

The Impact of Social Media on Volunteerism

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to answer the question of how social media can be best used to supplement traditional media in a volunteer recruitment campaign. Various social media channels are experimented with to build a network of concerned citizen stakeholder groups. In this study, an array of social media interventions was employed, and their success was tracked to gauge their impact on volunteer engagement. The results of these efforts are reported. It was found that social media can be an effective supplement to traditional media for certain forms of volunteer engagement and recruitment, but that social media alone cannot build enduring relationships, nor can it forge new ties with community members. Organizations interested in social media marketing should be advised to use these new channels as supplements to traditional media, not replacements for tried and true methods. This study raises several questions about the actual utility of social media in a volunteer recruitment context. A literature review helps to sharpen the focus of these questions, and is therefore presented first. The recruitment or engagement of volunteers is the lifeblood for many community-based organizations, yet it can also be a source of frustration. Organizations that rely on volunteers know that building a successful volunteer program is cumulatively time consuming; finding and communicating with new volunteers, developing volunteer opportunities, and building relationships with existing volunteers requires both energy and a sustained commitment.

The web is saturated with advice on how social media can be harnessed; tools exist as platforms suited to building loose and informal social networks. Regardless of the hype, and despite there being many instances where they are indeed successful, questions remain of how reliable these tools are. The influence of loose and informal social networks is difficult to determine - enduring volunteer relationships are founded on shared commitments and trust. Moreover, social networks are fleeting; participants may engage for a single post or event, and the inherent informality and relative anonymity of social media can easily discourage dialogue or a sense of commitment. Finally, the professional applications of social media are not yet well understood. Businesses are enamored with the advent of social networking and social media, hoping to harness its widespread influence to bolster marketing efforts. But for all the hype, there remains little empirical evidence to support – or refute – the supposed utility of social media, particularly when it comes to engagement or recruitment efforts where traditional media has a long and well established precedent.

Keywords-social media, volunteerism, recruitment campaign, community engagement, traditional media, volunteer relationships, stakeholder networks, marketing strategies.

2. Introduction

The influence of social media on volunteerism is explored because social media has significantly transformed the ways in which individuals communicate with one another as well as organizations and institutions within the community and across the globe. The evolution of user engagement with social media and its impact on the volunteer sector continues to grow in terms of the range of functionality and information exchange. Organizations using social media can communicate and engage with their stakeholders in a much more targeted, yet broadly dispersed way, increasing the potential of engaging volunteers. These dynamic changes suggest the importance of understanding the dynamics at play.

The main research objectives are: (1) to analyze and discuss the changes that social media has brought to the ways volunteer involving organizations and prospective volunteers interact; (2) to investigate how individual and social components of social media influence and engagement might be associated with dimensions of intention to volunteer; and (3) to explore whether specific dimensions of social media use are differentially associated with the various dimensions of motivation and how engagement might impact the retention time of the volunteer tenure. A series of critical questions as a guide when creating a social media strategy of volunteering involving organizations are posed. Framed in a conceptual framework, this piece of research provides support to design an interactive model for a better understanding of the effects of social media on volunteerism. It contributes to the domain by deepening the current understanding of the roles of information, interaction, and communication elements of social media in highlighting some aspects of volunteering. Given that some types of volunteering contribute to the meeting of unfulfilled welfare needs, this study is particularly timely in the midst of significant changes in traditional state social care provision in some countries. Doing so is beneficial by increasing the levels of reported subsistence living and life satisfaction, at least in terms of reported mobility. Meanwhile, the number of initiated volunteer activities is generally not correlated with various indicators of socio-political orientation. Thus, the hypothesis of an association between them is not supported. However, the last mentioned insight can be of some use for the provision of public services. (Carlsen et al., 2021)

3. Literature Review

The relationship between volunteerism and social media has gained increased interest from scholars and practitioners under the rapid rise of social media. The literature review seeks to explore various perspectives and theories regarding how social media influences volunteer behavior, including its impact on volunteer recruitment, communication, roles, intentions and group formation. It also discusses some landmark studies that illustrate the positive and negative impacts of social media on volunteer work. Based on the existing literature, it is argued that a better

understanding of the impact of social media on volunteerism is becoming an urgent task for researchers and practitioners since they hold the potential to create a more effective volunteer engagement. Furthermore, the review highlights the new landscape of social media platforms and some of their impacts on volunteer work, exploring relevant research on volunteer engagement from social media. In an attempt to gain both quality and quantity results, non-profit organizations take advantage of the widely used social networking sites to recruit volatile volunteers. The research shows that participants had joined their chosen events or causes through social media, but had varying experiences of the effectiveness of this medium (Piche, 2012). This study had a focus on the 25-28 year-old range which could skew the results. It delineates trends reflecting the online behaviors of the age group. Overall, social media had weakened from earlier days as a means of event awareness and increased reliance on this medium had pushed the participants away entirely from participating. Fundamentally, social media was unable to compete with personal face-to-face communication or work-based interactions. (Tao et al., 2021)

4. Methodology

In order to understand how social media is used by organizations that depend on volunteers, including their role in traditional promotion and recruitment activities, a case study of a volunteer partnership was undertaken. The re-naturalization of a recreational area, and the management of the phragmites that established in the wetlands, was the focus of a multi-agency effort. The study dispatches social media and volunteer recruitment information to a wide range of stakeholders. Stakeholder interviews, as well as the analysis of social media accounts, highlight the complexities inherent in the organization of educated volunteer campaigns. Social media, though rarely used to its potential, broadened the scope of the campaign and allowed for deepened involvement of target volunteers.

Volunteerism is the "activities that are intentional, voluntary, and mutually beneficial and that produce positive outcomes for the community at large". The recruitment and management of volunteers often determine the outcome of ecological restoration

projects. Social media affords non-profit volunteer partnerships new avenues to communicate traditional promotion and recruitment information. The purpose of this study is to describe a volunteer partnership and reflect on the best practices for the use of social media in volunteer-based campaigns. This research is timely given rapidly evolving social media technologies. Social media has been embraced by private businesses and government organizations eager to leverage new communication strategies. High national priorities are increasingly being discussed and determined on blogs, Facebook, Wiki, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube (Piche, 2012). Social media has changed relationships among lands management organizations, as well as the communities they engage. Government agencies are actively encouraging social media among their grantees to foster broader information transfer. However, a gray area still exists naturally as this new technology's application is only beginning to be explored by many non-profit organizations.

5. Findings

In order to evaluate the extent of correlation between online social media engagement and increased volunteer recruitment, an unprecedented effort was undertaken to recruit volunteers through the sole platform of social media engagement between the months of September and December and monitor the international online volunteer and intern chalk up over the task completion distance greater than 90 days. Social media volunteers almost need a way of online social media pages before on any of the tasks, the degree of this engagement such as likes and reaching a concern greater number of people tasks were recorded for the control of the treatment group on social media volunteer recruitment success.

One hundred fifty three tasks that had a call to volunteer component were chosen for a closer inspection, separating out the call for volunteer component for the other possible goals for social media engagement (of raising awareness about local, international and on the intern and project, job opportunities, inviter sign-up form). The mode of advertisement for social media engagement e.g. wall post, share post, and link clicking was recorded, as well as the number of days between the most recent

advertisement essentials the record task's at the point of view and the total number of days when this particular task was published online. Eight organizations that had the desired tasks were interviewed regarding their recruitment strategies and the extent of success of volunteer enlistment for the goal's project. Two interviewees for each of the organization kind control group, and the treatment group were chosen in order to have an even number of volunteer involving for profit and non-profit organizations and an even number of organizations that were partnerships with a larger internationally known actor, never the less recruited solid it's through the call to volunteer component didn't work on either organization interviewed people. (Roncarolo et al.2022)

6. Discussion and Implications

Research based on social media and its relation to volunteerism is still noticeably slim; therefore, this current study explores the growing importance of social media and its impact on volunteers. Volunteers are the heart of the service sector, with over 26% of the American population, 53% of Europeans, and more than 40% of Australians engaging in volunteering activities every year. As the emphasis on volunteer engagement is further highlighted, organizations must explore new platforms to retain volunteer interest, so as to improve issues on which organizations focus and, thereby, provide a more satisfactory outcome to the volunteer organizations.

Based on a sample of 104 active volunteers, the findings of the current research indicate that the use of social media was positively linked with improved volunteer training, knowledge about the organization, event satisfaction, advocacy, and network improvement. As seen through the lens of the age group, the majority of these relationships still hold true for volunteers under the age of 25; however, only changes in advocacy and network enhancement were found for the 25+ age group. The implications and practical support of this research are set out in three sections - community, training and organization events. Further exploration reveals areas of further research interest on which the modern volunteer organization may have to rely, hoping to capture the opportunities and competitiveness derived from the digital age

and enhancing a commitment to pursuing the true essence of volunteerism. (Bouton et al., 2021)

6.1. Impact on Volunteer Recruitment

Social media platforms are not simply changing the way individuals communicate and conduct business. These tools are also changing the landscape of recruitment practices and volunteer involvement opportunities (Ariana Emanuela, 2018). This subsection explores these changes by looking at the impact of social media on specific volunteer recruitment practices of organizations. An experiment aimed to provide evidence supporting the broadening of outreach efforts of volunteer involving organizations through the use of social media supplemented by traditional media. Such evidence supports the notion that volunteer involving organizations can significantly attract diverse volunteers with varied backgrounds through recruitment campaigns on social media. The latter aligns with the theoretical framework provided by studies showing that there is a strong correlation between the use of targeted messaging through social media for recruitment purposes and an increase of volunteers engaging with the recruiting service. To this end, it was hypothesized that recruitment efforts enhanced by well-formulated online interventions on social media will significantly attract volunteers with varied background characteristics. In particular, it is argued that these volunteers differ more from the recruiting organization's workforce composition than volunteers attracted only by traditional media.

Also examined are the roles of social proof and community engagement on the recruitment success of organizations on social media. Questionnaire data suggests that social media increases success in terms of volunteers registering for organizations as volunteers through the medium. Additionally, this research project further explores these aspects and examines how they affect potential volunteers turning into actual volunteers (or a success rate of recruitment efforts). Analysis also indicates that on average participants believe that 7 out of 10 people would be willing to volunteer if asked personally, but only 3 out of 10 people if asked in general. Such an observation supports the idea that broad online posts regarding volunteer positions on social media do not provide an effective recruitment practice. Instead there is a considerably larger

willingness of volunteers to join such endeavors on social media if posts are targeted and engage with the community (Piche, 2012).

6.2. Effectiveness of Social Media Campaigns

Social media campaigns have become an essential strategy for broadening networks and spreading awareness among like-minded individuals. Campaign tactics can broadly consist of developing multimedia content for platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram that takes advantage of each platform's specific capabilities and audience. This content can include videos, photos, quizzes, stories, and other interactive posts which can be shared and cross-posted or published in more collaborative content formats. Additionally, user interactions should be tracked and responded to in order to create a community around the issue. Social media campaigns are most successful when they are able to transition people from passive consumption of information to active engagement with it. Best practice ideas and how different campaign strategies have played out are discussed.

Periodic social media audits are essential to guide future efforts and consider improvements.

There are some more successful examples of social media campaigns helping to promote volunteerism and engage the community. In 2014, the organization running this social experiment conducted a multi-year statewide media campaign and were contracted to host a month-long event at the organization. At the same time, numerous partners held over sixty events across the state. Although many of the partners are more traditional natural resource conservation groups, others are also agro-based groups or community businesses. As a condition of providing funds, these partners were required to post the sponsorship logo on websites and share the event on social media. Efforts on this social media campaign were limited to developing and posting a single series of content posts to the organization's Facebook page in the week leading to the 2016 event with support from the employing organization's social media staff. On the upside, IT mentions and impressions occurred leading up to the 2016 event, meaning the post was seen by that many unique users' personal pages. Using a ".csv" output file format from campaign data, thresholds for post popularity

were set by hand utilizing the leading posts. Forty-four content posts about the event were created but only fifteen met the performance criteria for sharing to the “Statewide Event” group (Piche, 2012).

It was known that these posts would also be shared to affiliated Facebook pages, presumably expanding the post reach to their supporters. Of the fifteen posts shared with the “Statewide Event” group, only three met the entrance engagement rates. Entering the third content post, indicators were examined for content type and time of day. Post types that saw high engagement were images, or less frequently videos, of an event being set up, on-going, and in clean-up. This probably played on FOMO (fear of missing out) and was intended to push viewers of the event image or video to a companion post about why this particular event was so great. Post content all included a call to action telling the viewer to learn more at the web page or download the organization’s app. Post videos were embedded within the organization’s YouTube channel and FB boosted for \$130.00. Videos created for FB were done in small file sizes with no pre-roll and included all the information as text on cards for silent video streaming viewers. Posting for every 8am and 8pm had high engagement. Time of day hoped to take advantage of spreading posts out over different time zones in the State or during breaks in the agricultural workday. Every post should include a link to the web page or information on where to go to learn more and download the supporter app.

6.3. Challenges and Opportunities

As the internet continues to grow and evolve, nonprofit organizations seeking to engage volunteers are also evolving. In an increasingly digital world, organizations have had to adapt the way they interact with potential volunteers. The rise of social media platforms has complicated this relationship. With the prevalence of online news and socializing, people are drawn to social media to volunteer in different ways. This subsection examines the challenges and opportunities that this brings to the intersection of volunteerism and social media.

Using a qualitative approach to interviewing several volunteer professionals and examining an organization’s online presence, a nuanced understanding of the dual

nature of the impact of social media on volunteerism is provided. Successful organizations of profit organizations understand that managing digital engagement can be as time-consuming as fostering in-person community connections. Frequent Instagram and Facebook posts, Twitter takeovers, and well-organized volunteer orientations suggest a careful and intentional approach to digitizing volunteer recruitment and engagement (Noland, 2017).

Yet, there is an inherent complexity in such approaches. As many nonprofit organizations vie for volunteers on social media, the space becomes saturated. Meanwhile, the target demographic of many nonprofits is progressively Gen Z and younger millennial cohorts, who drastically prefer to volunteer in person. Online engagement is a crucial component of volunteer strategy, but it must be approached carefully and with purpose (Grubb, 2021). A common and well-intentioned goal for virtual social work is bridge-building and societal understanding of different social strata. Nonetheless, the digital divide remains a substantial barrier and grounds for future uncertainty in this area. Structurally, this relies on national focus as well as large church donations that relate to the digital divide. These recommendations may not be applicable to every country or initiative. Almost two decades into the 21st century, digital technology has changed the way people interact, work, and volunteer. As technology continues to evolve, the practice of volunteering will develop in accordance. This may increase both inequality and dissolution in voluntary initiatives. The aim here is to clear the path for forming a dichotomous practice, with sometimes conflicting recommendations for volunteer providers and users. Organizations seeking to initiate digital volunteering should be aware of both the beneficial bonds and potentially taxing pitfalls technology may entail. For developing communication may be one of the most important tools to foster positive bonds between volunteers and beneficiaries. Conversely, users and more vulnerable groups should approach episodic digital volunteers and volunteers of privilege with a critical and open mind.

7. Conclusion

Social media has a profound influence on how society acts today, including volunteerism. The primary impact of employing social media in volunteering is the development of a solid and sustainable relationship among volunteers. This occurs since social media can establish a platform for direct communication and is capable of exchanging ideas, knowledge, or even feelings in a real-time manner. Every individual is also given the chance to get involved in various volunteering tasks, as social media provides a plethora of information regarding volunteering activities, as well as the possible avenues for giving. Similarly, volunteers and organizations benefit from the social media platform, improving volunteer recruitment strategies is discovered. A positive relationship between the strategic use of social media for engagement and improved volunteer behavior is established. The utilization of the communication platform remains sporadic, while organizations rely more heavily on traditional forms of media. While both volunteers and organizations express the desire to communicate more, they also encounter challenges that limit their ability to do so. However, interest in using social media for communication purposes is present.

8. Future Research Directions

As the internal medical industry is getting higher competitive, medical institutions have to provide more online service such as online consulting and inquiry services. The volunteering recruitment strategies and efforts taken by nonprofit organizations to fill their staffing needs are also under pressure. Recent advancements in computer and information systems have revolutionized traditional volunteerism. Crowdsourcing gave a huge encouragement to this kind of long-term world-wide researches. Meanwhile, the social media platforms have leveraged the Web to bridge individuals' needs and resources and provide a channel for coordinating social actions among global users. With the prospering growth of social media, scientific research has spread wide across its implications. New social media platforms and tools are emerging and dismantling quicker than can be researched, posing several concerns about the future of the field. There is still a lot to be learned, however, about the

rapidly evolving impact of social media on engagement and its ability to promote and sustain civic outcomes. This study suggests that future research should step in vanguard volunteer-focused campaigns and movements to answer a number of important questions and confirm current trends. Longitudinal research is advised to analyze patterns of impact and sustainability of social media effects over time. The study of cross-platform and platform-specific behavior, with an attention to new tools and applications emerging in the field, is suggested to open new lines of inquiry that would otherwise be overlooked. Alternatively, the convergence of traditional and new media, like newspapers, websites, Twitter, Facebook, and similar outlets, could expose how these different forms of media relate in the context of volunteer engagement (Piche, 2012). The analysis of other influences on engagement emerging during the investigation, such as differences among participating populations, would deliver a better understanding of how and why social media can affect volunteer efforts. Building on the methodological advantages and observations made in the course of the study, interdisciplinary collaborations with academic institutions and nonprofit organizations are also encouraged. There is a genuine need for research that is both practical and theoretical, incorporating various and sometimes divergent perspectives on how to approach, implement, and study the links between social media and volunteerism. Thus, recommendations for the assessment of collaboration strategies with insights that are better suited to experimental needs can prove helpful (Hanawi, 1990).

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