
5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION	39
REFERENCES	44
APPENDIX A. Interview Questions.....	47
APPENDIX B. Interview Request.....	49
APPENDIX C. Consent.....	50

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Interview participants.....	15
Table 4.1	18
Table 4.2	18

Chapter 1

Introduction

On September 30th, 2012, Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida (RMHCSF) held its 1st annual charity bike ride event, Pedal 4 Kids, to benefit the children and their families living in the two Houses of RMHCSF. During the event organizing process, the vast adoption of online tools undertook the most frequent and direct communications for Pedal 4 Kids to build up relationship with its stakeholders.

Although it was the first time that Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida entirely relied on Internet-based tools to manage communication with its publics in a fundraising event, it was not the first instance of a nonprofit organization using online communications to advance its cause. Initially slow to adopt new technologies in the past (Jamieson, 2000), however, nonprofit organizations have increasingly embraced new technological modes of action (Kenix 2008). The Internet being available to NPOs as an affordable, direct and interactive access to the public at large (Civille 1997) has led to a revolution called e-philanthropy in the nonprofit sector (Waters 2007). NPOs, therefore, have an opportunity to utilize the Internet with their unique focus on advocacy, volunteerism, fund-raising and relationship building (Johnson 2009; Kenix 2008). Waters (2007) addressed that the technological advances have affected the nonprofit organizations, especially in fundraising and communication. With the booming of social media, this embracing of Internet-based communications by NPOs has been moved forward from traditional adoptions of webpage and e-mail to a strategic utilization of social networks. Furthermore, for many nonprofit organizations, especially local NPOs, which are operating on minimal budgets, Internet, a cost-effective media, has offered

them an ideal channel to perform their public relations. This phenomenon has enlightened researchers to look into how nonprofit organizations can make full use of the Internet features to interact with its publics by examining their web presence, *Facebook* profiles, *Facebook* strategy, *Twitter* messages and etc. (Briones et al., 2011; Botree, & Seltzer, 2009; Curits et al., 2009; Kang, & Norton, 2004; Kent et al., 2003; Park, & Reber, 2008; Taylor et al., 2001; Yeon et al., 2005).

Fundraising is a critical component of the daily activities of nonprofit organizations, because it is not only able to bring in financial support to nonprofit sector, but also provides a practical platform for NPOs to cultivate relations with its major publics. Beyond its literal function of soliciting for charitable donations (Waters, 2010), Kelly (1998) pointed out that fundraising is more involved in the management cultivation between the nonprofit organizations and its donors. She firstly proposed the idea in 1991 that fundraising was a sub-specialty of public relations, and then in 1998, she defined fundraising as “the management of relationships between a charitable organization and its donor publics” (p.40). This viewpoint has been greatly supported by both scholars and practitioners in the fields of philanthropy. Hall (2002) discovered that in university development programs, the most effective fundraising programs were incorporating the best public relations practices. Even the former president of National Society of Fundraising Executives agreed, “We special in building long-term relationships between philanthropic organizations and the individuals, corporations and foundations that support [us] with money, material resources, time and expertise” (Lewis, 1996, p.3). Nevertheless, little research has explored how fundraising programs are using online communication tools for relationship cultivation. Consequently, this study can provide

empirical suggestions resulted from theoretical and practical discussions for nonprofit organizations' use of Internet communication.

In this regard, this study examined a fundraising event from public relations viewpoints through analyzing responses from various stakeholders toward the event's online communications. By performing qualitative content analysis of event's online information and in-depth interviews with the event participants, the present research has discovered what are the most significant relationship cultivation messages that the fundraising event's stakeholders seek to know online; and by which means, those messages could be effectively received by the public. The implications will offer literature reference for future qualitative research in nonprofit online communications and guidance for professionals in the nonprofit sector to best practice public relations in organizing fundraising event through Internet-based communications.

The 1st Annual Pedal 4 Kids Charity Bike Ride

On September 30th, 2012, Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida (RMHCSF) held its 1st annual charity bike ride event, Pedal 4 Kids, to benefit the children and their families living in the two Houses of RMHCSF. As an important part of the celebration of RMHCSF's 30th anniversary, this event initially aimed to recruit 500 cyclists and to raise \$50,000. Three cycling levels were designed along the Florida State Road A1A from Fort Lauderdale to West Palm Beach, which included 30 miles, 60 miles and 100 miles. Registration fee was required for cyclists participation: \$60 for 30 miles and 60 miles, \$75 for 100 miles. Besides, seven levels of sponsorship opportunities were offered to the public with monetary donation ranges from \$500 to \$10,000. Meanwhile, cyclists were expected to do fundraising and word spreading to help P4K to reach its

goals. At the end, this event finally has recruited 207 cyclists and raised more than \$32,000 according to a *Facebook* post by the Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida.

During the event organizing process, the event committee has utilized different ways to disseminate the event information building up relationship with the public. Besides physical outreach, for instance event postcards and flyers were displayed in local bike shops, and an event announcement was post on *The Miami Herald*. The most frequent and direct communications they have constructed were through online tools. The committee has built up an event official website for posting information, cyclists participants and volunteers registration, making donation, running fundraising, etc. Pedal 4 Kids has also contacted online cycling event calendars to have the event added to their lists, therefore it could be noticed by larger population. As for social network, a *Facebook* event “ Pedal 4 Kids” named was created under Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida official account and an event video was uploaded to its *YouTube* channel. The event information has also been sent out through e-mail and quarterly e-newsletter to the volunteers and sponsors on the contact list of RHMCSF.

Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. As a local chapter of Ronald McDonald House Charities, RMHCSF is a separate public charity, operated by a local Board of Directors. In addition to its official website and other event websites, it has also created official profiles on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*, *Volunteer Match* and etc. to target related publics with multiple channels. However, Pedal 4 Kids was its first fundraising event that enormously relied on online communications in any facet.

Largely depending on the volunteer support and donation from communitywide, RMHCSF has its mission to improve the health and well being of children in South Florida. It consists of two Houses in Miami and Fort Lauderdale offering 47 bedrooms and serving up to 560 pediatric families annually. The Ronald McDonald House provides a “home-away-from-home” for families while their child is receiving treatment at pediatric hospitals in South Florida.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Extensive academic research has systematically documented the adoptions of Internet-based public relations tools by nonprofit organizations. This series of studies started from the examinations of nonprofit webpages. Prior study has found that the Web has been effectively used by the nonprofit organizations. Different from corporations and profit making organizations that have many resources, websites have been adopted as the primary resource for nonprofit organizations to communicate with stakeholders. They would seek to fully use the potential of Internet to manage the relationships with publics (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). Park and Reber (2008) content analyzed the websites of 100 Fortune 500 companies and found that in relation building, website served to promote control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, openness and intimacy. Kang and Norton (2004) performed content analysis on the websites of 100 largest nonprofits in the United States, and concluded that to fulfill organizational goals, websites were effectively used to present traditional public relations material and connect with publics with its major function as ease of interface and information provider. From the investigation of the adoption of 100 activist organizations, Talylor, Kent and White (2001) stressed that activist organizations have better used the online sources to manage the relationship with its member publics rather than media.

It is summarized that among the 100 largest NPOs in the United States, the presentation of traditional public relations materials have become the connection between NPOs and their publics. These materials included organizations' logos, missions, history, goals and responsibilities (Kang & Norton, 2004). Besides, the websites contents have

been presented strategically with features of convenient navigation, abundant information and timely updates, therefore the official websites were able to attract more visits, make positive impressions and determined the visitors' reliability towards the organization (Ables, White & Hahn, 1997; Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Taylor, Kent, & While, 2001). As the Internet tactics continue to evolve, the external communications of nonprofit sectors have no longer been limited in information dissemination, namely the one-way communication through publicity (Sundstrum 2012). Instead, they have attempted to offer more interactive capabilities to enhance the mutuality and intimacy with relevant stakeholders (Park & Reber, 2008). According to a study investigating the websites of the top 100 nonprofit organizations, donors have received the most frequent and prominent interactive features (Yeon, Choi, and Kiouisis, 2005). Moreover, the ways that NPOs build up relationships with publics have no longer been carried only by websites.

More nonprofit organizations became aware of the interactive feature of Internet. However, being lack of technique support, this dialogic capability could only be fulfilled by e-mail (Park, & Reber, 2008) rather than discussion forums, chat rooms, online polls or online surveys (Kang, & Norton, 2004). Park and Reber (2008) found in their research that among the 100 websites samples from Fortune 500 companies, although 100% of them have offered their contact information, 87% had their e-mail addresses on the websites for visitors to express their thoughts and opinions through that function. In another study, a content analysis has stressed that among sites of the 100 largest NPOs in the United States, though more than 85% of the organization have provided visitors with email addresses, less than 10% of them had interactive functions (Kang, & Norton 2004).

This situation has been enormously improved due to the openness offered by

social media platforms. On *Facebook*, Twitter, Foursquare, LinkedIn and etc., organization can create profiles and become an active member to interact with the public (Waters et al., 2009; Curtis et al., 2009). It is social networking sites that provide organizations with a space to interact with key publics and to allow users to engage with one another on topics of mutual interests; and that set up ideal conditions necessary for stimulating dialogic communications (Bortree, & Seltzer, 2009).

Researchers have pointed out that the adoption of social media can benefit nonprofits in multiple facets. At the organizational level, Water (2009) found that nonprofit organizations use social media to streamline their management functions, interact with volunteers and donors, and educate others about their programs and services. Beyond deepening the existing relationships, at the individual level, social media usage also allows individuals to self-organize around collaborating with each other (Kanter, 2009).

However, reviewing the results of prior studies, it is hard to deny that the potential of social media has not been effectively utilized by nonprofit sector. By analyzing 100 nonprofit organizations' use of Titter, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) resulted that dialogue is rarely the predominant form of social media-based communication, nonprofits have not been living up to their interactive dialogic potential. Bortree and Seltzer (2009) coded 50 *Facebook* profiles of environmental advocacy groups and found out that they only created an interactive space via a social networking profile, which is not sufficient to facilitate dialogue. Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas (2009) discovered from their content analysis of 275 nonprofit organization profiles on *Facebook* that even though nonprofit organizations recognized the rapid expansion of social networking

phenomenon, and they wanted to be on *Facebook*, they were not taking advantage of all the options of the site and to offer their relationship cultivation efforts.

Previous research about NPOs' internet-based public relations management has paid little attention on local charity chapters that normally has limited external monetary support and staff surviving with self-initiated fundraising events. Instead, most of the studies focused on large national corporations with high revenues and great number of employees. Their samples were chosen from the lists of *The NonProfit Times* top100 NPOs in the United States (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Kang & Norton 2004; Yeon, Choi, & Kioussis, 2005), from Philanthropy 400 (Waters 2007), or from the member list of the Climate Action Network-Canada (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009) and etc. Due to local chapters' even scarcer resources, cost-efficient Internet communications might play a more important role, but unfortunately it is under-researched.

In addition, the past investigations merely examined either website, or *Facebook* or *Twitter* separately as individual tool rather than perceiving the Internet-based communication as an integrated tunnel. This, to some extent, may decrease practical values that can be applied in the real industry. Because nowadays, most nonprofit organizations are using more than one tools to manage their online communication. Moreover, most studies were examining organizational public relations of NPOs from the general perspective (Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Ingenhoff, & Koelling, 2009; Kang & Norton, 2004), but they fail to offer insight into the use of electronic media for fundraising purpose, which remains fertile territory for research (Sargent, & Woodliffe, 2007).

Kelly (1991, 1998) theoretically grounded fundraising within the paradigm of

public relations by using Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations. Because fundraising and public relations seek to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their major publics, two fields might be able to learn from each other's best practices and models (Hall, 2002). Cutlip, Center, & Broom (1994) defined public relations as "a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends." While Kelly (1998) made a break through and defined fundraising as "the management of relationship between charitable organization and tis publics." Although this definition greatly different from previous definitions, it has been supported by philanthropic scholars, particularly the relations-ship building function (Waters, 2007). Based on the excellent descriptions of fundraising by successful practitioner such as Rosso (1991) and Seymour (1998), Kelly demonstrates that the sound principles of symmetrical, two-way communication were applied, whereas, less successful fundraising practices are based on asymmetrical or one-way communication (Hall, 2002). Therefore, understanding fundraising from the public relations perspective will provide fundraising with a conceptual and theoretical guidance, which will ultimately benefit nonprofit sectors with fundraising issues. Following the public relations principles, this study first of all seeks to know who are the major publics of Pedal 4 Kids and what kinds of messages that have been disseminated via Internet to reach them:

RQ1: What messages were sent out by Pedal 4 Kids?

RQ2: Who are Pedal 4 Kids' major publics?

In term of research methodology, most of prior research, which studied how nonprofit organization use online communication tools, has been conducted mainly with quantitative methods and from the organizations' perspective. For instance, content analysis was adopted almost in every study as an independent method to test the functions as well as two-way symmetric, interactive and dialogic features of the Internet-based communications used by NPOs. In a few other studies, though content analysis was also utilized together with other quantitative research methods helping to design follow-up surveys and questionnaires (Ingenhoff, & Koelling, 2009), these studies ended up with results supported by either descriptive or inferential statistical analysis (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Cukier, & Middleton, 2003; Saxton, & Guo, 2011).

In addition, served as theory frames, two-way symmetric public relations model and dialogic theory have been most applied or tested in the past studies concerning Internet-based communication in nonprofit sector. Park and Reber (2008) coded the 100 nonprofit websites following dialogic features on the corporate websites. Greenberg and McAulay (2009) examined the environmental nonprofit organizations to discover if their online broadcast paradigm was based on one-way information flow or two-way dialogical communication. In order to evaluate the interactive features of 98 NPOs' Web presence, two-way symmetrical model was also brought in the research as theoretical foundation.

Grunig and Dozier stated that (2002) guided by the Excellent theory, excellent departments will design their communication programs on the two-way symmetrical model rather than the press agency, public information or two-way asymmetrical models. They also emphasized that two-way symmetrical model 1.is based on research;

2.attempts to balance the interests of the organization and public 3.to manage conflicts with strategic publics. It is obvious that to achieve the excellence of public relations, publics have played a critical role in it. The significance of stakeholders has also been indicated in the model of public relations impact on ROI. The return of expectation of stakeholders, which can be impacted by public relations campaign, will directly influence the economic decisions (Stacks, 2011). However, reviewing the prior studies, the opinions of message receivers, namely the major stakeholders have been seldom concerned to reveal the effectiveness of NPOs' online public relations management from in-depth qualitative perspectives. To fill this gap and offer literature reference for future studies, the present study has collected the responses of major stakeholders from a fundraising event via interview by asking the following research Questions:

RQ3: What information that major publics would like to know?

RQ4: If these messages sent out by Pedal 4 Kids have met major publics' interests?

RQ5: If the major publics have received these messages?

Chapter 3

Methodology

To ensure prolonged engagement (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), the researcher immersed herself with the Roald McDonald House Charities of South Florida for nearly one year by volunteering for the Pedal 4 Kids bike ride with its event organizing, online publicity, logistics and after event follow-ups as well as for the Miami House's volunteer recruiting and volunteer programs.

This research was conducted in two steps. At the first stage, a content analysis was conducted interpretively with the data collected from Pedal 4 Kids official website. In addition, information related to P4K on the front page of RMHCSF official website, RMHCSF *Facebook* posts, in e-mails and e-newsletters was collected. Since some information might be posted with multiple purposes, every single piece of which was coded according to its primary purpose. The information includes every text appearing as words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; and appearing in pictures and webpage buttons. The interpretive analysis was conducted to reveal what kind of information was Pedal 4 Kids intended to send out to which publics. Nvivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software has been used for building up the codes and categories while the researcher is looking for the certain clusters from the data.

Secondly, audio-recorded one-on-one interviews were conducted with event participants. Three pilot interviews were first conducted with participants who have registered in P4K. The results of pilot interviews together with interpretive analysis results have benefited the later interviews in terms of 1.the design of interview questions

and 2. which group of interview participants should be further recruited with different perspectives including sponsors, volunteers, cyclists participants who donated or raised money during the event, cyclists participants who neither donated nor raised money during the event. At the end, ten event participants have participated in the study. The average length of each interview is 30 minutes. The interviews have been conducted with semistructured interview questions “with a focus on the issues or topic areas to be covered and the lines of inquiry to be followed” (Daymon & Halloway, 2002, p. 171). By using semistructured interview questions¹, the researcher aims to “clarify the meanings of common concepts to distinguish the decisive elements of an opinion, and to understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations”(Lindlof, 1995, p.172). The interviews later were transcribed. To establish trustworthiness through member check (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), transcripts have been e-mailed back to interview participants for clarification and confirmation (Lindlof, 1995). Using Nvivo 10, the researcher coded the interview transcripts thematically by breaking down the content into clusters and categorized them into self-evolving themes.

Sampling and recruiting

Interviewees were approached through purposeful sampling and snowball sampling, the most adopted sampling methods in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). To represent diversity of voices and experiences within the boundaries of defined population (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), interviewees with different participation roles in Pedal 4 Kids were purposively recruited. To construct a sample that can present an active social network, the researcher asked interviewees to help introduce other event participants to

¹ See Appendix A

be interviewed. The interview did not stop until certain patterns and themes began appearing repeatedly (McCracken, 1988). The requests of research interview were sent by e-mails² at the first stage including research introduction. Depends on the response rate, the follow-up e-mails have been sent.

Ten participants in total were interviewed in this study. Coming from multiple participation statuses, they were cyclists, volunteers, donors and sponsors in Pedal 4 Kids. Some of them have taken more than one responsibilities at the event (see Table 3.1). Triangulation was adopted in the sampling to seek convergence of research direction from more than one sources (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). 16 Pedal 4 Kids event participants have responded to researcher's interview request. The final sample is comprised of 10 event participants with six females and four males joined the one-on-one interview with the researcher. Participants came from different professions, including communication professional, college student, college professor, administrative, business professional,

Name	Gender	Participation role(s) at the event
Dan	Female	Sponsor and cyclist
Jessica	Female	Volunteer
Nikki	Female	Volunteer and cycling team leader
Kathy	Female	Volunteer
Eileen	Female	Cyclist
Harry	Male	Cyclist and volunteer
Jack	Male	Cyclist
Sam	Male	Cyclist and money donor
Mike	Male	Cyclist and money donor
Anne	Female	Cyclist and fundraiser

Table 3.1 Interview Participants

² See Appendix B

programmer, personal trainer and triathlon coach. In terms of confidentiality agreement, the name of every participant has been replaced with a pseudonym.

Interview

All the interviews were conducted in the nearest café either to participants' homes or working places or other public places that are convenient to them. The researcher conducted the interviews with semistructured interview questions and probing questions that came out during the interviews. Before starting, every participant was noticed with a written consent³ following the template of IRB at the University of Miami. The interviews have been done confidentially, only if any of them would like to be acknowledged. The information and data collected will be only used for this academic project and has been destroyed as soon as the transcripts were completed.

³ See Appendix C

Chapter 4

Interpretive Findings

The final study is presented with interpretive data analysis including direct quotes from interview transcripts, contents posted by Internet-based communications and codes conducted through open coding process (Daymon & Halloway 2002, p. 123). Besides, the visual outputs have also been offered in the final result helping readers to better understand the analysis.

Content Analysis

Prior the interviews, in order to familiarize with the messages conveyed to the stakeholders, a content analysis was conducted to understand the information related to Pedal 4 Kids sent out by Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida through online communication tools. These tools include Pedal 4 Kids official website, RMHCSF official website, RMHCSF *Facebook* page, Pedal 4 Kids *Facebook* event page, e-mail and e-newsletter. The information includes every text appearing as words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; and appearing in pictures and webpage buttons. Some of them have been posted with multiple purposes, therefore every single piece of which was coded according to its primary purpose.

At this stage, the researcher was mainly seeking for what key information did Pedal 4 Kids committee intend to disclose and who were the major publics that the event aimed to target. Nvivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software was used for building up the codes and clusters while the researcher was looking for the certain categories from the data. Several categories have been coded as below (see table 4.1 and 4.2).

Category	P4K website	RMHC website	E-mail	E-Newsletter	Facebook	YouTube
Educational introduction	X	X	X	X	X	
Cyclists invitation	X	X	X	X	X	
Recognition	X	X			X	X
Donation appeal	X				X	
Response to publics	X		X		X	
Volunteer recruiting	X				X	
Join other broadcasting channels	X	X	X	X	X	
Learn how to help	X		X			

Table 4.1

Category	Examples
Educational Introduction	Introduction of Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida, general information of Pedal 4 Kids, cycling related information of Pedal 4 Kids event, register information, informing registration rate and donation updates, logos of RMHCSF and P4K.
Cyclists invitation	Registration page, general information of Pedal 4 Kids, routes maps, event setups.
Recognition	Sponsor Logos, scroll box with sponsor logos, announcement top fundraisers, announcement of team rank, an introduction of a sponsor.
Donation appeal	Donation button, donation bar, registration button, virtual biker page, sponsorship packet, sponsorship opportunities, <i>Facebook</i> posts of donation updates, <i>Facebook</i> posts of current sponsors.
Response to publics	FAQ, e-mail replies, <i>Facebook</i> replies
Volunteer recruiting	Volunteer registration button, informing volunteer opportunities, replies to current volunteers' posts on <i>Facebook</i> .
Join other broadcasting channels	Links of Pedal 4 Kids event website in e-mail signatures and e-blasts, and Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida official website, links of RMHCSF official website in e-mail signatures and e-blast, and link of RMHCSF <i>Facebook</i> page in e-mail signature and RMHCSF official website.
Learn how to help	"Spread the words" function on P4K event website, ask for sharing <i>Facebook</i> posts, FAQ.

Table 4.2

The results of the content analysis have indicated the key stakeholders that were targeted by the Pedal 4 Kids; and the core information that was sent to those them. In the 1st Annual Pedal 4 Kids, cyclists, volunteers and sponsors were the major publics, with whom the event organizers tried to manage relationships through online communications. Besides, the core information that the organizer publicized consists of eight themes: educational introduction, cyclists invitation, recognition, donation appeal, response to publics, volunteer recruiting and join other broadcasting channels. Therefore, the researcher decided to further recruit interview participants from different perspectives to find out if the event's messages have matched the interests of major publics.

Pilot Interview

During the pilot interview stage, purposeful sampling was adopted to approach potential participants. Triangulation was adopted in the pilot sampling to seek convergence of research direction from more than one sources (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). All participants of Pedal 4 Kids including organizers, cyclists, sponsors, and volunteers were regarded as potential interviewees. The requests of research interview were sent by e-mail. Four participants involved in Pedal 4 Kids responded to researcher's interview request. Their roles for the bike ride event include volunteer, cyclist, and sponsor. In the end, three of them attended the one-on-one interview; one was absent due to business travel.

Interview Analysis

Pedal 4 Kids set up two goals: first, to recruit 500 cyclists; second, to raise \$50,000 fund. However, neither of them has been successfully achieved at the end. This event was ended up with 207 cyclists participants and more than \$32,000 financial

achievement. By asking research participants' motivations of participation and donation, and their general impression of Pedal 4 Kids, the researcher aims to find out what kinds of information or messages will attract people to join a cycling fundraising event and make a donation or raise money for it.

Motivation of Participation

At the beginning of every interview, participants were asked by the researcher why they signed up for Pedal 4 Kids. While answering this question, everyone mentioned that part of the reason was because this event was for a good cause, however the primary purpose varies from person to person. Some of the participants shared their personal stories happened with Ronald McDonald House Charities, some introduced their companies' volunteer programs with RMHCSF, some recalled their past experience with all kinds of bike rides including Pedal 4 Kids. After interpretive analysis, the primary reasons of their participation turned into three categories: to support RMHCSF, to support company community engagement and to exercise.

“My family and I do anything for Ronald McDonald House”

The primary reason why Kathy volunteered for Pedal 4 Kids was to support RMHCSF and to help the kids and their families living in both Miami House and Fort Lauderdale House. Kathy is a volunteer who has been working with the Ronald McDonald House of South Florida for almost 10 years. During her years of volunteering, she has participated in numerous events and programs including her routine hosting “Adopt a Meal” on second Tuesday of every month. Beyond that, she is also serving as a committee member of "The Home for The Holidays", which is an annual Christmas

event at the charity. In Pedal 4 Kids, she together with her families was in charge of the “turn around point” in West Palm Beach. She told the researcher, “My family and I do anything for Ronald McDonald House.”

Kathy: My family was in a car accident in Orlando. It was a bad car accident and they were offered to stay at one of the Houses was there. Well my sister in law was, because she had two children that were in intensive care for a while. So after that I decided that I would like to give back for all the kindness that was shown to us. They were feeding whoever was there. So we wanted to give back. And at the time, they had just opened the Ronald McDonald House in Fort Lauderdale.

According to Kathy, she is not the only one in the volunteer team that has cuddled by the Ronald McDonald House at a dark moment of life, “I met another woman who sales jewelry and I saw her at a Red Cross event, but she does Ronald McDonald's events, too. And the reason she got involved as a volunteer was because at one time she needed the Ronald McDonald House. So I think a lot comes from that, too.”

Jessica is also a volunteer for RMHSF at the Miami House. During the organization of the Pedal 4 Kids, she was in charge of responding participations' emails regarding any questions about the event. She recalled a very touching e-mail that testifies the same reason as Kathy's involvement. That was a lady who was once helped by RMHC, therefore she is filled with gratefulness and would like to support this event and give back to the community:

Jessica: That was from a cyclist, she wrote e-mail thanks us for doing Pedal 4 Kids while replying our event reminder right before the event day. She said she had extensive surgery on her back, when she was little. They lived an hour away from the hospital and her Mom stayed at the Ronald McDonald House to be with her. She wrote though she was angry with her Mom over the surgery, she now can stand straight and ride a bike and do so many other things. She was very grateful

for the help from the House that her Mom was able to company her. So now she came to ride for kids who are receiving helps from RMHC of South Florida.

“What I prefer to do is just do charity for my company.”

However, Harry, a manager from the McDonald's, he rode at this event with a different motivation. “We are very proud of this charity. It is brand loyalty. For me, I prefer to do charity for my company.” Same as Harry, Nikki came to this event also for her company. Nikki is an administrative working at the Miami office of a global medical technology company. She summoned a team in her company with 12 volunteers and five cyclists for Pedal 4 Kids. Nikki has been in charge of the their company's community involvement program “Project Six” for a few years, she said, “We were so excited about participating with this organization, because we are medical devices, so in some ways it is very linked to what we do, because it is the medical field.” Another cyclist Eileen got involved with this event with the similar motivation:

Eileen: You know a lot of companies are shifting towards this kind of trend, you know let us give back; let us get involved. It is motivational for employees, it is a good opportunities for employees to get to know each other outside of the working environment. So I think there is lot of good that comes out of this type of stuff.

“As a cyclist, I would try to do whatever event is out there.”

Among the 10 interview participants, five of them are experienced cyclists and have participated in many different cycling events including the most influential ones such as MS 150 (now Bike MS), Team in Training, Susan G. Komen Race for The Cure, Dolphins Cycling Challenge and etc. Anne claimed that the motivation of her team was mainly for training:

Anne: Our motivation was very selfish and very typical. We were training for Ironman (Ironman Triathlon) and Ironman was a 112 miles bike ride, so we got tired of riding the same bike route everyday. So we looked at the century rides. That (Pedal 4 Kids) came up and had just fit for the schedule and we call it a catered ride. That was really the driving point behind it.

Sam and Mike who teamed up with her at Pedal 4 Kids testified Anne's statement. Mike told the researcher that since there was a very limited among cycling events in Miami, especially events support 100 miles, thus they have always tried to seize every opportunity that they could get. Sam was the coach for this team, in his standpoint; Pedal 4 Kids had a very different course compared to the ones they normally rode on, therefore it had to be a great training.

Beyond stating the reasons why they specifically participated in Pedal 4 Kids, all the cyclists who took the interview have recalled their past experience with other bike ride events. Anne told the researcher, "People do the MS Ride is because they love that. It is a fun ride." Sam also spoke highly of the MS Ride, "I know that attracts a lot of people, because that is a fun event, too. They ride down a day to the key to spend a night, have a party, and ride back. It is popular." "It makes them also feel good that it is for the charity," said Jack, "but that is not the main reason, unless the charity is especially meaningful to them. ". "It is huge, but I do not think everyone cares necessarily that it has multiple sclerosis. It just happens to be there." Mike said. In Anne's point, " I do not know what makes a good event, but it is not the charity."

According to their statements the primary reason of cyclists to participate in Pedal 4 Kids or other bike ride events does not vary a lot from individuals. Just as Mike

concluded, “They want to bike, they will try to participate in the event that has to be a fun one.”

Motivation of donation and fundraising

In this fundraising event, Ronald McDonald House Charities had originally set up its goal to raise \$50,000 through its 1st Annual Pedal 4 Kids. Therefore, they have offered 34 monetary sponsorship opportunities at seven different levels to recruit sponsors at the corporate level. Companies or organizations could apply for sponsorship directly through Pedal 4 Kids event website and receive the benefits accordingly. In addition, at the individual level, all the cyclists who had registered for the event were encouraged to create their own fundraising pages through Pedal 4 Kids website and to help send out the event information to their families and friends. However, from RMHCSF *Facebook* posts and P4K event website, it shows that only nine sponsors have participated as monetary sponsors, namely have donated money to Pedal 4 kids; and among the 207 cyclists, only 52 of them have donated or raised money during the event. Being lack of financial support from sponsor and cyclists, Pedal 4 Kids ultimately raised just more than \$32,000, thus failed to achieve its fundraising goal. “We were worried if this event could make the ends meet, but fortunately, the good news was we were not loosing money,” said Jessica.

Among the 10 research participants, four people, one volunteer and three cyclists, have either donated or raised money for Pedal 4 Kids. And each of 10 has shared stories with not only pedal 4 kids, but also with other fundraising events regarding donation and fundraising issues. Three themes have self-evolved from their narratives about under what circumstances, the participants would more inclined to donate.

“It has to be in the education: What I am raising the money for?”

Sam has made a donation when he signed up for this event, but has not raised money. As an experienced cyclist, he has participated in many cycling events. According to him, during the past five years, he and his team have raised about \$35,000 for different events. “It is just a matter of asking. I can be fundraising all year long,” but in terms of raising money for a specific event, he wants to know “What I am raising the money for, why do you need money, why does this charity need money?”

Sam: For the Ronald McDonald House, I did not know where the money was donated. I was participating, but I did not necessarily know is the money going to support the houses, I guess it is, but I am not sure, because it was really limited of information. I have a friend who only does fund raise for the Nautica, because St. Jude does very good job as a nonprofit of educating people. People realized that it is a good cause. That is an important thing what I am raising money for.

Sam’s narratives have reflected Kathy’s worries. In her opinion, one of the fundraising problems with Pedal 4 Kids was that people did not have enough knowledge of what is Ronald McDonald House Charities, especially its relationship with the McDonald’s:

Kathy: People think McDonald’s sponsor everything and pay for it. They do not realize that although their names are tied, they are not giving, they are not sponsoring anything. Everything is done to fundraising.

When Kathy’s words were explained by the researcher to some of other research participants, five of them expressed that they had no clue about this. “No, I didn’t know that. You are kidding!” Eileen responded immediately. Mike told the researcher that

“Obviously, everybody says OK, McDonald's probably are giving them a good bit of support. I am sure most people are thinking that.” So is Anne, “I am surprised. I wouldn’t think that they need a lot of money...I mean you just presume it’s because they get a lot of money. It makes it a little hard to fundraise”. However, at the end of the interview, Sam presented that it is a possibility for him to raise money for the next Pedal 4 Kids, since from the interview he has been acknowledged of enough information of the organization and the event as well:

Sam: If I have been given enough information, even though I did not raise money this time, maybe I will come back next year, maybe I will come back again, since it was their first year. Now you give me information about why this is a good reason to raise money for. I will come back and do more.

Having insights through volunteering with the charity is another more direct way of being educated, thus will lead participants to raise money. According to Kathy, compared to cyclists who had no previous experience with Ronald McDonald House Charities, volunteers have more insights with the charity. Both Kathy and Nikki had offered volunteer services in the RMHCSF prior to Pedal 4 Kids. In the interview, they have told the researcher very moving stories that they had experienced and witnessed in the Houses. Those stories consist of detailed personal understandings of the history and mission of the charity, the services offered, the kids living there and more significantly why they need donation. However, Kathy told the researcher that volunteers from other programs were not very informed of the Pedal 4 Kids event; otherwise more of them would have helped the event to recruit cyclists and collect funds. She suggested that

volunteer recourse should have been used in making more exposures for the event and searching for funds rather than just helping with event logistics:

Kathy: I think that although we got the word out, I talked to a lot of people (volunteers) who did not know anything about it. And they said that if they would have had known, they would have sponsored the event and bent in it. I think we just need to get much more exposure, more word of mouth exposure. Everybody that is on the list for “Home for The Holidays” should be emailed about every event that they are having. I think those are all our supporters already and then just tell anyone that this event is open to, and anyone who wants to ride.

However, equally to the point that potential money donors have to be well educated by the charity to make donations, there is another issue stressed by cyclists that would effect the action, especially for active cyclists. Sam told the researcher that from his years’ cycling experience, most of the active cyclists have their own strategy in terms of raising funds, “They try to use the strategy either pick one thing, like one of us he raises money strictly for autism, some people raise for cancer; or some people be a fundraiser once a year.” Harry’s narrative can more or less explain why does this have happened to cyclists. He pointed out that frequently ask people for money donation will not only make them uncomfortable, thus pay less attention to charity events, but what makes it even worse is that it will decrease the effectiveness of fundraising that less money could be collected:

Harry: I am constantly broadcasting to my friends. I have another ride. I need more money. So what is happening is people do not donate money as much as they used to, because it is so frequent. I can only send some emails to my friends and they said Harry we have already donated. I want people to come to enjoy the ride, but I do not want people to feel obligated

to give money. So some people stayed away from it, because they did not want to get involved with fundraising. And that was unfortunate, because that was more about the ride, the spirit of the event and getting exposure to the event, especially for Fort Lauderdale (Pedal 4 Kids), because that was the first annual event and we needed to get just enough people to involve to get the word out. So unfortunately, I think that was the down side of that. People are not comfortable about that.

Mike also made a donation to Pedal 4 Kids, but did not join in fundraising. He is one of cyclists that Sam talked about. He told the researcher “I just had to put the minimum (for Pedal 4 Kids), because I made the promise to people who have already donated a lot of money to previous ones.” What he personally does is to pick one event every year, “For me it is the Nautica Race for St. Jude. So that is the one that I tell people all the time, I promise this is the only time of the year I will ask people for money.”

Then what are the other essential reasons, besides getting enough education from the charity, will drive potential fundraisers to raise money for an event: Company encouragement and the attractions of the event itself.

Company encouragement

Dan got a free registration as a benefit from her In-Kind sponsorship in Pedal 4 Kids. Since she has donated goods valued at \$200, she neither donated nor raised extra money for the event. But she also shared her fundraising story at Dolphins Cycling Challenge. According to her, the supports and encouragements coming from her company made their team’s fundraising a great success:

Dan: It was interesting. In order to get people to register, the leadership, the CEO, the CIO, the VPs, they put money on side, and they donated to us. Natalia is the VP of finance for the company, and she wanted more participation from the company. So she donated \$50 to anyone who registered. She donated a hundred for me, because I wrote her a begging letter and I am good at that. Then our CEO

he got us jerseys. The jersey costs \$65 wholesale. We designed the jersey and he paid for it. He put it out of his pocket. The leadership involvement is important.

Nikki's company has also supported every cyclist riding in Pedal 4 Kids with their registration fees. Nikki introduced to the researcher, "For each activity, we have certain amount of budget, we counted that registration towards the budget. From that budget, there was money left over from the registration, we just put it as a donation."

Although Harry did not take part in Pedal 4 Kids as a fundraiser, he had organized a team for the charity ride held by the Ronald McDonald House Charities in Orlando. In that event he and his team raised more than \$1100, which he owned it to the team spirit, "All those riders opened a webpage (fundraising webpage) and everybody did fundraising. Each person had a couple of hundred dollars. That was nice. "

Attractions of event itself

Additionally, from the perspective of cyclists, echoing to one of the reasons why participate in certain cycling event, they are more prefer to raise money in events that can bring them special experiences. While recalling unforgettable events that they have rode in, cyclists always talked about the routes designing, events setups, after event parties and etc., rather than the charity related issues. Even when they were recalling Pedal 4 Kids, the most prominent a few things that they mentioned were food trucks, taking pictures with Ronald, medal that is made of bike chain, riding routes along A1A and etc.:

Dan: I will do that (Dolphin Challenges) again next year. You know why, because it was a great bike ride, it was a great experience... They had all kinds of food for everybody... They have these hot water tubs. Whatever you were wearing, sit in there. And they have whole bunch of masseuses, so they gave you a massage. Plus the food, you don't have to wait in line, there were party bars, had three bar tenders.

Anne: That (Nautica) is just a fun event. They made theirs funded by getting celebrities, not big one, but local celebrities, like basketball players, or somebody lives in a celebrity way. Last year, they had paintball played after that.

Anne, though rode 100 miles in Pedal 4 Kids and donated \$190, told the researcher that she would not participate in the next Pedal 4 Kids, “ It finished and that was all. You did not get this, ‘Oh, I have to do this again next year’. There is just nothing to make you want to do it again.”

As for those “fun events” defined by cyclists, they usually require high costs, which becomes the most realistic motivation that makes the cyclists to raise funds. Interviewees have told the researcher that the commitment of Pedal 4 Kids was much less than many of other cycling events. Mike offered the source that “MS 150, that one is big, a lot of my friends would like to do. I think that is a \$500 commitment. And then the Dolphins Challenges is another one and the commitment for that one, if you want to do 100 miles, you have to give to a thousand dollars,” said Mike. In order to get involved, cyclists have to raise certain amount of money, other wise they have to pay for that by their own. “But with this mandatory minimum donation, you really have to go out for fundraising. You do not want to pay yourself out of pocket,” said Jack.

Furthermore, both cyclists and volunteers have been interviewed about their general impression of the 1st Pedal 4 Kids. Although the overall comment seems to be positive that they regarded this event as a nice one, when it comes to the cycling related experience, three themes clustered from the interviews: route issues, SAG escort and event infrastructure.

From the interview, it is not hard to find that the core issues that motivated research participants to join Pedal 4 Kids are very different based on the roles they played in the event. For cyclists, since they are very active in cycling itself, the mightiest messages that could attract cyclists' attention would be the information about the event. Information that reflects if this event is interesting enough, so that would be able to bring them a special opportunity to exercise as well as to have a fun time. Resulted from the interview, this group of messages should consist of elements as event schedule, routes design, infrastructure, water and food supply, SAG support and safety guarantee. Besides, messages that encourage cycling teams' participation, especially those teams build up at the company level, may also make cyclists to get involved. As for volunteers, due to the existing relationship between them and the charity, all they intend to know is basic event information including the schedule of the event and volunteer tasks offered in the event.

When it refers to messages that could raise participants' enthusiasm to make donations and to raise funds, the essential of which, no matter for cyclists or volunteers, has to be the educational information offering sufficient knowledge for participants to understand the charity as well as the event. In addition to that, messages that appeal to team fundraising and that emphasize event settings would be other two impetuses for turning more cyclists into fundraisers. At the mean time, the donation appealing information should be addressed to catch volunteers' attention that they are welcomed to get more engaged in taking responsibilities of fundraising and event information broadcasting.

Reviewing the categories that researcher coded from the online information sent out by Pedal 4 Kids, it seems that most of the messages, except the information to

encourage volunteers' engagement in fundraising, which were disseminated by Pedal 4 Kids should have met the interests of research participants regarding both volunteers and cyclists. Nevertheless, why participants were claiming that they did not get sufficient information? Some of them even stated they did not receive any educational information? The interpretive analyses of the interviews about how participants were approached by the event through online communication tools would to some extent answer the question.

Online Communication

From the one-on-one interview, participants pointed out that the only tools they have used to receive information from Pedal 4 Kids were its event website and e-mail. However, except Jessica, no one else was aware of the existing Pedal 4 Kids *Facebook* event page or the RMHCSF *YouTube* channel. Even more, some of the research participants have never visited the official website of Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida. From participants narrations, through Pedal 4 Kids event website and email, the major interactions they had with Pedal 4 Kids were registering online, getting the basic event information and making online donation, they have encountered little educational information, received a small part of the event setting information, and did not they feel they were actively kept in touch by the event.

Online registration

In the 1st Annual Pedal 4 Kids Charity bike ride event; online registration was opened to both cyclists and volunteers. 193 out of the 207 cyclists and all volunteers were signed up online. All of the research participants, no matter cyclists or volunteers were registered online. While talking about the online registration, everyone has given positive comments on it.

Cyclists have introduced, to date, it is a major trend that almost every bike ride events are having their participants registered through the Internet. Mike even told the researcher, “For me, that was mandatory, without online registration, that (participation) would not happen.” Therefore, most of the cyclists are familiar with the process, “It was simple,” and “It was easy to navigate,” Harry and Anne recalled the moment when they signed up with Pedal 4 Kids. Nikki, as the team leader for her company in Pedal 4 Kids, did the registration for all her cyclists, “I could find that the online tool was very user-friendly. There's certain places, when you register someone with the same email, it rejects. But with the way of their (Pedal 4 Kids) system, when you register, it let you to put the same email for everybody.”

Different from cyclists, online registration for volunteers at Pedal 4 Kids was the first time adoption of signing up for volunteer tasks at the RMHCSF. Kathy spoke highly of it that made all the volunteers works assigned in a much more organized way:

Kathy: I think that one advantage of this is “what time do you want to work”, “what would you like to do”. These are the jobs. And I think it is better to have people pick up what they want to do. Because they will show up and there is no unknown. And you know who is coming at what time.

“Then the webpage will guide you through how to set up your webpage,” Harry added.

Online Fundraising and donation

Among the ten interview participants, none of them has actually raised money for Pedal 4 Kids. The \$190 donation from Anne was not even collected specifically for this event, but a fund left from a pervious fundraising event ride. Most of the participants had

fundraising experience with either Ronald McDonald House Charities or other events. During the interview process, people not only confirmed the advantages of the Internet-based tools over traditional ways in raising money, but also offered suggestions for future practice of it.

Convenient and Efficient are the most frequent comment given by research participants towards online fundraising tools, which have not only brought benefits to fundraisers, but to donors as well. For people who are helping charities raising money, with the help of Internet-based tools, the action has no longer been limited by geographic space. Kathy has done fundraising for RMHCSF for years, but the online fundraising came to her in the recent three years. She told the researcher that she had a personal fundraising page with another program at RMHCSF. Owing to the online fundraising, Kathy collected more money than she ever did. Because since that, she started contacting people who are not near her to branch out:

Kathy: It is a great page, because you can make the wallpaper what you want, you can write what you want, it shows your goal and then it shows how far you have achieved your goal. And on the side it has the scrolling list saying now Kathy donated \$50 dollars. You can send out personal emails. You can see their names if they decide to. And they can write a message say 'good luck'. They are able to know more about the organization.

Jessica agreed with Kathy's statement, "It is also easy for people donating money. It is just mouse clicks." Other than convenience and efficiency, in Sam's opinion, the webpage display additionally caused peer pressure to donors, thus could potentially raise more money. Sam introduced researcher his fundraising strategy coping with the webpage:

Sam: Usually, I am going to talk to people who I know would give more money first, because the scrolling thing online will sort of giving peer pressure. You will see other people have given \$50, \$100, because I might as well, so you are inclined to give more.

Though, the webpage fundraising tool is very similar to that of those popular fundraising bike ride events, Pedal 4 Kids still missed an important media: social network. “Basically, it (Nautica Ride) has the page similar to yours and can be completely customize, but it can be posted on my *Facebook*, to my Twitter,” Mike recalled. Anne spoke highly of *Facebook* when comparing it to emailing donation appeal to her friends and families:

Anne: People are not like ‘I do not want to,’ they are just like, ‘Yeah!’ And they forget. And you get embarrassed to re-email them. And they always tell you, ‘Just keep me reminded.’ But you are embarrassed, you know. Social media thing is absolutely is a better way. I have got this on Nautica: my friends keep posting online, ‘I am so close to the scene.’ It keeps showing up to the *Facebook* as a reminder.

In addition to that, Jack introduced an even more advanced fundraising tool, a third party application embedded in *Facebook*, “You do not have to email somebody and say ‘click this link to my fundraising page’. They are already on *Facebook*, they can sponsor your link on *Facebook*, you do not have to go anywhere.”

Furthermore, in terms of online fundraising, research participants have offered two other methods that can help Pedal 4 Kids not merely collecting more money, but making longtime relations with its stakeholders. Based on the interviews, uploading event pictures to the event website or social media and have them claimed by the event

participants is one of the most adopted ways that the events can continuously raise fund even after the event has accomplished. Participants said they were willing to see the event pictures afterward and share them. However, very few of the research interviewees had known that Pedal 4 Kids had uploaded the event pictures as well as an event video online, since most people could not remember if they had received any after event follow up linking them back to the website and asking them for next year's participation

It can be indicated the webpage-based registration and fundraising tools have greatly change the way people getting involved with charity and fundraising by offering more availability to larger population. But the introduction of social media in this field has effectively increase the information exposure rate towards the key stakeholders, therefore generate larger donation amount.

During the interview, several research participants have once mentioned, they have only received one or two e-mails from Pedal 4 Kids. Jack told the researcher, "I have got only on e-mail from Pedal 4 Kids. That was not enough to catch my attention or to make me remember. People are so busy, so if you want to get in touch with them, you have to do multiple channels." Mike was even not able to find the Pedal 4 Kids event webpage, because of deleting the only e-mail with the website link in it. The researcher even got an e-mail reply from a potential interview participant responding to the interview request. The email stated though he signed up for Pedal 4 Kids, but he had totally forgot about it, until the interview request came in.

By comparing three different coding clusters: social media, e-mail and website, which are the major ways that participants mentioned how they have received from both Pedal 4 Kids and other fundraising events, the researcher discovered that they have

shared some internal relations. Every cluster is connected to other two. That is, in addition to being individually adopted by the participants, those online tools have also been used in an integrated way. This conclusion is further confirmed by participants' testimonials. Social media cluster contains nodes of *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube*; e-mail cluster represents e-mail and e-newsletter.

Dan mentioned how she helped Pedal 4 Kids spread the word. On her *Facebook* she shared the pictures and stories of kids living in the Houses directly from the official website of Ronald McDonald House Charities. "I have got so many 'Like' on them," said Dan. How Harry did his fundraising last time was by sending e-mails through his fundraising page, "After you set up your webpage, then you click a link that import your address book of emails. So you import an email (contact) and you just broadcast asking him being a fundraiser." Jack also sent out e-mails to his friend for donation, but different from Harry, he did it on his *Facebook*, "On my *Facebook* fan page, everyone's e-mail address is there. I could send them e-mail to invite them to like my page. "

Further more, Eileen offered a suggestion that these three different types of online communication tools should be utilized at one time:

Eileen: However we were contacted, if an e-mail was going to us saying, 'we are having this event, checking us on *Facebook*, checking us on *Twitter*, and here is the link for our website'. Because then we share that (the e-mail) with everybody and they share the links. I did not even know there was a *Facebook* page of Pedal 4 Kids. I would have liked to it. So the initial communication that is going out to make sure you are including different media.

Sam's narrative further supports Eileen's suggestion that, "I would like to help you to spread the word on social media, or through other ways. But if you don't offer me the direct links to them, I am not going to Google them out. "

Thus, it can be concluded that the multiple adoption of online communication tools is how event participants get information. It is the failure of disseminating information in multiple channels that partially resulted the Pedal 4 Kids' information to be miss-delivered to its stakeholders.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Discussion

By analyzing the interview transcripts of 10 event participants and the online information disseminated by Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida, this study found that the 1st Annual Pedal 4 Kids Charity Bike Ride event has not successfully reached its publics through online communication tools. The interpretive analyses resulted that overall Pedal 4 Kids was, following Grunig and Hunt's model (1984), using one-way communication while adopting the Internet-based communication as a way of providing information. However, simply sending out the key information will not effectively create relationships with stakeholders motivating them to either participate or donate in a cycling fundraising event.

A content analysis was first conducted to analyze the data collected from the online information related to Pedal 4 Kids sent out by Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida through online communication tools. Results show that in this event, cyclists, volunteers and sponsors were the major publics, with whom the event tried to manage relationships through sending out information in eight themes: educational introduction, cyclists invitation, recognition, donation appeal, response to publics, volunteer recruiting and join other broadcasting channels.

These finds have matched the analysis of research participants narration regarding which information could possibly generate motivation for them to participate and donate for a cycling event. Nevertheless, further examination of the research participants in their usage of online tools communicating in fundraising events indicates that high information exposure rate and active multiple-channel dissemination can successfully deliver the core

information to the major stakeholders, therefore turning latent publics to aware publics or event active publics.

As the rapid development of online communication in both its tools and contents, the simply information dissemination is no longer enough for fundraising events to manage its communication with stakeholders. In this case study, though Pedal 4 Kids has set up multiple online communication channels and sent out information that could generate key publics' motivations, the failure of increasing the exposure rate of key messages and inefficiency in adopting multi-channel communication tools finally cause the information to be delivered unsuccessfully.

Further examining of the participants' adoption of online communication tools revealed that the core information dissemination does play the very basic role in creating relationship with major stakeholders for fundraising event. Yet, message receivers will not initiatively look for opportunities to be informed, unless the related information could be offered directly to them through certain tunnels. Those communication tunnels have to firstly be able to disclose key information and secondly be able to motivate the publics to get more engaged in the event. Therefore, the publics can later change their role from latent publics to aware publics or even active publics that help the information dissemination.

These findings parallel earlier studies. Bortree and Seltser (2009) found that though nonprofits has recognized the value of the Internet for helping improve an organizations competitiveness and image, they were not taking advantage off all the opportunities offered to cultivate the relationship with its publics. Kang and Norton (2004) discovered NPOs did not demonstrate strong out reach to various publics or

efforts to connect publics. They need to more effectively utilize the Web for public relations goals, but relying mainly on one-way communication strategies, nonprofits are not investing enough resources of the Internet (Water 2007).

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) proposed a scheme of microblogging message classification “Information-Community-Action” in *Information, Community and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media*. In this scene, This scheme can also be further adopted in the setting of how cycling fundraising event can effectively reach its key publics through multiple online communication channels. Sending information to the publics of Pedal 4 Kids is extremely significant. As a newly invented cycling fundraising event that has little influence in the community, the essential of information sending for Pedal 4Kids is to guarantee the credibility of messages and reach as many potential publics as possible. Therefore, by using multiple online communication tools, the organizer will be able to address both sophisticated and concise messages to let its publics to find out the information they are interested in. Community is the second function, according to Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), it involves dialogue and community building, which starts the true publics’ engagement. Previous studies also showed that NPOs should fully utilized the conversation generation functions on website, especially with e-mail and social network, thus, to build up a network having the publics to join the conversation and giving feedbacks.

However, in this study, participants also expressed their concerns in interacting with organization through online communication tools. Research participants stressed that they may not want to respond to the organization directly through the interactive functions of online communication tools, even though the availability of multiple

communication tunnels can indeed enhance their trust and loyalty towards the organization, for it is disseminating information in a transparent way. Most of the research participants are active social media users, but mainly for interpersonal communication purpose. Therefore, they expressed their hesitation in communicating with Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida on *Facebook* or other social media platforms due to their uncontrollable private information exposure. According to them, it would be more acceptable to be connected by Pedal 4 Kids, the event, through *Facebook*, instead of RMHCSF, the organizer. On the other hand, they are willing to broadcast event information to their *Facebook* friends and raise fund directly through *Facebook*, for its convenience and instant communication features.

Different from other fundraising programs that are mainly about soliciting, whose major publics are donors, athletic fundraising event such as charity bike ride with a broader purpose to have its organization better understood in the community, will have more opportunities to target various publics including money donors, volunteers and cyclists. Moreover, these major publics are not expected to stick in one participation role, they could later turn into fundraisers and be part of the organization spreading the word and generating more funds, namely taking action. Therefore, the guidance of two-way symmetric communication model is significant while this kind of event is adopting interactive features of Internet-based communication to manage its relationship with the public. It can not only bring more transparent information to the publics, thus motivate them to build up the long-term relationship with the organization, but also more importantly elevate their position in the communication with nonprofit organization. At this scene, the stakeholders will have the same power as the fundraising event organizer

to disseminate the information, but have two-way communication with their publics. This in turn will ultimately benefit the fundraising event to expand its relations both vertically and horizontally.

From a practical perspective, adopting multiple communication tools itself signal that Pedal 4 Kids is willing to actively build up relationships with stakeholders. However, to make signal to be more effective, Pedal 4 Kids has to first find out how different tools will be better for sending out different information to target various publics. This wise utilization of online communication tools requires nonprofit employers' to expand their knowledge, therefore relate staff training should be provided by the organization accordingly. In addition, future research should pay more attention on how social media information exposure could effect stakeholders' online communication with NPOs, therefore provide practical instructions for nonprofit sector to practice social media campaign more effectively.

The small number of interviews constitutes a key study limitation, which may skew the finding and interpretations. However, intensive onsite observation over a long period and detailed descriptions offered a rich portrait of Pedal 4 Kids event participants responds to the event key information and the way they were sent out. The results from this case study are transferable, therefore can be used in related type of fundraising events or local charity online communications management.

References

- Ables, E. G., White, M. D., & Hahn, K. (1997). Identifying user-based criteria for Web pages. *Internet Research* 7, 252-262.
- Bortree, D. S., & Seltzer, T. (2009). Dialogic strategies and outcomes: An analysis of environmental advocacy groups' Facebook profiles. *Public Relations Review* 35, 317-319.
- Civille, R. (1997). Environmental organizing on the Internet. Center for Civic Networking, Whitepaper for Desktop Alliance. <http://www.techrock.org/enviroorganizing.html>.
- Cukier, W., & Middleton C. A. (2003). Evaluating the web presence of voluntary sector organizations: An assessment of Canadian web sites. *IT & Society*, 1(3), 102-130.
- Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelskey, S., Holmquist, J., Thoronto, K., Sweetser, K.D. (2010). Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations. *Public Relations Review* 36, 90-92.
- Daymon, C. & Holloway, I. (2002). *Qualitative research methods in public relations and marketing communications*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Erock, S. L., & Leichty, G. B. (2000). Organization of corporate Web pages; Publics and functions. *Public Relations Review*, 26(3), 327-344.
- Grace, K. S., & Wendroff, A. L. (2001), *High impact philanthropy: How donors, boards, and non-profit organizations can transform communities*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Greenberg, J., & MacAulay, M. (2009). NPO 2.0? Exploring the web presence of environmental nonprofit organizations in Canada. *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, 2(1), 63-88.
- Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York, NY: Holt.
- Grunig, L. A., Grunig, J. E., & Dozier, D. M. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hall, M. R. (2002). Fundraising and public relations: A comparison of programme concepts and characteristics. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 7(4), 368-381.
- Ingenhoff, D., & Koelling, A.M. (2009). The potential of Web sites as a relationship building tool for charitable fundraising NPOs. *Public Relations Review* 35, 66-73.

- Johnson, M. (1999). Non-profit organizations and the Internet. *First Monday*, 4(2).
http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue4_2/mjohnson/.
- Kang, S., & Norton, H. E. (2004). Nonprofit organizations' use of the World Wide Web: Are they sufficiently fulfilling organizational goals? *Public Relations Review*, 30(3), 279-284.
- Kanter, B. (2009). 4 ways social media is changing the non-profit world. Accessed 15.08.09. <http://mashable.com/2009/05/22/non-profit-social-media/>.
- Kelly, K. S. (1998). *Effective fund-raising management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kelly, K. S. (2001). *Stewardship: The missing step in the public relations process*. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kenix, L. J. (2008). Nonprofit organizations' perceptions and uses of the Internet. *Television & New Media*, 9(5), 407-428.
- Lewis, P. (1996). Expressing our profession. *NSFRE Advancing Philanthropy*, Spring, 3.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1995), *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17, 337-353.
- McCracken, G. D. (1988). *The long interview*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McAllister, S. M. (2013). Toward a dialogic theory of fundraising. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 37, 262-277.
- Park, H., & Reber, B. H. (2008). Relationship building and the use of Web sites: How fortune 500 corporations use their Web sites to build relationships. *Public Relations Review* 34, 409-411.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Saxton, G. D., & Guo, G. (2011). Accountability online: Understanding the web-based accountability practices of nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 40(2), 270-295.
- Sargeant, A., & Woodliff, L. (2007). Gift giving: An interdisciplinary review. *International Journal of Nonprofit Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(4), 275-307.
- Stacks, D. W. (2011). *Primer of public relations research* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Sundstom, B. (2012). Integrating public relations and social marketing: A case study of Planned Parenthood. *Social Marketing Quarterly*. 18(2), 135-151.
- Taylor, M., Kent, M. L., & White, W. J. (2001). How activist organizations are using the Internet to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 27(3), 263-284.
- Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009) Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 35, 102-106.
- Waters, R. D. (2007). Nonprofit organizations' use of the Internet a content analysis of communication trends on the Internet sites of the philanthropy 400. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 18(1), 59-76.
- Waters, R. D. (2008). Applying relationship management theory to the fundraising Process for individual donors. *Journal of Communication Management*, 12(1), 73-87.
- Waters, R. D. (2009). *The use of social media by nonprofit organizations: An examination from the diffusion of innovations perspective*. In T. Dumova, & R. Fiordo (Eds.), *Handbook of research on social interaction technologies and collaboration software: Concepts and trends* (pp. 473-485). Hershey, PA: IGI Publishing.
- Waters, R. D. (2010). The value of relationship and communication management in fundraising: Comparing donors' and practitioners' views of stewardship. *Prism* 7(1): <http://www.prismjournal.org/homepage.html>.
- Yeon, H. M., Choi, Y., & Kiouisis, S. (2005). Interactive communication features on nonprofit organizations' webpages for the practice of excellence in public relations. *Journal of Website Promotion*, 1(4), 61-83.

Appendix A. Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with Pedal 4 Kids.

- How did you hear about this event?
- How did you get involved?
- What was your involvement in the event?

2. What do you think about their event website (www.Pedal4kids.kintera.org) while you were registering?

- What was your impression of the design and content?
- When you were browsing through the web pages, what were the priority things you first looking for?
- Did you find them right away?
- Were you able to obtain the necessary event information and learn about the Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida?
- Besides registration, have you ever used other functions of it?
- What was your favorite part of the website

3. What do you think about their online fundraising?

4. What do you think about the Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida's official website (www.rmhcsouthflorida.org)?

- What was your impression of the design and content?
- When you were browsing through the web pages, what were the priority things you first looking for?
- Did you find the necessary information in a short period?

- Did it help you learn more about Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida?
 - Have you ever tried to contact them or get further information through attached links in their website (e.g. e-mail address, *Facebook*, *YouTube* Channel, etc.)?
 - What is your favorite part on the website?
5. What is your opinion about their online donation program?
 6. Tell me how much do you know about Pedal 4 Kids and RMHC?
 7. Tell me what do you want to know about Pedal 4 Kids and RMHC?
 - Mission
 - Revenue
 8. Do you have any suggestions on how Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida or other non-profit organizations should use online communication tools to organize athletic fundraising events?
 9. Do you have any questions or comments?

Appendix B. Interview Request

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. XYZ,

My name is Yi Grace Ji, a graduate student at University of Miami majoring in Public Relations. I am doing an academic research inspired by my past internship experience at the Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida and wish can get help from you.

This research will help reveal how local chapter nonprofit organizations can better use online communication to manage their donor relations. I believe your recent experience with the Pedal 4 Kids Charity Bike Ride (<http://pedal4kids.kintera.org/>) organized by the Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida (<http://www.rmhcsouthflorida.org/>) can help with my research. The final results would benefit local nonprofit chapters like RMHCSFL, therefore offering more help to the community.

I am writing to ask if you could share your experience by participating in a short survey at your earliest convenience. It will take about 30 minutes to complete and you may do so confidentially. Upon your permission, I will send you more details about the research.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me either by e-mail:

y.ji5@umiami.edu or by telephone: (925) 395-3436. Thank you so much for your kindness. Looking forward to hearing from you soon!

Kindest regards,

Grace

Appendix C. Consent

The following information describes the research study in which you are being asked to participate. Please read the information carefully. At the end, you will be asked to sign if you agree to participate.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this case study is 1. adopt qualitative textual analysis and qualitative interviews to address the shortcomings of prior quantitative research while examining the two-way symmetrical communication model in the Internet-based context, 2. benefit the online public relations management for local NPO chapters in organizing athletic fundraising events.

PROCEDURES:

An interview will be conducted at a place convenient for you. It will take about 40 minutes. The conversation will audio recorded for transcription use.

You will be asked about your personal experience with Pedal 4 Kids Charity Bike Ride (P4K) organized by Ronald McDonald House Charities of South Florida (RMHCSF) on September 30th, 2012. The questions will be specialized on your opinions toward the official website of P4K, the official website of RMHCSF, the *Facebook* posts of RMHC on P4K event page and any other Internet-based communications you ever had with P4K committee.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS:

We do not anticipate you will experience any personal risk or discomfort from taking part in this study. During the interview you may skip any questions you do not wish to. If you feel uncomfortable being audiotaped, it can be turned off at your request. You should report any problems to the researcher.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The records will be saved in the researcher's personal computer. Only the research will have the access to them. They will be destroyed as soon as the transcriptions are accomplished.

RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. The investigator reserves

the right to remove you without your consent at such time that they feel it is in the best interest for.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Yi Grace Ji (phone: 925-395-3436, e-mail: y.ji@miami.edu) and Dr. Wanhsiu Suuny Tsai (e-mail: wanhsiu@miami.edu) will gladly answer any questions you may have concerning the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project. You may also contact If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami, at (305) 243-3195.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT:

I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study and consent to be audio taped. I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. I am entitled to a copy of this form after it has been read and signed.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date