

Canadian Online Social Economy Organizations

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Abstract

This paper describes the preliminary findings of an innovative study undertaken to identify Canadian organizations that meet the broad definition applied to social economy enterprises and that rely on Internet-based technology to achieve their primary organizational objectives. Search engines, key informants and notices in email newsletters and discussion forums were employed to find appropriate nonprofits. Websites of potential organizations were analyzed to assess whether they met the proposed criteria. At the time of writing, 65 online organizations had been identified. Members from five of these organizations were recruited for interviews to explore their similarities to traditional social economy enterprises, their use of information technology and their understanding of online social economy enterprises. The research initiates the mapping and inclusion of online nonprofits within the Canadian social economy context.

Ce rapport décrit les résultats préliminaires d'une étude entreprise pour identifier les organismes canadiens qui rencontrent la définition large appliquée aux entreprises d'économie sociale et qui dépendent de l'Internet afin d'achever leurs objectifs organisationnels fondamentaux. Des engins de recherches, des informateurs clés et des mémos publiés dans des bulletins et dans des forums de discussion ont été utilisés afin de repérer les organismes à but non lucratif

appropriés. Les sites web des ces organismes potentiels furent analysés pour s'assurer qu'ils rencontrent les critères proposés. Au moment de la rédaction de ce rapport, 65 organismes avaient été identifiés. Des membres de cinq organismes furent recrutés pour participer à des entrevues pour explorer les similarités entre leur organisme et les entreprises d'économie sociale traditionnelles, leur utilisation de la technologie d'information et leur compréhension des entreprises d'économie sociale en ligne. Cette recherche initie l'inclusion et un tracé de la carte des organismes à but non lucratif en ligne dans le contexte de l'économie sociale canadienne.

Este trabajo describe los resultados preliminares de un estudio innovador realizado con el fin de identificar organizaciones canadienses que se incluyen en la definición amplia de la economía social y que usan tecnologías de información y comunicación (TICs) para alcanzar sus objetivos. La metodología para identificar a las organizaciones consistió en búsquedas en la internet, informantes claves, y avisos en boletines, revistas y foros de discusión electrónicos. Los sitios de las organizaciones identificadas fueron analizados para determinar si se encuadraban dentro de los criterios propuestos. Hasta ahora escritura, hemos identificado 65 organizaciones en línea. Reclutaron a los miembros a partir del cinco de estas organizaciones para que las entrevistas exploren sus semejanzas a las empresas sociales tradicionales de la

economía, a su uso de la tecnología de información y a su comprensión de las empresas sociales en línea de la economía. La investigación inicia traz y la inclusión de nonprofits en línea dentro del contexto social canadiense de la economía.

This paper describes a study undertaken to identify Canadian organizations that meet a broad definition applied to social economy enterprises and that rely on the Internet to meet their primary organizational objectives.

Although traditional nonprofits are beginning to turn to the Internet to enhance their public profile and their member outreach, organizations that rely on information technology for their work, virtual nonprofits, are rarely included in any mapping of the nonprofit and voluntary sector. Exploratory studies provide an opportunity to generate information on topics that have received little scientific attention (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The purpose for this exploratory study is to find and shed some light on these enterprises so that we then can begin to explore their human,

social, economic and political contributions to the social economy.

Background

There is little doubt that information and communication technologies are having a significant impact on modern life. The Internet has changed the way Canadians work, shop, bank and entertain themselves. Recent Canadian surveys show that almost three-quarters (72%) of the population have Internet access (Canadian Internet Project, 2005), with 64% of households having at least one person who regularly uses the Internet at home (Ipsos Canada, 2005). Internet usage by Canadians between the ages of 16 to 24 has reached 90.4%, with computer-mediated social interaction being the most popular online activity (Media Awareness Network, 2005).

As early as 2001, the Pew Internet and American Life Project reported that one in five

Internet users belonged to at least one online community (Horrigan, 2001). The rapid growth of online group environments has attracted the attention of social scientists and prompted considerable debate about the Internet's impact on society (Castells, 1996; Wellman et al., 1996). Utopian views of this technology claim that it can facilitate new forms of egalitarian association that transcend the limitations of space and time (Baym, 1997; Rheingold, 1993). Dystopians argue that people's absorption in an individualized technical environment increases the fragmentation and alienation that is prevalent in today's society and contributes to the decline of face-to-face associational activity (Kraut et al., 1998; LaRose, Eastin, & Gregg, 2001). However, despite reports about the decline in face-to-face associational activity (Putnam, 2000); people, in increasing numbers, are turning to the Internet to communicate with others who share their interests. Online communities or groups may

be the fastest growing form of social organization.

Online groups and organizations have spurred research interest in a number of academic disciplines, for example, sociology (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002), psychology (McKenna & Seidman, 2005), political science (Deibert, 2000), business, and management (Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, & Vitale, 2000; McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000). In comparison, these types of enterprises have received far less attention from nonprofit researchers (Brainard & Brinkerhoff, 2004), perhaps, because nonprofit organizations have been slow to adopt information technology (Spencer, 2002). The reasons for this are rooted in the everyday reality of these types of organizations. The majority of nonprofit associations have limited resources, both human and financial. Nonprofit organizations have traditionally engaged in hands-on activity, often with the disadvantaged who

have limited, if any, access to the Internet. This can make it difficult to imagine justifying financial and human investment in technology as a priority (Spencer, 2002). Nonprofits that do not have technology champions in positions of leadership tend to be wary of emerging information and communication platforms (Corder, 2001).

This situation, however, is changing. Spurred by the increasing prevalence of Internet-based technology in everyday life and the mainstream success of advocacy organizations such as Moveon.org, many nonprofits are beginning to build a web presence. These organizations are using the Internet to promote their mission, to enhance their fundraising and to communicate efficiently with their constituencies (Brainard & Siplon, 2004). Groups that have an established offline presence and that use the Internet to enhance their outreach potential are known in nonprofit circles. Groups that rely on the Internet to

support their mission and objectives and that maintain little face-to-face presence run the risk of becoming, to borrow a term from Smith (2000), dark matter associations (Brainard & Brinkerhoff, 2004). They tend to attract little research attention because they do not obviously appear to fit the prevailing paradigm applied to mainstream nonprofits (Brainard & Brinkerhoff, 2004; Smith, 2000). These online associations are rarely included in any mapping of the nonprofit sector, rendering them nearly invisible to social economy research.

There are a number of challenges to including online nonprofit enterprises within the study of the social economy. The first challenge is to identify them. The concept of the social economy and the organizations that make up this sector has attracted definitional debate. As yet, there are no universally accepted definitions applied to the social economy. In addition, concepts operationalized for place-

based phenomena have not always transferred well to the online milieu. Online nonprofits, characterized by fluid boundaries, widely fluctuating and partially committed membership, and informal organizational structures (Wellman, 2001), challenge traditional views of social economy enterprises.

Another challenge is our acceptance of the metaphorical image that a dividing line or a membrane separates the physical and the virtual environments. This is a false dichotomy; the Internet does not have a separate existence outside of the real world (Wellman, 2002). The Internet is woven into everyday activity. Some organizations are reliant on the Internet to support their extensive place-based activities; others make limited use of a physical place to support their largely online enterprise and still others blend platforms and environments. It remains unclear or perhaps immaterial, which of the

above might be considered a 'virtual' social economy enterprise.

Since this research is exploratory, a broad, inclusive, definition, based on the work of Quarter, Mook and Richmond (2003) is employed to identify potential online social economy enterprises. This perspective incorporates a wide variety of organizations such as cooperatives, social enterprises, community development initiatives and nonprofit member associations, including civil society groups. Quarter, Mook and Richmond (2003) suggest four organizational characteristics that are useful in describing these enterprises, a strong social mission, a member or public orientation, a dependence in varying degrees on voluntary participation and member engagement in democratic decision-making. In order to identify online social economy enterprises, an additional characteristic added to the above is the enterprise's reliance on Internet technology to

achieve its objectives. To manage the scope of this initial exploration of online social economy organizations, the study limits its search to organizations that originate in Ontario or that have distinct Ontario sub-units or chapters. A few potential online social economy enterprises outside of Ontario, recommended by participants in the study, have also been included.

Methods

Search engines and snowball sampling were employed to find potential online social economy organizations. Snowball sampling is often useful in identifying populations that are difficult to find (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Key experts in the field of social and community informatics, as well as nonprofit technology practitioners, were canvassed for their suggestions of organizations that might fit the study's criteria. Suggested organizations were then contacted and asked for their

recommendations of other potential online social economy type groups. The procedure was repeated with each new organization. Several organizations posted a description of the study in online newsletters or forums and word of the research began to circulate through a variety of networks. Leaders of groups found in this manner were asked to participate in interviews, to be carried out online, by phone or in person.

Websites of organizations identified by this method were analyzed to assess the degree to which they met the proposed criteria.

Members from five of these organizations were interviewed to explore similarities to traditional social economy enterprises, their use of information technology and their perceptions of online social economy enterprises.

Findings

At the time of writing, 65 organizations had been identified as potential online social economy enterprises. Using a preliminary grouping system, the organizations fell into seven categories. The categories were civil society groups, including human rights, social justice and social change organizations (16), community development organizations, including community economic development groups (12), health groups that address children's, women's and disabled individual's health concerns (10), feminist organizations that address gender equality (7), independent news organizations that present alternative perspectives on current events (6) and arts and education groups that support online expressions of art, culture and learning outside of formal education (6). The remaining category, other, was made up of nine organizations, including online directories, technical support groups, etc. Five short cases based on analysis of websites and interviews

with organizational leaders are presented below.

Toronto Social Purchasing Portal

A Social Purchasing Portal (SPP) is an Internet-accessed business-to-business database that connects socially responsible companies with local businesses that have agreed to employ people who need support to enter or to succeed in the workforce. It is based on a model, which incorporates a blended financial and social bottom line in an attempt to facilitate economic development in a targeted community (Social Purchasing Portal Canada, 2007). Purchasers can search the database by keyword, by type of goods or services, and by location. The search produces a list of vendors that match the purchaser's criteria, including more in-depth information about these businesses. In addition, the SPP system supports advertisements and job postings.

The first SPP, the Vancouver SPP, was developed in 2003 and has generated over \$1 million of new business activity in the downtown east side and has facilitated the employment of 75 individuals (LePage, 2006). The success of Vancouver's SPP has been a catalyst for the creation of other SPPs across Canada.

Toronto Social Purchasing Portal was created in 2004 to assist the city's long-term unemployed, immigrants, and urban Aboriginal people. It was developed through a partnership between three nonprofit organizations, the Learning Enrichment Foundation, an established community organization that provides programs and services for the disadvantaged, Miziwe Biik, an organization that provides Aboriginal employment and training programs and the Information Technology Association of Canada for Ontario (Toronto Social Purchasing Portal, 2007a). This partnership is

described as a true collaboration as each of the participating nonprofits contributes their specific strengths, expertise and networks to the enterprise and is actively engaged in overall decision-making for the venture. The long-term goal of this enterprise is to become self-sustaining and to make social purchasing an accepted form of economic transaction in Toronto's corporate community.

To join, companies fill out a purchasing partnership form that asks them to make a commitment to support job creation by privileging suppliers who are members of the portal. Suppliers must also submit a form and commit to hiring the hard to employ.

Representatives from the Social Purchasing Portal follow up on these applications offline to make sure that the applicants understand their commitment and the premise behind the SPP program (Toronto Social Purchasing Portal, 2007b). At this time, the Toronto SPP requires substantial face-to-face relationship

building by portal representatives in order to develop a base of purchasers and suppliers. Although the Toronto SPP requires face-to-face activity, it is dependent on Internet-based technology to fulfill its objectives. The interviewee felt that the initiative was a useful example of a developing online social economy project. He cautioned that the phrase ‘online social economy’ was confusing and that many community economic development groups may not consider themselves online or social, even if they fit the criteria for the study.

Torontothebetter.net

In early 2000, Torontothebetter.net became the city’s first online progressive business directory (Torontothebetter, 2007b). Torontothebetter is an initiative of Libra Knowledge and Information Services Co-op Inc, a unionized worker’s co-operative. The goal of this enterprise is to facilitate informed shopping based on an individual’s principles.

Torontothebetter helps people put their money where their values are (Torontothebetter, 2005b). Torontothebetter is supported primarily by the profits earned by the Libra Cooperative. Fees for business listings and a shoppers’ card program account for only a third of Torontothebetter’s funds. Libra Co-operative has made the decision to develop Torontothebetter slowly, as a unique, debt-free, value driven project.

Purveyors of goods and services can be nominated by customers or they can get a listing directly if they meet certain criteria. Aside from regional rules (no U.S. head offices); the businesses are assessed by the degree to which they exhibit the following principles:

- Involve excluded or inadequately served sections of the community (community category)

- Educate consumers and offer them economic participation in business benefits (consumer category)
- Actively support environmental improvement (environment category)
- Provide workers with right to participate in business management and economic benefits (worker category)
- Specialize in services to the types of business identified above (services category) (Torontothebetter, 2005a, ¶ 2)

The interviewees reported that they also make use of the Internet to research an enterprise's credibility and fit. They begin by reviewing the potential participant's website and then they search for any news, blogs, and reviews that have information about the business. If there are doubts, Libra workers are canvassed for their opinions. Libra workers come from activist backgrounds and are connected to other progressive organizations, including the Social Investment Organization. The

information embedded in these networks provides third party assurance of a potential vendor's bone fides. As of July 1, 2007, Torontothebetter had 55 participating businesses in its directory.

Potential customers can search the site by product, service, category or name. Once they have located a business, they can find out more about the enterprise, such as its mission, services, special offers, location and contact information (Torontothebetter, 2007a). The website supports a blog for news, events and comments about social shopping and businesses. Shoppers and businesses make some use of the blog as an interactive communication environment.

Libra has been a worker co-op since 1989 and has supported this mission and values-driven online project since 2000. The interviewees were familiar with social enterprises and with information technology and perceived

Torontothebetter as a good example of online social economy enterprise.

Ontario Women's Health Network

The Ontario Women's Health Network (OWHN), incorporated in 1997, is a provincial nonprofit that advocates for women's equitable access to effective health services (Ontario Women's Health Network, 2007a).

The organization's mission is to:

- Give voices to women's health issues
- Link women to resources and tools
- Build and strengthen the ability of individual women and communities to act on their health issues. (Ontario Women's Health Network, 2007a, ¶5)

OWHN believes that information about women's health and the resources that support wellness must be shared publicly. With the help of volunteers, it has developed a website that provides up-to-date information and resources that can assist women in making

informed health decisions. OWHN has created a regularly updated Internet directory of Ontario women's services and programs so that women can find health resources close to home (Ontario Women's Health Network, 2007b). The website also provides general information about common female health concerns and links to more in-depth articles and publications (Ontario Women's Health Network, 2007c).

In addition to sharing information through its website, the OWHN publishes a weekly E-Digest and a quarterly E-Bulletin. The E-Digest features health related news, announcements and events. It is an open, unmoderated list and all OWHN members may post to it. The E-Bulletin provides more in-depth coverage of particular health related topics such as poverty and women's health, violence against women, HIV/AIDS. The website also has an extensive alphabetic list of links to other Ontario women's organizations.

OWHN does not have any core funding. It relies on money from contracted, often research type, projects to cover the salaries of its 1.5 FTE (4 part-time employees), to maintain its office and to operate its website and email outreach. This work involves considerable face-to-face activity, for example, conducting focus groups for organizations such as the Hospital Report Research Collaborative, Women's College Hospital, Women's Health Matters and York University. Even though OWHN relies on this type of work for financial survival, it employs Internet technology to fulfil much of its organizational mission.

The OWHN interviewee could appreciate her organization as type of online social economy project. She reported, however, that the organization engaged in little future planning about the employment information technology. The organization was surviving from project to

project and they did not have the resources to investigate how emerging technology could further benefit the organization or the women that they serve.

DAWN Ontario - DisAbled Women's Network Ontario

Formed in 1992, DAWN Ontario is volunteer, feminist organization that advocates inclusion and equality for women and girls with disabilities (DAWN Ontario, 2007a). Its mission is to empower its members to advocate for their needs, to engage in coalition building with other sympathetic organizations and to bridge the digital divide. DAWN has attempted to achieve its mission through education, research, resource development, capacity building and knowledge sharing (DAWN Ontario, 2007d). DAWN has 426 registered members and women with disabilities make up 100% of the board.

DAWN launched its website in 1998. In 2000, it began to develop online discussion forums so that members could share information, support, and build their individual and group capacity for self-advocacy (DAWN Ontario, 2007b). In addition to the above online activities, the website also includes an updated news and campaigns section and access to a variety of resources such as a Media Kit, an Advocacy Tool Kit, a Disability Access Checklist , a Virtual Activist Training Reader and a Violence Against Women section that focuses on women with disabilities (DAWN Ontario, 2007a). The organization also hosts and maintains websites for organizations with less technical expertise.

One of DAWN's major strengths is its ability to form cross-sectoral networks with organizations that share their concern for social justice. The organization has developed links with 185 like-minded Canadian groups (DAWN Ontario, 2007c). An abbreviated list

of organizations with whom it has worked closely includes, Ontario Social Safety Network, National Association of Women and the Law, Cross Sectoral Violence Against Women Strategy Group, Lesbian and Breast Cancer Project and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

DAWN uses these collaborative opportunities to raise awareness of accessibility issues and to promote the full and equal participation of women with disabilities. Much of this activity occurs online and DAWN Ontario has developed a positive reputation for its effectiveness in mobilizing its members and allies through its website and forums.

DAWN Ontario has been operating without funding or paid staff since January 1999 (DAWN Ontario, 2007a). This lack of funding has severely limited the organization's face-to-face activity, its ability to provide copies of print or video material and, recently, its telephone access. This year, DAWN received a

donation from the Elementary Teachers Foundation of Ontario to offset some of the website's hosting fees.

DAWN Ontario is a good example of an online social economy enterprise in that it has a social mission; it is a public social property that is governed by volunteers who are actively engaged in civic participation. A quote from the interviewee poignantly illustrates the experience of DAWN members.

I think for many of our members and even for our board, it was the first time any of us had engaged in such meaningful work (outside our families) ... the bulk of us are ordinary women, many without formal education, many socially isolated and many too accustomed to living in our own little worlds. The new world that had opened for us via online activism was incredibly empowering and for the first time, many of us felt like we were contributing to a great causehelping in some small way to work to positively affect social change.

K-Net

Kuhkenah Network (K-Net) is an information and communication technologies initiative of Keewaytinook Okimakanak (KO), a nonprofit, non-political, tribal First Nation's council that represents six remote communities in the Sioux Lookout region of northwestern Ontario (K-Net, 2007c; Keewaytinook Okimakanak, 2007). K-Net provides telecommunication infrastructure, services, training and support to remote First Nations, some of which can only be reached by small aircraft. In doing so, it enhances local health, education, social and economic initiatives. K-Net is governed by the KO council that sets the long-term goals for the enterprise, ensuring that the service supports local cultural self-determination (Ramirez, Aitkin, Jamieson, & Richardson, 2003). K-Net projects are funded through a combination of provincial and federal programs and, like other nonprofit organizations, are susceptible to yearly pressure for ongoing funding for their various initiatives.

K-Net was established in 1994 and immediately began work to provide communication resources to the KO communities. Starting with a Bulletin Board System, the organization has evolved to a point where it now offers a range of digital communication services, including sophisticated multi-media applications (Fiser & Clement, 2006). From the beginning, KO and K-Net understood that community development meant more than economic development. K-Net supports a variety of projects that enhance the quality of life in these remote communities.

To address the health care needs of KO communities, K-Net developed the capacity to support a set of telemedicine services such as telediagnosics, telepsychiatry, teleophthamology, etc. (K-Net, 2007b). Rather than traveling hundreds of miles to get service,

people can now stay in their community, in their homes, and receive quality health care.

Educational support was also seen as a priority for the people in these remote communities, especially since 50% of the region's population is less than 20 years of age. K-Net's educational initiatives include the operation an INAC funded First Nations SchoolNet helpdesk that provides technical support for First Nation K-12 schools across Ontario in the development and provision of Internet connectivity and various online applications including IP videoconferencing support service. K-Net has also been instrumental in the development of Keewaytinook Internet High School for grades 9 and 10 as well as providing access to other distance education opportunities (K-Net, 2007a). These programs strengthen the community by enabling young people to engage in learning activities with their peers in

a familiar environment and to share their knowledge with the rest of the community.

In addition to the above, K-Net's portal supports a variety of online services from chat rooms and individual websites to band office programs and promotion of Aboriginal arts, crafts, and culture (K-Net, 2007d). The organization is recognized as an international leader in the provision of information and communication technology in support of First Nation community self-determination. KO and K-Net created a research institute (KORI – <http://research.knet.ca>) in 2004 to study the uses of information and communication technology for the advancement of Aboriginal issues (Okimakanak, 2007).

K-Net is a social economy enterprise that uses a wide range emerging Internet technology to achieve the health, education, social and economic objectives of the KO First Nations communities. When asked how he would

describe an online social economy enterprise, the interviewee responded

In thinking about this one, I think I would use words like engaging, transformative, innovative, empowering, etc. I use these descriptive words to highlight how these communication tools provide a means for the remote and rural communities to now have a voice that can be heard anywhere in the world. They are now able to share and market their knowledge, experience and products as they see fit instead of depending on others to be taking care of them. They are now able to create new opportunities, services and products for themselves, their community and for others in far away places. They now have choices of how, where and when they can receive support services including education, justice, health, counseling and other applications that most urban dwellers take for granted.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify online enterprises that fit the broad definition and characteristics of social economy organizations and that fulfilled their primary organizational objectives using Internet technology. Sixty-five organizations were

found by employing Internet search engines, key informants and a snowball sampling technique. The search to-date suggests that civil society organizations, community development projects and health groups tend to be the most prevalent types of online social economy enterprises. This supports previous research findings that advocacy and health groups have been very successful in harnessing Internet-based technology to the benefit of their respective constituencies (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Eysenbach, Powell, Englesakis, Rizo, & Stern, 2004).

Although these findings are interesting it should be noted that these are only preliminary results and represent an initial attempt at locating online social economy organizations. One of the limitations of snowball sampling is its inherent bias towards over-representing certain findings due to similar social identities or homophily within accessed social networks (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This study has yet to

replicate the search procedures to find, for example, peer-to-peer online professional groups or avocational interest groups that fit the criteria for social economy enterprises.

A secondary purpose of this study was to examine a number of potential online social economy enterprises to explore their similarity to traditional social economy organizations, their use of information technology and their understanding of the concept of an online social economy enterprise. All five online social economy organizations fit the broad definition used in this study with variations in their dependence on volunteers and in the active participation of their members.

Although the enterprises employed Internet-based technology to achieve their organizational objectives, their use of this technology lies on a continuum in terms of the amount of face-to-face activity in which they engage and the type and degree of Internet-

based communication they employ to interact with their constituents.

Toronto SPP and OWHN engaged in the most face-to-face activity and employed minimum computer-mediated interactive communication with their members. Toronto SPP only used online forms to initiate the SPP process.

OWHN reached out to its members through an email list that disseminated e-digests and e-bulletins. Members could respond to the circulated information, however, this rarely occurred. Torontothebetter occupied the middle ground and used a blog to communicate news, events and to highlight certain progressive businesses and their practices. Members were encouraged to comment and contribute their own content and this occurred several times a month. DAWN Ontario and K-Net made extensive use of their Internet-based communication platforms to interact with their members and the public. Both organizations employed technology not

only to achieve their missions but also to accomplish day-to-day activity. DAWN Ontario accomplished its work primarily by email, while K-Net was able to incorporate many emerging technology platforms.

Although all five organizations fit the criteria of the study, the extent and degree to which they use Internet-based technology to engage their members is an important consideration when developing the concept of online social economy enterprises. Active member participation is a key descriptor of social economy types of enterprises. The five cases described in this study appear to be representative of the general state of online nonprofit development, that is, most organizations are primarily in the brochure stage with only a small number of innovative associations actively participating online with their members and with like-minded organizations (Kenix, 2007). A question to be considered is whether the criteria applied to

online social economy organizations should be made more stringent and limited to groups like DAWN Ontario and K-Net, which support a certain level of member Internet-mediated communication. Unfortunately, this would effectively exclude many online associations that contribute to the social economy and may further perpetuate the artificial online-offline dichotomy.

The interview participants exhibited a mixed understanding of the concept of online social economy organizations. With the exception of Torontothebetter and K-Net, the other organizations found the terms, online social economy confusing. Sometimes it was a matter of the word social, other times the word economy was difficult for the participant to apply to their organization, and one person questioned their organization's online status. Further studies will need to clarify these terms when recruiting participants.

This study is an initial step in understanding online social economy enterprises. More examples of potential social economy enterprises that incorporate emerging Internet technology need to be found. In addition, the scope of this project could only touch the surface of complex social economy projects such as K-Net. More in-depth case studies are required to systematically examine the contributions these organizations make to the social economy sector.

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