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Insta-Impact: Evaluating Media Forms Used by Non-Profit Organizations to Engage with their Publics on Instagram

Emily Barber

Elizabethtown College, barbere@etown.edu

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Insta-Impact:

Evaluating Media Forms Used by Non-Profit Organizations to Engage with their Publics on

Instagram

Elizabethtown College

Emily P. Barber

Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of the way organization's function, making their presence known on popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Feng & Du, 2017). Non-profit organizations are included among those that businesses utilize these growing online platforms to gain support for their given causes.

Social media has been shown to influence people's opinions on specified companies and organizations (Nah & Saxton, 2012). This influence makes it possible for organizations to tailor the opinions of their supporters, increasing the importance of having an active and curated social media presence. In order to succeed in this field and better construct an organization's social media face, quantitative research is conducted to seek how publics interact with a given post (Chalmers & Shotton, 2015). This usage of self-reporting from the companies, which may cause a skew in results, thus seeking successful techniques across a variety of fields and organizations is necessary. In order for a non-profit organization to have continued success, their usage of social media is just as pivotal.

The objective of this research is to discover which type of social media post will receive the highest level of viewer interaction and therefore success for organizations under the non-profit umbrella.

Literature Review:

In a world where social media has become an integral part of society, more and more organizations have made their presence known across multiple platforms (Feng & Du, 2017). Despite this being a part of popular culture, how important and influential is social media usage on prospective customers and supporters? As social media advertising becomes increasingly

popular among people, it is important that companies and organizations evolve to stay as viable members of society in finding the most successful and efficient ways of advertising.

Opinion Influence

According to Nah and Saxton (2012), social media usage has a way of influencing people's opinions on specified companies and organizations. With feelings toward social media varying so largely and responses dependent solely on opinion, it is imperative for organizations to be able to influence a consumer's satisfaction and trust when viewing their presence on social media (Feng & Du, 2017). Despite social media having such a large influence on so many people, not every company is utilizing it in a compelling and engaging way. Many different lobbying organizations have been seen to be less likely to be using social media as a means of advocacy and support gaining (Chalmers & Shotton, 2015). Many studies are dependent upon self-reporting as a technique to quantitatively illustrate how their publics interact with their organization across platforms (Chalmers & Shotton, 2015). This usage of self-reporting has the possibility to skew results. It is also important to note that influence is not controlled by one party, organization or viewer, more than another. Defined as interactivity, the relationship the parties have on each other is a necessary measure that must be looked at when discussing this on the experimental level (Ott et al., 2016). In order to reach a target audience who has a positive attitude towards their brand, an organization must account for the choice of media and content at which they are providing to their publics.

Content Shared

With Facebook and Instagram being two of the most popular social media platforms, the publication of images on these sites is what can be seen most frequently when viewing an organizations presence on these platforms. With the ultimate goal of brand social media usage to

be creating and increasing recognition, consistency and guidelines are necessary to prevent information overload. Kaufhold et. al. (2018) discuss the importance of clear messaging and guidelines when it comes to emergency situations as follows, “uncertainty can be generated by unreliable information and mistakes due to chaotic and disorganized work of volunteers” (p.199).

It has been shown in the literature that mixed media posts including, photos or videos tend to depict higher user engagement (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). The quality of the content that is placed onto the social media platform of any given organization is imperative with how likely someone will be to interact with a posting and the following was found; “high-quality and professional shot pictures consistently lead to higher engagement on both platforms for both product categories (Li & Xie, 2019, p. 1).” With there being such a large variety of not only content available on social media, but also platforms available for posting, it is integral to a business’s success to remain consistent across platforms.

Despite Instagram being one of the most popular photo sharing platforms, Facebook is still seen as having a higher usage throughout the world (Duffett, 2015). Being at forefront of today’s usage, it is not surprising that much of the literature pointed to Facebook as their only means of study. This provides an opportunity for future research into the use of other platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. Twitter is a platform more focused on text updates as opposed to videos and images, the kind of media distributed on Facebook and Instagram. Li and Xie (2019), “argue that the presence of pictures and emojis, as well as the length of the tweet, contribute to the obtrusiveness of a tweet” (p. 8). The limited research that was discovered covering the platform of Twitter found that there was little to no increase in support when utilizing the platforms ability to have public tweets and private direct messages (Coppock et. al., 2016). Viral advertising influences how likely a viewer or possible customer is to purchase and recognize an

organizations product or cause (Petrescu et. al., 2015). Recognition has been shown to be another important factor in contributing to a consumer's likelihood to support a specific non-profit cause. Increased recognition on social networking sites, specifically mentioning Facebook, proved to increase donation intention and volunteer intention for a cause, compared to an organization that had no recognition (Kim & Um, 2016).

Sanders et. al. (2019) conducted a study to explore the interactions consumers had with the same brand across multiple different platforms. Brands that provide and foster engagement between platforms and consumers create a more personalized experience for their consumer, which generally creates a positive experience for them.

Social media sites provide both channels for brands to connect with the public and measures of brand engagement, defined as following brands on social media and responding to brands' posts via interactive features such as retweets and likes. When brands foster engagement by personalizing communication and responding to consumers, they are engaging in *masspersonal communication* (Sanders et. al., 2019, p.181).

Masspersonal communication, creates content and a platform that the consumer can feel connected. This idea of connection to a brand and the personalization of it circles back to the previously discussed idea of opinion influence. Masspersonal communication can be summed up as this, "...when a brand account's public tweets are intended for a wide audience, they constitute mass communication. However, subsequent personalized , yet public, replies between brand accounts and consumers are masspersonal communication (Sanders et. al., 2019, p.181)." Consumers are able to place themselves into the shoes of another consumer who may have faced an issue with a brand in the past. This makes it vital that the consumer can see the organization handle the issue on a personal yet public level building their trust and recognition for the future.

Posting Frequency

Frequency in posting is an influence on a user's purchase intention or likelihood of donation (Ott et al., 2016). Without the possibility to physically see how posts are able change and evolve over multiple years, multiple experiments discuss how early posts were used to predict how consumers would continue to act once the experimental time concluded. During these periods of study, it was found that there was a rise in post engagement for a single post rather than the total number of posts, when a singular post was pulled out for study, the engagement was shown to be increased compared to when the posts were looked at as a whole. Thus, showing that there was a correlation between an increase in posts and a decrease in engagement among the individual posts (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). The frequency of posting tends to influence a user's attitude toward the advertisement itself, based on the article content that can be found. When advertisements include specific appeals, such as humor, they tended to have an increased likelihood in being shared, illustrating viral intention (Petrescu et al., 2015). It was found that not only did viewers of the advertisements have these strong opinions and emotional responses, but so did the leaders of the organization who had branched out into the social media field as a way to promote their organization (Goldkind, 2015). Well-known, commercial nonprofits are likely to have a more frequent posting schedule and prefer to engage with their large number of publics in this way (Nah & Saxton, 2012). This is what make them commercial and why it is important to survey and analyze a variety of nonprofits at different levels.

Audience

It is important that when attempting to gain support nonprofit organizations seek a variety of audiences, in order to capture the most support possible. Some of the studies researched found

it pivotal to include a diverse population, not only in gender and race but in age, and level of usage on popular platforms (Goldkind, 2015). It is a common theme among platforms that audiences are more likely to follow, like and share posts that have similar ideologies and themes. This subject commonly connected to political beliefs but is a common theme among a variety of posting and support, such as religious affiliation, environmental impact and aesthetic (Coppock et al., 2015). Another approach that many organizations take when attempting to create credibility and gain support is throughout the use of bloggers and sponsorships. With relatability being one of the most common things people seek on social media, companies and organizations who provide sponsorships and opportunities to bloggers and influencers with this quality are more likely to gain support (Hayes & Carr, 2015). When there is an increase in this perceived relatability, there is also an increase in how audiences view the posters' expertise to be, trusting they would not highlight an organization that did not deserve their publicity (Hayes & Carr, 2015).

Summary

There exists a valuable relationship between user engagement and user support for a given organization or company. This fragile relationship is based upon how the company utilizes their social media presence, whether it is through the use of influencers or bloggers, how often their posts are viewed on a followers feed as well as the multimedia that is used on the differing platforms aimed at the different publics and audiences. These factors combine to show the large influence social media has had and continues to have on how organizations such as nonprofit are able to get support whether that be through donations or volunteer support. The content that is created on each of the given platforms should work together to create a personalized relationship with the consumer and or viewer of the material. Having content that follows a clear outline and

theme is what viewers have been seen to seek out when engaging in media. It is clear through this analysis that followers, likes and shares have become a pivotal part of gain support for organizations throughout the world and across multiple platforms. The content that is posted to each of the given platforms will be recorded in order to show the relationship between the materials and how an organization is able to have a following, providing them with support and volunteerism for their organization.

Methodology

A list of 75 non-profit organizations from the Forbes top 100 within the United States was created. A two-week period was designated, and all Instagram posts from these organizations corporate Instagram accounts were collected and categorized on the basis of media type. Social media posts were labeled as either “photo”, “mixed media” or “video”. Additionally, data about each post was recorded. For videos, the number of views and the number of comments was recorded. For photos and mixed/media, the number of likes and the number of comments was recorded. Viewer interaction was measured by recording the number of likes or views as well as comments. Conclusions were drawn based on statistical analysis. This thesis could then be published in journals commonly used by non-profit organizations, as well as, presented at social media-based conference for educational purposes and as part of Elizabethtown College’s annual Scholarship and Creative Arts Day.

Research Question

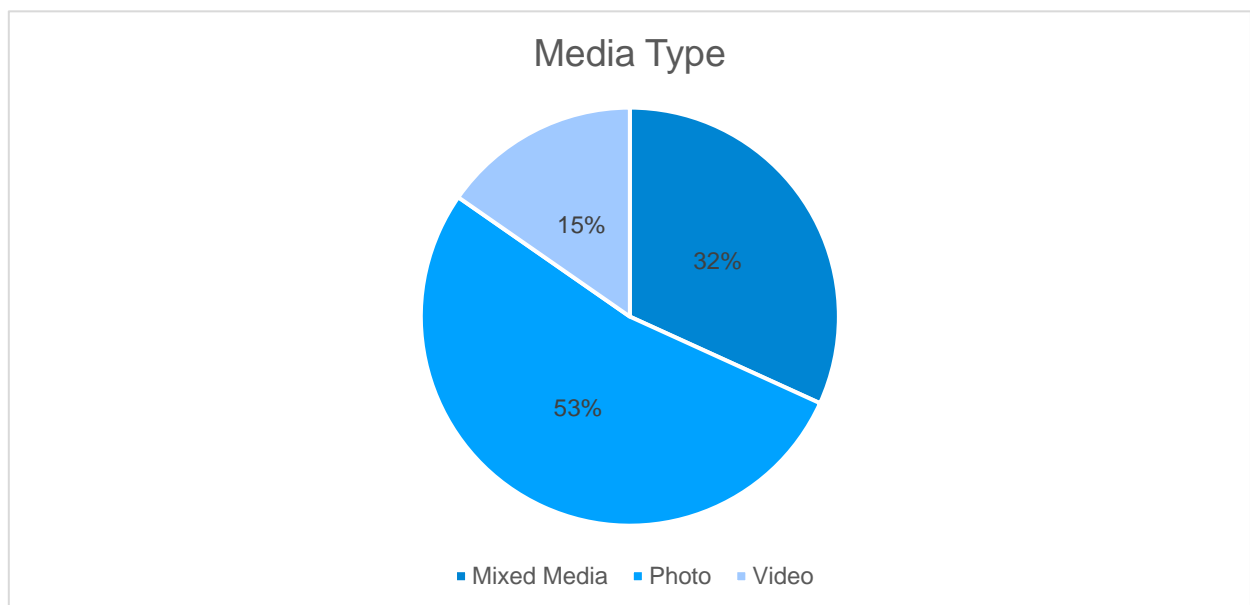
Which type of social media post is the most successful in terms of viewer interaction, through likes or views and comments on the platform of Instagram?

Results

The total number of non-profit organizations that were surveyed over the two-week time period of February 19 to February 26, 2021 was 75. During the two-week collection period, a total of 522 posts were collected. The information collected can be broken down into three different categories; media type, likes/views and comments. The percentage breakdown can be seen below.

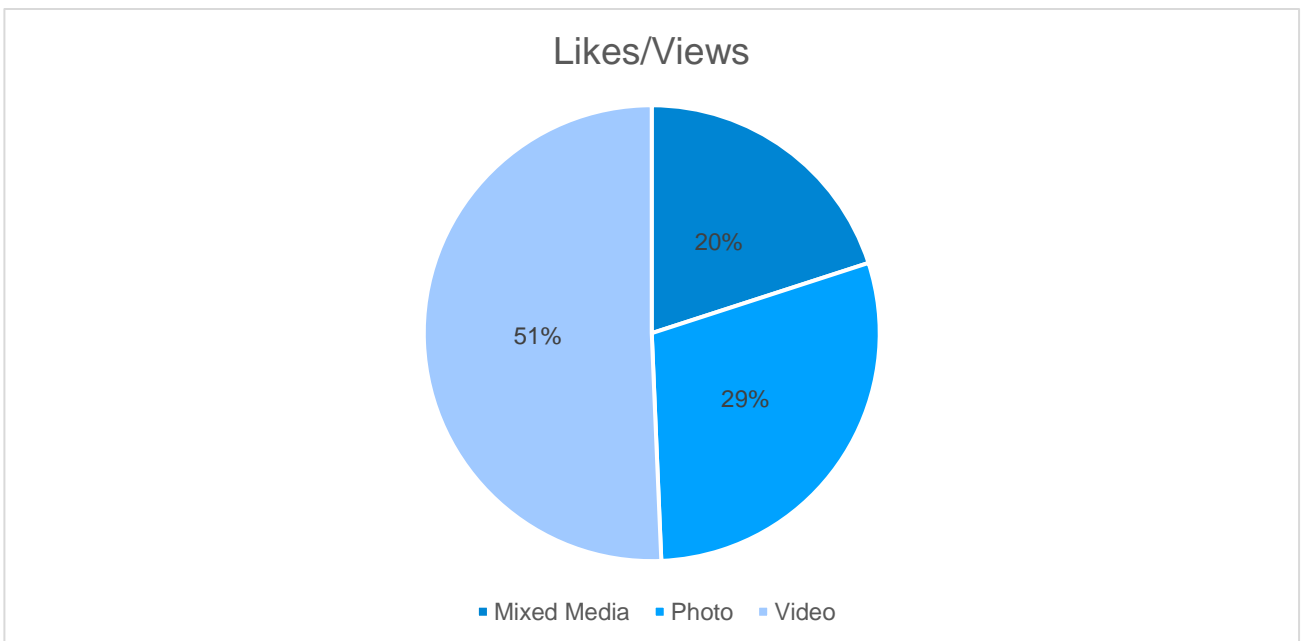
Media Type

Photos proved to be the most common post category, accounting for 53 % (276 posts) of the total, compared to mixed media at 32% (166 posts) and video which accounted for 15% (80 posts) of the total analyzed.



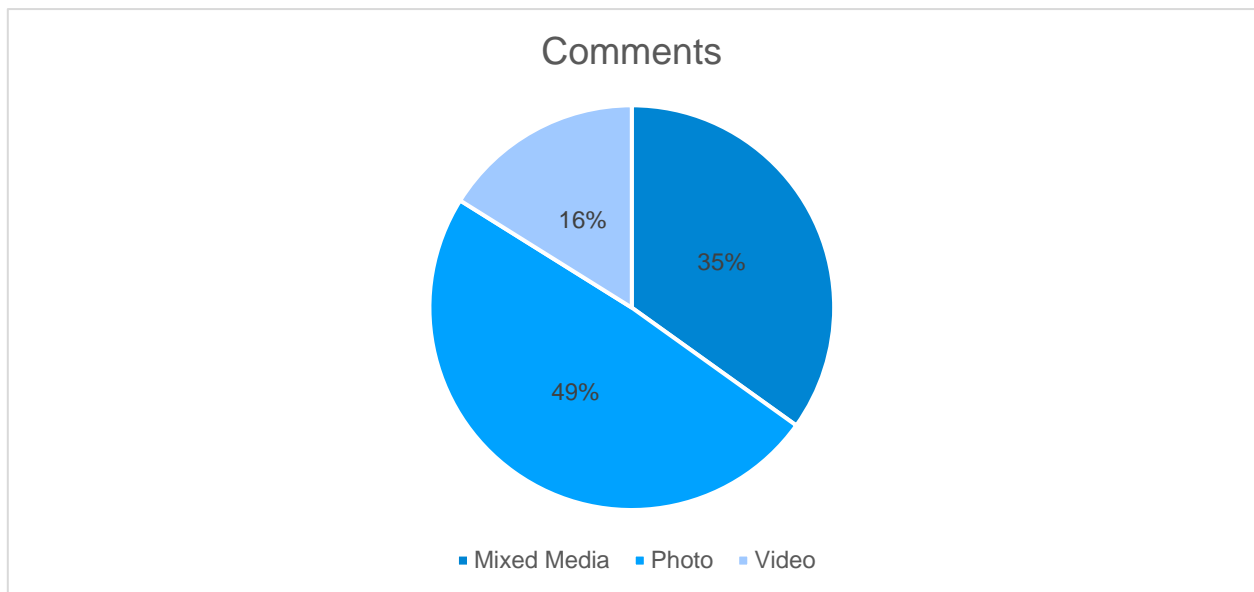
Likes and Views

Views on videos proved to be the highest out of the compared media, with 51% of total likes and views collected. This is over half of combined total likes and views was compared to mixed media that received 20% of the total and 29% of the total was photos. The average number of views a video received was 11,944.1 views compared to the average for a mixed media posting which was 2,273.40 likes and for photos with 2,003 likes on average.



Comments

For comment amounts the majority of total comments were seen at 49% for photo. Mixed media postings compared at 35% of total comments and 16% of total comments were seen to be video postings. The average number of comments on a photo was 24.2, for a mixed media posting it was 28.6 and for a video posting the average was 27.5 comments.



Discussion

One limitation in this study is that there was only one platform that was investigated. Other platforms such as Facebook, Tiktok, Snapchat or Twitter may offer different results. This limitation encompasses others by only exploring the age group of users and also limiting the pool of non-profit organizations to those that were on Instagram. Another limitation to this research is that it focuses on the top 100 non-profits within the United States. There are a little more than a million non-profits within the United States, limiting the selection group was necessary, but also eliminates the other non-profits that may be successful on Instagram. There are millions of non-profits worldwide and the limit of only using those in the United States as a pool of selection

limits the available data in the selection process and therefore the results gathered only have application within the United States. Another limitation of this study is that views were compared to likes. On the platform of Instagram, there was no ability to see the exact likes that a video received nor the number of views a photo or mixed media posting received; thus, it was necessary to compare the two. One final limitation of this study is that the data was collected for only 75 organizations and was only over a two-week time period. For some organizations, despite appearing active on Instagram had no postings within the time frame, causing some zero in the posting category, thus limiting the total number of postings collected.

There are multiple different opportunities for future research after this study. As previously mentioned, the focus of this study was media seen on Instagram, this provides the opportunity for data collection on other platforms such as Facebook and Tiktok. Another opportunity that can be seen is the insights feature Instagram holds. This feature is common on business accounts and allows for an organization to see how many people interacted with their media in any way including likes, comments and views. This extended research would cause a more direct comparison as well as insight into the platform as a whole in usage. Finally, widening the net on how many non-profits studied would be beneficial in finding more clear posting trends. This could mean exploring outside of the top 100 as well as expanding globally as a means of discovering global trends.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research was helpful in the discussion as to which type of posting; photo, mixed media or video, was most successful in gaining a higher amount of engagement on the platform of Instagram. The data illustrates that postings that are video focused, received a higher amount of engagement on the basis of views. On the basis of comments, photos received

the highest amount of engagement. In total, photos were the most common type of medium and received the most overall comments in comparison. This information rejects the hypothesis that mixed media postings would receive the highest level of engagement. The importance of creating a lasting impact on social media is becoming ever important, and the usage by businesses and organizations continues to become popular and necessary. Discovering which posting media gains the highest interaction is crucial for non-profit organizations as they run on support from others both in creating awareness and in monetary donation.

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