

Emotion Loop: From Empathy to Sympathy – a sustainable social design strategy for Organ Donation in Hong Kong.

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Abstract

The Shortage of Donors for Organ Transplant is severe in Hong Kong. This paper envisions a potential resolution of this critical issue by implementing a sustainable social design strategy based on human affects of empathy and sympathy. As a matter-of-fact, many studies have been done on measuring attitudes and commitment to organ donation while other studies focused on the promotion of the organ donor card. Those surveys pointed out a discrepancy between positive attitude and low commitment rate to donation. This paper is to make a case for a new Organ Donation scheme which embraces emotional, functional and spiritual needs of both patients and potential donors. The scheme involves collaborative networks and interpersonal channels of communication. It results in a viral marketing strategy which involves empathy and sympathy as stimuli of the altruistic behaviors.

Conference theme: Values and Culture

Keywords: Altruism, Empathy, Organ donation, Societal design strategy, Sympathy, Viral marketing

Introduction

In 1969, Hong Kong introduced its' first renal transplant, since then 947 patients have taken benefits from cadaveric renal transplant. Thanks to the advancement in the transplant surgery, we foresee an increasing numbers of patients can take benefits from the Organ Transplant project. Even though organ donation is considered as an altruistic act, the shortage of organ donor is still present. According to the latest data from the Hong Kong Hospital Authority, in 2007, there are 1489 patients on the waiting list of renal transplant. Only 58 cases of cadaveric transplant have been recorded. The average waiting time for cadaveric renal transplant exceeds 7 years (Chan, 2002). Similarity, in the larger context of organ donor population, Hong Kong had a record of 4.2 patients per million population in 2005. It is the lowest rate of organ donation comparing with the western counterpart. For example, Spain has a donation rate of 35.1/million (Buckley, 2000; The Hong Kong Medical Association, 2008). Nevertheless, the shortage of donors is still a worldwide problem.

Organ Donation in Hong Kong

An Overview

Like many other western cities, Hong Kong practices an opting-in policy for organ donation by signing an organ donation card. However, the consent of the next-of-kin is needed prior to the operative removal of the organ from the donors. A local survey done by Yeung et al. (2000) shows only one third (33.3%) of registered donors have discussed with their family the wish to donate organs after death.

In Hong Kong, there are 3 organizations directly involved in Organ Donation. They are the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority, and the Hong Kong Medical Association. The Transplant Coordination Service was established in 1988 to provide coordination and consultation services at the time of organ transplant. An online registration of Donor registration at the Centralized Organ Donation Register will be in place by the end of 2008. Meanwhile, various kinds of communication media, such as Ad poster, TVC, donormobile, educational leaflet, and website, serve the purpose of encouraging people to sign a donation card.

A disagreement between knowledge, attitudes, and Behaviour

With the infrastructure and means provided by the Authorities mentioned, a local survey pointed out a clear discrepancy among the awareness of organ donation (97%), the awareness of organ

donation card (89%), the willingness to donate organ after death (53%), and the committed act of signing a donation card (22%). Only 71% of the committed donors carry the donation card. (Li, PK. et al. 2001). In the same way, similar attitude towards organ donation was found in a few overseas studies. Falvo et al. (1987) argue that lack of appropriate arousal motivator may result in a lower participation rate even with a higher commitment to donate.

Socio-cultural and administrative issues

The lacking cadaveric organ donation in Hong Kong may also be caused by other socio-cultural and administrative issues, such as the traditional Chinese's negative attitude towards organ donation, the failure to identify suitable donors, the inadequate management of potential donors, different social attitudes toward organ donation policy, a lack of success in approaching the bereaved's family by the transplant coordinators. Last but not least, the attitudes of medical professionals also play an important role in the procurement of organ donation. (Gaber et al., 1990; Wolf, 1990; Lui et al., 1993; Buckley, 2000; Yeung et al., 2000)

Failure to turn potential donors into actual donors

In spite of the social-cultural and administrative hurdles, increasing the numbers of registered donors directly and informing the family members of the donation decision are more effective and efficient ways to resolve the emerging shortage of organ donors. As what Lui et al. (1993) has concluded, "the shortage of organ donation is due not to a lack of potential donors, but rather to a failure to turn potential donors into actual donor." From overseas experience, only less than 25% of potential donors become actual donors (Hibberd, 1992; Tolle, 1987; Soifer, 1989).

Envisioning a new solution to organ donation

Urging for a holistic strategy to organ donation

There is an urge to reconstitute a new organ donation scheme which is not relying on the advertising campaigns we are using today, as pointed out by Schulz et al. (2002): "the support for organ donation can hardly be further increased by campaigns." Taking opportunities from the extensive penetration of new media such as online blogging and collaborative platforms, the new scheme (Emotion Loop) aims to resolve the conflicting attitudes towards high motivation but low commitment of potential donors. It creates direct channels of communication so as to maximize the exchanges and participation of potential donors.

The proposed strategy comprises two interrelated medium (Fig. 1&2): an online patient-centric blog and customizable T-shirts printed with (distressful) messages quoted from the patients' blog.

A patient-centric blog

The online blogging platform is for patient to express their needs (Fig. 1), however, it is open to all stakeholders who participate in Organ Transplant. They include:

1. Medical professionals: Doctors, Nurses
2. Transplant personnel: Transplant coordinators, and Counsellors
3. Patients and the relatives: Patients in need, Organ recipient, and their Next-of-kin
4. Donors: Registered donors
5. Public: Potential donors (i.e. general public)

The asset of this patient-centric blog not only provides channel for patients to call out their pathological needs of organ, but also creates a convivial community for them to gain social, emotional and spiritual supports.

The distressful messages on the blog become a strong stimulus of empathy arousal which is favourable to altruism behaviours. This blog also provides an ideal platform for medical professionals, transplant personnel and public to discuss both positive and negative information and opinions concerning organ transplants. The open discussion with transplant professionals is to demystify the transplant process, which resolves a major obstacle for potential donors to commit in organ donation.

T-shirt with (distressful) message imprinted for viral marketing

Apart from encouraging interpersonal supports, this patient-centric blog also accommodates features specific to the promotion of organ donation. Instead of pleading public to sign donor cards, potential donors (viewers of the blog) can demonstrate their sympathetic support to patients by composing a make-to-order T-shirts (Fig. 2) with an illustration, a message, and a web address imprinted. On the front, there is a graphical illustration of organ(s) corresponding to the pathological needs of the patients. At the back, there are words extracted from the patient's dialogs by the potential donors. On the sleeves, there is a printed web address which allows the public to access to the specific patient's diary.

This printed T-shirt will successively become another significant empathy arousal stimulus in service of viral marketing strategy. As a result, more favourable attitudes changes towards organ

donation are expected. Everybody can actively participate in the appeals of organ donation before engaging into a higher level of commitment of registered donors.

Talking organ donation with others

Furthermore, this T-shirt serves much more than a viral marketing strategy. Wearing the T-shirt is also an affirmation of altruistic commitment towards the patient and organ donation. Consequently, it produces a sense of rewards and creates “back-channeling” communication with the others. It is to facilitate interpersonal discussion especially with family members, which represent an influential figure up to 88.9% on the refusal of cadaveric organ donation (Yeung et al. 2000).

Discussion and Conclusions

The “Emotion Loop” suggests a scheme that envisions constructive causal changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour to organ donation (Fig. 3). It embraces emotional, functional, and spiritual needs of both patients and public. There are four main functions/purposes of “Emotion Loop” : (1) to empathetically arouse peoples’ cognition; (2) engenders sympathetic and active support to patients; (3) creates a sustainable level of attention to organ donation; (4) engages general public in the commitment of organ donation. Nevertheless, before implementing the scheme, further investigations and measurements about issues like administrative duties, patients’ data and privacies are necessary.

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Fig. 1. The patient-centric blog. (Designed by Carman Ng)

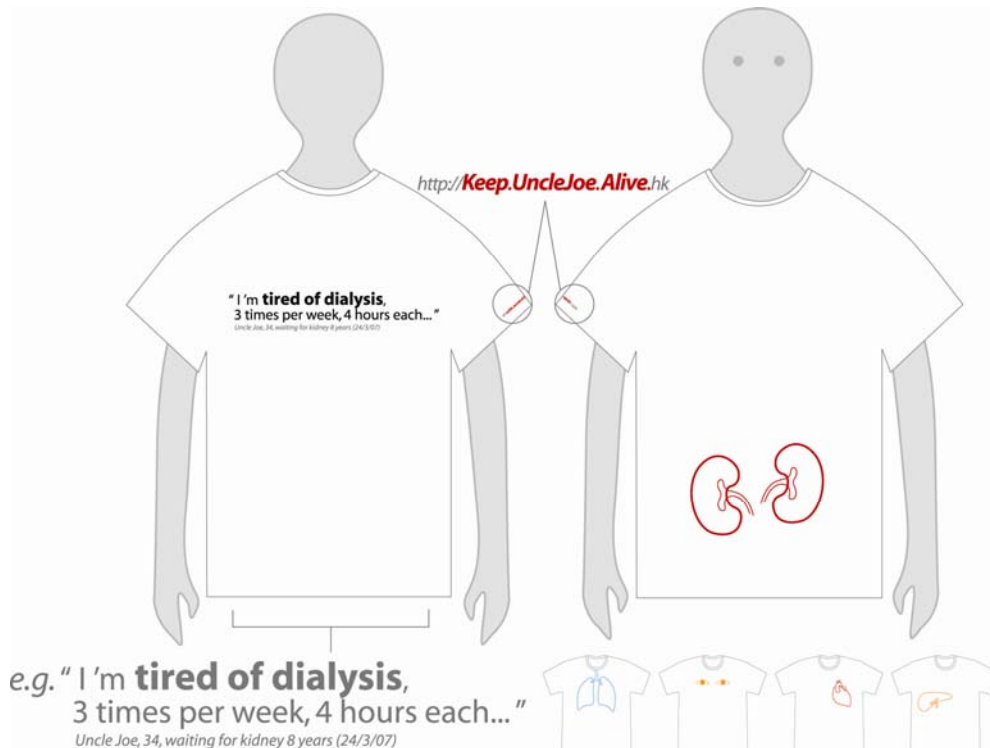


Fig. 2. The make-to-order T-shirt with a message imprinted. The message was extracted from the patient's dialogs by potential donors (viewers of the blog). (Designed by Carman NG)

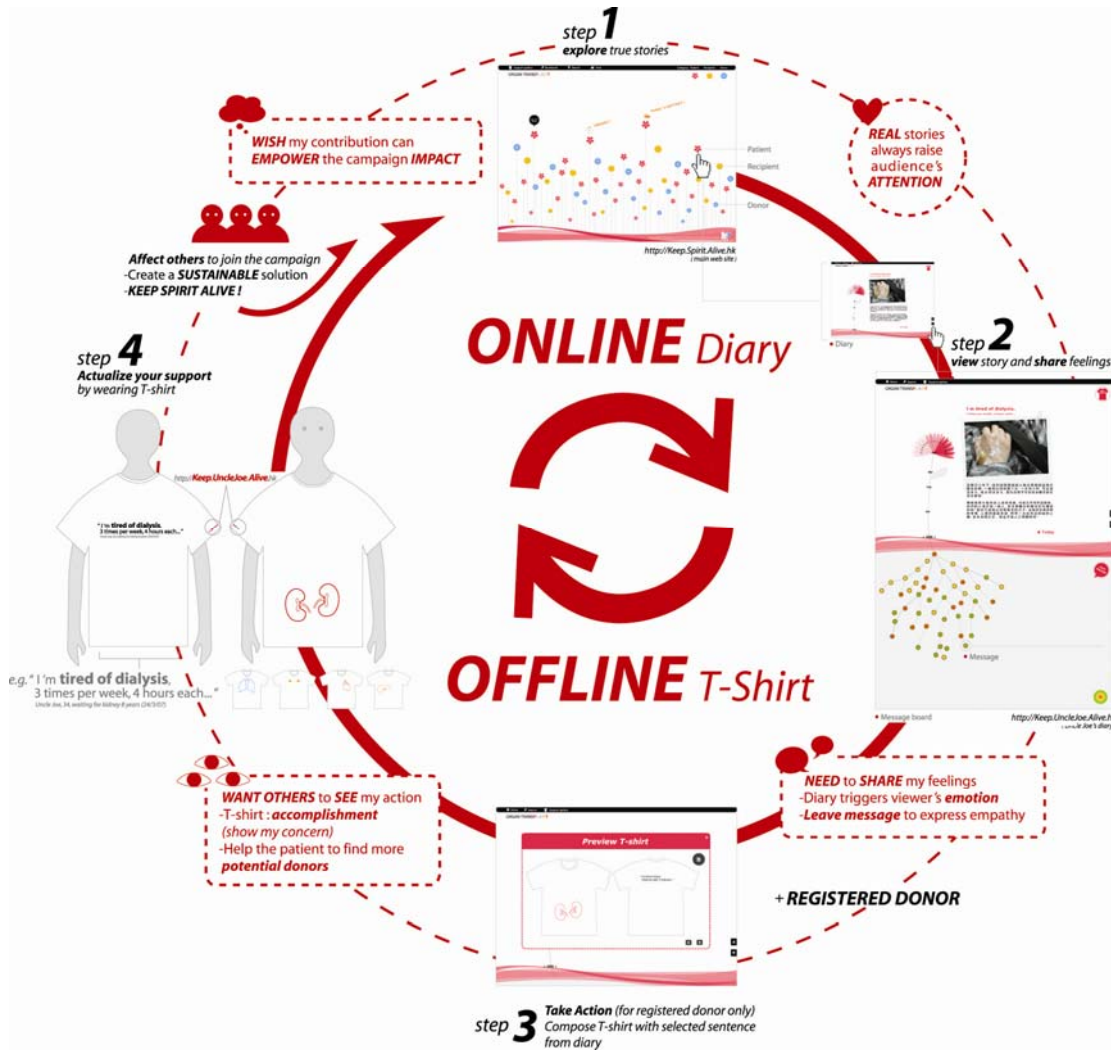


Fig. 3. “Emotion Loop” – the model of the sustainable societal design scheme (Designed by Carman NG)

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