

The role of credibility in shaping attitudes toward nonprofit websites

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- *The study examines the factors that impact the perceptions of consumers when visiting a nonprofit website. Measures of online communications effectiveness in the for-profit environment are applied to the nonprofit world.*
- *Consumer reactions to two major nonprofit websites provide insight into the relationship between website credibility and attitude toward the site.*
- *The study points to the importance of several credibility measures (particularly those related to site design) that are significantly related to attitude toward the site.*

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Introduction

Today, in light of geopolitical developments and natural disasters, public scrutiny of the nonprofit sector is intense. This scrutiny is heightened by an additional trend—the role of the Internet as a valuable communications tool for nonprofit organizations. While nonprofit organizations need to be perceived as believable entities, they also need to leverage the power of the Internet and communicate in a manner that is convenient for constituents.

However, non-legitimate uses of the Internet abound, with unscrupulous individuals fundraising in the name of dubious charities. For example, in connection with the Asian tsunami relief efforts in January 2005, highly reputable charities observed bogus letters circulating via email. These letters fraudulently mentioned them by name in order to secure donations

online. Innocent donors who contributed in this manner most likely had their confidence shaken in both the Internet and charitable institutions. The issues surrounding the need to remain credible while taking advantage of the Internet as a communications device provide the focus for this paper.

The study described here examines the factors that impact the perceptions of consumers when visiting and viewing a website sponsored by a nonprofit organization. The paper is divided into several sections. First, we provide background information and a literature review on the use of the Internet by nonprofit organizations. Next, the issue of credibility for online communications and nonprofits in particular is addressed. We then examine measures of online communications effectiveness in the for-profit environment and apply them to nonprofit organizations. Specifically, websites for the American Cancer Society and the American Red Cross are evaluated using these commercial sector performance measures. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the findings and managerial implications of the study.

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Background

Scope of the nonprofit sector

The importance of the nonprofit sector to economies worldwide is immense. This is highlighted by a 35 country study by the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project which finds that the nonprofit sector is a major economic force, representing a \$1.3 trillion industry employing 39.5 full-time equivalent workers, both paid and volunteer (Salamon *et al.*, 2003). Put another way, if the nonprofit sector were a separate economy, it would rank seventh among the countries studied and would employ 4.4% of the population (Salamon *et al.*, 2003). While the non-profit segment is dominated by traditional services (i.e., health, education and social services) its composition varies considerably among countries. Sources of revenue for nonprofits also vary widely among countries, although on average most revenue comes from the fees and charges for the services that the organization provides. Government or public sector support is the second largest revenue source, while private giving comes in third (Salamon *et al.*, 2003). Clearly, nonprofits must project a trustworthy image in order to attract revenue from these various sources.

The relationship among nonprofit organizations, the internet, and perceptions of credibility

Although in its early stages practitioners referred to the use of the Internet by nonprofit organizations as a 'new playing field' (Carter, 2000) the perception that it is new still persists today as organizations struggle to learn how to use it most effectively. For example, Wenham *et al.* (2003) note that the web offers a new way for nonprofits to cut costs, reach new audiences, raise money and involve users. However, the environmental charities examined in their study took advantage of only a few of the recommended features of best online practices. Bhagat (2004) arrives at similar conclusions. He notes that nonprofit organizations that rely primarily on traditional fundraising

methods are confronting a more challenging environment. This is most probably due to a gradual shift by the pool of prospective donors to online giving and away from the traditional offline fundraising vehicles.

Interestingly, a recent survey of website and Internet usage among nonprofit leaders (Leverus, 2004) reveals a love/hate relationship with the Internet. On the one hand, about two-thirds of these nonprofits budget for Internet activities including education of prospective donors and volunteers as well as nondues related revenue opportunities. However, about one-half of them report that they are not satisfied with their progress in the use of the Internet. In particular, many wish to see improvements in site navigation and in the structure and presentation of the home page.

While the nonprofit sector is still sorting out how to best use the Internet, it is clear that many of their constituents have already embraced this medium. For example, in the U.S., more than 70% of the population is online, and nearly 60% of these users have access at home (UCLA, 2003). Moreover, the number of hours individuals spend online continues to increase (UCLA, 2003). The use of the Internet also extends beyond the home. Data from Nielsen/Netratings for February 2005 (NMR, 2005) indicate that the number of domains visited per person at home per month is 53 while the number of domains visited per person at work per month is 97.

However, while the majority of people who go online consider the Internet an important source of information, a declining number of users consider the Internet to be reliable and accurate (UCLA, 2003). Others have noted that as many as 50%–60% of websites may have a credibility problem (Anonymous, 2002). Examples of problems that may impact credibility include vague or unspecific claims, undated content and an absence of information on the commercial influence of a website.

While the for-profit sector has its share of credibility issues, trustworthiness issues appear to be increasing in the nonprofit world. The nonprofit sector has been referred to as the 'hidden sector' because it is so large that it

merits more disclosure of operating performance (Clyde, 1994). Fenton *et al.* (1999) in their review of the issues related to trust and the voluntary sector, note that the erosion of public confidence in charities is related to the new fundraising blitz and all of the potential breaches of performance that are likely to occur in the name of fundraising. Examples of such breaches of trust can be found in the daily press, with the most recent high profile example being the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program.

The issue of trust and security continues to be central to the role of the Internet and charitable giving by individuals and corporations. In the recently issued *Trust Barometer 2005*, published by the Edelman Public Relations (Edelman Public Relations, Trust Barometer, 2005), it was determined that the Internet is the least popular source for information about organizations but it is growing and is likely to become the most used source in the future. To be effective, however, organizations will need to communicate in a manner that enhances feelings of security through website functionality and appearance.

A problem presented in the use of the Internet as a source of information relates to the relationship between trust and security and the motivation to give time or money to a charitable cause. One of the important contributions to understanding trust and the marketing exchange was by Morgan and Hunt (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Their work suggested that trust is related to the development of a marketing relationship. They specified a variety of cognitive variables that are related to trust and a secure relationship. Particularly relevant to this discussion, cognitive and attitudinally based variables such as shared values and the presence or absence of perceived uncertainty influence the nature of the relationship that can be developed. It is unreasonable to expect people or corporations to give their time or money to a charity if they have not developed a relationship with it. In terms of the Internet, this can be expected to be impacted by a nonprofit's website and the degree it eliminates uncertainty about the

nonprofit. In the discussion later in this paper on the variables selected to evaluate a website, the ability of a website to communicate effectively will be addressed.

Traditional and new methods for evaluating communications

The commercial sector has a long history in the development of measures to assess the effectiveness of communications in offline areas of communications. However, marketing professionals do not have the same kind of long-term experience concerning online communications with consumers. Historically, market researchers engaged in measuring the effectiveness of offline communications have focused on the measure of Attitude toward the Ad (Aad) as an indicator of advertising effectiveness that can also transfer to the brand and influence consumer choice behavior (Shimp, 1981; MacKenzie *et al.*, 1986; Baker and Lutz, 1988; Brown and Stayman, 1992). Attitude towards the ad continues to be a well-investigated area of research in the offline world with recent studies examining the impact of variables such as corporate and endorser credibility (Lafferty *et al.*, 2002), prior product category attitude (Arias-Bolzmann *et al.*, 2000), and dimensions of creativity (Hoon and Low, 2000) on attitude toward the ad.

Similar research initiatives are not as prevalent for online communications but are emerging. Measures for the online environment focus on assessing attitude toward the organization's web presence and the credibility of its web presence. Additionally, these measures of communications performance in the commercial sector provide the potential to impact the broader community of nonprofit online marketing organizations.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of a website, Chen and Wells (Chen and Wells, 1999) expanded the concept of Aad to Attitude toward the Site (Ast)—a measure of an online user's predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to a website. A follow-up study confirmed the reliability of the six-item scale across different web sites, respondents, and

methods of administration (Chen *et al.*, 2002). This measure is finding increasing acceptance because of the broad nature of its approach to the total effect of a website and its close alignment to more traditional measures of offline communications performance (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2002, 2003).

Website design and credibility

In the past, librarians and information professionals established criteria for evaluating the legitimacy of print materials. Building on this base, they have applied existing methods for critical evaluation of conventional print publications to the online environment while also incorporating new criteria, particularly related to the design aspects of Web pages. Navigation and graphics, for example, are now important considerations in evaluating electronic publications (McMurdo, 1998).

Unlike general advertising, communications via the Internet increasingly require a direct response from the consumer. Individuals, who visit websites are often asked to register personal information, download software or reports, and complete surveys in order to access the information they need. Additionally, most large nonprofit organizations also allow donors to make financial contributions over the Internet. Understandably, consumers are reluctant to provide personal information (or potentially expose their pc's to a virus) if the website looks disreputable. Legitimate sites try to alleviate consumers' fears by using symbols on their sites such as a seals available from the Better Business Bureau, TRUSTe and other trust auditing organizations. Other design elements can also increase trust and credibility and enhance the consumer's perception of the website (Fogg *et al.*, 2002).

Recognizing the importance of website credibility, Fogg *et al.* (2002) developed items to measure online users' perceptions of the credibility of a website. They measured 55 items under four broad categories that could affect web credibility: expertise factors, trustworthiness factors, sponsorship factors, and other factors. Based on this research, they

made specific design recommendations that could be used to enhance a web site's credibility. A related study by Yang *et al.* (2003) had consumers rank 18 factors based on their perceptions of how the factors contributed to the effectiveness of a website. Security and privacy were the most valued attributes. These results further contribute to the view that credibility is a key element for online marketers.

Method

The following sections describe the rationale for selection of the websites, the sample, data collection procedures, and measures.

Selection of websites

Websites of nonprofits were selected to represent charitable organizations that have a large presence as measured by information reflected in public filings. Specifically, tax information from fiscal year 2003, collected by the *Non-profit Times* and reported in the *Christian Science Monitor*, was examined. An examination of the 50 largest charities revealed that humanitarian and disease prevention/research nonprofits comprised more than half of the institutions on this list. In the interest of removing any bias due to the religious preference of respondents, no institutions connected with a religion were considered for the study. The largest humanitarian nonprofit on the list without a religious affiliation was the American Red Cross. The largest disease prevention/research nonprofit on the list without a religious affiliation was the American Cancer Society. These two institutions were selected for evaluation because they are large, represent the major categories of nonprofit organizations and they do not have a religious affiliation.

Sample

Respondents consisted of a convenience sample of 262 adults located in a major metropolitan area of the Northeast United States. We choose to focus on first time visitors to

minimize the impact of previous attitudes about the websites. The vast majority of respondents ($n = 238$) had never visited either one or both of these websites in the past — 79% had no previous exposure to the American Red Cross site while 85% were new visitors to the American Cancer Society site. All respondents were between 25 and 64 years of age with about half (56%) in the 25–29 age category. Fifty-one per cent of these first time visitors were female, 65% had completed college or had some advanced education, and 68% were employed full-time. The sample was fairly experienced in their Internet usage with 80% stating they had been online for four or more years. Internet usage was frequent, with 57% indicating they used the Internet several times a day and 18% using the Internet about once a day.

Data collection procedure

Recruiters were upper-level marketing students who were trained in research administration and briefed extensively on matters of recruitment and interviewing techniques. This form of data collection is consistent with other research investigating trust related issues (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) and in investigating approaches for charities and other nonprofits (Bednall *et al.*, 2001). They were instructed to screen for people who were at least 25 years of age and who had some experience using the Internet.

Respondents first completed a self-administered questionnaire which required them to provide information related to their demographic characteristics and their usage of the Internet. Information concerning the respondent's name and telephone number was also collected at this time. Interviewers and respondents were informed that this information would be used to call back respondents to verify that the interview had been conducted and to obtain responses to selected questions in order to verify the accuracy of the original responses (for validation purposes).

After the first part of the questionnaire was completed, respondents were asked to sit in front of a computer and shown one of the

two websites (American Cancer Society or American Red Cross) that were to be evaluated. The respondents were interviewed in person in either their home or work location. They were asked to spend 4–5 minutes surfing the website and to become acquainted with the information on the website and any pages that interested them. They began the task by first viewing the home page of the website, but were encouraged to navigate throughout the website to any other page or pages that they found of interest. They were not restricted as to how much time to spend on any one page but could decide for themselves how much time to spend.

After navigating the website, respondents were given a second self-administered questionnaire consisting of questions to measure their attitude towards the website. Respondents were then exposed to the second website. The order of presentation of each website was rotated across respondents, thus eliminating bias related to order of presentation. After the two websites were viewed and evaluated, respondents were thanked for their time and excused. Due to the complexity and time required for the task, respondents were asked to evaluate only two nonprofit sites.

Measures

Attitude toward the site (Ast)

To assess respondents' attitudes toward the websites of the two nonprofit organizations we used Chen and Wells (1999) Ast scale. As previously noted, Chen *et al.* (2002) tested this measure across different websites, respondents and methods of administration and found that the measure remained reliable, robust, and unidimensional. Other research initiatives have been launched based on the face validity and the reliability of the Chen and Wells scale (e.g., Chakraborty *et al.*, 2002, 2003). The items which comprise the Ast measure appear in **Table 1**.

Website credibility

The 55 items developed by Fogg *et al.* (2002) formed the basis of the measurement of

Table 1. Attitude toward the site (Ast)

Item	Loadings
The website makes it easy for me to build a relationship with the company	0.64
I would like to visit this website again in the future	0.77
I am satisfied with the service provided by the website	0.79
I feel comfortable in surfing this website	0.79
I feel surfing this website is a good way for me to spend my time	0.70
Compared with other websites, I would rate this one as	0.76

Note: First five items measured on 5-point Likert-type scales anchored by 1 = 'definitely disagree' and 5 = 'definitely agree.' Last item measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = 'one of the worst' and 5 = 'one of the best.'

Source: Chen and Wells (1999).

credibility. Most of the 55 items can be objectively measured. For example, 'does the website list an address on its home page' is an example of such an objectively measured item. However, our intent was to examine the range of perceptions that consumers might have about a website. To that end, items from the Fogg *et al.* (2002) inventory were chosen that were open to subjective interpretation by respondents; for example, 'the site is by an organization that is well respected.' The authors independently examined all 55 Fogg *et al.* (2002) items and determined that 13 of these were perceptually based items. In other words, respondents could differ on how they evaluated the website on these items.

Additionally, our literature review regarding websites indicated that design issues were also integral to consumers' evaluations of the websites. Therefore, we included four additional web design items adapted from McMurdo (1998) that are likely to be related to Ast. The 17 items used to measure website credibility appear in **Table 2**.

Findings

An exploratory data analysis was conducted to determine if there were any important demographic differences within the data set. Key subgroups that were examined via *t*-tests were age and gender. There were no significant

Table 2. Website credibility

1. The site lists well-known donors or people who buy from them.
2. The site is advertised on the radio, billboards, television, magazines, newspapers or other media.
3. The site has ads that match the topic you are reading about.
4. The site makes it hard to distinguish ads from content.
5. The site is by an organization that is well respected.
6. The site looks professionally designed.
7. The site is arranged in a way that makes sense to you.
8. The site's design is appropriate to its subject matter.
9. The site contains content that differs from your opinions.
10. The site takes a long time to download.
11. The site represents a company that is having financial or legal difficulties.
12. The site links to a site you think is not credible.
13. The site is difficult to navigate.
14. The purpose of the site is clear.
15. The site is user friendly.
16. The site is easy to browse for information.
17. The site requires that I provide information about myself.

Note: Items 1-13 adapted from Fogg *et al.* (2002) items 14-17 adapted from McMurdo (1998). All items measured on 5-point Likert-type scales anchored by 1 = 'definitely disagree' and 5 = 'definitely agree.'

differences by age or gender in terms of Ast related variables.

Chen and Wells (1999) had previously demonstrated the unidimensionality of the Ast scale. To confirm this, we used SPSS principal component analysis to factor analyze the items (see **Table 1** for the factor loadings). As expected, all six items loaded on one factor. We calculated coefficient alpha as 0.83 (Chen and Well's study produced $\alpha = 0.92$).

Our first objective was to look for differences between the two websites. *t*-tests were used to compare the mean scores of the 17 credibility

variables and Ast for the two websites—the American Cancer Society and the American Red Cross (see **Table 3**). Both organizations were viewed equally high in terms of the respect that the respondents have for them as represented by 'the site is by an organization that is well respected.' Overall, both sites received favorable ratings on the credibility items. However, respondents gave significantly higher scores to the American Red Cross site on several of the credibility variables. In particular, respondents agreed more strongly that the American Red Cross site

Table 3. Mean differences for websites. American cancer society (ACS) versus American red cross (ARC)

Variables	Group	Mean	<i>t</i> -value
Attitude toward the site (Ast)	ACS	3.14	−0.589*
	ARC	3.33	
The site lists well-known donors or people who buy from them	ACS	2.75	−0.519***
	ARC	3.34	
The site is advertised on the radio, billboards, television, magazines, newspapers or other media	ACS	2.47	−4.599***
	ARC	3.05	
The site has ads that match the topic you are reading about	ACS	3.04	−3.021**
	ARC	3.42	
The site makes it hard to distinguish ads from content	ACS	2.12	−0.703
	ARC	2.19	
The site is by an organization that is well respected	ACS	4.41	−1.310
	ARC	4.51	
The site looks professionally designed	ACS	4.08	−3.53***
	ARC	4.37	
The site is arranged in a way that makes sense to you	ACS	3.82	−4.513***
	ARC	4.23	
The site's design is appropriate to its subject matter	ACS	4.10	−2.093*
	ARC	4.28	
The site contains content that differs from your opinions	ACS	2.30	0.138
	ARC	2.29	
The site takes a long time to download	ACS	1.80	0.358
	ARC	1.77	
The site represents a company that is having financial or legal difficulties	ACS	1.85	−1.663
	ARC	2.02	
The site links to a site you think is not credible	ACS	1.69	−0.862
	ARC	1.77	
The site is difficult to navigate	ACS	2.08	1.35
	ARC	1.94	
The purpose of the site is clear	ACS	4.24	0.363
	ARC	4.20	
The site is user friendly	ACS	3.88	−3.349**
	ARC	4.17	
The site is easy to browse for information	ACS	3.79	−3.714***
	ARC	4.13	
The site requires that I provide information about myself	ACS	2.21	1.964
	ARC	2.00	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Mean scores on 5-point Likert scale with 1 = 'definitely disagree' and 5 = 'definitely agree'.

'listed well-known donors,' 'advertised in the media,' and 'had advertisements that matched the site.' The American Red Cross was also rated more favorably for the credibility items related to the design of the website—'looks professionally designed,' 'arranged in a way that makes sense,' 'design appropriate to the subject matter,' 'user friendly,' and 'easy to browse.'

Table 3 also includes the mean scores for the unidimensional Ast measure (calculated as the average of the six items). For each organization, Ast was only slightly above the midpoint of the scale, with the American Red Cross having a small, but significant, edge over the American Cancer Society (3.33 vs. 3.14, $t = -2.5$, $p = 0.01$).

Our second objective was to examine the relationship between the credibility variables and Ast. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between the credibility variables and Ast. **Table 4** displays the correlation coefficients for both websites. For the American Cancer Society, 14 of the 17 credibility items were

significantly related to Ast while for the American Red Cross, 13 credibility items were significantly related. Overall, while the correlations were primarily at moderate levels, the strongest relationships occurred between Ast and credibility items related to site design and ease of use—'looks professionally designed,' 'arranged in a way that makes sense to you,' 'difficult to navigate,' 'user friendly,' and 'easy to browse for information.' The direction of these correlations were as one might expect, with negatively phrased variables such as 'the site is difficult to navigate' negatively correlated with Ast and positively phrased variables positively correlated with Ast.

Implications for research and practice

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that contribute to perceptions of online communications by nonprofit organizations. We examined measures of online communications effectiveness in the form of measures of credibility and Ast. Of primary concern is an

Table 4. Correlations of credibility variables with attitude towards the site (Ast). American cancer society (ACS) and American red cross (ARC)

	Ast ACS	Ast ARC
The site lists well-known donors or people who buy from them	0.012	0.046
The site is advertised on the radio, billboards, television, magazines, newspapers or other media	0.104	0.102
The site has ads that match the topic you are reading about	0.177**	0.178*
The site makes it hard to distinguish ads from content	-0.254**	0.252**
The site is by an organization that is well respected	0.282**	0.263**
The site looks professionally designed	0.419**	0.391**
The site is arranged in a way that makes sense to you	0.541**	0.385**
The site's design is appropriate to its subject matter	0.361**	0.343**
The site contains content that differs from your opinions	-0.166*	-0.274**
The site takes a long time to download	-0.139*	-0.183**
The site represents a company that is having financial or legal difficulties	-0.142*	-0.114
The site links to a site you think is not credible	-0.217**	-0.230**
The site is difficult to navigate	-0.414**	-0.278**
The purpose of the site is clear	0.325**	0.314**
The site is user friendly	0.487**	0.437**
The site is easy to browse for information	0.491**	0.453**
The site requires that I provide information about myself	0.025	-0.009

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

interest in understanding which elements of credibility impact Ast. Specifically, websites for the American Cancer Society and the American Red Cross were evaluated using these commercial sector performance measures to contribute to our understanding of credibility and Ast.

The two organizations were evaluated as equal in levels of respect that the respondents have for them. They were not perceived as equal, however, in terms of Ast ratings. The ratings for Ast for the American Red Cross were higher overall compared to respondent Ast ratings of the American Cancer Society. Additionally, the American Red Cross ratings were significantly higher than the American Cancer Society on 8 of the 17 credibility measures used in this study.

The differences for most of these 8 measures hold practical managerial meaning. In almost every instance, the differences in credibility ratings related to design considerations. Importantly, design considerations, such as 'the site is arranged in a way that makes sense to you' or 'the site is easy to browse for information' are areas that can be addressed in the developmental stages of website design. Best practices in the commercial sector already exist that can enhance performance for on these measures. For example, many firms conduct usability studies or operate usability labs that examine the areas in need of improvement during the development of a site. Respondents that represent the relevant target audience are recruited to these labs and exposed to the pages being considered for inclusion within the site under development. Based on respondent feedback, the pages under development are altered to improve the potential reaction by visitors to the site.

Upon launch, for-profit firms also will often test multiple versions of a site during an early trial period to assess which version holds the attention of visitors to the site. In terms of a nonprofit context, important measures related to numbers of volunteers as well as, size and frequency of donations and pledges can be generated to assess which version is optimal. Ultimately, even after the selection of the optimal design, testing and experimentation

can continue in order to refine the design of the website. The major point here is that if design related elements are major contributors to the credibility of website presence and eventual Ast by visitors, then nonprofit managers already have methods and tools available to improve communications over the web with important constituencies.

In addition to measures that are primarily design related, content was also found to be a differentiator. Having 'ads that match the topic you are reading about' was a measure that separated the two sites in terms of overall credibility. The implication is that managers need to be even more sensitive about what interests people who visit their nonprofit website. Making sure that sufficient market research is conducted to find out what is on the minds of donors or volunteers or other important target audiences would be of value.

Of great interest is the set of results concerning which of the credibility ratings impacted Ast for the two websites (Table 4). With a few exceptions, the size of most of the correlations between the credibility ratings and the Ast were similar for both sites, indicating that an approach using credibility ratings (with the strong emphasis on design elements) can be a reasonable path to improved Ast. Most of the correlations were of moderate strength. Although the American Cancer Society did not rate as well on the credibility measures, the correlations for its set of credibility measures with its Ast measure were generally stronger. This suggests that credibility of its website may hold the potential for an even greater impact on Ast.

Measures such as 'the site is arranged in a way that makes sense to you' and 'the site is difficult to navigate' were both at high to moderate levels. Interestingly, the correlations with Ast were much stronger for the American Cancer site compared to the correlations generated by respondent perceptions of the American Red Cross site. One possible explanation is that people coming to a site such as the American Cancer Society often have an immediate need for specific medical

information and are apt to be frustrated by less than optimal site design and organization.

Another unexpected result was that while the most highly rated credibility item for both sites was 'the site is by an organization that is well respected' this credibility item had only a moderate correlation with Ast. This suggests that there may be two components involved in a consumer's evaluation of an organization — an attitude toward the organization (formed offline) and an attitude toward the organization's website (formed online). While we did not ask participants about their prior attitudes toward the two nonprofits in the study, it is likely that the majority had heard of these well-known organizations and had a positive opinion about them. However, the correlations suggest that website design may have a greater impact on consumers' Ast than their 'offline' perception of the organization. These results underscore the need for nonprofit organizations to pay attention to their websites, since there is the potential that an unfavorable Ast could have a larger impact on the consumer's overall evaluation of the organization.

The results of this research are immediately relevant to charities that engage in humanitarian or disease prevention/research related missions. It remains to be determined through future research if other nonprofit organizations can expect results similar to what was found in this present research. Our study points to the need for further research to explore these and the other issues noted above.

Biographical notes

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