

THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS: THE CASE OF 'VRATIMO PALČIĆE U PETROVU' FACEBOOK GROUP

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ABSTRACT *The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected interpersonal relationships globally. Furthermore, in 2020, Croatia was hit by devastating earthquakes that triggered a series of humanitarian actions. This paper deals with the 'Let's bring the premature babies back to Petrova hospital' Facebook group and its auctioning model. The auctions were created through cooperation of the Facebook group members and, as such, have not been described in scientific literature. The aim of this paper is to understand what the case can tell us about cooperation in the digital environment and its role in creating digital humanitarian actions. Using a mixed-methods approach, the authors analyze posts published by Facebook group members and interviews conducted with organizers to explain the phenomenon of strengthening the existing connections among participants and undertaking a collective action. This case indicates that digital activism does not necessarily result in pure slacktivism. In point of fact, transparent participation of community members, along with a transparent model, can have tangible effects on society through successful humanitarian actions.*

KEYWORDS

DIGITAL HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS, FACEBOOK GROUPS, BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL, DIGITAL CAPITAL, SLACKTIVISM

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INTRODUCTION

On March 22 at 6:24 am, Zagreb was hit by an earthquake measuring 5.5 on the Richter scale, the strongest since 1880. It was great luck that Zagreb was under intense lockdown during that period as strict measures for combating the COVID-19 pandemic had been introduced just a few days earlier, on March 19. Due to the circumstances of the lockdown, and since the earthquake occurred on Sunday morning, numerous human casualties were avoided.¹ The date will remain one of the most important in recent Zagreb history, and the reconstruction of Zagreb itself remains a complex, multi-year process.

In this article, we will analyze a social action that was launched on the morning of the earthquake when ordinary citizens (primarily members of the Dinamo Zagreb supporter group, called Bad Blue Boys or BBB²) intervened to help relocate preterm babies and incubators from the earthquake-damaged maternity hospital in Petrova Street to a hospital in Dubrava, one of the districts in Zagreb. This act caused a salvo of enthusiasm in public and was a positive example of civic reaction in a time dominated by negativity in the media space (Sacerdote et al., 2020). Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bad Blue Boys supporters' group had stood out in helping citizens who found themselves in trouble due to the new circumstances (Gol.dnevnik.hr, 2020, March 19; Index.hr, 2020, March 17; Vecernji.hr, 2020, March 24). The action in Petrova additionally encouraged the membership to continue acting for the common good.

In cooperation with the existing association that helps premature babies named "Klub roditelja nedonoščadi - Palčići" (Eng. *Club of parents of premature babies - Thumbings*), the BBB decided to launch a humanitarian action to raise 4.391.202,84 HRK³ (Klub roditelja nedonoščadi – Palčići, 2021.) for the purchase of hospital equipment through the *Vratimo Palčiće u Petrovu* (Eng. *Let's bring the premature babies back to Petrova hospital*) Facebook (FB) group. The group was founded on April 21, 2020. It was conceived as a group through which citizens would participate in a raffle where the jerseys of famous athletes would be distributed (Klub roditelja nedonoščadi – Palčići, 2021).

During the preparation of the action on April 21, a fan, Dario Prekratić, offered a signed jersey of the Croatian football player Milan Badelj for the raffle in the FB group. Still, the organizers of the raffle already had a Badelj jersey to give out. D. Prekratić repeated the post on the group wall the day after (April 22), but this time he wrote:

... since there is no need for the same two jerseys, I thought (if the team agrees) to put the jersey here in the group and start some kind of auction. The starting price would be 100 HRK⁴;

¹ A total of 27 people were injured, while one person died from the injuries

² Bad Blue Boys is an official name of the supporter group of Dinamo Zagreb Football Club, formally originating in 1986, although there are earlier records of ad-hoc organizing attempts and unified actions. According to the accepted urban myth, the name derives from the popular action movie *Bad Boys*, while the word *Blue* symbolizes the official jersey color of the club. Traditionally, the group occupies the northern stand of the Maksimir stadium and has a relatively apolitical standpoint towards the larger political and social trends, with a notable exception regarding the management style, and especially official club personnel and key executives of Dinamo (Milak, 2020).

³ Approx. 581.362,24 EUR

⁴ Approx. 13,24 EUR

whoever offers the most takes the jersey. Show me proof of payment, and I will send you a jersey. The auction lasts 24 hours from now. (Prekratić, 2020, April 22)

The jersey ultimately achieved the price of 1800 HRK, and the money was paid into the humanitarian action bank account. This way of auctioning was immediately liked by others who auctioned their jerseys and other props (Prekratić, 2020, April 22). Prekratić himself had “never seen this way of auction anywhere before” (Prekratić, personal communication, March 10, 2021), but he came up with the idea in the desire to participate in the action. The auction model itself was not planned by the auction organizers “but was created due to the dynamics within the group” (Prekratić, personal communication, March 10, 2021; Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021; Vučko, personal communication, May 6, 2021).

Regarding the auction model itself, it can be seen as an innovative, or at least previously unprecedented in the Croatian context, due to its focus on users to generate the content, traffic, and reach, while also providing the auctioned artifacts themselves for humanitarian purposes. This community-oriented approach was further reflected in the actual outcome of the auction not only in the collected and paid bids, but also in strengthening the trust between the group members, although measuring the rise in collective trust is a topic that ought to be tackled in a separate paper. It is also very important to highlight the role that group administrators had in the process of controlling the interactions between group members. Due to an obvious role that financial resources had in the auction, “several attempts of fraudulent behavior had appeared” (Vučko, personal communication, May 6, 2021).

As far as the model of the auction is concerned, it was novel in the sense that it was community driven and for the way items of sale were auctioned. The logic of the auction was simple, but nevertheless it represented something rarely seen in previous humanitarian attempts. Basically, users offered their own objects for an auction, mostly sports-related items and sport memorabilia (such as original jerseys hand-signed by players, old tickets for sporting events, flags, scarves etc.) while other group members started the bidding process using the comment section of the original post. At the same time, liking, sharing, or reacting to the post increased its visibility beyond the original group to the entire contact list of users, gradually spreading throughout Facebook. After the bidding time elapsed, members who offered the highest sum got the product, only if they proved that the payment had been made to the bank account of the selected organization. During the entire process, administrators played the crucial part in overseeing the bids and the content posted, keeping the topic of the group on point, and removing those posts that sought to undermine the auction, attempted frauds, or those that tried to derail the topic.

Given the extraordinary context, the ultimate success, and the novel auction model of the group, as well as a lack of empirical studies of trust in humanitarian actions on FB, this paper will try to answer the following research question: What can the *Vratimo Palčiće u Petrovu* group tell us about the emergence of digital humanitarian actions?

To do so, we will explain the scope and the phenomenon of the auction model that emerged from a humanitarian action through the concept of digital capital and its convertibility to show how people driven by a common interest worked together to better the community. Through the transparent dynamics of the FB group, and the selected auction model, this humanitarian action became very successful, influencing not only future auctions of a similar type and scope, but also fostering stronger relations between group members. Methodologically, this paper will use a mixed-methods approach comprising qualitative analysis, in the form of interviews with the creators of the *Vratimo Palčiće u Petrovu (VPP)* FB group as primary data sources and quantitative, in the form of content analysis of the posts in the group.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development of technology as an intermediary of human relations significantly affects humanitarian activities. In times of the COVID-19 crisis, the impact of digital platforms on our communication and interpersonal relations rapidly rose as increased internet usage and dependence were reported in many countries during periods of lockdown (Masaeli & Farhadi, 2021). During the pandemic, social inequalities were further emphasized as many citizens faced limited opportunities for employment and earnings (Ali, et al., 2020; Matković & Lucić, 2021).

The logic of humanitarian actions is also changing with the emergence of digital networks and digital mediation trends, which leads to digital humanitarianism. Digital humanitarianism was conceptualized as a consequence of events following the great earthquake in Haiti in 2010 (Burns, 2015, p. 479). Digital humanitarianism is best defined as “the enacting of social and institutional networks, technologies, and practices that enable large, unrestricted numbers of remote and on-the-ground individuals to collaborate on humanitarian management through digital technologies” (Burns, 2015, p. 477).

When starting a digital humanitarian action, it is necessary to think about producing engaging media content and the use of platform mechanisms (Van Dijck, et al., 2018). We do not act only by consuming certain content in the digital space of social media; users must create and communicate messages, which Hartley et al. (2008, p. 61) call *demand-led literacy*. Both skills are needed to become a fluent user of digital technologies, and according to Livingstone, “mastering technology means mastering not only the hardware but all that the internet affords its users” (2008, p. 102). Wang et al. (2013, p. 409) define digital fluency as “the ability to reformulate knowledge and produce information to express oneself creatively and appropriately in a digital environment.” Social networking in everyday life, with the mediation of digital technologies, is guided by the logic of connective action, and the “core of the logic is recognition of digital media as organizing agents” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 752).

When considering the role of social media as organizing agents, special focus must be placed on the underlying mechanisms that are unique for every platform, but share the

role of creating the framework through which all digital actions are conducted (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). These underlying mechanisms on Facebook serve first and foremost as a driver for increasing the engagement of users through encouraging sharing, liking, and clicking a specific post in order to increase its visibility. Social media therefore enable a wide arrangement of what is commonly known as social media affordances (sometimes sociotechnical affordances), a set of properties and characteristics that permit a certain action to take place (Kaufmann & Clement, 2007; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). In the context of Facebook affordances, interaction becomes permitted thanks to the underlying scope of technological software power, but the interaction is in its core distinctly social, advancing only through personal action of each and every user. That is not to say that technological aspects lose their importance with users' interaction. On the contrary, the technological sphere reassures itself through the role of constituting the possibility of interactions happening, effectively "affording" user-generated content.

Engaging with a certain post through aforementioned actions creates a sort of personal relation between the user and the post, placing the power to determine a duration of life that the post will have in the hands of users. Acting upon the post increases its visibility and reach across the platform to a wider audience, thereby increasing the chance of new users being attracted to it. An increased, wide-reaching engagement can give rise to forming digital groups and communities around common interests, goals and issues. With Facebook groups being constructed around such a core, knowledge sharing becomes a very important factor of the internal group functioning and nurturing an open and inclusive environment for the members (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Several studies in this field have proven that fairness, openness and identification of members with the group positively correlate with an increase in knowledge shared, which indicates that these traits are desirable when creating new communities (Pi et al., 2013). Alongside these traits, having members who are perceived as trustworthy, enjoying high reputation amongst other members, also helps both internal and external validation of the group and bolsters its role in the digital space (Pi et al., 2013).

Thorson et al. (2014, as cited in Bouchillon, 2019, p. 613) claim that "for every cause, there is a community online." Currently, some of the favorite online places to deal with community causes are FB groups which are "an appropriate avenue to influence community opinion" (Clifford et al., 2020, p. 1) and "are perceived as a major medium of community communication" (Clifford et al., 2020, p. 7). The essence is that Facebook groups are less oriented to the demographics of group members, their social status or political or personal affiliations, but are oriented to the goal around which the group was created; FB groups are focused on the core of the interaction (Donath & Boyd, 2004). FB groups let people come together around a common cause, issue, or activity to organize. Groups can be private, secret, and public. They have their unique features, and the role of the administrator of the group is crucial (Lifewire, 2021).

FB offers pre-defined options for humanitarian fundraising for various purposes, and this type of humanitarian action on FB is regulated by internal Facebook rules (Haruvy & Popkowski Leszczyc, 2018; Saxton & Wang, 2013). However, on this platform, users can also

create custom humanitarian auctions and set their own auction rules, as we have seen in the case of the VPP group. This type of humanitarian auction is not a novelty but has not had a significant presence in Croatian humanitarian actions. Additionally, while there are papers studying humanitarian auctions via pre-defined fundraising models on Facebook (Haruvy & Popkowski Leszczyc, 2018; Li et al., 2020; Lucas, 2017; Saxton & Wang, 2013; Waddingham, 2013), there is a lack of scientific research on unregulated FB auctions in FB groups. Since the main difference between regulated and unregulated Facebook auctions is in intermediation (in unregulated FB auctions, users communicate directly with each other through FB posts and bid auctions according to rules agreed within the group), understanding the dynamics and mechanisms of the process is necessary for, apart from filling in a gap in the literature, understanding digital humanitarianism in general.

Moreover, in these groups, the amount of money for which a particular item is sold is paid directly to the account of the humanitarian association without the mediation of FB during the transaction. In this case, members of the FB group “sold” items after the highest bidder had paid that money into the humanitarian action account. In this way, the space for fraud was significantly reduced, which served as a driving factor for further engagement with the auction.

Understanding the logic of the digital environment and social media is essential because of the specifics directly related to humanitarian actions. A phenomenon that is directly related to the case of this article is *slacktivism*, which is defined as “actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause (e.g., signing an online petition), characterized as requiring little time, effort, or commitment, or as providing more personal satisfaction than public impact” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018). Slacktivism on social networks can also be observed through the model of self-actualization (Dennis, 2019, p. 28) and mimicking others (Tsvetkova & Macy, 2014, p. 117). Thus, while participating for a good cause, actors on social networks also create certain connotations of their image to influence their audience. One of the reasons for the participation can also be found in general popularity of the auction both on social and traditional media, which led to the perception of an auction being something that is “in”, an activity that makes those who participate aligned with a social trend, making them “hip” and “cool”. Therefore, space for slacktivism was greatly reduced from the start, and it continued to tighten as more time passed, reducing the importance of the click-based engagement. Slacktivism is a real threat to humanitarian actions on social media because, although click-through participation somewhat increases the visibility of the action, it mostly gives only the illusion of humanitarianism while producing no actual effect. There is concern that *keyboard activism* may replace actual actions; promoting online actions which require less effort can lead to clicktivism (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010).

We observe people’s behavior on social media in this case through the concept of digital capital, a rather new concept which still being developed. Park (2017, p. 27) states that it is an “individual’s digital technology ecosystem that shapes and guides how a user engages with digital technologies,” Regnedda (2018, p. 2367) adds that digital capital is “the accumulation of digital competencies (information, communication, safety, content-

creation, and problem-solving), and digital technology.” Capital theorists in their work mainly start from the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), who identified three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural. “Economic capital is interpreted as a set of material riches, Bourdieu defines social capital as the network of personal relationships and cultural capital as the intellectual capacities, the cultural assets possessed, and the educational qualifications acquired throughout the course of people’s life” (Regnedda & Ruiu, 2020, p. 12). The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis for their reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253), and digital capital as a concept has brought an additional level of convertibility to these and other forms of capital. In the context of digital capital, it is necessary to understand how it affects the creation of new divisions that are transferred from non-digital space to digital. According to Regnedda and Ruiu (2017, p. 7), “social, economic, and cultural capital not only generate digital divide between people who can and cannot access the Internet (first level of digital divide), but also inequalities in terms of motivation, skills and purpose of use (second level of digital divide) and inequalities in terms of (social/cultural/economic/personal/political) benefits they can gain on-line (third level of digital divide)”.

There are significant differences in the connection between people who participate in everyday communication and those who do not participate in face-to-face communication. Robert Putnam (2000) conceptualized bonding and bridging social capital. While bonding refers to family and close friends, bridging refers to *weak ties* between individuals (Putnam, 2000). Social media are suitable for developing *weak ties* between people (Donath & Boyd, 2004). Bridging social capital extends when people with different backgrounds and common interests are tentatively connected (Hwang & Kim, 2015; Williams, 2006). Bridging social capital in the context of social media is even more pronounced when “social movements are being transferred from on-site activities to online activities associated with social media” (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 479). There is a positive correlation between the use of FB and the development of bridging social capital and between the use of Facebook and civic activism (Krolo, 2015, p. 164).

FB “constitutes a rich site for researchers interested in the affordances of social networks due to its heavy usage patterns and technological capacities that bridge online and offline connections” (Ellison et al., 2007, p. 1144). For Putnam (1993, p. 35), social capital refers to “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit.” FB group sociability can contribute to generalized trust indirectly through an increase in bridging social capital (Bouchillon, 2019, p. 622). “All groups embodying social capital have a certain radius of trust, that is, the circle of people among whom cooperative norms are operative” (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 8). Kenneth Arrow stated that “trust is an important lubricant of a social system” (Arrow, 1974, p. 23). We can understand this by the fact that trust raises the efficiency of exchange by reducing opportunistic behavior and thus indirectly lowers the common cost of the transaction (Bromiley & Cummings, 1995; John, 1984; McEvily et al., 2006). As mentioned earlier, unregulated auctions within FB groups require trust to be operational. In the analysis, we will show how the cooperation of members of a Facebook group can lead to the development of trust.

METHODS AND DATA

In order to understand the dynamics of the humanitarian activities in the group, this paper will use a mixed-methods approach combining a quantitative content analysis (of all posts in the group) and interviews with three actors who influenced the creation and implementation of the humanitarian action. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, exploring the timeline of the creation of the humanitarian action, its implementation, success and post-action developments and long-term results. The data obtained through these interviews were used to describe the story behind the development of the humanitarian action, while also serving as a necessary supplement for the quantitative part of this paper and the process of post-scraping the Facebook group.

We first interviewed Sanjin Španović, a member of the Bad Blue Boys supporters' group, who was actively and visibly involved in organizing the humanitarian campaign. Next, we contacted Željka Vučko, the leader of the "Klub roditelja nedonoščadi – Palčići" Association, who was primarily responsible for the administrative execution of the campaign, and we spoke with her twice. Additionally, we interviewed Dario Prekrtić, a member of the Facebook group who devised the auction model. These interviews were conducted in early 2021. The first interview with the BBB member was more extensive, semi-structured, and formal. The other interviews were also semi-structured and formal, but shorter and conducted by telephone. To get data about activities in the group, we used a slightly modified Python Facebook post scraper⁵ to extract all posts ever posted in the group (together with metrics such as the number of likes, comments, and shares they generated) from the group's creation in April of 2020 until the end of February 2021. This database⁶ containing information on 5043 posts allowed us to visualize the data in the forms of graphs generated with the matplotlib.pyplot library in Python and we used basic descriptive statistics to conclude the data.

The group's data on activities – posts, likes, shares, and comments – will be operationalized in line with established interpretations of these activities (Begkos & Antonopoulou, 2020; Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013; Kim & Yang, 2017). First, likes will be interpreted as an indicator of slacktivism, an illusion of contributing to a cause, since liking a post involves minimal effort or commitment (Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 9) and, apart from signaling popularity (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013, p. 791), has virtually no impact on the real-life outcomes of the humanitarian action. Shares will be interpreted as the lowest possible form of meaningful contribution since sharing a post makes the post more visible (at least to your list of friends) and therefore presents a higher commitment to the cause than a mere like (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013, p. 791; Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 9). Comments will be interpreted as a proxy for genuine involvement in a humanitarian action as commenting generally presents a larger commitment than likes, since commenting on a post makes the post appear on one's friends' news feeds (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013, p. 791; Kim & Yang, 2017, p. 9), and due to the fact that one participates in the auction and raises money for the cause by commenting on posts in the VPP group. Finally, the act of submitting a post will be used as a proxy for

⁵ The original script was developed by Kevin Zúñiga and can be found on: <https://pypi.org/project/facebook-scraper/> (accessed: 24.4.2021).

⁶ The database can be found in the appendix.

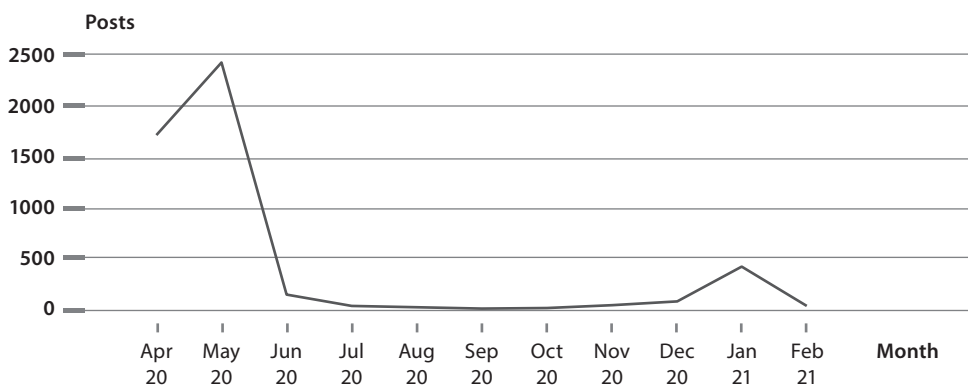
the largest commitment and impact for raising money since users who posted their items on auction were effectively donating their property to other users who bid for them and, in return, donate money to the charity. These criteria by which we operationalized the data form an ideal-type categorization. However, we are aware that there are cases that come out of our categorization, but they are not included in this research.

In the following section, the dynamics of the humanitarian activities in the VPP FB group will be analyzed in light of the insights gained from the interviews and descriptive statistics obtained from the database.

RESULTS

Judging by the number of posts presented in Figure 1, the activity in the group experienced a big spike in the first two months of its existence, that is, in April and May of 2020, and then a sudden drop during the following month. This is understandable since more than a sufficient amount of money, namely 4.391.202,84 HRK (Klub roditelja nedonoščadi – Palčiči, 2021) was raised. In the meantime, when the financial goal of the hospital in Petrova was reached at the end of May, the action was redirected to other hospitals in Croatia, and a total of 7,957,933.33 HRK was collected through these actions that were completed on August 22 (Vučko, personal communication, May 6, 2021).

It is important to emphasize that the model of auctions and interaction of people on the FB group contributed to the visibility of the action in the media and society, resulting in the fact that "about 1.300.000,00 HRK were collected through the auctions themselves, while the rest of the money was collected from donations from citizens and companies" (Vučko, personal communication, May 6, 2021).

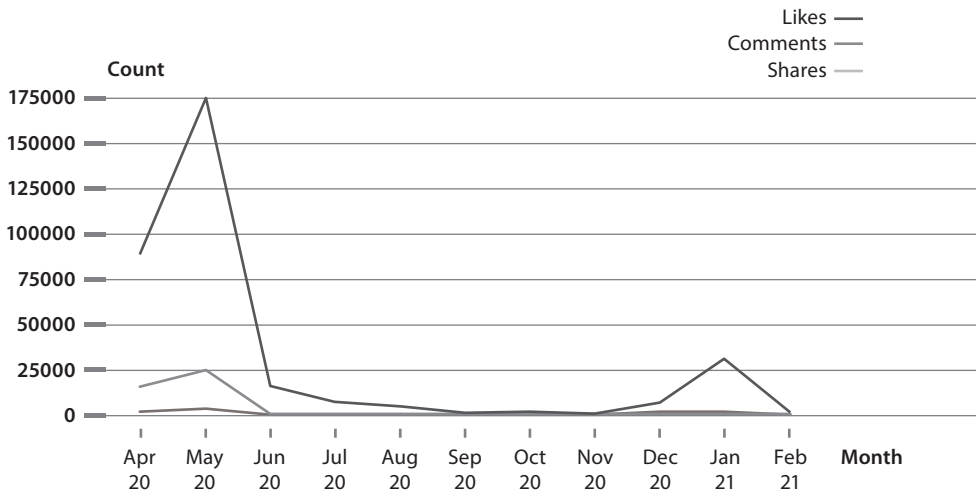


▲ Figure 1.

Posts in the group over time
Source: Authors' own calculations

The suspension of the graphic line explains the dramatic decline in activity. What is more interesting is that the activity did not drop to zero, meaning that the group did stay somewhat active even after the end of the official fundraising for the original cause it was created for. The reduced (but persistent) activity remained stable until December of 2020 and January of 2021 when the second spike in activity can be observed.

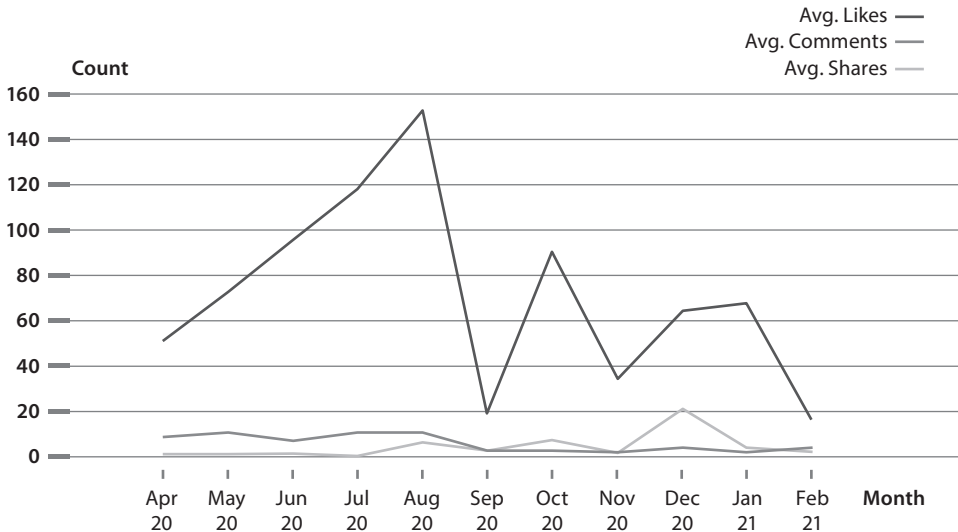
The reason for this second spike can be traced back to the second and third major earthquake that hit Croatia in 2020, both of which were devastating to the town of Petrinja in central Croatia, near the city of Sisak. After the effects of the earthquakes became apparent, members of the Facebook group started using the same auction method for raising money for aiding Petrinja. In the interview, a Dinamo Zagreb supporter and co-creator of the action commented on the reawakening of Facebook group: "Then the situation happened in Petrinja, and we wondered what we were going to do, and we decided to allow people to share their post, that Facebook group no longer has any reach, it was in hibernation, and it should be cleaned up. People kept posting to help a particular family or something, we didn't want to take responsibility, but we let them post" (Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021). This means that the Facebook group has outlived its initial cause and was used as a platform for humanitarian aid in the next major crisis. The fact that the second spike is much lower than the first one, however, suggests that the level of virtual participation (and its real-life outcome) was not the same as during the original cause for which the group was created.



▲ Figure 2.

Count of likes, comments, and shares on group posts over time
Source: Authors' calculations

If one looks at the absolute number of likes, comments, and shares (previously operationalized as indicators of users' effort and commitment) in Figure 2, one can observe that only the number of likes saw a significant increase during the second crisis, while shares and comments remained low in comparison. This would indicate that in the second peak of the humanitarian action in the group, the substantive effort and commitment of users did not come close to the effort during the original cause.



▲ Figure 3.

Average likes, comments, and shares per post over time

Source: Authors' calculations

Figure 3, displaying average (per post) likes, shares, and comments, also reveals that comments per post never rose close to the rates in the first few months of the group's existence (9.1 in April and 10.4 in May compared to 4.1 in December and 2.4 in January). Average shares did experience a spike in December, but shares, unfortunately, have a much lower impact on the real-life cause. Likes per post remained unstable through the period. These findings suggest that, while humanitarian groups on Facebook do continue to exist as platforms that can be re-activated during another crisis, the subsequent response of the users will be significantly weaker, marked by a lower effort in substantive contribution and a higher rate of slacktivism.

DISCUSSION

“At the beginning of this humanitarian initiative, there was enthusiasm among the organizers and the citizens who wanted to help” (Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021; Vučko, personal communication, May 6, 2021). With the cooperation between the members of the FB group and the initiative of one member, an auction model was created. Although the “Klub roditelja nedonoščadi – Pačiči” association was founded in 2010 and is known for its help and support for parents of premature and sick newborns and support for health care personnel, this digital humanitarian action also contributed to the popularity of the association and to raising awareness of the issues of the weakest in our community (Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021).

The auction model served as an excellent catalyst for enthusiasm about measurable outcomes of humanitarian action. The results of this humanitarian action are monetary, yet what is valuable is the auction model that has continued to be used in other humanitarian activities. The example of this humanitarian action shows how interaction and exchange among citizens through a transparent model can lead to a successful outcome. This humanitarian action shows that cooperation between citizens in exchanging goods for humanitarian purposes creates trust in a humanitarian action. It also shows us that administrators have to control it because attempts at fraud and slacktivism can jeopardize this trust. Slacktivism represents a much smaller threat to the success of the action, because its effects have negligible effect of the transparency and the general sense of trust in action being legitimate and provides the action with at least a small increase in visibility on social networks (provided slacktivism is based on clicking/sharing and not on reading and forgetting about the action as soon as it is scrolled past on the feed). The threat of slacktivist engagement primarily lies in the use of these activities for personal social promotion, earning superficial approval from other users and reducing the activity to a short-lived trend. The threat of fraud is on the other hand much more serious, as it directly delegitimizes the action itself, not only creating reasonable doubts in aims and goals of an action, but also discouraging further engagement in similar actions, thus making the online humanitarian actions much less successful due to previous negative experiences.

The parameters we measured are essential for measuring group dynamics, but they are also vital to explaining trust in this humanitarian action. We interpret how trust was achieved through a transparent model of auctions established by the members of the FB group themselves and supported by platform mechanisms. The group members themselves encouraged each other to participate in the humanitarian action, which is evident through their great activity in terms of posting (items for bidding) within the group and their great activity in the comments (bidding activity). After the initial goal of the action had been achieved, the likes and shares that we interpret as slacktivism came to the fore without any actual humanitarian effect.

In this case study, people invested their social capital in the form of social ties that are the core of supporter groups (Nosal et al., 2021), economic capital in terms of time and

valuable, and cultural capital in the form of football culture. The result of this humanitarian action can be observed in the form of economic capital, money raised, and purchased maternity equipment. Furthermore, this activity can serve as proof that platform mechanisms of both Facebook and its groups can serve as a catalyst for humanitarian action during the times of need, while strengthening and fostering the existing social capital. Perhaps the most valuable outcome is the auction model created practically *ad hoc*, as an initiative of an individual followed by a group not following the already created FB settings and regulations for humanitarian auctions, but through FB group members' cooperation bolstered by platform mechanisms. After the VPP humanitarian action, the auction model became popular and was used in other Facebook humanitarian actions (HNK Jadran Tučepi 2021, January 24; Nogometne Ikone, 2020, December 20).

We followed the course of this action in the time of new circumstances that affected our society. Many people did not work because of COVID-19 restrictions, so they could invest their time and knowledge in creating this kind of action. Also, the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic in society, combined with the restrictive measures that sought to reduce the transmission of the virus created unprecedented levels of fear and anxiety in both individuals and groups, while simultaneously removing all the known outlets that would help reduce such feelings. Therefore, the appearance of this Facebook group helped foster solidarity that could not be achieved in a "real world" due to necessary anti-epidemic measures. From the safety of their homes, users could express their solidarity towards those less fortunate while staying completely safe from the virus, therefore helping them feel like they are making an actual change in the world that turned unpredictable in an instant. "Many got excited and wanted to participate in this action; they took many memorable jerseys out of the closet and put them up for auctions that became engaging media content" (Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021). We could see how substantial social capital is among football supporters, which was confirmed to us by our interlocutor: "We have extremely strong networking, the football supporters are like a kind of Rotary club, stronger than anything, whether you need a plumber, a web designer or anything else, there are us in all walks of life" (Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021).

The auctions were watched by potential buyers and by others who found the content interesting. Many famous athletes and people from public life took part in the action; it had widely positive connotations because it was intended for the most vulnerable in society. At the same time, a large number of athletes participated in this action while remaining anonymous "by giving their memorabilia, preferring not to be publicly named" (Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021). Football is the most popular sport in Croatia, and it is very important for Croatian society and culture (Lalić, 2018). Therefore, it has proved to be an ideal way to connect people who act for a good cause. The action was exceptionally successful and it exceeded all organizers' expectations, "so after equipping the maternity hospital in Petrova, they organized further activities to help other hospitals" (Vučko, personal communication, March 8, 2021). The Facebook group was used for further humanitarian activities after a big earthquake near Petrinja. In the wake of another catastrophe that happened, this time, and much worse, in another part of Croatia,

people continued to use the group and its auction model because it successfully proved effectiveness and transparency, believing that the outcomes will be the same. The whole sequence of events that followed and other humanitarian Facebook groups showed an excellent example of online action that produces tangible benefits in the offline world.

The shocking circumstances awakened in many people the urge to act. A considerable role in this was played by the media, especially social media and their algorithms that affected the visibility of the whole action. Broader visibility through the sharp increase in the engagement was further helped by the logic of existing Facebook algorithms that made posts widely accessible to the audience. A significant factor was also the type of the content (in this case objects being auctioned) that was interesting to many more users when compared to the original number of the FB group members. Bigger demand for those objects, and rapid increase in group members due to the group becoming somewhat "in" activity in which to participate, pushed algorithms to attempt to catch more people in the net of engagement and visibility. Combined with the several changes to algorithm prior and during 2020 that focused on evaluating the credibility of information posted, success was practically guaranteed from the start.

The attractiveness of the content has a significant impact on the logic of algorithms on social networks that target the audience. The sense of functioning of social media platforms is constantly changing, so it is necessary to monitor and understand the platform mechanisms.

There is a certain distrust of humanitarian actions in Croatia due to various frauds that have occurred so far (Express.24sata.hr, 2018, October 19). While there is no research that directly measured trust in humanitarian actions, a number of papers have shown that there exists a considerable level of general distrust in Croatia, regarding numerous aspects of society, such as general distrust in the representative institutions of the state (Bovan & Baketa, 2022), the media (Baloban & Rimac, 1998) and the solidarity between citizens (Strika, 2005). The model of auctions on which this action was based proved to be transparent; everything was happening on the group's website, everyone had an insight into the course and realization of each transaction: "Primarily, what I think is the biggest gain for this action was that it was purpose-built, it was known exactly what it procured, how much it cost and that it would be bought directly" (Španović, personal communication, March 7, 2021). In addition to the higher level of cohesion created within the group, it should be added that the Bad Blue Boys in their actions of helping fellow citizens during the lockdown and in helping after the earthquake, served as a positive example that was promoted by the media. It has been shown here that social networks can be an extremely effective tool for creating a transparent model of cooperation between involved actors, which is the very essence of success of humanitarian actions (Khan et al., 2019). But it also turned out that this action had its lifespan with the audience because initial enthusiasm simply disappeared. When people started to use the group platform individually (without supervisors) for their humanitarian attempts, "there was also an attempt at fraud, which is not good for the image of the entire humanitarian action" (Vučko, personal communication, March 8, 2021). Ultimately, such attempts of

fraudulent behavior resulted in the group being permanently locked for new posts, as administrators could not control all the users that wanted to derail the group after the action had ended. On the basis of our findings, we can conclude that the act of connecting individuals that have the shared interests on social networks creates the basis of a successful humanitarian action, while slacktivism, and inappropriate actions especially, lead to an opposite outcome.

CONCLUSION

The case of “Vratimo Palčiče u Petrovu” showed how, in certain conditions, the space of the digital sphere can be used for the benefit of the community. The humanitarian action in our case took place in the new and unprecedented circumstances of lockdown and social disorientation at the very beginning of the global pandemic. In this case, FB has proven to be an excellent platform for networking and collaboration, which are ideal conditions for the emergence of digital humanitarian action. Dario Prekratić was the one who designed this auction model, but inter-actor cooperation within the FB group made this action unique and effective. While the cooperation of the members created the auction model, the role of administrators in safeguarding the integrity and transparency of the process cannot be overlooked. It is also necessary to highlight the important role of the Bad Blue Boys and the “Klub roditelja nedonoščadi – Palčiči”, an organization that gathers the parents of prematurely born babies in Croatia and provides them with support, which was the foundation on which the entire humanitarian action was conceived and implemented.

Our research shows that the FB group outlived its initial cause and was used as a platform for humanitarian aid in the next major crisis as citizens continued to use the FB group and the auction model for other purposes. However, the level of virtual participation (and its real-life outcome) in the case of the following humanitarian crisis, namely the Petrinja earthquake of December 2020, was not the same as it was for the original purpose for which the group was created. As time passed, humanitarian enthusiasm in the group declined as slacktivism took up a more significant part of the in-group activities. Despite the best efforts of the group administrators to continue using the auction model in the same capacity, the FB group was unfortunately locked for new posts for a while in an attempt to combat rampant fraud attempts that emerged. However, it has since been reopened and is now used occasionally, particularly for new charitable initiatives. This case study shows that there is a massive space for research of online humanitarian actions and digital networking in general.

The limitations of this research are the lack of surveys of FB group members that would have been based on a study of bridging social capital and trust to make our claims in this paper more relevant. Another limitation of this research is the fact that we did not conduct a deeper analysis of the content of the posts and compare it with similar groups. We also lacked interviews with more people who participated in the auctions. The model of capital convertibility could also be refined by determining specific indicators for measurement

to explain the effects of this action more accurately. Research on unregulated Facebook humanitarian auctions is needed, especially when these auctions are generated through the interaction of Facebook group members. This is an exciting research space that has not yet been covered.

Many valuable cases like the one covered by this case study remain scientifically unrecorded in the age of digitally mediated communication and relationships. Digital capital is a concept that offers a better understanding of human relationships and the convertibility of other forms of capital. A better understanding of the online world can give us certain advantages when creating other social actions and movements that can provide positive social impact. FB groups are a precious space for the digital public as they gather different people around shared interests. The development of bridging social capital through Facebook groups and other forms of digital communities is an attractive area of research. Developing the integrated model that could measure the levels of trust created through cooperation and successful humanitarian actions on social networks would be a good start in this direction, providing the means to conduct more profound scientific research, which is best left for future work.

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NASTANAK DIGITALNIH HUMANITARNIH AKCIJA: SLUČAJ GRUPE NA FACEBOOKU „VRATIMO PALČIĆE U PETROVU”

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SAŽETAK *Pandemija bolesti COVID-19 uvelike je utjecala na međuljudske odnose na globalnoj razini. Osim toga Hrvatsku su 2020. godine pogodili i razorni potresi koji su pokrenuli niz humanitarnih akcija. Ovaj rad bavi se grupom na Facebooku „Vratimo Palčiče u Petrovu” i aukcijskim modelom koji je nastao u grupi, a koji je inovativan po tome što su aukcije nastale suradnjom članova navedene grupe i kao takve nisu opisane u znanstvenoj literaturi. Ovim člankom nastoji se objasniti što nam taj slučaj može reći o suradnji u digitalnoj okolini te o njezinoj ulozi u stvaranju digitalnih humanitarnih akcija. U radu se analiziraju objave u grupi i intervjui s organizatorima kako bi se opisao fenomen jačanja veza među članovima navedene grupe i provođenja kolektivne akcije. Analizirani slučaj ukazuje na to da digitalni aktivizam ne mora rezultirati čistim slaktivizmom (engl. slactivism), s obzirom na to da transparentno sudjelovanje članova zajednice, zajedno s postojanjem transparentnog modela, pogoduje stvaranju opipljivih učinaka u društvu kroz uspješne humanitarne akcije.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

DIGITALNE HUMANITARNE AKCIJE, GRUPE NA FACEBOOKU,
PREMOŠĆUJUĆI SOCIJALNI KAPITAL, DIGITALNI KAPITAL, SLAKTIVIZAM

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