"Who's going to read this anyway?" Non-profits, electronic newsletters, and the elusive reader

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Abstract

In the face of extended global recession, non-profit organisations face not only declining revenues but also increasingly distracted consumers. The communication challenges of non-profits angling not just for financial support but also for relationship with their publics are growing apace. Longitudinal studies from the United States and Australia suggest that the non-profit sector has enthusiastically embraced information and communication technologies. However, several other studies suggest that non-profit organisations are yet to use these technologies to their full potential, and there is presently a lack of research into non-profit use of digital channels other than Facebook and YouTube. This paper reports on the first stage of research investigating the use and usefulness of e-newsletters for New Zealand non-profit organisations. The research examined the technical composition as well as the strategic effectiveness of this tool, and assessed how well e-newsletters matched and met the organisations' communication goals.

1. Introduction

In the face of extended global recession, non-profit organisations face not only declining revenues but also increasingly distracted consumers (Levine and Zahradnik, 2012). Innovative and emerging publicity strategies; the increasing technological sophistication, time poverty, and information overload of the consumer market; and growing competition for inbox attention have made ever more difficult the communication challenges of non-profit organisations angling not just for financial support but also for public consciousness and sympathy. Paine (2011: 191) notes that "while relationships impact the bottom line in any organisation, in the not-for-profit world relationships take on even greater importance". The initiation and maintenance of those organisation-public relationships pose unique challenges for twenty-first-century non-profit communication personnel, who need pertinent and up-to-date information on the effectiveness of communication tools and strategies. This paper reports on the first stage of research investigating the use and usefulness of e-newsletters for New Zealand non-profit organisations in their attempts to reach their publics, when attention, readership, and relationship, rather than solely profit, are the primary goals.

Our initial research questions were formulated to seek information on what elements may characterise 'effective' e-newsletters, on the one hand in terms of technical features, and on the other in terms of their promotion of non-profit organisations' particular communication goals.

RQ1: Are there identifiable characteristics of electronic newsletters associated with high readership rates?

RQ2: Are non-profit organisations' goals for their e-newsletters a) clearly articulated; b) measurable; and c) achieved?

RQ3: Are e-newsletters perceived by non-profits to improve relationship with their readers?

2. Literature Review

Two recent longitudinal studies, one from Australia and one from the United States, suggest that the non-profit sector has enthusiastically embraced the use of information and communication technologies (see Bradshaw and Nolan, 2010 and Ganim-Barnes, 2011). The perceived usefulness of digital communication channels to non-profit organisations is reflected in the number of recent books published specifically aimed at guiding non-profits in the use of social media (for recent examples see particularly Kanter and Fine, 2010; Aaker and Smith, 2010; Diaz-Ortiz, 2011; Mansfield, 2012; Mathos and Norman, 2012). Kanter and Fine (2010) argue that social media are now indispensable for the three non-profit imperatives of listening, engaging, and building relationships. Similarly, Hart, Greenfield, and Johnston (2005) assert that electronic media play an essential role for non-profits in communicating with constituents, providing volunteer opportunities, and facilitating fundraising. The possibilities of fundraising through social media, in particular, have resulted in many tactical discussions in such practitioner outlets as *Nonprofit World*, as well as a number of academic inquiries attempting to theorise strategic approaches.

However, several academic studies suggest that non-profit organisations are yet to use websites and online media to their full potential, and often lag behind the public and private sectors in online media use (see, for example, Burt and Taylor, 2003; Schneider 2003; Fine, 2006; Waters et al., 2009). Monitoring social media such as Facebook and Twitter and responding to potentially huge numbers of messages, postings, and tweets poses severe challenges even for well-resourced corporate organisations; for non-profit organisations, the resources required to support the investment of such staffing time and energy may simply be unavailable. Further, the organisation's specific communication goals must be kept in mind when assessing the usefulness and effectiveness of any medium or channel. For non-profit organisations, communication goals may include, in addition to fundraising, building awareness of the organisation's aims, values, and specific programs; growing the number of people with such awareness; building a positive attitude toward the organisation;

soliciting involvement in programmes and initiatives; and so on. Research suggests that such communication goals may be more readily achieved than specifically financial goals, via social media. Ganim-Barnes (2011) found 90% of the U.S. not-for-profit executives interviewed reported using social media to increase awareness of their organisation and its mission; less than half reported social media as being useful for generating donations. Similarly, Bradshaw and Nolan's 2010 study of Australian non-profit organisations found 67% reported delivering information as a main reason for using social media, 53% reported 'engaging with supporters' as a main reason, but only 37% reported 'fundraising' as a main reason for using social media. A study of U.S. mid-sized non-profit organisations by Ogden and Starita (2009) found the organisations reported social media use helped improve existing relationships, but it was a particularly ineffective way of generating funds and also of attracting volunteers. Bradshaw and Nolan (2010: 12) conclude that "digital channels are acknowledged as a vital part of non-profit communications [but] the sector's ability to leverage them is still very patchy". More research is needed into how non-profits may better leverage specific digital channels, particularly for relationship gains.

Despite the size and importance of the non-profit sector in New Zealand, there is only one major study on the use of information and communication technologies by non-profit organisations in this country. A 2011 empirical study conducted by Zorn et al. surveyed 1046 registered charitable trusts and incorporated societies to assess what institutional, organisational, and environmental factors influenced use of ICTs including email and electronic databases. Their findings show that non-profits use ICTs primarily for communication and information flow, stakeholder engagement and resource acquisition (Zorn et al., 2011: 17-18). Beyond this study there is a paucity of published research into New Zealand's non-profits' online communication strategies, and into their use of particular digital channels or specific electronic communication tools.

To this point, and reflected in the review above, most of the existing literature into non-profit use of digital channels has focused on the interactive, multimedia tools of the social network Facebook

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and, to a lesser extent, the video portal YouTube, as well as weblogs (blogs) and Twitter (see for example Hausmann, 2012; Waters and Jones, 2011). Far less attention has been paid to organisational use of digital channels such as e-zines and e-newsletters, despite the fact that organisational use of electronic newsletters is largely ubiquitous. In 2012, email marketing firm Lyris surveyed US digital marketers with monthly email volumes of at least 50,000, and found that 89% were using newsletters for their email messaging campaigns. In New Zealand, an unpublished study conducted in 2012 found that 94% of the country's fifty largest non-profit charitable organisations produced e-mail newsletters (Dickerson, 2012). Cheap and easy to produce, and not requiring resource-intensive monitoring, e-newsletters hold obvious appeal for non-profits, but little research has been undertaken into the actual readership of these e-newsletters. The literature on email marketing suggests limited insights for non-corporate usage, but Kent and Brandal (2003: 501) close a study into email surveys in Norway with the apposite conclusion: "the results indicate that there is still little knowledge about which campaign elements affect email response".

3. Method

For the purposes of this exploratory study, three New Zealand non-profit organisations were chosen as a purposive sample. Each organisation has both a nationwide communication effort and a centralised headquarters in the New Zealand capital (where both researchers were based), each uses an array of computer-mediated communication tools (including regular e-newsletters), and each was willing to allow full access to their web usage analytics software and to their communication personnel.

The researchers recognise that the terms 'e-zine' and 'e-newsletter' are often used interchangeably. In this research, terms have been adopted and adapted from PCmag.com, which defines an 'e-zine' as a magazine disseminated via email or on the web, and an 'e-newsletter' as a subset of e-zines in which the content is text only. Both require readers to subscribe, sign in as members or otherwise

agree to receive the communication. It was agreed that 'e-newsletter' was the most appropriate descriptor for the communications sent via email by all three organisations, both because in two cases the e-newsletter superseded a hardcopy newsletter that was specifically so-named, but also because each presented short, condensed news items in the style of a newsletter, rather than the more comprehensive and discursive format of a magazine.

All three organisations made available to the researchers databases containing subscribers' email addresses and, in some cases, identifying information, as well as data concerning those subscribers' reading patterns. In addition to the need to safeguard the privacy of this information, it was considered that some of the data gathered may have been of a financially sensitive nature to the non-profit organisation. No information presented in this article identifies the organisation, any subscriber, or any individual who responded to an interview or survey. With these provisos, the research was also evaluated by peer review within the authors' institution and judged to be of low risk.

Full access was granted by the organisations to their web usage analytics software. The size of the organisations' mailing lists varied from approximately 700 to approximately 7000. A twelve-month period of time was selected for examination: August 2011 through August 2012. Data was mined to answer a series of initial questions on readership patterns. Subsequent interviews with CEOs and communication personnel sought to probe deeper in terms of non-profits' ambitions for their e-newsletters, in terms of their technical composition as well as their strategic effectiveness, and to discover how well the organisations knew if their goals for their electronic newsletters were being met.

The e-newsletters of the three organisations tended to have certain technical elements in common. All featured colour, a branded masthead/banner, and prominent links to Facebook, Twitter and 'forward to a friend'; all featured condensed summaries of news stories with the option of clicking

on a link to read more; all tended to include multiple stories in their e-newsletters (usually between four and nine); and all tended to be several screens long, requiring the reader to scroll down a number of times to scan all the stories. It is important to note, however, that there was considerable variation in the content and appearance of the e-newsletters surveyed, both across the three organisations and across campaigns within any one organisation. Org 1 was unique amongst the three organisations in providing a 'menu' of headlines at the top of the e-newsletter. Further, Org 2's regular six-weekly e-newsletter was generally composed of introductions to several stories, usually between four and six. However, sometimes Org 2 sent an e-newsletter that only contained a single story, particularly when it was linked to a current event of regional or local significance.

The study aimed for depth rather than breadth, acknowledging that such a small sample did not produce findings generalizable to the entire New Zealand non-profit sector, but rather to build a deeper understanding of the aims and the experience of non-profits that have embraced electronic communications with their publics, to improve understanding of the effectiveness (actual or potential) of these communications, and ultimately to contribute to knowledge sharing, capacity building, and knowledge of best practices in the sector.

4. Findings

Across the three organisations, and across all e-newsletter campaigns, the percentage of readers who opened the e-newsletter (RWO) was 30.8%. Of those readers who opened the e-newsletter, 25.0% of them clicked through to read further (RWOCT). This means the percentage of total recipients who actually clicked through to a story (TRCT) was 7.9%. When we looked separately at the three organisations, the figures were remarkably similar despite the considerable differences in the organisations' size, mission, and readership (see Table 1):

RWO	RWOCT	TRCT

Organisation 1	28.0%	29.5%	8.1%
Organisation 2	34.3%	19.0%	7.5%
Organisation 3	31.2%	26.1%	8.1%

Table 1: E-newsletter readership statistics

Interviewees were asked about their knowledge of the actual readership rates. In general, the communication personnel had a realistic understanding of the e-newsletter readership rates, while the Chief Executives expressed more aspirational views.

Org 3's communication advisor knew the e-newsletter had approximately a 30% open rate; she was pleased with this. The Chief Executive of Org 3 claimed, "each month we looked at the stats. I always looked at them. Where were the most numbers of opens going…". This Chief Executive was particularly interested in seeing *who* readers were rather than *how many* readers there were, and she mentioned keeping an eye on a competing agency. While she claimed "the openings remained higher than average", she didn't specify what she believed the average to be, or where her sense of this comparison came from. The data above show Org 3's RWO rates are entirely comparable to those of the other two organisations studied.

Org 2's communication advisor stated she regularly looks at readership metrics to see what stories are the most popular, and to check on readership rates. In the interview she stated, "in general we find the stats pretty encouraging". The Chief Executive of this organisation did not profess to know readership rates, but assured the researcher that "my comms team will know".

The Chief Executive of Org 1 stated she would be happy with a 20% click-through rate. The actual figure is 8.1%.

4.1 High-readership stories

In order to address *RQ1: Are there identifiable characteristics of electronic newsletters associated with high readership rates?,* we identified which stories were most often clicked, and then analysed certain technical features within those stories.

Of the 73 e-newsletter campaigns in the twelve-month study period, eleven had open rates above 40.0%. The original aim was to examine each of these high-readership campaigns to discover which stories were clicked most often. However, all eleven high-readership campaigns shared a common feature: they had not been sent to the full database of e-newsletter recipients, but were specifically targeted messages sent to a small segment thereof. For example, the highest readership rate for a single campaign was a staggering 60.0%, from a communication sent by Org 2 in November 2011, but this e-newsletter was sent to only 500 of the almost 7000 individuals on the full mailing list. Because all eleven high-readership campaigns were narrowly targeted communications, the researchers felt these eleven should be excluded from consideration of 'general' characteristics of high-readership e-newsletters.

Thus, the next step was to target campaigns that had a RWO percentage higher than that organisation's RWO average.

- For Org 1, three campaigns had RWO% over 28.0%

- For Org 2, two campaigns had RWO% over 34.3%

- For Org 3, two campaigns had RWO% over 31.2%

Each of these seven campaigns was examined in turn to determine which two stories received the most clicks, and what characteristics those stories possessed. Three of the seven campaigns only featured one story; and one campaign, while featuring multiple stories, had one story that achieved 76% of total clicks, so this one story became the only one closely examined within that campaign. This resulted in a total of ten stories to be closely examined.

4.1.1 What kinds of headlines do high-readership stories have?

The researchers were interested in the possibility of identifying 'trigger' words in the headlines of the most frequently clicked stories (for example, 'urgent' or 'disaster' or 'success').

- One contained words expressing positive connotations: 'wins'

- Four contained words conveying status: 'Chief Executive,' 'UN High Commissioner,' 'International Delegation,' 'international recognition'

- Two included words connoting urgency: 'important,' 'essential'

- Two included words directed at the reader's needs or benefits: 'Why it is so important to you'; 'check out the quick promotional tools'

(See Appendix A for a list of headlines of the ten most often clicked stories.)

In addition to headlines, the researchers considered the composition of the actual active link, that is, the wording, phrase, or occasionally graphic, within or next to the story, which visually invited readers to click for further information. (See Appendix B for a list of the active links to the ten most often clicked stories.) A number of the wording-based links closely echoed the headlines and included status words: 'UN high commissioner,' 'international delegations,' and 'international recognition.' Three of the links were nonverbal: these included a YouTube graphic, a news feed graphic and a URL.

The Chief Executive of Org 3 was the only interviewee to specifically mention writing style in relation to the e-newsletter, and she explicitly linked style to success: "[the communications advisor's] ability to write in a way that was real to people was fantastic [...] she single-handedly made a difference".

4.1.2 What is the position within the e-newsletter of high-readership stories?

Findings showed that 90% of the ten most frequently clicked stories were in first or second position within the e-newsletter (see Table 2). The number of stories contained in the e-newsletters varied from one to eleven.

High-readership story	Position within e-newsletter
1	Second of six stories
2	First and only story
3	First of nine stories
4	Sixth of nine stories
5	First and only story
6	First and only story
7	First of eleven stories
8	Second of eleven stories
9	First of seven stories
10	Second of seven stories

Table 2: Position with e-newsletter of ten most frequently clicked stories

4.1.3 What time of day and year were high-readership stories sent?

Time of day

The Chief Executive of Org 1 is aware of research showing email readership is higher in the morning, and states her aim is to send the e-newsletters at 8:45am. One of the three high-readership campaigns from this organisation was sent at approximately this time: at 8:29am on 18 April 2012. However, the organisation's other two high-readership campaigns were sent at divergent and much later times of the day: 4:59pm (on 31 January 2012); and 6:29pm (on 31 July 2012).

The two high-readership campaigns of Org 2 were sent at 11:43am and 3:25pm.

The two high-readership campaigns of Org 3 were sent at 12:45pm and 4:45pm.

Time of year

The high-readership campaigns were sent:

- 31 January
- 6 March
- 18 April
- 24 April
- 31 July
- 24 August
- 25 October

A further finding was that one of Org 2's most frequently clicked stories (24 August 2011) concerned an update to a story that had achieved national reporting in media outlets including the nightly television news. Clearly, the high readership rate of this story was timing related: it was sent to capitalise on a readership already interested and engaged through exposure to the story through mainstream media. The high readership rate was not, however, related to the particular time of year the e-newsletter was sent.

4.2 Action produced from reading an e-newsletter

Several interviewees were convinced that the e-newsletters prompt readers to action – but tended to conceptualise that 'action' as solely electronic, confined to visiting the organisation's website or engaging with other related social media. The communications advisor of Org 3 said, "to see the impact on the website when you send those communications […], that's probably the biggest benefit [of the e-newsletter]". The Chief Executive of Org 3 agreed, stating the e-newsletter "always drew people back to the website". The communications advisor of Org 3 also noted people often connect with the organisation via social media subsequent to receiving the e-newsletter: "we often got more Facebook likes and things like that so we would see some of that digital engagement increase a little

bit, usually after one went out, and we would certainly see shares". While in the case of Org 3 this reported Facebook activity was not able to be measured or assessed, a measurable electronic response was recorded in the case of Org 2. For Org 2, analysis of both of the two high-readership e-newsletter campaigns revealed a similar click pattern: the second most frequently clicked link in each campaign was to the organisation's homepage – suggesting that a significant amount of traffic to the organisation's website is generated from the e-newsletter.

It is hypothetically possible that e-newsletters lend themselves to wider dissemination, as it is easy to forward messages received via email. The CEO of Org 2 was confident that the e-newsletter was regularly forwarded: "The other thing about it as well which I quite like, is the […] members who we know flick it on to their friends […] I'm sure that happens a lot". However, the data analytics software revealed few e-newsletters were forwarded, across all the organisations and all the campaigns. Of 73 separate campaigns, 20 were forwarded, and 9 of those 20 were only forwarded once. The greatest number of forwards of any one campaign was eight, and those forwarded an e-newsletter that was originally sent to 5973 separate email addresses (Org 2).   Thus, a minuscule percentage (0.0013%) of those original e-newsletters was forwarded to other readers.

4.3 E-newsletters and communication goals

In order to answer *RQ2: Are non-profit organisations' goals for their e-newsletters a) clearly articulated, b) measurable, and c) achieved?,* and *RQ3: Are e-newsletters perceived by non-profits to improve relationship with their readers?,* we tailored specific interview questions for the Chief Executives and communication personnel of each organisation.

The Chief Executive of Org 1 basically articulated no goals whatsoever for the e-newsletter. When asked if she had specific objectives for the communication to achieve, she answered, "probably not.

[The purpose] would [be] just, purely, yes we are doing something […] It's not really there for people to act on".

When questioned about the organisation's primary motivation behind using e-newsletters, the communications advisor of Org 3 responded, "to actually be personalizing what we did. Putting faces on it". What this organisation wants the e-newsletter to do is simply *to be read*; that is, being read is the end as well as the means: "We don't have a 'call to action' [in] this. Sometimes we add like the little addendum at the end of a … story; 'if you're interested in volunteering', but the call to action was to read the stories, to open the emails and read the stories. […] I do think that promoting good stories is quite important for what we do because that helps to create that social inclusion that is a huge part of our mission".

While Org 3 did report some increase in digital engagement (for example in Facebook likes) after sending an e-newsletter, no impact on funding or volunteering was seen, nor was this perceived as a goal of the e-newsletter: "It shouldn't be your fundraising tool".

Interview questions probed the perceived effectiveness of the e-newsletter in building relationships. The Chief Executive of Org 1 stated, "I think it's one of the tactics you can use to manage relationships [but] I don't think it should be the only touch point in a relationship". She did, however, emphasise the important role an e-newsletter played in promoting in readers a feeling of relatedness with herself as Chief Executive.

The Chief Executive of Org 2 identified the main purpose of the e-newsletter as "keeping [the organisation] top of mind. It's just a prompt". She specifically identified relationship building as a key aspect of the e-newsletter but emphasised it was only one of many tools for this end: "the newsletter's [only] part of it in terms of [building] that depth of the relationship". She defined that relationship in specifically personal terms, making readers feel personally connected with many of the staff, not just herself as CEO: "we've got the staff profile in there now and stuff like that. … there's not always a bit from me in our newsletters,

which is very different to what I see other organisations do. There's always 'From the CEO's desk' or whatever. And we don't do that. […] The [organisation's] about more than just me".

In a somewhat different vein, the communications advisor of Org 2 suggested an e-newsletter is not as effective at building relationship as a hard copy: "I think in some ways it doesn't necessarily carry as much weight for people. There's a real value, for any kind of mail, when it's addressed to someone: when it goes to their house, they open it up. That's quite high value. And they see that as, I think, a more valuable communication from us".

The communications advisor of Org 2 also articulated the limitations of an e-newsletter as a one-way communication channel: "We are finding social media for us is a bit better bang for buck sometimes … It starts more of a conversation and [that's important] because we're really trying to create kind of a lifelong connection with people, having those relationships where it's not just one sided, it's not just us pushing information out".

5. **Discussion**

The first, unanticipated but unsurprising finding that emerged, that the highest readership rates are consistently achieved from the most specifically targeted e-newsletters, suggests that e-newsletter readership rate may have less to do with the technical elements examined below than it has to do with the nature of the recipient's existing relationship with the organisation.

To answer *RQ1: Are there identifiable characteristics of electronic newsletters associated with high readership rates?,* we assessed technical elements of frequently clicked stories including headline and linking wording, position of stories within the newsletter, and the time of day and year the e-newsletters were sent.

It is not possible, given the small sample, to draw conclusions about the relationship of headline wording and rate of readership, but the emergence of potential patterns involving words connoting positives, status, urgency, and reader benefits will be tested at the next stage of the research. Additionally, we can hypothesise from this small sample that the first story within the e-newsletter is the most likely to be clicked on, and the story in second position is the second most likely to be clicked on. However, analysis of a much larger sample will be needed to test this hypothesis.

No discernible link was apparent between readership rate and the time of day the e-newsletter was sent. Our findings did not seem to reflect the findings of a study by Get Response into peak email readership rates, reported by *PR Daily*. Analysis of 21 million sent emails produced the recommendation that organisations should maximise open and click rates by sending their emails between 8 and 9am and 3 and 4pm (Sebastien, 2012). Similarly, no discernible relationship between high readership and time of year was apparent, although again the very small sample size clearly militates against the ready visibility of any pattern.

When seeking answers to *RQ2: Are non-profit organisations' goals for their e-newsletters a) clearly articulated; b) measurable; and c) achieved?*, we discovered an interesting degree of organisational disinterest in readership activity, and a lack of clearly articulated goals. One organisation considered the e-newsletter was meeting its communication goal simply by being sent. This organisation's expectations for 'what will this e-newsletter do' were basically nil. Several other interviewees spoke about the upsurge in traffic to the organisation's website or Facebook page subsequent to an e-newsletter posting, but did not have specific targets in terms of visits, 'likes', or 'shares'. No organisation reported that raising funds or volunteer numbers was either a goal or an achievement of the e-newsletter campaigns. This may reflect the literature that suggests that fundraising is not readily achievable through non-profit electronic communications (Bradshaw and Nolan, 2010; Ganim-Barnes, 2011; Ogden and Starita, 2009).

Despite the opportunities offered by newsletter delivery services like MailChimp to dig deeply into readership data, there was marked unevenness in how much organisations actually knew about the readership of their e-newsletters, and in how much they sought to measure. The Chief Executive of Org 3, for example, was not interested in readership numbers or readership rates as much as identifying particular readers (particularly the competition). The Chief Executive of Org 2 was convinced many people forwarded the e-newsletters on, but this view was not supported by the research findings. Findings further revealed that the communication advisor of Org 3 was unusual in her diligence in using metrics to investigate the data provided by the newsletter delivery service. She tracked who read what kind of stories and even ran some testing on subject lines. However, she admitted that the organisation does not take full advantage of what e-newsletters can provide: "we [haven't done] what we could have done which was to set really tangible metrics for ourselves … [for example] do we get a spike in volunteers signing up right after we send out a newsletter? So a lot of those things we didn't quite set up to know how successful it was".

Whether and how the organisations used their knowledge of how their e-newsletters were read to make changes or emendations was also variable. The Chief Executive of Org 3 noted that the ability to respond to the data was a huge advantage of using electronic mail analytics software: "I saw the advantages of being able to interrogate the data that you can capture ... So you're knowing how it's being passed on, how many people are opening it, knowing what it is that they are looking at, *so you can craft the next one based on what people's interests are*" (emphasis added). There was, however, no indication that this organisation did in fact craft subsequent e-newsletters in the light of data about the previous one. Org 1, on the other hand, did craft e-newsletters in the light of previous data; stories that had enjoyed high readership in previous campaigns were often recycled. Additionally, the communication advisor took specific action in response to reader feedback that readers wanted to hear more directly from the Chief Executive, and personal reports from the Chief Executive became a regular feature of the e-newsletter.

Given the imprecisely articulated communication goals of the organisations studied, and the lack of consistent use of metrics, the researchers' attempts to address the third part of RQ2, *Are non-profit organisations' goals for their e-newsletters achieved?*, became elided with the answers to *RQ3: Are e-newsletters perceived by non-profits to improve relationship with their readers?* While we are not able at this stage of the research to ascertain whether the estimable but inchoate communication goals of "keeping [the organisation] top of mind" (to borrow the words of the Chief Executive of Org 2) have been achieved by the studied campaigns, and will not until we survey e-newsletter recipients, all interviewees indicated that they felt an e-newsletter did serve to build relationship between readers and the organisation. However, a range of qualifications or reservations were expressed about this. A number of interviewees felt that to effectively build relationship with their publics, e-newsletters should be just one tool among many. Two spoke of the sense of connectedness they felt had been lost with the abandonment of the hardcopy newsletter. All, however, reported they were planning to continue using e-newsletters.

6. Conclusions and directions for further research

Because this is an exploratory, first-stage study, few hard-and-fast conclusions can be drawn, but a number of directions have emerged for the next stage of the research. Our findings suggest, unsurprisingly, that segmentation of an audience in order to target particular messages to particular readers is the single most influential factor in raising readership rates. It is evident that people who are interested in a specific cause or issue are the ones who will open and read and engage: deeper engagers are attracted not by features of a particular story but by a pre-existing predilection for an organisation or an issue. However, when the Chief Executive of Org 2 stated her passionate desire to make e-newsletter readers *want* to know more, "because the more someone knows about something the more they are likely to be interested to know more", she is expressing a desire to find out not just what characterises present deeper engagers, but how to turn light-engagers or non-

engagers into deeper engagers, those who actually read the e-newsletters and subsequently, in some fashion, respond.

In this light, possible identifiable elements of high-readership campaigns show some promise. The use of certain wording formulations in headings and links, and the placement of stories in first or second position within an e-newsletter (or alternatively limiting the number of stories contained in any e-newsletter to two), may potentially increase the readership rates of those stories. Wording formulations in headings and links, and e-newsletter formatting, deserve to be further examined and tested to see if they will attract a higher number of clicks and greater degree of engagement with stories, attracting readers who are not presently deeper engagers with an existing orientation towards an issue. This will involve a far broader-ranging examination of the e-newsletters of fifty non-profit organisations, and running controlled experiments involving varying wording and graphical features.

Secondly, we aim to produce more robust hypotheses about the characteristics of deeper engagers that will be tested when we survey the recipients of the e-newsletters. This will give us more data on who these people are, how they feel about the non-profit organisation and its electronic and other communications, and what they actually do in response to electronic messages from the organisation. Additionally, the non-profits we examined believed that the use of e-newsletter did, with some reservations, help build relationship between the organisation and the readers of the e-newsletter. The survey will help us determine if e-newsletters are perceived *by their recipients* to improve relationship with the non-profit organisation.

Ultimately, we hope in this longitudinal study to identify characteristics of high engagers with electronic newsletters, as well as to deduce best practices concerning technical features of e-newsletters, which may help non-profits better attract light engagers. The reader, for non-profit organisations' communication efforts, remains an important but elusive figure.

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Appendix A

Headlines of most frequently clicked stories within most frequently read campaigns*

'UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Refugee Families Welcomed to New Zealand'

'International Delegation Visits New Zealand to learn About Refugee Resettlement Programme'

'[Org] Board Member and Former Refugee Mitchell Pham Wins International Recognition'

'Housing Sector Partners in Nelson Support [Org]'

'An Important Message from [Org]'

'Haere Ra Happy Feet'

'Essentials of Volunteer Management'

'Message from the Chief Executive'

'Corporate Social Responsibility – Why It Is So Important For You!'

*Only nine stories had headlines; one of the ten stories examined only had an active link within a paragraph's text

Appendix B

Active links to most frequently clicked stories within most frequently read campaigns

'UN High commissioner visits NZ'

'International delegations learns about NZ programme'

'Mitchell Pham receives international recognition'

'Nelson landlords supporting former refugees'

'I HEART [org]' (graphic)

[news feed] (graphic)

'course information'

[URL]

'Check out the quick promotional tools on our website'

[you-tube graphic]

'CSR reports and information on [org]'s website'