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case study

When starting out to write this the initial goal was to analyze one campaign from a single organization. However, I quickly was intrigued by two very successfully, but extremely different, organizations: 350.org and Surfrider. Hence, I decided to look at a campaign from each of them that tackles the state of the world's oceans: #ExxonKnew and Rise Above Plastics. Not only did I find both campaigns fascinating, I also realized that looking at two organizations with different missions, goals and philosophies would aid me in narrowing down the scope and outlook for my own thesis.

the organizations

350.org is a worldwide organization that focuses on renewable energy and reducing our dependency on fossil fuels. On their website, they describe themselves as “using online campaigns, grassroots organizing, and mass public actions to oppose new coal, oil and gas projects, take money out of the companies that are heating up the planet, and build 100% clean energy solutions that work for all.” In order to achieve the goal of having a safe climate and just, better future, 350 has three distinct goals: keeping carbon in the ground, building a new, more equitable low-carbon economy and pressuring governments into limiting emissions. As such, they have a global reach – their network extends to 188 countries. In line with this, they also rely heavily on collaboration and are frequently working with organizations like Greenpeace and Environmental Action to achieve their mission. At the heart of their fight is the belief that the fossil fuel industry exerts too much influence over the public realm, especially in politics. As such, 350 usually creates campaigns designed to increase awareness about an issue (i.e. through social media sharing and prompting mainstream news coverage) and/or exert political pressure (i.e. through petition signing, mass mobilizations and public demonstrations).

In contrast, Surfrider is an organization that was created by a small group of surfers in Malibu who strongly believed in preserving the world's oceans and beaches. Thus, Surfrider's mission is much more constrained than 350's. Surfrider's “vision is to keep our beaches open to everyone, promote smart coastal development that avoids coastal impacts, protect special ocean and coastal places before they are threatened, ensure the water is clean to surf and swim and the beaches are free of plastic litter.” They are “a community of everyday people who passionately protect our playground – the ocean, waves, and beaches that provide us so much enjoyment.” Surfrider conducts activities in 5 focus areas: beach access, clean water, ocean protection, coastal preservation and plastic pollution. They also have a much narrower scope with chapters only in the United States. Surfrider achieves its mission through campaigns and projects. “Campaigns define [Surfrider] as an organization” they have a “defined beginning, middle and end” and are how Surfrider measures a lot of its success. Its campaigns span from implementing plastic bag bans to expanding marine sanctuaries and completing beach restorations. They also have ongoing projects like the Blue Water Taskforce which tests ocean waters all year long and their Ocean Friendly Gardens initiative.

the initiatives

#ExxonKnew is an initiative that is aiming to raise awareness about the fact that Exxon Mobil knew about climate change and the devastating effects its oil refineries were having over a decade ago. However, instead of doing something about it or acting in the best interest of our planet, Exxon executives started a widespread campaign meant to deemphasize global warming and discredit those who were working to stop climate change. The campaign took on a renewed effort when Rex Tillerson was appointed to Secretary of Energy by President Donald Trump. The goal of the campaign is to ultimately make Exxon answer for its crimes (fraud, knowingly misinforming the public etc...) as well as reduce the damage Secretary Tillerson can do to the planet. The aim is to do so through multiple petitions, state specific initiatives in states like Oregon, Iowa, Maine and Vermont as well as increasing mainstream news coverage of the issue. The campaign has also included a mock public trial of Exxon Mobil at the 2015 Climate World Summit.

Rise Above Plastics (RAP) is an initiative aimed at reducing the amount of plastic in our oceans as well as raising awareness about the danger these plastics cause to marine life. RAP's chief goals are reducing plastic consumption on an individual level as well as enacting plastic bag bans and other pieces of local legislation. Thus, in addition to providing support and resources aimed at helping people through the public ordinance process (and thereby implement a plastic bag ban) RAP also has "Ten Ways to Rise Above Plastics" which is an easy list to reduce single use plastic consumption in your own life. The RAP campaign has also created a speaker program with the aim of educating as many people as possible about the dangers of single use plastics.

comparing the sites

The first point of contact with both the campaigns is their respective web presence – both their websites as well as the campaign pages. When comparing the two, the differences are apparent right away and speak to the fundamental differences in goals and scale of the two organizations. I've broken down the organizations' webpages as well as the campaign pages through screen capture videos linked below:

[350.org homepage breakdown](#) (Please imagine the title slide says "350.org homepage breakdown" I don't know why it didn't export as such)

[Surfrider homepage breakdown](#)

[350.org campaign page](#)

[Surfrider campaign page](#)

Ultimately, what becomes clear by looking at these two sites is how their web presence reflects their differing approaches and styles. 350.org is a multinational non-profit focused on building awareness, petitions and encouraging people to start their own grassroots campaigns. As such, their website is sleek, modern and very deliberate – someone has clearly spent time deciding what should go where and how to best organize the different elements. Additionally, social media capabilities and shareable media assets are built right into the site and prioritized over other things. In contrast, Surfrider, while not having an ugly site by any means, has a slightly less professional web presence – it has repetitive pages, submenus that don't quite make sense and a

lot of copy on their pages. All things that make sense given they are a smaller organization. Additionally, because of this they have more information regarding their approach, funding and impact to validate themselves in the eyes of a first-time viewer. Their site is also constructed to emphasize their local outreach, physical events and achievements emphasizing their focus as an organization on mobilization on the ground through active chapters.

comparing impact

While web presence and information availability is important, the impact of an initiative is its true test. This is where I found things got really interesting for me. As I had first analyzed the two initiatives based on their web pages I was drawn to 350.org's #ExxonKnew. The campaign was catchy, well laid out and was built for sharing. In contrast, Surfrider's website lacked the 'pizzaz' and graphic layouts to pack a punch. However, when I started to look more closely at the impact each organization was claiming to be having and how they were reporting on their success the picture began to change.

In addition to having an "our impact" section on their homepage:



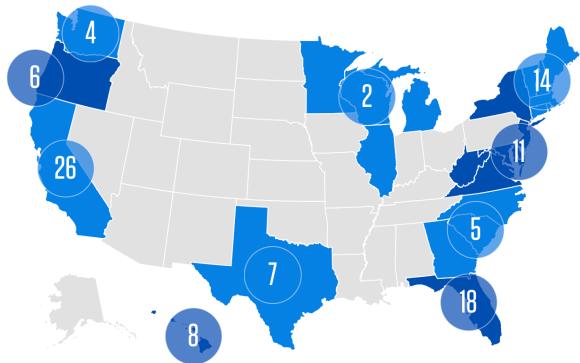
screenshot of "our impact" section on the homepage of Surfrider.org

Surfrider also lays out their campaign success and progress very clearly at <https://www.surfrider.org/campaigns>:

SURFRIDER FOUNDATION HAS 435 VICTORIES SINCE 2006

Active Victories

Click on a region



THEMES

Beach Access: 13 campaigns
Coastal Preservation: 19 campaigns
Clean Water: 24 campaigns
Ocean Protection: 17 campaigns
Plastic Pollution: 28 campaigns

SCALE

Local: 66 campaigns
Regional: 12 campaigns
State: 24 campaigns
National: 6 campaigns
Total: 108 campaigns

screenshot of interactive campaigns map off Surfrider.org

Not only can you quickly see all the current and ongoing campaigns you can also see their past “victories” aka successful campaigns. The list breaks down every campaign by region as well as by which of area the campaign falls under, making it easy to locate the different initiatives. Each initiative listed is also a clickable link which enables you to ascertain even more about the campaign.

All active campaigns in California

CAMPAIGN ▾	THEME ▾	STATE ▾	REGION ▾	DATE ▾
Bring Down Matilija Dam	Coastal Preservation	CA	California	
Broad Beach Restoration Project - Malibu	Coastal Preservation	CA	California	Jan 2009
California Plastic Foam Container Ban	Plastic Pollution	CA	California	Mar 2017
Clean Up Cowell's	Clean Water	CA	California	Sep 2013

screenshot off Surfrider.org

Additionally, there is a very similar format to most of the local chapter websites which includes an “our programs” section. While not all of the chapters have detailed accounts of each program/initiative, as they choose to focus on different ones, they do provide reports on what action is being achieved on the local level in relation to the larger Surfrider campaigns. For

example, the [West LA/Malibu chapter](#) of Surfrider has a page dedicated to RAP and under the “History of RAP in LA” heading explains the following:

“Leveraging the existing [RAP] model, the West LA/Malibu Surfrider Chapter has expanded on the program, with success in two areas: Education and Local City Ordinances. Since 2009, trained adult volunteers have delivered approximately 20 presentations per year to approximately 2000+ total people in community groups, education systems, businesses and more. At Environmental Charter High School, a leading charter school located in a diverse area of south Los Angeles, the chapter has created a student speaker program. Over the past 3 years, the student program has trained 50 student speakers who have in turn delivered their presentation to more than 8,000 Los Angelenos. Because of its effectiveness, the Rise Above Plastics program has become part of every student’s required green curriculum. The school also offers educators the opportunity to learn and share the Rise Above Plastics program at their own schools through a course offered at UCLA Extension.

OTIS College of Art & Design has also partnered with the local chapter to offer students a Rise Above Plastics class through it’s integrated learning department for the past three years. To date, the Rise Above Plastics Program has reached approximately 50,000+ persons in Los Angeles Metro areas.”

This gives someone perusing the website a very clear and direct understanding that this campaign is achieving real results on the ground and engaging with large numbers of people. It also highlights how getting involved on the local level helps to achieve a broader organization-wide goal.

350.org on the other hand is much less clear when it comes to reporting impact. It is understandable in many ways as their goals are so much bigger and less concrete: proving you have raised awareness is more difficult than proving you passed a plastic bag ban. On top of that many of the things 350.org is trying to accomplish with its initiatives, #ExxonKnew included, require legislation to be passed and action enacted at the very highest level of politics. Hence, everything takes much longer and is much more difficult. That being said, it was virtually impossible to find any type of quantitative or qualitative assessment of how the campaign was doing and whether it was achieving results. You could easily sign petitions or share things on social media but there was very little to suggest progress towards mission. I even attempted to Google the initiative to see if there were outside reports talking about its effectiveness to no avail. Given the volume of reports on the Exxon Mobile issue it was impossible to find specifics relating to 350.org’s involvement outside of the official sites. In some ways, the high volume of news reports covering the issue and the fact that press releases about holding Exxon Mobil accountable and the emergence of new damning information as recently as June 2017 indicate that 350.org is succeeding in bringing the issue to the attention of mainstream news, it is difficult to measure the impact of the campaign. I finally did find an assessment of the campaign in the 350.org [2016 Annual Report](#) which entailed searching for the annual report itself rather than by the campaign. The annual report painted a relatively optimistic picture. #ExxonKnew was only launched in 2016 and by the time of the Annual Report had garnered 520,000 signatures on the petition and had 4 attorney generals sign on.

Exxon Knew



520,000 petition signatures

4 Attorneys General investigations

We launched the Exxon Knew campaign to draw attention to the fact that **Exxon knew about climate change decades ago but chose to cover it up.**



Photo: Eman Mohammed

Working with a variety of partners, we pushed state attorneys general to investigate Exxon. In October, the US Securities and Exchange Commission opened an investigation into whether Exxon failed to account for the risk climate change and climate regulations could pose to their business model.

These actions weaken the social license of not only Exxon, but of the whole fossil fuel industry. We are moving towards outcomes analogous to the investigations and vilification of the tobacco industry. Our work is already having an impact; since launching our campaign, four Attorneys General have launched investigations into Exxon, and over 520,000 people signed our petition for an Exxon investigation.

(screenshot of the #ExxonKnew portion of the 2016 Annual Report)

This however, doesn't truly give you a sense of context (i.e. what was their initial goal? How close are they?) Thus, it is difficult to understand what kind of contribution you would be making by signing the petition and/or how close it is to completion. This is further compounded by the fact that when one goes through exxonknew.org to the specific state initiative petitions many of them haven't been contributed to in months.

LAST SIGNED BY:

Mark F.	6 months ago
Chase T.	about a year ago
Nate B.	about a year ago
Alison R.	about a year ago
Lanny W.	about a year ago

screenshot of the Vermont petition website indicating when it was last signed

350.org and Surfrider's resources

Surfrider's resources are designed and linked by campaign. When you are on the RAP page on the Surfrider website there is a "resources" tab with sources and information that link directly to the campaign itself. The specific resource related to RAP is the "[RAP Toolkit](#)" a downloadable PDF that takes readers through the steps required to launch their own ordinance campaign specifically regarding plastic bag bans. While not the most visually pleasing PDF (there are a plethora of different fonts including a quite childish looking sans serif that is used for the body text) it does include a wealth of information – you just must be willing to sit there and read it all. It is clearly designed for those who want the facts and detailed information all in one place. In addition to the PDF the resources page also includes information about and links to other Surfrider initiatives like the "Hold On To Your Butt" campaign designed at reducing the number of cigarette butts dropped on the beach. One thing I really appreciate about the resources page for this campaign is that it gives you a brief explanation along with the link. It doesn't just say "For a list of Ocean Friendly restaurants click here" rather, it explains in a small paragraph what Surfrider's Ocean Friendly certification means so that you know whether you would like to delve further into the link.

350.org's resources are not specifically linked to campaigns, rather they are general and apply to the entire organization. The first page covering their resources splits them into the following categories: organizing, arts + graphics, photos and videos. A lot on this initial page is devoted to physical media resources like photo deposits and video files. However, exploring the "organizing" resources brings you to a separate linked site – <http://trainings.350.org>. A truly amazing site that includes a HUGE wealth of information about how to organize your own campaign and be ready to face anything that could come up from facilitating a meeting, to

preparing people for physical political action and potential run-ins with the police. Everything on the website is super well organized and truly speaks to 350.org's belief in collaboration and trying to initiate as many movements around the world as possible to truly achieve mass mobilization. In particular, they have a category "For Organizers" designed to help those organizing a campaign that I definitely will be referring back to later in my thesis as delving deeper into as it has articles ranging from 'How Campaigns are Really Created' to 'How to Get others involved'.

theory

changing politics

"On the one hand, there is a widespread perception that: the institutions historically associated with American democracy are dysfunctional, public trust in core institutions is eroding, civic organizations no longer bring us together, elected representatives are more beholden to big contributors than to voters, electoral processes have been rigged to protect incumbents and to disqualify minority and youth participants, periodic government shutdowns and budget crisis reflect a core impasse between the two parties in Washington, the mass media is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a dwindling number of conglomerates, the news we are receiving is sharply biased by those same partisan interests, surveillance invades our privacy and intimidates would-be political participants, and very little is likely to emerge at the level of institutional politics that is going to shift those conditions very much. Whew! On the other hand, we have seen an expansion of the communicative and organizational resources available to everyday people (and grassroots organizations) as we become more and more accustomed to using networked communications toward our collective interests... grassroots media [is] being deployed as the tool by which to challenge the failed mechanisms of institutional politics" (BAMN 3)

"Malcolm Gladwell (2010) claims so-called Twitter revolutions build on weak social ties and do not motivate participants to put their lives on the line. Make no mistake – what we are describing here is not a Twitter revolution. Gladwell's historical analysis rests on the unfair comparison between platforms (Twitter or Facebook) and social movements (whether the civil rights movements of the 1950s or today's Arab Spring and Occupy movements). A fairer comparison might have been between today's Twitter revolution and the telephone revolution of the 1960s, since we know that Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and other black leaders used the telephone as a key tool for coordinating activities among other black church leaders, freedom riders, and a range of other dispersed sets of supporters. Yet few readers would reduce the civil rights movement to the effects of long-distance phone calls. Rather, the telephone was one tool among many this movement deployed towards its aims" (BAMN 23)

These two quotes from *By Any Media Necessary*, underscore the difference between Surfrider and 350.org. Additionally, I think that the first quote from page 3 explains the increasing disillusionment that millennials have with 'traditional politics'.

While 350.org has a website that makes it seem tech-savvy and appealing to millennials it seems, in many ways, to have got caught up in social media and forgotten that it is merely a tool to be used rather than an end in and of itself. 350.org remains fixated on the mass mobilization,

raising awareness and petitions as its key weapons of choice. While these have proven to be effective for decades, they also are very traditional methods of political expression and ultimately, still are centered around convincing the traditional Washington establishment to change. Thus, I have a feeling, if BAMN is anything to go by, that although it has updated its site and boasts an impressive number of social media followers, 350.org will not be able to sustain the interests of the younger generation in years to come. Millennials are much more focused on results, on hands-on action, and distancing themselves from institutions we see as inefficient.

Where Surfrider excels is that it brings its mission and cause into the everyday and the practical – their website remains highly apolitical. Instead of focusing on legislation in the senate and the presidential election Surfrider is trying to protect the oceans through the actions of everyday individuals. The most ‘political’ they get is by passing local ordinances against plastic bags. While this is, arguably, an extremely traditional political act the fact that it is being conducted on a local level means it takes less time and is more direct thereby allowing people to retain a feeling of being in control as local ordinances are about face to face meetings, attending city council and campaigning with the people who live next door to you rather than just sending off a petition in the hopes of swaying a congressional figure in D.C.

social media + impact

“It’s one thing to measure how many millions of Facebook users changed their profile photo to the logo of an equality campaign, and another to determine whether those profile changes led to a change in public acceptance of equal marriage rights. Moreover, such messages risk adding more clutter to an already vast media landscape, as citizens are pulled and tugged by many such efforts.” (By Any Media Necessary 6)

“Yet even the [new political] organizations themselves tend to define success in terms of activities that can be quantified – numbers of views on YouTube, number of retweets on Twitter, number of voters registered, amounts of money raised – and we can anticipate that this tendency to stress quantity of quality of experiences will only increase as we plunge even deeper into the era of big data. All of this suggests an even more literal notion of what ‘counts’ as politics.” (BAMN 265)

“As organizations or campaigns there is something wrong if we praise likes and count followers instead of understanding that our fans are primed for real action and that we should build opportunities for them to engage in something meaningful” (Social Change 57)

These quotations, taken from both *By Any Media Necessary* (BAMN) as well as *Social Change Anytime Everywhere* speak to the heart of the question of how do you measure success and impact and how does that change with the rise of social media? We can easily measure the number of social media followers 350.org and Surfrider have:

	350.org	Surfrider
Facebook	350.org (@350.org): 565,007 likes, 537,505 followers	Surfrider Foundation (@surfrider): 292,443 likes, 276,176 followers

	ExxonKnew (@exxonknew): 535 likes, 540 followers	
Twitter	350 dot org (@350): 334k followers #ExxonKnew (@Exxon_Knew): 2,356 followers	Surfrider Foundation (@surfrider): 125k followers Rise Above Plastics (@RiseAbovePlastics): 5,794 followers
Instagram	@350org: 23.8k followers	@surfrider: 98k followers

However, that paints an incomplete picture of their impacts and leaves out valuable data regarding their campaigns and engagement. What it does do however is show where the different organizations followers are most active – with 350.org far outpacing Surfrider on Facebook and Twitter but Surfrider dwarfing 350.org on Instagram. Rather this is just one of many metrics as these quotes point out.

They also touch on the fact that impact is incredibly difficult to measure, as noted on page 265 of BAMN. We have a tendency to examine impact in quantitative numbers. I know this personally as when I went looking for impact for both #ExxonKnew and RAP I found Surfrider.org much easier to access impact reporting on as Surfrider had quantified it – they neatly displayed the numbers of campaigns and individuals reached through their endeavours. Automatically, that makes them feel more successful when compared to 350.org's initiatives as 350 simply didn't provide any time of metrics based feedback beyond the two numbers in their annual report. This definitely raises interesting questions not only for this case study and my thesis regarding how to measure impact but also more generally for the world as we start to move into these new forms of political expression – how do we measure success? How can we start to record and analyze our impact through qualitative measurements as well as likes, followers and comments?

engagement

“Engagement refers to subjective states, that is, a mobilized, focused attention on some object. It is in a sense a prerequisite for participation... For engagement to become embodied as participation and therefore give rise to civic agency there must be some connection to practical, doable activities, where citizens can feel empowered” (269)

“Your audience has to leave knowing how they can help you out. They have to be invited to join you on your journey” –Jeff Olsen Director of Special Events, CHLA @ Biz Bash

Point that we give money when we feel emotionally and personally connected to another individual- puts an emphasis on stories (Social Change)

The question of engagement is also where I see Surfrider truly differentiating itself as understanding its audience and the younger generation. When exploring the 350.org website your options for action are signing a petition, donating and/or sharing on social media. They do have organizational resources that would enable you to start your own chapter, but given how much

more of a commitment that is on the ladder of engagement I am treating that separately as I don't see it being likely that a casual person stumbling onto 350.org would go "I've never done anything before but care about the environment – let me start my own chapter." Plus, even the process of starting a chapter or organizing your own campaign is grounded in creating petitions. This focus and emphasis on signing petitions and sharing on social media, while it does raise awareness, limits involvement by making it a solitary and removed act. Until you get to a mass march like the climate march there isn't collaboration, co-creation or the feeling of truly mobilizing to *do* something. This I think is the chief disconnect with 350.org's mission and ultimately, where it fails to truly attract millennials as with the number of petitions you get forwarded/can find every single day it no longer feels like that is truly doing anything.

In contrast Surfrider has positioned itself as very much in the physical realm. The deemphasising of their social media channels (you can only find them in the footer of their website) speaks to that. Their mission is all around getting people out to their chapters and engaging in things like beach cleanups, water testing, plastics lobbying etc.... This not only helps their audience "know how they can help" but also invites them to join through "practical, do-able activities" that they can see the results of.

central theme

"All great stories and experiences have a central theme... It becomes your north star. If you develop that theme, it can work across all platforms." – Christian Lachel, Creative Director, BRC Imagination Arts

I included this quote to remind myself that this is critical. Both of these organizations have clear central missions/themes. Surfrider's is protecting our oceans and beaches while 350.org's is stopping our dependency on fossil fuels and thereby reducing pollution. This is what makes them such appealing organizations – they are not trying to be jacks of all trades, rather they are picking one specific issue and proceeding to tackle it from as many sides as they can.

key take aways

- Ultimately Surfrider's campaign is more related to thesis
 - o On the ground + getting towards physical action
- Understand the importance of what 350.org is trying to do and think they are succeeding but I want to do something more hands on and action based
- Important things to note though about strengths and limitations of both approaches
 - o 350.org doesn't necessarily have on the ground action, BUT it has the capability of reaching a massive network and truly getting mass mobilization (as seen with the Climate march in Washington). Additionally, it has the wherewithal and global network to produce some amazing resources and supports for those trying to start their own campaign. IT's size also gives it the necessary clout to truly go after massive companies like Exxon Mobil and try to reduce the immense influence they exert over our politics. I also truly think that their name and the simplicity of it (as well as its ability to be understood in just about every language) is really incredible. It's yet another piece of evidence showing how

much they ~get~ the social media world and the importance of both online sharing as well as having aesthetically pleasing campaign pages to draw in millennials and make their information easily digestible.

- Graphic design matters in terms of drawing the audience in
- Actionable items like beach clean ups and involved chapters help people feel more empowered
- The bigger the action the harder it is to report on impact
 - o While 350.org is trying to accomplish some incredible things, they are also much bigger – i.e. fining Exxon or having them face judgement in a court – hence, they take much longer to achieve and hence it is harder to report on progress
 - o Surfrider on the other hand, has much smaller goals (local and city wide ordinances and beach restorations) hence it's easier to make people feel like they are achieving something and quantify your action
- Never underestimate the need for an about page and a clear and concise mission statement on your homepage
 - o All the information regarding media and social shares is great but it doesn't help if a first-time visitor is quickly trying to ascertain your goals
 - o Exxonknew.org doesn't have an about page – has all the information but unless you get to it from the campaign page on 350.org you don't understand the goals, context or mission of the campaign
- Comes back to all the talk about metrics → need to know how you are going to measure and *communicate* your success
 - o It's great to talk about the work you're doing but you need some way to *prove* it, to claim you are in fact doing what you say you are and that there is an impact
 - Make sure to include context so you are not just printing a random number
 - need your goal or something so that a reader understands what the number means

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