Facebook Likes: A Study of Liking Practices for Humanitarian Causes

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ABSTRACT
Civic engagement on Facebook has evolved, but there are still few studies of people’s motivations and reasons for liking humanitarian causes on Facebook. Introduced in 2009, the “like” button has become a part of users’ daily Facebook routines and a way for them to engage in humanitarian causes. Content analysis from a survey (N = 405) revealed six different liking practices for humanitarian causes on Facebook: (1) socially responsible liking, (2) emotional liking, (3) informational liking, (3) social performative liking, (5) low-cost liking and (6) routine liking. Interestingly, informational-driven liking was much less common than the more socially and emotionally motivated reasons for liking. The majority of the respondents also believe such likes help in promoting humanitarian causes; only a few had disliked such causes. The implications of these findings for understanding the nature and function of Facebook likes as a new form of civic engagement and humanitarian support are discussed.

Author Keywords: Facebook; likes; uses and gratifications; motivation

Introduction
Facebook is changing how people engage in and relate to humanitarian organisations. The number of Facebook fans and “likes” has surpassed the number of people on many organisations’ e-mail lists (Valverde et al., 2013). Each day, 2.7 billion likes occur on Facebook (Power of Facebook Advertising), and the like button is transforming
Facebook users’ practices. The enormous number of likes on Facebook is also an increasingly important means for attracting attention and disseminating information. Therefore, humanitarian organisations have started to use Facebook (Cone, 2012; Madianou, 2013) to mobilise awareness campaigns, to empower people to help and even to apply pressure on government decisions (Cone, 2012).

Despite the growth of Facebook likes for humanitarian causes, little is known about the motivations for and experiences surrounding this behaviour. Research on the psychological aspects of using the like button is lacking. We need to know more about Facebook users’ attitudes towards and motivations for liking practices, which are part of a new and emerging type of online civic engagement and social mobilisation (Enjolras et al., 2012). As civic engagement and humanitarian causes on Facebook are diverse, as well as users’ skills and motivation in terms of participating, it makes sense that the reasons for liking practices on Facebook vary.

Against this background, we aim to explore how people understand, experience and conceptualise liking humanitarian causes on Facebook and their beliefs concerning this kind of engagement. Exploring these questions affords scholars and humanitarian actors the opportunity to gain a strong understanding regarding the reasons as to why individuals are paying attention to and like humanitarian causes and organisations on Facebook. In addition, this understanding will help humanitarian organisations to gain more visibility and more impact when designing for various liking practices on Facebook.

The following section will describe how the like button works and how this study defines and approaches civic engagement in the context of Facebook likes and humanitarian causes. After this clarification, this paper has the following structure (1) related work, (2) research questions, (3) results and discussion, (4) limitations and further work and (5) the conclusion.

Civic engagement and the like button
The like button was added to Facebook in February 2009. It is a “simple plugin that lets people quickly share content on Facebook” (Like). Liking allows users to show their support for specific comments, pictures, status updates or fan pages without having to make a written comment (Like).

After users like something, their news feed is updated, letting their friends know what pages they like. Facebook has also made it possible to add like buttons directly to other websites (Facebook features).
The design purpose of the like button is to convey positive feedback (to users’ friends), not outrage, anger or compassion, which often arises from humanitarian issues. Therefore, the challenge related to the like button is its lack of complexity. The button presents users with only two choices: to like or to not like, which creates challenges for humanitarian organisations seeking to launch effective Facebook communication strategies promoting causes that are problematic or sad, and to call for compassion and solidarity, not likes. However, as a broader portion of the population becomes Facebook members, the site will be used in increasingly varied ways (Brandtzaeg, 2012a), which might also lead to differences in how people perceive and use the like button.

In this paper, liking humanitarian causes on Facebook is considered as a new type of civic engagement. Civic engagement is generally seen as a highly important feature of a healthy democracy (Valenzuela et al., 2009), but it is unclear how science should approach and understand it. Civic engagement is usually defined as the ability to influence choices through collective action (Camino and Zeldin, 2012) on a spectrum ranging from a minimal level of involvement and objectification, to involvement that carries legitimate influence (Hart, 1992).

Coleman (2005) claims that we are seeing a migration from traditional forms of participation to newer and more creative forms, and therefore we need to rethink the meaning of civic participation. Civic engagement in the Age of the Internet embraces a range of specific activities (Jenkins and Thorburn, 2004), and social media has further extended the range of civic engagement. Following Brandtzaeg et al. (2012, p. 69), we define civic engagement in social media as “action in response to societal needs” and identify three distinct practices: supportive, deliberative and collaborative.

1) Supportive practices are participation and online sharing practices involving easy-to-use social media features, such as the like button on Facebook and the retweet function on Twitter, which facilitate participation in a convenient and efficient manner, i.e., “micro-participation” (see Haller, 2011).
2) Deliberative practices are known as discursive practices. This is the process of thoughtfully weighing various options through a discussion in which different opinions are represented (Davies and Chandler, 2012).
3) Collaborative practices occur when people collectively create new ideas or solutions to support, promote or discuss societal issues (Brandtzaeg et al., 2012).

This study focuses on civic engagement as supportive practices, specifically using the Facebook like button to support aid and development organisations such as Save the Children, Amnesty International and Plan International, and humanitarian causes such
as child aid, charity, disaster relief, earthquake, drought, war and famine relief and asylum seekers.

**Related work**

Individual social-responsibility motivations are recurrent when explaining why people care about social themes such as social problems, charity, environmental problems and sustainability. The motivational driver is related to the “presence of social issues within the challenges” (Battistella and Nonino, 2012). It has been suggested that we must understand the individual’s social responsibility within his or her context to drive behaviours intended to help others (e.g., charitable giving) (Mathur, 2013). Benkler (2011) argue that the costs of collaborating and volunteering activity via electronic media are lower than ever before, and that humans in general are less selfish than the literature and research would have us believe. Scientists are, however, still struggling to understand how people care in terms of social responsibility in a new electronic environment such as Facebook. More precisely, there is a lack of knowledge about liking practices of humanitarian organisations and causes on Facebook, which are the focus of this study.

Most studies on Facebook have focused on the site’s social implications and the motivations for using it (see Brandtzaeg, 2012a; Ellison et al., 2007; Hargittai and Hsieh, 2010; Joinson, 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2009). These studies suggest the motivations and usage of Facebook are diverse. A systematic review of all research on Facebook by Wilson et al. (2012), published in the Journal of Perspectives on Psychological Science, confirms that no studies have been conducted on Facebook likes in general and in an humanitarian context in particular. One obvious reason for this absence of research is that the like button is a relatively recent feature.

Some empirical research has found that non-profit organisations (e.g. humanitarian) are more successful with positive engagement than for-profit organisations on Facebook. While non-profit organisations use social media mainly to raise awareness, for-profit organisations spend more time servicing their customers than engaging in discussion (Novak, 2012). Similarly, a recent benchmark study of non-profit organisations (Valverde et al., 2013) found that the social media audience of non-profits grew in 2012, with a 46 per cent median increase in Facebook fans. Photos were the content type with the highest virality (information circulated rapidly and widely from one Facebook user to another). Moreover, users were more than twice as likely to like, share or comment on photo posts than on any other type of content. The study concluded that non-profit organisations seeking to generate the most viral activity might have more success with photo posts than with other types of content (Valverde et al., 2013).
In another 2013 study, the market firm Syncape (Scissons, 2013) interviewed 2,080 consumers about their reasons for becoming Facebook fans. The most common reason for liking a brand was “to support the brand I like” (49%). The other main reasons were “to get a coupon or discount” (42%), “to receive regular updates from brands I like” (41%), “to participate in contests” (35%) and “to share my good experiences” (31%). However, since the results were based on a quantitative survey with predefined reasons, the questions might not have accurately captured participants’ real motivations. The latter study is not peer-reviewed either.

On a general level, low-cost and low-commitment engagement in online environments such as Facebook likes is often associated with the negative term slacktivism (see Christensen, 2011). On the other hand, optimism that social media can stimulate more civic engagement has been increasing. US President Barack Obama’s 2008 social media campaign motivated new groups of citizens not only to vote but also to become active in the campaign (Castells, 2009). Facebook also strives to ensure that brands and organisations are not only collecting fans, but are also actively engaged in and driving advocacy for various causes.

Since the 2008 Obama campaign, Facebook’s key role in political and social issues has been increasingly recognised (Golbeck, 2012). The growing importance and use of Facebook likes might affect people’s ability to discuss and participate in new forms of information sharing and interaction, such as user-generated content involving civic issues such as charitable and humanitarian causes. This might decrease the distance between humanitarian organisations and citizens (Lüders et al., 2013) on the one hand, but on the other hand, it may create participation inequality and new digital divides (Norris, 2003). These issues highlight the importance of researching differences among people’s Facebook liking practices in relation to humanitarian causes.

Facebook liking behaviour appears to have become a vehicle for those who wish to inform others of what they perceive as desirable activities and to call forth a preferred presentation of the self. These kinds of actions might be linked to what Bennett (2012, p. 24) calls “personalized collective action”. This type of action is possible because social media enables a large number of ordinary people to become linked to and recognised by a large number of other people, but the focus remains up-close and personal. According to Bennett (2012), individuals can experience being in the centre of a large universe thanks to the social networking potential of ubiquitous communication technologies. Examples of personalised collective action are the Facebook pages “We are all Khalid Shaid” (Egypt) and “We are the 99%” of the Occupy Wall Street movement.
Similarly, studies on social interaction (Goffman, 1967) describe how individuals commonly seek to acquire information about others and to define their general socio-economic status, conception of self, competence and trustworthiness. Individuals’ support for humanitarian causes through Facebook likes therefore could be understood in the light of Goffman’s (1967) theoretical framework. Facebook likes can also be interpreted as an easy form of self-representation (Mehdizadeh, 2010) attached to meaningful engagement.

Another theoretical perspective – the uses and gratification (U&G) theory – is often used to identify and explain why people choose to use specific media, and it has been previously applied to explain differences and motivations related to the usage of computer-mediated communication and social media (e.g., Parke, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). The U&G theory focuses on intrinsic psychological needs and develops the theoretical dimensions of user motivations for media use and selection (Stafford, 2004).

By applying the U&G framework, a study on Facebook usage (Joinson, 2008) identified six unique uses and gratifications: social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing and status updating. Various demographic groups were found to be motivated to use Facebook for different purposes, with social connectivity and perpetual contact motivating younger (and female) users more than older (and male) users. The study by Joinson (2008) was undertaken before the introduction of the like button. Anyway, the variety of motivations and interactions afforded by Facebook suggests that individuals may bring different psychological motivations and expectations when they also use these sites for the purpose of liking (a humanitarian cause or organisation). In addition, because this engagement requires varying degrees of interactivity, interest and civic resources, the role of individuals’ behaviour in terms of humanitarian attitudes and support may differ through Facebook likes.

According to Pai and Arnott (2012), the main shortcoming of previous studies applying the U&G framework has been their use of questionnaire-based, quantitative methodologies. Thus, earlier studies have failed to adequately explore gratifications qualitatively. This study addresses this limitation by applying content analysis with open-ended responses to understand how people engage in different liking practices on Facebook in relation to humanitarian causes.

**Research questions**

This study was conducted to explore differences in liking practices related to humanitarian causes. In other words, why are users engaging by liking these pages? It aims to determine how individuals on Facebook perceive other users’ and their own
motivations for liking a humanitarian cause. The research questions (RQs) are as follows:

1) Do Facebook users believe that liking humanitarian causes on Facebook really supports humanitarian causes?
2) What motivates Facebook users to like humanitarian causes?
3) Why do Facebook users unlike humanitarian causes?

We empirically examine these RQs and integrate Goffman’s (1967) framework, which explains (1) self-presentation in social networks and (2) the U&G theory.

Our study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and precise view of what motivates people to participate by liking humanitarian causes and organisations on Facebook. This knowledge could help humanitarian organisations, campaign planners and researchers understand the complex implications and motivations of Facebook likes. The present study could also provide deeper knowledge about the usage of Facebook likes, a growing form of social and civic participation in social media. Information about what motivates Facebook likes could help policymakers understand inequalities in new forms of civic engagement and improve humanitarian non-profits’ ability to engage more fans and to perform well in a competitive Facebook environment.

Method
The literature on Facebook likes as civic engagement is not yet rich enough to provide a sound conceptual foundation for evaluating such user activity. Therefore, an exploratory survey with open-ended questions was undertaken to investigate liking practices related to humanitarian causes. This survey was designed to gain new insight into people’s liking behaviour and to determine which factors motivate such engagement.

Norway, where this study took place, is one of the most advanced digital societies in the world and has a high rate of access to the Internet. Ninety-two per cent of the population and nearly 100 per cent of those under the age of 45 are connected to the Internet at home (Enjolras et al., 2012). More than 80 per cent of the total Internet population uses Facebook (MMI Ipsos, 2012), making Norway an interesting starting point for investigating new practices of Facebook liking.

Participant demographics
The study involved 405 participants, of whom 82 per cent were female and 18 per cent male. Age was measured by fixed categories, with a minimum age of 16 and a
maximum age of 71. About half of the respondents (51%) were between the ages of 16 and 30. Most (94%) of the sample used Facebook daily, and all participants had experience with using the like button on Facebook. Ninety-two per cent of the respondents completed the entire survey.

**Data collection**
Data was collected through an online survey hosted by Survey Monkey and posted on Plan Norway’s official Facebook page (Figure 1). The survey was carried out between 7 July and 10 September 2012. Two iPads were raffled off as an incentive to recruit participants. The online survey enabled reaching Facebook users in their own context. It offered easy access to an extremely large number of users while they were actually using Facebook – individuals who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels (Wright, 2005). Another benefit of approaching the users in their specific Facebook context is that the users are in their natural setting and thus have a clear perception of the particular site, usage patterns and the environment under investigation (Brandtzaeg, 2012b).
Why Plan Norway?
Plan Norway’s Facebook page has more than 100,000 followers, and it is one of the most successful humanitarian organisations worldwide at using Facebook. Plan International, one of the largest children’s development organisations in the world, promotes children’s rights and fights poverty (About Plan). Plan Norway is therefore an especially interesting case for studying motivations for liking practices on Facebook.

While the information on some Facebook pages is accessible only to individuals who have liked the page, Plan Norway’s Facebook page is open to all users, regardless of whether they have liked the page or not. This means that the survey respondents were not necessarily followers of Plan Norway’s Facebook page. Two-thirds (66%) of the participants said they had liked Plan Norway’s Facebook page. Sixty per cent of the sample sponsored a child through Plan Norway (donating US$ 45 a month) or had
family members who did. Thus, part of the sample had a committed involvement in Plan Norway.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions and took approximately 20 to 25 minutes to answer. It inquired about demographic information (e.g., gender, age and education) and included both closed- and open-ended questions. Several iterations were employed to develop our final questionnaire design. First, three advisers working with Plan Norway on its Facebook strategy tested the questionnaire and suggested some changes. Secondly, a small pilot study with six randomly selected Facebook users was conducted because the variables in the study were new. The pilot investigation employed two different approaches. First, three pilot users tested the complete questionnaire online and gave immediate feedback on measurements and aspects they found irrelevant or difficult to comprehend. The second approach was a questionnaire walkthrough, in which a researcher sat next to and was in dialogue with three pilot users filling out the questionnaire.

Do likes help?

Participants were asked to answer the following questions using a four-point scale, in addition to a “don’t know” category (see Figure 2): “To what extent do you think that likes help promote humanitarian causes?” The respondents were told that humanitarian causes referred to “causes such as humanitarian disasters, child aid, earthquakes, drought, war and famine, and to cases such as Kony 2012, asylum seekers, and aid and development organisations (e.g., Save the Children, Amnesty and Plan International)”.

Reasons to like

To explore participants’ perceptions of others’ motives and their own reasons for liking humanitarian causes and organisations on Facebook, we asked the following open-ended questions: 1) “Why do you think other people ‘like’ and share content on social and humanitarian issues, e.g., Kony 2012, asylum children, the Sahel drought, on sites such as Facebook?” and 2) “Can you explain in your own words why you chose to like the organisation Plan Norway and its cause on Facebook? Was there any particular reason why you liked Plan Norway on Facebook?”

We believe that posing these diverse questions about how people interpret their own personal motives and those of others in terms of likes is a fruitful approach with which to compare motivational differences and to avoid the third-person effect (Davison, 1983), which is a common bias method in self-report questionnaires. We, therefore, systematically distinguished between respondents’ own and others’ motivations (see Figure 3).
Reas ons to unlike
The shortcomings of measuring liking practices on Facebook along purely conventional lines are evident, not only in general, but particularly for humanitarian activity on Facebook. We, therefore, constructed a sound, single-item measure to identify users’ overall unlikeing practices. We asked the following question: “Have you ever unliked on Facebook? Why?” Respondents could choose from five fixed categories and were allowed to select multiple categories (see Figure 4). They could also select the category of “other”, which was an open-ended response category.

Single-item measures are quick and easy to use; however, methodologists recommend the use of multiple-item measures. Recently, this strict view has been challenged. Studies have demonstrated that meaningful reliability estimates can be calculated for single-item measures (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007; Loo, 2002).

Content analysis
To be able to identify the reasons behind why people like humanitarian causes on Facebook, we decided to approach the data in the open-ended responses using content analysis. Content analysis is, according to Holsti (1969), proven to be a useful technique to identify the characteristics of communications or open-ended responses.

The answers in the open-ended responses in our survey were studied and sorted into categories according to the experiences and opinions of the respondents, and then summarised. We used the same approach documented in other studies (Brandtzaeg et al., 2012; Brandtzaeg and Heim, 2008; Lüders et al., 2013). Such quantification allows researchers to characterise the open-ended responses in a way that is potentially reliable and valid (Holsti, 1969).

In more detail, we first performed quantitative content analysis on word frequencies to identify which words and phrases were mentioned most frequently in the answers to the two open-ended reasons-to-like questions. Second, we performed in-depth, qualitative content analysis based on the frequency data, and interpretations in the light of the U&G framework as well as the theory on self-presentations. Based on these interpretations, we classified all answers to the two open-ended questions into six meaningful groups (Figure 3).

Each message was coded by two researchers for the purpose of validation. Inter-rater reliability was measured through pilot coding, resulting in Cohen’s kappas ranging from 0.5 to 0.8 for the themes, which represent moderate to substantial agreement between the raters (Landis & Koch, 1977). Since participants’ responses could contain
one or more explanations, a single response could be coded into more than one category.

**Results and discussion**

This section is divided into three parts following the three RQs. The results are discussed and interpreted in relation to Goffman’s (1967) framework, which explains self-presentation in social networks and the U&G theory.

**RQ1: Do likes help?**

Our findings presented in Figure 2 suggest that this sample of Facebook users believes that likes help promote humanitarian causes (63%). About half (51%) of the sample reported that “it helps somewhat” to like these causes on Facebook, while 12% reported that “it helps a lot”. These numbers might challenge the notion of “slactivism”, as most people actually believe in their liking practices related to these kinds of causes. However, Figure 2 illuminates some gender differences.

![Figure 2: Respondents’ opinions on whether liking humanitarian causes on Facebook helps](image-url)
Title

More females than males believe that likes are assets in supporting humanitarian causes. A chi-square test found that there was a statistically significant gender difference, $\chi^2 (4, N = 397) = 15.2, p = .000$. These gender differences are also discussed in the “Limitations” section.

RQ2. Reasons to like

The first part of the content analysis shows the words most frequently mentioned in the two open-ended questions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency word count for others’ motivation (N = 405) and respondents’ own motivation (N = 261)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Others’ motivation</th>
<th>Own motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Care, 86 mentions</td>
<td>1. Support, 113 mentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engagement, 80 mentions</td>
<td>2. Information, 89 mentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. People, 78 mentions</td>
<td>3. Engagement, 29 mentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Support, 58 mentions</td>
<td>4. Important cases, 29 mentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Easy, 32 mentions</td>
<td>5. Care, 11 mentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Attention, 24 mentions</td>
<td>7. Share, 8 mentions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This frequency count indicates that liking practices not only differ in terms of how users perceive their own motivations and those of others, but that liking practices also range from care, support and engagement, to easy access as well as feelings and attention. Attention and feelings were typically identified as others’ motivations for liking.

Moreover, the results of the in-depth, qualitative content analysis went beyond simply counting phrases or words in a text to developing meaningful categories. These results are presented in Figure 3.

Six unique liking practices were identified, each of which presents different reasons for liking humanitarian causes on Facebook. Figure 3 also compares individuals’ self-reported motivation (personal reasons for liking) and the motivations they perceive other as having (what they think others’ reasons for liking are).

The six main categories of liking practices are (1) socially responsible liking, (2) emotional liking, (3) informational liking, (4) social performative liking, (5) low-cost liking and (6) routine liking. There is a large difference between people’s own motivations for liking and what they perceive as others’ motivations. For example, only 3 per cent reported social performative liking as their own motivation, but 22 per cent believed that others liked based on this motivation.
1) Socially responsible liking

The category of socially responsible liking captures the participants’ answers reflecting how liking behaviour is based on the desire to actively help and contribute to humanitarian organisations. Socially responsibility is also defined as an ethical ideology or theory where an individual has an obligation to act to benefit society at large (Kwizera et al., 2011).

Similar percentages of participants reported social responsibility as motivating others’ (62%) and their own (66%) liking of humanitarian matters. Thus, a majority of respondents reported that liking and sharing humanitarian content on Facebook is grounded in motivations of social responsibility. This finding is supported by Benkler’s (2011) notion that humans not are motivated primarily by narrow self-interest, but in orders to help and support others.

People in this category seemed devoted and committed to this task. Participants mentioned diverse aspects of social responsibility as their motivations for liking Plan Norway on Facebook, as well as for others’ liking and sharing content from humanitarian organisations. The most frequently mentioned reasons were to show one’s support to others, to raise awareness and to contribute in non-economic ways. Organisational membership through sponsoring a child via Plan was also a common reason.

Many of the participants believed that people like humanitarian matters with the purpose of spreading the word to their Facebook friends and making others aware of a specific cause. By doing so, they hope to motivate others to support the organisation and become engaged sponsors. When asked about others’ liking and sharing of humanitarian causes on Facebook, one participant stated:

Because the cause engages them, they want to distribute the information so that people will know what is happening in the world and hopefully will support the organisations that do something about the situation. (Female, age group 31–35)

The desire to raise awareness and to show support was salient for answers about one’s own and others’ liking behaviour (26% and 53%, respectively). Some respondents also said that liking humanitarian content on social media sites such as Facebook can be a way to contribute to and be engaged in an organisation’s work, even if one does not have the means to contribute financially. Fourteen per cent reported this as a motivation for others’ liking, while 5 per cent said it was a reason for their own liking. A younger participant explained this liking motivation:
Because people would really like to share with others the things that are happening in the world, it [liking and sharing] can be a way of showing that one cares about the things that are happening in other countries, if one does not have the possibility of contributing with money and similar means. (Female, age group 16–20)

Similarly, another respondent pointed out that people use likes to raise awareness about humanitarian causes in their social network:

They want that more people shall see what is actually going on in the world. The like button contributes to the message showing up in all one’s friends’ newsfeeds, so they can’t fail to see it. (Male, age group 21–25)

Almost half of the respondents (48%) whose answers fell into the category of socially responsible liking pointed to their organisational membership and sponsorship of a child through Plan as the main motivator for liking the organisation’s fan page on Facebook. Plan membership as a reason for liking was often reported in connection with the desire to make others aware of the organisation’s work. One participant (female, age group 21–25) wrote, “I am a Plan member, and I wish to follow the organisation because I myself am involved”.

2) Emotional liking

The second most frequent category was emotional liking, which is described as an emotional reaction towards a specific humanitarian cause or an emotional engagement that individuals want to share with others. A considerable number of participants cited emotional engagement as an important motivation for their own (37%) and others’ (26%) liking of humanitarian matters.

Emotional liking is typically based on spontaneous feelings and compassion for humanitarian tragedies. Motivations within this category differ from those of social responsibility; the latter express a more profound desire to contribute to and actively participate in humanitarian work. Emotional liking, in contrast, is a less committed form of engagement, but still a form of social activity, as individuals share their feelings with others in their network. Emotional liking is based on feelings towards humanitarian issues and, to a lesser extent, on personal intentions to participate and contribute over time. One participant expressed her attitudes towards children’s welfare and her motivation for liking Plan’s Facebook page:

Because I think all children have the right to water, food, schooling and medication, no matter where in the world they live. They are innocent in the midst
Title

of all that is happening in their country. Because of poverty, a lot of children do not have access to the resources that satisfy their biological needs; it is therefore important to help as many as possible. (Female, age group 21–25)

Content such as photos, videos and messages that speak to people’s primary emotions (surprise, fear, sadness, joy, disgust and anger) (Ekman et al., 1969) trigger sharing on impulse (Jones, 2012). People who report emotional liking could become active in exercising social responsibility. Features that support this emotional state should be considered to enhance people’s committed engagement.

3) Informational liking

Informational liking is a practice motivated by information retrieval. Receiving information and updates about Plan’s humanitarian work was the third most frequently mentioned reason (38%) for one’s own liking practices. Instant information gratification and the desire for relevant information seem to be highly important factors. However, only 5 per cent believed it to be a key motivation for others’ liking practices. Members of Plan were more likely to mention receiving information as a main motivator for liking. One participant expressed the following:

I am a sponsor, and I like many of the causes they post. And I can get information that interests me as a sponsor. I also think it is nice to inform others by sharing Plan’s posts, so that others can also see what they are working for and consider sponsoring a child. (Female, age group 36–40)

In addition to sponsors receiving updates relevant to their membership, non-members also liked Plan’s Facebook page to obtain information about the organisation and its activities. One participant wrote:

[I want to] learn more about the sponsoring program, and to get updates of what the organisation does and how one can contribute, e.g., campaigns. (Female, age group 16–20)

Facebook was mentioned by several respondents as an appropriate channel for providing information about the organisation’s work. A motivation for liking was the short, succinct format in which Facebook delivers information. Some participants preferred it over other forms of information. One participant said:

I like Plan and their focus on children (and girls). I am a sponsor and I try to keep close contact with the child I sponsor. I like receiving short updates of what Plan is working on and what goals they achieve. I would rather receive short updates on Facebook than long updates through e-mail. (Female, age group 21–25)
This category of liking corresponds to the finding of Lampe et al. (2012) that individuals use Facebook as a significant source of information. Similarly, Enjolras et al. (2012) found that younger people, in particular, disseminate news and information on Facebook. However, informational needs have not surpassed strictly social reasons for using Facebook (Lampe et al., 2012). This trend seems also to hold true for the like button, as information is only the third most frequent reason for liking.

4) Social performative liking
Several participants considered liking humanitarian content on Facebook as a way to construct and perform an online social identity for themselves. This is in line with Goffman’s (1967) theory of self-presentation and with social gratification in the U&G approach. The participants said that this social identity was either a true or false representation of a desired or better self. One participant expressed this double-sided motivation for liking as follows:

Some [like] because they genuinely think that something is important, useful or pleasant (recommendation), and some [like] because they wish to adorn themselves with their preferences [reputations]. (Female, age group 41–45)

Some participants perceived liking and sharing humanitarian causes on Facebook as a means of enhancing one’s social status and portraying a better self. This was cited mostly as others’ motivation for liking humanitarian matters on Facebook (22%); a much lower proportion cited it as a motivation for their own liking behaviour (3%). The large gap between how respondents saw their own and others’ motivation might be explained by the third-person effect (Davison, 1983), in which people assume they are less influenced by communicated or social media messages than others. This perception stems from a self-motivated social desirability, in which individuals believe that they are not influenced by new user trends or media messages. One participant expressed a negative view of others’ motivation for liking and sharing as follows:

People like to believe that others have a positive view of them, in which they are good or better people than they really are. We love to pretend that we are better than we are, and we feel we reach the goal of having a high status and that people think well of us when we receive many likes. (Female, age group 21–25)

However, as mentioned, not all answers characterised others negatively. Six per cent of respondents stated that they believed others liked in order to construct a genuine online representation of themselves. Some participants reported genuine identification with an organisation or a cause as a motivation for others’ liking behaviour.
These findings on social identity are in line with research by Pai and Arnott (2012) on users’ motives for adapting and using social networking sites (customisability). They found that self-publicity through customised profiles can lead to improved self-esteem. Liking humanitarian organisations and causes can be a way for users to construct and present a social identity, whether authentic or false, and to gain acknowledgement from others. Thus, liking humanitarian causes becomes part of the narrative of the self, the story that users tell their Facebook friends (Madianou, 2013).

One of the most successful campaigns developed by Plan Norway, “Because I am a girl” (http://www.flickr.com/photos/plangirls/sets/72157630837049764/), is a great example of such an identity strategy, using elements such as social identity and group solidarity. The online campaign urged people to publish “selfies” or photos of themselves with a raised hand in different social networking sites to show their support for quality education for girls all over the world.

5) Low-cost liking

Low-cost liking is a type of low-commitment humanitarian engagement performed through Facebook likes. This was the fourth most frequently mentioned reason for liking reported by the sample. Motivations within this category were mainly attributed to others’ liking practices (17%). One participant stated the following:

[Liking is] an easy way to feel one helps and does something for somebody. [It entails a] low level of commitment, [it is] free, and at the same time you get to share important content to a lot of people. (Female, age group 21–25)

This type of low-cost civic engagement has been referred to as a type of slacktivism (see Christensen, 2011). Clicking the like button entails no effort but can still lead to massive distribution of a message. Thus, in some cases, it is believed to have a real impact, such as in the Kony campaign (the most viral campaign in 2012). However, people who participate through low-cost liking might not feel a real or committed engagement. They might participate in this kind of engagement only as an easy way to feel good about their contribution. Hence, low-cost liking and online civic engagement in general are often met with scepticism, which has increased in recent years. Nevertheless, research has shown that slacktivism does not replace, but rather can reinforce more active forms of civic engagement and participation (Enjolras et al., 2012). Low-cost liking or slacktivism aims to increase people’s level of knowledge about civic causes (Christensen, 2011).

6) Routine liking
Having a liking routine is the fifth main reason for liking humanitarian causes on Facebook. Routine liking means that this activity is a central part of the daily routine for many people and that it has become the norm when using Facebook. Instead of a real kind of engagement, this is a mechanically performed procedure, a standard activity. Respondents attributed this as motivated only to others (6%). Such answers typically described Facebook members’ usage of the site and the norms, culture and routines that have become part of general user trends and that also apply to humanitarian causes. One participant explained this trend:

> It is all about a culture of sharing, where everybody wants to distribute “good” content. (Male, age group 26–30)

Similarly, another respondent expressed this attitude in this way:

> The like button does not necessarily need to be used because one actually likes what is happening, but simply because you want to share it with others, regardless of if the content is positive or negative. (Male, age group 15–21)

Thus, this activity is embedded in the culture of Facebook that makes sharing part of the routine, whether users truly like a cause or not. In this regard, this motivation is not related to socially responsible or social performative liking practices, which are typically grounded in actions that are more thoughtful.

In addition to the embedded sharing culture of Facebook, another motivation connected to user trends was using the like button to show that one has read a message, regardless of whether one actually liked the content or not.

**RQ3. Reasons to unlike**

Figure 4 shows the various reasons for unliking something on Facebook. Twenty-seven per cent of the sample said they had never unliked anything. However, Figure 4 shows that content is king. Boring or uninteresting content could be a trigger to stop liking, while too little information was seldom an issue.

Males were somewhat more sensitive than females to information overload. Only 17 respondents cited “other” as a reason for stopping liking. Some said they had stopped liking a cause because it had taken a new turn. As one respondent explained:

> The Kony case was very much talked about and so many people cared about it, but the leaders who ran it did so much nonsense. (Male, age group 22–25)

Others said they stopped because the content was too painful:
Yes, [I stopped liking] because of the incredible number of painful images that were completely insane. I cannot bear to see injured animals. (Female, age group 21–24)

**Figure 4: Reasons for unliking a humanitarian cause or organisation on Facebook**

Content relating to awful events or disasters is harder to like than good news. This dilemma arises particularly in connection with liking humanitarian causes, which themselves might be of an unpleasant character (e.g., thousands of children are starving; a family does not have access to clean drinking water). In general, people do not truly like bad news, but use the like button to express sympathy or solidarity with the cause. However, in these circumstances, clicking on a button called “like” might leave
users with a bad feeling. One respondent described the dilemma of liking humanitarian causes:

It’s important that the expression of sad cases is formulated in a way that it is possible so a s to LIKE the message. I do not LIKE that there has been an earthquake, but I LIKE that humanitarian organisations are present there and help victims. (Female, age group 36–40)

Therefore, transforming a sad message into a positive message might be an important communication strategy for gaining likes and supporters. The like button lacks complexity, as it leaves the users only with two options.

Limitations and further research
For several reasons, the results of this study are limited in scope. Relying on online questionnaires to study Internet and Facebook usage could create a bias towards people who spend more time online (Hargittai and Hsieh, 2010). The sample in this study suffers from self-selection bias, which is a well-known, major limitation of online survey research (Brandtzaeg, 2012b). Some individuals are more likely than others to complete an online survey, which might reduce the generalisability of the findings (Wright, 2005). However, as mentioned in the method section, approaching the users in their specific Facebook context also had the benefit of giving users a clear perception of the particular site, usage patterns and environment under investigation.

Only one organisation was examined (Plan Norway). This choice was reasonable due to the great number of Facebook users who engage with Plan Norway and already have experience with the humanitarian liking practices investigated in this study. The selected case, however, is not generalizable, as it only looks into Norwegian users in one particular organisation. Future researchers should consider assessing multiple Facebook pages to gain a broader view of liking practices across countries and organisations. This could help future research make larger comparisons of a more diverse range of Facebook users.

Moreover, the gender skew in our sample is heavy, perhaps due to the topic of humanitarian and child aid, which is generally more attractive to female than to male Facebook users. Females are also found to be more active in social media usage in general (Brandtzaeg, 2012b). Beyond the self-selection bias in our sample, it also includes people who already think positively about liking a humanitarian cause, which can partly explain why more than 60% of the respondents who liked a humanitarian cause believed that it helped, despite Christensen’s (2011) talk about slacktivism. Therefore, more research is needed to confirm the results of this study. Future research should be conducted across countries, and account for both gender differences and users who do not like humanitarian organisations on Facebook. The current sample problems
could be reduced by employing a Facebook ads approach examining more than one Facebook page in order to reach a broader user base including people who do not like humanitarian organisations as well as males.

Overall, this study provides an important understanding regarding how individuals engage in different Facebook liking practices to participate in humanitarian issues. People clearly do differ in their motivations due to various predispositions, beliefs and expectations. The categorisation of these different liking practices is simple and useful for practitioners and researchers trying to understand differentiated liking on both Facebook and other social media platforms. The results of this study should be of interest to those who agree that an essential element in improving strategic effectiveness of non-profits, also on Facebook, is to tailor strategies to reach different segments (e.g., Harvey, 1990).

Finally, differences in liking practices in relation to civic engagement should also be investigated more in depth in the future in relation to new forms of digital divides that are emerging with the growing importance of Facebook as a new public arena. The categorisation of liking practices, though, requires more rigorous development in future research to serve as a standardized tool or measure for the research community.

**Conclusion**

An in-depth content analysis based on a U&G framework identified six main categories of liking practices: (1) socially responsible liking, (2) emotional liking, (3) informational liking, (4) social performative liking, (5) low-cost liking and (6) routine liking. The categories give insight into the motives that drive people to support humanitarian causes through Facebook likes. These categories extend U&G theory into social media and Facebook liking by exploring another form of communication that can be explained by evaluating the needs of users. The six practices identified also demonstrate that complex and diverse usage patterns can be found in the simplest domains – in this case, the easy-to-use like button. From a user-centred perspective, reasons and motivations are often not straightforward.

Interestingly, an informational-driven liking activity was much less common than the socially motivated reasons such as socially responsibility liking and emotional liking. That people most often engage in socially responsible liking highlights that non-selfish motivation is hard to ignore, which also is in line with Benkler’s (2011) research. However, this study also shows the importance of self-presentation when we try to explain motivations for liking practices as well as humanitarian engagement on Facebook.
Moreover, notwithstanding the controversy over slacktivism, many Facebook users in this sample – significantly more females than males – believed that liking humanitarian causes could make a difference. Respondents in general most often attributed socially responsible liking as their own motivation and as the perceived motivations of others for liking humanitarian causes. Despite this study’s limitations, this kind of user engagement highlights the potential that social media sites such as Facebook hold for social movements and civic engagement. It is important to note that people like a cause on Facebook because they want to support it and encourage others in their network to support it as well. The like button not only provides an opportunity to support a cause, but also enables users to engage with the site as a self-presentation tool.

These insights into different liking practices have great significance, specifically for humanitarian organisations and more generally for practices of liking and social media action. The results presented in this paper can help humanitarian organisations create better strategies for organising and presenting data and information to engage potential supporters and donors. Features, formulations and issues, for example, should support users’ desires to be socially responsible. The design should inform users how a like on Facebook actually makes a difference (or does not).

Our results also revealed that uninteresting content, information overload and lack of relevant content are the three most common reasons for unliking a cause on Facebook. Further research should determine what content is relevant and appropriate to different groups of people and what stimulates their motivations and liking patterns in order to create more user engagement.

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