Grassroots Mobilization of Internet NGOs in China: The Cases of www.1kg.org and www.geshanghua.org

Tian Luo
Ohio University
Athens, OH, USA
1-740-856-5658
tl303308@ohio.edu

ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to draw attention to the experiences of two distinguished examples of Chinese Internet NGOs, www.1kg.org and Gesanghua.org, using them as case studies to illustrate how grassroots NGOs in China use the Internet to organize, operate, and mobilize general public to volunteer for social and welfare service. By comparing the differences and similarities between two Internet NGOs that have harnessed the Internet on a different level and utilized different strategies, this paper also provides some insightful implications in terms of how internet serves as a venue for grassroots mobilization. This paper suggests that grassroots NGOs should tailor the Internet to their own use according to their own organizational and operational characteristics. In the meantime, political viability always plays a critical role in deciding its online mobilization strategies. Additionally, strategic and thoughtful partnership with private corporations is another key to maximize Internet NGOs' capacity.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
K.4.2 **[Computers and Society]**: Social Issues – *miscellaneous*

General Terms
Human Factors

Keywords
Internet NGOs, grassroots mobilization, China

1. INTRODUCTION
In June 2008, China surpassed the US and became the world's biggest Internet user with its 338 million online population. The Internet has developed with an unprecedented speed and exerted phenomenal impact on Chinese society. Using the Internet, more and more local grassroots activists compose informal online advocacy groups. Over time, some of them have evolved into formal NGOs devoted to specific development practices, including in various geographic regions as well as nationally, while others remain as online advocacy groups without having actual practitioners.

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee, provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee.

ICTD'12, March 12–15 2012, Atlanta, GA, USA
Copyright 2012 ACM 978-1-4503-1045-1/12/03...$10.00.

The term Internet NGO as discussed in this research denotes a particular type of NGO that predominately uses the Internet as a platform to operate and to organize for philanthropy or for social purposes [24][25]. In the Chinese context, some of them operate solely on and through the Internet but do not register through the government, nor do they have a stable and physical offline office. Over time, some successful ones go through the transformation from an unregistered, illegitimate NGO, to a registered, legitimate NGO and have developed unique operation models. At present, there is a growing number of this specific type of NGO emerging in domestic China, and this garners increasing attention from both scholars and practitioners.

This paper attempts to draw attention to the experiences of two distinguished examples of Internet NGOs, www.1kg.org and Gesanghua.org, using them as case studies to illustrate how Internet NGOs in China organize, operate, and mobilize general public to volunteer for social and welfare service. By comparing the differences and similarities between two Internet NGOs that have harnessed the Internet on a different level and utilized different strategies within a politically and culturally restricted environment, this paper also provides some insightful implications in terms of how internet serves as a venue for communication and mobilization for needed resources.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNET NGOs IN CHINA
China has witnessed a phenomenal growth in Internet accessibility within this decade, which lays a solid foundation of the development of Internet NGOs. From the latest 25th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China [4], the number of Chinese Internet users and Internet access rates have reached 384 million and 28.9% respectively. The number of broadband Internet users has reached 346 million, accounting for 90.1% of all Internet users. The number of Chinese mobile Internet users increased by 120 million, accounting for 60.8% of all Internet users.

As indicated in above, the extraordinary increase of Internet accessibility has paved the way for NGOs to utilize and integrate the Internet into their operation. Many researchers have recognized the substantial impact of the Internet on resource mobilization on the grassroots level. Internationally, the adoption of the Internet by NGOs has incepted since 1990s when multilateral non-profit organizations started to use the Internet for their international campaigns [3][14]. Later on, some other researchers stressed the "networking" power of the Internet, proposing that the Internet enhances the loose structured networks, accelerates and smoothes the information flow, which itself is transformed into part of NGOs' organizational process [2][7][17]. Since 2004, the presence of Web 2.0 technologies,

centering on the "two-way communication process," bestows the Internet users with an active participatory status instead of a passive listener or viewer's role, which is highly promoted and harnessed by NGOs [1][19]. Cook extended the concept of Web 2.0 to Enterprise 2.0, giving a comprehensive illustration of how Web 2.0 social media and social software that can be harnessed by enterprises and organizations, which is largely embedded in this research [5].

The above-mentioned international exemplifications can also be seen in the Chinese context. Through meticulously examining the in-depth cultural and political ramifications of the Internet in China's modern society, Tai [18] concluded that the Internet is currently employed as an empowering tool for like-mined grassroots Chinese citizens to convene on the virtual communities to undertake collective action which further grows into mass mobilization and organization for social movements. By conducting surveys and interviews with seven renowned Chinese NGOs, Kuhn and Wu [9] concluded that the role of the Internet in an NGO's advocacy, publicity, organization establishment and management is becoming more and more essential.

Generally speaking, NGOs that use the Internet on a large scale can be viewed as Internet NGOs, as is stated in the definitions that some scholars proposed. In summary of those definitions, Internet NGOs are believed to be some grassroots NGOs that are established freely and openly by netizens (Internet users), and that are non-for-profit in nature, predominantly using Internet virtual space as an organizational and operational platform to mobilize volunteers and to engage on philanthropic and social service activities [25][26].

There are some distinctive features of Internet NGOs summarized by some scholars, as advanced adopters of the Internet compared to traditional NGOs. First, Internet NGOs are more compelled to take advantage of the Internet as a result of lacking in resources and funding. By building their official website, blogs, and online interest groups and networks, they can effectively recruit potential members and attract attention from the online space [26]. Second, given the open online space, Internet NGOs can easily and freely share information, build effective international and national network, convey needs and requirements, and seek solutions through participatory approaches [24].

However, some researchers are not as optimistic. G. Yang [22] asserted that domestic NGOs have not made full use of the Internet in a practical sense, as China now merely has a mass of bystanders among online communities who do not undertake any realistic collaborative actions, which is the mainstream Internet culture in current China. A recent survey on Internet usage and communication needs with 327 domestic NGOs in China demonstrated plenty of practical hindrance NGOs have encountered, in spite of their substantial utilization of the Internet [15]. Among those heavily Internet-based NGOs, over 30% of the NGOs do not have their own physical offices, 67% have their own websites but only 31% have specialized IT staff. Although over 85% of the NGOs have ownership of computer and Internet access, only 45% of the NGOs have their own blogs, 58.1 % of the NGOs are using online discussion forums, while less than 15% have used Wiki tools. By adopting a proxy measure of Internet capacity according to information index from ITU (International Telecommunication Union), G. Yang's [22] investigation suggested that Chinese civic organizations have a minimal level of Internet capacity with a very small number of computers, low proportion of numbers of computers versus computer host to the number of staff, and slow Internet connectivity. It is concluded that the usage of Web 2.0 technologies are overestimated in the Chinese case.

Apart from cultural and physical predicaments in fully utilizing the Internet, researchers have also been clearly aware of disadvantages of Internet NGOs as an organization. The first concern is the registration issue. The official and politically "correct" way to register an NGO as a social organization or a civil non-enterprise institution is to register at the Ministry of Civil Affairs through an affiliated organization as a government or Party counterpart. However, it is appallingly difficult for any grassroots NGOs to complete this process on their own; thus, many of them resort to register at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as an enterprise [8][10][13].Since a great of number of them have not officially registered at the government, their activities lack legal support, especially in the face of a lawsuit [25].Furthermore, because of instability of Internet users and the diversity of the online environment, Internet NGOs usually have weak management capacity and organizational [26].Lastly, since Internet NGOs are small-sized young NGOs, they lose their comparative advantages that the Internet provides such as low operation cost when their activities scale up. Their internal defects, including institutional inefficiency, lack of credibility, and shortage of human resource and management experience, all hinder their effective and efficient operations in the real world [25].

3. METHOLOGY

The methodological approach to this research is a case study. First and foremost, a case study allows an in-depth investigation of critical contextual conditions. Rather than providing descriptive and exploratory evidences, a case study focuses on "how" and "why" questions, which probe into a contemporary, complicated phenomenon. The case study method also allows researchers to "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life-events," such as small group behaviors, organizational and managerial processes and performances [23].

In addition, case studies embrace a multi-dimensional approach to analysis, especially through the use of multiple sources of evidences [23]. Through conducting a case study of two NGOs, this research allows for a comparative analysis in relation to Internet NGOs' appropriation of Web 2.0 technologies, operation and management strategies for its communication and mobilization, and various other key elements associated with such activities.

The two cases chosen for this research were selected because examining their experiences allows for a comparison of Internet NGOs that have similar purposes and histories, but that have evolved somewhat differently over time. 1kg.org and Gesanghua.org both have a similar mission statement in relation to rural education and rural development, and were founded in 2004 and 2005, respectively. Moreover, both of them can be considered among China's most well-known and influential NGOs, although 1kg.org has apparently garnered more international attention than Gesanghua.org.

In this case study, three different methodological approaches comprise this triangulation: an in-depth investigation of their internal documents, a detailed examination of the two NGOs' websites, and qualitative interviews with four core members from both NGOs. Analysis of internal documents includes an in-depth inquiry of NGO's e-newsletters, blog entries, and annual reports. Website analysis, in this research paper, refers to a general

analysis of the design analysis of both Internet NGOs' main websites and a close examination of their appropriation of Web 2.0 technologies.

As a primary research method, the interview form adopted in this case study is a semi-structured qualitative interview. An interview is generally considered one of the most important sources of case study information [23]. One of the significant advantages of a semi-structured interview is that it allows alterations of sequence change and potentiality to probe for more information, while at the same time still keeping a succinct and consistent structure. In other words, it grants permission to the researcher to be able to "adapt the research instrument to the level of comprehension and articulacy of the respondent" [6]. Particularly in this research, the semi-structured qualitative interviews allowed the researcher to have a direct interaction with the core staff of both Internet NGOs, and also to give them a voice to provide their genuine perspectives. The interviews were conducted through video conference technologies offered by Skype and Tencent QQ, a Chinese Instant Messaging software. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and then translated and transcribed into English. Instant messaging and email interviews were used as supplementary methods if needed.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Internal Document Analysis

By reviewing the internal documents of the two NGOs, such as their e-newsletters, blog entries, and annual reports, the document analysis section provides a succinct profile of both NGOs with a chart for comparison.

4.1.1 1kg.org (in Chinese: 多背一公斤)

Started as an online participatory platform for backpackers in April 2004, 1kg.org encourages everyone to bring along 1kg of stationary and books and give away these materials to local schools and children in poor areas along their journey. Through the website, backpackers can share local school information and experiences, make new friends with common interests, and provide sustainable services to the schools they have visited. They value three core actions: Passing – prepare 1kg of books or stationeries for underprivileged kids you may meet in your journey; Communicating – talk to and play with kids and get to know them; Sharing – share your travelogues with people via 1kg forum and spread the words among friends and around. By offering consultancy and services to for-profit businesses, 1kg.org makes a profit and applies part of the income to its team operation and the rest to its own non-profit projects. In 2008, they successfully collaborated with 10 enterprises.

4.1.2 Gesanghua.org (in Chinese: 格桑花西部助学)

Gesanghua.org was founded by a senior engineer in February 2005. Its mission is to create lasting change in the lives of children in Western China by providing them opportunities to go to school. Gesanghua in English means Kalsang flower, which is one of the wildflowers with strong vitality in Tibet. As a traditional local NGO, Gesanghua's funding source is mainly from donations from its supporters. Its adoption of the Internet is predominantly for collecting donation and recruiting volunteers. They also have local programs to facilitate reconstructing schools, establishing libraries, and also providing children with scholarship, clothes and shoes.

Table 1. Comparison of 1kg and Gesanghua.

	1kg	Gesanghua
Operation model	Using their main website as platform to mobilize backpackers to contribute rural education; Developing an unconventional but profitable model by selling books, postcards, moon cakes, and collaborating with business groups to organizing travelling activities and charitable activities	Sponsoring kids, build or reconstruct rural school infrastructure including libraries, classrooms; developing volunteer teaching program for rural schools
Fundraising	Sales profit, funding from foundations, award-winning and collaboration with business groups	Largely depend on individual donation, very little funding from collaboration with business groups
Publicity	International level, three international awards winner, have publicity materials and presences on Western websites	National and local press, merely has presence on Chinese websites
Registration status	Registered at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in 2009	Registered at the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2005
Projects	1. Traveling activities (main platform) 2. Twin books 3. Postcards 4. Moon cakes 5. Libraries 6. photo exhibition	1. Volunteer teachers program 2. Teacher training program 3. 1 to 1 paired sponsorship 4. Material donation 5. Reconstruction of school facilities and infrastructures
Geographic focus	Nationwide	West (Qinghai, Tibet, and Gansu provinces)
Partnerships	Large-scaled and extensive collaboration with business groups and other NGOs	Limited collaboration with business groups and other NGOs
Staff	7 paid fulltime staff total; unknown number of online users/volunteers/back packers	Unpaid fulltime volunteer staff and a few paid fulltime staff, around 20 people total as regular fulltime volunteer staff.

4.2 Website Analysis

4.2.1 Web Design Analysis

The analysis of the general design of both websites is categorized as imagery, interactivity, navigation and content, followed by benchmarks provided by Nielsen and Tahir (2002). Viewing from the abovementioned aspects, 1kg has a better web design than Gesanghua, lending it more opportunity and credibility to approach their users.

First, 1kg has a more solid grasp of imagery, not only in terms of number of pictures and graphics, but also in terms of suitability. The proper use of imagery makes 1kg a better candidate to solicit potential users and participants. By visually emphasizing the importance and ease of registration, 1kg's website itself also encourages participation and interaction on the website; while in Gesanghua's case, all the interactivity needs further registration of its sub-sites consisting of its discussion forum and volunteer management system website. Moreover, the navigation of 1kg also performs better than Gesanghua. The most serious problem of Gesanghua is that it is too text-heavy with cramming content and text overlap, especially its navigation and text chunks on the right side of the site. A great deal of unimportant or less important content should not be displayed on its homepage since it considerably reduces the prominence of the primary content. In other words, 1kg has a better visualization of its graphics and consolidation of its content in general sense.

On the other hand, Gesanghua does disclose more organizational information than 1kg, such as organizational structure, budget and its annual report, which highly enhance its credibility. As a traditional NGO depending predominantly on external donations, it is strategically critical for Gesanghua to maintain financial transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, if the content is not prominent enough on the homepage and not easy for users to access, the efficacy of exhibiting significant content will be significantly reduced.

4.2.2 Web 2.0 Technologies

The web 2.0 technologies analyzed in this section range from traditional internet platforms including discussion forums and blogs to more up-to-date, advanced ones such social presence sites, media sharing sites, and other internet applications.

4.2.2.1 Discussion Forums

1kg has an integrated discussion forum within its website. After logging into their website, one can participate in an "activity," join a "topic" or write a "report." The discussion forum designed by 1kg is not a typical forum. Its most distinctive feature is that it serves as an effective filter which does not allow irrelevant content but concentrates on their causes. Either to participate in an activity, to join a topic or to write a report all exactly echoes with three symbolic steps proposed by 1kg- "delivering," "communicating" and "sharing."

Compared to 1kg, Gesanghua's discussion forum has a traditional interface. The content of its discussion forum is also highly relevant to its organizational mission, which can be divided into three sections: open announcement, project discussion, and miscellaneous. The open announcement section is designed for public announcement such as rules and regulations, reports and assessments of their projects posted by Gesanghua staff. Project discussion is designated for volunteers to discuss all-inclusive information of the projects including financial information, information of school and sponsored children and publicity/advertising information. The miscellaneous section includes all relevant or irrelevant discussions such as picture and video sharing.

4.2.2.2 Blogs

A blog can be a vital resource for members in that it is not merely storage of information, but a record of ideas and opinions originating from interactions from the members. 1kg has a link on its website which directly goes to its own blog, while on Gesanghua's page, the link does not go to Gesanghua's organization blog but goes to another page that shows all the volunteers' blog links. 1kg has had a blog since it was founded in 2004, while Gesanghua's organization-wide blog was established in January, 2010. Initially, all the relevant information was published in the founder's personal blog.

1kg's blog serves a similar purpose as Gesanghua's discussion forum. It is an effective tool for 1kg to post information of its projects, individual's thoughts and ideas, recruitment announcements, and media reports. By using tags, 1kg's blog is well organized; it can be viewed as a project and knowledge management tool. In Gesanghua's blog, although we can see the well-designed categories, there's actually not too much content under the categories since it was only built recently.

4.2.2.3 Social Presence Applications

Social presence applications refer to those sites that allow people to sign up and post updates and current information. The purpose of social presence sites is to improve the individual or organization's virtual visibility in order to increase its influence to a large extent. These updates can be sent and received via multiple channels including Internet, emails, SMS or mobile application. Facebook and Twitter are good examples of social presence sites.

1kg seems to have a stronger social presence than Gesanghua in general. Particularly, 1kg is strategic in increasing its international influence via using international social networking sites. Although Facebook and Twitter are blocked by China due to political reasons, 1kg still keeps its existences on both websites by using anti-blocking technologies aimed at enhancing their international influence and popularity. In contrast, Gesanghua is restrained to the Chinese domestic realm with its participation in Chinese social networking sites.

In terms of the Chinese social presence sites, both of the organizations are fairly active. For example, both NGOs keep a presence on Douban.com (in Chinese: 豆瓣网 ,)a Chinese Web 2.0 website providing user review and recommendation services for movies, books and music. 1kg had its first group established on May 23rd, 2006 in Douban. To date, it has six groups with over 2050 members all together from different cities such as Xi'an and Shenzhen. Gesanghua also has one group with 601 members as of March, 2010.

4.2.2.4 Media Sharing

Media sharing refers to sharing photographs and videos online, which is another way to increase an organization's visibility. 1kg and Gesanghua have both actively been using this strategy. 1kg, in particular, has its presence on YouTube as an international video sharing site, while Gesanghua only has its presence on the Chinese video sharing sites. In the bottom navigator of 1kg, there is one link to a Chinese video sharing site – Tudou.com (in Chinese: 土豆网). Tudou.com is the largest video sharing platform in China, where users can upload, view and share video clips. 1kg,

as an organization, consistently posted all of its relevant videos on Tudou and now it has 19 complete videos posted in total. Gesanghua does not select any site as a stable storage place to put all its videos; rather, it has various videos on different Chinese video sharing sites randomly posted by different individuals; thus, it is not as well-organized and mixed with other individuals' less qualified videos. Comparatively speaking, Gesanghua has not used media sharing as effectively as 1kg.

4.2.2.5 Online Donation

An online donation application is considered a collaborative effort which can be completed through online means for fundraising purposes. Gesanghua is largely promoting this by incorporating an application button on their homepage, while 1kg does not have online donation or any donation information shown on their website. This difference largely hinges on their different missions and fundraising strategies. 1kg is depicting itself as a social enterprise which does not depend on donations; but it gains profit and is self-sufficient by operating its own projects, while Gesanghua is still a traditional NGO which predominantly requires donations and funding from external sources.

4.2.2.6 Tagging, Social Bookmarking, and RSS

Tagging, social bookmarking, and RSS are all ways for users to better deconstruct information that is provided by the information creator. Tags are generally chosen informally and personally by the content creator as keywords of their content and its viewers can easily identify needed information by searching for those tags. Social bookmarking is a method for online users to share, organize, search and manage bookmarks of web resources. Tagging is predominantly used by 1kg's blog but not used by Gesanghua. RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication," which allows viewers to subscribe to an information feed that gets delivered directly to their RSS reader or web browser. All these three technologies are utilized in their websites in various degrees. RSS functionality is also integrated into both NGOs' blogs. RSS also is embedded on the blog page of Gesanghua. By clicking on each blogger's name, an aggregated feed of blog entries will be displayed on the webpage automatically. In May 2010, RSS function was also integrated into 1kg's main website.

In summary, both Internet NGOs have adopted Web 2.0 technologies and integrated them into their organizational management and operation processes to different degrees. Generally speaking, 1kg has a better presentation of itself on the homepage than Gesanghua. Due to their different goals and missions, they have developed distinguishing strategies in terms of utilization of Web 2.0 technologies. 1kg, as a more innovative Internet NGO which is on the way to evolve into a social enterprise aligned with international standards, attempts to stay active in the international realm and connect more with international collaborators. Gesanghua, as a more traditional NGO, prefers engaging in a more domestic realm and is more interested in the overall management of their volunteers and in providing open and free information of their organization in terms of annual reports, project assessments, and their online management systems.

4.2.3 Interviews

4.2.3.1. Internet Indispensability

The qualitative interviews with the four core members across the two NGOs were informative. As indicated throughout the interviews, both NGOs have developed their own strategies for communication and mobilization. Those strategies correspond to many intrinsic characteristics of the organizations, such as registration status and their operational models.

Affirming the multiple purposes the Internet plays in their organizations, interviewees believed that the use of the Internet is deeply integrated into their organizations' regular day-to-day operations. Interviewees from 1kg considered the Internet "core competence," and one of them said "the whole [operational] process cannot go without the Internet." Interviewees from Gesanghua shared identical opinions, such as "if there was no Internet, Gesanghua would not exist."

When asked about the Web 2.0 technologies they have been using, founder of Gesanghua's answer was "we've been using whatever we can use from the Internet." Apart from utilizing web technologies like email, blogs, IM, and discussion forums, both NGOs also have attempted to develop more advanced and specific technologies. Although both NGOs have been utilizing the Internet to optimize their organizations' functionalities, 1kg seems to have reached a more advanced level of web-based information management than Gesanghua. This finding concurs with discussions in the website analysis. 1kg's interviewee mentioned that they have been through the process of using blogs and discussion forum to manage data, whereas Gesanghua is still in the process of managing school information via a discussion forum.

4.2.3.2. Volunteer Mobilization and Management

Volunteer mobilization is crucial for Internet NGOs, given the inhibiting Chinese Internet culture. As B. Yang (2007) affirmed, there exists a lack of motivated "efforts of agents" and "participants" who could undertake collaborative actions. When asked whether they agree that China has a hard-to-mobilize mass of bystanders among online communities, all four interviewees congruently acknowledged this phenomenon as a cultural predicament.

1kg and Gesanghua have taken nearly opposite approaches in terms of volunteer mobilization and management to confront with this culture. Apparently, 1kg sets an extremely low threshold for volunteers while maintain a fairly loose management. It aims at absorbing a larger number and groups of Internet users without demanding mandatory obligations; Gesanghua, on the other hand, has relatively more rigid rules and regulations to recruit volunteers. Rather than attempting to engage a wide range of the general public, what Gesanghua is interested in most is to target the interested individuals and motivate them to maintain their commitment to Gesanghua.

1kg's interviewees kept emphasizing the essentiality of their website, which serves their ultimate goal of mobilizing every single Internet user to participate in the career of philanthropy. Therefore, they aspire to advance and customize their website, making it as convenient and user-friendly as possible to best serve their users. 1kg's approach articulated by one of its interviewees is fairly distinctive as compared to traditional NGOs. While in Gesanghua's case, the website and Internet-related issues are not considered as important as in 1kg's case, which also explains the reason why Gesanghua does not maintain a more user-centered and interactive website, and a far-reaching web presence as 1kg does.

The difference between "user" and "volunteer" is another peculiarity identified in the conversation with interviewees from 1kg. In 1kg's interviewees' eyes, 1kg tends to view people who

pay attention to or make contributions to 1kg as pure and unbidden users instead of devoted volunteers. The difference between a user and a volunteer resides in whether or not they have mandatory obligations. Among 1kg's users, they entitled a specific type of contributive users as "school ambassador," who has the power to freely edit and update school information and request resources for that specific school to which he belong, or to apply for these resources so as to maintain or provide more service for the school of which he or she is in charge. "The school ambassador position is open to all users so other people can become school ambassadors. If the current school ambassadors cannot fulfill the responsibilities to supervise new ambassadors, full-time staff will take place of them and assign a new school ambassador, which spontaneously completes the takeover process." 1kg staff members view themselves merely as a facilitator and service supplier who provides a web-based service and facilitates users' participation. As one of the interviewees said, "Our staff members are not managers, but more like servants; we provide service for users to achieve self-management…Our relationship with our users is not a leader and follower relationship; rather, we are on the same level."

In contrast, Gesanghua obviously prefers the "volunteer" concept, which better fits a conventional approach that mandates volunteers' obligation and commitment. As is evident in Gesanghua's volunteer management website, volunteers are required to enforce a "long-term commitment" with "passion, sense of responsibility and rationality." Both interviewees from Gesanghua delivered the same sense of commitment in terms of recruiting volunteers: "We believe everyone has their own understanding and their own reasons to participate in our organization; but if they only view Gesanghua as a virtual community where they can make new friends and have some fun, or they only want to keep their volunteer identity in name not in practice, we would rather not have them." Long-term and devoted commitment and obligation is a prerequisite for any Internet user to become a volunteer in Gesanghua. Therefore, Gesanghua stresses the importance of oversight of volunteers when it turns to volunteer management. As is mentioned above, volunteers need to undergo an application, admission, review, evaluation, and final recognition process in which the supervisory role of its staff members is critical. The board members and secretariat members are held accountable for general volunteers.

4.2.3.3. Political Viability

The significance of adherence to policies correctness to some extent is the foundation of an Internet NGO's existence in the Chinese context, as is reflected in the difficulty in registration. As identified in the document analysis, 1kg is registered at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as a company, while Gesanghua is registered at the Ministry of Civil Affairs as a social organization. One of the most notable commonalities that appeared in both NGOs' registration process is the transformation from a loosely-organized, web-based group to a well-organized and officially-registered organization. The web presence is often regarded as the inception of both NGOs, as many of the initiatives were conceived by a few online activists. Over time, both Internet NGOs attained its legitimacy through different registration methods, which largely strengthen its mission of grassroots mobilization.

As indicated by its interviewees, Gesanghua went through different hierarchical levels of registration, starting on the township level, the city level and finally to the provincial level so as to maintain its political viability. As an organization targeting a Tibetan area, it is impossible to operate any tangible and substantial project without government authorization. Moreover, for an organization whose financial standing predominantly depends on donations, a legitimate status is central to earning a donor's trust in order to maintain their overall operation.

1kg's registration process is not as complex as Gesanghua and it is less attached political elements on the grounds that they are not obliged to deal with government agencies in the first place. The primary advantage of not registering at the Ministry of Civil Affairs is that it exempts them from being watched by any governmental organization and diminishes the likelihood to take the traditional operation fashion as Gesanghua does. What is mostly striking is that when it was purely unregistered, 1kg still managed plenty of projects and engaged a vast number of the general public for four years. Without official registration, an NGO like 1kg can still secure a great amount of funding from donors and substantial support from corporations and individuals.

Aside from that, this approach also gives 1kg more freedom and space for innovative exploration. 1kg is not a typical example of all Chinese NGOs, but it sets a good example in terms of its development approach. Dissimilar to Gesanghua, the registration status of 1kg was an outcome and a necessity when the development of the organization reached a certain stage, rather than an initiative as in Gesanghua's case. In other words, 1kg did not consider difficulty in registration or the legitimacy issue as serious barriers at the beginning stage of their organization; what they paid more attention to was their organizational development and innovation.

4.2.3.4. Financial Standing and Collaboration with Corporation

Interviews with the four core members from each NGO provide a detailed picture of their financial standing. Through the document analysis, it seemed that 1kg has secured a great amount of funding from partnerships with various corporations and developed a relatively mature business model, which frees them from financial predicaments. However, this optimism is not seen in the interviews.

One of the interviewees from 1kg disclosed that the majority of 1kg's funding still comes from foundations such as China Poverty-Reduction Foundation. In terms of a fine-developed business model, he is also uncertain about whether or not 1kg has developed their own business model, although he acknowledged that 1kg did reap some profit through collaboration with companies of various sizes. The interviewee also identified funding as one of greatest difficulties 1kg has encountered over time. It can be concluded that funding is still a big concern for 1kg even though it is viewed as a successful model with regard to financial standing.

Gesanghua's funding source primarily originates from individual donations, as was seen in their internal documents. Individual donations are often regarded as unstable and scattered, but one of the interviewees affirmed that Gesanghua has already maintained a great number of stable individual donors as their funding sources over time. This can be explained by Gesanghua's ceaseless efforts in keeping financial transparency and credibility. Being officially legitimate and financially transparent, Gesanghua is able to win generable public's trust and thus retain individual donation as long-term and stable funding sources.

With the purpose of achieving abundant funding, both NGOs have enthusiastically collaborated with multiple corporations. 1kg began its collaboration with corporations since its inception, whereas Gesanghua started to develop this partnership since last year. All these collaborations are considerably conducive to boosting both NGOs' financial standing. Interviewees from both NOGs gave different concrete examples to illustrate the collaboration process.

5. CONCLUSION

As we can draw from the above analysis, the Internet has become a pivotal necessity for both of the Internet NGOs' operations. Both 1kg and Gesanghua view the Internet as an indispensable tool for the existence of the organization, vigorously seeking to maximize its communication and mobilization capacity towards its optimization.

Nevertheless, these two Internet NGOs have adopted contrastive Internet strategies. Both Internet NGOs intend to use the Internet to boost their organizational performance and enhance online population's participation in their mission, but apparently, they have taken distinctive approach that conforms to their own strategies and needs. Strikingly, 1kg is more Internet-oriented than Gesanghua as it tends to be more explorative in employing the Internet. For 1kg, the Internet serves as an interactive and participation-oriented tool that is geared towards elevating engagement and commitment of Chinese general public, whereas in Gesanghua's case, it is more likely to serve as an information database and one-way communication tool.

In addition, NGOs should also expand the Internet's capacity to mobilize passive online users, transforming them into active participants and agents that can contribute to China's development of civil society. As all the four interviewees stressed, engaging the online population and enhancing their participation is the key to improve Internet efficacy. In the case of 1kg, building a more leading-edge user-based website and thus lower the threshold of user participation successfully engage more online population. In the case of Gesanghua, seizing a more absolute and firm volunteer recruitment and management standard ensures the quality of volunteers' commitment and thus leverages the organization's accountability. In short, the success of utilizing the Internet to appeal online users and to mobilize participation fundamentally resides in the NGO's overall strategies.

Political viability also plays a critical role in Internet NGO's operation. As many scholars contended in their research [11] [12].the political situation in the Chinese Internet sphere is by no means less severe than before. Due to the restrictive control, Internets NGOs are more compelled to develop flexible strategies when confronting the unfriendly political environment. Both 1kg and Gesanghua have set a good example in dealing with government control, which can be seen in their registration process and their strategies of Internet use.

Given China's passive Internet culture and unfavorable political environment, an Internet NGO ought to develop its core competency, meaning that an Internet NGO has to develop a certain distinguished specialties with which other approximate organizations can barely compare. This specialty plays an unparalleled role in an organization's development because it overshadows others and thus secures its social recognition and credibility, which is considerably critical given China's contemporary social, cultural, and political environment. An Internet NGO can only remain "online" if it does not dedicate itself to real-world activities or not seek to entail online users' offline physical participation.

Last but not the least, cross-sector collaboration is strategic to the strengthening of Internet NGOs' overall capacity, particularly considering their shortage in financial standing. In the Chinese context, Internet NGOs especially need financial support from corporations. Drawn from both Internet NGOs' experiences, partnerships with private corporations can provide immense opportunities, which is an effective means to improve NGOs' operational performance. 1kg has developed long-term strategic marketing relationships with multiple private companies since its inception, and Gesanghua realized the importance of collaborating with corporations recently and started to cooperate with them last year.

Notably, although this cross-sector collaboration has great potential to attenuate NGOs funding difficulties, it is also possible to put NGOs' credibility and accountability at risk. On the one hand, more collaborative opportunities with corporations are conductive for NGOs to overcome their own financial difficulties, obtain comparative advantages, and attain resource mobilization; On the other hand, NGOs also need to be thoughtful of the consequence, given that NGOs are not in a socially, culturally, and politically embracing environment. Strategic and thoughtful partnership with private corporations is the key to maximize Internet NGOs' capacity, thus significantly reaping mutual benefits.

6. REFERENCES

[1] Bach, J. & Stark, D. 2004. Link, Search, Interact: The Co-evolution of NGOs and Interactive Technology. *Theory, Culture & Society, 21(3): 101–117.*

[2] Bennett, W. L. 2004. Communicating Global Activism: Some Strengths and Vulnerabilities of Networked Politics In Donk, van de W. &, Loader, D.B., *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements* (pp.123-146). London: Routledge forthcoming.

[3] Bray, J. 1998. Web wars: NGOs, companies and governments in an Internet-connected world. *Greener Management International,* (24), 115.

[4] China Internet Network Information Center. 2010. 25th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China. Retrieved from http://www.cnnic.net.cn/uploadfiles/pdf/2010/3/15/142705.pdf

[5] Cook, N. 2008. Enterprise 2.0: How social software will change the future of work. Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub.

[6] Gilbert, N. (Ed.). 1993. *Researching social life.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[7] Gurak, L.J. & J. Logie. 2003. Internet Protests, from Text to Web, In M. McCaughey & M.D. Ayers, *Cyberactivism - Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (pp. 25-46). New York & London: Routledge.

[8] Huang, H. 2007. NGO Development trends in China. Retrieved from http://base.china-europa-forum.net/rsc/docs/doc_616.pdf

[9] Kuhn, B. & Wu, W. 2007: Civil Society and the Internet in the P.R. China, Beijing: KAS Series No. 66, Beijing..

[10] Li, J. 2005. Plenty of opportunities for NGOs. *Beijing Review, 48* (26), 2.

[11] Liu, X. 2002. NGO's in China: An Overview. Retrieved from http://www.icfdn.org/publications/chinaeducationneeds.htm

[12] Liu, X. 2007. The Rise of Civil Society in China. In Hom, S & Mosher, S (Eds.), *Challenging China: Struggle and Hope in an Era of Change* (pp. 109-122). New York: The New Press.

[13] Lu, Y. 2007. *NGOs in China: Development dynamics and challenges*. Nottingham, U.K.: China Policy Institute, the University of Nottingham.

[14] McNutt, J.G. & K.M. Boland. 1999. Electronic advocacy by Non-profit Organizations in social welfare policy. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 28 (4), 432-451.

[15] MIT-NMAL. 2009. A Recent Survey on Internet Usage and Communication Needs of NGOs in China (In Chinese). Retrieved from http://www.ngocn.org/?uid-22006-action-viewspace-itemid-50179

[16] Nielsen, J. & Tahir, M. 2002. *Hompage Usability – 50 Web sites Deconstructed*. New Rider Publishing.

[17] Nugroho, Y. 2008. Adopting technology, transforming society: The Internet and the reshaping of civil society activism in Indonesia. Retrieved from http://www.swinburne.edu.au/hosting/ijets/journal/V6N2/pdf/Article1 Nugroho.pdf

[18] Tai, Z. 2006. *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society*. New York: Routledge.

[19] Wellman, B. 2004. The Glocal village: Internet and community. Idea&s 1, 26-30.

[20] Wexler, R, Xu, Y., & Young, N. 2006. NGO advocacy in China: a special report. *China Development Brief.* from http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/749.

[21] Yang, B. 2008. NPOs in China: Some issues concerning Internet communication. *Knowledge, Technology & Policy, 21*(1), 37-42.

[22] Yang, G. 2009. *The power of the Internet in China: citizen activism online.* New York: Columbia University Press.

[23] Yin, R. K. 2009. *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

[24] Zhang, L. 2009. 我国网络草根NGO发展现状与管理论析. [The analysis of Internet grassroots NGOs' contemporary living environment and management in China]. *Cass Journal of Political Science*, 87, 82-88.

[25] Zhang, Z. 2008. 网络草根组织的生发机制探析. [The emergence of Grassroots NGO]. *Social Science in Nanjing*, 11, 115-119.

[26] Zhu, J. 2004. 草根NGO与中国公民社会的成长. [Grassroots NGO and the growth of Chinese civil society]. *Open Times*, 174(6). Retrieved from http://www.china-europa-forum.net/bdfdoc-413_en.html