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**Investigating Instagram Marketing Strategies for Nonprofit Donor Engagement
During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

A Thesis

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Lacy School of Business

and

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Abstract: The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to a profound shift in various industries around the world, the non-profit industry being one of them. In this research the author virtually interviewed four participants with experience in marketing from three non-profit organizations to determine what strategic components of Instagram marketing worked best to influence donations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The changed marketing strategies in the nonprofit industry are the result of changed donor behavior. The results from the interview findings reveal two Instagram marketing strategies were successfully adapted to influence donations during the pandemic: focusing on authentic media to increase user connection, and implementing video content and increased innovation. Data analysis of interview responses reveal COVID-19 had a direct impact on donor behavior and increased their use of social media. In conclusion, after reviewing the results, the author created two strategies that NPO marketers can implement into their Instagram marketing to influence donations: increasing their use of multimedia advertising on the Instagram platform, and prioritizing having sponsored posts. These implications can be used by NPOs to reach donors even after the pandemic is over.

Keywords: pandemic, marketing, donations, nonprofit organizations, digital marketing, Instagram, social media

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1. Introduction

In March of 2020, the world was faced with the Coronavirus, most commonly referred to as the Covid-19 pandemic, which has since resulted in over a year of unprecedented times (AJMC Staff, 2021). Due to this pandemic, many industries and businesses have dealt with constant change and uncertainty (Martyn, 2020). In this mix of industries, nonprofit organizations (NPOs), too, have been incredibly impacted.

NPOs are generally created to improve quality of life for others at a community, local, state, national, or even global level and are not designed for private or financial gain, but for the advancement of public interest (UpCounsel, 2020). A world-wide “new-normal” consisting of lockdowns, remote work, limited in-person events, and inconsistent reopening plans, has made it essential for NPOs to pivot and implement different marketing and communication strategies to keep doors open and maintain meaningful relationships with donors, those who are crucial for the success of NPOs.

The philanthropic sector has kept a close relationship with social media. Pre-pandemic, NPOs have frequently utilized Instagram as a marketing tool. For example, CARE, a nonprofit organization focused on defeating poverty, achieving social justice, and fighting for women and girls, partook in an Instagram social media campaign in 2018 using the Instagram Stories component. To do this, CARE used Instagram stories to tell compelling stories about women they serve. Their campaign was titled, “Stories from the Other Side of the World” and it follows seven women over seven days showcasing their narratives and day-to-day life (Ibrisevic, 2018). While CARE serves as an example of how Instagram has been used, since then, the world has experienced new shifts and

therefore, more research needs to be done about what Instagram strategies worked well during this unprecedented shock to the world.

The research of this thesis will aim to answer what strategic components of Instagram marketing worked best to influence NPO donations during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as provide a long-term outlook as to what strategic components will remain important for donor retention as the world enters post-pandemic mode. **What strategic components of Instagram marketing worked best to influence NPO donations during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Marketing campaign strategies of NPOs will be analyzed to provide data on what ways they have utilized Instagram as a marketing tool to influence and maintain donor engagement throughout the pandemic. To assist in that research, interviews will take place to define what guidelines marketing specialists and representatives from each organization follow regarding donor engagement marketing strategies, what risks are involved in implementing such marketing campaigns and what trends are applied for successful donor engagement through the organization's Instagram account.

Social Media Marketing

There are almost 5 billion internet users, and roughly 92% of those users access the internet via mobile devices (Johnson, 2021). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), mobile devices include, “a mobile phone (in later use *esp.* a smartphone) or a portable computing device (in later use *esp.* a tablet computer)”. This increasing use of the internet has led to digitalization. Following the OED, “digitalization” is defined as “the adoption or increase in use of digital or computer technology by an organization, industry, country, etc.”. With almost 5 billion internet

users, digitalization has introduced new ways for businesses to sell and market goods and services on a variety of different online platforms, such as social media platforms.

Social media platforms “allow each organization to create and reach new networks and mobilize the networks to take action” (Guo & Saxton, 2014). Such platforms can include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, just to name a few. Social media has redefined interpersonal interaction with society by creating a platform for feedback that has never existed before. Social media marketing (SMM) can be defined as the use of social media and social networks to market a company’s products and services (Hayes, 2021). It provides companies ways to engage with existing consumers, as well as reaching new audiences.

With SMM, businesses create content that attracts an audience and others share it on their social media outlets. SMM aims to create content that users will engage with and ultimately share with their social network. In turn this helps a business build brand awareness and increase customer outreach (Rouse, 2011). Social media platforms have become a hub for customers to express their opinions and reviews onto other users.

According to a study conducted by The Content Factory (2018), the average cost of social media marketing services is between \$200 and \$350 per day. Per year, that equates to around \$72,000 and \$126,000. In 2021, almost 92% of United States marketers in companies larger than 100 employees were expected to use social media for marketing purposes. Around 63% of marketing professionals strongly agree that social media marketing is very important to their business (Statistica, 2021). While this data supports for-profit organizations and their use of social media marketing, this study will collect

research to unpack how NPOs have utilized Instagram for their own marketing purposes, specifically to influence donations during the pandemic.

About Instagram

In October of 2010, the Instagram application, created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, was launched, and in just one day, accumulated 25,000 users. At the end of the first week, the application had been downloaded around 100,000 times and by December of 2010, the number of users had reached one million (Blystone, 2020). According to the Instagram webpage, Instagram is a free photo and video sharing application available on IOS devices, such as the iPhone or iPad, as well as Android devices including phones and tablets from Google, Samsung and others (Instagram, 2020). Instagram can also be accessed through the web at Instagram.com, however, content can only be uploaded from the mobile app. Furthermore, the website states that anyone over the age of 13 can create an Instagram account by registering an email address and creating a username.

Instagram allows users to upload photos or videos to the application and share them with their followers, or with a select group of friends. Similar to other social platforms, interacting with other users can be done by following them, letting others follow you, commenting, liking, tagging, and direct messaging (Moreau, 2021). Every individual who creates an Instagram account has a profile to share their content, a news feed to interact with and view their followers, and an explore page to search for other user accounts.

Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has released new features for businesses, including advanced analytics, shoppable Instagram posts, new ways to drive traffic from

Instagram Stories, and video incorporations such as IGTV, and Reels, providing a unique platform for organizations to promote its mission and services to optimize its promotional tactics (Huey Lim & Yazdanifard, 2016). With roughly a billion active users, Instagram serves as one of the most popular social networks worldwide (Statistica, 2021). With the large-scale use of Instagram, businesses have found this to be an opportunity for marketing. While many Instagram components are known to be of use to for-profit businesses, this research will aim to discover how and which components NPOs have been found to be successful to influence donors during the pandemic.

Nonprofit Donations

Need for Donations

The backbone of any NPO is funding. Without strong donor support, NPOs struggle to remain functioning (Aposporos, 2021). This information makes donations a vital element for NPO success. Alexandra Pia Brovey, the senior director of gift planning at Northwell Health Foundation, says that in order to “successfully engage with donors, fundraising professionals need to be in a donor-centered frame of mind” (2020). These donations can be separated into three different categories: individuals, corporations, and foundations (Jarvis, 2021).

Individual Donations

Individuals make up over 70% of all charitable donations, (Charity Navigator, 2018). These types of donations include, but are not limited to, online donations, mobile donations, text fundraising, recurring donations, event fundraising, direct mail, and volunteers. Individual donations have historically accounted for over two-thirds of all donations. This alone showcases how it is the public, not large companies or grantors,

who is responsible for the vast majority of annual NPO donations. With social media, more individuals can be reached.

Corporation Donations

According to the Council on Foundations, corporate donations refer to the investments and activities a company voluntarily partakes in to responsibly manage and account for its impact on society. Corporation donations can take many forms. For instance, a corporation can give corporate grants, employee volunteerism, and in-kind donations, just to name a few. Companies that participate in giving publicly, often showcase its ability to deliver the values of their organizations and in return benefit from having a higher sense of corporate social responsibility. For many leading companies, corporate donations lead to more than just simply giving to a good cause. For instance, Fannie Mae, a private mortgage company, was ranked first and second in Business Ethics' 100 Best Corporate Citizens list in 2004. By engaging in a variety of philanthropic activities, such engagement has showcased not only Fannie Mae's giving back, but also its corporate social responsibility which enhances society's expectation that business be good corporate citizens (Hill, Smith, 1991). Another example includes Coca-Cola Company's commitment to giving back 1% of its prior year's annual operating income. In 2020, the Coca-Cola company gave \$186 million to around 432 organizations (The Coca-Cola Company, 2021). Walmart has a commitment as well, which provides a volunteer grant of \$250 to an organization that an employee spends 25 hours volunteering at (Double the Donation, 2021).

Foundation Donations

There are three different types of foundation donations: corporate foundation, private foundation, community foundations. Corporate foundations, similarly, to corporation donations, come from corporations willing to donate to support an organization's mission. Private foundations award grants to NPOs based on certain guidelines. Most typically there is an application process for NPOs to be considered for private foundation grants. Community foundations serve certain regions and award grants to NPOs within the regions they serve. Community foundations distribute grants for a variety of reasons, including, building and renovations, endowments, research, annual funds, and more. According to the 2019 Donor Advised Fund annual report, community foundations totaled an estimated \$5.95 billion contribution to organizations including NPOs (2020). In 2017, foundations accounted for 16% of all donations, equating to about \$66.9 billion (Giving Statistics, 2018).

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is another way to streamline donations. By definition, crowdfunding is when businesses, organizations, or individuals fund a project or venture with small donations from many people, as opposed to one or two main investors (Johnson, 2021). NPOs use crowdfunding as another way to increase their online donations. According to Gore and DiGiammarino (2014), they found that if used strategically, crowdfunding can help NPOs build community networks, increase brand awareness, and expand their donor base to increase funding and impact. With crowdfunding, donors can encourage their personal network of friends, family, and

colleagues on Instagram to join them in supporting a specific organization or mission, thus increasing not only the monetary donations, but also the brand awareness of a NPO.

Knowing that there are many ways to engage in fundraising and donation opportunities, this poses the question of if and how NPOs have been able to utilize the Instagram platform in a way to influence such donations, and furthermore, what parts of Instagram have proven to be most successful. Through the interviews in this study with NPO marketing professionals, that information will be useful in developing a conclusion.

2. COVID-19 Pandemic Background

The Coronavirus pandemic disrupted labor markets around the globe. Early into the pandemic, millions of people lost jobs, and others were adjusting to working from home due to lockdowns and closings. Ultimately, COVID-19 has changed the way that people work. According to research done by McKinsey and Company (2021) the pandemic has accelerated existing trends in remote work, e-commerce, and automation. Research supports that the COVID-19 pandemic has increasingly driven the digitalization of businesses around the world (Amankwah-Amoah, et al, 2021). Digital marketing among industries is a topic that has been thoroughly studied. However, further study of the implications, pivots and strategies of digital marketing and communication regarding NPOs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to better understanding of NPO SMM. Specifically, marketing and communication among NPOs throughout the past year should be studied in order to learn a better understanding of how NPOs can influence and maintain successful donor engagement through the social media platform of Instagram during a pandemic.

Along with investigating the constructs formalized in the research question, this research will also look to examine how those strategies provide a long-term outlook as to what ways digital engagement will remain important for donor retention as the world enters the post-pandemic period, in order to provide tips for successful strategic marketing components for NPO Instagram accounts.

3. Literature Review

Instagram as a Marketing Tool Pre-Pandemic

Social media has been widely associated with marketing, particularly since there have been a total of over 2 billion active social media users worldwide since 2015 (Dean, 2021). Chi (2011, 46) defines social media marketing as “connection between brands and consumers, [while] offering a personal channel and currency for user centered networking and social interaction.” (Paquette, 2013).

The relation between social media, specifically regarding the Instagram platform, and marketing is a well-established concept; a qualitative study by Berg, and Sterner (2015), concluded that Instagram is home to unique characteristics such as the real-time aspect, and hashtags, reinforcing Instagram’s effectiveness as a marketing tool for companies.

For instance, an Instagram study conducted by Bergström and Bäckman (2013) focused on two methods of analysis: content analysis, and survey analysis. Through the content analysis the content and level of interaction of 200 Instagram posts were examined. While the survey conducted focused on investigating Instagram users’ motivations for using Instagram as well as their motivations for following a company profile on the platform.

Through the completed research, results showed strong connections between the different kinds of content posted and the levels of user engagement. It found that companies who mainly use Instagram to market its products and to share information about upcoming events and new products and/or releases received low levels of interaction on such posts. On the other hand, the companies that utilized Instagram's co-creative features, such as encouraging followers to use company specific hashtags, the level of interaction increased by as much as five times.

Another case study done by Kally A. Lavoie (2015) studied how Instagram can help market a company's brand identity. The case specifically focused on Dunkin' Donuts, an American multinational coffee and doughnut company, and sought to discover how the company uses Instagram as a way to market its brand. Through the study, they found that Dunkin' Donuts uses both the textual and visual elements of Instagram together to create a unique social media experience for the followers and fans of the brand. More specifically, it found that the company utilizes its strong brand name and imagery by including its logo, the brand colors, and the name when possible on its Instagram account. Due to its brand centered content, such as the hashtag #mydunkin, followers can use interactive methods such as these to upload and share pictures of Dunkin' Donuts products. This case highlights a few of the many different components of Instagram that have been used as a brand marketing tool.

Furthermore, research shows that companies are using Instagram as a way to create marketing campaigns specifically through the use of influencers. According to the Merriam -Webster Dictionary, influencers are defined as "a person who is able to generate interest in something (such as a consumer product) by posting about it on social

media.” Social Influencer Marketing is defined by Singh et al. as “a technique that employs social media (content created by everyday people using highly accessible and scalable technologies such as blogs, message boards, podcasts, microblogs, bookmarks, social networks, communities, wikis, and vlogs) and social influencers (everyday people who have an outsized influence on their peers by virtue of how much content they share online) to achieve an organization’s marketing and business needs”(Singh et al. 2012, p. 19).

In a qualitative study conducted by (Biaudet, 2017), semi-structured interviews were completed with the Co-founder and CEO of the influencer marketing agency, Monochrome. Themes focused on influencer marketing and the process of influencer marketing and campaigns were discussed. Through these interviews, results indicated that social influencer marketing on Instagram is a logical process where the built in level of trust between influencers and readers is impossible for a brand to build alone with the consumer. Thus, providing strong support as to why influencer marketing is considered to be a strategic component of Instagram marketing.

Through this past research, it is clear that strategies on the Instagram platform have been implemented and relatively successful in achieving their goals through Instagram marketing pre-pandemic. However, this research aims to fill in the gaps of Instagram marketing throughout the pandemic, as well as, through the lens of a NPO.

Instagram as a Marketing Tool During COVID-19

In the midst of a pandemic that has led to a 70% increase in online usage (Beech, 2020), as well as an era of fast changing social media trends, social media marketing has become a necessity among companies. For reference, in 2021, almost 92% of United

States marketers in companies larger than 100 employees are expected to use social media for marketing purposes (Statistica, 2021).

Furthermore, research supports that the COVID-19 pandemic has increasingly driven the digitalization of businesses around the world (Amankwah-Amoah, et al, 2021). This increased online usage and marketing expectation has saturated the advertising market. All this to say that findings of older studies demonstrating unique characteristics of Instagram, such as Bergs and Sterner's research, may not be as accurate during these current times. In consideration of this changing landscape, researchers have become increasingly interested in optimizing social media marketing tools.

Exploratory research by Mason, Narcum, K. Mason, and Awan (2021) conclude that since the pandemic, consumers have increased their utilization of social media as a tool for "identifying products, collecting information on products, evaluating products and making product purchases." Thus, contributing to the research that social media marketing has increased as a form of advertising since the pandemic. Additionally, several qualitative and quantitative studies have focused on Instagram usage as a form of marketing during the pandemic (Noris, Cantoni 2021; Curtis, Chad M., et al 2021) For instance, data exemplifies that since the start of the pandemic, the use of influencers as a social media marketing tool has increased. The market has grown from \$1.7 billion in 2016 to 9.7 billion in 2020. In 2021, it raised to \$13.8 billion, indicating the strong growth the market is experiencing. According to Influencer Marketing Hub, 56% of brands are now investing in long-term relationships with influencers.

Across these studies, there is consistent evidence that social media, as well as Instagram specific marketing usage, has increasingly become a more primary form of advertising and communication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, a study in 2020 studied the Instagram marketing strategies of the top three online food delivery services (OFDS) before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jia, Si Si, et al.). Through their research, their findings concluded OFDS adapted their Instagram marketing content by implementing the theme of ‘combating the pandemic’.

Additionally, another piece of research from the work of Dias, Pessoa, and Andrade (2020), the authors developed an exploratory study to map the main changes in brand communication on Instagram during COVID-19 to understand how both brands, influencers and users perceive them. Through their research, they concluded that during the COVID-19 pandemic, brands collaborate with influencers to promote social responsibility.

Overall, there is research supporting that changes within Instagram marketing strategies throughout COVID-19 have been investigated. However, such research only demonstrates strategies in the context of for-profit organizations and have not yet explored the Instagram strategies for non-profit organizations. This thesis seeks to fill this research gap by investigating Instagram marketing strategies within NPOs specifically during the time of the pandemic.

Nonprofit Donations During the Pandemic

The backbone of any nonprofit organization (NPO) is funding. NPOs rely on earned income, government funding, charitable donations and investment income to

support numerous programs and services for the public good. Without strong donor support, NPOs struggle to remain functioning (Aposporos, 2021).

Based on results from both quantitative and qualitative research using multiple sources, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy identified key takeaways during its study, *Understanding Philanthropy in Times of Crisis: The Role of Giving Back During COVID-19* (2021) relating to individual and corporate giving during the COVID-19 pandemic. Key takeaways from that research included: innovation and digital adaptation were vital to meeting new demands during the pandemic, Americans have maintained their commitment to charitable giving throughout the pandemic, and end of year giving made up a larger portion of giving in 2020 than in the previous two years.

While it is clear that there is research available representing the shift from in-person donor engagement to digital donor engagement during the pandemic (Murphy, 2021), there is a lack of significant research relating this digital donor engagement specifically to Instagram. Furthermore, there is an absence of research on the strategy behind such digital engagement that has proven to successfully influence donations including how the donor relationships have been maintained throughout the duration of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic created an environment of crisis where it became more crucial to provide services for those in need, further stressing the funding streams to support such activities and programs. Johnson, Rauhaus, and Farley-Webb (2020), conducted a study of article reviews focusing on historical financing patterns for US nonprofits and secondary data to provide understanding as to how COVID-19 might change nonprofit financing. Their findings concluded earned revenues, the historically

largest source of revenue for nonprofits, had been down significantly. The findings of this study also suggested that the philanthropic response from those with resources, individuals with a high net-worth, institutional funders and corporations had been large.

Through this research two factors were made clear: [1] during the COVID-19 pandemic, donations were being made by both individuals and corporations, and [2] Instagram components and strategies played a role in these donations. However, the specific Instagram strategies that proved to be successful in capturing the donations is not clear. This thesis seeks to investigate this.

4. Research Methodology

Research approach

There are two main research methods to collect data: quantitative research and qualitative research. The type of research used depends on the type of information the author is looking for in their study. Quantitative research methods emphasize objective measurements and the numerical analysis of data collected through (but not limited to) polls, questionnaires, and surveys. Quantitative research focuses on using numerical data to explain a particular phenomenon (Babbie, 2010).

Qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Authors Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as the “study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. Different types of qualitative research include, but are not limited to, focus groups, interviews, ethnographies, and case study research.

In this paper, qualitative methodology is chosen to execute the empirical study of this research due to its exploratory nature. Qualitative data provides flexibility to explore detailed information about any experience or knowledge (Whiting, 2008). Furthermore, since this thesis question concerns Instagram marketing strategies and donor engagement under the effects of COVID-19, qualitative research is best to collect a richer source of information from a small number of people about knowledge, experiences, feelings, and attitudes, and is effective in helping better understand, explain, and explore research subjects' behavior, and experiences.

Research design

Personal interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire with the participants are conducted to gather qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to explore detailed information about any experience or knowledge (Whiting, 2008). The semi-structured questionnaire allows the author to ask the participant a set of structured questions that not only provide the needed information for the research study, but also opens the opportunity to ask follow-up questions if needed (Adams 2015, 493). The questionnaire focuses on the participants' opinions, knowledge, experience, and predictions on Instagram marketing strategies and donor engagement pre-, during- and post-pandemic. The interviews for this research were executed online through Zoom, a video call platform.

Data collection

The author successfully interviewed four participants, who have work experience in marketing from 3 NPO organizations. The original plan was to interview at least 5 experts in NPO marketing; however, the study has faced difficulties due to bandwidth

limitations from the organizations and concerns surrounding the confidentiality of the research from the participants. The participants were approached by the author through email or an Instagram message directly through the participant's NPO organization first by explaining the interview process and what research was being studied. After the participant agreed to the interview, the interviewer and participant chose a suitable time for the virtual interview. The interviews were audio-recorded by Zoom, then transcribed if needed by the author. The answers then were used for the data analysis of this thesis.

5. Data Analysis

Four participants were recruited to be interviewed. A questionnaire guide consisting of ten questions sectioned into four categories regarding, general information, pre-Covid-19 marketing, Instagram marketing efforts for fundraising and donor engagement, and post pandemic, was used by the author during the interviewing process. The guide can be found after the references portion of this study. The empirical study was introduced to four participants, who have work experience in the marketing and donation field. The paragraph below summarizes information about the four participants with their job position, industry and region. All identities and information leading to the identities of the interviewees have been removed to retain complete anonymity. The names of the participants and their organization will be changed into pseudonyms.

The first interviewee has been working in the marketing field for several years. They have experience in public relations, communications, and event management. They are currently the Vice President of Marketing and Communications for an NPO based in the United States. The second interviewee is a Communications Coordinator and has worked as an NPO marketer for over ten years. They work as the Communications

Coordinator and lead the social media marketing team. Throughout their five years as the Communications Coordinator for the organization, they were able to provide insightful information regarding Instagram marketing trends throughout the years.

The third interviewee is the Marketing Manager at an NPO located in the United States. They have been in this role for over 5 years. Their role includes digital marketing and managing the organization's Instagram page. As a digital marketer, their experiences and knowledge can make a meaningful contribution to this study. Lastly, the fourth interviewee is the Associate Director of Advancement Marketing and Communications. Their role includes leading and executing communications for planning the organization's annual giving campaigns, as well as creating marketing and communication strategy and implementation, and project management. Not only will their marketing insights be important for this study, but their knowledge in annual giving will directly contribute to the donor portion of this study.

6. Results

This study started first by asking the interviewees about their current position and the NPO they work for. Then the interviewees were asked to share what their Instagram marketing plans for their respected NPOs were before the pandemic hit in March of 2020. Prior to COVID-19, interviewees agreed that the majority of their NPO donation marketing and donor engagement came primarily from human interaction, for instance, through fundraising events, peer-to-peer fundraising, or direct mail. All participants said that their Instagram marketing content before the pandemic, had little focus and little impact on donor engagement. To follow, all interviewees stated that their NPOs were not very experienced with using Instagram for donor marketing, as it was not a major drive to

increase their audience or donors. Instead, interviewees said their NPOs focused on engaging the audience they already had since growing their social media audience was not a primary focus.

After asking the interviewees about their pre-COVID-19 Instagram marketing plans for their respected NPOs all respondents had varying answers that kept in line with what their organization marketing had been in the past. All interviewees said that their marketing plans for Instagram lacked innovation, as they saw no need in being creative or trying to increase and engage their audience since most of their donations and donor involvement came from human interaction. Interviewee 1 said that their Instagram marketing strategy consisted of mainly still-graphic images, and they were not planning on including different marketing tactics. Another interviewee said Instagram was just not a primary realm of focus, as their organization prioritized other ways to engage their community, therefore there was not much marketing done on the platform.

In regard to donor behavior during COVID-19, all interviewees said that there were changes in behavior and one of the largest changes came from the fact that people were forced to stay at home, and they were not going out to interact with other people. Interviewees believe that this not only led to an increase in social media usage, but also an increase in a need to feel connected. Almost all the interviewees agreed that during this time, people were searching for connection. Due to the stay-at-home orders and lockdowns, people were not achieving the levels of connection with other people as they were before the pandemic. The interviewees mentioned that social media seemed to be an outlet where people could feel connected to others.

Interviewees said when they noticed this behavior change, they had to pivot their Instagram marketing strategy. They agreed that this change also led them to having to rethink their entire way of engaging donors. A common theme from the interviewees included a social media pivot to Instagram campaigns tailored towards making their audiences feel connected which ultimately increased engagement on their Instagram page.

When asked about what strategic components of Instagram were used to engage donors, the interviewees had a common thread of responses. The first being the introduction of video content. Prior to the pandemic, most of the interviewees said they had not utilized the video functions that Instagram had to offer. Some had used IGTV, but they had used sparingly. In general, the interviewees did not view video content as a priority. Most of their Instagram content included graphics, either with text, or just an image. However, during the pandemic and the newly discovered need of connectivity among their audiences, the interviewees agreed that incorporating the video components of Instagram, including, Stories, Reels, and IGTV, created a way for their audience to see their NPO's authenticity, impact on the communities they serve, and ultimately feel connected with their NPO's mission.

Interviewees also mentioned that asking for money is not an ideal way to market for donations. If a post were to include messaging that was blatantly asking for money, it would not be a very successful post, and most interviewees said it would give followers a negative impression of their NPO. Interviewee 3 specifically mentioned that during this time, they felt it was inappropriate to have a campaign focus on asking people for money. Their reasoning being that the pandemic uprooted the lives of many and there were

people all over the nation who were facing job loss and financial insecurity. Therefore, creating content, such as impact videos, where followers could see the positive work the NPO was doing firsthand, made people feel emotionally compelled to give and ultimately eliminated the need to blatantly ask their audience for donations.

From incorporating the video components of Instagram, all participants stated that they noticed a change in donor engagement. Most of the interviewees stated that videos were able to showcase the impact and importance of what their NPO does, and therefore influenced their audience to donate and all interviewees saw tremendous growth in individual giving through Instagram during this time. Interviewees said they noticed an increase of clicks on donation links through their Instagram pages, specifically after video content was posted. One of the interviewees touched on the fact that the implementation of video content on Instagram not only increased engagement and awareness of their NPO, but also led to an increase in volunteer interest which according to the interviewee, is an invaluable asset for this NPO's success. Interviewee 2 provided specific numerical data on behalf of their NPO. They said their engagement on Instagram was higher than past quarters and their follower rate increased by almost 7%, which they said was impressive since their engagement rate had been stagnant for the previous few years.

As for the future of NPO Instagram marketing, it is ever evolving. When the interviewees were asked about what marketing strategies they are following for the rest of the year and going forward as the pandemic becomes less prevalent, they all spoke about the constant change in trends and the new algorithms currently present on the Instagram platform, which have made it continuously difficult to predict and plan a

strategy around. Most interviewees believed that their organizations would adapt their Instagram marketing strategies to the new social media habits and users. Interviewee 1 mentioned that NPO marketers are often working with limited funds and tight budgets. Therefore, it is imperative for their marketers to weigh out what the pros and cons are before participating in an Instagram trend that may or may not pay off by successfully bringing in donors. Thus, this showcases a limitation of using Instagram as a platform to market to donors.

7. Managerial Implications

As the objective of this research study is to examine what strategic components of Instagram marketing worked best to influence NPO donations during the COVID-19 pandemic, this chapter centralizes on how the findings of this study can be implemented. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that two Instagram marketing strategies were successfully adapted to influence donations during the pandemic: [1] focusing on authentic media to increase user connection, and [2] increased innovation through video content. Knowing this information is important for NPO marketers currently in this space, especially for NPOs that may be struggling to influence donations through Instagram.

From these results, there are two strategies the author created that NPO marketers can implement into their Instagram marketing to influence donations. The first being to increase their use of multimedia advertising on the Instagram platform. Multimedia advertising includes, but is not limited to, video, audio slideshows, and animated videos. Multimedia ads are also easily accessible for their audiences to playback and watch on computers, laptops, mobile devices, and other electronic devices. Maximizing the use of

video content, as mentioned above through the interviewees, is a way to keep people engaged and show the firsthand impact of how the NPO positively impacts the communities they serve. It shows the authenticity of the NPO and increases the connection between users and the NPO. Based on the experiences of the interviewees, this incorporation can increase not only more monetary donations, but also can increase overall engagement, brand awareness, and volunteering interest which helps support the success of the NPO.

Secondly, based on the experiences described by the interviewees, one of the limitations Instagram presents is the random and unpredictable algorithms. When there is an algorithm change, many NPOs struggle to adapt and find a way to be successful through it. Currently, the Instagram algorithm boosts sponsored posts. Sponsored posts are advertisements that are paid for by an organization wanting advertisements. “Boosts” mean that the sponsored post will be randomly placed in the Instagram feeds of various users, thus increasing the post’s reach. Therefore, it would benefit NPOs to prioritize having sponsored posts. It has proven to be an effective way of advertising through the Instagram platform. Through those ads, NPOs can connect with not only already existing donors, but also potential supporters in which case will help them increase brand awareness and reach a broader audience. Ultimately, making room for sponsored Instagram posts in NPOs financial budgets can help them maximize donations on the platform.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, donor behavior changed during the pandemic as it forced many people to rely on social media for their need to feel connected and engaged with others.

After the conduction of these interviews, NPOs were able to use their Instagram accounts to modify how they approach their Instagram marketing strategies specifically for donor engagement. Two main strategies were made clear in both this empirical research and the theoretical findings. Those two main strategies being focusing on authentic media to increase user connection and increasing innovation through video content.

Stemming from these results, the author created two strategies that NPO marketers can implement into their Instagram marketing to influence donations. Those two strategies being increasing their use of multimedia advertising on the Instagram platform, and prioritizing having sponsored posts. Maximizing the use of video content, as mentioned above through the interviewees, is a way to keep people engaged and show the firsthand impact of how the NPO positively impacts the communities they serve. Prioritizing sponsored Instagram posts in NPOs financial budgets can help them maximize donations on the platform. These implications can be used by NPOs to reach donors even after the pandemic is over.

For future research, the author recommends that researchers interview a larger number of people in the NPO sector, expanding the interviews to not only marketers in the field, but also to other experts that can share their insight and experiences regarding marketing and donor behavior as well.

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Questionnaire Guide

RQ: What strategic components of Instagram marketing worked best to influence NPO donations during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Section 1: General information regarding the organization, interviewee, and the main characteristics of the NPO

- Introduction about yourself. (Name, current work position, experience in the marketing field, etc.)

Section 2: Pre-Covid-19 Marketing

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, what were the predicted Instagram marketing trends that you had known of?
- What was the marketing strategy of your company for 2020 pre-pandemic? Did it follow any trends that you mentioned above?
- On average, how many new donors and new volunteers did your NPO acquire via non-digital channels in each month before Covid 19?

Section 3: Instagram Marketing Efforts for Fundraising and Donor Engagement

- On average, how many new donors does your NPO acquire via digital marketing channels each month during Covid 19? How many of those donors were obtained through Instagram?
- How did your donors' behavior change after the pandemic? What effects did it have on your Instagram marketing strategy?
- What components of Instagram did your NPO adopt to influence and promote donor engagement during the pandemic? Are they any different prior to the pandemic? If so, how?

- What factors do you think support the emergence of Instagram marketing as an effective way for your NPO to acquire and influence donors during Covid 19?
What was the most significant change in your opinion?
- What factors do you think hinder the emergence of Instagram as an effective way for your company to acquire and retain donors?

Section 4: Post-Pandemic

- What are your predictions for Instagram marketing trends in the upcoming year?
Does the NPO have any plans to implement strategies for these trends?