

Differential effects of omni-channel touchpoints and digital behaviors on digital natives' social cause engagement

Andrew J. Dahl

*College of Business and Economics, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater,
Whitewater, Wisconsin, USA*

Anthony M. D'Alessandro

University of Wisconsin Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA, and

James W. Peltier and Eric L. Swan

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, Whitewater, Wisconsin, USA

Abstract

Purpose – Social causes increasingly rely on omni-channel touchpoints involving personal discussions and grassroots digital marketing efforts to engage individuals via social referrals. This paper aims to examine digital natives' perceived effectiveness of omni-channel touchpoints for increasing social cause engagement including social media, digital media, traditional and interpersonal communications, along with an individual's social/digital media behaviors.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reports empirical results from an online survey of 924 digital natives. The paper uses multivariate and multiple regression analyses to examine the differential effects of a diverse range of media influencing the perceived effectiveness of social cause referrals from a family member versus a close friend.

Findings – The results identify the combination of omni-channel touchpoints most likely to be effective for enhancing organ donation support and registration efforts as part of social referral campaigns. The findings suggest differences exist based on whether the campaign targets family members or friends.

Research limitations/implications – The research focuses on digital natives and does not address differences that may vary by specific messages shared across generational groups or ethnicities. More research is also necessary, which examines the effects of digital consumption versus content creation behaviors.

Practical implications – The paper includes implications for social marketers looking at increasing viral reach and engagement via social referral campaigns. Marketers should integrate the omni-channel touchpoints deemed to be most effective for each target based on specific campaign goals.

Originality/value – This paper addresses a gap in marketers' understanding of how digital natives perceive social referral campaigns targeting their social circle via various omni-channel touchpoints.

Keywords Social media marketing, Marketing communications, Facebook, Health care, Word-of-mouth marketing, Millennials

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

Social cause marketers have increasingly used omni-channel touchpoints to raise cause awareness, generate support and motivate action (Guo and Saxton, 2014). Fueled by the growth in interactive digital media, campaigns integrating omni-channel touchpoints have spurred grassroots movements that raise monetary donations, increase public support or create political/social change (Smith *et al.*, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2017). Successful cause marketing efforts are often a result of generating electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) or social referrals from connections that virally disseminate user-generated information to their social circle and ask others to take a specific action (Cummins, *et al.*, 2014). Similar to for-profit marketers, cultivating and maintaining consumer engagement via omni-channel campaigns remains elusive for social cause marketers (Schultz and Peltier, 2013; Barger *et al.*, 2016). For every ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, Black Lives Matter or #MeToo movement, there are countless others that are unable to capture or sustain a similar level of involvement (Guidry *et al.*, 2014). Given limited resources and the continued shift toward consumer empowerment (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013), it is necessary to conduct research that helps marketers better understand how consumers view different omni-channel touchpoints to maximize campaign effectiveness and engagement (Hartemo, 2016; Manser Payne *et al.*, 2017).

Recently, public health officials and social cause marketers have increased the use of omni-channel touchpoints as part of public education campaigns to increase organ donor registrations (D'Alessandro *et al.*, 2012a; Quick *et al.*, 2015). Although these efforts have increased individual's positive attitudes and support toward organ donation (Peltier *et al.*, 2012), actual donor registrations, donor conversion rates and related behavior measures have not reached the levels necessary to reduce the transplant waitlist (Quick *et al.*, 2016). Traditionally, a primary focus of these campaigns has been to increase the potential organ donor pool by encouraging individuals to sign-up through online state donor registries and/or via indication on state IDs or licenses. More recently, public health officials have pushed for a national online donor registry, mobile app registration process and Facebook or other social media-based campaigns to encourage individuals to promote their organ donor status as part of a social referral process (Cameron *et al.*, 2013; Cameron, 2015). Despite these efforts, participation in donor registrations remains relatively stagnant with only 48 per cent registered nationally (Donate Life America, 2016). As further evidence of the minimal effect to-date, a meta-analysis of organ donor campaigns shows that previous mass-mediated and interpersonal efforts have a relatively small effect on actual organ donor registration (Feeley and Moon, 2009), suggesting more research is needed to understand the effectiveness of omni-channel touchpoints as part of social referral organ donor registration campaigns.

Despite the growing use of first-person consent registries, discussions between family members and others remain a large and critical barrier to organ and tissue recovery (Downing and Jones, 2009). The emergence of omni-channel touchpoints suggests that more research is needed to identify the most effective media for encouraging individuals to share social proof of their personal support of organ donation and to engage others in discussions to enhance their support and increase registrations (Quick *et al.*, 2016; Anker and Feeley, 2011). The existing literature studying organ donation awareness, attitudes and behaviors provides limited, though growing, evidence of the positive impact omni-channel touchpoints and communication campaigns can have in reducing the organ and tissue shortage (Li *et al.*, 2015). Despite this promise, relatively little is known about the communication or behavioral effects different omni-channel touchpoints have on social referrals of organ donor registration (Smith *et al.*, 2016). Thus, there is a need for research that investigates the role of social- and digital-networking-based messaging as part of a larger campaign to help identify

the effectiveness of combining multiple media formats within a single campaign (Stefanone *et al.*, 2012).

Given these gaps, the current study's purpose is to examine the potential effectiveness of different omni-channel touchpoints for reducing the organ donation shortage via social referrals from digital natives. Specifically, we focus on the perceived effectiveness of omni-channel touchpoints such as traditional advertising/print media, social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, digital video and blogs) and interpersonal digital media (i.e. email and text messaging). Additionally, we explore the effects of behavioral actions related to holding personal discussions about organ donation and social media behaviors (i.e. sharing videos, inviting someone to join a social cause group, posting messages on social networking sites, blogs and discussion forums) on organ donor social referrals.

This article contributes to the social cause marketing and omni-channel literature in a number of ways. First, we expand the omni-channel literature by showing the differential impact of social, digital and personal touchpoints on social referral. Second, we offer insight into the effectiveness of omni-channel communications on desired organ donor registration perceptions. Finally, this study advances the social and health marketing disciplines by providing implications for practitioners to enhance the effectiveness of omni-channel organ donation social referral campaigns to increase the number of registered organ donors. The results identify the combination of omni-channel touchpoints most likely to be effective for enhancing organ donation support and registration efforts as part of social referral interventions. Importantly, the findings suggest differences exist based on whether the social referral campaign targets two close interpersonal connections – family members and friends. Social marketers interested in using social referral campaigns should consider integrating the omni-channel touchpoints deemed to be most effective for each target based on the campaign goals.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the extant literature on omni-channel marketing touchpoints and the engagement of consumers in organ donation registration campaigns. The paper then introduces the framework and hypotheses related to the joint effects of omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness and social media/personal behaviors on digital natives' social cause engagement in organ donor campaigns. We then provide the methodology utilized in the empirical study to test the proposed hypotheses along with a discussion of the study's results. The paper concludes with a summary of the theoretical and practical implications, along with opportunities for future research.

Literature review

Omni-channel touchpoints

Marketers have long recognized the value of market segmentation and targeting appropriate media touchpoints to varied audiences. For example, research shows that integrated marketing communication (IMC) efforts remain important to effectively communicate with different generational cohorts along with other segments (Fall and Lubbers, 2009). Fundamentally, IMC involves the use of consistent messaging across customer touchpoints and media platforms (Moriarty and Schultz, 2012). From a theoretical perspective, omni-channel marketing combines this IMC principle with the interactive use of multiple channels (i.e. multi-channel marketing) to enhance customer engagement via a synchronized cross-channel experience (Rangaswamy and van Bruggen, 2005; Cummins *et al.*, 2016). Accordingly, omni-channel marketing allows marketers to deliver consistent messaging regardless of the touchpoints customers use to engage with a brand or social cause. Recently, the concept of omni-channel touchpoints has attracted increased

attention from marketers given the potential to deliver consistent messaging and to present a unified brand experience across all channels and stages in the customer lifecycle (Bell *et al.*, 2014).

Despite this increased attention, marketers often fail to develop campaigns that fully leverage omni-channel touchpoints to increase customer engagement (Ots and Nyilasy, 2015). Moreover, the explosive growth of digital media and related communication technologies presents new challenges for marketers in identifying appropriate messaging strategies and ensuring message consistency (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2013). Specifically, the rise of digital media requires that marketers first acknowledge consumers' evolving communication channel preferences (Bell *et al.*, 2014), while requiring marketers to address potential message conflict originating from user-generated messaging (Schultz and Peltier, 2013). The result is a shift in the balance of power from marketers to consumers (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013), requiring a greater emphasis on identifying effective communication strategies and tactics to help facilitate consumer-driven social advocacy efforts rather than relying solely on marketer-generated messaging. For that reason, marketers need to seamlessly integrate campaigns across multiple channels while considering the most effective media strategies and tactics across the customer journey from initial awareness, to commitment and ultimately advocacy (Neslin and Shankar, 2009).

Engaging consumers in organ donor campaigns via omni-channel touchpoints

Social marketing is defined as:

[...] the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part (Andreasen, 1994).

Specific to the current study, registering to be an organ donor represents an altruistic behavior, which benefits others more than one's personal welfare. Public health marketers and researchers have increasingly used social marketing campaigns to help address the organ donation transplant shortage and close the organ donation support-registration gap (Quick *et al.*, 2016). Conventional wisdom suggests successful social marketing efforts require segmenting the targeted populations into subgroups based on their needs, wants, lifestyles, behaviors and values pertinent to the behavioral change under consideration to develop more personalized communications and messages (Grier and Bryant, 2005). In turn, social marketers commonly target audiences with carefully crafted messages delivered via one-way communication platforms that place the intended target in more of a "passive" role thereby limiting social marketing's effectiveness (Brenkert, 2002; Gurrieri *et al.*, 2013). Organ donation social marketing campaigns often follow these principles to help address the common misconceptions, myths and other barriers related to mass media coverage of organ donation (Tian, 2010; Yoo and Tian, 2011).

An emerging perspective consistent with the digital power shift and customer value co-creation literature suggests that social marketers need to place greater focus on facilitating active "customer" participation in the messaging and communication process to increase the effectiveness of social marketing initiatives (Luca *et al.*, 2016). As part of this user-generated social advocacy process, research suggests social marketers should leverage both traditional media channels along with emerging interactive, omni-channel touchpoints (Karpen *et al.*, 2012). Thus, there is a need for research that explores consumers' views of media effectiveness for co-creating personalized advocacy messages as part of social change marketing efforts (Luca *et al.*, 2016). Thus, research exploring how consumers engaged in

social referral organ donor registration campaigns view the effectiveness of different omni-channel touchpoints along with social media and personal behaviors is warranted.

Engaging digital natives in organ donor campaigns via omni-channel touchpoints

Research suggests Millennials are a critical target audience for social cause marketers to engage through social referrals driven by omni-channel campaigns. Millennials, or Generation Y, represent the first generational cohort born after the start of the digital age in the early 1980s (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005). Prensky (2001) referred to this cohort as “digital natives”, alluding to the immersion of digital technology and its emergent role in consumers’ daily lives. Research suggests that digital natives are not only more willing to engage with social causes on social media than previous generations, but also differ in how they engage (Kanter and Fine, 2010). Marketers, therefore, need to integrate omni-channel touchpoints that reach digital natives how, when and where these consumers prefer to engage with social causes (Paulin, et al., 2014). However, there is a lack of research that investigates digital natives’ omni-channel preferences and the role digital/social media behaviors have on consumer engagement in social referrals (Barger, et al., 2016).

Efforts leveraging omni-channel touchpoints as part of social referral campaigns targeting digital natives have received increased interest from health communication researchers and the organ donation community to better understand the behavioral and communication effects on organ donor registration (Feeley and Kruegler, 2015). Digital natives have been especially active in the use of interpersonal media and have a greater likelihood of using social and digital media such as videos, text-messaging, email and other user-generated content to communicate with members of their social communities (Ellison et al., 2007). Beyond digital natives’ growing use of omni-channel touchpoints, recent research shows that digital natives serve as social catalysts for increasing support for organ donation and donor registration (Smith et al., 2016). The emerging use of electronics, mobile and social media as communication and viral devices in conjunction with traditional media offers the opportunity to reach and impact organ donation enrollment far in excess of the number of college students initially targeted by a multimedia campaign (D’Alessandro et al., 2012a). Engaged digital natives can, thus, enlist the support of family members, friends and even strangers who encounter their social networks and organ donation referral messages. The combination of media advances and new digitally enabled donor registration methods offer information immediacy opportunities to convey organ donation information and motivational messages to encourage organ donor registration at the time-of-decision (Cameron, 2015). In turn, social referral campaigns have the potential to convert “passive-positive” non-donors (those who support but fail to register) to donors by exposing them to omni-channel communications and registration methods that close the intent-registration gap (Siegel et al., 2010).

Model development

Organ donation social referrals

As noted earlier, there is an increased interest in using digital natives such as college students as referral sources to convince others to register as organ donors (Feeley and Kruegler, 2015). Notably, the rise of social media and other digital communications offers social marketers the potential to involve the consumer as a co-creator in the social marketing process (Thackeray et al., 2012; Luca et al., 2016). Of particular interest to social marketers is research that examines the effectiveness of digital-enabled omni-channel touchpoints for co-creating personalized social marketing messages (Robinson and Robertson, 2010). Recent research shows digital natives can serve as organ donor registration promoters by making

their personal connections aware of the need for organ donor registrations, increasing organ donation support and ultimately motivating others to sign up as organ donors (Smith *et al.*, 2016). Research on word-of-mouth (WOM) and social connections indicates information shared by strong tie connections such as family and close friends is more likely to influence consumer decision-making (Brown and Reingen, 1987). Consequently, co-created organ donation social referral messages targeting an individual's family or friends are likely to be more effective for motivating someone to register as an organ donor. The current study examines the joint effects of omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness and social media/personal behaviors have on digital natives' organ donation social referrals. Specifically, we assess the effectiveness of varied social media, digital media and personal omni-channel touchpoints on motivating (1) family and (2) friends to register as organ donors via social referral campaigns. Figure 1 shows the research model exploring how the effectiveness of 11 omni-channel touchpoints (*H1a-k*), summated social and digital marketing behaviors (*H2*) and interpersonal discussion (*H3*) affects social referrals.

Omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness

Social marketers interested in increasing donor registration rates must contend with limited resources (Grier and Bryant, 2005) and, therefore, strive to use the most effective media while engaging consumers as co-creators (Thackeray *et al.*, 2012). The emergence of digital communications provides digital natives with a diverse set of omni-channel touchpoints for providing social proof of their organ donation support, initiate discussions and/or invite others to support organ donation (Cameron *et al.*, 2013). Media richness theory and social presence theory imply that communication media that provide more interactivity and allow for greater levels of information exchange are likely to be more effective in situations involving complex information exchange (Daft and Lengel, 1986; Dennis and Kinney, 1998; Dennis *et al.*, 2008). The sharing of online videos may also be effective for reducing misconceptions and changing attitudes (Tian, 2010; Yoo and Tian, 2011). Social media touchpoints may be particularly effective for referring connections to register as an organ donor in states with online registries or on the national donor registry (Stefanone *et al.*, 2012). Consumers' perceptions of media effectiveness are likely to influence their selection of omni-channel touchpoints for referring a personal connection to become an organ donor. Specific to organ donation education efforts, research shows campaigns using a combination of

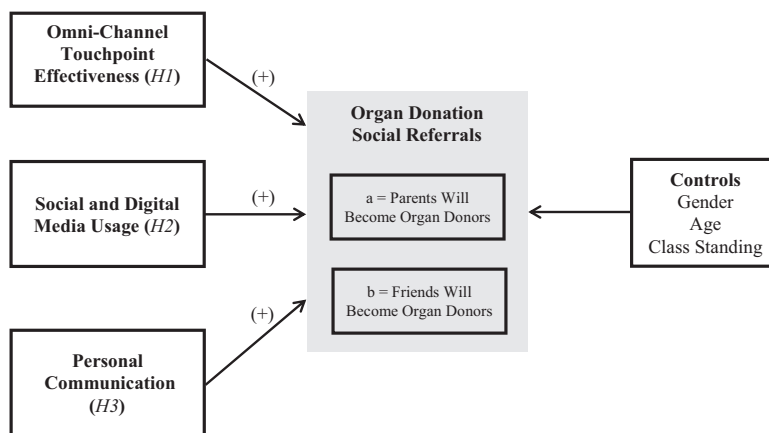


Figure 1. Omni-channel touchpoint model

personalized messages across omni-channel touchpoints are likely to be more effective for increasing support and commitment to organ donor registration than campaigns using single intervention methods (Li *et al.*, 2015; Quick *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, we hypothesize as follows:

- H1. As digital natives exhibit higher perceptions of the effectiveness of omni-channel touchpoints for social marketing purposes, they will feel it is more likely their (a) parents and (b) friends will register as an organ donor if asked via a social referral campaign.

Social and digital media usage

Social media usage represent actions taken by digital natives related to maintaining a social networking site profile, blogging/online discussion forums, online videos, photo sharing and holding personal discussions with others about organ donation. Social media allows for a multidirectional exchange that creates deeper connectivity for sharing (Bernhardt *et al.*, 2012) and encourages consumer engagement (Manser Payne *et al.*, 2017). Research suggests digital natives tend to be socially connected via social media and can be engaged with social causes through these touchpoints (Kabadayi and Price, 2014). Qualitative research also suggests digital natives who engage in social media behaviors are likely to view social referral organ donor registration campaigns as being more successful (D'Alessandro *et al.*, 2012b):

- H2. As digital natives engage in more social media and digital behaviors, they will feel it is more likely their (a) parents and (b) friends will register as an organ donor if asked via a social referral campaign.

Personal communications

Encouraging personal discussions with family members remains a critical issue for marketers in the organ donation community (Downing and Jones, 2009). Research indicates that personal discussions about organ donation are critical to solidifying positive attitudes about organ donation and help increase support and commitment to organ donation (Hulme *et al.*, 2016). The extant literature also shows a connection between engaging in personal discussions about organ donation and intent to register as an organ donor (Morgan, 2004). Therefore:

- H3. Digital natives who have had more discussions about organ donation will feel that it is more likely their (a) parents and (b) friends will register as an organ donor if asked via a social referral campaign.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

The Collegiate American Marketing Association (CAMA) agreed to be a project partner. The CAMA is a professional student association with approximately 11,000 members and 350 chapters in Canada, Puerto Rico and the USA. Of the total universe, 1,800 randomly selected CAMA members with known email address were sent a survey link asking for their participation. After three waves, 924 usable responses were generated, for a response rate of 51.3 per cent. Respondent profiles are shown in Table I. The gender, age and class standing findings match the overall CAMA demographic profile. As would be expected for business student organizations, the majority of members are juniors and seniors.

Demographic profile	(%)	Omni-channel touchpoints	
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	64.8	265	
Male	35.2		
<i>Age</i>			
18-20	32.6		
21-23	49.5		
24+	18.9		
<i>Class standing</i>			
Freshman	6.0		
Sophomore	8.4		
Junior	28.2		
Senior	45.1		
Graduate student	12.3		

Table I.
Profile of respondents

Measures

The goal of the study is to assess the perceived effectiveness of varied omni-channel media for generating organ donor registration social referrals. We examine these relationships along with recent social media and interpersonal interaction behaviors.

Independent variables

Omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness. On a five-point scale, digital natives indicated the perceived effectiveness of 11 electronic, personal and traditional media omni-channel touchpoints for motivating organ donor registration. The omni-channel touchpoints include (1) “An online video I create and send to them”, (2) “An online video I send to them, but didn’t create”, (3) “An email that I send to them”, (4) “A Facebook group invitation I send to them”, (5) “A website link I send to them”, (6) “A blog entry that I send to them”, (7) “A tweet I post”, (8) “A text message I send to them”, (9) “A personal conversation I have with them”, (10) “Traditional advertisements such as TV, radio, magazine and newspaper” and (11) “An invitation to become a fan/friend/follower of a ‘cause’ I support”.

Summated social and digital marketing behaviors. A summated score was computed, aggregating 17 different social media and digital marketing behaviors that the digital natives completed in the past 30 days (1 = yes, 0 = no, potential range = 0-17). The behaviors included the following:

- (1) updated profile/page;
- (2) looked at profiles/pages of friends;
- (3) posted messages on friends’ profiles/pages;
- (4) downloaded/added applications to profile/page;
- (5) sent an invitation to join a group;
- (6) joined a group;
- (7) read an online discussion forum entry;
- (8) posted/contributed to an online discussion forum;
- (9) updated/maintained a profile on an online discussion forum;
- (10) read a blog;

- (11) posted a comment on someone else’s blog;
- (12) wrote/maintained own blog;
- (13) watched a video;
- (14) uploaded a video;
- (15) shared a link to a video with someone else;
- (16) uploaded/shared photos; and
- (17) viewed photos shared by others.

Interpersonal discussion. Interpersonal discussion consisted of a single item, five-point Likert scale asking respondents their level of agreement with the statement “I have had discussions with others about being an organ donor”.

Controls: Age, class standing and gender.

Dependent variables

Social referrals. On a five-point Likert scale, students indicated their agreement with the statements:

- “If asked by their son or daughter, parents are likely to sign up to become an organ donor”; and
- “If asked by a friend, a person is likely to sign up to become an organ donor”.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness measures. Table II provides the mean effectiveness scores for each of the omni-channel communication touchpoints for motivating organ donor registration. Perceived effectiveness was highest for “a personal conversation I have with them” (mean = 4.60) and “Become a fan/friend/follower of a ‘cause’ I support” (mean = 4.13). Both of these are personal sources of social referrals, suggesting that WOM and personal relationships remain the strongest of all social connections (Berger, 2013). The next four most effective omni-channel touchpoints were via digital or electronic platforms, including “An online video I create and send to them” (mean = 3.72), “An email that I send to them” (mean = 3.69), “A website link I send to them” (mean = 3.60) and “An online video I send to them, but didn’t create” (mean = 3.57).

Omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness	Mean	SD
A personal conversation I have with them	4.60	0.63
Become a fan/friend/follower of a “cause” you support	4.13	0.97
An online video I create and send to them	3.72	1.05
An email that I send to them	3.69	0.95
A website link I send to them	3.60	0.91
An online video I send to them, but didn’t create	3.57	0.97
Traditional advertisements such as TV, radio, magazine and newspaper	3.52	0.96
A Facebook group invitation I send to them	3.33	1.06
A text message I send to them	3.26	1.17
A blog entry that I send to them	2.86	1.03
A “tweet” I post on Twitter	2.49	1.08

Table II.
Effectiveness scores

didn't create" (mean = 3.57). Traditional advertisements such as TV, Radio, Magazine, Newspaper, etc., was the remaining touchpoint with a mean above 3.50 (mean = 3.52).

Social media, digital marketing and interpersonal discussion behaviors. Table III contains the social media and digital marketing touchpoints respondents used in the last 30 days. Touchpoints used by at least 60 per cent of organization members included "Looked at profiles/pages of friends" (98.2 per cent), "Posted messages on friends' profiles/pages" (96.4 per cent), "Viewed photos shared by others" (96.0 per cent), "Watched a video" (94.7 per cent), "Updated your profile/page" (89.6 per cent), "Joined a group" (80.1 per cent), "Uploaded/shared photos" (75.6 per cent) and "Shared a link to a video with someone else" (64.6 per cent). Combined, these frequently used omni-channel touchpoints included social media pages, photos and videos. When aggregating the 17 social media and digital touchpoints, we found that the average number used in the past 30 days was 10.0. The mean agreement score for the referral behavior of "I have had discussions with others about being an organ donor" was 3.50.

Social referral dependent variables. For the two social referral dependent variables, the mean score for "If asked by their son or daughter, parents are likely to sign up to become an organ donor" was 3.75. The mean was 3.56 for "If asked by a friend, a person is likely to sign up to become an organ donor".

Regression analyses

We first correlated the two social referral dependent variables, "If asked by their son or daughter, parents are likely to sign up to become an organ donor" and "If asked by a friend, a person is likely to sign up to become an organ donor". The Pearson correlation coefficient was 0.56 ($p < 0.001$), indicating the two social referral variables are related but also capture different variation.

Using multivariate multiple regression:

- we used factor scores for each of the omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness scores;
- the summated social and digital marketing behaviors score; and
- interpersonal discussions as independent variables and social referrals as dependent variables.

Social and digital touchpoint platforms	(%) Having used in last 30 days
Looked at profiles/pages of friends	98.2
Posted messages on friends' profiles/pages	96.4
Viewed photos shared by others	96.0
Watched a video	94.7
Updated your profile/page	89.6
Joined a group	80.1
Uploaded/shared photos	75.6
Shared a link to a video with someone else	64.6
Read a blog	56.2
Read an online discussion forum entry	51.5
Downloaded/added applications to your profile/page	49.1
Sent an invitation to join a group	45.3
Posted/contributed to an online discussion forum	26.2
Uploaded a video	22.3
Updated/maintained a profile on an online discussion forum	19.5
Posted a comment on someone else's blog	19.0
Wrote/maintained your own blog	10.7

Table III.
Social and digital touchpoint platforms used in the last 30 days

As shown in Table IV, “Become a fan/friend/follower of a ‘cause’ you support”, “An email that I send to them”, “A ‘tweet’ I post on Twitter”, “A text message I send to them”, “A personal conversation I have with them”, “Traditional advertisements” and “I have had discussions with others about being an organ donor” significantly contributed to the joint explanation of the dependent variables.

Separate multiple regression analyses were then conducted for each of the dependent variables. Both the parent model ($F = 8.90, p = 0.001, R\text{-Square} = 0.130$) and friend model ($F = 10.70, p = 0.001, R\text{-Square} = 0.153$) were significant. The VIF ranged from 1.0 to 1.6 for all dependent variables in both models, indicating multicollinearity was not a problem. An examination of the regressions in Table IV reveals differences in the impact of the independent variables across the two models. In the “If asked by their son or daughter, parents are likely to sign up to become an organ donor” model, the four significant impact variables in the order of strength were “I have had discussions with others about being an organ donor” ($\beta = 0.241, p < 0.001$), “Become a fan/friend/follower of a ‘cause’ I support” ($\beta = 0.110, p < 0.010$), “A personal conversation I have with them” ($\beta = 1.09, p < 0.001$) and “An email that I send to them” ($\beta = 0.082, p < 0.05$). All four represent some form of personal conversations with parents. In contrast, in the “If asked by a friend, a person is likely to sign up to become an organ donor” model, both the number and type of communications touchpoints increased. These touchpoints included personal, digital and traditional advertising. “I have had discussions with others about being an organ donor” ($\beta = 0.235, p < 0.001$), “An email that I send to them” ($\beta = 0.102, p <$

Variables	Likely to sign up as an organ donor		
	Wilk's λ	If asked by son/ daughter	If asked by a friend
Intercept	0.957***	0.112***	0.028
<i>Social/digital IVs</i>			
Become a fan/friend/follower of a “cause” you support	0.989**	0.110**	0.060
An online video I create and send to them	0.997	0.030	0.058
An online video I send to them, but didn't create	0.998	0.041	0.105
An email that I send to them	0.990**	0.082*	0.102**
A Facebook group invitation I send to them	0.998	0.044	0.024
A website link I send to them	0.999	0.008	0.029
A blog entry that I send to them	0.996	0.040	0.100
A “tweet” I post on Twitter	0.990*	0.036	0.091*
A text message I send to them	0.991**	0.049	0.079*
A personal conversation I have with them	0.988**	0.109***	0.086*
Traditional advertisements such as TV, radio, magazine and newspaper	0.989**	0.007	0.075*
<i>Summated social and digital marketing behaviors</i>	0.999	-0.016	0.017
<i>Interpersonal discussion IV. I have had discussions with others about being an organ donor</i>	0.923***	0.241***	0.235***
<i>Controls</i>			
Gender	0.999	0.033	-0.028
Age	0.980	-0.022	0.025
Class standing	0.981	0.013	0.035
<i>F-value (sig.)</i>		8.90***	10.70***
<i>R²</i>		0.130	0.153

Table IV.

Multivariate results

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

0.01), “A ‘tweet’ I post on Twitter” ($\beta = 0.091, p < 0.05$), “A personal conversation I have with them” ($\beta = 0.086, p < 0.05$), “A text message I send to them” ($\beta = 0.079, p < 0.05$) and “Traditional advertisements” ($\beta = 0.075, p < 0.05$). In combination, these findings offer partial support to *H1*, but only for the perceived effectiveness of a selective set of omni-channel touchpoints and ones that differ based on the social referral target.

The relationship between digital natives’ social/digital media behaviors and likelihood of signing up to be an organ donor was not significant for if asked by a son/daughter ($\beta = -0.016, p > 0.05$) or if asked by a friend ($\beta = 0.017, p > 0.05$). Thus, social/digital media behaviors are not significantly associated with social referrals as hypothesized, and *H2* was not supported. “I have had discussions [...]” had a significant and positive relationship with a “[...] likelihood of signing up to be an organ donor if asked by a son/daughter” ($\beta = 0.241, p < 0.001$) and “[...] if asked by a friend [...]” ($\beta = 0.235, p < 0.001$), thus supporting *H3*. Finally, none of the controls including gender, age or class standing were significant in either model.

Conclusion

Omni-channel marketing is a relatively new phenomenon and growing in importance in both the literature and business community (Manser Payne *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, there is growing interest in the organ donation literature in assessing various social and digital omni-channel touchpoints as part of social referral campaigns (Feeley and Kruegler, 2015; Stefanone *et al.*, 2012; Cameron *et al.*, 2013). We contribute to the omni-channel and organ donation literature by assessing the relationships between perceived effectiveness of varied omni-channel social and digital touchpoints, recent social/digital media usage and interpersonal interactions for generating organ donor registration social referrals. Notably, we present multivariate multiple regression and individual results for motivating organ donor registration social referrals across two target audiences – family and friends.

Previous research indicates campaigns using multiple touchpoints for personalized messages are likely to be more effective (Quick *et al.*, 2012, 2015). Our results indicate there are differential effects of social, digital and personal touchpoints on organ donor social referrals. The multivariate results show that a combination of perceptions of omni-channel touchpoint effectiveness along with personal discussions impact social referrals for both the family and friend targets. Additionally, the individual regression results reveal interesting findings depending on the target of the organ donor registration social referrals. The results show what is effective for social referral campaigns targeting parents is different from what is effective when targeting friends. Specifically, the results indicate interpersonal communication touchpoints are more effective when the social referral efforts target parents. However, there is a more diverse range of omni-channel touchpoints and interpersonal communications deemed to be effective when social referral efforts target a broader audience such as friends and other digital natives.

Accordingly, health and social marketers interested in engaging consumers in social referral campaigns should help facilitate consumers’ co-creation efforts by supporting consumers’ usage of a mixture of omni-channel touchpoints and interpersonal communication devices depending on the target (Luca *et al.*, 2016). In particular, campaigns should consider designing specific social referral messages that consumers can easily share via specific omni-channel touchpoints. Marketers may also help facilitate social referral organ donor registrations by making specific recommendations on the omni-channel touchpoints likely to be most effective given the end target (i.e. family or friends and digital natives or not). For example, health marketers might develop specific messages for social referrers to tweet to friends that take into account Twitter’s character limit. Likewise, marketers can develop suggested messages for sharing via text messages that also include links to mobile-optimized call-to-actions such as

mobile-optimized donor registration methods. These example messages and recommended communication devices should be readily available via campaign websites and other omni-channel touchpoints digital natives or other social catalysts are likely to access. However, more research is needed which examines the potential message conflict from user-generated social referral messages (Schultz and Peltier, 2013). Additionally, there is need to conduct research that examines the specific types of messages (i.e. benefits, dispelling myths and need) likely to be most effective if shared as part of user-generated social referral messages and how message effectiveness may vary based on the type of social/digital media (i.e. text-based, photo or video-based digital touchpoints).

Consistent with previous research (Ellison *et al.*, 2007), our results confirm digital natives such as college students tend to be active and heavy users of social and digital media. Surprisingly, students' engagement in various social/digital media behaviors in the previous 30 days was not significantly associated with social referrals. Perhaps, this finding would be different if examining respondents across diverse age groups that are likely to exhibit greater variation in their social/digital media usage. Future research should explore the omni-channel touchpoint model with a more diverse audience including generational cohorts and diverse racial groups. Additionally, research is needed that accounts for potential differences in social/digital media behaviors across digital consumption versus digital content creation activities. Research is also warranted which examines individual's actual use of social/digital touchpoints as part of social referral campaigns and the actual impact on donor registrations.

Finally, the current study confirms holding prior discussions about organ donation are key to increasing social referrals from both family and friends (Morgan, 2004). In both models, students' engagement in discussions had the strongest impact on social referrals. This finding is consistent with research on media richness and social presence that suggests complex information requiring deeper processing is best shared via media that offers information richness and high social presence (Dennis and Kinney, 1998, Dennis *et al.*, 2008). New forms of social/digital media offer touchpoints high in social presence and information richness. Therefore, future research on using omni-channel touchpoints for social referral campaigns should consider perceived differences in media richness and social presence. Finally, research involving models that are more comprehensive are needed to investigate social referral messages and omni-channel touchpoints likely to lead to others' support and registration.

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Further reading

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Corresponding author

Andrew J. Dahl can be contacted at: dahlaj18@uww.edu

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