

Mobilising Civic Engagement? The Use of Online Technologies by Australian Third Sector Organisations

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Abstract

In the current public policy environment, the importance of an engaged citizenry is gaining increased attention from political leaders, social scientists and community activists alike. Global transformations, including developments in information and communication technologies (ICT), are influencing the nature of, and access to, participation in the public sphere. Traditionally, third sector or non-profit organizations have played a significant role in mediating civic engagement in Australian life. The burgeoning literature on the importance of social capital has raised concerns about declining participation in third sector organizations, suggesting that such decline represents a commensurate reduction in civic engagement. In the context of broader discussions about whether social capital is in decline, a growing theoretical debate has emerged about the effects of ICT on citizen engagement.

While the value of citizen engagement is experiencing a renaissance in public policy discourse, and the impacts of ICT on citizen engagement is the subject of robust theoretical discussion, very limited attention has been given to just how online technologies may impact upon third sector organizations' capacities to mobilize citizen engagement. This paper presents a preliminary analysis of Australian third sector organizations' attempts to mobilize citizen engagement using online technologies. Recent debates about the nature and importance of citizen engagement, and the impacts of online technologies on citizen engagement, are reviewed in order to identify the significance of these technologies to third sector organizations. Drawing on a content analysis of 40 Australian third sector organisation websites, the ways in which these organizations are, or are not, utilizing online technological capacity to mobilize citizen engagement with their organizational activities are considered.

Introduction

In the current public policy environment, the importance of an engaged citizenry is gaining increased attention from political leaders, social scientists and community activists alike. Global transformations – characterized, in part, by rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT) – are providing both new imperatives for, and new conditions in which, individuals and organizations participate in the public sphere. While not constitutive of civil society in its entirety, third sector, or non-profit, organizations have traditionally played a significant role in mediating civic engagement in Australian life (see Lyons, 2001). The burgeoning literature on the importance of social capital, popularly spearheaded by US political scientist Robert Putnam (see Putnam 2000), has raised concerns about declining participation in third sector organizations, suggesting that such decline represents a commensurate reduction in civic engagement. We may briefly define civic engagement as individual and

collective forms of action that are designed to identify and address matters of public concern. While civic engagement includes participation in formal and informal political processes, this paper is particularly concerned with the latter. That is, it focuses on those aspects of civic engagement that are mediated through civil society, rather than formal political institutions. More specifically, it is concerned with civic engagement facilitated by third sector organizations.

In the context of broader discussions about whether social capital is in decline, a growing theoretical debate has emerged about the effects of ICT – particularly online technologies - on civic engagement. This debate is essentially polarized between those who hail online technologies as facilitating radical social spaces in which virtual solidarity and activism are produced and those who bemoan online activities as indicative of the rise of consumerism over citizenship, the fragmentation of social relations and the consequent erosion of social capital (Barraket, 2002: 14). The empirical research to support either position in this debate remains limited, although work such as that conducted in the US by Horrigan (2001) as part of the Pew Internet Life Project suggests that some people are using online technologies to engage in new forms of collective activity, and to access more traditional forms of civic activity in new ways.

While the value of civic engagement is experiencing a renaissance in public policy discourse, and the impacts of ICT on civic engagement is the subject of robust theoretical discussion, very limited attention has to date been given to just how online technologies may impact upon third sector organizations' capacities to mobilize civic engagement. That is, while some writers are lamenting the decline in traditional forms of associationalism, limited attention has been directed to just how online technologies may be used to enhance third sector organizational capacity. At the same time, those who are researching the engagement possibilities of online technologies (see Wellman et al, 1996; Wellman et al, 2001; Kavanaugh & Patterson, 2001) are typically more concerned with new forms of connectivity and collective action than they are with how traditional third sector organizations may organize themselves online. There are two exceptions to this gap in knowledge. The first is a growing body of empirical research – often commissioned by government – on ICT use in community service organizations (see, for example Pargmegiani & Sachdeva, 2000; Public Sector Consultants Inc, 1999; Hall Aitken, 2001). This research identifies some very important issues around ICT capacity, and related policy implications, in organizations that serve traditionally vulnerable groups, is primarily concerned with issues of service delivery, and does not focus on issues of civic engagement as such. The other exception is an emerging nonprofit management literature on ePhilanthropy (see, for example Hart, 2002; Olsen et al, 2001), which seeks to promote the advantages of online technologies for donor relationship building. While this literature has some utility in explaining the possibilities

of ICT for third sector organizations, it is limited to the most instrumental aspect of civic engagement; that is, making financial contributions.

The purpose of this paper is to consider existing theoretical understandings of the civic engagement impacts of ICT, and to report on a preliminary analysis of Australian third sector organizations' attempts to mobilize civic engagement using these technologies. I begin by considering recent debates about the nature and importance of civic engagement, and the impacts of ICT – particularly online technologies – on civic engagement, in order to identify the significance of these technologies to third sector organizations. On the basis of a systematic analysis of 40 Australian third sector organisations' websites, I then consider the ways in which these organizations are, or are not, utilizing online technological capacity to mobilize civic engagement in their organizational activities. The findings of this analysis are then discussed in relation to the future of the Australian third sector and the implications for Australian civil society.

Civic Engagement in the Network Era

Manuel Castells has declared the network the principal organizing framework of the information age. In so doing, he suggests that “the Internet is the technological basis for the organizational form of the Information Age” (Castells, 2001: 1). In terms of the public sphere, the notion of networks may be seen as informing the way in which policy is produced and implemented and the way in which local social systems are organizing themselves. In brief, some policy theorists argue that contemporary liberal democracies are shifting away from bureaucratic forms of *government* and towards networked approaches to *governance* in order to manage increasingly complex societal needs (Considine, 2001). One of the key implications of the shift towards governance is an increasing role for non-government actors (including business and third sector organizations and individual citizens) in the design and delivery of public policy. As Considine describes it, network governance expresses an alternative to markets and hierarchies, and “imagines a set of public and private agencies taking over the joint delivery of public services” (2001: 15). The importance of civil society and civic engagement to the healthy functioning of society is being revisited by political leaders, theorists and practitioners. In the Australian context, we have seen growing discussions by government and opposition leaders on the importance of voluntarism and local development. Initiatives such as the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership awards suggest an increased emphasis on communities 'doing for themselves' in collaboration with a more socially responsible corporate Australia. At state and local government level, there has been a veritable explosion of policy and programme approaches that focus on community capacity building, civic engagement, integrated service delivery and local solutions to so-called local problems. In effect, civil society in general and the third sector specifically, is being simultaneously interpellated as a

critical actor in the reform of public service delivery and a site for renewal of social democracy.

The notion of civil society has itself been the subject of broad theoretical debate across the sociological and political sciences. While some theorists view civil society as an emergent public sphere, in which the principles of citizenship, rights, democratic participation and the 'rule of law' are grounded (see Habermas, 1989), others describe it as the space between the formalized structures of the state and informal relations of family (see Walzer, 1995). In the latter definition, the market is included as an integral feature of civil society. Edwards has recently summarized theoretical understandings of civil society into three broad definitional categories: a focus on civil society as a part of society, which is constituted in associational life; civil society as an ideal kind of society; and civil society as the public sphere (Edwards, 2004: 10). Given this paper's particular focus on civic participation through third sector organizations, it is specifically concerned with the first of these definitions. While the third sector itself does not constitute civil society, it provides the organizational framework through which much formal and informal associational activity takes place. These forms of associational activity, in turn, are representative of civic engagement; that is, they involve individual and collective actions that give expression to diverse human aspirations, and/or which seek to influence rules, laws and public policy.

In a recent study of civic engagement in Britain, Pattie and Seyd (2003) identified three 'types' of civic engagement. The first category they describe is 'individualistic activism', which is characterized by relatively individual acts, such as making donations, signing petitions, and ethical consumption. The second dimension is 'contact activism', which includes making contact with organizations, and writing to the media and/or political leaders. The third type of engagement is 'collective activism', which includes participation in meetings and collective actions (including civil disobedience) and 'the propensity to form a group of like-minded people' (Pattie and Seyd, 2003: 448). While Pattie and Seyd's study is more concerned with civic interaction with formal political institutions and practices, and is not specifically concerned with online activity, their typology of civic engagement provides a useful framework through which to explore online civic engagement via third sector organisations. This will be discussed further in the methodology section below.

Civic Engagement and Online Technologies: A review of the theoretical debate and empirical evidence¹

There is a wealth of theoretical literature that considers the potential of online technologies, and particularly the Internet, in building civil society and online democracy (see, for example Wellman et al, 1996; Street, 1997; Levine, 2000; Naughton,

¹ Parts of this section have been drawn from Barraket (2002).

2001). As discussed in the introduction to this paper, the debate is heavily polarised. This polarisation is illustrated by the opposing perspectives of Levine (2000) and Naughton (2001).

Levine (2000) has suggested that 'online civil society' poses significant concerns in five areas:

1. Access, and contribution, to online content is highly inequitable, which reduces the possibilities of genuinely democratic participation;
2. Online interaction replaces robust social bonds with superficial and contingent ones and, over time, use of the Internet is socially disengaging or atomising society as a whole;
3. Online interaction threatens public deliberation, as there is limited engagement across ideological divides, and exit from online debate prevails over exercising dissent or working through difference;
4. The Internet has dramatically increased consumer choice, which has encouraged the rise of consumerism over personal creativity; and
5. The Internet has fundamentally changed the nature and limitations of privacy, which can constrain people's motivation to associate.

At the other end of the spectrum, Naughton (2001) argues that, while the Internet is a contested space, where corporate power and government regulation are limiting the freedoms of online engagement, the benefits of the Internet to civil society are that it:

1. Facilitates radical access to published data, information and knowledge;
2. Lowers the barriers to publication and enables groups and individuals to bypass traditional cultural gatekeepers in the expression of ideas, issues, and causes;
3. Facilitates rapid communication on a global scale;
4. Facilitates the sharing of information resources; and
5. Facilitates the formation and maintenance of virtual communities of people or institutions with shared interests.

It is axiomatic that the advancement of online networking technologies has radicalised opportunities for individual and organisational networking across the globe. What remains unclear, however, is the quality of these networks and the outcomes they produce. As suggested by the polarisation of the theoretical literature on this topic, the nature and extent of the impacts of online networking opportunities on civil society in general, or civic engagement in particular, is not yet well understood. The arguments cited above, however, suggest that the rise of online activity offers both new possibilities and pitfalls for third sector involvement in building robust civil society.

The theoretical debate encompasses two 'sub-debates' about ICT and civil society. The first of these is the extent to which ICT is transforming collective action through global online networking and advocacy (see, for example, Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Led for the most part by theorists of social movements and non-institutional politics, this body of literature has identified ICT as a critical factor in the emergence of 'segmented, polycentric, ideologically integrated networks' or 'SPINs' (Levine, 2000:4), such as support networks for the Zapatista uprising in Mexico and the anti-globalisation movement which has recently stimulated mass protest actions throughout the world. SPINs are mobilised online and, writers suggest, provide new opportunities for global solidarity around economic, social, and environmental causes.

To date, there has been limited discussion within this particular debate about the impacts of online collective action on traditional social movement and advocacy organisations. Keck and Sikkink (1998) have suggested that the information society has redefined the nature of social movement activity. They identify the emergence of ICT enabled 'transnational advocacy networks', which are not social movement organisations, *per se*, but fluid representations of ideas rather than traditionally organised constituencies (Keck & Sikkink, 1998: 236).

As a number of writers have pointed out, however, online advocacy and civic engagement is limited by inequitable access of individuals and organisations to ICT, and by the limited availability and accessibility of meaningful content online (Kirschenbaum and Kunamneni, 2001; Levine, 2000). The implication for the third sector is that, while it does not engage systematically and creatively with the opportunities for information dissemination, relationship building, and advocacy afforded by online technologies, its power over content and use of ICT to stimulate civic engagement will remain minimal.

The second 'sub-debate' on ICT and citizen participation and engagement is concerned with the extent to which online activity supports or erodes offline, local community building activity. This debate has engaged a range of theorists and practitioners – particularly those concerned with how social capital is generated and mobilised – and mirrors the general polarisation of opinion about ICT and civil society discussed above. Critics of the effects of ICT on community life (see, in particular, Putnam, 2000) have argued that ICT has fostered a decline in social capital by replacing face to face interaction with poorer quality 'virtual' interaction, and by taking time away from civic activity. Conversely, proponents of the impacts of ICT on social capital (see, for example, Rheingold, 1993; Wellman et al, 1996) have argued that online technologies create new opportunities for the development of networks and interaction, and that these relationships also foster greater offline interaction and participation. One implication of this scenario is that the decline of social capital as measured by leading theorists such as Putnam (1993, 2000) focuses on traditional forms of civic involvement

(such as organisational involvement) and fails to capture emerging forms of participation and engagement developing in cyberspace.

Wellman et al (2001) have suggested that use of ICT – particularly the Internet – neither increases nor decreases social capital, but rather that it serves a supplementary function. As outlined by Wellman et al, the supplement argument does not privilege the Internet as a profound shaper of social trends, but ‘presents the Internet as best understood in the context of a person’s overall life’ (2001: 440).

In a survey of 1697 Internet users for the Pew Internet & American Life project, Horrigan (2001) found that the Internet is a site of meaningful engagement, and that many people were using the Internet to intensify their connection to their local communities and community organisations. This research found that 29% of participants used online technologies to contact local community organisations, ranking contact with these types of organisations 4th out of twelve types of (business, government and non-profit) organisations contacted. Of the people who contacted local community groups online, 80% were members or supporters of these organisations prior to contacting them online. However, the research found that Internet use is drawing new and different kinds of people to local groups and that, once they make contact online, they tend to maintain a high level of involvement (Horrigan, 2001: 5). As with other studies, this research found a correlation between Internet experience and joining local groups online. That is, familiarity with online technology appears to be a pre-condition for meaningful online participation.

With regard to local democratic engagement, Horrigan (2001) found that the Internet was playing a less significant role. The research concluded that, at the local level, people utilise the Internet primarily as a source of information about local commerce and community activities, and that involvement in online deliberation (including communicating with elected officials and debating local issues) was low. Limited public access to the Internet was identified as one barrier to online civic engagement. It should be noted that, the research only surveyed existing Internet users, thereby excluding those with no access to Internet use. As such, the extent of the problem of inequitable access and participation was not made clear in this study.

In a longitudinal study of the impact of a community computer network on social capital and community involvement in Blacksburg, Virginia, Kavanaugh and Patterson (2001) identified frequent and increasing use of the network and Internet for social capital building activities in the local community. These activities included increased use of the Internet to communicate with local family members, church members, informal social groups and local community organisations. However, the research also found that there was no correlation between computer network/Internet use and

increased community involvement and attachment, except for a subset of users who were already actively involved in the community (Kavanaugh and Patterson, 2001).

In an web-based survey of 39 211 visitors to the National Geographic Society website, Wellman et al (2001) found that the communication possibilities of the Internet supplemented participants' use of face to face and telephone interaction, without increasing or decreasing this interaction. However, they found that there was a correlation between heavy Internet use and increased involvement in voluntary organisations and political activity. It should be noted that, while Wellman et al draw the conclusion that 'the Internet supplements and increases organisational involvement' (2001: 444), their methodology and analysis does not appear to support this causality. That is, while the research identifies an association between these two factors, it does not determine whether high organisational involvement is a pre-condition of heavy Internet use, or whether heavy Internet use determines organisational involvement. However, a longitudinal study of the impact of the Internet on civic engagement conducted in the US by Jennings and Zeitner (2003) found that Internet access and use itself had a significant positive affect on several indicators of civic engagement.

The four studies are consistent in their findings that, the longer people are users of online technologies, the more likely they are to use these technologies for the purposes of social capital building and civic engagement. However, the Kavanaugh and Patterson (2001) research contradicts the Pew Internet project finding that people are broadly using the Internet to enhance their local community participation, while the Wellman et al (2001) research is inconclusive on this matter. As observed by Kavanaugh and Patterson (2001), there is a basic 'chicken and egg' problem in assuming a causal relationship between ICT use and social capital levels. That is, do high levels of social capital determine robust online community networks, or vice versa? (Kavanaugh and Patterson, 2001: 506). Building on this question, should we assume a relationship at all? And, if so, are such relationships likely to be linear (causal) or iterative (cyclical)? While some inferences may be drawn from the research summarised here, it is clear that rigorous comparative longitudinal research is required if these questions are to be validly and reliably investigated.

While the relationship between online technology use and civic engagement is not fully understood, research conducted by Horrigan (2001) and Jennings & Zeitner (2003) presents evidence to suggest that online technologies are being used to *facilitate* civic engagement amongst some groups. The work of Horrigan and the Pew Internet project more generally also suggests that online interactivity is supporting new *forms* of civic engagement, both within and outside the parameters of existing political institutions and third sector organizations. Horrigan's research also suggests that, via online

technologies, people who would otherwise not engage with particular third sector organizations are doing so.

The changing role of civil society in governance and policy, combined with the transformative effects of online technologies on organizational practice and individual activity, suggests that Australian third sector organizations are facing both a new operating environment and changing opportunities for mobilizing civic engagement to meet social, economic, environmental and cultural needs. In this context, third sector use of online technologies is increasingly significant. The empirical findings discussed below represent an exploratory effort to further understand these opportunities in the Australian context.

Methodology

A preliminary analysis of the home pages of 40 purposively sampled Australian Third Sector organizations was undertaken. In order to accommodate the diversity of the sector, organizations were purposively sampled from a range of industries, and small, medium and large organizations were included (see Table One below). In order to limit the analysis to the mobilization of individual citizens (rather than other organizations), peak or 'umbrella' third sector organizations were not included in the sample. Further, in order to focus the research on those organizations that are employing online technologies to support offline activity, recently established third sector organizations which are predominantly web-based were not included in the research.

Table One: Summary of Third Sector Sample by Size and Type

	Large Organisation	Medium Organisation	Small Organisation
Community Services	9	3	4
Sport		2	
Religion	1		
Arts and Culture		1	4
Interest Group	6	3	2
Health and related	2		1
Economic Cooperation		1	

Using Pattie and Seyd's (2003) typology of civic engagement, sampled home pages were reviewed to identify the extent to which they facilitated individualistic activism (such as donations, bequests, and petition signing), contact activism (such as writing letters to political representatives, actively seeking information from the organization about activities and events), and collective activism (such as forming a local group, participating in an organized campaign, becoming involved in civil disobedience, and attending local meetings and events). A matrix of particular site features was developed to assess the types of activism facilitated. In order to achieve an accurate 'snapshot' of activity, the review of websites took place over a two-day period in June, 2004.

A summary of website features and the types of activism with which they were matched is detailed in Table Two below.

Table Two: Website features by types of civic engagement

Level of Activism	Website Feature
Individualistic Activism	Online donation facility
	News information on site
	Online merchandising
Contact Activism	Online Newsletter sign-up option
	Contact with organization available via site or email
	Site feedback function
Collective Activism	Information about events (off or online)/how to get involved
	Online interactive activities (eg discussion forums, surveys, actions)

In order for a website feature to be included in the matrix, it needed to be clearly accessible on, or directly linked to, the organisation's home page without use of the site map.

At this stage, data have been analysed descriptively. It is anticipated that another round of sites will be reviewed before inferential statistical analysis is undertaken.

Discussion

Before considering the findings of the research, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The methodology employed in this research has two notable limitations. First, the sample is limited to those third sector organizations that have an online presence. To more comprehensively assess the extent to which the Australian third sector is, or is not, utilizing online technologies to mobilize civic engagement, further empirical research that includes organizations without websites would need to be conducted. Further, a 'front end' analysis of websites does little to explicate the extent to which particular web features are used by the public, nor the 'back end' use of information gained by organizations via their use of online technologies. For example, this research does not identify if and how third sector organizations are utilizing information about traffic on their websites, or individual information collected via online donation features to further adapt their approaches to mobilizing participation. Further research in this area would provide more detailed insights into the nature and extent of third sector use of online technologies to mobilize civic engagement.

Despite its methodological limitations, the research highlights, via systematic investigation of a relatively broad sample, a number of interesting findings worthy of consideration.

First, the research findings suggest that there is a wide disparity in the functionality of Australian third sector websites in mobilizing civic engagement. Across the organizational websites reviewed, the use of online capabilities ranged from very limited emphasis on individualistic engagement (through online donating functions and information dissemination) to a comprehensive emphasis on all forms of engagement, including online and offline participation through: donation, sponsorship or purchase of goods and services; provision of news, research findings, and updates on the organisation's involvement in broader civic activities; information about specific volunteering activities and/or activist events; and interaction through forums, discussion groups, surveys and opinion polls.

Of the 40 websites reviewed, 20 had a high degree of functionality with regard to mobilizing civic engagement (measured as presence of five or more out of a possible

seven related website features), while only 3 of the websites sampled had a low degree of functionality (measured as two or less features). Only two of the 40 websites sampled contained all the civic engagement features included in the study. It is notable that both of these organizations were large social movement organizations with a transnational orientation.

One of the regular speculations about ICT use and third sector organizations is that there is a relationship between organizational size and ICT use; that is, smaller organizations with limited resources are less likely to invest in ICT than larger organizations (Barraket, 2002). The findings from this research support this speculation, with 13 of the 18 'high functionality' websites belonging to large organizations, and all 3 'low functionality' sites belonging to small organizations.

With regard to Pattie and Seyd's (2003) typology of civic engagement, the organizational websites sampled universally presented options for individualist engagement (such as online donating or membership opportunities), and inconsistently presented options for contact and collective engagement. In relation to contact engagement – that is, making contact with civic organizations – all websites reviewed provided direct online and offline contact details for their organization, and 34 of the 40 sites presented information about the news and activities of the organization on their home page. It is interesting to note, however, that approximately two thirds of sites reviewed did not contain an explicit 'site feedback' function, by which the user can contact the site manager(s) to let them know if something on the site is not working.

With regard to collective civic engagement, 36 of the 40 sites reviewed provided information about how to get involved in the 'offline' activities of their organization, including information about how to become a member or volunteer, information about specific events and group activities, and advice about how to establish like minded groups, where relevant. While there was a high degree of information about offline collective activity, the sample reviewed revealed very limited options for collective engagement online. That is, only seven of the 40 sites reviewed provided opportunities for online interaction via forums, surveys, discussion groups or opinion polls. Of these seven organizations, five were large organizations, one was medium and one was small. Four of these can be characterized as social movement organizations, while one was a community service organization with a strong history of advocacy, and the other was a community arts organization.

The most significant finding from this research is that, overall, organizations reviewed were making very limited use of the interactive or 'communicative' functions of online technologies, and tended to maximize the 'informative' and instrumental functions of the technology to a greater degree. That is, while the third sector organizations sampled

were relatively consistent in the (one way) provision of information about their activities and opportunities for web users to become involved in face to face activity, there was a distinct under-utilisation of the features of online technologies to build 'virtual' collective engagement via two-way or multi-way communication. This suggests that, for the organizations sampled ICT was being used to facilitate web-users' engagement with the traditional activities of the organization, but not to facilitate new forms of engagement as such.

Conclusions

Beyond the methodological limitations of this study discussed above, drawing universal conclusions about the effectiveness of the online presence of the Australian third sector in mobilizing citizen engagement is potentially problematic due to the diversity of the sector itself. In part, the varying nature of the websites reviewed in this study reflect organizational differences, and the types of civic engagement valued or prioritised by third sector organizations with diverse objectives, orientations and resource bases. For example, large charitable organisations that rely on individual philanthropy as a primary source of financial support may conceptualise organizational participation very differently to grass roots social movement organizations that are explicitly concerned with promoting activism to achieve organizational objectives. While the limited utility of comparing all organizations within the third sector must be recognized, the findings of this research do suggest that, sectorally, third sector organisations are using online technologies to enhance traditional methods of organizational participation, but are inconsistent in using ICT to mobilize civic engagement in new ways.

This suggests that many third sector organisations are missing out on some of the vital benefits of online technologies. For example, these organizations are not encouraging meaningful feedback on their sites and they are inconsistent in giving people immediate opportunities to participate in or engage with organizational activities, or to build collective identity online. There are presumably many reasons for this, particularly resource limitations, but it is notable that even those that are relatively well resourced have been inconsistent in their employment of ICT to enhance communication and collective engagement.

This research suggests that there is a long way to go if the Australian third sector is going to maximize the capacity of online technologies to mobilize civic engagement. In a policy environment where the third sector is viewed as having an increased role to play in public service delivery and/or the revival of social democracy, its capacity to connect with a diversity of people, to mobilize resources in multiple ways, and to provide mechanisms through which individual and collective identity is developed is of critical significance. While the relationship between civic engagement and online technologies remains largely untested, there is an emerging body of empirical evidence that

tentatively indicates that ICT does impact on collective identity formation in general and patterns of engagement with the third sector in particular, at least for early adopters of these technologies. These trends and their implications for the third sector need to be better understood. For now, however, they suggest that online technologies are an emerging site of engagement, which third sector organizations must harness if they are to remain a relevant representative voice of civil society in the network era.

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