

The blurring of the distinction between public and private in social campaigns on the Web

by

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## **Abstract**

The recent popularity explosion of new media has encouraged companies, organisations and governments to become more and more present on the Web. Social campaigns are no exception to this trend, as many now incorporate various Web platforms into their core strategies. Consequently, it is important to study these “new social campaigns” in order to better understand and maximize their impact on society. To do so, we studied 3 social campaigns’ websites through a critical content analysis and individual interviews and observations with young adults aged 18 to 25. We approached the analysis through persuasion theories and media influence theories. While studying these “new social campaigns”, we noticed a growing link between social campaigns and social media: platforms on social media are used to encourage participation and increase an organisation’s visibility. Paradoxically, this new method of participation seems to come with user-imposed limits and constraints. Hence, we tried to understand, among other things, the predictors of personal engagement through public spaces such as social media. With the growing popularity of the Internet and its various applications, it is important to determine the role and effectiveness of Web platforms presented to young adults through social campaigns, whether they focus on health, road safety, politics, etc. Our research project (published in 2012) is a first step in this direction.

## **The blurring of the distinction between public and private in social campaigns on the Web**

Internet has changed the way individuals and society transmit and use information: we are now in an era where interaction and immediacy are not only common, but are also expected (Barkat and Jaeggli Dorsaz , 2011). The rise in popularity of the Internet and social networks especially among adolescents and young adults (Cefrio, 2011), has led many companies and organizations, including social organizations and governments to invest in these new web platforms. Hence, we notice a more widespread incorporation of Web platforms in social campaigns' communication strategies, among other things. However, with the advent of emerging technologies, we are witnessing not only the emergence of new possibilities such as the potential for interactivity or the personalization of content, but also of new challenges (for example, how to get individuals to visit your Website). These new opportunities and threats therefore influence the social campaigns' development process.

Several researchers, including, in Quebec, Frenette (2010), Giroux (2009), Daignault (2007) and Landry (2000), have demonstrated the importance of using communication research and related theories in order to maximize the influence of social campaigns in society. However, the issue of the Internet remains poorly studied with regards to social advertising. That is why we have chosen to look at new social advertising practices, and more specifically, at the integration of the Internet with social campaigns through the creation of Websites. The ultimate goal of our exploratory study was to suggest ways to improve social campaigns directed toward young Quebecers from 18 to 25 years old that use the Web to transmit their message. More precisely, this case study is based on the following social campaigns' websites: *Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec's* (SAAQ) "*La vitesse, ça coûte cher*" (translation: Speed is expensive), Sainte-Justine UHC Foundation's "*50 000 adeptes, 5 000 toutous*" (translation: 50 000 followers, 5 000 stuffed animals) and the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux's* "*Les ITSS se propagent*" (translation: STBBIs<sup>1</sup> are spreading). These Websites were studied first through a critical content

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<sup>1</sup> STBBIs are sexually transmitted and blood-born infections.

analysis and then with respect to the opinions of young people themselves during interview sessions.

Within the framework of the Media in Transition International Conference *Public Media, Private Media*, we will discuss the growing link between social campaigns and social media. To do so, we will first present our theoretical framework, that is to say the persuasion theories used to analyze the Websites, followed by a brief presentation of our methodology. We will then present parts of our results. Finally, we will discuss these results in order to suggest ways to optimize the studied websites and social campaigns' websites directed at young adults in general.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social campaigns seek to persuade or convince people to change their behavior or attitudes, with the aim of improving their well-being and, on a larger scale, the collective well-being. To do so, these campaigns, rather than forcing change, try to encourage people to introduce it themselves. To accomplish this, a good understanding of how people view and initiate change is needed. This knowledge can be acquired by using various persuasion theories (Frenette, 2010). These theories allow us to understand how to initiate change by taking into account, inter alia, environmental, behavioral and cultural factors that influence the chances that an individual will change. In other words, these theories seek to identify factors that contribute to an identified problem and try to establish appropriate communication strategies to address them. In fact, social campaigns with the greatest chance of achieving their goals tend to have a greater understanding of the conduct they wish to influence as well as the context in which this conduct occurs (Frenette, 2010). For example, a young person wishing to eat healthier foods could, despite his good intentions, be forced to change his mind when faced with the lack of healthy options offered by his college's cafeteria or by the pressure of his friends who insist on going to a fast food restaurant. The behavior of an individual is influenced not only by his own attitudes, knowledge and beliefs, but also by the social environment in which he finds himself, including his family, friends and peers, as well as laws, rules and policies.

### *A few useful persuasion theories and models*

Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model helps to determine which aspects a campaign should focus on, based on the target audience and its prior level of interest in the campaign's subject. Thus, if a campaign is aimed at individuals who are both motivated and able to assimilate its message and who are interested in the issue a priori, it is recommended for a campaign to use the Central Route process. Conversely, if a campaign is aimed at individuals who are not motivated or not able to assimilate its intended message, it is recommended to use the peripheral route process. This entails using secondary elements such as a fun scenario or a spokesperson that the targeted audience trusts and likes in order to convey the desired message (Frenette, 2010).

Alternately, the Health Belief Model attempts to understand the relationship between the behavior of individuals and health issues. It is based on four conditions necessary in order for an individual to change his behavior:

(1) the perceived vulnerability of the possible consequences of his own behavior and their severity, (2) the perceived barriers to solving the problem, (3) confidence in the ability to implement the suggested solutions, and (4) the incentives present in the individual's environment (for example, pressure from friends or the establishment of new regulations related to the issue).

Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Yzer and Fishbein, 2003) states that individuals modify their behavior according to three variables: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over one's own behavior (Frenette, 2010). In this theory, attitude represents the individual's personal evaluation of the behavior in question. Subjective norms represent the individual's perception of the opinions of those around him (do others approve of this behavior? Do they disapprove of it?). Finally, the perceived control over one's own behavior is the individual's belief that he is able to control and change his behavior without the help of others. In the best-case scenario, an individual has the greatest chances of changing when his attitude is positive, the environment is supportive and he is confident in his abilities (Frenette, 2010).

According to the Stages of Change model developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983), change is seen as a process, a sequence of actions (Coffman, 2002). In fact, it consists of five stages through which individuals progress - not necessarily in a linear

fashion – when in the process of change. The first stage, that of precontemplation, begins even before the individual considers the change. Then, in the reflection stage, the individual becomes aware of the existence of a problem and considers change but without formulating concrete plans. The individual then prepares himself for change (the preparation stage) and finally changes his behavior for the better (the action stage). The process is complete when the problematic behavior is eliminated (the maintenance stage). When planning a social campaign, the target audience should be evaluated in terms of the above criteria in order to tailor the campaign to their specific stage-dependent needs.

Finally, according to the Sense-Making Approach (Dervin, 1992), a message can be interpreted in many ways depending on the life experience of each individual. Individuals try to make sense of the world around them in order to achieve or maintain a state of equilibrium, or a state of relative satisfaction toward their own situation and personal journey. This stability, however, is precarious: the individual must regularly deal with a state of imbalance requiring the resolution of problematic situations in order to attain a new state of equilibrium (Dervin and Frenette, 2003). This too should be taken into account when creating a social campaign. According to this approach, the failure of social campaigns can often be explained by individuals' lack of interest in the subject, lack of perceived representation of his personal reality and/or by the provided information's capacity solve the individuals' unbalanced state. In short, successful communication campaigns are those which the individual can understand, and those he can apply to his own situation.

### *Persuasion theories and the Web*

Persuasion theories were not originally intended to be used in the context of the Web, yet we find that they remain applicable and relevant in such a context. Moreover, this new environment, characterized by new possibilities such as interaction and personalization, enables easier applications of some of these theories. For example, in the case of the sense-making model, the individual may, through the Web, get easier access to the information necessary to restore his equilibrium. Also, because of the large amount of information available on the Web and the possibility of choosing information according to one's own needs, the information found on the Web should resonate more with each

individual user. Hence, a social campaign could use the internet to its advantage in simultaneously speaking to different audiences in different stages of change.

## Methodology

To achieve the objectives of our study, we used an approach with two different yet complementary methods in an attempt to increase reliable and unbiased results. First, we did a descriptive and critical analysis of the selected social campaigns' Web-based platforms. This step served as a preliminary inquest, allowing us to document the nature and scope of the websites of interest (Kim and Lee, 2002). This is a common method in studies which evaluate websites (Visser, Docks and Detienne, 2004). Secondly, we completed our data collection through semi-structured interviews and observations with 19 Quebecers aged 18 to 25. During these interviews, we led participants to the three selected websites. Participants were asked to navigate the websites while thinking aloud, providing verbal commentary to their actions and openly expressing their opinion. In addition, participants were asked complementary questions throughout their exploration of the Websites. We favored an individual rather than a group approach to ensure that the participants felt as comfortable as possible to share their thoughts freely, without group bias or censoring themselves for fear of what others might think or say.

Taking into account the views of the actual intended websites' users was very important for us. Moreover, it allowed the analysis to avoid simple descriptions and focus instead on the dynamics and the meaning resulting from the interaction between the user and the Website (Laperriere, 2010). According to Sabourin (2010), "*the meaning is not in the text, but in the relationship between the producer of a text, the text and the receiver*" (p.379, liberal translation). Furthermore, this technique is widespread when it comes to website evaluation:

*« One of the most productive exploratory methodologies utilized in HIC [human interaction computer] research has involved monitoring user action while collecting concurrent verbal protocols to help understand what is actually going on. Taken together, these have often given rise to the best kinds of problem-defining evidence, including the kind of scenario material already outlined »* (Barnard, 1991 in Charest et Bédard, 2009; 60).

## **The choice of the study's target group**

In our society, young adults are viewed both as a source of problems as well as bearers of solutions. As an example of a source of problems, let us note that only 64% of young people involved in road fatalities were wearing their seatbelts whereas 93% of Quebecers do (Auger, 2011). They are also often the most reckless age group, driving at extreme speeds and going against laws promoting road safety. In contrast, as a source of solutions, it is often young adults aged 18 to 25 who take a stand and participate in commercial and social campaigns, especially on the Web.. Hence, along with their familiarity with and knowledge of emerging technologies, their fearlessness and their role in society, youth aged from 18 to 25 are particularly interesting to study in relation to social campaigns on the Internet.

## **Campaigns under study**

To answer the research questions listed earlier, we analyzed some social campaigns affecting young Quebecers aged 18 to 25 from 2010 to 2012. The inclusion criteria was based on the existence of the campaign in Quebec between 2010 and 2012, the inclusion of a website in the campaign and the campaign's target group of young adults aged 18 to 25. In the end, we selected the following three campaigns: the SAAQ's (*Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec*) "*La vitesse, ça coûte cher*" (translation: Speed is expensive), Sainte-Justine UHC Foundation's "*50 000 adeptes, 5 000 toutous*" (translation: 50 000 followers, 5 000 stuffed animals) and the MSSS' (*Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*) "*Les ITSS se propagent*" (translation: STBBIs are spreading).

### *La vitesse, ça coûte cher*

The first campaign, "*La vitesse, ça coûte cher*", targeted speeding. Contrary to the shocking and graphic advertisements usually presented by the SAAQ, this campaign focused on the legal and financial consequences of speeding. It was made to cater to the general public, but specifically targeted two subgroups: men in their forties and fifties and young drivers under 25. The single page Website, *encorepire.ca* (*evenworse.ca*), presented three videos. One portrayed a middle-aged man, one portrayed a man in his twenties, and a group



of 18 year old friends, all breaching road safety regulations. It also provided a link to the SAAQ website under the title "Want to know more?" and to the SAAQ's Twitter account, Facebook page and YouTube channel through the title "Converse with us".

According to the SAAQ, *"speed is one of the main causes of road accidents in Quebec. Each year, on average from 2006 to 2010, speed was a factor in 255 deaths (44% of annual deaths), 1,000 serious injuries (37% of the annual number of serious injuries), 10 700 minor injuries (25% of the annual number of minor injuries)"* (Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec, 2012a). In fact, according to a recent survey by the organization, Quebecers are already aware of the dangers of speeding (Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec, 2012b). The same survey even shows that although they are aware of the dangers of speeding, Quebecers don't feel the need to change their driving behavior. Despite the fact that a majority of drivers say they are aware of the speed limits and the importance of respecting them, data collected by the SAAQ and the Ministère des transports du Québec (Quebec Ministry of Transportation) shows that the majority of drivers do not respect the limits set out for them (Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec, 2012b). This gap between knowledge and behavior is likely caused by the drivers' attitudes and perceptions. Almost all drivers (95%) think that they are safe drivers, blaming others for the problems and dangers on the road (Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec, 2012b). There is a perception that accidents are rare (and serious or fatal accidents are very rare) and that they only happen to other people. Hence, drivers do not necessarily realize the risk associated with their non-compliance with the imposed speed limits. The interviews conducted for this study strongly support the previous conjectures. For example one participant stated, *"I'm a good driver. I judge situations. I don't necessarily respect everything like wearing a seatbelt. If I judge that it's 3 am and that there is no one at a stop sign, well I'm gonna do it quickly"* (H23.3). Moreover, although only five of the thirteen participants with a driver's license had ever received a ticket for speeding, twelve of them admitted to speeding on a regular basis: *"I always drive over the limit"* (F22).

Following this logic, several participants questioned the very relevance of such a website, wondering what its role and target were (*"I don't understand why they made a site just for that, and who is it addressed to?"* [F22]) or why someone would visit such a site (*"I don't see why someone would say 'Oh speeding, I'll look for information on that.'" [H25]*).

Speeding is not an easy topic to discuss, especially on the web where you must first convince users to visit your website or watch your video even though *a priori* they are not interested in your subject and believe they already know enough about it ("*If you do speed, you know that if you get caught, it will cost you. You don't need to be reminded of that.*" [F23.2] or "*Through the years, I'm sure I had to see others quite similar this one.*" [F23.1 talking about the videos]).

### *50 000 adeptes, 5 000 toutous*

The second campaign, "*50 000 adeptes, 5 000 toutous*", focused on hospitalized children and the isolation that often overwhelms them in such situations. Clément, a Quebec family-owned business specializing in the sale of baby and kids products and the Foundation's partner for this campaign, pledged to give 5,000 stuffed animals to UHC (University Hospital Centre) Sainte-Justine's hospitalized children once the Foundation's Facebook page reached 50,000 fans. This campaign was aimed at French-speaking Quebecers who are active Facebook users, which includes a large number of 18 to 25 year olds. Launched exclusively on the Web during the summer of 2010, the campaign quickly became viral, reaching its goal in less than four weeks. The Website, *5000toutous.com*, was the campaign's only platform. It presented humorous videos from Quebec personalities and asked people to participate actively in the campaign by becoming a fan of the Foundation's Facebook page, changing their profile picture to that of a stuffed animal and identifying friends in group photos of stuffed animals.

This social campaign tackles a delicate and sensitive subject: sick and hospitalized children. We believe that it is because of the nature of its subject matter that the campaign used a humorous approach and a child-like, lively visual theme. Furthermore, it is something that the participants noticed and appreciated:

*"For something on sick children, we see no photos of sick children, I think it's great. [...] When you see sick children, it touches us right away, but it seems that people just want to get our pity more than our reasoning and I find that it is a principle that is not necessarily honorable. [...] There's less discomfort." (H25) and*  
*"There is no focus on the fact that they are sick, that they need help, but rather on the fact that they are children and they need have fun. I like the angle they took; they don't play on guilt. They focus on childhood and not the fact that the children of Sainte-Justine are there because they are sick. They focus on the children. I like this campaign because of that." (F25.1).*

Hence, the campaign's argumentation is based on the peripheral route of persuasion (ELM), counting on the presence of well-known spokespersons, of humorous scenarios and cute images. In other words, the campaign's message is inserted in an entertaining context and the central route of persuasion (ELM) is totally set aside. In fact, the website presents very little information about the campaign, its relevance or the Foundation. Thus, the campaign relies heavily on the positive interaction between the user and the website, followed by similarly positive interactions between the primary user and his friends.

### *Les ITSS se propagent*

Finally, the third campaign, "*Les ITSS se propagent*", addresses the issue of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs). It is aimed specifically toward young Quebecers from 15 to 30 years old (the population most affected by STBBIs). In spite of being present in the media for decades, these campaigns have failed to achieve their goals. For example, "*even though preventive speech is well integrated on a cognitive and a rational plain, young people are not able to incorporate it into the exercise of sexuality, where the emotional stakes and interactions with the partner [...] can interfere.*" (Levy et al., 2009, 24, liberal translation). Additionally, the discovery and learning about sexuality that characterizes this stage of life coupled with the "*emotional instability, willingness to experiment and sense of invulnerability*" of youth (Levy et al., 2009, 25, liberal translation) all help to subvert the potentially positive impact of social dialogue touting the benefits of safe sexual behaviors. This reality was also reflected in our interviews. Although the majority of our participants showed concern with ensuring safe sexual practices during high-risk sexual encounters, this same majority openly admitted that they did not consistently practice safe sex: "*Sometimes you think to yourself 'Once, what are the odds?'*" (F23.1), "*I protect myself, but I have had slip-ups.*" (F23.2) or "*I'm not very responsible. I think guys in general are more stupid.*" (H23.3). Hence, the challenges are significant for social campaigns talking about prevention against STBBIs.

The campaign's Website, *itss.gouv.qc.ca*, contains four pages. It starts off with a series of true or false questions about intended to dispel misconceptions about sexuality, STBBIs, and their prevalence within the population. By concretizing a subject that can otherwise appear very abstract (i.e. by presenting statistics and facts that situate the problem in terms

of youth's reality and everyday life), the campaign tries to increase users' perceived vulnerability in relation to STBBIs (Health Belief Model). In some cases, however, such information may have an adverse effect on users, leading to opposition practices. For example, instead of raising awareness of the dangers of STBBIs and unprotected sex, the campaign appeared reassuring and ended up reducing perceived vulnerability towards STBBIs in some of the study participants. One female participant stated that she was pleased to learn that she was dramatizing the subject and was being unnecessarily alarmist: *"We hear a lot about it. In our minds, it can happen to everyone, but it is worse in my head. One per day, it isn't a lot."* (F20).

This Website also fails to invoke the three other factors related to the Health Belief Model, namely the evaluation of costs and benefits related to the suggested solutions, the confidence in one's ability to put the solutions into practice and the presence of incentives from one's immediate environment. These Health Belief Model factors also seem to be areas of difficulty for young people, according to our participants' comments: *"Sometimes it's easy to say but not so easy to do."* (H23.2 talking about having protected sex) or *"Sometimes you're in a position where you're not thinking rationally, but then, afterwards, you'll worry."* (F23.1) In addition, many participants naturally inquired about external incentives (e.g., the presence of free clinics, condom distribution, etc.).

## **In the end, what does it take for a user to publicly endorse a social campaign?**

Following the analysis of our data, we noted a series of trends that, we believe, provide clues to optimize the websites for social campaigns that are aimed at young adults. One trend appears particularly relevant in the context of the Media in Transition International Conference *Public Media, Private Media*: the public endorsement people give (or are asked to give) in response to a social campaign through social media like Facebook. In fact, we have observed the emergence of a new and already widespread trend: the fostering of people's participation in social campaigns through social media. Hence, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts are becoming a more and more integral part of social campaigns. In our case, the three campaigns in this study seemed to rely on social media to increase their visibility, reputation and reach.

In principle, this trend is consistent with the behavior of young people who tend to share personal and emotional information, as well as information that coincides with their personal values. The previously discussed Sainte-Justine UHC Foundation's campaign was motivated by this desire to share on social media, and it ended up reaching its goal of 50,000 Facebook "likes" in just four weeks.

However, the participants expressed some concerns and apprehensions about their public involvement in the context of social campaigns. For example, despite the clear success of the UHC Foundation's campaign, our participants found that the campaign was asking too much: in addition to asking users to like the Foundation's Facebook page, the campaign also ask users to advertise its message by sharing its URL and purpose on social media, by replacing their Facebook profile picture with that of a stuffed animal and by publishing on Facebook and identifying their friends in a group photo of stuffed animals taken from a gallery specially designed for this purpose. While none of these steps was mandatory, the workload that was requested of users was judged excessive: *"Already with the first step, I helped you. Just the fact that you tell me that there are more steps discourages me a bit."* (F23.2). Hence, a factor affecting compliance is the number of steps to be performed by the user. This is because, even though the tasks are not mandatory, their complexity and the involvement they require may discourage the user from visiting the website and from accomplishing what is asked of him (Bastien and Scapin, 1993).

During the course of the study, we also noticed that subjects responded differently to different kinds of tasks requested by the websites. While exploring the Sainte-Justine UHC Foundation’s campaign, the study’s participants naturally classified the different steps they were asked to do according to the perceived level of engagement they felt was demanded. Thus, the first step, that of becoming a Facebook fan of the Foundation, was completed by the vast majority of participants since it only demanded a small personal and social commitment:

*"It's so easy for me to become a fan of the page that I'll do it because it is really simple, it requires no great commitment on my part." (F23.1).*

*"It costs me nothing and if it can make children happy, I would do it for sure." (F18.1)*

*"Liking a page for a good cause, it's never too much to ask" (H19).*

When asked to share the Foundation’s campaign on social media, the participants became more reluctant and most refused to comply. For example, *"I "like" sometimes, but I do not share anything and I do not ask others to "like" things." (F18.2).* Then, when it was a question of changing their profile picture or identifying friends on a photo published on Facebook, although some participants found the pictures funny and cute, only two said they might have identified friends in a group shot while none said they would have changed their profile picture. It seems that the commitment and the necessary input were too high (see Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1.** Why participants wouldn’t identify friends in a group photo: the case of Sainte-Justine UHC Foundation’s *50 000 fans, 5 000 stuffed animals* campaign

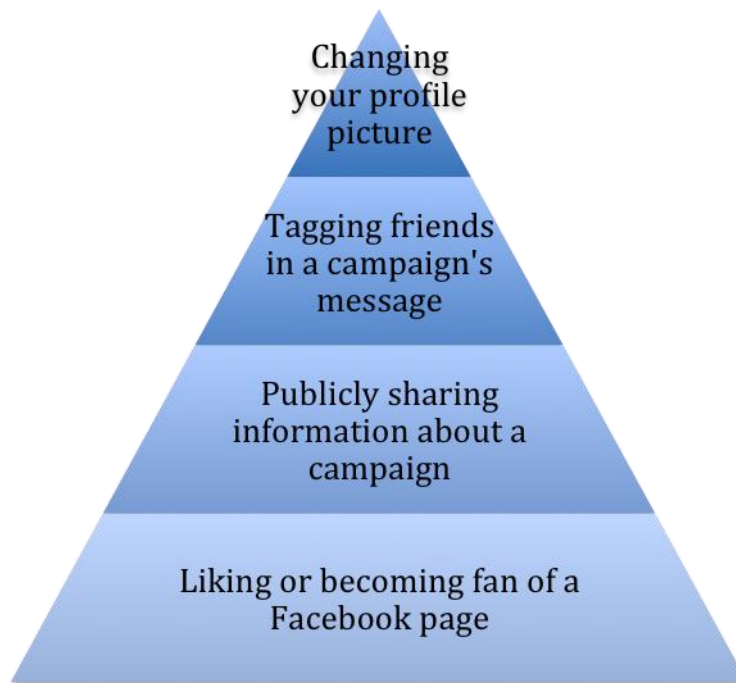
<i>"It's a little too long to do." (F23.1)</i>
<i>"I already don't tag people when they actually are in photos. So I would be even less tempted to tag people who are not on a photo. They would be like " Uh, why did you tag me?" " (F24)</i>
<i>"I do not like to involve people in what I do. [...] I strongly believe that everyone should do what he wants and I would not involve anyone without their knowledge." (H25)</i>
<i>"At that point, I think it starts to look like a promotion. [...] I do not want to bother people with that." (F23.2)</i>

**Table 2.** Why participants wouldn't change their profile picture: the case of the Sainte-Justine UHC Foundation's 50 000 fans, 5 000 stuffed animals campaign

<i>"I don't. I like having my face ..." (F25.2)</i>
<i>"It's more engaging towards the cause. A 'like', that's fine, but from that to completely endorsing the campaign by changing my profile picture, I would not." (F24)</i>
<i>"I don't know if I'd go that far. There is also the opinion of others to take into account, not many would bother to click on the picture to see why I did it." (H18)</i>
<i>"It really won't change anything" (F23.1)</i>
<i>"It is also that it does not mean much. I may not feel enough belonging to the cause, compared to a TV show where I have friends, like me, who follow the characters and stuff." (H23.1)</i>
<i>"The stuffed animals are too much like stuffed animals. I can not identify with them" (F23.1)</i>
<i>"From the start, it is not written that it is for the Foundation on the photo" (F20)</i>

Overall, there seems to exist a hierarchy of public involvement on Facebook (see Figure 1) where liking a page is seen as the most simple, common and accepted action. Then comes the action of sharing information and generating content on the platform, which requires a higher level of interest and personal involvement in the campaign. Implicating specific friends, for example, by identifying them on a photo, appears even more demanding. Finally, making someone change his or her profile picture appears to be the most difficult to achieve and demonstrates the highest level of personal involvement: *"The profile picture is what identifies you from the start."* (F20).

**Figure 1.** Pyramid of public commitment on Facebook



This pyramid of public endorsement on Facebook seeks to expose the level of personal commitment related to each of the presented options and, therefore, the degree of reluctance of users to carry out the tasks requested. During our research, we also found additional factors that influence the practice of public endorsement through Facebook. The most important of which related to the perceived views of “others”. It was found that the perceived idea of how others would react to an individual’s actions dictated much of his behavior. This strong concern for others and what they might think is a phenomenon that can be associated with the theory of Planned Behavior’s subjective norms variable (do others approve of this behavior? Do they disapprove?). Because of the exhibitionism and voyeurism inherent in social media like Facebook (to see and be seen), it may be more difficult to avoid social norms, the reactions of others, and trend effects. For example, on the Foundation’s campaign website was a Facebook plug-in where users could see who of their Facebook friends were fans of the Foundation’s page. This plug-in was perceived as a great incentive for participation: *“Well, I can already see that there are people I know. It’s good; it helps. If I saw this, I might be more inclined to continue. I think that if people who are somewhat in the same spheres as me are interested and participate in this campaign, it is*



*perhaps worthwhile for me to spend more time on it. [...] As with any movement, people want to be a part of it because they feel they are part of a movement, of something that is happening."* (H23.1).

While social norms may encourage participation now and then, they mostly restrict the accepted range of actions. In this case, they did so by encouraging public endorsement through Facebook. Thus, even when it is only a question of liking a page (the action with the lowest perceived level of commitment [Figure 1]), all topics are not deemed worthy of public sharing by all people. The most obvious example from our case study is that of the campaign on STBBIs where users were asked to share the Website as a whole or some of its questions on Facebook or Twitter. Not surprisingly, all of the study's participants said they would never have shared such information on social media. The main reasons given were the fear of what other people might say or think, and the taboo nature of the information itself, which the participants considered as belonging to the private sphere (see Table 3): *"I really do not see the relevance [of offering this option]."* (F23.2). It seems that most of the website's users agreed: on average, the website's questions were shared by 0,45% of the people who read them.

**Table 3.** Why participants wouldn't share the Website publicly: the case of the MSSS' *STBBIs Are Spreading* campaign

<i>"This is personal. I feel that if I ever talk about STIs in public, others will be like, 'Oh yeah! This is because she sleeps around with anybody' or something like that. For my reputation..."</i> (F18.3)
<i>"Like it or not, it is still taboo. I don't think I would put something about herpes on my wall like that ... It opens doors for people to think I've got a problem like that"</i> (F20)
<i>"I'd be afraid of how other people might see it. [...] I'd be afraid of stupid comments that people could write [on Facebook]."</i> (F24)
<i>"I think there would be controversy around it. It's just because of the image it would give off. It looks as if I needed it."</i> (H18)
<i>"With my Facebook friends, it's not the place to share that I learn about that. Sounds a bit like I'm not educated."</i> (H23.1)
<i>"I would not share it publicly [...] It remains intimate. Also, it's because people may wonder, 'Huh, why did she go see that?' People, they talk. In the end, you should not raise questions."</i> (F23.1).

Based on the responses, self-image seems to be an influential factor in determining what is deemed acceptable to share in the social media context: *"I 'like' things that it doesn't matter that I like or that other people see that I like. If subjects are a little more pejorative, I don't want to like them."* (F25.2).

Another interesting example concerns the SAAQ's campaign on speeding. Here, it was the perceived level of interest towards the campaign's subject that seemed to have the most impact on the decision of whether or not to publicly endorse it (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Why participants wouldn't share the Website publicly: the case of the SAAQ's *Speeding is expensive* campaign

<i>"We are sufficiently sensitized."</i> (F22)
<i>"I never would put this on Facebook. It doesn't talk to me. There's zero emotion there."</i> (F23.2)
<i>"I can't see myself lecturing people about it."</i> (H25)
<i>"Because I think others don't care."</i> (F23.2)

Finally, when talking about endorsing a campaign publicly on Facebook, social norms also seem to prevent people from imposing their choices, actions or opinions on others. A primary concern of the study participants was the fear of forcing others to make an endorsement without their consent (such as participating in the campaign) through the actions of the participants. For example, sharing information on your own Facebook profile was not perceived as binding (*"This endorsement is all right because I leave the choice to people of whether to click or not. It will only be shown in their news feed."* [F24]). Conversely, identifying friends on a photo was perceived as binding (*"I do not like to involve people in what I do. [...] I have for principle that everyone does what he wants and I will not involve them without their knowledge."* [H25]).

In essence, the use of social platforms such as Facebook should vary according to the subject of a social campaign, its approach and its objectives. Knowledge of the group to which the campaign is addressed and the attitude of the group towards the topic should be used to determine to what extent a campaign may use social media. In addition, our study suggests that although the limits between the public and the private spheres may have blurred, they have not disappeared. In fact, the distinction between what belongs to the

private and intimate spheres and what belongs to the public sphere seems to remain present and important for many: *"Ultimately, on Facebook, I would put what I could say to a stranger on the bus."* (F24).

## **Conclusion**

For several years now, people have been turning to the Web for their information needs and to help answer many of the questions. The topics of well-being and health rank among young adults' most popular searches on the Internet. In addition, the Web's privacy and easy access enables information to be obtained on a variety of sensitive topics. For this reason it is often the first step in a search that can eventually lead to seeking medical advice or to a complete lifestyle change (Kim , Park and Bozeman, 2011). It is therefore not surprising that stakeholders and public health organizations have in turn invested in the Web. Although there is a lot of interest in the Internet as a platform for the dissemination of information, it remains a black box: our knowledge of the uses and practices of its users are still very limited, especially in the field of social campaigns (Giroux, 2009). Although we are trying to value the individual in "new social campaigns", it seems that their view is not sufficiently considered by the designers of these campaigns. This can be observed in the considerable gap which persists between designers' expectations and individuals' actual uses of the Web platforms of social campaigns. It is this lack of knowledge, of understanding and of taking into account the target audience of social campaigns that emerges from our analysis. The aim of this paper is therefore to shed light on this novel, yet widespread use of social media that has yet to be thoroughly studied. We have attempted to demonstrate that the practice of expecting cooperation between the public campaign and private user does not work for all campaigns. Various factors, most notably the perceived level of engagement related and the campaign's subject, can affect people's participation in social campaigns on social media.

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