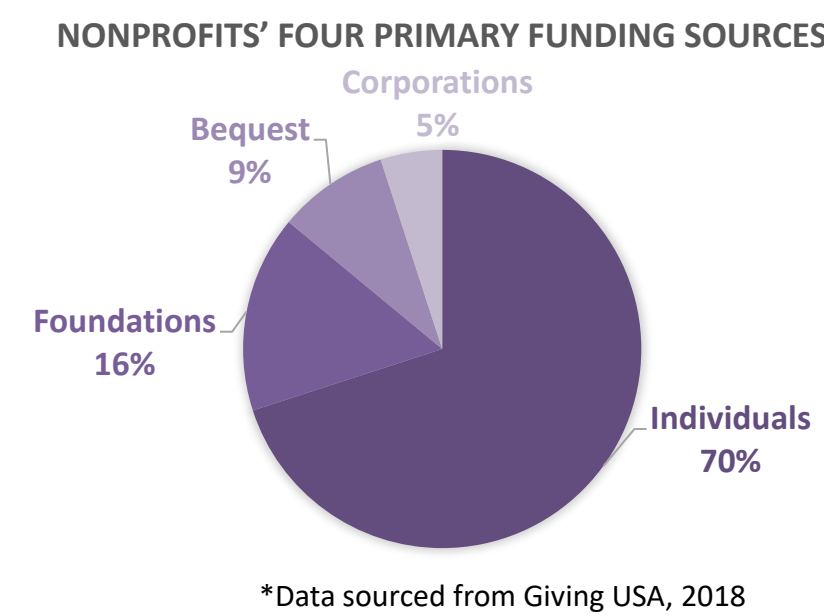


## The Gap

Unless your nonprofit organization becomes a lucky and surprised recipient of the giving spree of Mackenzie Scott (ex-wife of Jeff Bezos), you are likely going about your daily organizational functions. Most of your energy is thus, probably focused on securing more funding for the countless beneficial programs and assistance you provide your local community.



Of course, nonprofits (NPOs) also receive earnings from **non-donor-related activities** such as charging fees for services, selling products, earnings from investments, and lastly, earnings from businesses they may own and manage (Klein, 2016). It is, therefore, essential to acknowledge that nonprofits are beginning to transform **into hybrid organizational entities** and are expanding their funding capabilities by creating for-profit social enterprises.

**However, raising enough money for essential organizational functions and program rollout is still a challenge within the nonprofit industry**

Through my work with Social Enterprise Ecosystems (SEE) which allowed me to engage with local NPOs on their overall online presence it became apparent to me that social media, a seemingly free, easy to use, disruptive technology, which all NPOs have access to, was not being used effectively for fundraising. **Why not?** I took a step back and realized that donor behavior through social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok etc. is not really understood and so fundraisers don't know when and often how to target potential donors.

Internet usage of course extends beyond just social media, in **2022 there were 268 million online shoppers**. Online shopping has increased exponentially over the past decade and has brought with it a wave of research focused on understanding an individual's online purchasing process. But what does that behavior look like when no tangible product or services are offered, and individuals are being asked to give money to solve a social issue?

### Why Social Media?

As of January 2023, **4.76 billion people** (59.4% of the total global population) had one or more social media profiles

In the U.S **90% of the population** use social media

**55% of people** who engage with NPOs on social media end up taking some sort of action

**59% of them** donating to the organization

**71% of NPOs** worldwide agree that social media is effective for online fundraising

**70% of NPO funding** in the U.S. is from individuals, **90%** are on social media, yet **no clear model** of the donor's decision process when deciding to give via social media **currently exists**.

## Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this study is to understand the process social media users go through when engaging with giving behavior through social networking sites. It also aims to understand the overall challenges small, local, community-based nonprofit organizations face maintaining and managing social media accounts in a successful way, if at all. As such, the following research questions have been developed:

- (1) What process do individuals go through on social media that converts their engagement to a donation?
- (2) Why do individuals decide to donate to a nonprofit organization through social media?
- (3) How does a nonprofit organization's social media presence affect a donor's donation process?
- (4) What are the main challenges that local community-based nonprofits experience (if any) regarding maintaining and managing organizational social media platforms?

**The ultimate goal** of this research is to help me to create an online space of short educational videos for NPOs on how to fundraise through social media.

## Methodology

**Research Framework:** The research uses a **grounded theory and ethnographic approach**, both embedded within the **qualitative methodology of interpretivism**. Glesne (2016) notes that this principle focuses primarily on gaining an understanding of people's lived experiences, and therefore is ideal for understanding donor and nonprofit organizational behavior.

### Methods:

- Fifteen (15) in-depth, semi-structured **interviews** with self-identified donors who give via social networking sites.
- Three (3) **focus groups** of social media donors, nondonors, and a combination of both.
- Two (2) **case studies** of local, community-based NPOs.

**Lens:** Interest in this topic originated after working for SEE as a social media strategist. SEE assists nonprofits and social enterprises in the Mid-Ohio Valley region. I quickly began to identify a disconnect between small, local nonprofits and their social media presence. Yet, potential donors and/or volunteers (myself included) often utilize social media for various reasons that impact their involvement with the organization. I cannot, in all honesty then, claim that my approach to this research is thus entirely inductive. Abductive reasoning has impacted the ways I structured this study.

## Results

Results thus far show that **online giving** is of a **hybrid nature** which both involves a fair amount of **thought and deliberation**, and yet is extremely **impulsive**.

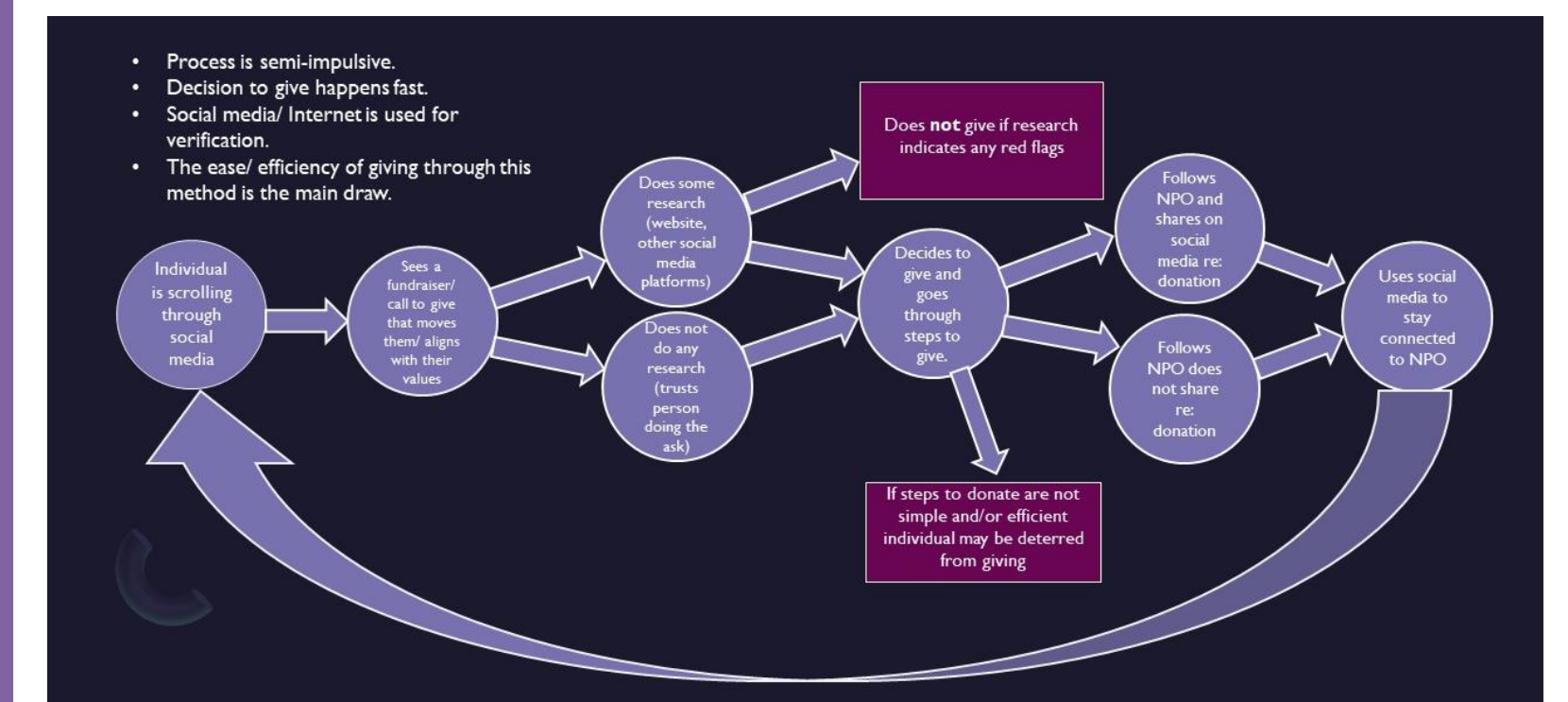
- Individuals are often triggered to donate whilst scrolling through their social media.
- Based on who is making the ask individuals will then either give or go through a process of research to legitimize the NPO and/or cause. At this stage, an alignment of values is also key and can serve as a trigger to give, or as a deterrent.
- Following this, the individual will either take the requested action of giving or be deterred.
- Individuals then follow the organization's social media pages to receive continued information of their ongoings and as a way to hold the NPO accountable.

## Results cont.

The **most critical aspect** of this journey, however, is the **payment process**. If it is complicated or untrustworthy it is likely that an individual will give up. The **efficiency** and ease of getting through that final stage of making **the payment** is what **brings back donors via social media**.

## Preliminary Model

The collected data so far has been transcribed and through the process of "axial coding" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) categories and subcategories have been identified to test their relationships and build on the emerging themes. A preliminary model illustrating an individual's process of giving through social media networks has been developed and is shown below in **Model 1**.



Model 1: Individuals' online donation process through social networking sites

## Conclusion

Social media's recent development in creating spaces to give has shifted the overall giving behavior of donors.

- Less frequent (1-3 times a year).
- Larger amounts.
- Planned out giving.

### Traditional forms of Giving



- More frequent (1-3 times per month).
- Smaller amounts.
- More impulsive giving.

### Giving through Social Media



The triggering effect of social media thus has the power to serve NPOs' fundraising needs and provides a new channel for fundraising and relationship maintenance whilst keeping NPOs accountable to their donors.

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