



Social enterprises in electronic markets: web localization or standardization

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Abstract

The question of how social enterprises (SEs)—organizations that work to solve social issues through innovative ideas and strategies—utilize the web to internationalize has received little attention in electronic business literature. We address this issue by examining whether SEs pursue a web globalization strategy that is standardized across national markets or localized and culturally customized to individual locales. Accepted knowledge about e-commerce corporations predicts that these firms would be better off with web localization. However, an investigation using content analysis and two case studies complemented with face-to-face and digital interviews reveals that SEs differ inherently from for-profit businesses in web globalization. Specifically, this paper shows that SEs adopt a web strategy high on standardization to mobilize, educate, advocate, and recruit would-be donors, influencers, and volunteers. Such a strategy allows SEs to build legitimacy and reinforce their global brand. Our empirical findings show the uniqueness of SEs' digital context from profit-oriented e-commerce corporations and the need for a suitable theoretical framework.

Keywords Social enterprises · E-commerce · Internationalization · Web globalization · Localization · Standardization

JEL classification L81 · L31

Introduction

The acceleration of globalization, the proliferation of information and communication technologies, and the emergence of a global electronic network present significant opportunities for

global expansion (Kshetri 2001). They are fashioning significant transformations in the way businesses and organizations conduct their activities. Indeed, the continuous evolution of the Internet and web applications has accelerated the internationalization of firms and organizations and created greater interdependence among organizations and societies. It has facilitated instant communication between widespread business, social, and political actors with the expectation of delivering goods and services beyond domestic spheres. It has also transformed diverse agents, such as social entrepreneurs, into global actors.

However, the concept of internationalization, which has a long history in business literature (e.g., McDougall and Oviatt 2000; Mudambi and Zahra 2007) and has been addressed by some in e-business literature (e.g., Steinfield and Klein 1999; Kshetri 2001; Gibbs and Kraemer 2004; Raymond et al. 2005), has not been fully embraced in social entrepreneurship literature (Elkington and Hartigan 2008; Brooks 2009; Ratten 2013). There is theoretical ambiguousness on the process of internationalization of social enterprises and how it compares to the internationalization of business enterprises. While this gap merits thorough theoretical and empirical investigations,

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this paper seeks to focus on the digital economy aspect of SEs' internationalization process, using the concept of 'web globalization' (Singh 2011).

Web globalization, according to Singh (2011), 'addresses all enterprise-wide issues that are involved in successfully launching and maintaining international websites and achieving international e-business expansion' (p. 83). Web globalization addresses all internal processes associated with developing, launching and maintaining international websites and entering new global markets (Singh 2011). This includes not only technological and digital aspects of managing an international website but also managerial and strategic decisions such as country selection, marketing, service delivery, customer service, inventory management, international finance, international human resources, translation, and localization versus standardization to name a few (Singh 2011).

Technically, web globalization involves two major types of integrations to achieve an international web presence: web internationalization and web localization. Web internationalization is the process of making digital content acquiescent to localization, cultural customization, and international deployment without further redevelopment. Thus, web internationalization occurs as a foundational step in the design and development process rather than as an afterthought that can often involve time-consuming and expensive re-engineering (Ishida and Miller 2005). Web localization is the adaptation of digital content on the web and through mobile applications or software applications to meet the cultural, linguistic, legal, and other requirements of a target market where it will be deployed. Clearly, translation is only a small, albeit significant and vital, part of the localization process. At the other end of the spectrum is standardization, which keeps web content standard and cohesive across all global markets. In other words, from a technical standpoint, online users see the same web template, regardless of where they are in the world.

The web globalization of SEs has received scant attention in e-business, social entrepreneurship and internationalization literature (Zahra et al. 2008; Chen et al. 2017). Existing internationalization theories largely ignore the social economy since these theories are designed from a profit-maximizing perspective and tend to overemphasize multinational enterprises (Rugman and Verbeke 2004; Rivas 2012). We address this research gap by examining how SEs leverage the web to expand globally.

To our knowledge, this paper is the first to examine the internationalization of SEs in the digital economy. Over the last decade, there has been increasing interest in SEs by academics, practitioners, and policymakers (GEM 2015). While the phenomenon of SEs has grown significantly, many gaps exist in our knowledge of these organizations, particularly their operations and strategies in electronic markets. SEs continue to grow worldwide (GEM 2015); however, we know little about their digital strategies.

From a profit-oriented perspective, extant research indicates that the most successful web strategy is for the business to localize their websites to the appropriate cultural contexts of the various audiences (Singh 2011). However, SEs do not operate with the same profit-focused mentality as traditional businesses do. First and foremost, many SEs lack the vast financial and human resources that profit-oriented businesses have. Rather, many depend on various sources of funding, including donations, grants, and service fees, among others. They also have various barriers to growth and development, including values-based, strategy-based, and institutional-based barriers (Davies et al. 2019). Our research explores how SEs weigh the decision to invest in highly localized websites that would demand a high level of investment versus standardizing their websites for a global audience.

Theoretically, much of the literature on the digital economy and electronic markets has focused on commercial enterprises (e.g., Raymond et al. 2005) with less attention devoted to SEs. In addition, existing internationalization theoretical frameworks such as the resource-based view (RBV), the industrial organization approach, the incremental internationalization perspective, the eclectic theory, and network theory are not fully equipped to explain the growth of networked businesses (Singh and Kundu 2002; Agarwal and Wu 2015), let alone the web strategies of SEs.

These profit-inspired frameworks are unlikely to apply to SEs because SEs face an environment that is vastly different from the for-profit business environment. Circumstances typical of SEs, such as target audiences, ownership structure, mission, and financial setup, suggest that business recommendations might not be feasible for SEs. To gain a better insight, multiple qualitative methods, including content analysis, case studies, and in-depth interviews, were used to assess SEs' strategies in electronic markets and whether they pursue strategies of standardization or localization of web content and functionalities.

In the following section, we present the literature review. This is followed by a description of the methodology, analysis, and findings. Then, we note the theoretical implications with a focus on the disparities between SEs and for-profit businesses. We conclude with managerial implications, limitations, and opportunities for future research.

We must first define SE. The literature on SE varies in terms of its name, definitions, and contexts. Despite the variations among them, most definitions agree on two ultimate goals of SEs: social value creation to impact the wellbeing of social beneficiaries and an innovative response to a social purpose (Martin and Osberg 2007; Kroeger and Weber 2014). To provide consistency throughout this paper, we will refer to organizations that work to create social value through innovative responses as social enterprises (SEs).

Literature review

A major stream of research within international business and marketing that has only recently been applied to international

entrepreneurship is the debate on whether to localize (adapt the business, marketing, or web strategy to the host country) or to standardize with a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. Research on standardization versus localization within social entrepreneurship is limited (Zahra et al. 2008; Volery 2010; de Arruda and Levrini 2015); however, the research that does exist in this field subscribes to the same conclusions as the electronic business research.

Qualitative case studies find that, in an international environment, even enterprises with a goal of social value creation must adjust to the local context to effectively serve that population (Volery 2010; de Arruda and Levrini 2015). Likewise, Zahra et al. (2008) acknowledge that the many different forces at play in an international context make a standardized business model very difficult to implement. However, adaptation to the local context greatly increases operational costs because of the necessary knowledge of local cultures, values, and institutions (Zahra et al. 2008). Furthermore, entrepreneurs operate with limited resources (Oviatt and McDougall 2005) and under bounded rationality, thereby leading them to make satisficing decisions (Zahra et al. 2008) that may not be the best solutions but are considered ‘good enough’ with the given resources.

Similarly, research in international entrepreneurship also suggests that a business model adapted to the local context is needed (Onetti et al. 2012; Rask 2014; Di Gregorio 2017). While Rask (2014) details four different types of business models depending on the differences of geographic location and entry modes, Onetti et al. (2012) emphasize a ‘locus,’ or location, dimension as essential to their entrepreneurial strategic management approach. Others make contextualization a core part of their business that offers a competitive advantage, such as with ‘place-based business models’ (Di Gregorio 2017), or through the advantages that ‘embeddedness’ offers by stronger connections to and awareness of needs of the local community (McKeever et al. 2015). Others find that understanding local culture, forming strong local relationships, and using digital platforms are essential to success (Mosley 2017). Further empirical case studies have found similar results that replicating trainings and practices internationally requires country-specific adaptation (Ojala and Heikkilä 2011; Tremblay et al. 2013). Even industry magazines within the nonprofit sector offer detailed advice on improving funding by raising funds internationally, and this advice includes making many cultural and linguistic adaptations to communicate with potential international funders (Waasdorp 2003).

On the other hand, within the field of social franchising, research reveals that a standardized business model implemented by international nonprofit organizations increased the quality of reproductive healthcare services within the public sector in Vietnam (Ngo et al. 2009) and healthcare in India (Alur and Schoormans 2011). Such a model of social franchising builds off of the traditional for-profit franchise approach

by including operational procedures, trademark permissions, and assistance with marketing from the franchisor (Alur and Schoormans 2011). This supportive social franchising structure resembles a standardized approach to international SEs. However, despite the success of the standardized model in these studies, both also acknowledge the importance of cultural customization. For example, the authors found that the major factors of franchisee selection depend on not only objective factors, such as financial capability and market viability, but also subjective factors, such as local market knowledge (Alur and Schoormans 2011). Similarly, others have found that promoting a culturally relevant brand contributes to the success of the health network (Ngo et al. 2009). Therefore, despite the success of some standardized models, adjusting to the local culture remains an important factor.

While research on social and international entrepreneurship largely supports a localized approach to internationalization, they are more applicable to SEs’ physical environment and field activities than the virtual sphere. The literature tends to treat SE’s internationalization as unidimensional, neglecting other significant dimensions, namely, the web dimension. Unfortunately, we were unable to find any web-related research on the internationalization of SEs. If such research does already exist, it is not easily found. This further justifies the need for the present exploratory study.

With the relative absence of empirical work on web globalization in social entrepreneurship literature, we reviewed equivalent works in electronic business (see Table 1). Our review of prominent empirical studies shows substantial empirical support for web localization and cultural customization of digital content for firms entering and serving foreign markets. Research finds that cultural localization improves important performance measures, including the presentation of information, attitude toward the website, navigational ease, and purchase intent (Baack and Singh 2007). In a five-country study, researchers found that “consumers prefer highly adapted websites to medium and low adapted web sites,” with cultural adaptation improving the perception of website effectiveness, purchase intentions, and attitude (Singh et al. 2004, p. 77).

Other empirical research supports the outcomes of not only attitude toward the website but also its ease of use (Singh et al. 2006), likelihood to experience flow (Luna et al. 2002), and as a key driver of consumer trust (Bartikowski and Singh 2014). A review of research on the subject found overall reliable support for web localization, citing that research has found that websites that are considered ‘culturally congruent’ are rated higher in usefulness, ease of use, and overall effectiveness, and they generated positive attitudes and positive intentions (Vyncke and Brengman 2010).

Additional empirical research comparing Chinese and American Internet users found that attitudes and preferred websites were influenced by the respective collectivistic and

Table 1 Relevant empirical studies on the merit of localization and standardization in web globalization

Paper	Setting	Entity	Method	Findings/Conclusion
Baack and Singh (2007)	Taiwan	Hui Bao	Experiment	Significant effect of localization on presentation of information, attitude toward the website, navigational ease, & purchase intent.
Bartikowski et al. (2018)	France (French and Maghrebian ethnic minority consumers)	Electronics retailer	Experiment	Attitude certainty mediates between website cultural congruity, and attitudes toward the site and purchase intentions.
Bartikowski and Singh (2014)	France	Online retailers in 11 business categories	Content analysis	Cultural markers (language, typical colors, country symbols, country references) is a key driver of online trust.
Ganguly et al. (2010)	India, Canada, United States	Online shopping	Survey	Culture moderates the relationship between website design factors and trust, and also between trust and purchase intention.
Gevorgyan and Manucharova (2009)	China, United States	Not specified	Survey, Content analysis	Attitudes and preferred websites are influenced by cultural backgrounds (collectivistic, individualistic), with ethnic identity strengthening these relationships.
Halliburton and Ziegfeld (2009)	UK, France, Germany	Top 100 European listed companies	Content analysis	Overall, companies followed a “glocal” branding strategy.
Jarvenpaa et al. (1999)	Australia, Israel, Finland	Amazon, Internet bookshop, Opus, Barnes & Noble, El Al, British Airways, ISSTA, Travelocity	Experiments	No strong cultural effects were found regarding the antecedents of trust in an internet store.
Ko et al. (2015)	Korea, United States	Travel agencies	Experiment	A culturally congruent condition increases consumers’ willingness to pay, when compared with culturally incongruent conditions, and can be explained by the mediating by information processing effort in Korean consumers.
Luna et al. (2002)	Spain, United States	Online camera retailers	Experiments	The congruity of a website with culture influences a visitor’s likelihood of experiencing flow.
Nath et al. (2019)	Not provided, measured “global diversity” and “global penetration”	Global retailers	Multilevel or hierarchical linear regressions using secondary data sources.	Retail banner standardization (RBS) improves profitability with global penetration and status-based differentiation. RBS has stronger effects with an increased focus on emerging markets and e-commerce. Effects become non-significant with expansion to highly diverse foreign markets.
Pavlou and Chai (2002)	China, United States	Self-selected web retailer	Experiential survey	Significant interactions of culture with attitude and societal norms on online transaction intentions.
Sia et al. (2009)	Australia, Hong Kong	Online bookstore	Experiment	The impact of peer customer endorsements on trust perceptions and effectiveness of portal affiliation differed by countries.
Singh et al. (2006)	Brazil, Germany, Taiwan	American and Japanese B2C MNEs	Survey using TAM framework	Cultural adaptation is an important determinant of ease of use and attitude toward an international web site.

Table 1 (continued)

Paper	Setting	Entity	Method	Findings/Conclusion
Singh et al. (2004)	Italy, India, Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland	Local companies, American multinationals	Survey	Cultural adaptation leads to better perception of web site effectiveness, purchase intentions, and attitude.
Steenkamp and Geyskens (2006)	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Macedonia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States	Large U.S. and European Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) companies	Survey	Cultural congruence improves perceived value, in particular when national identity is higher.
Tixier (2005)	France, United States	French subsidiaries of large American companies in 10 industries.	Interviews, Survey	Whether the products sold are standardized or not and the degree of involvement in the purchase determines whether the strategy used is “global,” “local,” or “glocal.”
Vyncke and Brengman (2010) ^a				

^a A review of a decade’s worth of empirical research on the effectiveness of website cultural congruence

individualistic cultural backgrounds, with a strong ethnic identity further strengthening these relationships (Gevorgyan and Manucharova 2009). Research has also found that cultural congruence improves perceived value, particularly when national identity is higher (Steenkamp and Geyskens 2006). Further support has been found for a link among Korean consumers between cultural congruence and willingness to pay, explained by the mediating force of reduced effort to process information (Ko et al. 2015). Similarly, researchers have found that attitude certainty mediates the relationship of website cultural congruity and the dependent variables of attitudes toward the website and individual purchase intentions (Bartikowski et al. 2018). Additionally, Hubspot, a popular marketing, sales, and service software provider, claims that their localization is a driver of international growth (“Globally Speaking Radio”) and cites that an initial investment of \$1500 in localization returned \$144,000 in annual recurring revenue (Beninatto and Stevens 2018).

However, few studies in electronic business have found support for standardization. For example, in a study by Jarvenpaa et al. (1999), authors found no support for any cultural effects on trust at Internet cafes, which suggests that a website adapted to collectivistic or individualistic cultural backgrounds does not influence the consumer’s trust of the site. Others have found support for a hybrid approach called ‘glocalization,’ wherein the company utilizes a standardized global approach with certain localized details (Tixier 2005; Halliburton and Ziegfeld 2009).

In summary, the internationalization literature is rich with empirical assessments of the merit of both standardization and

localization strategies, but a growing body of literature in electronic business has shown that web localization leads to better results (e.g., Luna et al. 2002; Singh 2011). Hence, they argue in favor of catering to local preferences to maximize impact (Luna et al. 2002; Singh 2011). Additionally, this is an argument shared by 71% of multinational executives in a survey conducted by Petro et al. (2007), who consider web globalization as a strategic priority for successful international expansion.

The web-based internationalization of SEs has been heavily under-researched, and current theoretical internationalization frameworks do not provide adequate answers to fully explain the strategies of SEs in electronic markets. These frameworks are limited to a business context and struggle to account for other players with different agendas and characteristics. There is, clearly, a need for a new conceptual framework that integrates the unique aspects of SEs’ activities in electronic markets. To appropriately address this theoretical gap, a qualitative exploratory approach has been used, as is recommended for research where the case in question is novel or in its infancy (Eisenhardt 1989; Ghauri and Gronhaug 2005; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). Thus, because of the lack of extant research on the web localization of SEs, we employed a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Edmondson and McManus 2007). This procedure consists of integrating prior theoretical developments on web localization with data collection and analysis from content analysis, case studies, and interviews (Yin 2009). The purpose of grounded theory research is to develop a theory where none existed beforehand, as opposed to theory testing, which is

used to test hypotheses derived from extant theory (Fisher & Aguinis 2017). Grounded theory uses inductive techniques to develop data-driven theoretical explanations for an unexplained phenomenon, resulting in new testable propositions or constructs (Fisher & Aguinis 2017). While concepts and patterns come from the data, the analytical process of grounded theory is one of ‘testing’ the researcher’s tentative conceptual structures and ideas through the constant comparative method (Suddaby 2006). As such, it incorporates elements of both positivist and relativist traditions, intended as “a compromise between extreme empiricism and complete relativism” (Suddaby 2006: 634), and contains elements of induction, abduction, and deduction (Suddaby 2006).

Methodology

Data collection

The initial stage of the research consisted of a content analysis of SEs’ websites to identify the electronic strategy that is currently implemented by these SEs. Content analysis is a method used extensively in marketing (Berelson 1952; Kassarjian 1977) and e-commerce research (Singh et al. 2004; Singh and Boughton 2005; Singh and Pereira 2005; Singh et al. 2009) for quantitative analysis of communication and media content. It is also regarded as a suitable technique for analyzing cultural norms and values and examining the interplay between communication content and consumer behavior (Tse et al. 1989; Cheng and Schweitzer 1996).

This research randomly sampled 230 SEs from the online database of the World Association Non-Governmental Organizations (WANGO). The initial list consisted of 54,428 both local and international non-governmental organizations around the world. From that list, we extracted SEs with international operations to form our sampling frame. We selected 230 SEs entirely at random from the sampling frame using a simple random sample technique. The approach consists of selecting SEs one by one, with equal probability of selection for each SE at each draw. This approach is meant to create a probability sample that has the greatest potential for representing the population being studied (Babbie 2008).

An analysis of the characteristics of the sample revealed that 61.5% were from North America and Western Europe, 17.4% from Asia, 10.4% Africa, and only 5% from Latin America. Also, there are more than 80 different areas of activities that these 230 SEs operate in. This is due to different naming and labels of activities in different countries. WANGO aggregated all these different areas into nine focuses: membership associations, humanitarian, human rights, educational NGO, environmental, women, children, youth, and peace and conflict (WANGO 2020). Our samples include all nine focuses, with the majority of SEs active in humanitarian

(38.4%), environmental (14.3%), children (11.6%), and education (10%).

To analyze our sample of websites, we used the coding scheme that was originally designed and used by Singh and Pereira (2005) and has a proven track record in international e-business literature. The code includes 13 localization, cultural customization and translation variables, and each is ranked using a 5-point ordinal Likert scale. Table 2 lists each variable, including operational explanations or definitions. We added another variable to the framework to capture the use of languages. For each website, we listed the languages supported. We recruited five coders who are fluent in the languages used on the sampled websites. A detailed version of the coding scheme was shared and explained to each coder, along with training to become familiar with the coding scheme and coding procedures. When a disagreement occurred during the content analysis, coders repeated the coding scheme until they reached an agreement.

Following the conventions of content analysis, we tested for reliability using Krippendorff’s alpha, which measures the interrater agreement for categorical scales (Hayes and Krippendorff 2007). All of the results indicated acceptable to excellent reliability with values equal to or greater than 0.70 (Hayes and Krippendorff 2007). We also sought the input and approval of an independent researcher with considerable qualitative research experience to assess the reliability of the coding protocol and the content analysis procedure.

To examine the degree of localization and cultural customization of the reviewed websites, we ran Pearson’s chi-square goodness-of-fit test. This is the nonparametric alternative to the Anderson-Darling and Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness-of-fit tests when the data are put into classes (binned data), as is the case with our variables. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test compares the observed value to the hypothesized value to determine whether the observations within each category fit a theoretical expectation. In other words, for the purpose of this study, we ran chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to examine whether there is a ‘preference’ between different classes of web localization (i.e., do SEs prefer standardization or localization of web content or a different localization scale). Table 3 shows the results of our tests.

In the second stage, we conducted case study analyses of two SEs, complemented by digital and face-to-face interviews with key informants from each SE to investigate the factors affecting their international web strategy. There are three reasons for using the case study approach. First, a case study can help compensate for the descriptive nature of the results of the content analysis and is a suitable approach to address the “how” and “why” questions (Yin 2003; Ghauri and Gronhaug 2005; Eren-Erdogmus et al. 2010) that resulted from the research. Second, a qualitative case study is useful in gaining information and insights that are not possible in other approaches (Rowley 2002). Finally, case studies allow

Table 2 Coding scheme and web globalization descriptive

Construct/Variables	Upper Scale (on 5-point Likert Scale)
Content Localization	
The percentage of web pages translated to the local language	81 to 100% Web Pages Translated
Depth of content translation	All Sections of Home Country Website Appropriately Translated
Local content synchronization with home content	Most International Website Content is in sync with the Home website content
Navigation attributes	Excellent Navigation Attributes
Online web support	Online Web Support That is Equal/Better Than Home Website Online Web Support
Cultural Customization	
Webpage structure	Unique Web Design Based on Local Cultural Norms
Graphics localization	Unique Graphics Based on local Cultural Norms
Colors localization	Unique Colours Based on local Cultural Norms
Product/service localization	Unique Product/ Services Based On Local Cultural Norms
Local/Global Gateway	
Global gateway	Full Fledge Global Gateway
Country/language gateway visibility	Upper Right-Hand Corner on Home Page
Country/language URL usability	All Country Specific Domains Supported
Translation Quality	
Translation quality	Excellent Translation in Terms of conceptual, idiomatic, and vocabulary equivalence

us to compare units of analysis (a website) from different circumstances (target markets) while controlling for the SE.

After carefully reviewing the sample from our content analysis of 230 SEs, we applied a theoretical sampling to select

cases that are relevant to our investigation (Eisenhardt 1989) and determined that Oxfam International and Habitat for Humanity (HFH) fulfil the following selection criteria through their unique structure, global reach, and web strategy. First,

Table 3 Chi-square analysis of web globalization

Construct/Variables	Chi-Square	df	Count	%
Content Localization				
The percentage of web pages translated to the local language	264.217***	4	114	49.6%
Depth of content translation	256.217***	4	91	39.6%
Local content synchronization with home content	216.391***	4	103	44.8%
Navigation attributes	120.826***	4	112	48.7%
Online web support	25.565***	4	54	23.5%
Cultural Customization				
Webpage structure	731.174***	4	5	2.2%
Graphics localization	627.957***	4	8	3.5%
Colors localization	705.304***	4	6	2.6%
Product/service localization	574.174***	4	17	7.4%
Local/Global Gateway				
Global gateway	635.148***	3	2	0.9%
Country/language gateway visibility	355.783***	4	66	28.7%
Country/language URL usability	495.043***	4	35	15.2%
Translation Quality				
Translation quality	162.245***	4	95	41.3%

*** $p < .01$

Oxfam and HFH are global organizations with a wide geographic spread. This provides us with the opportunity to observe the web strategy in multiple locations around the world. Second, Oxfam and HFH have a long history of social action around the world. Because of their globally extensive reach and recognition, we identified Oxfam and HFH as exemplary cases to examine how they balance a vast international presence with local responsiveness. Table 4 provides an overview of the two SEs and selection criteria.

The results from the content analysis were used to develop interview questions. Questions were aimed at addressing the web strategies of the national offices and the importance of the website to the organization to provide more insight into the possible reasons behind and outcomes of the web strategy.

The interviews were 30–45 min in length. Following Arnould and Wallendorf's (1994) recommendations, questions were open-ended to establish "a conversation-like dialogue." We conducted a total of 11 interviews with national and regional digital media and communications managers, as these individuals should have the most knowledge regarding the international web strategies of their organizations. These key informants were invited twice by email to participate in this research. Each was given the option to participate in a one-on-one interview via telephone or Skype or to answer open-ended questions in a survey format. Six of our respondents chose face-to-face interviews, and five opted to digitally fill out the open-ended survey. The digital approach was given as a secondary option when we had difficulty securing a face-

Table 4 Oxfam international and habitat for humanity websites

Oxfam	Coverage	ccTLD*	HFH	Coverage	ccTLD*
Headquarters			Headquarters		
Oxfam International Secretariat, Nairobi Kenya		gTLD	Habitat for Humanity, Atlanta, GA, U.S.	70+	gTLD
Oxfam Affiliates			Affiliates		
Oxfam America	94	gTLD	Argentina	NS	ar
Oxfam Australia	79	au	Armenia	Only Armenia	am
Oxfam-in-Belgium	NS	be	Australia	6	au
Oxfam Brazil	NS	br	Bangladesh	Only Bangladesh	gTLD
Oxfam Canada	94	ca	Bolivia	NS	gTLD
Oxfam IBIS (Denmark)	67	dk	Brazilian	NS	br
Oxfam France	NS	gTLD	Bulgaria	Only Bulgaria	gTLD
Oxfam Germany	94	de	Cambodia	Only Cambodia	gTLD
Oxfam GB	94	uk	Chile	NS	cl
Oxfam Hong Kong	32	hk	China	Only China	gTLD
Oxfam India	NS	gTLD	Colombia	NS	n/a
Oxfam Intermón (Spain)	90+	es	Egypt	Only Egypt	gTLD
Oxfam Ireland	94	gTLD	El Salvador	NS	sv
Oxfam Italy	NS	gTLD	Ethiopia	Only Ethiopia	gTLD
Oxfam Mexico		gTLD	Fiji		n/a
Oxfam New Zealand	8	nz	Germany	Global Village Projects	gTLD
Oxfam Novib (Netherlands)	NS	nl	Great Britain	63 (including funding programs)	uk
Oxfam-Québec	NS	ca	Guatemala	Only Guatemala	gTLD
Oxfam South Africa	3	za	Haiti	Only Haiti	gTLD
Public Engagement Offices***			Honduras	NS	gTLD
Oxfam in South Korea	87	kt	Hongkong	Global Village Projects	gTLD
Oxfam in Sweden	94	se	Hungary	Only Hungary	hu

* A country code top-level domain (ccTLD)** A generic top-level domain (gTLD)

***The public engagement offices raise money and engage the public in Oxfam activities (oxfam.org)

****In few instances, we couldn't get the exact number because the website and other documentations either do not specify the target countries (NS) or use a general term such as "the world"

to-face interview. Nevertheless, it is an appropriate data collection method in qualitative research (see Creswell and Poth 2018; Anderson et al. 2019).

Upon reviewing each additional response, we determined that we had reached data saturation with these 11 respondents, and no additional information was acquired (Fusch and Ness 2015). Two of our respondents were regional-level media and communications managers, eight were national communications managers, and one was the national director. Our respondents represented countries in Europe, South America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Such breadth of geographical representation, in conjunction with the in-depth content analysis of Oxfam and HFH websites, should mitigate biases commonly associated with open-ended responses (De Massis and Kotlar 2014). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, which amounted to 37 pages of transcripts and nearly 3 h of audio data.

Data analysis

The recorded data were transcribed and conceptually structured using the latest Nvivo software. In line with the grounded theoretical approach, we performed open, axial, and selective coding to analyze our data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). First, during open-coding, we read through the data line-by-line several times to identify a tentative list of codes or themes (first-order concepts) (Strauss and Corbin 1998). This is a descriptive phase that relies on information from interview participants. Next, during axial coding, we searched for relationships and connections among the first-order concepts and, ultimately, aggregated them into second-order concepts (Gioia et al. 2010). This is a theoretically driven phase that relies on the literature and existing theories to identify relationships among the first-order concepts (Nag and Gioia 2012). Finally, during selective coding, we integrated, refined, and then further aggregated second-order concepts to extract the core variables, which “pull the other categories [concepts] together to form an explanatory whole” (Strauss and Corbin 1998: p. 146). To ensure the credibility of our results, we relied on triangulation of investigators and methodologies by comparing interview data with results from content and case study analysis. To further enhance the trustworthiness of our results, a qualitative research expert evaluated our research procedure. Key informants were also invited to assess and comment on the accuracy of the interview data (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Table 5 lists the conceptual results of the grounded theory research approach. As shown in Table 5, several first-order concepts emerged when examining SEs’ strategies in electronic markets. These concepts were then collapsed, using relevant patterns, theories, and literature, into seven second-order concepts and subsequently into three overarching aggregate core concepts: dual audience, dual strategy, and lingua

franca. Next, we examine each core concept supplemented with theoretical verification and findings from content and case analysis.

Findings and discussion

The key impetus of this research is to reveal the web globalization strategies of SEs. Core concepts that are related to web globalization were derived from content analysis, case studies and interviews (see Table 5).

Dual audience: World citizen vs. service beneficiary

First, our data suggest that SEs use websites to primarily target their main sources of funding. For several SE managers, this is an important strategic decision, given the competitive nature of the donor market and scarce resources. Whether in poverty reduction,

Table 5 Conceptual results of the grounded theory procedure

Theme	First-order concepts	Second-order concepts	Core Concepts
Services / Activities in electronic markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership dues • Selling goods and services • Grants • Private donations • Government funding • Gifts • Advocate, defend or promote a specific cause • Attract volunteer helpers 	Funding	Standardization
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service delivery directly to beneficiaries • Act as lobbyists on behalf of interest groups • Providing consulting services directly to beneficiaries 	Advocacy Recruitment Field service delivery Global brand recognition Legitimacy
Target audience in electronic markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • donors; academics; journalists; volunteers; supporters; ...etc.) • refugees; children; homeless...etc.) 	Opinion Formers Cosmopolitans World citizens Local Beneficiaries	Dual Audience Strategy
Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English • Spanish • French • Arabic 		Lingua Franca

immigration, environmental protection, housing, human rights or social causes, SEs use their websites to target potential donors rather than service beneficiaries. As a result, SEs use the website to engage in societal marketing to portray a favorable image to would-be donors and to align them with a cause.

Second, our data imply that SEs use their websites to reach out to their advocates and potential influencers to gain influence and raise awareness. They also use websites to recruit volunteers to champion their international causes. Content and case analyses have consistently confirmed these tendencies, as web content is generally crafted toward the interests of opinion formers and volunteers and not beneficiaries. The message is designed to inspire further action in support of the social cause. One key informant noted that “members of the public who has [*sic*] an interest in our issues, donors, corporate partners, etc.” are the primary targets they intend to reach through the website. Another manager added that “Opinion formers ([such] as journalists and academic researchers, university students, etc.) and middle class” are the primary targets. Another local manager further confirmed that the website targets “donors, media, regional policy stakeholders, national governments, general public.” The respondents also explicated that fundraising and advocacy are the primary goals behind their website strategy.

While SE funders, influencers, and volunteers might come from different backgrounds and economic status, the mission and work of the SE is the common cause that unites them. In the face of social, economic, political, and environmental emergencies, SEs rally and connect diverse organizations, activists, corporations, and individuals under a common interest and vision. For this diverse base, cosmopolitanism is a common disposition enacted through involvement in international charitable activities, global philanthropy, transnational advocacy, and other social activism. As research shows, ‘cosmopolitans’ are individuals belonging to a high social class who see all individuals around the world as equals, rather than by national boundaries (Crosby and Bryson 2005; Miller 2005; Maak and Pless 2009). Like SE donors, volunteers, and influencers, cosmopolitans seek a “decent world; a fair, inclusive, just and thus principle-driven global community that enables human flourishing and seeks to build human capabilities” (Maak and Pless 2009, p. 538). Furthermore, a hallmark of the cosmopolitan mindset is that they identify more as citizens of the world than by any national culture (Maak and Pless 2009).

This does not mean that SEs do not cater to local populations with personalized and localized messaging. In fact, they do adapt their web content to cater to local donors, volunteers, and influencers, while maintaining complete consistency with the branding of the international SE (e.g., logo, color scheme, etc.). For example, one national-level manager remarked on the use of the SE’s international branding audiences, developed by headquarters:

For instance, International suggests that while we are not completely dropping any messaging to what’s called the ‘content traditionalists,’ these are people who... for whom their faith is very important because it’s a faith-based organization originally. They skew much older, probably less educated, that kind of thing... In [our country] that is not the case. Our faith-based audience skews younger, much younger—still not necessarily highly educated—but they are growing all the time ... So, you see, we have to make that kind of modification in our messaging and in our prioritizing of our messages because of our cultural and economic contexts.

They also interact in a very local manner with their beneficiaries, volunteers, and donors through face-to-face interactions, such as standing on busy street corners and asking people to donate. It was also noted that beneficiaries are not the primary targets of the website because they often do not have access due to their low income. Rather, the national-level SEs work in a very personal way with their beneficiaries that may be reflected in the website content to attract donors and volunteers. One manager explained,

And, our communication with the families is very personal, you know? We have our team that works with the community and they talk to the family, they share information, and those things, so they ... the families don’t need to access the website to learn information.

SEs clearly distinguish between two different audiences requiring different strategies: “world citizens” [funders, opinion formers, influencers, and volunteers] on the one hand and service beneficiaries on the other. In other words, SEs constantly deal with a dual audience that is vital for its operations and sustainability. The web target is primarily “world citizens,” while other channels, such as in-person meetings, are used to reach service beneficiaries. Theoretically, this marketing reality in social entrepreneurship sets off a new conceptual understanding that forces us to rethink how SEs strategize to target these two segments and their interaction.

Dual strategy: Website standardization vs. website localization

Our interview and content analysis data show that SEs pursue a standardized approach to designing international websites to tap their target audiences, with little to no localization and cultural customization, except through content. Table 3 shows that more than 90% of SEs’ international websites are standardized and only 2% are highly localized ($\chi^2 = 731.174$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, standardized graphics ($\chi^2 = 627.957$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$), standardized colors ($\chi^2 = 705.304$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$), and standardized products/services ($\chi^2 = 574.174$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$) were found in more than 80% of SEs’ international websites. The results are clearly at odds with the common ad hoc approach to web globalization that has permeated international e-business in recent years.

In addition, our data indicate that local and regional offices of an SE promote their mission and activities online in a way that highlights the SE's overall brand. In fact, the word "brand" was mentioned several times when discussing website content. For instance, in the past few years, HFH has pursued a rebranding strategy worldwide to establish a "singular voice" and unified "brand story" when addressing general or specific audiences worldwide. HFH international websites, according to several key informants, were essential elements for brand-building. In the words of one key informant, "we are doing another rebranding of the websites this year, to more closely match habitat.org, which is the U.S. international affiliate, to more closely resemble the look and feel of their website." Another key informant echoed the same fact: "today I go to any website of a Habitat and it has a Habitat face; it is similar in terms of brand, message, image style, of course, color palette." Hence, SEs find more value in a standardized web image that promotes the organization as a consistent and reliable brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 2001), worthy of the investment and attention of donors and other influencers.

In sum, the analyses allude to two distinct target audiences that are both crucial to SEs ("world citizens" and service beneficiaries). Hence, the SE must act in a way that addresses both segments. As the data confirm, SEs adopt a dual strategy that resonates with these two segments, as each constituent receives the SE's message differently and even responds to different communication strategies. When operating in (the field) in foreign countries, SEs benefit from adapting to the local environment (Zahra et al. 2008; Volery 2010; de Arruda and Levrini 2015); however, in electronic markets, SEs benefit from standardizing, rather than localizing, web content.

Lingua Franca

The key informants we interviewed indicated the importance of using language(s) that are widely used in communicating with target audiences. Indeed, data from content analysis show that English (overwhelmingly—87%), Arabic (10%), Spanish (9.7%), French (8%), and Japanese (7%) dominate the SEs' web landscape. In other words, numerous SEs translate the website, not into the local language, but into common lingua francas. For instance, in our review of Oxfam's web content, we found that each affiliate website is written in the affiliate country's official language. However, each affiliate does not have a dedicated website for each country in which it operates. For example, while Oxfam America is active in more than 40 countries, it does not have a dedicated website for each target country. Instead, it has a single web page for each target country on its main website. For instance, Oxfam America [oxfamamerica.org] does not have a dedicated website for Bangladesh, but it has a single page as a part of oxfamamerica.org.¹ The web page is not in Bengali, the

official language of Bangladesh, but rather it is in English. Like Oxfam's affiliate websites, none of the countries listed on the Secretariat website has a dedicated localized website. Instead, each country has a webpage embedded on the main website [oxfam.org] in three lingua francas (English, French, and Spanish) that do not necessarily match the country's formal language(s).

Theoretically, research is divided on the merit of using the local language vs. lingua franca. While some emphasize the importance of promoting the use of local languages throughout the enterprise (Henderson 2005; Neeley 2013; Janssens and Steyaert 2014; Tenzer et al. 2014; Neeley 2015), other research points to the use of a lingua franca as positively influencing communication, coordination, and knowledge sharing among the enterprises (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999; Luo and Shenkar 2006). For example, Ehrenreich (2010, p. 408) found that English "has become an indispensable 'must' in the company", and others have found similar support for using a lingua franca (Briguglio 2005). In electronic markets, the business literature is leaning toward multilingual translations on their websites as a part of the argument in favor of website localization Singh (2011). For instance, the use of a common lingua franca on a website may encourage brand consistency across geographic locations regarding communication to targets and among affiliates (see Kaul 2019). This is the opinion shared by several key informants from various parts of the world. However, the use of lingua franca may signal interest in a limited target group, possibly alienating those who do not speak the language.

Cost is also a factor. Designing and managing multiple international websites that cover various local languages can be costly and challenging. The cost depends not only on how much content needs to be translated but also on how many languages and whether the content is duplicated or unique for each market. In fact, one key informant from Brazil's national office mentioned that although all campaign information comes pre-written from the Latin American regional office, it is only provided in Spanish and English, which requires translation into the national language of Portuguese. Additional technical features associated with this approach might also exacerbate the cost, such as country-specific URL structures that, according to Google, are expensive, require more infrastructure, and have strict country-code top-level domain name (ccTLD) requirements (Murphy et al. 2003).

Theoretical implications

Our research reveals that SEs tend to pursue a standardization approach in managing their websites with little to no localization and cultural customization. The overall design and feeling

¹ <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/countries/bangladesh/>

of the websites' colors, graphics, and even products and services do not cater to local target markets. This is clearly at odds with the empirical support of the web localization strategy from research on for-profit firms previously laid out in this paper. Additionally, the mainstream view on multinational corporations (MNCs) has been that, in general, MNCs enter electronic markets to take advantage of cost-effective and efficient access to resources and to minimize transaction costs (Garicano and Kaplan 2001; Singh and Kundu 2002). The evidence we provide next shows a different pattern of internationalization by SEs in electronic markets and unique characteristics of SEs that fall outside the scope of established internationalization theories.

First, SEs' entry into electronic markets and choice of foreign markets are primarily driven by their missions rather than transaction costs. Research shows that SEs go to disadvantaged markets and marginalized communities around the world to bring changes (Sirisena and Shneur 2018), while MNCs prefer institutionally close and stable markets (Xu and Shenkar 2002). By highlighting the social dimension in electronic markets, this study provides a new understanding of web-based internationalization that is missing from existing research. Little research, with only one exception (Singh and Kundu 2002), has been done in explaining internationalization in electronic markets (see review by Agarwal and Wu 2015). However, none fills the theoretical gap caused by the emphasis on profit-making business advantages. These advantages underlie e-commerce corporations' internationalization decisions with no consideration of social motives around the world. From a social entrepreneurship perspective, monetary returns, if any, are often treated as secondary considerations in the decision to enter a foreign market.

Taken together, these arguments suggest that the web-based internationalization of SEs is positively associated with SEs' social mission of making a difference, uplifting communities, and serving needy populations overseas that have been affected by some disaster or emergency. This proposition is consistent with the findings in much of the foundational SE research, suggesting that SEs form because of social needs (e.g., Austin et al. 2006; Dees 1998; Mair and Martí 2006). For example, Austin et al. (2006) found that, "[w]hat might be deemed an unfavorable contextual factor for market-based commercial entrepreneurship could be seen as an opportunity for a social entrepreneur aiming to address social needs arising from market failure" (Austin et al. 2006: 16). However, SEs must possess the social credentials and advantages to justify foreign expansion and mobilize their target audience of funders, opinion formers, influencers, and volunteers to support the expansion. In other words, at least two conditions are needed to justify foreign expansion. First, the SE must possess social advantages over competitors in serving the target market. These advantages come from size, expertise, history, location, and resources dealing with the social mission. For instance, over the years, Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans frontières) has built

strong legitimacy and advantages in medical assistance and is one of the largest emergency aid organizations in the world (Nobel Media AB 2020). Each year, it sends out 2500 doctors and nurses assisted by 15,000 local employees in 80 countries (Nobel Media AB 2020). Second, the expansion must be appealing to funders, opinion formers, influencers, and volunteers, without whom SEs will struggle to deliver their services. This leads to our first proposition:

Proposition # 1: SEs' use of electronic markets to mobilize funders, opinion formers, influencers, and volunteers, along with their existing social advantages, drive SE foreign expansion.

Second, SEs target two different and vital audiences requiring different strategies: "world citizens" [funders, opinion formers, influencers, and volunteers] on the one hand, and service beneficiaries on the other. SEs use the electronic market to primarily target "world citizens," while other channels, especially offline channels, are directed toward meeting the needs of the beneficiaries such as distributing food or medicine or providing housing or education (usually for free). This is in contrast of MNCs where the target is a consumer who pays for goods and services.

As research has suggested, SEs rely heavily on external funding to pursue their social aspirations (Barnard 2019). Many SEs survive only through donations from charitable foundations, businesses, impact investors, governments, global agencies, high-net-worth individuals and others (Bugg-Levine et al. 2012). Not surprisingly, SEs invest much of their time and resources in fundraising efforts both online (through websites and social media) and offline. In this context, the electronic market has provided SEs with efficient venue and cost-effective ways to spread the word about SEs' causes and campaigns in foreign countries and allows them to collect donations from across the world. This is of great significance, as statistics show that over 50% of donors worldwide prefer to give online, over 30% give to SEs outside of their country of residence and that online giving grew by 10.6% in 2018 (Non-profit Source 2018). The vast difference in size and scope between SEs and MNCs and their critical dependence on external funding have shaped SE web-based internationalization in ways that MNCs with very different stakeholders do not experience.

In addition to funding, SEs use the web to advocate, draw attention and spread the word with the purpose of recruiting opinion formers, influencers, and volunteers who share common attachment to a specific cause. For instance, HFH has received support from various sources including students, athletes, politicians, musicians, business CEOs, religious leaders, and TV hosts. SEs target these world citizens, or cosmopolitan constituency, with a standardized message translated into a few lingua francas. This is in contrast with MNCs that use

electronic markets as platforms to facilitate cross-border transactions and exchanges (Li et al. 2019) and ultimately make profits using predominantly localized content. Thus, we propose:

Proposition # 2a. SEs adopt a dual audience strategy that targets two distinct subgroups: “world citizens” and service beneficiaries.

Proposition # 2b. Because “world citizens” share common pursuits, SEs craft their online messages using a standardized approach and a lingua franca to appeal to this group for funding and support.

Third, as our analysis points out, SEs’ standardized approach to web-based internationalization has also been a matter of global branding to gain institutional legitimacy in the host country. The data provide valuable insights into how local and regional offices of SEs utilize global branding in countries where legitimacy can be vitally important to secure financial and nonfinancial support from local and regional stakeholders and government and international organizations. This suggestion echoes the findings by Bitektine (2011) and Baur and Palazzo (2011), who argue that SE’s financial endorsement is dependent on its “legitimacy”, “reputation”, and “status”. Bitektine (2011) distinguishes between “cognitive legitimacy judgment” and “socio-political legitimacy”. Cognitive legitimacy, according to Bitektine (2011), is the product of being already known and recognizable. Socio-political legitimacy refers to the degree of correspondence between the organization’s characteristics or attributes and the prevailing social norms (Bitektine 2011). This leads to our final proposition:

Proposition # 3. SEs pursue a standardized approach to web-based internationalization to align with the building of a global brand in foreign markets.

The analysis offered here has implications for a more complete understanding of all the players in electronic markets and of internationalization theory and internationalization behavior. In our view, internationalization and web globalization theories emanating from the business realm are contextual rather than universal. Here, a case in point is the social enterprise and the third sector in general. In this sense, focusing on social variables that shape SEs’ internationalization in electronic markets can extend current research on internationalization and web globalization.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to shed some light on the web globalization of SEs. It is fair to say that this area of research

remains uncharted in international social entrepreneurship and electronic business. This paper serves as a call for further research to help SEs prepare for global electronic markets. One of the key findings of our research is that, just as SEs differ inherently from for-profit businesses (Dees 1998; Mair and Martí 2006; Estrin et al. 2016), the online activity of SEs differs from their offline activity. Specifically, research has found that when operating in (the field) in foreign countries, SEs benefit from adapting to the local environment (Zahra et al. 2008; Volery 2010; de Arruda and Levrini 2015); however, when using websites, SEs benefit from standardizing rather than localizing to the service areas. Therefore, any theory development in SE research must recognize that mediums (i.e., websites, social media, in-person, etc.) serve different purposes; an idea not yet recognized in the literature. Such activities result in distinct outcomes, such as donations, advocacy, and as a result of online activity, or services provided as a result of in-person activity.

As a result of this research, managers of international SEs would be well advised to critically evaluate who the targets of their websites are when developing an international site. Rather than following the trend of for-profit businesses, who would predominantly localize to the culture and language of consumers, SE managers must determine the purpose of the website, the nature of content to be displayed online, the languages to be used, and the electronic market branding strategies. In this case, it is critical to recognize that SEs’ targeted electronic audiences, despite their diversity, gravitate toward a common cause. Hence, localization may be a very large and needless expense. This opens a variety of angles for future research, including investigating the impact of web globalization on SEs’ performance. It would also be of interest to measure and assess online users’ expectations and preferences, as well as the impact of social media use in the web globalization efforts of SEs. Additionally, research is needed to investigate the regional aspect of SE web activity, such as how some SEs balance an overall standardized approach with certain regional needs, such as Oxfam Quebec’s French website (<http://www.oxfam.qc.ca/>). While some work has been done in the for-profit sector (e.g., Steinfeld and Klein 1999), more work should be done in the area of SEs.

The present study has some limitations. First, the findings from our exploratory study could be strengthened with empirical tests that quantitatively assess how online end users respond to certain web features. Second, the focus of this study was on SEs irrespective of the sector. Additional research is needed to better understand SEs’ internationalization strategies as segmented by sector (e.g., education, health, finance). Finally, a random sample of 230 SEs was used in this study. Though this is an acceptable size given our statistical approach, future research might consider a larger sample to achieve stronger statistical power. Additionally, several respondents from our case studies noted the importance of social

media to their activities. While this was outside the scope of the current paper, the social media activity and other mediums within the electronic markets may be linked to the overall global web strategy.

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