

# SOCIAL MEDIA – MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

Helen Magee and Mary Mitchell



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### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all those who agreed to be interviewed for this report.

Design by birdy

Helen Magee is a writer and broadcaster and author of two previous IBT reports, *The Aid Industry – what journalists really think* and *The East African famine – did the media get it right?*

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### About IBT

IBT (The International Broadcasting Trust) is an educational charity working to promote high quality broadcast and online coverage of the wider world. Our aim is to further awareness and understanding of the lives of the majority of the world's people – and the issues which affect them.

IBT regularly publishes research and organises events to encourage a greater understanding of the role the media plays in engaging people in the UK with the wider world. We are a membership based organization. We organize briefings for our members so that they can work more closely with broadcasters and producers. For a current membership list see the members' page of our website [www.ibt.org.uk](http://www.ibt.org.uk)

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# FOREWORD

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Social media is becoming increasingly important as a way of engaging the UK public with global issues. But it is also an increasingly challenging space in which to operate. In this briefing, we explore the changing social media landscape, look at what works and what doesn't, and make a number of recommendations for how NGOs can be more effective.

It's clear that social media offers huge potential for public engagement but many NGOs are failing to realise that potential. Social media challenges the traditional ways in which NGOs communicate with the public, their supporters and beneficiaries. To be more effective, NGOs will need to find ways of promoting an organisational culture that gives social media a central role in overall strategy and move away from a predominantly broadcast model to one which places far greater emphasis on dialogue.

## **Mark Galloway**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- Online communication is widely used by NGOs, but the full potential of social media is not always realised.
- The most effective use of online communications requires an organisational culture that values social media as central to its overall strategy. However, there is frequently a lack of integration of digital technologies within NGOs.
- The social media landscape is fast-moving and changeable and demands creative management. There is a danger that NGOs think too much about the platform and not enough about the message and the audience.
- NGOs need to move away from a predominantly broadcast model to a more dialogical model that encourages two-way communication.
- Measurement is essential to build an evidence base for future decision-making and the increasing availability of analytical tools facilitates this. But NGOs should be wary of simply aiming to gain followers or likes. “Going viral” raises awareness, but does not necessarily lead to sustained commitment.
- Listening has been undervalued and is vitally important in order to understand supporters and monitor public debate about development issues.
- There are NGOs who are leading the field and embracing the full potential of social media. This is reflected in a series of high profile campaigns that tap into cultural trends, work across online and traditional media, and provide a platform for seldom-heard voices.
- The future will present further possibilities for building greater engagement via social media as access to the internet and mobile technology continues to grow in both beneficiary and supporter countries.

# INTERVIEWEES

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**Tom Allen**, Acting Head of Campaigns, ActionAid International

**Karina Brisby**, Director of Blog Action Day and EU Director, CoreLab.

**Nigel Campbell**, Associate Director, Communications and Marketing, Rethink Mental Illness

**Richard Darlington**, Head of Online, WWF

**Sho Konno**, PR Manager, Restless Development

**Cathy Mahoney**, Head of Public Education, Comic Relief.

**Liz Scarff**, Director, Fieldcraft Studios

**Ben Niblett**, Head of Campaigns, Tearfund.

**Nic Seton**, Community Strategist, Greenpeace

**Will Tucker**, Campaigns and Policy Manager, VSO

**Peter Yates**, Digital Communications Manager, Tearfund

# FINDINGS

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## INTRODUCTION

The term 'Facebook Revolution' has been applied to contexts around the world where citizen journalists and activists have used social media to achieve change in their societies, most notably in Iran, Egypt and Tunisia. As a result, no one would now question the important role that social media can play in galvanizing communities and contributing to social action.

But to what extent are NGOs using social media to achieve their goals and create communities of interest around their work? What best practice case studies exist for fundraising and building engagement through social media? Criticism of aid and development has grown in recent years and new ways of communicating value and impact must be forged. What role can social media play in this?

The intention of this briefing is to provide a guide with overarching themes and questions relating to how social media is used and can be used within the development sector rather than tips about specific tools and platforms. (Many of these already exist and links to a selection of them can be found in the Appendix). As the world continues to move online, and beneficiary communities themselves begin to engage with social media, the issues this report raises have never been more relevant.

The briefing is based on:

- a. Eleven interviews with NGOs and social media consultants conducted from 24 October to 20 November 2014.
- b. A review of recent case studies.
- c. Online articles looking at current debates in the field of nonprofit social media marketing.

### The power of social media

Perhaps the biggest factor behind the success of post-dotcom companies has been the realisation that online users are not like TV audiences. This awareness, or at least the way it has been rationalised, can be summed up by the phrase, 'Web 2.0'<sup>1</sup>

Ethan Zuckerman argues that Web 1.0 was invented to allow physicists to share research papers and Web 2.0 was invented so we could share cute pictures of our cats.<sup>2</sup> Yet it's this mundane use of social media platforms that makes it so powerful for activism. This cuts to the heart of the question faced by charity communications teams using social media – how to harness the powerful participatory, user-centred and dynamic potential of Web 2.0 to move beyond the cat sharing towards galvanizing supporters for a cause.

There is no single definition of social media, yet it can be understood broadly as an expression of the principles of openness, conversation, community and connectedness.<sup>3</sup> Social media includes social networking platforms, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums, content communities and microblogging, and contains these key features:

- Encompasses a wide variety of content formats.
- Allows interactions to cross one or more platforms.
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or simply listen on social media networks.
- Facilitates enhanced speed and breadth of information dissemination.
- Provides for one to one, one to many and many to many communications.
- Enables communication to take place in real time or asynchronously over time.
- Is device indifferent. It can take place via a computer (including laptops and netbooks), tablets (including iPads, iTouch and others) and mobile phones (particularly smartphones).
- Extends engagement by creating real-time online events, extending online interactions offline, or augmenting live events online.<sup>4</sup>

## THE MAIN CHALLENGES

NGOs face some significant challenges in realizing the potential of social media:

### Integrating digital within NGO organisational structures

While social media originally developed as simply another tool for communicators, it has established itself in many charities as an integral feature of organisational life, used by CEOs to interns. Initiatives such as The Top 30 CEOs on Twitter are helping to create a culture where social media is recognized and valued rather than being seen as an add-on.<sup>5</sup> Comparing this year's top 30 to last year's, Zoe Amar, founder of Zoe Amar Communications, notes *a significant shift in charities' relationship with digital*. Whereas chief executives had previously used social media to promote their charities and to network, the 2014 winners demonstrated a deeper engagement with social media, tackling sensitive issues head on, giving beneficiaries a voice and encouraging other members of staff to use social media.

But levels of integration vary across the NGO sector. *The State of Digital*

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# ‘Sharing is part of the digital culture – very different from traditional media where everyone tends to keep everything close to their chests’

Karina Brisby, Blog Action Day

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*in the not-for-profit sector survey was conducted in May 2014.<sup>6</sup> The majority of respondents (80%) came from the UK and included a range of large, medium and small international development, animal welfare, environmental and health organisations with an equal focus on fundraising and campaigning. It found that:*

- Digital is seen primarily as a delivery function with limited strategic input and, when resources are tight, is seen as less of a priority over other functions in an organisation.
- In the majority of cases digital is not sitting at the decision-making table, with input still being sought on the operational level only and even then, inconsistently.
- There seems to be no uniform understanding within organisations of the contribution digital makes towards overall strategy. The number of organisations using more complex Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (e.g. income, new supporters and other conversions) is low.
- Charities struggle to manage and understand online supporter data.

In an interview for this briefing, Karina Brisby, Director of Blog Action Day and EU Director, Corelab comments:

*Some NGOs use social media incredibly well, others not. Social media has to be fully integrated into overall strategy. This can depend on how good the inter-departmental communication is.... everyone needs to be on the same page, sharing and learning. Sharing is part of the digital culture – very different from traditional media where everyone tends to keep everything close to their chests.*

Liz Scarff, Director of Fieldcraft Studios agrees:

*In lots of organisations departments are siloed. So if you're putting something together that requires co-operation across different departments, it's difficult. It's the organisational structures that are the legacy of operating in a particular way and things have changed so rapidly. Many are restructuring but many others are not. They can provide the good content, but the structure doesn't help.*

A report by the Canadian digital consultancy, Communicopia (2014), identifies four different models for structuring digital provision within an organisation.<sup>7</sup> They are:

- Informal: digital work is done by non-designated staff as and when it is required. The downsides are inefficiency and inconsistency.

- Centralised: digital has its own department, catering for the needs of everyone else within the organisation. The downside of this model is that disconnection between departments could result in unrealistic asks and bottlenecks due to demand.
- Independent: digital experts are sprinkled throughout the departments, so each division has one or two dedicated digital gurus.
- Hybrid: there is a central digital department, which trains, directs, supports and manages smaller teams which are stationed throughout divisions.

Neil Gunn, Head of Online at WWF-UK, helped to develop their digital strategy. He ensured it wasn't a stand-alone activity, in order to gain buy-in from key stakeholders. In phase 2, it became part of a wider marketing and communications strategy. The social media element of the strategy now sits with the Public Engagement team and is less of a technical exercise and more integrated with fundraising, communication and building engagement. He believes success in social media is about the approach the whole organisation takes, *from what the CEO thinks, what the board thinks through to each new employee that works for WWF. It's not just a bit more web and a couple of extra social channels stuck on.*

Social media is a major part of how Save the Children reach their supporters. Mark Weber, Head of Digital Engagement at the charity, writes that for this to be effective, *digital activities must extend far beyond the experts within marketing. Across every department, including fundraising and campaigns, we are about building capability. This means that in every section of Save the Children, we are looking at developing expertise around use of social networks, email, and the potential of digital generally.<sup>8</sup>*

Extending participation in social media to all departments and staff is one way in which some NGOs ensure that it becomes fully integrated into the organisational culture. Several interviewees emphasised the importance of trusting and empowering staff to use social media to act as advocates for the charity.

Peter Yates, Digital Communications Manager at Tearfund explains that they increasingly encourage people to use their own Twitter accounts: *Generally staff are fairly social media savvy and they can reinforce the main message on their own accounts and in their own departmental groups. There is policy documentation to adhere to, with a guidance document summarised by a quick and simple message – “don't be stupid”. When there's a situation where online chatter could compromise security of staff in high-risk countries, the media team provides the key messages and sends*

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*round examples of good and bad tweets to the people who are active on social media. It's empowering and requires trust.*

Richard Darlington, Head of News at IPPR, believes that giving staff the freedom to tweet about their work is *like live tweeting a literature review – it gets you into conversations with your peer groups. We see social media as part of the job, not just for dissemination or for the communications team.* However, Liz Scarff warns that *encouraging staff to share across social media platforms is problematic. You want them to become advocates, but how do you then ensure they are on message and how do you police it? Do you simply trust them or do you have draconian sign-off procedures?*

NGOs have to weigh up the risks and benefits of using social media in this way. Bureaucratic sign-off processes run counter to the very essence of platforms like Twitter and make it difficult to realise the full potential of online communication. Questions like this have to be addressed if NGOs are to avoid falling foul of charity law and the new Lobbying Act. Many charities have social media policies and offer training to highlight the pitfalls of careless comments. Staff can be advised to add some form of disclaimer if tweeting from their personal Twitter accounts, for example “these views are my own” and that a “re-tweet does not equal endorsement”. Some charities have begun to draw up additional internal guidelines to address specific concerns in the run-up to the general election.

### **From platform first to content first**

UK Social Media Statistics and Trends 2014 illustrate how quickly the social media landscape is changing. They reveal that *Facebook's growth period has clearly come to an end* and it is no longer seen as cool by younger people who are now turning to *enhanced messaging apps such as Snapchat and WhatsApp designed and initially released purely for use on smartphones.* Whilst Twitter growth *remains steady but not especially fast... the biggest growers are Pinterest and Instagram.*<sup>9</sup>

Managing a way through this landscape is essential. But it is the principles and lessons behind how platforms are used that are important rather than which platform is used. Interviewees talked of being “platform agnostic”, the choice of platform coming after decisions about message and audience.

Karina Brisby's advice is: *know what you want to achieve, know your audience, then choose your platform. Often it's the other way round – “I've got a good idea for a video.”*

Tom Allen, global campaigner with ActionAid agrees:

*You have to decide what you are trying to achieve, what are your objectives. Then who's the audience – are they somewhere with fast broadband connections or on dial up connections in Sierra Leone or in rural Myanmar with a long walk to an internet connection? ...The thing I've learnt is don't think about the platform – that limits you... The results will follow as long as you ease the passage or break down the barriers between the different platforms. There's a temptation to use the latest technology, but unless the people you want to reach are using that, they won't see it. There are easier and older ways to speak to lots of people already.*

Mark Weber from Save the Children believes that there is still a great deal of potential for innovation on established platforms. In an interview for marketing magazine, The Drum, he explained that *video is a huge area for us, and a very effective way of helping people understand what we do... In order to make sure the videos are seen, we seed them on YouTube, and promote them to our Twitter and Facebook followers. We've also segmented videos around interests, so that people can easily find the type of content they like.*<sup>10</sup> Save's recent ‘If London was Syria’ YouTube campaign, received more than 30 million views.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, these digital experts want to move beyond the categorisation of content into different media. Allen thinks there has been a hang-up about the difference between online and traditional media and talks about *bridging the online and the offline.* Weber agrees. *People shouldn't really be consciously thinking ‘one thing is digital, and one thing is not digital’... Every single thing that we're doing is going to be a mixture of using communication channels... Fundamentally, whether it's print, or online, or whatever, all of these are part of the ways in which we interact with our supporters.*

### **Knowing your audience**

Charities are relationship-driven and social media offers a new way of engaging with existing supporters, developing new ones and communicating with journalists and researchers. Liz Scarff argues that *audiences are much more fragmented now and people have very specific entry points to a campaign so you have to work across the board and tell the same story in lots of different ways... Fieldcraft have thought a lot about how audiences break down and for us it's easy to tap into different networks.* Some NGOs address this problem by using different Twitter accounts for different audiences. Save the Children have separate Twitter accounts focusing on jobs, news stories and supporters, and ActionAid have a similar strategy, as explained by Tom Allen:

*Journalists look to be treated differently from supporters on Twitter. They are interested in press releases and reports. So we have a*

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# 'You have to experiment and take risks. If someone doesn't agree with an idea, we take a segment of the audience and test it out'

Nic Seton, Greenpeace

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*dedicated Twitter News Account geared to journalists. One of our communications officers is working out how to connect with them best on Twitter and has a list of significant contacts. A press release is too dull for supporters – we'd write a blog for them.*

A recent Twitter event for NGOs revealed that 1 in 2 people on Twitter follows a charity and 79% are interested in information from the charity. They particularly appreciate links (79%); interviews with experts (44%) and fundraising appeals (32%).<sup>12</sup> Ideally therefore charities should provide a mixed diet covering all these elements and move beyond fundraising to building longer term, sustainable engagement.

Karina Brisby believes that the only way you can understand the audience that's following you and provide appropriate content for them is through trial and error. Will Tucker, Will Tucker, Campaigns and Policy Manager at VSO highlights the difficulties of meeting different expectations on one platform.

*The Facebook audience might include hardcore supporters, fun-runners etc. and they will all have different expectations of an organisation. But they all sit on the same channel so we have to be careful – we've got a way to go on improving on that.*

## Broadcast vs. dialogical models of social media activity

Social media is an inherently conversational tool. Its strength lies in its ability to forge new paths of communication and collaboration between individuals, and between organisations and individuals. Successful use of social media therefore depends on the extent to which organisations adapt their communications strategies from a broadcast model to a dialogical model that recognizes the participatory, collaborative and networked possibilities this can offer. While social media can be used as simply a new tool for sending and receiving email, announcing events and providing information about the charity, it also contains the potential to move beyond these activities towards new forms of knowledge co-production, cooperation and collective action.

In an effort to move away from predominantly broadcast orientated content, Save the Children have developed the #Vlog4Good project, the first of its kind for the NGO sector. Mark Weber explains that the idea arose *from a workshop with a whole bunch of YouTubers, which highlighted the importance of the personal relationship between the YouTube presenter and the audience.* The hope is that the project, which has recently introduced a new host for the charity's YouTube platform, will become an annual competition with winners being handed editorial control of the platform for one year and producing content on a weekly basis.<sup>13</sup>

However, moving to a more dialogical model requires the ability to respond. Ben Niblett, Head of Campaigns at Tearfund comments that *in terms of the organisational mind-set we can move away from the broadcast model now, but it's more about what we have to offer, how we follow through on ideas and requests.* Karina Brisby agrees: *It's fine to produce content, but if you don't know what you do next, how you talk to the people who respond to the content, then it's no good. The organisations that are doing well make sure that they are a few steps ahead.*

## The challenge of measuring success

Measuring matters in every other form of marketing and social media marketing is now catching up, moving away from criteria like 'awareness raising' that are difficult to define. Greater scrutiny of the aid budget and the development of a value for money agenda mean campaigning activities must increasingly demonstrate their cost effectiveness. The two-way modes of communication that social media is dependent on can be both time consuming and difficult to measure meaningfully. However, as measurement tools like Buffer App, Hoot Suite, Social Sprout, Google Analytics, Twitter Analytics and uberVU are developed, a greater number of charities are using social media metrics and data to improve their decision making.

Tom Allen highlights the challenges of tracking online communications. *You can say this person has so many followers so if they re-tweet your message, X is the number of people who might see it, but realistically probably only 2-3% of that number will actually see it and the Twitter analytics tools aren't that smart yet... There's better measurement on Facebook... but the measurement is on a basic level... The most important thing is that you measure against your own performance. It's redundant to measure against others because it's only relevant within its own context. Each organisation's supporters will be different and will behave differently so you have primarily to self compare.* However, he also believes that *digital platforms allow more insight, so in terms of financial outlay, it's a lot more targeted than bill-boards etc. A lot of people who use social media are happy to allow their interests to be collated.*

Interviewees from two NGOs talked of testing ideas and messaging before they fully commit to a particular campaign or strategy. VSO are strongly targeted on Facebook in terms of above the line advertising. Will Tucker explains that they do split tests on adverts – *we look at what's working the day after and invest in what's working... We look at the click through rate and completion – for example watching a video.* Nic Seton of Greenpeace argues that *you have to experiment and take risks. If someone doesn't agree with an idea, we take a segment of the audience and test it out. It often gives you the opportunity to try new things... You have to learn from your mistakes and not be afraid to make them.*

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But gaining followers or likes is just the beginning of a journey, rather than the ultimate goal. Two recent campaigns illustrate the limits of even the most apparently successful social media phenomena. On March 5th 2012 the film 'Kony 2012' made by a US-based charity Invisible Children was launched on the internet, breaking new ground and sparking new debates in charity campaigning.<sup>14</sup> A poll suggested that half of young adult Americans had heard about Kony 2012 in the days following its release and TIME called it the most viral video ever. But instead of 'stopping' Kony the attention highlighted several flaws in the organisation and the campaign itself. The first charity-led viral human rights campaign led to accusations of 'slacktivism' which still persist.

The slogan #BringBackOurGirls became a rallying cry for millions on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, where the hashtag was retweeted more than 4 million times. But a Daily Telegraph report from 14 July 2014 *highlighted the gulf between the simple good intentions of a social media campaign and the harsh realities of northern Nigeria*. It went on to ask *what exactly is the meaning of the slogan #bringbackourgirls? Should Nigeria's government release hundreds of Boko Haram prisoners to secure the schoolgirls' freedom? Or should the army try a rescue mission, despite the immense risk to the lives of the captives, supposing they can be found at all? Or does the campaign aim to persuade Shekau to see the error of his ways and "bringbackourgirls" of his own volition? If anyone harbours that particular fantasy, a glance at his YouTube diatribes should set them right.*<sup>15</sup>

The ultimate failure of #bringbackourgirls and Kony 2012 demonstrates that social media is not a silver bullet and should not be viewed as such.

## HOW CHARITIES ARE OVERCOMING THESE CHALLENGES

Although many NGOs may have some way to go in leaving old models of information sharing and communication behind, there are charities leading the way in participatory, networked communications. The following trends illustrate the ways in which international development charities can embrace the full potential of social media.

### Creating an organisational culture that values social media

US based Charity:Water are leading the way in charity communications and in their innovative use of social media.<sup>16</sup> This is best demonstrated not by individual campaigns, but by their marketing culture as a whole. Rather than broadcasting information, they create compelling content and then provide multiple ways for users to engage with it and make it their own. Opportunities for involvement are frequently shared across their social media profiles – from downloading cover photos or profile

pictures to purchasing posters and having their photo on the 'wall of fame'. In the words of Paul Young, their Director of Digital, *We create amazing content that we then distribute through the web – through social media - and then we give that to people we hope are passionate advocates who will take the content and share it with their friends*. Charity:Water's CEO is also active on Twitter which ensures buy-in throughout the organization and a focus on digital.

### Newsjacking

Newsjacking is the practice of jumping into an existing conversation with a new message or version of the previous message. It has generated some criticism, but has also been used to advantage by many charities who view it as a great way of engaging in debate.<sup>17</sup> Macmillan Cancer Support, Save the Children and Leonard Cheshire newsjacked the tube strike hashtag in May 2014. Whilst praised by some for their *quick thinking in using something that's in the public mindset to further promote their work*, others saw these posts as *causing distractions from the important topic of the cause of the strike*. *This effectively gives the message that their cause is more important than the cause of the striking workers*.

A more recent example of joining mega-hashtag activities is the #MontyThePenguin campaign (see below). This has been newsjacked by several charities apart from John Lewis' official partner, WWF (including Just Giving, Dog's Trust, Save the Children and Age UK). This tactic can be seen as a spontaneous way of promoting something, provided it fits with the charity's brand. Others believe that charities should stick to strategic marketing. Writing in Third Sector, Chris Harris argues that even though tightly regulated marketing budgets make raising awareness even more challenging, charities can still innovate in a way that's not jarring to their audiences and which can really enforce their message: *To do this, we need to get back to focusing on core values. Instead of allowing themselves to be led by what people are already doing on social media, charities should be more confident about creating their own ideas and campaigns and come up with traditional social strategies to deliver them.*<sup>18</sup>

Interviewees agree that newsjacking must fit the charity's core purpose. Nic Seton reports that Greenpeace high-jacked the Shell Arctic Ready campaign and got a positive outcome. Nigel Campbell, Associate Director of Communications and Marketing at the charity Rethink Mental Illness, explains that when a story emerges that echoes one of their own messages, they do participate. *For example, last year when Tesco and Asda used "mental patient" costumes at Halloween the complaints were picked up on social media and multiplied. It was totemic as far as Rethink was concerned – if we'd let it go, we couldn't have talked about stigma. The campaign really took off and the supermarkets had to withdraw the costumes*.

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# ‘Tell the human story first and let the issues emerge later. In the past we would have discussed the issues we wanted to campaign on and then found stories to illustrate them’

Nigel Campbell, Rethink Mental Illness

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## Tapping into cultural trends

Several recent high profile campaigns have tapped into celebrity and “selfie” culture. In spring 2013 #nomakeupselfie involved celebrities and others posting photographs of themselves without make-up to raise money for Cancer Research UK.<sup>19</sup> The #icebucketchallenge originated in the US and became one of Facebook’s biggest viral successes.<sup>20</sup> Celebrities joined the campaign and it soon spread to the UK raising money for the Motor Neurone Disease Association. The campaign merged the internet’s love of challenges with donating to charity and the “pass it on” model made it easy to share. Most recently, the #wakeupcall campaign featured celebrities taking photos of themselves as they wake up in the morning.<sup>21,22</sup> By the middle of October 2014 it was estimated to have reached 300 million people, raising money for UNICEF’s work in Syria.

Highly successful in raising awareness and money, digital experts have highlighted lessons to be learnt from these campaigns. Rachel Collinson, US digital innovation consultant, emphasises the importance of ensuring that a viral campaign is translated into ongoing commitment if the benefits of that campaign are to be realised. She advises charities to: *educate new donors about the difference their money will make; start a thank you campaign that aims to be just as viral as the original; follow that up quickly with a series of welcome messages explaining more about your charity.*<sup>23</sup> Luke Lewis, Editor in chief at BuzzFeed UK comments that *campaigns like #nomakeupselfie only really achieved critical mass when the text donation element came to dominate: no forms to fill in, no credit card details to enter... anyone who hopes to achieve virality of any kind needs to think about how their message will work on mobile.*<sup>19</sup>

These campaigns do also raise a number of questions. Often initiated by Twitter users rather than charities themselves, they can also be newsjacked and promoted by charities quick enough to engage with participants and see the potential for their own cause. Concerns have been expressed about the voluntary sector taking the focus and possibly donations from another organization.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Zoe Amar asks *are glossy celebrity selfies the best way to achieve [#nomakeupselfie] aims? #icebucketchallenge and #manchdogs – the appeal for Manchester and Cheshire Dogs’ Home – were exciting and vibrant because they were led by ordinary people. If UNICEF’s campaign is to achieve the same kind of results that is who they ultimately need to reach, not just celebrities.*<sup>22</sup>

## Social media as an element of a wider campaign

Rather than using social media in a silo, some of the most successful recent campaigns have chosen to integrate it into a wider campaign that works across different online and traditional media platforms.

## #findmike

Rethink Mental Illness’s #findmike campaign was originated by one of their ambassadors and active campaigners, Jonny Benjamin.<sup>25</sup> Centred on the search for a stranger who had prevented Benjamin from committing suicide, the campaign became a social media phenomenon straddling social, print and broadcast media. Nigel Campbell, Associate Director of Communications, spoke about the lessons learnt from the campaign.

- *Tell the human story first and let the issues emerge later. In the past we would have discussed the issues we wanted to campaign on and then found stories to illustrate them.*
- *We changed our procedures for sign-off and have developed a really slick process that’s kept at a certain level in the organisation where there’s trust.*
- *It’s changed the way the organisation sees social media. One of our key 4 objectives is now supporter development and engagement, looking at passing social media and website traffic and taking people on a journey to becoming full supporters. We now spotlight digital channels as premium ways to communicate.*
- *We developed other new processes during the campaign, for example, followers could send a text to donate. Now we have a telemarketing company following up to see if they want to become regular donors.*

The only above the line cost was the £8,000 put aside for their partnership with Postcard Production Company who filmed the process for a documentary which was released at a YouTube premiere at the National Film Theatre. Everything else was done in-house and many supporters and celebrities contributed their time for no fee. Yet it proved to be highly effective on many levels. As Campbell told us: *we mirrored the content on our website with loads of other information on suicide and mental health, and signposts to other help and advice. It was very good for brand recognition and building social media and website traffic.* The ramifications of the campaign are still ongoing. Corporate relationships begun during the campaign are maturing into sponsorships and Rethink is in discussion with a TV channel about a broadcast of the documentary.

## #AMillionMiracles

Fieldcraft Studios worked on the recent Sightsavers campaign.<sup>26</sup> Director Liz Scarf explains that *A Million Miracles aims to tell a story via lots of different platforms and then be able to demonstrate what we’ve done by using analytics. We filmed a live cataract operation from Malawi and then... the moment the bandages came off. It was using social*

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media to create a PR stunt. That then generates further media which we can use. They partnered with Google and the Daily Telegraph in developing the campaign and used Google's own video conferencing tool, Hangouts, to broadcast the operation. This was important because Google Hangouts create content that is embeddable enabling them to simultaneously broadcast on YouTube making the content permanently available even after the live broadcast... So then you've got your core content and you ripple out from that through other media partners like the Telegraph. Google promoted it across their Twitter feeds and set up a search programme if people typed in Sightsavers. On top of that we had blogger engagement. It's had 1500 blogs through travel, parenting and schools blogging networks. The live broadcast was presented by Doug Armstrong who's a leading UK YouTuber and so it also attracted his audience. Like other successful campaigns, A Million Miracles demonstrates the importance of working across online platforms and mainstream media to create more impact, but in this instance there was also an active partnership with online and mainstream media organisations.

### #IceClimb

In 2013 Greenpeace's Ice Climb stunt involved six activists scaling The Shard to protest against Shell's plans to drill for oil in the Arctic.<sup>27</sup> Community Strategist, Nic Seton, believes that social media is valuable in building engagement and campaigning. *Engagement is about relationships, campaigning is about impact* and the Ice Climb encapsulated these two major motivations in Greenpeace's work. It took a long time to bring together and Seton emphasized the importance of planning. *It's easy to think of social media as a live, constant battle, but the best strategy is to plan.* The stunt aimed to generate publicity for the charity, recruit supporters to the Save the Arctic campaign (more than 60,000 of the visitors to the page added their signatures in support), and tell the story in as responsible and safe a way as possible... *We'd experimented with live feeds before and saw the opportunity to build on people's interest in what happens, keep people's attention.* The planning paid off. *The average time spent on the page was 7 minutes... and about 80% re-visited it... YouGov did a poll in the evening and 53% of adults had heard about the campaign – in less than a 24 hour cycle. It was ground-breaking for Greenpeace – we'd never had that much attention for an unfolding event before... It's difficult to assess value for money. It doesn't cost a lot to get a few iPhones and some climbing gear, but the value to Greenpeace has been tremendous – a landmark.*

Emmie Spencer of brand and communications agency, NEO, attributed its success to three main factors:<sup>28</sup>

- It was iconic: Six women free climbing, tiny as ants up Europe's tallest building, is an undeniably arresting visual.

- It was integrated: The climb was supported by a sophisticated media operation with a live stream from cameras mounted on the climbers' helmets and a live radio commentary over it.
- It was human: They were doing it for the Arctic, but Ice Climb was at heart a human story. The climbers weren't superheroes... we genuinely cared about these women and their fate. As a consequence, we started caring about WHY they were doing what they were.

### #MontyThePenguin

With million-pound corporate marketing budgets leading the way in social media marketing John Lewis's 2014 Christmas advert can be seen as a best-case example of integrated social media marketing.<sup>29</sup> #MontyThePenguin partners the retail offering with a WWF campaign to protect the Adélie penguins in Antarctica. It is multi-platform with a simple web page hosted on their standard store website bringing all the elements together. Prospective customers can watch the video, engage on social media, download an eBook telling the story, explore a 360 degree computer game on desktop, tablet or mobile and engage with physical interactive experiences in-store. By 10 November (three days after its TV launch), the YouTube views numbered 10.5 million. Building on the £7 million advertising campaign, the WWF's Adopt a Penguin programme features on its homepage and the charity is tweeting celebrities and TV presenters suggesting they adopt a penguin for their children this Christmas. There have been thousands signing up to adopt since the launch of the campaign despite the fact that marine species do not normally hold the same appeal as big cats and elephants. In late November WWF, launched a #PenguinDanceBattle Christmas challenge asking people to share their penguin dance moves via social media - adapting elements of other successful campaigns to appeal to their own supporters.<sup>30</sup>

Neil Gunn at WWF says the charity is very strong on corporate partnerships. But, in his opinion, *we don't make enough play out of what we expect in return. We insist on changes in the way partners do business when it has significant environmental impact... but getting that across to supporters succinctly can be a challenge ... Quite often we are too reactive to criticism and not proactive about telling people the reasons we do it.* From his experience of these partnerships, *the commercial company will usually get their digital marketing team to lead on advertising etc and therefore you have to be strong to ensure you are seen as an equal partner. On the positive side, we can learn a lot from these commercial agencies about best practice. As a charity you're not often in a position to afford agencies like that so in some cases we can... use what we learn in our day to day work.*

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# ‘We are nervous about being out there by ourselves. We need to get over that and be more open to conversations’

Will Tucker, VSO

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## Listening

Any conversation involves listening as well as speaking – an element of social media practice which has been consistently undervalued as online participation tends to be conflated with having a ‘voice’ and ‘speaking up’. In an organisational context, social media monitoring can engage with vast numbers of people and amounts of data and act like a giant focus group. It can help NGOs:

- Find out what people are saying about them.
- Find out what people are saying about others in the development sector.
- Find relevant conversations that they can join in with.

Mark Weber believes that *ongoing discussion gives a much more personal feel to the work that we do*. In January 2014 Save the Children launched a dedicated Facebook app. It has around 4,000 users and focuses on the more active supporters. What the app does is gives tasks to those supporters including actions and fundraising. *We’ve been pleasantly surprised with the level of interaction we get from this, and we promote it within our individual campaigns.*<sup>6</sup> Social media works with real-time engagement so listening is necessary in order to address concerns or questions from supporters. In October 2014 Dan Stewart, Humanitarian Communications Manager at Save the Children UK, proactively sought queries from the online community on the charity’s Ebola response by carrying out a Q&A on social media. The conversation continued on social news site, Reddit – “the front page of the internet” - where people asked a range of questions from the availability of help for orphaned children to whether all the money donated will actually reach the charity or be “eaten up as graft and such.”<sup>31</sup>

Listening can also assist organisations to newsjack or engage with other campaigns more effectively if they know what hashtags are being used and the issues that are being discussed. The #nomakeupselfie campaign raised £8m for Cancer Research UK in its first week, but it wasn’t Cancer Research UK’s idea. They noticed that the campaign was gathering momentum and gave it a boost, but it had grown organically as women posted photographs of themselves without make-up on Twitter and Facebook. Karina Brisby praises Cancer Research UK for instigating and taking part in conversations. *They listened to their community on the no make-up selfies and stopped whatever else they were doing to seize the opportunity. If not, the idea would have been taken up by another charity.*

At a time when the concepts of aid and development are coming under more scrutiny, active listening also enables NGOs to gain entry

into the public conversation and counter criticisms when they arise. A recent report from Grant Thornton, a leading independent assurance, tax and advisory firm, consulted senior executives of charities in Australia, Botswana, Canada, Ireland, India, New Zealand, the UK and the US on how they use social media.<sup>32</sup> The report concludes that:

*An active online community steps up to rebuff critics, but the primary information has to come from the charity and its experts. Using specialist tools that report on keywords and sentiment in social media gives charities the opportunity to step in if negative or false reports are circulating, and to feed into beneficial conversations at the right time.*

But Will Tucker feels that *NGOs don’t want to put their heads above the parapet unless they all do it... We are nervous about being out there by ourselves. We need to get over that and be more open to conversations. It’s a resourcing issue too. Donors probably don’t want us spending money on “brand risk management” and therefore we’re slower to react.*

## Building engagement by providing a platform for unrepresented voices

Many charities are using social media to share stories on behalf of, or directly from, under-represented communities. Creative opportunities for engaging beneficiaries alongside volunteers and supporters are starting to emerge that provide platforms for seldom heard voices and thereby help to build public engagement in development issues. This is not without challenges. Liz Scarff believes it is important that NGOs do not simply act as a conduit for these voices. They should also enable beneficiaries to speak to each other and to supporters. She also highlights the potential technical problems: *Connectivity is a big issue. Enabling beneficiaries to tell their own stories is difficult if they are in remote, rural areas.* But she acknowledges that technologies, such as 3G bonding, which bonds mobile phones together, are being developed that will address these issues. Twitter Access and Facebook Zero now partner with mobile operators around the world to make connectivity and access to social media a reality across the developing world. With India and Indonesia set to see over 50% increases in Twitter users in 2014<sup>33</sup> and forecasts suggesting that mobile internet traffic across Africa will double between 2014 and 2015, and see a 20-fold increase by the end of the decade,<sup>34</sup> the growth in mobile technology around the world will create many more opportunities for NGOs to explore the participatory potential of social media.

Whilst conversion from passive or news based support to a more engaged involvement can be challenging, ActionAid believe that digital can help to do this in visceral and powerful ways. As a way of involving supporters in the lives of some of its beneficiaries it linked up UK supporters with survivors of acid attacks in Bangladesh. *Messages were exchanged via social media and supporters were able to express their solidarity with the*

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women. It proved to be a very emotional, engaging and uplifting experience for those involved.<sup>35</sup> Tom Allen explains how the charity has developed a way to amplify the voices of people on the ground to people who would be interested in their stories in an unmediated way. They use digital tools to do this for big opportunity moments such as World Food Day. People in rural communities with access to mobile phones can send an SMS to the ActionAid office, then Frontline SMS software provides an interface like Outlook.<sup>36</sup> They line up the messages on screen and can then export them or reply to them. It's a two way mass communication system that can be plugged into social media or broadcast via a Twitter account. They've branded it as ActionAid Voices.<sup>37</sup> Some tweets have reached six million people. So suddenly a rural farmer in Nepal can reach millions of people with a single SMS message.

Allen says that *now when we launch a campaign, we look at how we can support people to participate*. For example, the tax campaign and the anti-land grab campaign: #taxpower and #landgrabbing.<sup>38,39</sup> *With Tax Power, we tied the messaging around tax dodging in whatever relevant country and looked at how much less money there was to spend on public services as a consequence. So we had "#tax pays for"...and asked people to submit a photo of them with their favourite public service or the one that needed funds the most. For example, in rural Kenya, it was photos of sewage pipes; in Denmark, photos of a university. It was a way of bringing together voices from the north and south and was a low tech ask ...In 2014 we launched the anti-land grabbing campaign. It worked well on social media because it was a personal issue and again we encouraged people to determine what they wanted #landfor eg not agribusiness but communities or women farmers.*

Oxfam's Syria Twitter Takeover<sup>40</sup> and WaterAid's Big Pipe Project<sup>41</sup> both provided platforms for unrepresented voices. In February 2013 several Syrian refugees living in Zaatari camp in Jordan took over Oxfam's Twitter page to provide an insight into their daily lives. For the Big Pipe Project, people in Adi Sibhat used their mobile phones to share their stories and help raise £1 million to bring safe water to 130,000 people in Ethiopia. Pictures and films were taken directly by the community members and WaterAid staff. The campaign, which launched in October 2013, encouraged supporters to share their questions and messages with the community members by leaving comments on the website or tweeting on #bigpipeproject.

The voices of NGO volunteers are also often unrepresented in online campaigns. Restless Development and VSO ran a 'Voices for Development' pilot programme to encourage their overseas volunteers to be champions for international development.<sup>42</sup> Shou Konno, PR Manager for Restless Development, explains that the project *recognises that volunteers, because of their overseas experience, are more persuasive message carriers about development*

*and better able to engage people with development issues. People who are not paid are more authoritative messengers. We wanted to improve their training and support them to capture stories while on placements and when they got back... collaborating on videos and working together in Facebook groups to create content.*

Lessons have already been learnt from the completed pilot about how better social media impact came from a select group of 'development advocates' who then trained and mobilised other volunteers. *We spent a lot of time at the beginning trying to give everyone shallow learning in a wide range of different communication techniques. We now realise that we should have provided an overview and then focussed on what people were good at, see what they had a natural aptitude for. It worked better to give people roles and get them to work together and train a few (say 30 out of the 900) at a higher level than the others. Then they can motivate others and facilitate groups.*

Richard Darlington believes that although the most skilled communicators in an NGO are at HQ, *often the most interesting work is out in the field. If you don't empower these people, you won't get an authentic voice. The real value of social media for NGOs is to enable them to show the work they do.* The Media Trust argue that the *mainstream media are always looking for authentic voices so organisations which can offer stories, content, images and video across social media easily accessible to journalists will benefit.*<sup>35</sup>

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Social media is still in its infancy, and the potential for use in the international development charity sector is huge. This section highlights questions for charities to consider in their engagement with social media in the future. Organisations that ask these questions early will be in a strong position to harness the potential that they hold for the transformation of the sector.

### How can conversations about social media in programme implementation and marketing be better integrated?

Social media is being used simultaneously in programme implementation and external communication yet mechanisms for collaboration and sharing of best practice between these two areas are rare. As social media is used increasingly by international aid and development agencies in the context of implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes, it's important that communications teams working at HQ level are drawing on these experiences. UNICEF's reporting app, uReport, was launched in Uganda in May 2011.<sup>43</sup> It enables anyone with a mobile phone to become a volunteer uReporter and to share their observations and ideas on a wide range of development issues with the goal of assessing the progress of processes aimed at achieving development indicators. In less than a year, the population of U-reporters

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grew to over 89,000, with 400 to 500 joining the network daily. While this project is lauded in the Information Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) sector, it is little understood in the mainstream social media marketing community.

## What potential does social media present for research in the field?

Media ethnography is a field in its infancy, but presents huge potential for international aid and development organisations. Researching the use of social media and technology can be applied to supporters and donors, but it can also be used to observe how communities in the field are engaging with development programmes and thereby assist in the development and targeting of new programmes<sup>44</sup>

## How can social media be used to reframe the conversation about development?

Recent years have witnessed decreasing public support for development aid and increasing criticism from the media, politicians and other commentators. As a result, NGOs are searching for ways of moving away from negative representations of their role in the developing world towards a different narrative – one that emphasises the positive achievements of development, recognizes the role of partners in the South, and proactively addresses issues of corruption and waste.

Much of this debate has so far focused on audience segmentation and key messaging rather than particular communication tools (see for example the recent Bond report, *Change the Record*<sup>45</sup>). Indeed, using both mainstream and social media to convey complex ideas has its challenges. One of the core objectives of the 2013 IF Campaign was to build public support for action to reframe the poverty debate *by deepening the understanding of poverty and development, the environment, and the need for structural change*. The evaluation of the campaign found *that the messages were too complex, disjointed and too plentiful. This was a challenge not only in terms of messaging and communications for public mobilisation, but also for the media, social media and communications in general. There were particular problems mentioned by interviewees around the use of #IF, which apparently didn’t work well on Twitter as it was too generic*.<sup>46</sup> Cathy Mahoney of Comic Relief has been working with the Narrative Project, funded by the Gates Foundation to reverse the decline in public support for development by reframing the way NGOs talk about aid.<sup>47</sup> She acknowledges the challenges:

*So far we’ve not been looking at the role of social media in this. It’s a complex message and how do you boil it down to 140 characters? ... There is something to be said for sitting down with social media departments, there’s an argument for a social media workshop, but it’s early days yet.*

Evidence from recent campaigns suggests that social media has the potential to play an important role in changing public perceptions of aid

and building public engagement in a more organic way. The outcome evaluation report for the Voices for Development pilot programme (see above) highlights the potential of such initiatives to change perceptions. It states *although we have not yet consciously supported our volunteers to include the new [Narrative Project] frames (autonomy, partnership, progress and morality), volunteers are already including elements of these frames in their media, specifically the autonomy and partnership frames... the materials produced through the programme are likely to have had an impact on people’s perception of development*. The report argues for a diverse media strategy: *Self-published media allows the volunteer greater editorial control, potentially making it easier to control the quality of what is produced. A diverse media strategy focuses on a number of media types and outlets, allows for a balance between potential reach and quality of message*.<sup>48</sup>

Voices for Development and ActionAid Voices (see above) demonstrate how social media can be used to build on new narrative frames, not only by providing stories of increasing self-reliance, but also enabling supporters and other audiences to connect directly with those stories, promoting mutual self-interest and solidarity.

## CONCLUSION

NGOs’ use of social media is under-researched in the UK, but survey evidence indicates that its full potential is not yet being realised. Those NGOs who are pushing the boundaries tend to see digital as central to marketing strategy rather than as an add-on. They often go further and empower staff to advocate via social media, despite the possible risks. Above all, they are beginning to move away from a predominantly broadcast model where communication is a one-way process, to a dialogical model which can engage supporters, beneficiaries and the wider public in conversation.

The essence of social media is immediacy and spontaneity. Some of the most successful recent campaigns have been initiated by ordinary Twitter users and have grown organically. It is therefore essential that NGOs listen to their supporters and the online community, and respond quickly to these opportunities. But this does not mean that planning is unimportant. Strategic thinking is essential in order to facilitate the bridging of online and offline media and create integrated campaigns that resonate across all platforms and with all audiences.

Increasingly sophisticated methods of measuring reach and impact are now available enabling NGOs to derive useful lessons from their successes and failures. But whilst views, likes and followers are important indicators of awareness raising, NGOs that are able to respond creatively, address criticisms openly, and convert this interest into sustainable engagement will begin to see the real value of social media in achieving their long term goals.

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# APPENDIX

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## A SELECTION OF ONLINE GUIDANCE, TOOLKITS AND CASE STUDIES

### **Social Media Strategy for Non-Profits: Best Practices for Beginners**

<http://trailofpapercuts.wordpress.com/2013/09/24/social-media-strategy-for-non-profits/>

### **How to campaign online: 15 dos and don'ts**

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/jul/15/16-dos-and-donts-of-online-campaigning-clicktivism-digital-activism-kony>

### **Best practices in social media for NGOs**

<http://www.slideshare.net/SocialSamosa/best-practices-in-social-media-for-ngos-report>

### **10 Strategies for Non-Profits on Pinterest**

<http://mashable.com/2012/03/02/pinterest-strategies-non-profits/>

### **Creating a social media strategy for your NGOs**

[http://www.virtualactivism.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=135:socialmediastrategy&catid=36:articles&Itemid=54](http://www.virtualactivism.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=135:socialmediastrategy&catid=36:articles&Itemid=54)

### **3 Social Media Trends for Charities in 2014**

<http://whitefusemedia.com/blog/3-social-media-trends-charities-2014>

### **5 Steps to Creating a Charity Website Measurement Plan with Google Analytics**

<http://www.whitefusemedia.com/blog/5-steps-creating-charity-website-measurement-plan-google-analytics-free-template>

### **How your charity can boost Twitter engagement**

<http://www.charitydigitalnews.co.uk/2014/11/14/how-your-charity-can-boost-twitter-engagement/>

### **10 things your charity needs to know about social media**

<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/jul/21/10-things-your-charity-needs-to-know-about-social-media>

### **How charity chief executives can use social media to help their organisation**

<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/apr/25/charity-ceo-social-media>

### **How can charities use social media to meet their goals?**

<http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/social-media-charities/>

### **5 Social media toolkit essentials**

<http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2013/apr/09/5-social-media-tools>

### **How charities can make the most of LinkedIn**

<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/oct/08/how-charities-can-make-most-of-linkedin>

### **Using Twitter to Network, Inspire and Create Change**

[http://www.slideshare.net/mary\\_mitch/using-twitter-to-network-inspire-and-create-change](http://www.slideshare.net/mary_mitch/using-twitter-to-network-inspire-and-create-change)

### **How to prepare for your ice bucket challenge moment**

<http://blog.justgiving.com/how-to-prepare-for-your-ice-bucket-challenge-moment/>

### **Five social media charity campaigns you need to know about**

<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/apr/03/five-social-media-charity-campaigns>

### **3 Non-Profits Who Shine on Social Media**

<http://www.brandwatch.com/2013/03/3-examples-of-non-profits-who-shine-on-social-media/>

### **Examples of good practices for social media campaigning**

<http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-optimisation/examples-good-practices-social-media-campaigning/>

### **How Amnesty International took over dating app Tinder**

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### **Using Twitter to Speak? Take Time to Listen**

<http://whitefusemedia.com/blog/using-twitter-speak-take-time-listen>

### **Charity Digital News Tips and Advice**

<http://www.charitydigitalnews.co.uk/category/tips-advice/>