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## **Abstract**

Evolution of digital technology have transformed business processes across all sectors, through tools such as artificial intelligence, big data, machine learning and cloud technology. Marketing scholars are quick to espouse the virtues of digitization to organizations in terms of customer acquisition however, the charity sector is reported to be significantly lacking in terms of digital innovation to secure attract donors. One such reason for charities hesitance is ethically motivated due to widely reported nefarious digital practices. This chapter offers insights into charities' perceptions of adoption of digital marketing, as well as appreciating the ethical considerations of not-for-profits engaging in such strategies. It critically assesses prior studies that indicate the benefits of digital adoption for the sector. The results of a small-scale study are presented that indicate factors that deter digital adoption such as; resistance to change, reluctance to embrace digital, and widespread awareness of practices that are ethically questionable. However, it is argued that these barriers to adoption are surmountable and a considered approach to digital marketing strategy is effective for nurturing deeper relationships with customers. Further to the critical review of the literature, the chapter finishes by establishing a conceptual framework of digital marketing strategy for the not-for-profit sector.

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Key words: Digital Marketing, Charity Sector, Marketing Metrics, Ethics

**<Chapter Number 39 Ethics and New Media>**

**<A Double-Edged Sword: A Case Study of Digital  
Marketing Adoption in the Charity Sector>**

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## **Introduction: A Delicate (Digital) Ethical Dance**

From the early days, digital marketing involved a tenuous link between well intentioned marketing practices and the utilisation of data which would creep into the realms of the unethical. Web design practices involved hiding text on pages to ensure search engine rankings for phrases which did not match the content. Email marketing campaigns would regularly capture addresses which were obtained unobtrusively. Search engine results pages are regularly manipulated by website owners to achieve higher rankings. Social media introduced a plethora of ethically questionable practices whereby highly sensitive user data is gathered to develop advertising personas. The list is endless. However, for the purposes of this chapter, two key areas where ethical issues are present are pertinent to the organisations in general and to the charity sector: search engine marketing and website design. In examining these, the chapter will consider the most commonly known unethical practices and subsequent considerations for marketers employing them in their campaigns.

### **Search Engine Marketing – Black Hat SEO**

Despite the widespread appreciation for the potential of digital channels, it is also accepted that nefarious practices are evident in digital marketing. Historically, the search engine optimisation (SEO) industry have been using such practices to gain better rankings on search engines for websites (Duk, Bjelobrk and Čarapina, 2013; Keegan and Taylor, 2019). These so-called ‘black hat’ techniques have seen some attention, yet are generally unknown by website owners who employ search engine marketing agencies. A common ‘black hat’ techniques involve keyword stuffing whereby the website owner inserts as many keywords and phrases into the text of a webpage, which have little connection with the content of the page, and thus will capture a wider range

of search terms. Additionally, in inserting these keywords, another tactic is to present such erroneous phrases in white text on a white background. Another technique seen through empirical research suggests that doorway pages are also created to appear in search engine results pages, but redirect visitors elsewhere. Another common attempt to gain an unfair advantage over competitors in search engine results pages involves linking schemes of inbound and reciprocal links with newly created websites for which their only purpose is to link back to a main site. These aforementioned techniques represent a significant aspect of unethical practices within the digital marketing industry, and are reported to be rife amongst digital marketing strategies (Keegan and Taylor, 2019). These practices are favoured by spam websites who are not looking for long term successes and simply wish to gather large volumes of traffic in a short period of time. Websites that discovered to be enacting black hat SEO will be severely punished and even excluded from the search engine and can result in significant penalties for the brand. Search engine marketing agencies representing clients have fallen foul of such techniques without being fully aware of breaking search engine violation (Keegan and Taylor, 2019). In such cases, the search engine provider would send a notification to the owner of the website explaining how they and their brand and website will not appear in results pages for a prescribed period of time and after unethical practices cease. Hence the ethical connotations for engaging in such practices can result in a significant outcome for brands, their audiences and the long term success of businesses.

## Deceptive Website Design

Website design is a key part of the digital marketers arsenal as it is essential there is a functioning site to offer customers more information about the brand or service. Hence, the construction, design and ongoing management of a website is pivotal to a digital

marketing strategy. However, a litany of deceptive website design processes have been reported and identified which are designed to trick the user into achieving a specific goal (i.e., inadvertent sign-up to mailing list). Deceptive design is sometimes referred to as the Dark-Side of User Experience Design, whereby psychology is used to trick users to a point on the website where they did not intend to visit. Examples of dark side techniques are as follows:

- Bait and Switch - where the website promises one thing, but it turns out to be something completely different. This often happens when a website is hiding keywords on a site for something which is not relevant to their products/service to gain higher search engine ranking.
- The Hidden Cost – where an ecommerce website applies costs to the purchase before the end of the check-out. The user begins the journey believing the product is a fixed price and soon discovers this is not the case. Think of low-cost airlines as an example of this technique!
- The Roach Motel – where the user journey is designed so that it is extremely difficult to perform the intended task. Hidden buttons are typical in this type of technique where it is impossible to click on anything but an advert link.
- The Golden Snitch- where the site encourages the user to buy because a website might run out of product in stock or it creates a false sense of missing out. But it does it in a sneaky and harmless way by being just an impartial mediator. For

example, the site may suggest that another customer has purchased your item and they might run out soon. Think of hotel booking sites for an example.

See UX Planet for more Dark Side Techniques - <https://uxplanet.org/design-ethics-vs-dark-side-ux-15a703870ec6>

The formal penalties for deceptive website design are not as mature as search engine penalties, however customers may feel the need to share their bad experiences on public forums which may affect the brand's reputation. A regular feature for brands who engage in such practices is the generation of a website created by disgruntled customers with a URL that began with IHATE before the brand name.

## Ethical Resolution

In response to growing concern regarding unethical practices by the digital marketing industry, the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) were established in 2016. GDPR are explicitly clear on the legal options for obtaining, storing and usage of customer data. These directives specifically affect the following digital marketing activities: collecting or acquiring personal data; building targeting profiles; executing campaigns through first and third-party channels; and analysing user behaviour and campaign response to support decision-making (Thomas, 2018). Whilst these legal directives are designed to protect the consumer, the digital marketing industry sees these as significant impediments to targeting customers and developing campaigns. Indeed, it is reported that small to medium sized organisations are the ones most likely to suffer as a result of GDPR and hence may adopt 'black-hat' approaches to overcome such difficulties (Kelion, 2019). Increasingly, high profile cases of use of paid media advertising for political events have tarnished the ethical stance of the mainstream social media platforms. In one landmark case, over 90 million Facebook profile pages



were targeted with an application called “thisisyourdigitallife” which collected personal information on users against their wishes (Cadwalladr, and Graham-Harrison, 2018).

## The Charity Sector Dilemma

Considering these exemplars of unethical practices, it is understandable that a charity would attempt to avoid association with practices that would undermine their reputation. In some cases the knock on effect on the beneficiaries of the charity might also be affected by unethical practices (IBE, 2018). To investigate further, the authors conducted a series of interviews with marketing managers of UK charities to learn more of the state of play with digital adoption in the sector. In light of these recent events, the Fundraising Regulator has been established to (<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/>) further control the approaches charities use in communicating with customers. The Fundraising Preference Service offers a service which offers people the ability to control the nature and frequency of marketing communications that they receive from fundraising organisations. In doing so, the extent of regulations stipulate clearly how personal data is obtained, used and stored. Specific reference to digital channels of communication are listed in the Code of Fundraising Practice (<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/code/all-fundraising/processing-personal-data>).

## The Charity Sector

In 2019, there are 167,000 registered charities in the United Kingdom (UK), acquiring an annual income of £76 billion (Charity Commission, 2018). One in five charities are reported to be struggling to survive due to financial stresses, with more than half seeing financial sustainability as paramount to endurance (Dudman, 2017). Further, charities are set to lose a minimum of £258 million from EU funding as a result of Brexit (Ferrell-

Schweppenstedde, 2017). Most do not have the finances, nor the flexibility, to manage the operational tasks to react to these risks (Murray, 2017). As such, there is an ongoing debate for the application of sophisticated digital techniques to inform strategies using data to guide the actions of decision-makers in reaction to these pressures (Stringfellow et al., 2018).

Pressure to demonstrate return-on-investment (ROI) from any marketing activity is now an expectation from donors for charities to demonstrate their impact to ensure donations are used effectively (Bowman and Gimson, n.d). Money For Good UK notes that donors care about the impact of charities (Corry, 2014) with 58% of mainstream and 61% of high income donors paying close attention to impact when giving money (Simmonds, 2015). This is particularly troublesome given that most charities have a limited analysis of their impact (Bowman and Gibson, n.d). Collectively, these macro factors demonstrate a practical need to investigate the charity sector usage of digital marketing to assess whether charities are in the right position to address these external concerns. Alongside these practical motivations, the scarcity of academic focus on the charity sector in relation to digital marketing provides additional incentives for the research. However, despite the ongoing adoption of digital marketing techniques, there are further questions to be answered regarding questionable practices which are being reported by mainstream media such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, discussed in an earlier chapter. Large-scale digital advertising campaigns are coming under more scrutiny for lacking transparency, inappropriate use of customer data and unethical targeting of customers (Camillo and Camillo, 2019). In considering these unsavoury elements of the digital marketing industry, it can be argued that a charity is faced with a conundrum regarding the adoption of digital techniques. Whilst the strongest voice in the conversation suggests digital is the way to go, it can also be viewed as a double-

edged sword by senior management teams in charities. To assist in the development of digital strategy development, this chapter reports on findings from a small-scale study of marketing managers within the charity sector. A foundation for digital marketing in the not-for-profit industries is offered to assist in future decision-makers in the sector. Next the chapter will review the pertinent arguments in the literature that consider digital marketing strategy development in the charity sector.

## **Digital Marketing Strategy Development**

Whilst there is no consensus on a definition for digital marketing, some make reference to achieving objectives through the adoption of digital technology (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Quinton, 2012). Kannan et al (2017, pp.23) cite digital marketing as: “an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders”. Contrastingly, definitions for charity marketing are not that prevalent within the dialogue, as discussions around charity marketing consider what marketing can do for the industry rather than what charity marketing is (Charities Aid Foundation, 2008). Instead, the lack of a definition for charity marketing, compared to the saturation of definitions for digital marketing, is reflective of the disproportion of knowledge between the two subjects, highlighting a need to focus on charities to cultivate a richer understanding of charity behaviours and their digital activities.

Organisations have acknowledged the importance of digital touchpoints and have begun taking the steps towards engaging with this digital-savvy consumer by becoming visible on website and social media platforms (Intel, 2018). More universally, brands are using digital platforms as a means to market to their target audience, with digital

advertising spend estimated at £12.4 billion in the UK alone (Intel, 2018). The array of benefits that the digital space provides continues to incentivise businesses to endorse digital transformation as they look for new means for diversification, market penetration and expansion (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Of the many advantages of digital reported, one recurring factor is the affordance it gives to new ways of understanding the customer through a wealth of online analytical tools (Gonzalez, 2017). On Google Analytics alone, there are 75 standard reports an organisation can create to track performance and understand consumer behaviour (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). These metrics are said to be used to measure return-on-investment, to optimise strategy and to help with budget planning, which are all argued to contribute to the effectiveness of an organisation (Gonzalez, 2017). Hence, it would be constructive for charities to develop their digital skills to uncover how these digital tools would assist the sector in their comprehension of their target segments and the development of appropriate digital touchpoints.

Digital marketing literature stresses the significance of strategy development (Saura, et al, 2017; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Saura, et al (2017, pp.5) note that strategy encompasses ‘budgetary allocations... advertising and other actions intended to publicize [sic] the brand, the products and services offered’. They articulate that to understand ‘the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies’ one ‘requires the ability to analyse and measure their impact’ Saura et al, (2017, pp.5). The ability to strategise effectively is, arguably, an unfair expectation of charities as ‘analytical skills and technical skills’ are emphasised to be crucial for effective performance (Saura, et al, 2017; Royle and Laing, 2014), yet the charities suffer from a depravity of these skills (Lloyds, 2017; Amar, 2018; Goatman and Lewis, 2007). Therefore, it would be useful to explore charities’ opinions towards digital strategy, assessing whether charities are

using metrics to underpin their strategy, and whether they grasp the importance of the benefits they provide in terms of usable data (Flores, 2013). In doing so, insights will highlight whether the importance of strategy, and the significance of data in relation to that strategy, is as pertinent to the charity sector as it is to for-profit organisations (Stringfellow et al., 2019).

## **Digital in the Charity Sector**

The opportunities that digital adoption provides has been acknowledged by charity groups as the “*single biggest opportunity currently offered*” (Amar, 2018). Whilst some plan to invest in digital platforms (Dudman, 2017), most refrain due to four key barriers: access, skills, confidence and motivation (UK Government, 2017). Even where the appreciation for digital transformation exist, the lack of skills and confidence undermine their understanding of digital marketing (Amar, 2018). Alongside the lack of digital skills, which 31% of individuals commented as a barrier to digital adoption, 9% noted ‘not worth the investment’ (Lloyds, 2017, pp.51) and a further 24% suggested ‘no time to set up’ (Lloyds, 2017, pp.51) as additional barriers.

Bennett (2014) sought to understand how twenty-six non-for-profit dance companies engaged in marketing activities following a reduction in income. Despite the limited scope of his study, due to a reliance of dance charities in particular, Bennett (2014) made some helpful revelations, claiming that the investigated companies suffered from a lack of marketing expertise and resource, resulting in an over reliance of personal judgement, which is echoed by Lloyds (2017) and Amar (2018). Notably, a recommendation of Bennett’s (2014) was an undeniable need for measurement in any marketing activities, suggesting a need for an understanding of return on investment (ROI) and knowing where to market in order to attract new customers. Furthermore

Corry (2014) also acknowledges an organisational need to demonstrate ROI and does not provide any more insights into which metrics are appropriate in performing this task.

The adoption of digital platforms by consumers has transformed the way in which customers are now behaving (Gilliland, 2018). This generated a need to understand these behaviours in order to align business practices in the hopes to appeal to them (Gilliland, 2018). A need to grasp a better understanding of the customer and their behaviours was noted as particularly important by Bennett (2014). Similarly, Shaw and White (1999) have their own notion of what is considered to be an important metric to measure, where “thoughts and feelings” were noted as relevant (Shaw and White, 1999, cited by Bennett, 2007, pp.963). However, with Shaw and White (1999), their suggested taxonomy of metrics was supplied at a time when digital was not as pertinent as it is in contemporary society. Thus, there is no reference to digital metrics and there is little discussion into how the digital metrics available should be used to understanding the customer. The outdated nature of Shaw and White’s (1999) research is a weakness also suffered by Hems (1999), whose research discusses how to encourage charitable giving using marketing tactics – in a strictly offline environment. Bennett’s (2014) research revealed that it was primarily financial pressures that incentivised measurement, meaning financial metrics were emphasised (Bennett, 2014), so it will be useful for our understanding of charity behaviours to see whether this is the case for charities in 2019.

Bennett (2014) recognises the significance of measurement within the charity sector due to his earlier work on the use of marketing metrics by fundraising charities (Bennett, 2007). In this work, Bennett (2007) sought to understand which metrics were

most useful when presenting to senior management and which were important when petitioning for greater marketing budgets. He noted that this information is needed as ‘charities are under increasing pressure to justify and account for their marketing expenditure’ (Bennett, 2007, pp.960). Bennett (2007) stresses the value of brand equity, and what it can mean for the brand. The role of the brand and brand equity is pertinent to the charity sector as charities generally offer a service, rather than a commercial product (Chad, 2013). Given the inherent nature of services, in the respect that they are not a tangible product, they are more difficult to market (Keller, 2013), and so effective branding of a service will allow a charity’s supporter to ground the service in reality, to ‘help identify and provide meaning to the different services’ (Keller, 2013, pp.42). Keller (2013) notes the importance of having a succinct way to measure brand to justify expenditure dedicated towards brand, despite a lack of explicit ROI. The ongoing research will set out to uncover whether charities are looking at metrics around brand equity in order to analyse the perceptions around their services, which are argued to be necessary in order to justify the lack of an explicit ROI (Keller, 2013). Within the confines of the charity sector, Bennett (2007) comments that this can be measured in terms of behavioural responses to the brand and supplies metrics such as supporter lifetime value and awareness as key. His result found that there was little motivation to measure brand equity, which he feels is suggestive of the fact that value is not well-recognised within the sector (Bennett, 2007). Intriguingly, it is noteworthy to see that equity and the perceptions of the customer is seen as more valued in his later work (Bennett, 2014). Hence, it would be worthwhile to consider the relevance of brand

equity for contemporary charities and assess whether it is a relevant theme for charities in 2019.

Within commercial fields of digital marketing, and the principal point of this study, a topical area of study is the importance of measurement and its influence on organisations (Flores, 2013). This is articulated by Flores (2013, pp.9) when he notes that: ‘you cannot manage what you cannot measure’. Flores (2013) stresses the need for measurement to contribute to the effectiveness of organisations, which is applicable for the charity sector given the pressures to demonstrate digital impact (Bowman and Gimson, n.d). This need to measure is prescribed by Kannan and Li (2017) due to the complexity of the digital space and the plethora of metrics that are produced by the various platforms, media and devices. In their work, the authors provide useful solutions regarding search engine practice and discussions around social media marketing (Kannan and Li, 2017). They reference a plethora of studies from a variety of backgrounds to validate their claims. For example, the authors do indicate to a set of metrics linking cost-per-click, conversion Rate and click-through-rate to the practice of conversion rate optimisation (Kannan and Li, 2017). This reference used originated from Skiera and Nabout (2013) who used an algorithm to demonstrate a 21% increase in ROI for both the client and an agency (Skiera and Nabout, 2013, cited by Kannan and Li, 2017). However, the study is conducted with one client and an agency, often who have established teams and resources – an environment unlike that of charity organisations (Lloyds, 2017). Questions are raised about the relevancy of their work, as it may not be likely that they are engaging with high levels of digital marketing given the level of digital illiteracy articulated by Lloyds (2017). This constraint applies to the work of Flores (2013) too, as the focus of his research is restricted to marketing agencies and research companies, which do not face the challenges such as lack of funding and



limited resources (Charity Digital News, 2017; Everett, 2017). What is needed is a thorough understanding on the ways in which charities perceive measurement and what their approaches are to deal with complexities of analytics. This deeper understanding of charities is necessary to create a conceptual framework which is in line with the ways in which charities would like to measure their online activity.

A lack of a marketing-metric-consensus was also the conclusion of the work by Bruni et al (2017, pp.344) who established that a comprehensive marketing dashboard is not prevalent in the majority of their sample with one interview noting that ‘the market is changing so rapidly that we are trying to collect as much data as possible’. Several interviewees commented that they were unsure which metrics to include, with a lack of competencies and internal processes highlighted as barriers (Bruni, et al, 2017). This is important as the research undertaken by Lamberti and Noci (2010) identified that the use of marketing performance systems and tools varied depending on the size of the company. For some of the interviewees; a lack of formalised marketing performance standards was due to the cost of implementing a complex measurement system, and a lack of ability to measure what performances they would like (Lamberti and Noci, 2010). Whereas larger companies in the sample invested in this formalisation process over time, and thus it was more structured and organised (Lamberti and Noci, 2010). Whilst the appropriateness of the research to the UK charity sector should not be overinflated given the fact that the research was conducted across one industry in one country: the tourism industry in Italy (Bruni, et al, 2017), the identified barriers are synonymous of those with the charity sector (Lloyds, 2017). The significance of this work should therefore captivate the intrigue of charity organisations and incentivise research into measurement more thoroughly providing an opportunity for research in order to create a sense of consistency in metric adoption and usage. It will be useful to

explore how applicable the work of Lamberti and Noci (2010) is to the charity sector in 2018. The research will go about assessing what current measurement behaviours exist, and what charities have come to expect in terms of measurement systems. Any prevailing insights will inform the conceptual framework, improving its relevancy for the charity sector.

Saura et al (2017) have produced a contemporary piece of work on the digital marketing environment, and the key performance indicators (KPIs) needed to understand it thoroughly. Their work was necessary given the lack of ‘consensus in the digital marketing ecosystem about which particular metrics are most useful’ (Saura, et al, 2017, pp.7). Their research primarily looks at selecting metrics to demonstrate ROI (Saura, et al, 2017) which is appropriate for the charity industry given the pressures to prove how their marketing efforts are being effective (Bowman and Gibson, n.d). Despite its relevancy, the advised metrics are strictly financial and are not conscious of understanding customer and brand equity, which are becoming increasingly important (Bennett, 2014). Ewing (2009, pp.103) stresses this in his work, noting that an overreliance on financial metrics would be detrimental as alone it is ‘no silver bullet’. He suggests that understanding more qualitative metrics such as “share of heart” is as important as “share of customer” (Ewing, 2009, pp.103). It would be useful to uncover the significance of these qualitative forms of metrics for the charity industry, to see how relevant they are for the charity sector. It is these unanswered questions that justifies the need for this research in order to consolidate our understanding of the intricacies of charity behaviours in relation to measurement. What is important to identify, is that Saura et al (2017) conclude with the fact that the digital space is continuously evolving, with new technologies emerging, and new internet-based demands needed to be met. They argue that academic research into measurement needs to be constant and reflective

of the more current developments in the field (Saura, et al, 2017). This reinforces the justification for the need to understand digital marketing measurement within the confines of the charity sector as it is important for charities to cater to the new needs in order to meet demands and stay in-touch with the modern audience.

Spiller and Tuten (2015) delve into the complex world of digital marketing measurement, which they regard as the tools used to quantify marketing activities in order to understand performance. Their work focuses on integrating digital measurement into marketing education which in turn has revelations into how metrics can be used at each stage of the buyer journey (Spiller and Tuten, 2015). Such an overview of metrics is useful for any organisation, yet questions are raised about its relevancy as charities do not necessarily adhere to the same buyer journey as experienced by the commercial sector (Gilliland, 2018). Alternatively, Paton (2003) does offer a framework designed to support the measurement of impact within the charity industry. Yet the author relies on the case study of Health Rights International (HRI) which has an annual budget of \$5 million (Paton, 2003), as the basis for his work. This is less useful for small charity organisations that make up a ‘significant part’ (Everett, 2017, n.p) of that sector due to the lack of resources noted above. Following this, it is clear that there is a need to conduct research in the proposed field in order to comprehend digital experiences for a wider range of charities in the sector.

Järvinen and Karjaluoto (2015) make digital marketing measurement the central point of their study, as they look to understand how metrics are used to understand performance within the industrial sector. The result of this study provides insightful contributions to the field, as their in-depth analysis allowed for discussions around effects on the quality of the measurement including: skill depravity, managerial issues

and organisational culture (Järvinen and Karkaluoto, 2015). However, despite its usefulness for the commercial industry, the results produced stem from a study conducted between three industrial organisations, all of whom have unique challenges such as ‘long-lasting selling process’, which inhibits its generalisability to the charity sector (Järvinen and Karjaluo, 2015, pp.119). Its ability to be applied to charities is further hindered by the fact that charities face distinctive customer behaviour challenges produced by an inherent lack of customer trust (Kashif, et al, 2015) which are incomparable to the industrial sector. Thus, there is an opportunity, through research, to produce knowledge that will improve our knowledge of the charity sector in order to create metric frameworks that are more aligned with the charity sector needs. Next, the chapter will briefly outline methodology before discussing the findings.

## **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews with twelve UK marketing managers in the charity sector were conducted. Each expert was selected based upon the proviso that they were responsible for some degree of digital marketing activity within their role and thus were in a position to comment upon the adoption of digital. Participants are indicated below by an anonymous code (Bravo, Foxtrot, etc.). Data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Codes were applied to the interview transcripts and were analysed in order to identify relationships or patterns which can be used to draw conclusions.

## **Findings: Ethical Digital Transformation of the Charity Sector**

### **Digital Marketing Strategy Development**

All participants have experienced some level of digital commitment, irrespective of the level in which charities have undertaken digital transformation or are in the process of, investing in new platforms and digital systems. Evidently, given the overwhelming adoption of digital processes, the attractiveness of digital transformation articulated by various authors (Gilliland, 2018; Gonzalez, 2017; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016) has indeed resonated with the charity sector. The consideration of digital as a potential solution for the needs of the sector is mirrored by participant Bravo:

“We have noticed a gap in digital service delivery. So, we feel that we could be delivering more for people who live with, or are affected by, \*\*\*. It is likely that following the website project we will focus on that. We do not know what kind of platform that might be. It could be an app, it could be something different – I’m just speculating at the moment.”

This opinion contributes seems to advance Kaufman and Horton (2015), by confirming that charities are also adapting the ways in which they offer solutions and consider digital implementation as a worthwhile resolution for charity demands. However, the findings highlight a clear disparity between organisations, with charities polarised in their opinions about the usefulness of digital transformation. On the one hand, you have organisations who are classified as *large* by the NCVO (2012) where “everything we do is digitally orientated” (Foxtrot). For these larger organisations, there was the experience that the charity was confident in using a range of digital marketing formats. Golf noted that: “We have an agency called \*\*\* that we partner with, who we do our media buying with and who do our digital accounts. They do our PPC work and manage

our paid for Facebook ads.” Lloyd (2017) note this disparity in digital experiences as a key issue that ‘plagues the charity sector’. Whereas, Mangles (2018) also showed that charities who do invest in digital show positive digital transformation and justify investment into the platform.

For those who warranted digital transformation as a viable and appropriate solution for development, the key advantage being the ability to test new ideas and platforms. Golf suggested: “we can test so many different things, so that gives us such a huge advantage to make sure that we’re able to ensure that our channels are working the best way that we can.” Alpha explained how: “we’re trying to build our communication channels. We have YouTube now, to try and bring in more video based content.”

Whereas, for the majority of participants interviewed, their level of confidence in digital adoption is low, which seems to be in agreement with Gilliland (2018), Lloyds (2018), and Kannan and Li (2017). Participants acknowledge that: “In terms of digital, we are not very advanced” (Delta), stressing that “We do what we can, when we can” (Hotel). Hotel is also quite sceptical of digital transformation, articulating that: “We have relatively low expectations that have been met. We haven’t seen a massive change” (Hotel), their reserved opinions about digital are not reinforced by any other interviewee. Golf indicates in their charity there is still a lot to be desired in terms of digital adoption as it does not “challenge the performance of traditional, or direct marketing” (Golf). It would appear, that from conversations with participants, the benefits of digital transformation have not overwhelmingly influenced the charity sector as Amar (2018) indicated.

Given the findings above, it would be misleading to suggest that digital is fundamental for all of the participating charities. The mainstream opinion of the participants stressed

the value of traditional marketing stating: “there is a still a big part to play for offline and direct marketing. It’s not going anywhere quickly” (Bravo). Other participants commented on the value of traditional in developing their comprehension of their target audience and their ability to nurture their relationships with customers. Whilst there is recognition about the ways in which digital can “carry on that relationship” (Alpha), it does not compensate for the ability of traditional to “replace those one-to-one conversations” (Foxtrot). Findings begin to contest the works of Gonzalez (2017) and his stress on the ability of digital to provide a richer understanding of customers. In this context, the perceived value of traditional marketing, and not necessarily skills (Royle and Laing, 2014) that are impeding the utility of the various digital tools available online.

Another factor which deters digital adoption is: “budgets for digital end up being quite small or simply pockets of money that are left over” (Charlie). Additionally, Hotel commented on how “the jury is still out on what the turnout is in terms of financial reward”, making it difficult to justify an increase on digital spend. Hence, the findings in this area begin to contest the works of Gonzalez (2017) and Mangles (2018) who suggest that an increase in advertising spend by commercial organisations, does not translate to charity sector.

Furthermore, the topic of strategy was a prevalent question within the interview process due to the frequency of strategy within the digital marketing literature (Saura, *et al*, 2017; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, Flores, 2013, Saunders, *et al*, 2016). Skills were noted to be essential to making efficacious strategic decisions (Saura, *et al*, 2017), which arguably presents problems for charities as they are said to lack digital skills (Lloyds, 2017; Amar, 2018; Goatman and Lewis, 2007). It appears that the charity

sector's most common approach to a digital strategy is that: "We do [have a strategy]", however, "how formulated that is, is questionable" (Echo). This is reiterated by another participant as they state that: "we do know what each platform is for without formalising it" (Foxtrot). Only one of the participants were consciously using data within their strategy, as a means to "inform future marketing much more easily" (India). This accents the work of Saura, *et al* (2017) by showing that their suggested use of digital analytics is likely to be advantageous to the charity sector, however most lack a digital strategy. Amar (2018), Lloyds (2017), and Goatman and Lewis (2007) are quick to point out that the dearth of digital skills is the main challenge for charities lack of digital adoption. Findings indicate that charities are lacking in digital skills, however they also are reticent to invest in these platforms.

## Digital Inhibitors in Charity Marketing

With regards to the factors that are inhibiting digital transformation, the UK Government (2017) identified four barriers including: access, skills, confidence and motivation. Similarly, the Lloyds 2017 Business Index noted that 9% of those surveyed felt that digital transformation was 'not worth the investment' (Lloyds, 2017). Participants noted that the lack of digital skills was "simply acknowledged within our sector" (Echo) reiterating Royle and Laing (2014) who asserted the significance of skills as a hindrance to digital adoption. However, this was not the case for all participants, reflected positively on their digital transition:

"I think a lot of the time you don't need specialist skills. We are not very advanced, particularly in terms of fundraising. But, what we do, even though we are very limited in the skills we have in the organisation, we do manage to achieve something" (Charlie).



This indicated that charities are becoming more comfortable with the digital space in contrast to Lloyds (2017). From conversations with participants, the two most prolific inhibitors to digital adoption stressed were: reluctance to change, senior leadership decisions. With the former, where digital had become significant and influential, came teams of people who were “willing to try and use it” even if they “don’t understand something” (Delta). However, some charities teams are not completely on board with the digital transformation. This was the experience expressed by India when they stated that:

“There is a new culture of being brave and trying new things. You’ve got an organisation that has got staff that work in all different departments and specialisms, where digital may not be part of their day to day work. Like any change can be quite frightening for people. They may not get what it means. There’s obviously people of work to bring everyone up to speed. The new website is part of bringing everyone on this journey of efficiency.”

With the latter, the senior management team seemed essential for the maturity of digital within the charity organisation in question. This was most concisely summarised by Foxtrot when they verbalised that:

“I noticed the difference in opinion to digital as we progressed to a new CEO. The emphasis on digital changed due to the CEO and their previous experience.”

Whilst skills assuredly have an influence on charities when exercising their digital platforms and services, there are additional, more pressing factors that begin to provide examples to the barriers articulated by Lloyds (2017).

Whilst charities appreciated the need to demonstrate ROI for their marketing efforts, the majority of participants failed to elaborate upon ROI when it came to digital

activities. As Foxtrot quoting that: “If someone questioned the time we spent on there [social media], we’d be struggling to answer them.” Another commented that “we paid for X, which we think resulted in this profit” (Delta). It certainly seems that participants struggled to elaborate upon ROI in financial terms. However, the participants were quick to note that, for them, the social impact they are having on the ground would constitute as their interpretation of ROI. Following their acknowledgement about a difficulty in demonstrating ROI Delta highlighted that:

“Our ROI would be the amount of funding that we bring in and what we do with that. So, the number of volunteer hours, coaching hours, those kinds of things rather than cost. So, it is important that we show the benefit we are having on the ground.”

Hence, an intriguing finding shows a contrast to financial ROI for digital and there was more attention dedicated to providing “[digital] services are useful and that people can access them” (Alpha). These findings provide greater insight into the opinions and behaviours of charities, and add depth to the works of those invested into the research of the charity sector (Corry, 2014; Simmonds, 2015) as well as a contrast between the perceived need to demonstrate ROI by scholars (Bennett, 2014; Corry, 2014. Saura, *et al*, 2017). Arguably, the drive to show genuine societal impact through their online behaviours is the primary goal through use of digital technology, matching donor expectations (Simmonds, 2015). As Charlie puts it:

“As a charity, you want the metrics that show ‘this is the good impact we’re doing as an organisation’. But you can’t forget about the sales metric that will help you bring money in to do the good stuff.”

Charities also expressed a desire to use digital technology to gain a deeper understanding of customers behaviour. For the majority, it was a case of “looking at

people's comments and how they are feeling about stuff" (Bravo). These findings are significant as it reveals that the works of Bennett (2014), Ewing (2009) and Shaw and White (1999), and their suggestions to measure more sentimental data is reflective of the demands of the charity sector. In addition, thoughts and feelings were mentioned in conjunction with brand equity. This [brand equity], was the foundation of Bennett's (2007) work, in which it was regarded as unimportant by charities during the time of writing. Predominantly, comments regarding the brand were scarce, and those who did contextualise it, noted that it was "something we are going to start looking at" (Foxtrot). However, for one participant, Echo, brand equity was cited as "crucial ... It is absolutely crucial" as the "charity sector has lost a lot of trust." Given the lack of focus on brand equity within the third sector, charities have yet to use measurement to seek out how the consumer is specifically viewing the organisation, meaning that there is opportunity to help suggest metrics which can fulfil this void. Indeed, the predominant response in relation to metrics was often that it was too complex. This was the experience of Alpha:

"A manager and I were going to sit down and get our heads around Google Analytics. She did some of the online tutorials. She sat there going "what", looking at me bemused. These digital people are speaking to people on a different level. When we're using it a tinier amount of the time when we are trying to frantically pull some reports."

This view was reinforced by Golf, who were seemingly very digitally confident, when the participant stated that: "marketing nowadays is extremely focused on all kinds of data and digital caters to those types of marketers." Arguably, whilst the existing measurement systems are advantageous to those commercial entities who have the skills, resources and time to utilise it effectively (Lloyds, 2017), charities are being

alienated as it is collating “too much data” (Bravo) meaning that they’re “probably not using it to its full potential because there is so much there” (Foxtrot). It is obvious charity sectors are being overlooked in terms of digital technologies in this manner, reinforcing the Kannan and Li (2017) who state they are less relevant for the charity industry. These findings reveal that a lack of appreciation and understanding of the charity sectors means that digital solutions are being created without their consideration.

One such example of digital solutions is elaboration of the customer journey. Participants knowledge of the typical customer journey was notably absent from conversations. Bravo says: “we have everything, we really need to join up the dots to see what is most effective. That would be a great final step.” Whereas, others have slightly more advanced views on the customer journey: “It is not absolutely clear which actions result in donations to the charity. We can measure how many likes or shares, and things like that, but it is not clear that results in a financial benefit” (Hotel). Accordingly, Saura, *et al*’s (2017) may have positive implications for the charity sector, as it provides a selection of KPIs that can be used to show the overarching financial impact of the digital activity. This, coupled with the works of Spiller and Tuten (2015), display a comprehensive measurement system that would, provide a complete set list of metrics for tracking ROI. However, it is important to note that metrics presented by

Spiller and Tuten (2015) and Saura, *et al* (2017) do not consider conscious of the social impact discussed previously.

Lastly, one participant commented on how their digital measurement will be improved following greater digital transformation. Echo claimed:

“We won’t get our digital stuff right until we implement a proper CRM system and membership portal, which we’re implementing which will give us an indication into who is engaging with us, where they came from and why.”

This revelation reveals potential for charities that invest in digital platforms and tools and the benefits for them. Whilst this may seem obvious, charities are fundamentally lagging behind commercial entities in terms of digital progression, and yet there is the expectation that charities should be measuring in the same capacity as other sectors. The evidence demonstrates that digital marketing supported by effective measurement can be appropriate tools for improving their services.

## Summary and the Development of the Conceptual Framework

The construction of the conceptual framework by the chapter authors stemmed directly from the analysis process, designed as a means of addressing gaps in the knowledge, by creating a matrix which could be adopted by charities and referenced when creating digital solutions for charity needs. With regards to digital transformation the analysis revealed that charities who have a positive experience with digital, are more likely to experiment and take advantage of the flexibility that digital platforms provide. This shifted away from the archetypal justifications for digital adoption such as efficiency as cited by Saura, *et al* (2017) and Royle and Laing (2014). Subsequently, the ability to test new ideas is noted in the framework as a justification for digital transformation,

and a topic which should be measured in order to assess what is, and what isn't working. However, it is important to note that the study highlighted how an inherent lack of digital adoption fundamentally hinders an ability to measure effectively. As discussed in the report, whilst this may seem like an obvious consequence, charities are still pressured into being able to justify their digital activity, without the necessary tools to do so. The argument is put forth that charities need the right level of digital investment before this expectation can be fulfilled, and literature needs to focus more heavily on digital transformation for charities in order to facilitate this change. Within the findings, participants explicated that they lacked any coherent or formulaic approach to digital strategy, and instead understood their strategic direction without necessarily noting it down. This finding began to disrupt the status quo in terms of how important strategy is perceived within commercial circles in correlation with the charity sector (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; and Saunders, *et al*, 2016). As such, the framework references the need to develop a digital direction to address the lack of strategy within charity circles. The impact of digital on the changing experiences of digital budgets was a talking point of the findings. It was evidenced that charities generally lacked sufficient budgetary allocations for their online activity. This extended into a need for metrics that show ROI in order to further justify their digital activity and improve digital budgets. This need for ROI has played a key role in both the literature (Gonzalez, 2017; Mangles, 2018) and with the construction of the framework, and is a recommended metric as it can help justify the financial benefits of digital adoption. Additionally, the significance of understanding the customer was desired amongst the participants. Overwhelmingly, the participants held traditional marketing in high esteem, and felt that digital did not exceed the standard that traditional did in terms of building relationships and in understanding the customer. What this revealed was that, whilst authors such as Bennett

(2014) and Ewing (2009) were relevant within the charity context, there still required clear digital metrics which could be used to provide a greater understanding of the customer and thus validate digital as a viable approach to forming deeper relationships. Moreover, and as an annex to the desires to understanding the customer, the research divulged that charities are more frequently looking at brand equity. Here, updates were made to Bennett's (2007) work, showing that metrics surrounding brand equity are more important to charities today than in 2007. As such, the framework has been designed to include brand equity, in order to appease the demands of the charity sector. More extensively, within group of participants, there was a desire to comprehend the full customer journey in order to see the process between digital activity and ultimately, the ROI. Thus, the customer pillar will have two attached sub-pillars: thoughts and feelings and customer journey; which are recommended in order to further satisfy the requirements of the participating charities. With respect to impact, and the typical ROI, charities stressed their ambitions to ensure they are understanding their social impact. This focus shifted the dependence on showing ROI in a financial sense as suggested by Bennett (2014), Corry (2014), and Saura *et al* (2017), and derived a recommendation that metrics that are able to demonstrate social impact should be created and successively implemented by charities. Therefore, social impact holds a key position within the framework. This framework has been constructed in order to more holistically produce a matrix that can be utilised by charities in order to compensate for two prevalent digital inhibitors. Following the analysis of the findings, revelations were made regarding the key inhibitors within the third sector, that limit the transformation of charity spaces into digitally-savvy epicentres. The findings endorsed the works of Lloyds (2017) and Goatman and Lewis (2007), by clarifying that the lack of skills within the sector are naturally going to impede digital development. However, the

research provided new, alternative reasoning as to why charities may be lagging behind commercial entities, including: a reluctance to change, and the whims of the senior teams. The motivation for a framework such as the one presented in this research is needed more than ever to help evidence and thus demonstrate the sheer impact digital can have on charity organisations to incentivise change amongst those who are less willing, or those who hold authority. Lastly, with respect to the way in which charities or agencies should lay out their metric frameworks, the data analysis process revealed that charities are often overwhelmed by digital frameworks, and feel that they are designed in a complex and overwhelming fashion. As such, the framework recommends that metric matrices adopted and used by charities should be simple, straightforward, and focused on the aforementioned metric pillars supplied due to the requirements of charities.

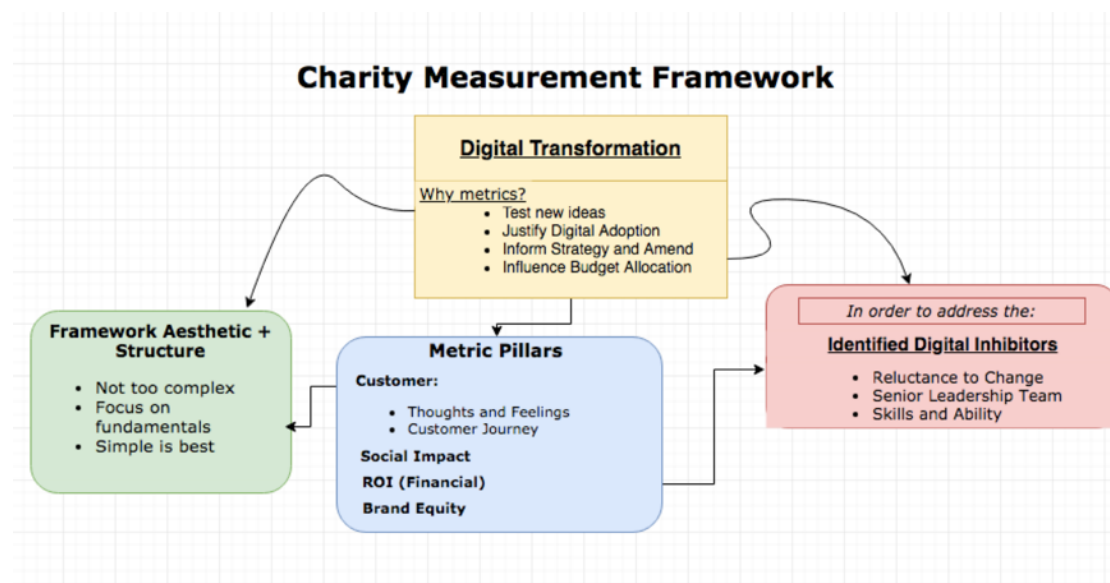


Figure 1 The Charity Measurement Framework



## Conclusions

The chapter has established how the lack of digital adoption fundamentally hinders charities ability to recruit customers. Despite increasing investment into digital platforms by a wide range of sectors (Gilliland 2018; Mangles, 2018; Dudman, 2017) there is little focus on how charities have adapted to digital change. The financial and competitive advantages of digital marketing is explored (Intel, 2018; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Chad, 2013), yet the understanding of charity motivations for digital adoption have yet to be discussed at length. Specifically, the role of measurement, which is noted to be as extremely relevant in commercial circles (Flores, 2013) is sorely lacking from conversations with a charity context. Where discussions around this topic does exist the subject of ROI (Bennett, 2014; Corry, 2014; Saura et al. 2017), Brand Equity (Bennett, 2007; Keller, 2013) and customer-centric metrics (Shaw and White, 1999; Ewing, 2009) are particularly prevalent. Subsequently, future research needs to explore charity behaviours around measurement, to assess what they are undertaking, and what motivators drive these decisions. As a result, this chapter calls for more research in exposing inhibiting factors to digital transformation and demonstrate whether charities are efficaciously using measurement to drive their digital marketing activities.

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