Motivating Millennials to engage in charitable causes through social media

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Motivating millennials to engage in charitable causes through social media

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Abstract

Purpose – It has been suggested that the future success of non-profit organizations lies in ensuring the sustainable involvement of the Millennial generation through social network sites. Facebook is a social media (SM) network that creates new research contexts and methodologies in service management. Organizations must now engage in learning how customer-with-customer interactions in SM could work best for them. The purpose of this paper is to better understand the factors influencing Millennials support for social causes through their autonomous engagement in the public environment of SM.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors conducted two studies of events for social causes (breast cancer and youth homelessness). In each, two Facebook event pages appealing to others-benefits and self-benefits were designed. Participants were randomly assigned the task of examining the appeal pages online. The dependent variables were two sets of intentions in support of the cause (online and offline). The effectiveness of an others-benefit vs a self-benefit Facebook appeal, the influence of empathetic identification with these causes and the direct and mediating effects of autonomous motivation was studied.

Findings – The studies provide consistent evidence that, to gain Millennial's support for social causes through SM, it is better to appeal mainly to the benefits others derive than to benefits to the self. Autonomous motivation is a strong predictor of supportive intentions and it also significantly mediates the positive influence of empathetic identification with a cause. Self-reported behavioral data following the youth homelessness event provided empirical evidence that the supportive intentions data were valid predictors of actual behaviors.

Originality/value – The paper used innovative experimental and correlational research methodologies to address Millennial's social behaviors within a SM context. The paper also introduced self-determination theory of motivation to this literature. From a practical standpoint, Millennials readily engage in impression management. Therefore, their supportive activities should be publicly lauded. Managers should also identify those Millennials who already empathize with the cause and facilitate their ability to influence other members in their networks. SM are changing at a fast pace and managers should employ Millennials in developing pertinent strategies and practices to keep pace. Taking advantage of marketing "with" Millennials can facilitate the development of new approaches for creating and supporting cause events.

Keywords Innovation, Networking, Non-profit organizations, Motivation, Social networks, Autonomous motivation, Charities, Self-determination theory, Empathy, social causes

Paper type Research paper

Can social networks and virtual communities revolutionize the way people give their time, talent and treasure? An answer to that question must begin with an understanding of the Millennials, a new generation [whose] online social networks are the superglue of millennial activism (Fine, 2009).

1. Introduction

The present research context of the Millennial generation and social media (SM) highlights the evolution of the service concept from a unidirectional focus on business-to-customer relationships to the study of "many-to-many" or "actors-to-actors" networks (Gummesson *et al.*, 2010; Vargo, 2009; Vargo and Lusch, 2011). In particular, Gummesson (2013) points out that Facebook is a network of online communities, the implications of which are not well understood by marketers and managers; a situation that creates new research contexts requiring the re-creation of methodologies in order to inform non-profit and for-profit organizations on how online customer-with-customer interactions could work best for them. They must understand how customers influence each other (Blazevic *et al.*, 2013; Ferguson *et al.*, 2010), especially through their online and offline connectedness. The extensive review of the Millennial generation's involvement in SM by Bolton *et al.* (2013), points out that it is their early exposure to the internet that distinguishes them from other generational cohorts. However, their extensive proposed research agenda does not include the need to study the linkage between Millennials, SM and the causes espoused by charitable non-profit organizations. Charitable non-profit organizations provide a broad range of indispensible services for the general wellbeing of society. Paradoxically, a large majority of the population does not support these organizations despite receiving benefits from them (Fisher *et al.*, 2008). Such organizations are also faced with increased competition for resources and declining government support (Reed *et al.*, 2007; White and Peloza, 2009). In order to obtain scarce human and financial resources, charitable organizations must identify and work closely with the most promising constituencies of potential supporters. As stated by Fine (2009), the future success of these organizations lies in ensuring the sustainable involvement of the Millennial generation through social network sites.

Therefore, we address three integrated challenges and opportunities for service research and practice. First, SM have become essential means of enhancing an organization's communication with and among online communities. Second, Millennials are the first generation to completely adopt SM as their primary mode of acquiring and sharing information in an environment that favors highly autonomous and public behavior. Third, there is anecdotal evidence that Millennials wish to engage in the social causes of charitable non-profit organizations to a greater degree but in a different manner than preceding generations (Kanter and Fine, 2010). We contend that it is no longer a question of whether SM are the best format to engage this important constituency in social causes, but rather it is incumbent on non-profit organizations and their corporate partners to develop the most effective strategies for capturing the power of SM to foster desired supportive behaviors for the common good. It must be noted that, although the present research treats the non-profit sector, the findings are applicable to service marketing and management with Millennials in broader business contexts.

Millennials are also referred to as the "Net Generation," "Generation Y," or "Nexters." These terms encapsulate a set of characteristics of people born between 1982 and 2000 who represent a significant segment of the population (30 percent) that will grow in relative importance (Yerbury, 2010). They are characterized as being a powerful and unique group in the marketplace with future spending larger than that of baby boomers (Bucic *et al.*, 2012; Farris *et al.*, 2002). The popular press,

blogs and the scientific literature present a paradoxical description of Millennials which is aptly captured by the terms "Generation Me" or "Generation We" (Twenge *et al.*, 2012). A "Generation Me" description is supported by cross-generational survey data suggesting that Millennials, compared to previous generations, are increasingly extrinsic and materialistic, placing emphasis on money and image (Twenge, 2006).

However, in support of the "Generation We" perspective, Arnett (2010) depicts Millennials as an "Empathic Generation" and *The Wall Street Journal* (Silverman, 2007) describes them as attentive and respectful, having a desire to make the world a better place by turning to SM to pool their resources and promote their favorite causes. Unlike their parents, they are not necessarily loyal to any one cause or non-profit organization. Rather they act as free agents outside institutional walls to organize, mobilize, raise funds and communicate with constituents (Kanter and Fine, 2010; Twenge *et al.*, 2012). This paradox highlights the necessity of studying Millennial's propensity for cause-related pro-social activities in an SM environment where they autonomously interact with each other. Surprisingly, the contextual, situational and motivational factors that could influence Millennials to engage in social causes through SM have not yet been extensively discussed or researched (Ferguson *et al.*, 2013).

The aims of our research are to better understand the factors influencing Millennials support for social causes through their engagement in SM. Given that SM could permit charitable non-profit organizations to build larger and stronger support communities, we broaden the range of outcome variables studied, from the traditional donations of time and money, to sets of both online and offline related supportive behaviors. We present two studies in the context of events for social causes (breast cancer and youth homelessness) using a combination of experimental and correlational methodologies. We examine the influences of a situational presentation of self-benefit vs others-benefit Facebook event page appeals, the strength of autonomous motivation and the degree of empathetic identification with the respective cause.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses
2.1 Others-benefit vs self-benefit appeals
The dominant theories of pro-social behavior in psychology, sociology, economics and political science are based on the assumption of universal egoism (Batson, 1990). Conversely, research also indicates that a simple self-interest model is inadequate for explaining human behavior and, although economic theory attributes the motives behind people's actions to be primarily self-interest, they also may act out of pure altruism because they care about principles of justice and the wellbeing of others (Holmes *et al.*, 2002). It is inaccurate to assume that a definition of pro-social behavior involves only benefits to others and excludes simultaneous self-benefits. The two are interwoven such that even in their most altruistic actions, people seem to find benefits for themselves (Batson, 1990). This impure altruism or "extended version" of the self-interest model implies that benefits to the self are inextricably connected with benefits to others (Meier, 2006). For instance, blood donation, although considered an altruistic act, confers benefits to the donor as well. It may alleviate the aversive arousal or distress that results from knowing that others are suffering, enhance the donor's mood, boost self-esteem and create a good impression if it is visible to others (Fisher *et al.*, 2008). The notion of "warm-glow" describes these positive benefits a person gets from behaving pro-socially (Andreoni, 1990). In addition to a warm-glow effect, individuals can acquire other private benefits from pro-social behaviors such as access to exclusive events, or the opportunity to be part of prestigious social networks (Meier, 2006).

Notwithstanding this theoretical debate on the role of self-interest and altruistic motives for helping others, researchers and marketers of social causes seek to determine to what extent, in which contexts and with whom, should one use self-oriented or others-oriented appeals. Specifically, because of the "We" vs "Me" paradox, it is not known whether with Millennials and SM if it is better to stress the personal gains or the gains that others get from their support of a social cause? Public self-image concerns may have a significant influence on whether a self-benefit or an others-benefit appeal is more effective in fostering pro-social behavior. A difference in appeal effectiveness may be partially explained by the fact that in public spaces people want to be perceived as doing good (Ariely *et al.*, 2009). In a non-SM context, White and Peloza (2009) present convincing evidence that others-benefit appeals are more effective than self-benefit appeals in soliciting volunteer intentions and monetary donations when people are publicly accountable for their actions. SM are characterized as public or semi-public communication spaces where the visible display of connections is crucial. This is particularly important with Facebook, which is primarily used by Millenials to maintain or solidify existing offline relationships (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, we propose that:

H1. An others-benefit Facebook event page appeal will result in greater online and offline related supportive intentions of Millennials than a self-benefit appeal.

2.2 Autonomous motivation and the autonomy supportive contexts of SM

Self-determination theory expands on the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by describing a continuum of motivational regulation ranging from autonomous through controlled motivation to amotivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Gagné and Deci, 2005). Autonomous motivation relates to acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice. In self-determination theory, autonomy involves the freedom of self-governance rather than freedom from the governance of others (Koestner and Losier, 1996). In a descending order of self-determination, the strongest form of autonomous motivation is found in behaviors where the individual intrinsically experiences learning, accomplishment and stimulation. Autonomy can also be engendered extrinsically when individuals have integrated the required behaviors into their sense of who they are, or have identified the behaviors as being aligned with their personal goals, regardless of whether the person perceives the behaviors to be intrinsically interesting (Vallerand, 1997). Controlled motivation involves external extrinsic factors imposed on the person such as implicit approval, punishment and rewards or extrinsically introjected into the person resulting in feelings of guilt, lowered self-esteem or attacks on ego (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Finally, self-determination theory also includes the concept of amotivation, a lack of intention or when a person does not know why he or she is doing the activity. Autonomous motivation is most likely to result in positive outcomes whereas controlled motivation is either unrelated or negatively related to adaptive outcomes (Vallerand *et al.*, 2008).

Research consistently shows that autonomy supportive contexts, where people experience choice about some behavior, engender higher levels of autonomous motivation, personal endorsement of the behavior and a fuller engagement with it (Moller *et al.*, 2006; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2004). People have a fundamental need to be autonomous and to feel that they are freely choosing their own actions. In particular, contexts involving autonomy supportive communications lead to a person's consideration of what is right for them and consistent with their values. This has the advantage

of prompting change that is likely to be maintained over time because it facilitates full internalization and autonomous self-regulation (Moller *et al.*, 2006). SM are such autonomy supportive environments because they foster the exchange of user-generated content. With SM, participants can by choice build relationships, collaborate, establish trust, and help others more effectively and efficiently than in the past (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, we postulate that in a SM environment:

H2. The higher the situational autonomous motivation, the greater are Millennial's online and offline supportive intentions.

2.3 Empathetic identification with a cause

Vanhamme *et al.* (2012) defined cause identification as the degree of overlap in customers' self-concept and their perception of the cause. To the extent that the cause has features that overlap with customers' self-concept, customers should experience higher degrees of identification with that cause. Empathy can be defined as the experience of emotions and concern for other persons in distress (Penner *et al.*, 2005). Individually focussed empathetic concern can elicit motivations aimed at alleviating suffering in a variety of situations and is a strong predictor of intentions to offer financial help (Pavey *et al.*, 2012; Small and Simonsohn, 2008). An appeal that indicates the intensity of the need and the consequences of not helping, as well as the closeness of the people needing help, can be effective in inducing pro-social behavior (Guy and Patton, 1989). Individuals are more empathetic toward victims who belong to their in-group rather than their out-group, and factors that reduce the social distance between victims and potential benefactors tend to promote helpful behaviors (Loewenstein and Small, 2007; Mattila and Hanks, 2012).

Autonomous motivation to help others has been found to be activated by empathetic concerns for specific persons and to play a mediating role in empathy's influence on these helping behaviors (Pavey *et al.*, 2012). Although much of pro-social behavior is about helping individuals, it can be directed at supporting groups or organizations (Eagly, 2009). Although most Millennials are not immediately in danger of contracting breast cancer, nor of becoming homeless, they will, depending on their personal experiences, vary in their empathy or emotional closeness to these causes. Thus, an empathetic identification with a charitable cause, not just specific persons in need, should also influence supportive behaviors and, the degree of autonomous motivation should mediate this influence. In a cause-related marketing context, the stronger the identification with the cause, the more positive are the evaluations of campaigns for the cause (Vanhamme *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, we postulate that:

H3. The higher the empathetic identification with a social cause, the greater are Millennial's online and offline supportive intentions.

H4. Situational autonomous motivation mediates the influence of empathetic identification with the social cause on Millennial's online and offline supportive intentions.

3. Empirical studies

3.1 Research framework

Two social causes. To study the supportive inclinations of Millennials toward social causes, we designed and experimentally manipulated the presentation of two

Facebook private event appeal pages entitled "Denim Night Party" and "Five Days for the Homeless." The former was associated with the non-profit "Cure Foundation" for breast cancer and the latter with the "In the Street" organization taking care of youth homelessness. At the breast cancer events, participants traditionally dress according to a denim theme. At Five Days for the Homeless, a few students, professors and celebrities live and sleep on the street. Both events have been organized in past years as partnerships between these charitable organizations and student associations at their business schools. These events were purposely chosen because of their specific differences. The breast cancer event is for a cause that is normally more a concern later in life than is youth homelessness. Breast cancer is more a women's preoccupation than is youth homelessness. These events also differ as to the physical implications. At the Denim Night Party, the student would be an active participant. However, unless the student is actually one of the few sleepers, participation at Five Days for the Homeless is more that of passive observation and interactions with volunteers. Finally, the Denim Night Party was a proposed event, whereas Five Days for the Homeless was an actual event. This second event served to determine if the findings from breast cancer could be replicated, and also permitted a follow-up study of self-reported online and offline behaviors.

The Millennial subjects in this research were enrolled in a university business school having an undergraduate population of 7,500 students, approximately 1,500 of which are in their first year. The samples in our studies were drawn from the same population of first-year students taking two compulsory courses. Students can gain 2 percent of their course grade by participating in research projects. No monetary or other incentive for participation is offered. Given the SM context of these studies, participating students did so online using platforms associated with their respective course. Historically, over 50 percent of the students participate in research projects on each of these platforms.

Pilot study. The design of the self-benefit event page appeal for breast cancer focussed on the "individual doing well." The profile picture, information section and the likes, comments and videos emphasized being seen, meeting cool people, having fun and getting a tax break. The others-benefit appeal focussed on "we are doing good," we, raised $17,000 last year, we wear the pink flower, we can find a cure and we our proud of our community. A manipulation check confirmed that participants ($n = 117$ undergraduate business students) actually perceived the Facebook appeal pages for the breast cancer event as intended experimentally. Two matching three-item scales measured the extend to which the self-benefit and others-benefit pages were perceived as appealing to concerns for self ($\alpha = 0.82$) or others ($\alpha = 0.87$) needs, wishes and goals respectively. There were significantly higher means for perceived self-benefits for the self-benefit appeal page compared to the others-benefit appeal page ($M = 3.79$, SD $= 0.73$; $M = 3.10$, SD $= 1.08$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's d:0.54), and higher perceived others-benefits for the others-benefit appeal page compared to the self-benefit appeal ($M = 4.04$, SD $= 0.85$, $M = 2.93$, SD $= 0.83$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's d:0.90).

3.2 Study 1: breast cancer event
Method. Study 1 used a between-subjects design involving 250 students who were randomly assigned to examine online, either a self-benefit or others-benefit Facebook private event page appeal for the "Denim Night Party" event. Verification for non-compliance to the instructions, errors indicating that the pages had not been sufficiently scrutinized and substantial missing data resulted in the exclusion of 42 participants leaving a sample of 208 participants (99 men; 109 women). The dependent variables included two four-item scales of supportive intentions. The Online supportive

intentions scale ($\alpha = 0.90$) was prefaced with the statement "The Facebook event page makes me want to […]." The items were: "[…] respond that I like some of the postings," "[…] post my comments to it," "[…] share it with my friends and others in my network," and "[…] share some of the videos, pictures and links." The Offline scale ($\alpha = 0.87$) was prefaced with the statement "Other things considered, I would […]." The items were: "[…] attend," "[…] make a donation," "[…] volunteer to help out," and "[…] willingly be on the organizing committee."

Situational autonomous motivation (16 items; $\alpha = 0.93$) was measured using the scale of Guay *et al.* (2003). The measurement items (see Appendix) were introduced with the statement " I would become engaged in events for social causes like The Denim Night Party […]." The degree of empathetic identification with the cause of breast cancer was assessed with a four-item scale ($\alpha = 0.73$) prefaced by the statement "The cause is important to me because […]" followed by "it is personally close to my heart," "I know someone who has suffered," "it can touch my family or those close to me," and "it is one of the most important concern for people my age." All measures were five-point Likert scales.

Analysis and results. Hierarchical regressions were conducted on the dependent variables of Online and Offline supportive intentions (Table I). The independent variables were entered by block in the following order: the dummy variable of Facebook appeals with the self-benefit appeal being the reference group, the empathetic identification with the cause and autonomous motivation. The final step adjusted R^2 values for the regression analyses were 0.37 and 0.36 for the Online and Offline intentions, respectively. The results confirmed *H1* (Figure 1). An others-benefit appeal page was superior to a self-benefit appeal page in predicting Millennial's supportive intentions (Online $\beta = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$ and Offline $\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$). *H2* and *H3* are also confirmed since autonomous motivation had a strong direct effect on supportive intentions (Online $\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$ and Offline $\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). Baron and Kenny (1986) analyses showed that autonomous motivation partially mediated the effects of Millennial's empathy with breast cancer on both sets of supportive intentions. Empathetic identification with the cause had a significant influence on autonomous motivation which itself had significant impacts on both intentions. With autonomous motivation in the models the total effects of Millennial's empathetic identification with breast cancer on supportive intentions was greater than the direct effects. The more highly recommended mediation analyses by bootstrapping (Hayes, 2013) revealed significant indirect effects. Autonomous motivation indirect effect estimates were important and significant (Online IE $= 0.13$, $BC_{95\%CI} = 0.06$ to 0.23 and Offline IE $= 0.12$, $BC_{95\%CI} = 0.05$ to 0.21). Specifically, this indirect effect explained 21 and 29 percent of the model's total explained variance for the two supportive intentions, respectively.

| | Breast cancer event | | | | Youth homelessness event | | | |
| | Online | | Offline | | Online | | Offline | |
Supportive intentions	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p
Facebook appeal page (Self- vs others- benefit)	0.66	0.001	0.33	0.001	0.45	0.001	0.13	0.05
Situational autonomous motivation	0.53	0.001	0.42	0.001	0.21	0.01	0.20	0.001
Empathetic identification with the cause	0.23	0.001	0.28	0.001	0.51	0.001	0.56	0.001
Final model								
Adjusted R^2 values	0.37		0.36		0.30		0.40	

Table I.
Regression analyses on online and offline supportive intentions toward two social causes
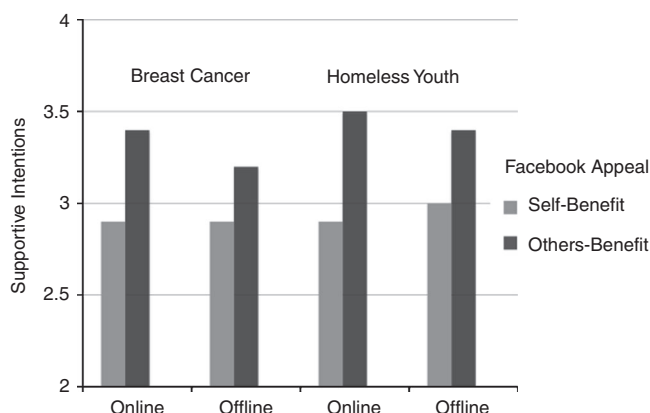
Figure 1.
An others-benefit
Facebook appeal
engenders greater support
for charitable events than
a self-benefit appeal

3.3. Study 2a: youth homelessness event

We subsequently investigated a second event in order to determine to what extent the findings from the breast cancer event could be replicated with one of a different kind. The two events differ in terms of the time of life implicated, the appeal to gender and the degree of personal involvement. Both events had the commonality of being co-organized by business school students and the respective charitable foundation. In addition, whereas the Denim Night Party was a proposed event, the Five Days for the Homeless was a real event. This second event also furnished the opportunity to validate participant supportive intentions with their post-event self-reported behaviors.

Method. Study 2a used a between-subjects design involving 423 undergraduate business school students who were randomly assigned to examining online either an others-benefit or self-benefit Facebook page appeal for the "Five Days for the Homeless" event. Verification procedures resulted in the exclusion of 39 participants leaving a sample of 384 participants (159 men; 225 women). The dependent and independent variables were identical to those of Study 1 but, where pertinent, the wording was adapted to the "Five Days for the Homeless Event."

Analysis and results. We verified the extent to which the findings from the studies on the breast cancer event were replicated with an event for youth homelessness. Hierarchical regressions were conducted on the dependent variables of Online and Offline supportive intentions (Table I). The independent variables were entered by block in the following order: the dummy variable of Facebook appeals with the self-benefit appeal being the reference group, the empathetic identification with the cause and autonomous motivation. The final model adjusted R^2 values for the regression analyses were 0.30 and 0.40 for the Online and Offline supportive intentions, respectively. First, an others-benefit appeal page was again superior to a self-benefit appeal page in predicting Online ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$) and Offline ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.08$) supportive intentions. Second, autonomous motivation was again an important predictor of supportive intentions (Online $\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$ and Offline $\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$). Third, empathetic identification with youth homelessness was a strong predictor of Online ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$) and Offline ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$) supportive intentions. As in Study 1, mediation analyses with bootstrapping (Hayes, 2013) showed that autonomous motivation again mediated the effects of empathetic identification on supportive intentions (Online: IE $= 0.08$, $BC_{95\%CI} = 0.02$ to 0.14 and Offline: IE $= 0.08$, $BC_{95\%CI} = 0.04$ to 0.13).

3.4 Study 2b: self-reported behaviors

In studies 1 and 2a, we assessed intentions toward Online and Offline supportive actions. Research on charitable causes often includes measures of intentions or hypothetical behaviors (Reed *et al.*, 2007; Shang *et al.*, 2008; White and Peloza, 2009). However, when possible it is fruitful to validate intentions with directly measured or self-reported behaviors in field studies or recorded observations in the laboratory.

Method. The 384 participants in study 2a were contacted by e-mail in the two weeks following the Five Days for the Homeless event. They were asked to respond by indicating which if any actions they took with regard to the event. The actions were grouped into two categories, online and offline behaviors. For example, online actions could be donating online, following the event, commenting or sharing information online. Event related actions included being a sleeper, visiting the site, being a volunteer, discussing with sleepers and volunteers, donating via a volunteer or attending opening and closing ceremonies. No monetary or other incentives were offered in return for this information. A total of 149 participants (39 percent) responded to the e-mail request.

Analysis and results. There were no significant differences in supportive intentions between participants who did or did not respond to the e-mail request for follow-up behavior information (Online: $M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.88$ vs $M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.92$ and Offline: $M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.78$ vs $M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.94$). However, those responders who reported that they actually engaged in supportive Online and Offline behaviors had also previously indicated significantly higher intentions to do so than those who did not (Online: $M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.88$ vs $M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.92$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.56$) and Offline: $M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.74$ vs $M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.86$, $p < 0.05$, Cohen's $d = 0.39$) (Figure 2).

4. Discussion

Our two studies provide consistent evidence that, to gain Millennial's support for social causes in the public context of SM, it is better to appeal mainly to the benefits others derive from these actions than to benefits to the self. In this autonomy supportive context, autonomous motivation is a strong predictor of supportive intentions. Also, the greater Millennial's empathetic identification with the cause, the more they intend to engage in supportive behaviors and this influence is significantly mediated by

Figure 2.
Self-reported behaviors confirm online and offline supportive intentions toward youth homelessness event
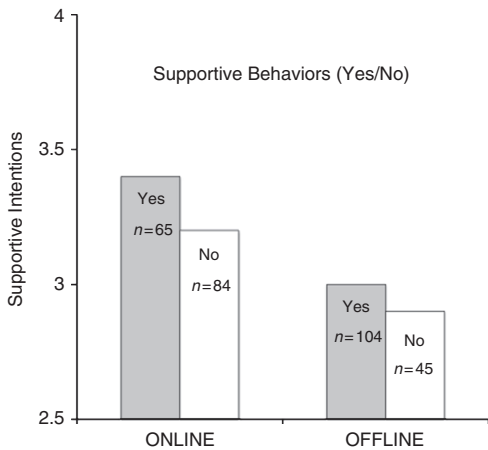
autonomous motivation. These findings are pertinent because they address the unique issues brought about by the Millennial generation interacting with rapidly evolving internet technology for the purpose of fostering support for causes that charitable non-profit organizations and their corporate partners are increasingly called upon to undertake.

4.1 Theoretical implications

SM are recent versions of public spaces mediated by technology that is rapidly disrupting the traditional dichotomy of what is meant by public and private behaviors (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). They involve public rather than private displays of activities because of participants' self-impression management through crucial connections, mainly with those who are already in their social network (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). Our findings with Millennials in this public SM context clearly demonstrate the supremacy of an others-benefit compared to a self-benefit Facebook appeal for engendering a broad range of supportive intentions. They provide convincing support for the argument that Millennials tend to reflect more the behaviors of a "We" rather than a "Me" generation. The findings are also in agreement with those of White and Peloza (2009), who demonstrate that, in public, people's desire to manage impressions is paramount. This does not exclude other explanations for the greater effectiveness of an others-benefits appeal such as altruistic motives or the "warm-glow" feelings one may get from helping others (Andreoni, 1990; Fisher *et al.*, 2008).

A central theme of our research was the proposed synergy between the construct of autonomous motivation and the autonomously supportive environment of SM. This proposition was based on considerable research from self-determination theory showing that autonomous motivation fosters positive outcomes in autonomy supportive contexts of work, school, sport and health (Ryan and Deci, 2000). We extended these findings with empirical evidence demonstrating that autonomous motivation does indeed foster supportive intentions toward social causes among Millennials in an SM environment. It is intuitively coherent to find that the stronger Millennial's empathetic identification with these causes, the greater are their intentions to support them. In addition, it is a major finding that this influence is mediated by the degree of autonomous motivation. Autonomous motivation has been shown in a recent study to mediate the influence of empathy toward a person in distress on donations of time and money (Pavey *et al.*, 2012). We demonstrated that this is also the case for a broader set of supportive intentions and the empathetic identification with the causes of two charitable organizations.

4.2 Managerial implications

Practitioners are increasingly called upon to find best practices in SM contexts where brick-and-mortar research is largely inapplicable (Naylor *et al.*, 2012). Our research, using innovative methodologies in this new research context (Gummesson, 2013), can inform decision makers in charitable organizations and their corporate partners as to approaches for garnering Millennial's support of events for social causes. In SM, Millennials readily engage in impression management and therefore, their supportive activities should be publicly recognized and lauded. Marketers should not assume that Millennials are mainly self-centered and egoistic but rather they should be addressed as a "We" generation (e.g. "It takes a village to fight cancer"). Because of the importance of autonomous motivation for soliciting supportive behaviors in SM, Millennials should be provided with the freedom to choose from an array of online linked to offline

activities. It is best not to impose action on Millennials, but rather to observe and listen to them. In addition, they should be permitted to choose and experience the inherent benefits of self-determined motivation (e.g. "Do you enjoy running? Join us at the Run for Cancer"). Also, incorporating messages that generate empathy for the cause can increase supportive behaviors (Mattila and Hanks, 2012).

Above all, SM must be considered as an important, if not the most important, communication medium for engaging Millennials in social causes. Organizers of events should furnish them with opportunities to participate in raising awareness of the cause and building and sustaining more support in their communities. Managers should identify those Millennials who already empathize with the cause and facilitate their ability to influence other members in their networks. Traditionally, marketers have tended to use tools that are mainly beneficial to their organization. However, marketing thought is evolving into placing emphasis on value co-creation processes, where customers are considered partners and also members of broader communities or networks. SM are changing at a fast pace and it would be to the advantage of cause marketers to employ Millennials in developing pertinent strategies and practices to keep pace. Taking advantage of open innovation processes and marketing "with" rather than "to" Millennials can facilitate the development of new approaches for initiating and supporting cause events. Our findings provide valuable insights that can inform marketers and managers on how to also work "with" Millennials in sectors other than that of non-profit charitable causes.

4.3 Limitations and future research opportunities
It is an oversimplification to view Millennials as a homogeneous population. Research into the involvement of heterogeneous cohorts of Millennials (e.g. gender) is necessary. Also, it would be advisable to determine if the present findings could be replicated with students from other faculties and perhaps with non-university Millennials. As in many studies of the marketing of social causes, we mainly assessed supportive behavioral intentions. Our self-reported behavioral data following the youth homelessness event provided important empirical evidence that these intentions data were indeed valid precursors of behaviors. However, it must be recognized that self-reported behaviors may not be as reliable as observed behaviors. On the other hand, self-reports of behavior in the field context may intuitively provide more realistic information than can be achieved with laboratory measures of behaviors. A more complete understanding of the behavioral outcomes involved in a given research question can certainly be achieved by integrating the results from a combination of these methods. Finally, because SM are the primary communication media for Millennials, there is not a strong argument to engage in comparative studies with traditional marketing communications tools, nor with cohorts of other generations. It may still be fruitful to explore the influence of other SM such as blogs or twitter chats. Also, it would be enlightening to study Millennials with regard to the degree of their socially oriented personality traits and personal values (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010). As previously mentioned, it is no longer a question of whether SM are the best format to engage Millennials in social causes, but rather it is incumbent on marketing researchers and practitioners to develop the most effective strategies for capturing the power of SM to foster desired supportive social behaviors for the common good. Finally, one can only speculate on the longer-term effects of Millennials use of SM on individuals, firms and society (Bolton *et al.*, 2013).

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Appendix. Situational autonomous motivation scale

I WOULD BECOME ENGAGED IN EVENTS FOR SOCIAL CAUSES LIKE THE CURE FOUNDATION DENIM NIGHT PARTY (OR FIVE DAYS FOR THE HOMELESS):

   … in order to feel pleasant emotions.

   … in order to help myself become the person I aim to be.

   … because I like making interesting discoveries.

   … because of the pleasure I feel as I become more and more skilled.

   … because of the sense of well being I feel while I am doing them.

   … because I chose them as means to attain my objectives.

   … for the pleasure of acquiring new knowledge.

   … for the pleasure I feel mastering what I am doing.

   … for the pleasant sensations I feel while I am doing them.

   … because I chose them in order to attain what I desire.
   … for the pleasure of learning new, interesting things.

   … because of the satisfaction I feel in trying to excel in what I do.

   … for the enjoyable feelings I experience.

   … because I choose to invest myself in what is important to me.

… for the pleasure of learning different interesting facts.

… because of the pleasure I feel outdoing myself.

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