



Mediatization of Success
among Small & Medium size NPOs
in the context of Social Media activities

by

Hoda Fahimpour

School of social policy, Sociology and Social Research

The University of Kent

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Sociology

September 2022

Word Count: 89,654

Abstract

Social media has penetrated most domains of UK society in the 21st century. Small and medium-sized non-profit organisations (NPOs), which are defined as having an annual income of up to £1 million, increasingly use social media platforms for a wide range of mission-related outcomes. COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face interaction increased the significance of these platforms among these organisations.

By drawing on the existing understanding of the attention economy and mediatization theory, this research explores how social media as a social context influences beliefs and behaviours among small/medium size NPOs. This project focuses on definitions of success and how this influences activities on these platforms. To achieve this understanding, I have formulated two specific research questions: (1) How do small/medium size non-profit organisations define successful social media activity, and how do they measure it? (2) How are the social media practices of small/medium non-profit organisations impacted by the way they perceive success?

To address these questions, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with staff members from NPOs who are actively engaged in their organisations' social media activities. Furthermore, I carried out a content analysis of 909 social media posts to compare the themes identified during the interviews with the actual activities of these organisations on social media platforms. Due to the timing of this project, which began in 2018, data collection and

analysis focused on both pre-and post-COVID-19 pandemic periods and is, therefore, able to additionally assess the impact of the pandemic on this topic.

The findings of this research suggest that small/medium size NPOs in the UK have been mediatized through their interaction with social media and submit to many of its logics. While study participants have various mission-driven goals related to their presence on these platforms, they rely on counting the number of likes, shares and comments rather than on fulfilling their objectives. The attention economy promoted by the social media platforms mediatized these NPOs beyond their expressed definition of success. In practice, they submit to social media logics in the way they post and create content. For example, by posting frequently to get promoted by the algorithms on these platforms, shortening their textual messages and using more visual content, especially happy images. NPOs, in their communication, prioritise social media logics rather than being based on evidence or best practice in non-profit communications, which may create a risk for achieving ultimate goals.

Mediatization of NPOs is further advanced by a range of well-documented factors, such as resource deprivation and limited access to digital training for staff and volunteers coupled with increasing dependence on social media. Further, many behaviours of the participating NPOs are informed by imitation of others on social media platforms rather than based on robust evidence or their own experience, for example, choice of images, shortening of the texts and presence across multiple platforms without a clear rationale. This is in the context of resource deprivation of the NPOs, which is evident in the gap between NPOs' intentions and practices; for example, the absence of storytelling or the replication of non-tailored

messages across different platforms. Similarly, research participants expressed the heightened importance of social media platforms during the pandemic, but this did not result in significant changes to the quantity and quality of posting patterns before and after the pandemic.

Overall, these findings create a picture that suggests small/medium size NPOs in the UK are broadly unsystematic in how they resource and use social media. Efforts are mostly limited to how much they can attract attention and satisfy the metrics defined by social media platforms. This definition of success, which results from the mediatization of the organisations and submission to the logics of these platforms, impacts the way they behave on these platforms, from the contents they produce to the way they present and post, which in turn impacts their success in securing support and resources to advance their non-profit missions.

This thesis contributes new empirical data and theoretically informed analysis that documents the mediatization of the success of small/medium NPOs in the UK, which undermines the focus and direction of their social media activities and their subsequent capacity to deliver their missions.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my family, especially my husband Mohsen and my son Taha who have always supported me throughout the years of my PhD study.

I thank my supervisors, Dr Beth Breeze and Dr Vincent Miller, for their continued guidance and encouragement.

And thanks to the participants of this research who dedicated their time and shared their experiences, allowing this research to be successfully conducted.

I could not have conducted this research without the generous support of all these people.

Chapter One: Introduction

“Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master.” remarked a famous historian Christian Lous Lange (Tripathi, 2018). The emergence of new technologies has transformed the operation of NPOs in the 21st century. While this transformation has brought many opportunities for NPOs, it has not been without challenges for these organisations. The idea of this research started with the urge to understand how NPOs have been impacted by the pervasive use of digital and internet technologies in society. In other words, how the technologies that were supposed to be the tools to serve the NPOs, changed their users, i.e., NPOs, in the ways they behave and decide?

Although the questions of the research have been fine-tuned after the gaps were found in the literature, it is valuable to understand the formation of the research idea and its broader context. Hence, this chapter starts by explaining why conducting research in digital technologies used by NPOs is critical. This is followed by the next section that focuses on the significance of the NPOs in the UK, showing why it is important to invest in studying these organisations separately and giving them focus. This part is followed by a section that justifies the reasons for focusing on small to medium size NPOs in the UK.

Next, I will explain why public support is vital for small and medium-sized NPOs (hereinafter referred to as S/M NPOs) to achieve their goals. Then, I’ll explain how the communication of NPOs with the public has evolved throughout history, emphasising social media as one of the mediums that NPOs widely adapt to in the contemporary age. This leads to the significance

of social media for the NPOs and why being active on these platforms is critical for engaging the public and getting their support. It is also explained here how the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the need for NPOs to be present and active on these platforms. This is followed by some concrete examples of how social media provided significant opportunities for collective actions that make them attractive for NPOs to achieve their objectives and ambitions.

Understanding the significance of social media for NPOs sets the scene for a possible dependency of these organisations on this media, making it likely that NPOs have submitted to the needs of social media to attract public attention. The next sections explain the competition for attracting attention as one of the main implications of adapting social media platforms, noting that this could have stimulated organisations to behave in more attention-seeking manners and may distract their resources and focus away from the primary goals of their communication. The goals highlighted in studies range from increasing awareness for their causes to accomplishing concrete actions like fundraising or volunteer recruitment. Lastly, it has been explained how exploring the meaning of success and the way that NPOs measure it could shed light on the possible impact of social media on these organisations.

1.1 The Significance of Research: “The Why”

Over the past decade, public life has shifted to the social media sphere, where many political, economic and civil society activities are taking place. As these platforms become integral to public communication, they have the potential to shape values, beliefs, and behaviours that may not have existed previously. Therefore, the role of social media and its impact on society,

including non-profit organisations, can be significant. This has been recognised in the civil society strategy published by the government in August 2018. The document explained the long-term plans to work with civil society to build stronger communities to create a fairer society. In this document, “digital” was mentioned 139 times, which is much higher than the number of times the words “volunteering” and “public services” were mentioned, which were, respectively, 48 and 70 times (Hornung, 2018). This government strategy highlights the crucial role of digital technologies in fostering more robust communities and improving society.

In response to this call, this research seeks to understand the use of digital technologies, specifically social media and its impact in the third sector. This research aims to achieve this objective by shedding light on the subjective meaning of successful social media activity from the point of view of small to medium size NPOs. Additionally, the research will focus on how this definition of success has influenced the way these organisations conduct their social media activities. The result of this research will provide insight into the decision-making process behind the social media activities of these NPOs. Acquiring this understanding will enable more effective evaluation and comprehension of the successes and failures of these NPOs in attaining their ultimate goals through social media.

1.2 The Significance of NPOs in the UK

This section will elaborate on the reason that this research considered a geographic focus in setting its scope. Then, it reviews theories and statistics that emphasise the significance of

NPOs from different aspects and in the UK. It is important to understand the significance of NPOs and their position and contribution in the UK since it helps to establish the value of this research and further studies in the field of NPOs.

Each country has a variety of economic, legal, political, technological developments and cultural/religious contexts. These varieties across the countries may shape the characteristic of NPOs, how they use social media and how social media impact them. For instance, in developing countries, the progress of technological development, including internet accessibility, varies compared to that of developed countries. This discrepancy in technological advancement can have implications for the influence and potential impact of social media platforms on NPOs. Hence, to ensure the depth of this study, the focus of the study will be within the context of one country, the UK. Studying NPOs in the UK would help the focus of the research's questions, the scope of the literature review and the depth of possible findings.

NPOs play a vital economic and social role in the United Kingdom; Explanations for the existence of NPOs in UK society could be seen through the lens of four main theories: contract failure theory by Hansmann (1980), heterogeneity theory by Weisbrod (1975), entrepreneurship theory by James et al. (1980s) and interdependence theory by Salamon (1987). These theories explain the existence of NPOs from different perspectives; for example, heterogeneity theory explains the existence of NPOs from the demand side, whereas entrepreneurship theory explains it from the supply side, but a common point of all these theories is that NPOs are important economic and social forces in societies.

Hansmann's (1987) contract failure theory argues that the non-distribution constraint of NPOs makes them less incentivised to act opportunistically compared to their for-profit counterparts. He stated that NPOs would be the preferred option from the consumers' perspective in distributing goods and services under information asymmetry conditions (Hansmann, 1987a). For example, in the context of donations to an organisation which supports communities hit by natural disasters in another part of the world, the donors often know very little, if anything, about the resulting needs and how best to help, as well as the cost of helping those hit by the disaster. However, the organisation has considerable information about the costs of their past activities. This information asymmetry means the donors will have little hope to assess and keep watch on how their donations are spent and whether the organisation is spending them efficiently or not. In this setup, according to the theory, the donors would trust an organisation that is not profit-seeking and won't aim to optimise paying the shareholders and instead spends the donations entirely on the cause (Hansmann, 1987b). In other words, under the conditions of information asymmetry, donors prefer to contribute to organisations with less incentive to increase profit by cutting corners and lessening the quality of the goods and services they provide with donated income.

The vital role of NPOs in the UK also could be seen from the classical theory of demand heterogeneity, aka public goods theory or governmental failure theory, by Weisbrod (1988). In this theory, Weisbrod (1988) suggests that demands for collective goods and services in society are heterogeneous. From the heterogeneity theory perspective, the government responds to the demands of median voters and, therefore, cannot meet all the existing

demands in society. Hence, parts of society in which government does not respond to their needs could receive inadequate services from the government. This theory states that these unsatisfied populations will seek to satisfy their unmet demands through NPOs. Accordingly, NPOs are necessary to provide sufficient and high-quality heterogeneous collective goods and services (Weisbrod, 1988). Given that UK society consists of diverse communities, it is closer to a heterogeneous society than a homogeneous one; consequently, the demands of collective goods are heterogeneous. Hence, NPOs could help diversify providing goods and services where government fails.

Opposed to governmental failure theory, the interdependence theory by Salamon (1987) views the dynamic between NPOs and government as a cooperation, not a rivalry. This cooperation could be seen in the case of the UK government's relationship with NPOs. The government prefers to support and subsidize NPOs instead of being engaged in the lengthy and costly process of responding to all the heterogeneous demands. According to Salamon (1987), most economic theories have yet to notice the mutual relationship between NPOs and the government. These theories have viewed NPOs as separate and even more effective than the government (Salamon and Anheier, 1992). Whereas, from interdependency theory, government and NPOs complement each other and make up for each other's weaknesses. This theory shows the importance of NPOs as a sector that the UK government partners with to provide services in society more effectively and extensively.

Entrepreneurship theories are another way of explaining the necessity and why NPOs exist in the UK. Estelle James, Susan Rose-Ackerman, and Dennis Young initiated these theories' basic

arguments during the 1980s and 1990s (Duckett, 2005a). Whereas contract failure and governmental failure theories try to explain the existence of NPOs from the demand side, i.e., why individuals want services and goods from NPOs, entrepreneurship theories explain the role of NPOs from the supply side.

Entrepreneurship theories highlight entrepreneurial behaviours as a fundamental driver behind the existence of NPOs. According to these theories, entrepreneurs recognise and respond to the unmet needs of a portion of society. James asserts that the goals of entrepreneurs as establishers of NPOs are maximising non-monetary returns such as an ideology, adherents or members. So, the existence of the NPOs could be seen as a function of entrepreneurial culture in society, which seeks to maximise non-material returns rather than material ones (Duckett, 2005b). Although this theory does not focus on what demand the NPOs try to address in society, it does help to explain the reason their founders establish them.

Beyond the theoretical views, empirical data confirms the significance of NPOs and their role in practice. For example, the UK public donated £11.3 billion in 2020 (CAF, 2021), and 93% of British households were found to have used at least one charitable service in 12 months (Glennie and Whillans-Welldrake, 2014). In addition, NPOs receive more than 12 billion from delivering government contracts per year (NCVO, 2019). This confirms the interdependence theory in practice, where the government partners with NPOs to provide essential services and goods. Maybe this is because the NPOs' services are more effective and cost-efficient as they often deal with local needs and problems in their early stages. Figure 1 below shows how

the UK public's attitudes are optimistic about the roles of charities in providing a voice to disadvantaged people compared to other groups like MPs.

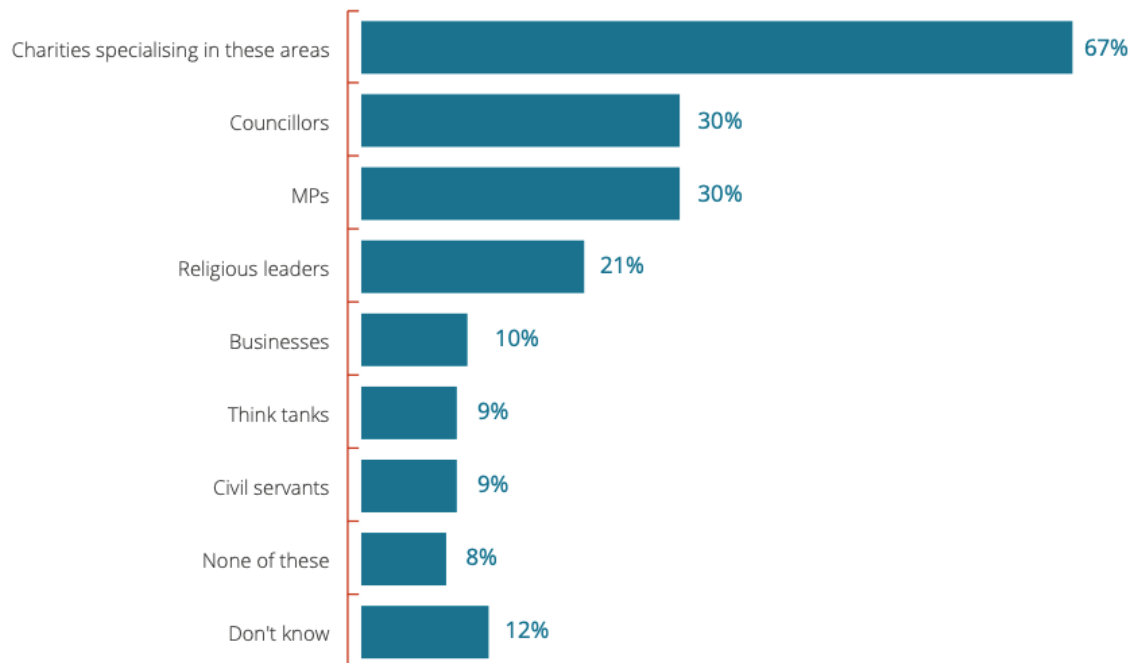


Figure 1: Who is perceived as best placed to speak on behalf of disadvantaged people (Source: CAF Publications, 2018, p.

18)

The size of donations to NPOs is better understood if it is compared to the rest of the economy; for instance, in 2012, donations contributed to 0.8% of the whole UK GVA, which is more than the contribution of the agriculture sector (Hyndman and McConville, 2016). A more relevant statistic from NCVO shows that the voluntary sector contributed £20bn to the UK economy in 2018/19, which is 0.9% of GDP. This number is larger than Honduras's GDP, which is the 105th out of 204 economies in the world (NCVO, 2021b). Figure 2 illustrates the consistent and gradual upward trend in the voluntary sector's contribution. Considering the

significant role of the voluntary sector in the UK, conducting research within this sector holds both social and economic value for UK society.

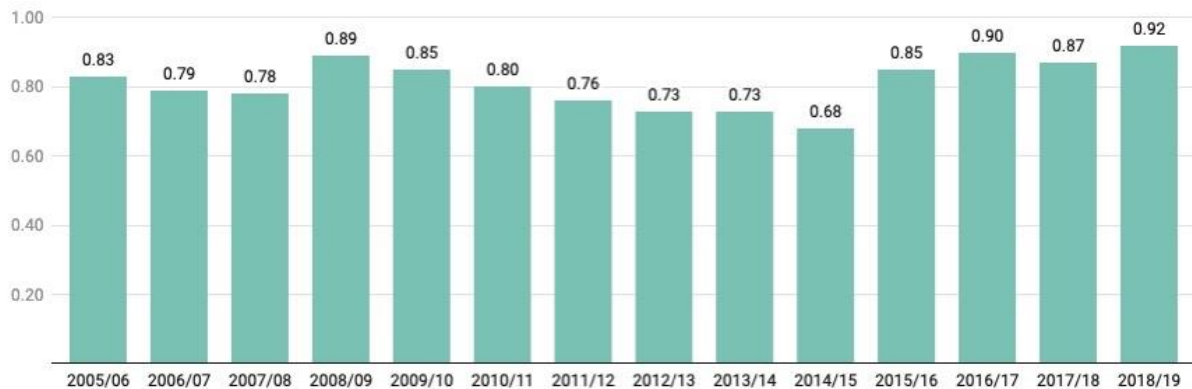


Figure 2: Voluntary sector's contribution to the UK economy, 2005/06 to 2018/19 (as % of GDP) (Source: NCVO, 2021c)

1.3 Focus on small-medium size NPOs

In this section, the reason that the prime focus of this research is on the small-medium size charities will be justified. The justification offers further context regarding the distinctive characteristics of small-medium NPOs, particularly their utilisation of social media platforms. The emphasis on these NPOs, based on these unique aspects, serves as a significant differentiating factor for this study and will provide insights into areas that have not been extensively explored before.

The Small Charities Coalition and NCVO's almanac have defined the size of NPOs according to their annual income. According to the Small Charities Coalition, small NPOs are those with annual income under £1m (Small Charities Coalition, 2019), whereas in the categorisation of

NCVO, the organisations with annual income under £1m are classified into three groups: Micro, Small and Medium as demonstrated in Table 1 (Hornung, 2019).

Income	Definition
Less than £10,000	Micro
£10,000 to £100,000	Small
£100,000 to £1 million	Medium
£1 million to £10 million	Large
£10 million to £100 million	Major
More than £100 million	Super-major

Table 1: NPOs sizes based on annual income (Source: Hornung, 2019)

This research will use both definitions by focusing on organisations with an annual income of under £1 million per annum. According to both sources, this distinguishes small-medium organisations from larger ones.

There are approximately 168,000 registered charities in the UK, of which over 136,000 are small and micro charities, making up 82% of all charities (Hornung, 2019). Despite the large number of small charities, they share less than 20% of the money that goes to this sector (Small Charities Coalition, 2019). This level of income and the gap in the charity market could cause financial deficiency for small/medium NPOs and make them more vulnerable to difficult conditions in the market. Since a significant portion of the income for charities, especially smaller ones, is derived from the public, effective communication with the public is crucial for their fundraising efforts. This topic will be delved into in greater detail in the upcoming section. Hence, there have always been hopes that the technologies such as social media could level the playing field for smaller NPOs, given the cheap cost of distribution of information. Social media has been considered a medium that can give small-medium NPOs

a voice and amplify their impact. This makes small/medium NPOs more attractive to study, as the expectations on the possible impact of social media platforms on them are expected to be more pronounced.

Notably, most categorisations of small-medium NPOs are based on their income. The categorisation based on income, rather than the number of employees or all the resources, might seem over-simplistic or at least inadequate. For example, if a charity has hundreds of volunteers but very little income, it would be considered a small NPO, whereas as an organisation, it is a large organisation. Although the income-based categorisation is simplistic, it can be justified that this is the best fit for the current research since financial resources play a vital role in how an organisation utilise technologies. Keeping up with technological changes and access to expert training are examples of where financial resources are a differentiator (Ghobakhloo *et al.*, 2011).

In the case of social media, given that use of media for communication with stakeholders is necessary for organisations, deficiency of financial resources could be a factor that impacts the way that employees of NPOs use media and how the media could have impacted the organisation. When the difference in the available financial resources across different NPOs is enormous, this impact could be material. The huge variation will be limiting and will not allow this research to have the necessary focus and depth. Hence, focusing on one segment of NPOs could eliminate the gap between the financial ability of NPOs and helps to gain a deeper understanding of how social media has influenced these organisations.

In addition, most of the research regarding NPOs and social media have collected data from established and large charities (e.g., Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Waters *et al.*, 2009a; Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012), only a few studies have examined small/medium size charities. Hence, there is a need for more research focusing on these organisations, and the current research will address this need.

The following three sections will elaborate on the significance of public support for NPOs, the definition of social media and the significance of social media for NPOs. The flow of these sections will emphasise the reasons that small-medium size NPOs can depend on social media for their communication. By justifying this dependency, the questions of this research have a richer context and more justifiable ground.

1.4 Significance of Public Support for NPOs

This section highlights the importance of public support for NPOs, particularly small-medium organisations. By clarifying the importance of public support as one of the main resources for small/medium size NPOs, the context in which social media is valuable for these NPOs will become more apparent. The presence of the public on these platforms could make NPOs dependent on social media to communicate with the public. This dependency could provide the context for the influence of social media on these organisations. So, understanding the importance of winning public support for small/medium NPOs will provide the backdrop for the main questions of this study.

1.4.1 Public Support as the main source of Income

According to the UK Civil Society Almanac (2020), income from the public is considered an essential income resource for NPOs. In 2017/18, the income from the public represented nearly half of the income of these organisations (NCVO, 2021c). This is also supported by Hyndman and McConville (2016) that donations from the public alongside government funding constitute two main income resources for the UK NPOs. These, in turn, make up 44% and 33% of charities' annual income. The remaining percentages come from the private sector, foundations, investments and the national lottery (Hyndman and McConville, 2016). Income from the public is not only a substantial portion of NPOs' funding but has also demonstrated consistent growth over the past two decades, as depicted in Figure 3. The income from the public has increased by 10% in the period of 7 years from 2018/19. So, while there are alternative sources of income beyond public funding, it is important to note that income from the public constitutes a substantial portion of NPOs' overall funding.

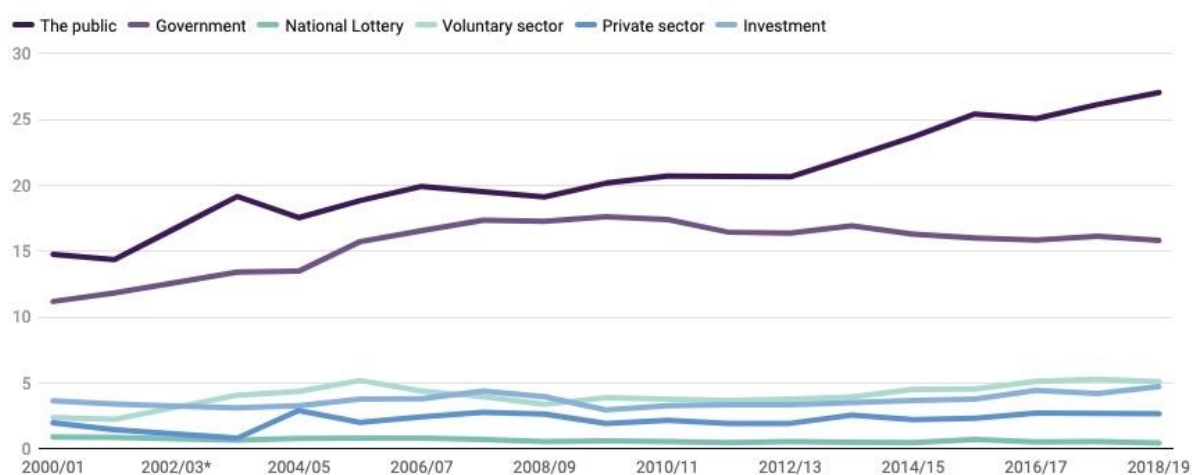


Figure 3: Breakdown of income by source over time, 2000/01 to 2018/19 (Source: NCVO, 2021a)

Income from the public holds even greater significance for small NPOs. Based on the UK Civil Society Almanac 2018 report, funding trends differ between small and large charities. For small charities, as it is shown in Figure 4, 58% of the income comes from individuals and only around 15% from the government, whereas, for large charities, a smaller proportion of their income comes from individuals and a higher proportion from the government (Hornung, 2019). Moreover, income from the public is unrestricted in the sense that money can be used for any purpose if it serves the objectives that NPOs outlined in their mission statement and their fundraising activities. For example, it can be spent on paying overheads, funding innovation, etc. In contrast, government income is typically provided through contractual agreements rather than grants and is often limited to specific activities carried out by NPOs (NCVO, 2021c). These points, therefore, indicate the significance of income from the public in the survival of small NPOs.

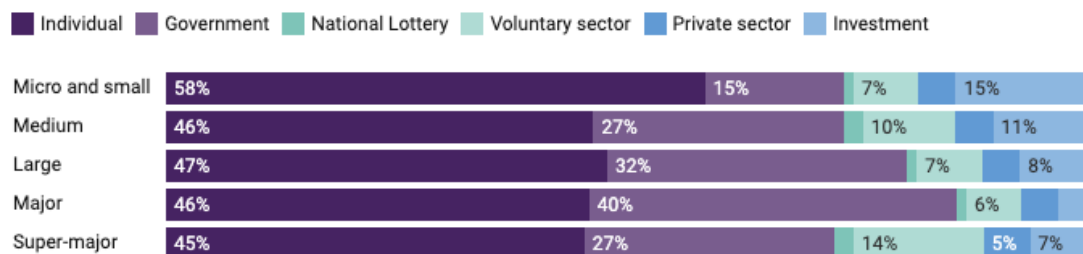


Figure 4: Funding trends differ for small charities (Source: Hornung, 2019)

Given the importance of public funds for small/medium NPOs, in the next section, the importance of communication with the public for NPOs and its evolution throughout history will be explained.

1.4.2 Evolution in the Communication of NPOs with the Public

Considering the importance of the public for NPOs, many scholars recognise building relationships with the public as one of the key activities that NPOs need to do to get their support. For example, Kelly (2001) mentioned that developing and maintaining relationships with the public, including regular communication, is one of the four elements needed for successful fundraising (Kelly, 2001). In line with Kelly, Waters et al. (2009) emphasise the vital role of relation-building for NPOs to achieve success. The emphasis on establishing relationships with individuals in fundraising literature has spurred the development of diverse strategies to cultivate and maintain public support. The suggested strategies range from arranging face-to-face meetings (Sargeant and Jay, 2014) to adding donors to the mailing list (Neal, 2001) as well as communicating with individuals via digital technologies such as social media (Hou and Lampe, 2015). To better understand the current strategies and ways the NPOs engage with the public, it is useful to understand the historical context and evolution of the communication of NPOs with the public.

NPOs in the UK and their communication with the public have a long history. They were not necessarily called NPOs then, but since churches, schools, and hospitals operate for collective benefit and typically under the non-distribution constraint, they can be considered as NPOs. For example, records of communication of NPOs, such as churches in England during the 14th and 15th centuries, show that churches communicated through the priest speaking to parishioners – from the pulpit and by visiting them in person (Breeze, 2021, p. 31). This has been for building public support, such as thanksgiving for a victory or prayers for success in

wars between England and France. So, the history of NPOs' communication with the public through basic mediums goes back at least as far as the 14th century in the UK. Hence, NPOs have experienced a shift or integration of various mediums in their relationship with the public throughout history, from the pulpit to traditional mass media such as TV and newspaper, and then to the social media (Breeze, 2017).

The historical evolution of NPOs' communication can be categorised into distinct periods. Medium theorists such as McLuhan (1994) suggested that the historical development of communication can be divided into three major periods: (1) oral; (2) written/printed; and (3) electric. McLuhan suggests that each of these periods has a different interplay of senses, hence influencing thinking and communication differently (McLuhan, 1994). However, as Logan (2002) points out in his work, due to the advancement of technologies since the time of McLuhan, the division of these ages needs to be extended, and two more distinct eras must be considered. Namely, he suggests the pre-verbal, the oral, the literate, the electric and the electronic ages as the five different eras of communication (Logan, 2002). The pre-verbal is not relevant to this study as the historical context is for a better understanding of the NPOs' communication with the public and its evolution; hence, the pre-historic communication methods of humans do not add much value to this study. The fact that McLuhan missed the electronic era is not a surprise, given that his work pre-dates the world of personal computers, mobile phones and social media. Considering these points, for this study, I look at the evolution of NPOs' communication in four distinct eras, i.e., oral, written, electric and electronic/digital.

NPOs have also experienced these four eras in their communication developments (Breeze, 2017). Given the different structural changes that each medium brought to NPOs' communication, such as how quickly NPOs' messages can be disseminated or whether the communication is one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many, their impact on these organisations could have been varied. For instance, the distinction between electric, e.g., radio & TV, and electronic eras, e.g., social media, are significant as they are very different in their interactions and communication structure. In broadcast media such as TV and radio, producers are those with power because of their wealth and privilege, and the audience is a different group of people. In contrast, in social media, all of these roles could be played by a person who uses this medium, meaning the distinction between producer and consumer is removed (Miller, 2020). The model of communication in broadcast media is hierarchal and one-way, whereas, in social media, it is interactive, less hierarchical and decentralised, which can be seen in Figure 5 (ibid). Therefore, the impact of public posts as generators of content regarding NPOs can be substantial for these organisations, as these activities are visible to other user groups who serve as producers and audiences of social media.

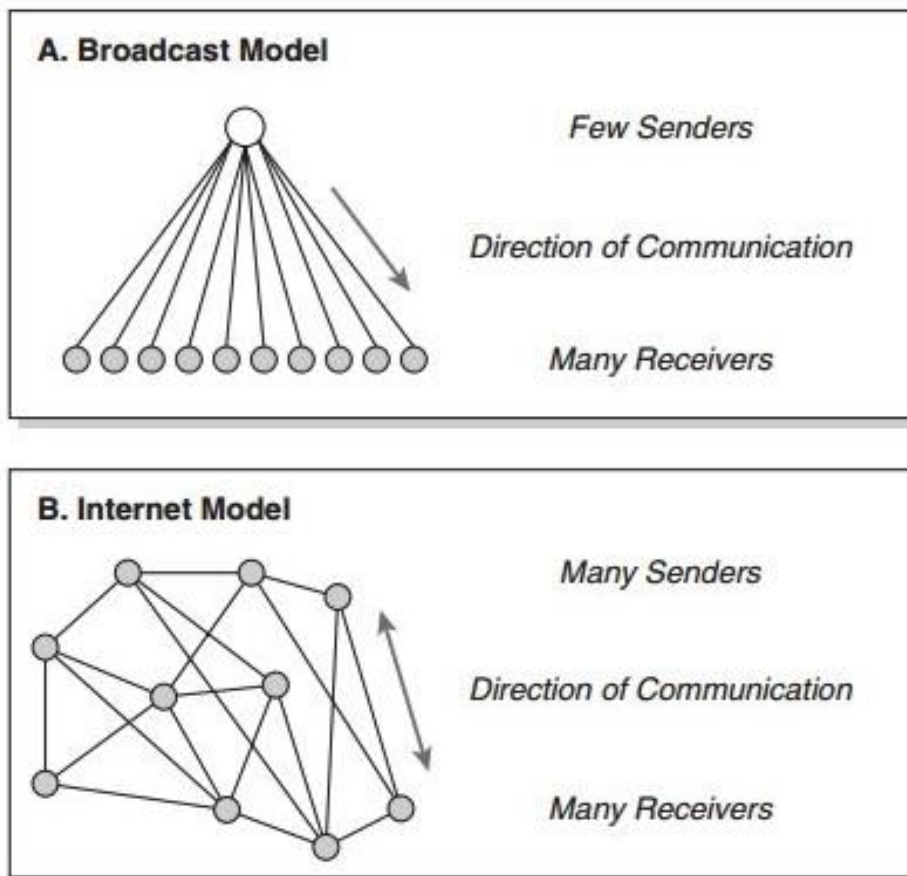


Figure 5 "Broadcast" versus "Internet" conception models (Source: Miller, 2020, p. 16)

Moreover, social media provides NPOs with more real-time and interactive communication with supporters, whereas communicating through TV is passive since NPOs do not have access to the audiences' reactions. Consequently, how success has been defined and how communicators try to attract attention could be varied in these eras. The development of the public communication of NPOs is mapped to these four eras in Figure 6.

It is important to note that the historical process through which new media emerges is more complex than shown in Figure 6. The diagram aims to capture the main communication mediums used by NPOs during different eras, so it is a simplification to show how certain

modes of communication became more dominant throughout time. The concept of "remediation" by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) highlights the complexity and nonlinearity of the historical process in which new media evolve (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). They emphasise the significance of understanding how new media incorporates and imitates previous forms of media while also striving to compete with them. According to them, remediation "is that which appropriates the techniques, forms and social significance of other media and attempt to rival or refashion them in the name of the real" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p. 65). This view suggests that new media should not be seen as a revolutionary force but rather as a form of media that interacts with and improves upon existing ones. As a result, the relationship between different media is not a simple progression of substitution or integration.

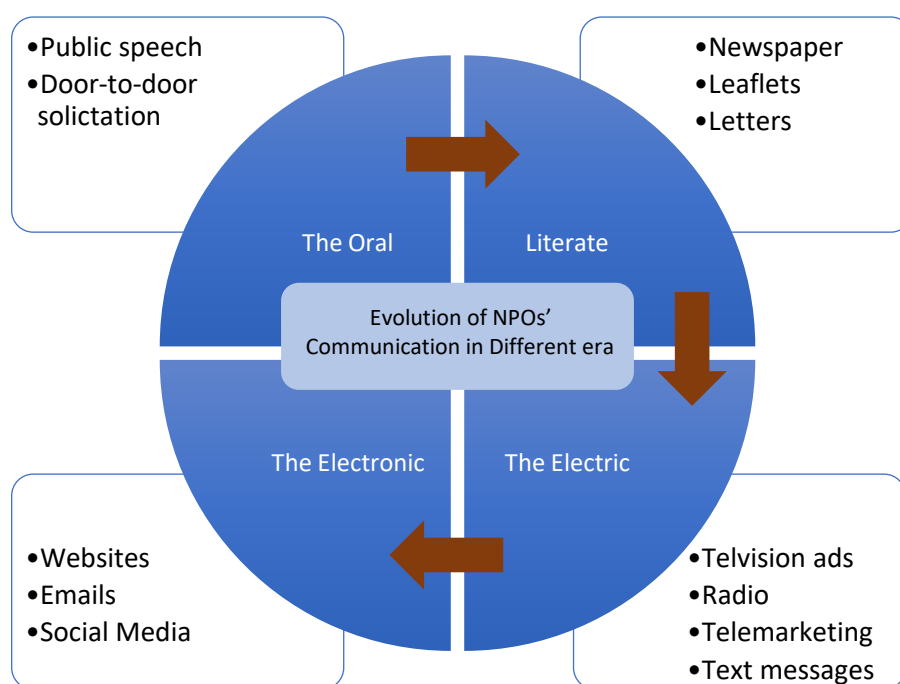


Figure 6: History of the dominant mode of communication among NPOs

The importance of this development is not only understanding what mediums the NPOs have used over time but how they potentially changed themselves as a result of adapting these mediums in their behaviour and organisation. In the oral era, as mentioned before, speeches were a common way of communicating with the public. The example of churches' use of pulpit in communication with the public in the 14th and 15th centuries provides a clear picture of how speeches were used for different causes. These speeches were limited in terms of the number of audiences that could be communicated to at once, relative to many of the mediums used in the next era, such as letters and newspapers.

However, compared to printed communication, speeches or door-to-door solicitation enjoy the benefit of immediate reaction from the audience. The immediate feedback could allow the communicator to change the tone or what's being communicated; for instance, if a lecturer feels that the audience is not paying attention to the message of his/her speech, s/he can change the tone or even the content slightly to grab their attention. This is not possible in communication mediums such as newspapers and letters. This fluidity of communication could have both positive and negative implications. This is because there could be tradeoffs between grabbing the audience's attention and communicating what the lecturer intended in this example. For instance, the lecturer could change what s/he was saying to the extent that the actual message is lost in favour of the audience's attention. That is, the lecturer is trading off the success of the actual message being understood by the audience and the success of them paying attention to him/her. While attention is a necessary condition, it is

not sufficient. Hence, the sole focus on attention as a measure of success for the lecturer could result in losing out on the message delivery, which was the intention.

As newspapers and letters no longer provide immediate feedback from the audience regarding organisational messages, NPOs must depend on alternative methods to measure the success of their communication. These measures could include measuring the level of “actual action” that the letter/newspaper has induced. For instance, when NPOs communicate to raise funds, measuring the amount they have raised is essential. Similarly, if the communication is aimed at gathering individuals for an event, assessing the number of attendees becomes significant. It could be argued that the same measures apply to oral and face-to-face communication; however, in the presence of immediate feedback, it is often tempting to overlook these measures of success that directly assess the ultimate objective of communication.

The use of social media now dominates the electronic age of communication. The NPOs’ communication has widely adopted the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram (Sun and Asencio, 2019). This is while these platforms have been growing fast among the public and other organisations, as shown in Figure 7 below.

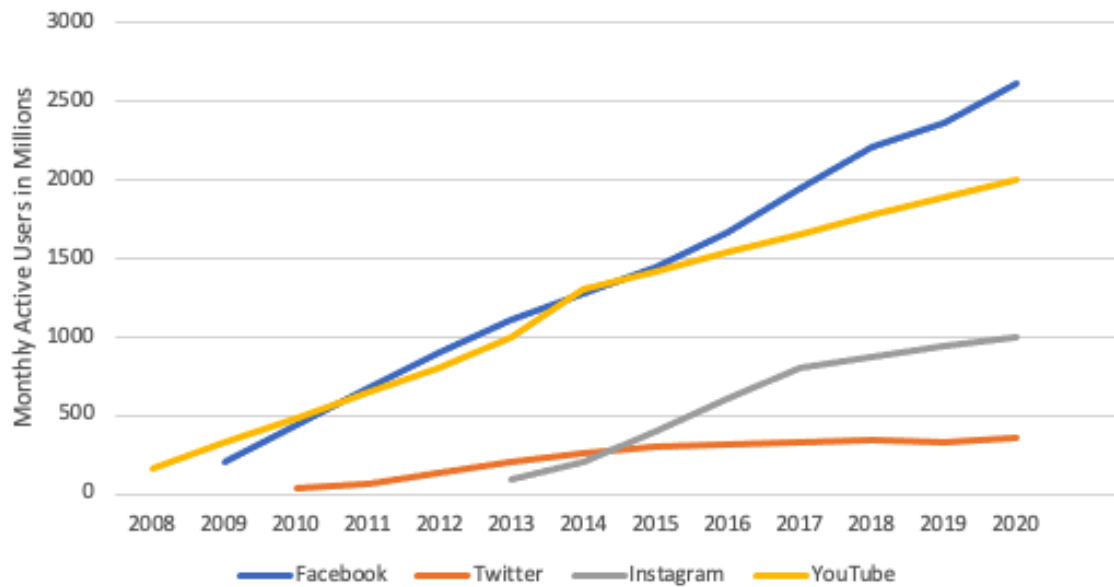


Figure 7: Active Users of Social Media Platforms in Millions. (Statista.com 2021, Backlinko.com 2021)¹

For instance, Facebook, with over 2.6 billion users globally, has seen substantial growth since its inception in 2004. Given that these social media applications are built on the ideological and technical foundation of Web 2.0, they provide organisations with wider interactive capabilities and more dynamic communication compared to older mediums of communication such as websites (Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008). This is in line with Poster’s (1995) argument, in which he highlighted being “active” as the main difference between new media and broadcast media (Poster 1995, cited in Miller, 2020, p. 16). For example, the advent of social media has shifted the role of supporters of NPOs from passive to active actors, as all users of this medium can continuously create and modify the content of the

¹ The stats are gathered from different reports from Statista and Backlinko. The definition of monthly active users(MAU) is platform specific and does not have a universal definition. Hence, the diagram is a useful indication of growth per platform and is not necessarily suitable for comparing across the platforms in absolute numbers.

platform. This evolution could have affected different facets of NPOs, including the meaning of successful communication. This definition of success, in turn, could impact their communication and adjust it to achieve more of that “success”. For instance, when TV was used for communication, the success was the actual result of the advert, measured through ways such as the number of donors responding or the amount of money raised, which cannot be known until at least a few weeks later. However, in the social media era, the audience can react immediately. It is like giving a speech and seeing the audience applauding live, not knowing whether that applause means the speech was effective. Social media lets the audience “applaud” a post in scale, e.g., “like” it. These signals from the audience change the dynamic and can provide more clarity or, on the contrary, create more confusion for the NPOs.

Figure 8 below shows how different mediums compare in terms of their interaction with their audience. Although the diagram does not capture exhaustive aspects of the different mediums, these aspects provide a good view of how social media is positioned relative to the other mediums. As seen below, social media allows for simultaneous feedback from the

audience and mass communication with many people at once. Additionally, unlike some

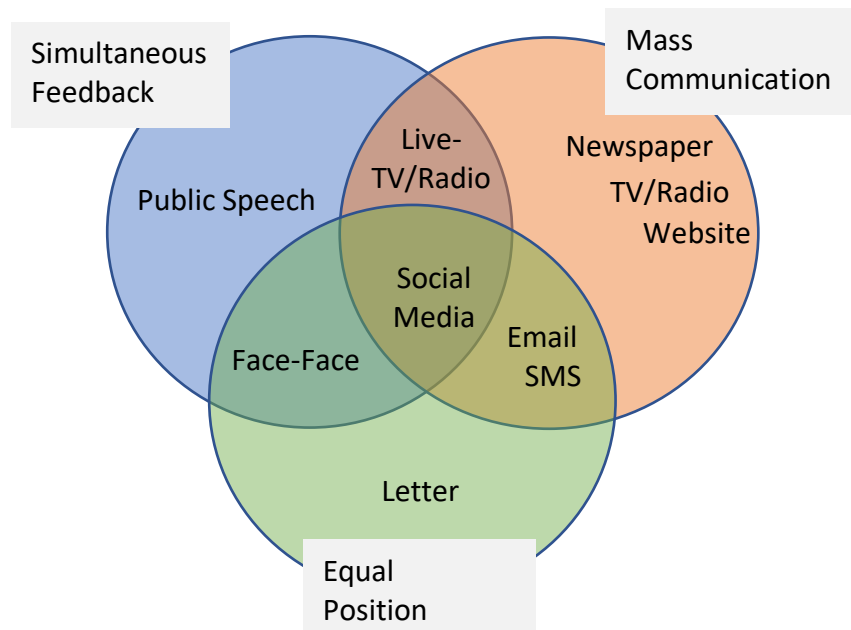


Figure 8: Comparison of different mediums in their relationship with their audience

other mediums, there are no distinct positions for the audience and producers; all the people on a social media network have somewhat an equal position in relation to the medium (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011). This positional equality can be attributed to the low cost of producing content on these platforms, which typically requires only a device connected to the internet, readily available to everyone in a country like the UK.

In the early days of the electronic era, websites held a dominant position in public communication. However, nowadays, they have largely become integrated into social media platforms. Websites primarily support one-to-many communication, while social media allows for many-to-many interactions (Bakir, 2010). To be considered a medium for many-to-

many communication, a website needs to incorporate interactive design features, empowering users to create and manage content (O'Reilly, 2010).

There are common characteristics between World Wide Web (WWW) and social media that form these mediums and impact the organisations that adopt them (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011). For example, both have the potential to quickly and globally disseminate the information. More importantly, people use common ways to measure the effectiveness of their communication through both platforms, such as counting clicks and visits, which has some similarities to likes and shares. Also, Web 2.0 technology, which is used in social media and is the key enabler for such platforms, has evolved from Web 1.0, which is used in WWW. So, although many of the studies on the use of websites by NPOs go back as far as 20 years ago, they provide useful insight into how NPOs adapted to large-scale technological change. These studies will be reviewed in detail in section 2.5 of the literature review chapter. Then in section 2.6, the literature on social media in the context of NPOs communication will be reviewed. Next, I delve into the definition of "the Public" in this research, providing a clear understanding of its scope and significance.

1.4.3 NPOs' Stakeholders and "The Public"

While NPOs utilise social media platforms to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders, including volunteers, funders, and other organisations, the focus of this research is to investigate the impact of social media on the definition of successful social media activities. In this study, success in social media activities is defined based on three primary categories proposed in Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) research: information sharing, community-building,

and calls to action (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a). Although NPOs may target different stakeholder groups in their social media efforts, their communications goals can be classified within these three overarching categories. Consequently, throughout this thesis, the term "the public" is used as a comprehensive reference encompassing the various segments of NPO stakeholders engaged in social media communication. The framework of success for NPO social media activities, as identified by Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) study, is employed as a guiding framework in this research.

Furthermore, although NPOs may tailor their social media activities to target specific demographic audiences, the prevailing emphasis in this research has been on perceiving social media as a public relations tool employed to shape and maintain their public image. Consequently, most NPOs opt for public social media accounts rather than private ones, signifying that the communication they generate through these accounts is intended for public consumption and accessible to a broad audience.

1.5 Significance of Social Media for NPOs

As mentioned earlier, public support is a crucial resource for NPOs, particularly those of smaller size. Moreover, since the emergence of social media in the early 21st century, the number of social media users has been increasing exponentially. Hence, it is worth looking through social media usage statistics worldwide and in the UK. Illustrating the extent that social media is used among the public and NPOs could help to emphasise the importance of any possible impacts of this media on these organisations. This is what the first part of this section focuses on. Next, to better understand these impacts, it is worth considering the

opportunities and challenges these platforms present and how dependent NPOs could become on them.

1.5.1 Popularity of Social Media

Over 4.2 billion individuals use social media, approximately half of the world's population (Dixon, 2022). It is estimated that this number will increase to almost 4.41 billion by 2025. In the UK, 45 million individuals had an active social media account in 2020. This number forms over 80% of the UK's population that, is over 13 and can open accounts on platforms such as Facebook. This uptake makes the UK above the global average of 45% (Clement, 2020). Considering these numbers, social media platforms could be counted as a major source of information for the public. Hence, social media carry significant potential as a communication medium for NPOs.

Not only significant portions of the public are active on social media platforms, but they are also becoming increasingly accessible through these platforms at different times and locations since these platforms are accessible through mobile phones. According to the 2019 Ofcom report, mobile phone usage is pervasive among the adult population in the UK, with 96% of individuals utilising these devices. Furthermore, mobile phones are progressively becoming essential in the daily lives of the UK population (Ofcom, 2019). The increase in smartphone users, especially among new supporters, has made it easier for NPOs to reach the public wherever they are (Chambers, 2013). Accordingly, any organisation, including NPOs, that is serious about engagement with the public cannot ignore social media platforms as a place where the public is increasingly active and present.

1.5.2 Presence of NPOs on Social Media

Studies have shown that NPOs are increasingly turning to social media to communicate with their audience in recent years. For example, Guo and Saxton (2014) show that 93% of their sample group, which includes 188 American advocacy organisations, use social media in their communication with the public. Based on their result: 87% of the group used Facebook, 80% used Twitter, 72% used YouTube, and 42% utilised other social media platforms such as LinkedIn. Although some useful statistical research exists on the usage of social media among US NPOs, like the one mentioned, statistical research focusing on NPOs in the UK is relatively rare (Guo and Saxton, 2014). However, studies such as “Technology in the Charitable Sector” emphasise the importance of social media as the most commonly used technology among third-sector organisations (Stedman, 2019). This could indicate that NPOs understand that being present on social media is necessary.

The unprecedented Coronavirus pandemic and imposed lockdown in the UK starting on the 23rd of March 2020 have contributed to the challenges that NPOs face in fundraising. According to CAF’s report, over half of NPOs reported reductions in donations which comprise an 11% decrease in donations raised by this sector compared to the same period before the coronavirus pandemic (Bennett, 2020). One of the contributing factors to this decline could be the prohibition of in-person fundraising events imposed by lockdown restrictions. For example, major fundraising events such as the London marathon, which raised over £60 million in 2019, were cancelled in 2020, but also other local and smaller fundraising events such as coffee mornings and pub quizzes (Hyndman, 2020).

NPOs needed to rethink their fundraising strategies, including maintaining relationships with their stakeholders and adjusting them to post-pandemic situations. As a result, many of these fundraising events and activities have moved online, and NPOs relied more on digital communication (ibid). In this context where digital communication is overtaking any other type of communication in use, NPOs may have become more dependent on their digital presence, such as social media, to communicate and raise funds from the public. It is worth noting that the move to digital could have also changed the nature of the presence and dependency of NPOs on social media. For instance, many NPOs might have used social media as a side communication channel where most engagement happened through other mediums. However, now they need to rely more on these platforms. The increased dependency of NPOs on social media could have made the impact of social media more pronounced on these organisations, making exploration of this possible impact more significant. Hence, this study that was conducted during this period could provide some insight into this shift.

Besides the extent of the penetration of social media among NPOs and its increased importance during the pandemic, several studies have explored how NPOs use social media. These studies revealed the key functions the NPOs have been trying to perform by posting on these platforms. For example, Waters and Jamal's (2011) research showed that NPOs primarily use Twitter to share information instead of utilising the interactive and dialogic potentials of the social media service in their communications (Waters and Jamal, 2011a). A study by Guo and Saxton (2014) also demonstrated similar results, finding that 69% of NPOs

use tweets to disseminate information about their organisation's activities, events, other news, facts, or reports that might be important for the organisation's stakeholders. 20% of tweets belonged to the community building category, which included giving recognition and thanks, responses to messages, and acknowledgement of current and local events; the remaining 12% of tweets were aimed at creating action such as selling a product, raising funds and recruiting volunteers (Guo and Saxton, 2014). Studies such as this demonstrate the diversity of activities that NPOs perform on social media and their purposes, almost covering all aspects of what NPOs do for public engagement.

Hence, not only do NPOs widely embrace social media, but they also exhibit significant variation in their objectives when utilising these platforms. Consequently, different objectives can lead to diverse measures of success for NPOs. To gain insight into NPOs' behaviour on social media, it becomes crucial to comprehend how they define and assess the success of their activities and the implications of their perspectives on these activities.

1.5.3 Social Media, Facilitator of Collective Action

The increase in the use of digital platforms among individuals and organisations, including NPOs, has led to increased hope in using these tools for cost-effective ways of organising collective actions, such as fundraising for NPOs. For example, social media use by March of Dimes, a US NPO that promotes the health of mothers and babies, has improved its ability to engage with large audiences and led to a considerable increase in revenue. In 2008 March of Dimes started using social media to promote its Walk for Babies program. A dedicated Facebook page enabled supporters to register directly for the program and to broadcast their

participation on a Facebook “wall” to their connections. This effective use of social media increased March of Dimes’ revenue by 102% between 2009 and 2010 (Saxton and Wang, 2014).

The role of social media platforms in facilitating collective action is supported by Clay Shirky (2011), who writes, “As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action.” (Shirky, 2011, p28). Shirky’s paper focuses on many examples of political movements that succeeded because of their use of social media and the speed of communication that comes with it. For instance, he highlights a striking example where the decision to set aside crucial evidence in the impeachment of the Philippines President Joseph Estrada was swiftly reversed following the protest of thousands of Filipinos. Even more remarkable is that this protest was organized through social media, and it took just two hours for the collective voice to lead to a significant change in the situation (ibid). The claim is not that every movement that is conducted using social media succeeds but rather to note that it has created opportunities for connecting people to undertake collective action to pursue and achieve shared goals (ibid). Whilst Shirky is focused on collective political action, his argument translates to what many NPOs look to do by using social media.

Social media has opened new ways of organising and undertaking collective actions and helped achieve success per the above examples. However, as noted in the same studies, being on social media and having activity on it does not guarantee success. The popularity of social

media and the time spent there by people means there is an amount of attention that everyone is trying to attract. NPOs, like other users of these platforms, can aim to attract the attention of people on these platforms to their causes and goals. However, this could be very challenging given the competition by other people and organisations on these platforms. Even if the NPOs succeed in attracting this attention, does it imply achieving what the NPOs want to achieve by being on social media? In the next section, this is looked at in more detail.

1.5.4 Social Media, the Competition for Attention

While social media has undoubtedly provided NPOs with broader and cost-effective means of information dissemination and granting the public greater access to information, it has also brought forth new challenges. These challenges include keeping pace with rapid technological advancements, engaging in time-consuming activities on these platforms, and capturing the attention of supporters and the general public amidst abundant information. Regarding the latter, Therall et al. (2014) observed that, for NGOs, the shift to social media has resulted mainly in trading one challenge for another. That is, the challenge of attracting the attention of news outlets to their cause has been replaced by the challenge of attracting public attention, which they argue is not necessarily any easier in the social media (Thrall, Stecula and Sweet, 2014).

Studies show these challenges are more difficult for small-medium NPOs, yet these organisations are increasingly adopting social media. While these NPOs might not get what they hoped for from social media, they are increasingly investing in it. For example, according to Ogden and Starita (2009), although the medium size NPOs that they surveyed did not have

a clear idea regarding the effectiveness of their activities, 73% indicated they want to increase their use of social media in future (Ogden and Starita, 2009). Small and medium-sized NPOs face various challenges, including limited financial resources, access to technical expertise, and competition with larger NPOs for attention in social media. These challenges can also contribute to the ineffectiveness of their social media activities (Thrall, Stecula and Sweet, 2014; Hou and Lampe, 2015). Luoma and Goodstein (1999) argue that as an organisation financially grows, it attracts greater attention from the media and the general public (Luoma and Goodstein, 1999). Thus, compared to the larger NPOs, smaller ones need more to stand out and attract public attention.

The use of social media by small NPOs may have helped these organisations to more efficiently and widely publish information; however, it has also helped every other user to do the same. For instance, on Facebook, 250 million posts are generated per hour and Facebook users “like” over 4 million posts every minute (Ajayi and Adeyemo, 2021; Hassan *et al.*, 2021). That is almost 12 billion posts and likes per day on this platform. This ecological shift in internet use, in which users can produce and disseminate information, has contributed to an explosion of content that ultimately has led to an overabundance of information.

The attention of humans is not infinite. The ability of humans to absorb information is limited since the human brain can process only a certain amount of information (Simon, 1996). The concept of attention as a limited resource is also supported by Matthew Crawford, who states: “Attention is a resource, a person has only so much of it.” (Crawford, 2015, p. 11).

Given that use of information consumes attention, the state of information abundance makes attention a scarce resource (Goldhaber, 1997; Franck, 2019).

Yet attracting the attention of the public and potential supporters of NPOs is a vital prerequisite for gaining their support. For instance, if NPOs want to raise awareness of a cause, raise funds or recruit volunteers through social media posts, they first must attract the attention of social media users before being able to engage and cultivate their support. Although attracting attention does not guarantee the desired outcome, it is a prerequisite for any meaningful engagement and desired results. As presented in Figure 9, in a wider context, theoretically, a successful social media activity consists of five steps:

1. Distributing information that is well presented.
2. Reaching the target audience.
3. Gaining the attention of the target audience.
4. Engaging with the target audience.
5. Achieving the intended result, which could be difficult to measure, such as increasing awareness, or more easily measurable, like raising funds.



Figure 9: Social Media Activity's Pyramid of Success

Social media platforms make the first two steps much easier and less costly than the mediums they superseded, such as print and broadcast media; however, as per above, they make gaining attention much harder. Social media platforms shift the competition from distributing information and reaching the audience to competition for attention. Accordingly, to get information to the target audience on these platforms, NPOs need to publish the information on it and try to win the public's attention in a highly competitive environment.

This research aims to understand how S/M nonprofit organisations define and measure the success of social media activities. All the steps in the above pyramid can be considered as the prerequisite of success, and measuring them means getting closer to success but not necessarily achieving it. For instance, if an NPO successfully posts some information on a social media platform, it has succeeded in distributing the information, as millions of users can potentially see the post. However, if it stops there, at step one of the pyramid, the post has yet to achieve its goal as no user has seen it, as there are four more steps to go. Ensuring

the information makes it to the “timeline” of certain users could be counted as reaching the target audience. However, unless it gains the attention of these audiences, it has not added any value.

Similarly, if attention has not resulted in any engagement and, ultimately, the desired results, it has yet to move the NPO closer to its goals. The pitfall is if the NPOs using social media stop at one of these steps and don’t go all the way to measure the achievement of their goals. As simple as it may sound, the stiff competition for attention could distract the NPOs from their original goals and make them think there is a direct correlation between achieving attention and getting the intended results.

1.5.5 Social Media and Mediatization

Rivalry for attracting public attention may lead to cultural and social changes and, in turn, could lead to media becoming important and impactful among different spheres of society. For example, politicians have been trying to maximise media coverage to secure public attention (Hjarvard, 2008). According to Hjarvard (2008), when politicians use personal and polarising issues in their public statements, they intend to have a chance of gaining better media coverage and consequently attract a higher proportion of public attention. Subsequently, this has led to politics becoming more about who could get more public attention rather than about the purpose of securing that attention which is to win policy arguments and secure votes. Hjarvard refers to this phenomenon as the mediatization of politics (ibid). Mediatization, like any other academic concept, has evolved, which is discussed further in section 2.2 of the literature review. However, mediatization as a theoretical

framework broadly refers to the “interplay between media, culture and society” (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2015, p. 1). In the literature review chapter, the mediatization concept will be looked at in more depth.

The significance of this study lies in recognising that NPOs also need to adapt to the logics of media in their social media activities to capture public attention. In the realm of social media, attention is often reflected through interactions such as the number of likes, comments, or shares a post receives (Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal, 2018). Therefore, NPOs may strategically align their activities with social media demands to enhance these engagement metrics. For instance, they may engage with social media influencers by liking their posts, thereby increasing the likelihood of reciprocal engagement and gaining visibility among the influencer’s followers. This could be seen as an attention-seeking tactic that could work in the context of social media. Thus, activities and contents of social media posts of NPOs may be affected by the intention of maximising public attention via following the media logics rather than what is required for effective philanthropic activities such as accountability, transparency and generating awareness of causes. In this research, I will argue that these activities should be understood as mediatization of NPOs’ philanthropic actions. That is, media becomes impactful via its values, such as the number of likes or shares as a metric of success; this results in making NPOs more focused on increasing these numbers rather than philanthropic activities.

By using the concept of mediatization, new perspectives can be offered for interpreting changes happening in different domains. Mediatization is not necessarily problematic, as

cultural and societal changes could have positive and negative implications. Some possible negative impacts could have come from the pervasive number of social media platforms and their extensive use in the digital era. For instance, extensive use of social media platforms such as Facebook has contributed to the cultural shift towards the obsession of users about their images and how they are depicted on these platforms (Sherlock and Wagstaff, 2019). This could have strengthened a society where people's images and appearances drive cultural and economic activities. The diffusion of this culture by social media could have played an important role in building "the society of spectacle", which was first coined by Guy Debord in 1967. In his book, he critiqued society for its obsession with images and appearance over reality and viewed capitalism as the cause of this phenomenon (Debord, 1998). Social media plays into this by putting people's life selectively on display and encouraging the desire to have what's on display by others (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

The image obsession could have a negative impact on the philanthropic activities of both NPOs and the public, such as:

1. NPOs, like other social media users, could become obsessed with their image and appearance in social media over what the reality is. For example, to attract public attention, NPOs may be encouraged by this culture to give a happy spin to all their stories to avoid the bitterness of reality faced by their audiences. Or they might only focus on success stories in their communication to prevent upsetting supporters. In summary, this culture could eliminate part of the reality that people live in and affect public awareness about what happens in the world.

2. The social media spread as an advertising platform could encourage social and economic order that boosts the purchase of goods to an ever-growing extent. In this status, society is determined by the goods individuals acquire and consume. Social media can be seen as the breeding ground of manipulative and sophisticated advertising methods that can target individuals and shape their ambitions. These methods could be used to grow the culture in which individuals are satisfied by purchasing more goods. This culture is contrary to the philanthropic culture that NPOs require to flourish, i.e., promoting people to experience pleasure and fulfilment through contributing to the community rather than through excessive consumption.

Moreover, social media has contributed to the “culture industry” that could have affected the NPOs. “Culture industry” is a term coined by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1947, in the context of their critiques about the production of art solely for it to be sold; or similarly about the ultimate goal of media products such as movies or TV shows becoming the amount of money that they can make. Adorno and Horkheimer describe these cultural artefacts as creating the “culture industry”, which distracts people and saturates their leisure time with commercially driven amusements.

Social media can be seen as a contributor to the “culture industry”, for instance, by shifting the motivation behind the production of posts on social media towards money-making as the ultimate goal. This may cause the commercialisation of interactions on these platforms. For example, the objective of many activities of influencers is commercial gain by promoting products, brands and organisations (Hudders, De Jans and De Veirman, 2021). Thus, social

media influencers post the most appealing and profitable aspects of their activities. This focus on information production in social media could damage the culture and use up leisure time of people by trying to attract people's attention to amuse and separate them from experiencing the sense of pleasure and satisfaction that comes from helping others. This makes it even more challenging for NPOs to attract people's attention and become successful in inviting them to experience pleasure by contributing to the community.

Promoting "the society of the spectacle" and the growth of the "culture industry" are among examples of the impacts that social media could have on culture and NPOs activities. It is worth noting that this is not the result of the unidirectional impact of social media but the result of an interaction and evolution between people and social media bidirectionally. So, for better or worse, social media poses challenges and opportunities for NPOs.

1.6 Research Problem

This introductory chapter has noted that 82% of charities in the UK are small to medium size NPOs that face significant challenges in generating income and reaching financial sustainability. Given that donations from the public are one of the main income resources for S/M size NPOs, the emergence of social media platforms as a popular medium among the public brought hope for these organisations to reach the public in more cost-effective ways and nurture collective actions for their causes. Studies show that S/M NPOs increasingly use social media to communicate with the public, which has not been without challenges. In these platforms, information is abundant, and attention is scarce; hence, presence on these

platforms and being active does not necessarily translate into more engagement with the – and from – the public. This means that any successful social media activity requires competing for attention on these information-overloaded platforms. The rivalry for attracting public attention may result in NPOs following implicit or explicit rules of social media logics. This, in turn, could impact NPOs' practices and result in organisational and cultural adjustments to attract attention on these platforms. This change could be amplified by the increasing dependence of these organisations on these social media platforms since, as the platforms grow in popularity, their importance increases for the NPOs. The process in which the NPOs change as a result of the emergence of social media can be seen as the mediatization of these organisations. Mediatization could alter many aspects of their activities and decision-making processes, including the way they define and measure the success of their activities on these platforms.

It is crucial to recognise that an organisation's understanding of success, whether implicit or explicit, serves as its guiding compass in shaping its behaviour. The pressure of social media platforms that pushes organisations to behave in more attention-seeking manners may absorb scarce resources and distract their focus away from the primary goals that have brought them to these platforms, thus achieving their charitable missions. This distraction may lead to an illusion of success where efforts on social media platforms are not contributing to the overall success of the organisation.

1.7 Purpose of the Study

This research aims to investigate the concept of successful social media activities for small and medium-sized NPOs, providing insights into the mediatization phenomenon within these organisations. Additionally, it will examine how their perception of success has influenced their actions on social media platforms. By exploring the meaning of a successful social media activity, this research aims to provide context on the way these organisations behave on such platforms. This context is complementary to research that has been done on the best practices for NPOs to conduct successful activities on social media platforms, as it provides an understanding of the process that has resulted in the current activities of NPOs. This is important as the formation process of activities could play a vital role in the sustained success or failure of such actions; that is, only change in the process will result in sustainable change in the ways the activities are conducted. Hence, this research aims to explore the factors that lead to the formation of NPOs' activities on social media in the context of mediatization. Two essential questions need to be addressed to accomplish this research objective:

- How do small/medium size non-profit organisations define a successful social media activity, and how do they measure it?
- How are the social media practices of small/medium non-profit organisations impacted by the way they perceive success?

Given that the focus of this research is on small/medium-sized NPOs, it is important to note that these organizations often have limited staff numbers. The smaller size of the organisation

often implies a less hierarchical structure, where individuals responsible for specific areas of activity are typically aware of the strategy and direction of those areas and, in some cases, even set them. In contrast, larger organisations often exhibit a clear division between individuals who establish the goals and strategies and those who execute them. Considering the research context of this research is S/M NPOs, the individual best positioned to offer valuable insights into how these organisations define successful social media activities is the person responsible for overseeing the social media platforms. This is because they are either aware of the social media strategies within the organisation or actively involved in defining and setting them.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research aims to obtain a better understanding of how social media as a social context encourages a particular form of beliefs and behaviour among NPOs, particularly regarding their definition of success within the context of these platforms. In this chapter, after justifying the theoretical framework of my research, i.e., mediatization and attention economy, various points of view regarding the research framework will be reviewed. Then two bodies of studies related to website and social media use among NPOs will be covered to illustrate the exact gap that my research wants to address. In the following paragraphs, the flow of this chapter will be explained in more detail:

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the view of medium theorists since these theorists do not look at a medium as a passive channel for conveying messages but rather as a social environment that influences the message's meaning. Although the medium theories are criticised for oversimplifying media impact, they provide enough evidence to show that this impact goes well beyond a new way of communication. In the next section, mediatization and its definition will be discussed as a more comprehensive way of thinking about the media's impact on institutions and individuals. Mediatization provides a framework that this research will use to explore social media's influence on the way that NPOs conduct their communication with the public.

The attention economy is the focus of the next part of the literature review, the context within which the NPOs operate in social media. The implication of the attention economy pushed all

the participants of social media to focus more on attracting attention, which had some implications for their behaviour. One of the key implications of the attention economy is “slacktivism”, which may have shifted the meaning of success for NPOs and could have impacted how they achieve “success” as they have defined it.

Then the following two sections focus on website and social media as the two latest consecutive developments in the public communication of NPOs. First, it reviews studies focusing on the use of websites among NPOs. Whilst this thesis is primarily concerned with social media, the literature review chapter includes a critical review of studies focusing on websites among NPOs for three main reasons: Firstly, web 2.0 technology is used in social media and is the key enabler for such platforms. It has evolved from Web 1.0, which is used in World Wide Web (WWW). Hence, there are common structural features between Web 2.0 and Web 1.0. For example, websites and social media enable users to express their views easily and quickly by leaving online comments. So, understanding the relationship between these features and NPOs could help this research to obtain a deeper understanding of how these features could have acted as a change agent in the NPOs realm.

Secondly, websites were the main “new” communication medium among NPOs before social media. Hence, reviewing studies regarding NPOs’ use of websites could help to understand how a shift in communication from websites to social media could be accompanied by certain behaviours and beliefs among NPOs.

Thirdly because communicating via websites has a more extended history among NPOs than social media, more studies have focused on website use among NPOs. Given that there are common features between websites and social media, an overview of these studies could help better understand how structural features of social media might impact NPOs.

This section concludes that there is almost a consensus among studies that NPOs have successfully implemented some technical aspects of websites but not in utilising their websites' dialogue and engagement potential. Then, the following section provides a review of studies that explore the extent to which NPOs utilise social media, as well as the underlying reasons and methods behind their usage. I found much overlap between these studies and those on NPOs' usage of websites. Namely, NPOs use these two mediums more for disseminating information than engagement with supporters and mobilising action. Then by narrowing down the boundary of review to the studies with the focus of attention on these platforms, this section concludes that few studies focus on the question of public attention and activities of NPOs in social media. Moreover, this review concludes that there is a gap in the literature regarding exploring how NPOs define successful communication.

The current literature has various studies showing how different organisations use social media. However, there has not been enough focus on how social media adaptation among organisations, particularly NPOs, has changed these organisations. Especially there is a lack of studies focusing on how this adaptation has changed the way they define success in their public communications and how the practices of NPOs are impacted by the way they perceive success. Although some studies looked at the outcome of activities by NPOs on social media,

some assumed a universal definition of success; no studies look at success from NPOs' perspective. Moreover, most studies regarding the NPOs have focused on larger organisations where the data has depth and concentration, but small/medium NPOs are mostly neglected.

Additionally, NPOs in the UK, the 6th most generous nation in the world, are not studied in any depth, creating a gap for this study to fill by focusing on them. Another difference that this study has to other existing studies on NPOs, and social media is that it is not positioning itself as applied (or "how to") research and is more focused on exploring the decision-making and behaviour of NPOs as social media presence has grown. Of course, the theoretical basis this research provides could be used by further applied research.

2.1 Definitions

This section provides a backdrop and context for the questions of this study. It achieves this by clarifying some of the definitions used throughout this research. Clarifying these definitions makes the research boundary more explicit and provides the required context for the rest of the research. The first section will focus on the definition of non-profit organisations (NPOs). There are various ways to define NPOs; however, for this research, I will use Salamon and Anheier's (1997) definition as outlined in the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project (JHCNSP). The next section focuses on the definition of social media since various social media platforms share some technologies and features. However, this

section centres explicitly on a working definition encompassing the fundamental characteristics shared by social media platforms, distinguishing them from other platforms.

2.1.1 Defining Non-profit Organisations (NPOs)

Given that this research focuses on non-profit organisations, it is crucial to establish a clear and concise definition for these entities. Doing so will aid in gathering relevant data and also position our research within the broader context of existing literature on NPOs. It is worth noting that there is no universally accepted definition for NPOs in the literature. Therefore, the following paragraphs will provide a clarification of the terminology and definition utilised in this research, highlighting its relevance in relation to other definitions in the field.

The terms “voluntary”, “charity”, and “non-profit” have been used interchangeably throughout the literature on organisations in the third sector (e.g. Salamon and Anheier, 1992; Billis and Glennerster, 1998; Kendall and Knapp, 2000a). Although all charities have non-profit-distributing features, in the UK, not all non-profit organisations are considered as a charity (Resource Centre, 2018). A non-profit organisation needs to have a non-profit-distributing feature, which means its income and profits should not be distributed to the organisation’s staff. However, the mission of a non-profit organisation does not need to possess a charitable purpose. Whereas in the UK, for an organisation to be counted legally as a charity, its purpose should be exclusively charitable, where the UK law defines the criterion of such purposes. Accordingly, non-profit and charity terms could refer to different entities but have been used interchangeably in the literature.

Similarly, “voluntary” and “non-profit” have been used interchangeably to refer to the same organisations. For example, Knapp and Knedall (2000) use “voluntary” to refer to the same set of organisations that Salamon et al. (1992) refer to as “non-profit” (Salamon and Anheier, 1992; Kendall and Knapp, 2000b). The former term, “voluntary”, emphasises the concept of voluntarism that need to be embodied to a meaningful extent in third-sector organisations, whereas the term “non-profit” emphasises the factor that if these organisations earn a profit, instead of distributing it to their owners; they invest the profit into the mission of the organisation to achieve the organisation’s vision. Both terms refer to features essential for differentiating third-sector organisations but are insufficient to highlight all key features.

While these terms are not adequate for fully distinguishing these organisations, different researchers have attempted to provide a definition beyond just a term for them. Several scholars have tried to define NPOs based on the characteristics that differentiate them from organisations working in for-profit and governmental sectors (Hansmann, 1980; Weisbrod, 1988; Lohmann, 1992). For example, Hansmann defines NPOs as organisations that “prohibit the distribution of residual earnings to individuals who exercise control over the firm such as officer, directors or members” (Hansmann, 1987b, p. 28). He used the “non-distribution constraint” term to refer to this differentiation. However, the “non-distribution constraint” element cannot draw a clear boundary between non-profit and other types of organisations since many NPOs pay compensation for their paid staff, which is taken from NPO’s income before the profit is calculated (Morris, 2000). Hence, it is hard to draw the line on where this

is the distribution of profit versus compensation when those who are paid are also directors and owners of the NPO.

The output of NPOs has been mentioned as another element that could be used to define these organisations. For example, Weisbrod (1988) emphasised the output of NPOs by defining them as non-governmental organisations that provide public goods (Weisbrod, 1988). However, more than simply relying on providing public good is required to differentiate these organisations fully. This is because some NPOs' outputs may not be classified as public goods when considering a broader historical and geographical context. For instance, an organisation that focuses on wine could be considered as doing public good if assumed its function expands the knowledge about wine; however, in another country where the consumption of wine is illegal, this is no longer considered a public good. So public good could be subject to interpretation and could differ over time and by societal changes. Hence, while this approach to defining NPOs distinguishes them from certain organisations, it is not a comprehensive or all-encompassing definition.

One of the most comprehensive and frequently used definitions for these organisations is the structural-operational definition by Salamon and Anheier (1997). Defining the non-profit sector was a part of The Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project (JHCNSP) directed by Salamon and Anheier, in which researchers tried to look "into the scope, structure, history, legal position, and role of the non-profit sector in a broad cross-section of nations" (Salamon and Anheier, 1997, p. 11). The scope of the project was to come up with a definition that can be applied to the third sector in a variety of nations; hence, they tried to

frame their definition as a “structural-operational definition”. So, the definition could be mapped to nations with different economic, social and cultural contexts, i.e., it is a universal definition.

According to Salamon and Ahneier (1997), an organisation could be considered a non-profit if it possesses five basic features:

- Organised, to some degree, having an internal organisational structure.
- Private; has an institutional identity separate from the government.
- Non-profit distributing; not distributing profits to its owners.
- Self-governing, to a significant degree, can control its own activities.
- Voluntary; uses volunteers in its management and operations.

This definition helped the NPOs become legally, financially and organisationally distinctive (ibid). Of course, even this definition has not been fully accepted as a universal one and has received some criticism for its contextual nature and exclusion of some organisations that could have been deemed as NPO. One notable work in this area is done by Morris (2000), where she demonstrates some downsides of the definition when applied to historical contexts, such as 19th-century institutions that provided primary health care through a multi-tier provision (Morris, 2000).

Although there is no perfect and universally accepted definition for NPOs, for this research, which is focused on the modern era of NPOs, the structural-operational definition of JHCNSP suits well. Using a relatively universal definition like this allows for the findings of this research

to stay relevant beyond the UK and its legal boundary, so studies focusing on other countries could be compared to this research. On the other hand, as discussed earlier, none of the terms used for referring to these organisations are all-encompassing, and each covers an aspect of these organisations. However, it is necessary to use a term to refer to these organisations throughout this text. Since JHCNSP used the “non-profit organisation” term in their definition, this research will use the same term, although other terms could have been used as well.

2.1.2 Defining Social Media

Since research questions guide all the stages of research, it is important to reach a clear and shared understanding of the questions of the study. Defining key elements in the questions is one of the ways that, to some extent, help reach this clarity. Hence, the following paragraphs explain what social media mean in this research because without agreeing upon what social media are, it will be difficult to understand how it has impacted the NPOs. Studies from communication, public relation, media, and marketing disciplines have been reviewed to find a concrete definition of social media.

Scholars from different disciplines (e.g., public relations, management, and communication) have tried to define social media, and several definitions exist in the literature. However, variations remain among scholars regarding what social media means. Daily changes and the rapid evolution of social media could contribute to the variation in understanding what social media is and is not (Carr and Hayes, 2015).

Most of the extant definition of social media is broad, referring to the internet-based applications or services that create and exchange user-generated content while facilitating collaboration and community for its users (e.g., Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Filo, Lock and Karg, 2015). The broad definition of “social media” has resulted in its interchangeable usage with other terms like social networking sites and web 2.0 services in the literature (e.g., Tredinnick, 2006; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Waters *et al.*, 2009a). However, Web 2.0, social networking sites and social media are different.

Web 2.0 refers to the “technological” and “ideological” change in internet use in which end users are more a participant rather than just the consumer (Alves, Fernandes and Raposo, 2016). Before the emergence of Web 2.0 technology, the World Wide Web traditionally had been used by end users to just consume the contents in activities such as reading, watching or purchasing a product. Web 2.0 technology has enabled end-users of the internet to create, alter and discuss the contents collaboratively (Carr and Hayes, 2015).

Social media applications may use Web 2.0 technologies for their services, but using this technology is not its distinguishing factor. Generating and disseminating user-based content is a service that differentiates social media from other communication technologies. In line with this, this characteristic of social media has been highlighted as one of the vital features of any social media applications in most of the social media definitions (e.g., Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Carr and Hayes, 2015; Filo, Lock and Karg, 2015).

Most studies refer to social media as a mean of communication that, for example, disseminate user-generated content or by referring to examples of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Carr and Hayes, 2015). Referring to social media using these examples presents challenges as simply providing a few instances does not adequately define its boundaries. Instead, a concrete definition that establishes the criteria for including or excluding an application as social media is necessary.

Despite this, several scholars have generated typological lists of social media. One of the most used categorisations in studies is the one developed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

According to them, social media takes six major forms, including:

- Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)
- Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)
- Blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter)
- Content communities (e.g., Youtube)
- Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)
- Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

One of the common misconceptions in the definition of social media is considering it as a synonym for social networking sites (SNS). Yet, these are merely a subset of social media tools, as not all social media are necessarily SNS. As seen in this example, this categorisation by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) helps to clarify the boundary of social media. However, relying solely on this definition is unlikely to be sufficient due to the rapid pace of change. Numerous

new tools and platforms will probably emerge soon that may not fit neatly into these existing categories.

Table 2 below summarises different definitions of social media by different scholars and highlights what each definition is focused on. Unsurprisingly, almost all the definitions have mentioned producing and sharing content to some extent. However, some of these definitions don't mention the interactivity of social media or mention it merely as "connecting people". Another difference across the definitions is whether they mention the user control over the scope in which the contents and interactions are happening or not, e.g., is it "broad or narrow" or is it "public or semi-public"? Few definitions attempted to provide categories of content or users on social media, which does not seem exhaustive or could be subject to change over time.

Among the definitions of social media in the table, the one by Carr and Hayes (2015) has some unique characteristics. They define social media as "Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others." (Carr and Hayes, 2015, p. 50). This definition is useful because it mentions the incentive of communication, i.e., the value users derive from being there. It also highlights the nature of communication regarding immediacy, which is not mentioned in other definitions. Another unique aspect of this definition is that it describes social media as a channel rather than a platform or technology. In addition to the mentioned unique aspects, two primary reasons merit using this definition

for this research. First, this research does not look at a specific set of social media platforms to understand the impact on the NPOs; instead, it focuses on social media as a channel and beyond just a set of tools with some commonality. Second, this definition focuses on distinguishing factors of social media in the way communication happens instead the concentrate on elements constructing social media, i.e., it is more focused on interactions through social media rather than its structure and building blocks.

Definition	Produce/Co-Create Contents	Share Content	Distinguish Users	Distinguish Content Types	Interactivity	Connect People	Scope of Communication	Communication Incentive	Real-time vs Async. Communication	Technology	Describe Social Media as...	By
"web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. "										Web	Services	Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 211)
"simply serve as a "label for digital technologies that allow people to connect, interact, produce and share content".										Digital	Label for digital technologies	Lewis (2010, p.2)
"a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content".										Web 2.0	Internet-Based Applications	Kaplan and Hanenlien (2010, p.61)
"mobile and web-based technologies that create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content"										Mobile and Web	Platforms	Kietzmann et al. (2011, p. 241)
"(a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and (c) the people, organisations, and industries that produce and consume digital content."										N/A	Infrastructure and Tools	(Howard and Parks, 2012, p. 362)
"New media technologies facilitating interactivity and co-creation that allow for the development and sharing of user-generated content among and between organisations (e.g. teams, governing bodies, agencies and media groups) and individuals (e.g. consumers, athletes and journalists)".										New media tech.	Technologies	Filo et al. (2015, p. 4)
"Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others."										Internet based	Channels	Carr and Hayes (2015, p. 50)

Table 2: Social Media Definitions by different scholars

2.1 “Medium is the message.”

The communication mediums that NPOs use are not only a way of conveying messages, but they could also change the message being communicated and its social-cultural environment. Marshall McLuhan (1994) goes even further, and in his well-known book, he claims “the media is the message”. That is, the medium through which the information is being communicated has more weight in terms of impact than the information being conveyed. McLuhan also suggests that the media changes how we think, behave and act and argues that each medium requires its own behaviour style (McLuhan, 1994). For example, an approach in that NPOs raise funds through email might be effective but unattractive and ineffective on other mediums, such as social media. So according to this view, the emergence of new mediums in NPOs’ communication with the public not only has considerable weight on what’s being communicated, but it also changes the thinking and behaviour of those in the organisation. That is, the change of medium could lead to changes in the organisational culture of NPOs.

Medium theorists, such as McLuhan, argue that the diffusion of new mediums and communication development among members of society act as an agent that shapes different aspects of society, such as its culture and organisations. These theorists assert that the power of each medium as an agent is stemmed from new structural features brought by each medium rather than the content communicated by them per se. For example, Eisenstein (1979) suggested that by looking at the contents of printing during the sixteenth century, it could be implied that the church would be more powerful via printing since the churches monitored the contents disseminated by printing. Nevertheless, recent literature refers to

printing as a medium that promoted the scientific revolution and weakened the church's power. He indicated that printing helped the secularisation of society via its distinct structural features, such as offering new distribution and storage. In line with Eisenstein, Martin Luther stated that printing facilitated the widespread distribution of the Bible compared to the era when handwritten manuscripts were common in society. Hence, the position of the church was weakened since it could not function as the only interpreter of the Bible (Meyrowitz, 1997). Similarly, J. C. Carothers, Eric Havelock, Jack Goody, and Ian Watt have looked at how the dissemination of literacy after orality has shaped different aspects of society from the micro level, such as the mental health of individuals to the macro level, such as the social definition of knowledge and cultural changes (Meyrowitz, 2019).

Another group of medium theorists, Daniel Boorstin, Edmund Carpenter, Walter Ong and Toney Schwartz, have explained how the use of electronic media has changed thinking patterns and social organisation. For example, according to Boorstin, electronic media have levelled times and places, "mass-produced the moment", and made them repeatable (ibid). So, according to medium theorists, the birth of new mediums does not only mean that a new way of conveying messages is born, but it could be the beginning of much broader changes in society and how individuals/organisations behave. While this model might explain some societal changes as new mediums have emerged, the view of the medium theorist is often criticised as too simplistic (Hepp, 2013a). The criticism is rooted in the focus and assumption embedded in the medium theory that a dominant medium has a deterministic impact on

society and culture. This assumption ignores the wider context and interaction of different mediums (Finnemann, 2014).

The emergence and utilisation of social media by NPOs should not be viewed merely as a new tool in their toolbox but as a phenomenon that can have a profound impact beyond communication. While social media and its adaptation alone are insufficient for bringing about cultural and structural changes in these organisations, they can contribute to such transformations. Adopting a more holistic perspective, the concept of “mediatization” provides a better framework for studying the impacts of social media on NPOs, considering it as a new medium penetrating the organisational landscape. Although the mediatization approach shares similarities with the medium theory, it addresses certain shortcomings by recognising the interplay between different media and their interactions within the broader societal context. Rather than viewing one medium as dominant and the primary driver of change, the mediatization approach acknowledges the dynamic nature of media and their reciprocal influences.

In the next section, the concept of mediatization from the point of view of prominent scholars in this domain will be reviewed. Then among reviewed perspectives and definitions, one that fits this research will be chosen to posit the perspective of this research regarding the influence of social media on the NPOs sector.

2.2 Mediatization as the guiding concept of this research

The ubiquitous presence of social media in all aspects of human life has influenced culture and society, driving significant changes. This transformation is not limited to society alone; the media landscape constantly evolves and adapts to this new reality. Mediatization refers to the interplay between these changes in media, culture and society (Hepp and Krotz, 2014a). In general, mediatization points to the role of media and mediated communication in the transformations of cultural and social (ibid).

The term "Mediatization" first emerged in the early 20th century when sociologists began examining the impact of mass media on various aspects of human life. As early as 1933, Ernest Manheim wrote about the "mediatization of direct human relationship" in his postdoctoral thesis (Manheim 1933, cited in Hepp and Krotz, 2014a, p. 2). Using this term, he explained how mass media has changed social relations.

The concept of mediatization from communication and sociology spread out to other disciplines, such as political and linguistics studies (see Table 3). However, there is no consensus between scholars regarding its definition (e.g. Asp, 1986; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008a; Livingstone and Lunt, 2014; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014). Scholars have approached mediatization differently and used the mediatization concept to describe the influence of media on different domains, such as politics, science, religion, consumption, war, and education.

Select	Field: Web of Science Categories	Record Count	% of 719	Bar Chart
☐	COMMUNICATION	347	48.261 %	
☐	POLITICAL SCIENCE	111	15.438 %	
☐	SOCIOLOGY	86	11.961 %	
☐	LINGUISTICS	30	4.172 %	

Table 3: Web of Science statistics on the use of mediatization theory by discipline

2.2.1 Mediatization Traditions: Institutionalism and Social Constructivism

In the late 20th century, media and communication scholars started to construct the concept of mediatization in more detail (Hepp and Krotz, 2014a). After the initial development of the mediatization concept, two main traditions of mediatization were established: “social-constructivist tradition” and “institutionalist tradition”. In the “social-constructivist tradition”, the focus is on understanding the role of media in constructing social and cultural reality. So, from the point of view of this tradition, mediatization refers to a process in which meanings are constructed through communication that is mediated by the media (Knoblauch, 2013; Hepp and Krotz, 2014b). Approaching mediatization from the “institutionalist tradition” means that in analysing the interplay between media and society, the focus is on media as an independent institution with its own set of rules and other social institutions. Hjarvard (2014) refers to institutions as a “domain or field of social life that is governed by a particular set of formal and informal rules, displays a particular structure, serves certain social functions and allocates resources for action in various ways” (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 130). From this perspective, mediatization happens when non-media institutions adapt these formal and informal rules of media to performance successfully.

The key difference between the two traditions is the way they model the role of the media in the interaction with broader society and culture. In social constructivism, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping society and culture by serving as a medium through which communication occurs, influencing how individuals perceive and comprehend reality. Communication through media is not a simple interaction to get perceived reality from one place to another, but the media itself has a role in shaping this perceived reality (ibid).

The institutionalist tradition perceives the media as an independent institution engaging in interactions with other institutions. Through these interactions, the media's rules are adapted and shaped by the participating entities. The process through which these media rules are adapted and shaped is the process of mediatization. In this view, the institutions adapt the media logics as they try to reach and communicate with people. In social constructivism, the emphasis is not on conforming to specific rules but rather on how media shapes the perception of reality within society through communication channels.

Although the traditions mentioned above differ in how they analyse the role of media in changes happening in society, they share the core concept that refers to a process by which the media becomes important and impactful among different spheres of society. According to mediatization theoretical framework, the increase in media use and society's dependency on media for communication leads to the growing importance of media and their impact on societal and cultural processes (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014). An example of mediatization in its general sense could be found in rituals such as weddings. When organizing a wedding ceremony, features are considered that prepare the event for their mediated versions

recorded by digital cameras or the ceremony that's a replica of the television version of such events (Couldry, 2008).

2.2.2 Definitions of Mediatization

Winfried Schulz (2004) used the mediatization concept in its broader definition to describe the role of media in changes happening in the communication sphere. He identified four sub-processes in which media influences human communication: extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation (Schulz, 2004). He points out that these sub-processes could overlap since mediatization is a complex transitional process.

In the extension process, he emphasises the role of media in extending the ability of individuals to communicate through time and space (ibid). Like individuals, media has enabled organisations to communicate globally with the public. For example, social media has enabled international NPOs such as Red Cross to communicate humanitarian crises with the public globally.

In the substitution process, he views media's influence on communication by replacing a face-to-face activity with its online form. For example, lockdown restrictions imposed by the government due to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerate the substitution process, in which many NPOs have substituted their face-to-face activities with online format (Dayson *et al.*, 2021).

In the amalgamation process, mediated communications merge into a face-to-face activity, leading to a new form in which face-to-face and mediated communications are combined. For example, a non-profit may use a video alongside face-to-face interaction with potential donors to create a powerful impact during the gala. So, in this amalgamation process, digital communication merges with face-to-face communication to achieve a successful fundraising event and outcome.

Lastly, in the accommodation process, media users have to alter their behaviours to accommodate the values, routines and media format (ibid). For example, in the case of NPOs, these organisations may adopt values of social media in which the number of likes and shares is a metric of the success of an activity. So, they may perform activities to increase their number of followers or likes. In this process, actions such as the amount of money raised through a fundraising campaign on social media could lose their role as metrics of success among NPOs. So, in this case, the accommodation phase has happened in which NPOs adapt to the meaning of success in social media.

Friedrich Krotz (2007), like Schulz (2004), uses the mediatization concept in its broader sense by using it as a “meta-process,” e.g., commercialisation, globalisation and individualisation but Krotz (2007) emphasises the role of media in the transformation that is happening in the society. He added a historical perspective to the concept and approached it to describe the long-term process of change since humans learnt to write down their thoughts (Krotz, 2007). According to Hepp (2013), taking Krotz’s long-term perspective into account, the concept of mediatization can provide insights into the historical progression of humankind as a

continuous process of media development and evolving communication practices (Hepp, 2013b). However, the media is not in the strongest position as a change agent from Krotz's (2007) point of view, meaning that he emphasises the role of choices people make regarding how to communicate, which ultimately contributes to societal changes (ibid).

The mediatization concept proposed by Hjarvard (2008) has common elements with Schulz's (2004) and Krotz's (2007) perspectives. Hjarvard (2008) borrowed extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation processes from Schulz's (2004) definition of mediatization. Also, he emphasises the importance of empirical validation through historical, cultural and sociological analysis, which has been stressed by Krotz(2007) in defining the mediatization theory (Hjarvard, 2008). According to Hjarvard (2008), mediatization is

"The process whereby society, to an increasing degree, is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterised by a duality in that the media have become integrated into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions in their own right"
(Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113).

Strömbäck's (2008) view on mediatization shares many commonalities with how Hjarvard views mediatization, although with much more focus on politics. Strömbäck (2008) defined four distinctive but highly related phases of mediatization. Figure 10 shows these phases that can be summarised as mediation, independence, adaption and internalisation phases (Strömbäck, 2008b). The first phase indicates the extent to which media becomes the main

communication channel and information source in a social institution. In the case of NPOs, this happens when the public and NPOs rely on media to communicate and obtain information regarding each other. Strömbäck (2008) also calls this phase mediated phase.

Moreover, he considers this phase the most important since it is a precondition of subsequent phases of mediatization. In other words, mediatization starts with the idea that as media usage and dependency on communication via media increase, the significance of media and their impact on societal and cultural processes also grows. Hjarvard (2008), in his definition, talks about “the process whereby society to an increasing degree ... becomes dependent on the media and their logic”; this corresponds to the meditation phase by Strömbäck (2008).



Figure 10: A Four-Dimensional Conceptualization of the Mediatization of Politics (Source: Strömbäck, 2008a, p. 235)

The second phase of mediatization, according to Strömbäck (2008), is the extent to which media have become independent from other social institutions. As a result of this independency, media evolves into an institution with distinct rules and logics. Hjarvard (2008)

also highlights “media as an independent institution” on various occasions as part of the mediatization process. In his definition, he mentions the independence of the media as part of the process, namely when media “have acquired the status of social institutions in their own right” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). As discussed later, his perspective on historical mediatization is also shaped by the transition of media from being a cultural institution appealing to the general public to becoming an independent institution that differentiates between various audience groups and serves them through professional media practices.

The third phase of Strömbäck (2008), the mediatization process, refers to the power relation between media as an independent institution and other social institutions (Strömbäck, 2008b). In this phase, mediatization happens to the degree that other institutions adapt to the rules and logics of media to continue their livelihood. The pervasive use of social media in society could create a forced dependency in which institutions could not communicate with the public without using this medium and following its rules. Again Hjarvard (2008) has referenced the same concept in his definition and in his writings on many occasions. In his definition, he refers to increasing submission to media and media logic as part of the mediatization process. The media logic concept and adherence to it will be covered later in this literature review (Hjarvard, 2008).

In the next phase outlined by Strömbäck (2008), the fourth one, the process of mediatization develops to the degree in which other social institutions, to achieve their mission, consciously internalise media logics in their operations. Implementation of digital marketing by executive leaders in large NPOs could be a sign of this phase of mediatization. This internalisation phase

is a key part of Hjarvard's definition of the mediatization process in which "media have become integrated into the operations of other social institutions" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113).

Strömbäck's (2008) and Hjarvard's (2008) views on mediatization have a lot in common, except that Hjarvard takes a broader perspective and is concerned beyond politics. On the other hand, Hjarvard's definition of the mediatization concept differs from Krotz' (2007) and Schulz' (2004) by two principles. First, in his definition of mediatization, he uses the institutional perspective. It means that he considers media as a separate institution where sociological concepts can be applied and examines how media interacts with other social institutions.

The other principle in Hjarvard's mediatization definition that is distinct from other scholars is that he sees mediatization in a specific historical context. Scholars define mediatization differently, but there is disagreement regarding when mediatization emerged. Strömbäck (2008) and Hjarvard (2008) argue that mediatization emerged only after the diffusion of contemporary media. Whereas Rothenbuhler (2009) and Krotz (2007) suggest, mediatization has happened throughout history along all forms of communication (Rothenbuhler 2009, cited in Finnemann, 2014). Overall, there is agreement among media scholars that the process of mediatization has happened parallel to other processes such as commercialisation, individualisation, and globalisation. Given that modern media such as Radio, TV and social media have been considered generators of the three latter processes, mediatization could have happened more heavily by diffusion of these modern media in society, especially in highly developed nations like the UK.

As the focus of this research is on social media, hence, Strömbäck (2008) and Hjarvard's (2008) definition of mediatization, which looks at mediatization as a contemporary phenomenon, is more suitable for this research. According to Hjarvard, "the mediatization concept could be applied exclusively to the historical situation in which the media at once have attained autonomy as a social institution and are crucially interwoven with the functioning of other institutions" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 110). He argues that this condition has happened to media in Europe since 1980, when media moved to a more autonomous and independent institution, which its logics are professional media practices. This is different from the period before when media were a cultural institution, and its dominant logic was to be interesting for the general public (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 120).

Among the mediatization definitions, Hjarvard's view on mediatization fits the topic of this study better since it has the following characteristics:

- It is a process that describes the change of institutions through interaction with media, which itself is an institution that is changed in this process. This study is interested in the change of NPOs through their interaction with social media.
- It looks at institutions and their change rather than the society and culture, hence the focus at the right level for this study that's looking at the NPOs and the third sector as institutions rather than the entirety of the society.
- It is focused on contemporary media and is more specific and less general. It fits the contemporary view of this study, although it will not ignore the historical context.

- It focuses on the adaptation of institutions to media logics as they become more dependent on it, without falling for media as being dominant and assuming deterministic outcomes from the emergence of a media. The adaptation of social media by NPOs and their increased dependency on it is at the core of how these platforms have impacted them. Hence, this view fits well. Also, it is not too naïve and simplistic on the other side to assume linearity of this impact.

The last point mentioned above is attributed to the widespread adoption of social media among NPOs (Weberling, 2012; Hou and Lampe, 2015). As these organisations increasingly rely on social media to communicate and engage with their stakeholders, their dependency on these platforms has likely grown. Hence, social media could be in the fabric of their key activities. Although the extent of dependency is arguable, studies show that, like other organisations, NPOs increasingly use mediated information and communication, e.g. via social media (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a; Nah and Saxton, 2013; Guo and Saxton, 2014). If the core of mediatization is applied to NPOs, it means the increase in social media use could lead to NPOs' dependency on this media. This dependency may grow since other institutions which NPOs communicate with, such as families, business corporations, and religious institutions, have also become increasingly dependent on social media (Livingstone, 2009). As social media becomes important among NPOs, these organisations could submit to the logics of social media that may not align with their organisational missions. For example, for an NPO that focuses on homelessness in society, raising funds to prepare accommodations for homeless people is a key activity that requires communication with the public. When this NPO

uses social media to achieve this, the aim of its communication could change to maximizing the attention that the communication attracts rather than the fund it raises. In this example, the social media logic influenced the communication goals as the NPO adopted these platforms.

Some scholars consider mediatization as a problematic consequence of the development of media. In their view, institutions would lose their autonomy and become increasingly dependent on the media for their key functions. Ultimately their behaviour would be shaped by the demands of the media (e.g. Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Habermas was one of the first sceptical scholars regarding the outcome of the development of media. According to Habermas (1989), social deterioration results from social dependency on media (Habermas, 1989). Though, other mediatization proponents such as Hjarvard (2004) and Schudson (1978) have argued against this sceptical claims, stating that such scepticism is based on the assumption that face-to-face communication is more valuable and democratic than other mediated communications (Schudson, 1978; Hjarvard, 2004).

Additionally, the sceptics may have overlooked the non-linearity of the mediatization, as every player in this process is with influence and choice. The media logics are not dictated by the media but formed through the interactions. This will be explained in more detail in the “Social media logics” section. According to Hjarvard (2008), an institutional perspective on mediatization makes it possible to frame what is included in the “media logic” and to better analyse the relationship between media and other social institutions.

Hjarvard (2008) refers to media logic as the “institutional and technological *modus operandi* of the media, including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of informal rules” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). From his point of view, media logic is institutional and technological methods that media use to communicate with their users. These methods include the way in which media produce and distribute information and how its audiences consume the material with the help of formal, informal rules and symbolic resources.

According to Hjarvard (2008), cultural or social activity can be mediated in two different ways: a direct (strong) and an indirect (weak) form of mediatization. A direct (strong) form of mediatization happens when the former non-mediated activity is converted to mediated form and entirely happens through interaction with a medium (*ibid*). One of the social media platforms that have been used for fundraising by NPOs is crowdfunding websites. According to Breeze (2017), the fundraising act could be divided into three main processes: fostering the philanthropic impulse, framing needs and facilitating solicitation (Breeze, 2017). Given that these three main processes in fundraising could be accomplished through crowdfunding websites, the non-mediated form of fundraising, e.g., face-to-face fundraising, is converted to a mediated form entirely. Based on Hjarvard’s (2008) definition of strong mediatization, the direct (strong) form of mediatization happens through the fundraising process via crowdfunding websites. These two forms of mediatization could also impact success as a concept. If NPOs describe the success of their social media activities entirely by metrics defined in these platforms, the direct (strong) form of mediatization could have happened;

otherwise, if the actual action has been considered as a contributor factor in measuring success among these organisations, the indirect (weak) form could be referred to this situation.

“Media logic” is a term that is often heard alongside mediatization, particularly among those with institutionalist views like Hjarvard. This term predates “mediatization” studies in the media and communication disciplines. The aim of one of the first studies that linked “media logic” with “mediatization” was to understand the media’s impact on politics (Asp, 1986). According to David Altheide and Robert Snow (1979), one of the social institutions that are most dependent on media is politics, in which the influence of media can be recognised (Klinger and Svensson, 2015a).

Swedish media researcher Kent Asp first used the concept of media logic in politics in describing the media’s influence on the communication of politics. He explains it as a process in which “a political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics” (Asp, 1986, p. 359). He emphasises the power of media for changes happening in political communication. According to Asp (1990) “system of norms surrounding media production processes” is one of the elements that is vital to be considered when the role of media is being studied (Asp, 1990a, p. 48). By referring to Altheide and Snow (1979), who proposed the concept for the first time, Asp suggested the “media logic” term can be used as an overarching term for the system of norms in the mass media. The norms embrace formats, practices and rationalities of the media. This was the first time that “media logic” and “mediatization” were linked together (Hepp, 2013b).

In 1979, Altheide and Snow defined “media logic” as a group of principles promoted by media institutions that diffuse every public realm and influence society structure. For example, Altheide (2004) indicates that politicians have dramatised their discourse by shortening their soundbites and using visual and entertainment formats to obtain media coverage. They state, “In contemporary society, every institution has become part of media culture: changes have occurred in every major institution that is a result of media logic in presenting and interpreting activity in those institutions” (Altheide and Robert, 1979, p.11). According to this view, media logic could be used to interpret and understand the activity of different institutions in society.

Since the idea of “media logic” was first conceived, Altheide and Snow have improved the concept significantly. For example, Altheide summarised and discussed many of the published research on the topic in 2004 and defined media logic as what “refers to the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium. This includes rhythm, grammar, and format.” (Altheide, 2004, p. 294). They never use the terms mediatization in establishing the concept of “media logic”. However, they note that the increased dependency of institutions on media for communication has forced them to adapt to the logics of media.

Scholars such as Couldry (2008), Lundby (2009), and Krotz (2009) have criticised media logic in singular form since they believe different varieties of logics exist in the media realm. For example, Couldry argues that media logics are not homogenous and should not become condensed to a single logic (Couldry, 2008). Krotz (2009) states that all media logics depends on their cultural, social and historical context; hence, there is no single media logic in the

media landscape (Krotz, 2009). Lundby (2009) goes beyond criticising the singularity of media logic and suggests the term does not help understand the impact of media as it is too simplistic, and it probably belongs to days when editorial powers controlled the media. In the current society, which is saturated by the internet and digital media, he suggests, the media logic is too coherent to encompass all the various formats, interactions and norms of the media (Lundby, 2009).

While the criticism might be applicable when considering mediatization as an all-encompassing theory that considers all different aspects of society, the present study, using Hjarvard's (2008) institutional perspective of mediatization, is far more focused on a meso-perspective. That is the interplay between social media and NPOs to explore the influence of this media. In this context, media logic in its plural form, i.e., logics, is helpful since, as it will be shown later, various social media logics are identified in the literature that are distinct from each other.

In the next section, the study will look deeper into the concept of social media logics. This will help demonstrate the diversity of these logics and provide a better context for the subject of this research.

2.2.3 Social Media Logics

To understand the logics of social media, focusing on how these platforms operate and exploring their different parts is useful. Van Dijck, Poell and De Wall (2018), in their book "Platform Society", outline elements that construct a platform, namely:

- *Data*: The platform collects both content and user data automatically. The data is collected through the interaction of users with the platform as well as through their devices (Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal, 2018).
- *Application Programming Interfaces*: The interfaces allow different platforms to tap into the data from other platforms. This allows for creating a large, connected network of platforms that collect data, derive new data and share the data with each other.
- *Algorithms*: Platforms use algorithms to drive outputs from the data they gather. This could be in the form of ranking content, filtering content or even deriving new content. The algorithms were often defined as a series of steps and rules to derive an output from some input data (ibid). However, as Amoore (2020) challenges this view, with the emergence of Machine Learning algorithms and their expansion, this view could be too simplistic. Amoore suggests that algorithm can be thought of as an “arrangement of propositions” (Amoore, 2020, p. 11). In this context, the algorithms are exposed to data, and based on these inputs, they propose various new possibilities, albeit with some uncertainties. They are no longer a set of rules and steps but evolve based on the data they receive or are trained on to propose new outputs.
- *Ownership*: The shareholders and owners of a platform, the legal and taxation regime that it falls under, and the for-profit or non-profit status of the platform all have implications on how it operates and interacts with its users. Since many of these platforms are empowered by user content and services, sometimes the consumer-owner relationship may seem blurry (Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal, 2018). However, it

is important to recognise that the ownership of the platform is distinct from the network of users who may fuel its activities and even profitability.

- *Business Model*: Platforms could have various business models through which they generate and capture economic values. There are various models used by platforms, such as charging fees for their services, selling attention to advertisers, selling data collected through the platforms, collecting donations or combining various models (ibid). The ownership of the platforms could have an implication on the platforms' business model.
- *User Agreement*: The relationship between the owners and users is subject to a pseudo-legal contract generally referred to as terms of reference. Van Dijck brings a few examples where these terms of reference go beyond just service conditions and set norms for the users, e.g., Airbnb states that hosts should not discriminate between guests based on their race, colour, religion, etc. (ibid). "The Twitter Rules" is full of such examples where the platforms define various contents that it deems inappropriate (Twitter, 2023). The rules effectively impose the values of the Twitter platform on its users as the norms of the platform.

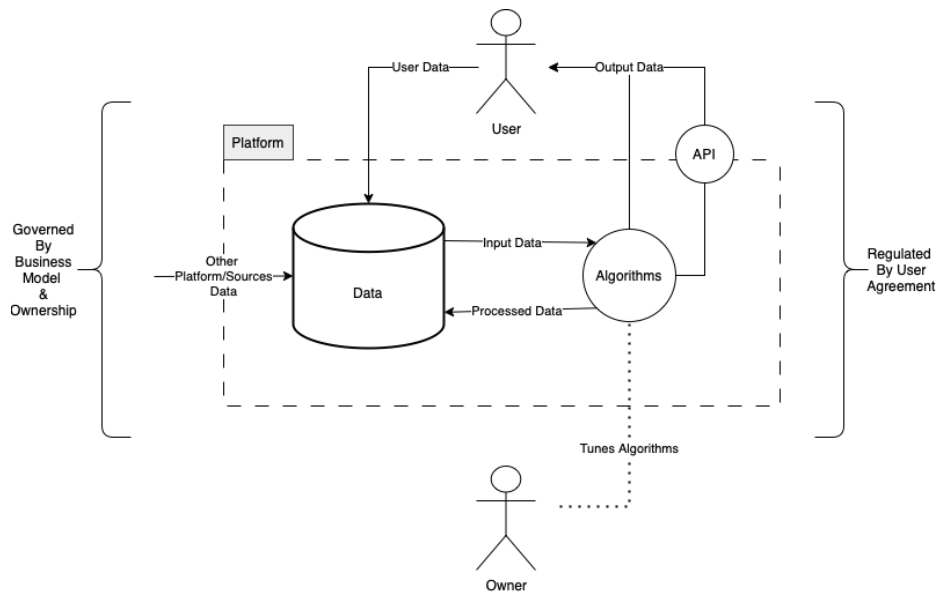


Figure 11 "Platform" model as described by Van Dijck, Poell and De Wall 2018

The picture above captures these elements and shows how the data and algorithms play a central role in how a platform is run, informed by its business model and ownership. Social media platforms are mainly centred around connected networks of users that interact with each other through user-generated content. The platforms have various business models, but mainstream platforms such as Twitter and Facebook generate income by selling the attention of their users to advertisers (Bhargava and Velasquez, 2021a). Although, these platforms generate income through other means, such as recent subscription fees for Twitter Blue and similar premium services (T. Twitter, 2023).

The table below summarises some of the notable studies related to the social media logics. Every study looks at the social media logics and norms through a different lens, but these logics can be grouped into three major categories:

- **Operational Logics:** Describing the logics and norms related to how a platform operates. These would map to the data, algorithms and API aspects in Van Djick's (2018) model for platforms, explained above.
- **Commercial Logics:** Describing the norms stemming from how a platform fulfils its commercial goals. These would map to ownership, user agreement and business model of platforms in Van Djick's (2018) model.
- **Consequential Logics:** These are the norms that were not necessarily intended or fulfilled any operational or commercial needs, but they have emerged as a result of how the platform operates and generate revenue.

Study	Logic	Logic Type	Logic Description
Klinger and Svensson (2015)	Production	Operational	"Inexpensive information selection and content generation by (lay) users according to their individual preferences and attention maximizing"
Klinger and Svensson (2015)	Distribution	Operational	"Users are like intermediaries, distributing popular content, sometimes like a chain letter, within networks of like-minded others."
Van Djick and Poell (2013)	Popularity	Operational	Promotion of certain metrics of popularity such as number of followers, likes and views
Van Djick and Poell (2013)	Connectivity	Operational	Users can select who they are connected to and the users are encouraged to build and grow their network.
Van Djick and Poell (2013)	Programmability	Commercial	Algorithm programmed to present content to the users with the aim of attraction of their attention as long as possible

Van Djick and Poell (2013)	Datafication	Commercial	Collection of huge amounts of data from users' interactions, network, contents and even devices.
Zuboff (2019)	Human Experience Commodification	Commercial	Users give up huge amount of private data, collected and commodified by the platforms for various purposes such as personalized services, targeted advertising and predictive behavioural models
Klinger and Svensson (2015)	Media Usage	Consequential	"Interest-bound and like-minded peer networks with highly selective exposure oriented towards interaction through practices of updating"
Gibbs (2015)	Platform Vernacular	Consequential	Platforms unique language and logic for communication.
Bucher (2017)	Algorithm Imaginary	Consequential	User's mental model of algorithms and how they work, shape their interaction with the platform.
Amoore (2020)	Coded Bias	Consequential	Social media algorithms have algorithms that by definition are not objective, i.e., are biased, and they exercise the bias in masses.

Table 4 Social media logics summary and their categorisation

It is worth noting that social media logics are formed in the interaction between media and its users, and there are not dictated from media to society unidirectionally. For instance, in response to many reports on the impact of Instagram on the mental health of its users, the platform has allowed users to hide the number of likes on their posts so they don't feel pressured because of the relative numbers (Criddle, 2021) The change may have made likes less of a driver for users and reduce the peer pressure to have more likes, that in turn can change the way they produce contents and present them. This example shows the interaction through which a media logic is changed due to societal pressures and how they may shape

the behaviour of the users in return. This applies to operational logics, like above, but also the commercial and consequential ones.

Comparison of social and mass media logics provides a better understanding of the media logics in social media and how they may have shifted NPOs from the more traditional settings of mass media. Given that mass media has been present for much longer than social media, it has been more extensively studied and can serve as a reference point to understand the logics of social media.

Social media logics and traditional mass media logics differ, though they have common grounds innate in communicating via the media (Klinger and Svensson, 2015a). An example where social media and traditional mass media logics overlap is when traditional mass media journalists use blogs. Although the expression of personal opinions is common in blogs, mass media journalists use the same norms and practices of traditional mass media in the production phase of the content in their blogs. Singer (2005) highlights how journalists often apply traditional mass media norms when creating blog content, such as adhering to a gatekeeper role that determines topics and events, overlooking the participatory nature of blogs (Singer, 2005).

A summary of Klinger and Svensson's (2015) view on the differences between mass and social media is shown in Table 5 below. According to them, one of the distinguishing attributes of network media logics is that the production logics and usage logics are entangled since users of these platforms can play the role of both a producer and an audience. Therefore, content

is produced based on the preferences of individuals who have free access to these platforms rather than professionals. Whereas in the logic of production in the mass media, expert producers who follow professional codes of mass media production generate and select content (Klinger and Svensson, 2015a).

	Mass Media Logic	Network Media Logic
Production	Expensive information selection and content generation by professional journalists according to news values	Inexpensive information selection and content generation by (lay) users according to their individual preferences and attention maximizing
Distribution	Content selected by expert/ professional gatekeepers – based on established news values – distributed to a paying fixed audience of subscribers	Users are like intermediaries, distributing popular content, sometimes like a chain letter, within networks of like-minded others.
Media Usage	Location bound mass audience with limited selective exposure oriented towards passive consumption of information, based on professional selection.	Interest-bound and like-minded peer networks with highly selective exposure oriented towards interaction through practices of updating

Table 5: Mass media logic and social media logic (Source: Klinger and Svensson, 2015, p. 6)

Returning to the distinctions in the logics of social and traditional mass media, research indicates notable differences in the style and content of news between the two (Klinger and Svensson, 2015a). These logics can be categorised under production logics. For example, Maier (2010) states that the overlap of top stories of social media, mainstream print and broadcast media was less than a third in 2009. Moreover, Wall (2005) indicates that blogs regarding the US war with Iraq showed a new genre of journalism in which a personalised narrative style was used in the news, and the audience participated in generating content (Wall 2005, cited in Klinger and Svensson, 2015b). According to Klinger and Svensson (2015),

the logic behind the construction of content in social media is to maximise attention and reflect personal interest (ibid).

Distribution logics represent another category where differences can be observed between mass media and social media logics. The distribution of information in traditional mass media involves gatekeeping by professional editors. They have the authority to determine which information will be disseminated and when, and they can also exercise their editorial perspectives on the content. For the mass media, there is the concept of a sender and a receiver (ibid). There are audiences out there that will receive the information from the mass media, who have no direct influence on the distribution of the content.

Contrary to this, in social media, there are no audiences; there are only users. Users are in charge of the production and distribution of information through likes, sharing and commenting. The whole distribution of content is based on the concept of virality; if a post resonates with a lot of users, it becomes dominant. Many of the posts go unnoticed, but those that resonate with like-minded people in the context of the post will gain attention. The user-to-user distribution rather than editors-to-audiences means there is no dominance in what can be distributed. While there is no dominance, some influencers can act as catalysts of virality in the network, but they are merely powerful intermediaries rather than gatekeepers (ibid). The algorithm on social media platforms are examples of such intermediaries that, while they do not change the content of posts, they prefer some posts over others. This type of manipulation by the algorithms affects the users of social media and what they read. For example, some studies show that the algorithms and the network of users trap them in their

bubble of like-minded people and reinforce their biases (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic, 2015; Adee, 2016).

Like production logics, the distribution logics from social media and mass media influence each other. For instance, some news outlets commonly pay journalists by network popularity metrics such as pay-per-click. Furthermore, the distribution logic of social media has influenced business models and marketing strategies within traditional mass media. For example, a more targeted and focused approach has emerged instead of employing catch-all advertising techniques prevalent in traditional mass media (Klinger and Svensson, 2015b). This approach involves identifying and targeting specific user profiles on social media networks through campaigns conducted by traditional mass media.

Media logics of traditional mass media and social media differ in how information is consumed (ibid). In traditional mass media, the audience receives information through professionals' editorial choices, mostly based on their location. However, in social media, the tailoring of what is received results from the networks that people choose to be part of and their past choices (e.g., what they liked). While traditional mass media target the general public, most information on social media networks is more selective and tailored. The mass media control of information, considering the influence of governments and powerful individuals, has been seen as a problem that leaves the public at the mercy of the media for receiving information. Social media somewhat resolved this issue but has replaced it with other problems.

First, the influence of governments and a few media moguls is replaced by another oligopoly of a few major firms, such as Meta (Facebook) and Twitter. While they do not manipulate the contents, their algorithms can manipulate what is seen by the users. Furthermore, recent controversies in US politics have revealed that these platforms can unilaterally remove users, such as the suspension of Donald Trump's Twitter account, based on the judgment of these firms regarding undesirable behaviour (Twitter, 2021).

The second problem social media introduces is information abundance, as it is discussed in more detail in the "Attention economy" section. The problem that users of social media face is selecting what's relevant to them in the huge amount of information that is thrown at them. In social media, this selection process occurs when individuals join networks of like-minded people, who then act as filters for the information.

The structure of social media leverages human behaviour, as people are more inclined to follow recommendations rather than seek out information. That is, even if they have objective information about selecting a product, they are more likely to follow the recommendation of people they know (Klinger and Svensson, 2015a). The social media network provides recommended information selected by peers on most platforms, which could be different to the expert and journalistic view of traditional mass media. Another aspect of usage logics that is different between the two media is the urge for social media users to be kept up to date. The mass media provides information based on particular timings, whereas, in social media, users frequently check for updates. While the production and distribution logics are more about how social media operates, the usage logic is more consequential of how these

platforms evolved. The explosion of information on these platforms and the speed of information dissemination made users constantly seek updates and made that a norm for social media users to keep themselves updated.

The production, distribution and usage logics of traditional mass media and social media have differences, but as it was mentioned above, they are evolving and influencing each other. Additionally, one is not necessarily replacing the other. Traditional mass media have adapted ways of getting attention on social media. On the other hand, the social media content of expert journalists in traditional media has popularity on these platforms.

Another notable study on the social media logics has been conducted by Djick and Poell (2013), in which they talk about these logics in terms of four key principles: 1- Programmability, 2- Popularity, 3- Connectivity and 4- Datafication (Dijck and Poell, 2013). A key difference between this study and the one by Klinger and Svensson (2015) is the focus on the business model of social media platforms. The programmability and datafication logics could be categorised as commercial logics since they are more focused on the business model of social media platforms. Whilst the other two, namely popularity and connectivity, are more about the operational aspect of these platforms.

Programmability is the first principle they mention. In traditional mass media, the program and content sequence were determined by an editorial group of experts to captivate the audience's attention. In contrast, social media content is selected by algorithms programmed by software engineers with the same objective (ibid). These algorithms are not the only

determining factor and are influenced by social media users and their interactions. That is, the users can participate in promoting content across the platform.

In the context of the mediatization of society, including NPOs, social media could be considered as an institutional actor that chases specific goals to make a profit. Algorithms, data, interfaces and protocols implemented in these platforms have been considered as one of the leverages that help them to reach their goals (Berry, 2016). Although algorithms are constantly evolving, they enable social media platforms to steer users' activities and encourage users to come back and spend more time on these platforms. For example, algorithms try to order content based on the likelihood that a user wants to see it (Pariser, 2011). Exposing users to desirable content may encourage users to use social media in a continuous flow. According to Van Dijck and Poell (2013), this could be considered a part of the programmability element of social media logic which is grounded in the technology (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Though humans act as agents in shaping the stream of information by creating content or even showing resistance to protocols defined in social media platforms, the power of programmability of these platforms, which is often invisible, should not be undermined.

Louise Amoore (2020) looks at the broader implication of algorithms. She emphasises that algorithms are not merely a sequence of steps but a configuration of propositions (Amoore, 2020). In this sense, the outcome of algorithms is influenced by the prioritisation of one possibility over others. During the process of generating outputs, algorithms necessarily eliminate alternative options. Amoore argues that this elimination process and providing a

single result shape our perception of the world. As algorithms possess the capacity to tackle complex problems, including significant social and political issues such as pandemic management and national security, they have the potential to exert a particular influence on society (ibid); This suggests that algorithms may exercise a degree of agency in shaping societal perspectives.

In her work, Amoore (2020) goes beyond technological determinism and delves into the intricate process through which algorithms impact human perspectives and experiences. She emphasises that algorithms are not standalone entities but products of multiple individuals' data and decisions (ibid). As such, people's past choices influence the algorithms, subsequently shaping the decision-making process of the following user interacting with the algorithms. This highlights the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between users and algorithms, where human decisions shape algorithms, which, in turn, influence subsequent human decisions. She effectively points out the impossibility of having objective algorithms, which means that biases are coded into and learnt by the algorithms and deployed in masses. This is a consequential social media logic that stems from the business model of social media platforms and what Van Dijck and Poell (2013) describe as the programmability (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). As a result, the business model and operations of social platforms give significant power to algorithms, enabling them to influence users according to their biases.

Along the same lines, Bucher (2017) mentions the number of user stories under the "profiling identity" section of her study, where Shannon, a middle-aged woman, receives ads about fat loss and creams to reduce wrinkles (Bucher, 2017). This is indicative of the coded/learnt

biases that Amoore(2020) mentions and how algorithms on social media platforms exercise stereotyping (Amoore, 2020). However, Bucher's (2017) study is focused on another consequential logic of social media platforms and not the biases embedded in their algorithms. She argues that users construct their unique understanding of algorithms through their engagement with the platform, forming their worlds of experience. This process leads to the development of algorithmic awareness as users attempt to comprehend how these algorithms function. Simultaneously, understanding algorithms impact users' utilisation of social media platforms (Bucher, 2017). Bucher (2017) introduced the concept of the "algorithmic imaginary" to capture the interplay between human perception and the emergence of algorithms within social media. This concept also highlights the distinction between the actuality of algorithms and individuals' perceived understanding of them. This not only underscores the potential misconceptions in users' understanding of algorithmic operations but also emphasises the significant influence of users' perceptions on their behaviour, irrespective of the actual functioning of algorithms. This aspect is particularly relevant to the present study, as it examines the impact of social media from the users' perspective rather than focusing on how the algorithms, in fact, work.

Bucher's (2017) "algorithm imaginary" inspired research that takes a user-centric view of the way algorithms are imagined to work and the impact of this imagination. A recent study suggested that the algorithm imaginary can be extended further and get applied to the way algorithms are developed and built (Schulz, 2023). Schulz (2023) proposes that the algorithms are also developed based on the imagination of how users will react to their behaviour(ibid).

This is in line with Amoore's (2020) view on the biases built into algorithms since the predictive models are based on data collected from the users (Amoore, 2020). This means users' previous behaviour influences how the algorithms imagine they will behave going forward.

Another significant principle Van Dijck and Poell (2013) emphasised in the context of commercial logics is the concept of "datafication." Datafication refers to the capacity of interconnected platforms to convert numerous facets of the world into quantifiable data. This data includes not only demographic information or profiling data voluntarily provided by customers through online surveys but also automatically extracted and generated from any device which is connected to the internet (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Social media platforms have the ability to render huge amounts of information about the interaction, behaviour and network of the users in real-time. For example, Facebook and Twitter are increasingly leveraging this potential to extract insights from online social activities, such as identifying popular subjects and frequently shared or liked content (Andrejevic, 2011). According to Louise Amoore, this information says more about "what can be inferred about who we might be" (Amoore, 2011, p. 24). So, datafication encompasses more than just gathering data; it involves converting that data into valuable resources for purposes such as real-time analytics and prediction. Hence, datafication points to a commercial logic of social media platforms and how these platforms exploit users' data. The logic can be considered an agreement between the users to give up their data in exchange for the services on the platform.

Van Dijck and Poell (2013) underscore that datafication is inherently biased and unequal. Through datafication, new forms of data-mining are emerging that seek to manipulate users by gathering data about responses and conducting controlled experiments on users, which Andrejevic (2011) refers to it “sentiment analysis” (Andrejevic, 2011). These types of capacity that collect, analyse, and exploit data is concentrated among influential entities like technology corporations and governments. This concentration of power has the potential to worsen preexisting social inequalities and introduce novel forms of discrimination and surveillance.

This personal information forms capital in an economic system that Shoshana Zuboff (2019) calls “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2019). In this concept, she highlights how technology companies commodify the personal data of their users, acquired through digital surveillance, to fuel targeted advertising, personalised services, and predictive behavioural models. These models play a pivotal role for businesses eager to understand and influence customer behaviour in the future. The commodification of human experience and the market around it is a commercial social media logic that derives profits for many of the owners of such platforms. This logic is very close to Van Dijck and Poell’s (2013) logic of datafication, except it is a lot more specific about the type of data that is being commodified and its consequences.

Zuboff (2019) raises legitimate concerns about privacy in the context of surveillance capitalism. This system establishes an alarming power imbalance between individuals and technology corporations by extensively tracking and monitoring individuals’ online activities without their explicit consent or knowledge. These corporations gain unprecedented access

to personal information, exploiting it for their financial gain (ibid). Furthermore, she emphasised that surveillance capitalism has widespread societal implications. It perpetuates inequalities by disproportionately targeting vulnerable individuals and perpetuating discriminatory practices. The ethics and transparency of data collection and usage also come into question, as does the potential for surveillance to undermine democratic processes and erode personal autonomy.

Zuboff (2019) and her “surveillance capitalism” has received some criticism for not having a strong theoretical basis (Mueller, 2022). Mueller (2022), for instance, criticized a number of terms Zuboff uses as the basis of her surveillance capitalism, terms such as “capitalism”, “data extraction”, and “behavioural surplus”. One key theme in his criticism is that Zuboff somewhat neglects that users are exchanging value with social media platforms. It is not a one-way street that the users are giving up their data for nothing in return (ibid). Moreover, Mueller (2022) points out various examples where users had the power to influence and change the way social media platforms operate and use their data (ibid). Additionally, Mueller (2022) argues the manipulation of the users and taking their choice away is not as black and white as Zuboff (2019) suggests, and if anything, the consumers have more choices than ever before (ibid).

The criticism raised against Zuboff's (2019) work does hold merit, as certain aspects of her views may appear to lean towards a political stance rather than being purely academic in nature. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that some of Zuboff's (2019) core concepts received substantial support and were not subject to as much criticism. Particularly, her perspectives

on the commodification of human behaviour, the extensive collection of data, and the potential for human exploitation or manipulation through such data hold solid ground and are widely acknowledged.

In addition to programmability and datafication logics that emphasise the commercial norms of social media, Van Dijck and Poell (2013) mentioned two other logics that relate more to the operational aspect of social media and how they work. One of these is the *popularity* (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). The mass media has a well-known track record of shaping and promoting popular celebrities. Mass media has a hand in making individuals popular or tends to give a platform to popular individuals to attract the audience. On the other hand, social media promotes specific metrics of popularity like number of followers, number of likes or views. These metrics would define a user's popularity while giving them influence on the platform to promote content and be an "influencer". The mass media and social media are complementary in the sense that those celebrities on mass media gain popularity on the social media platforms while the social media influencers get a platform to be present on mass media.

The emphasis on popularity metrics and the promotion of popularity concepts by social media platforms contribute to the formation of distinct language and expressions on these platforms, including users' widespread use of hashtags to initiate trends. Gibbs et al. (2015) use the notion of "platform vernacular" to focus on this aspect of social media platforms (Gibbs *et al.*, 2015). Platform vernacular highlights the distinct affordance of each platform that defines specific channels of expression or behaviour, shaping the platform's unique

language and logics. These affordances are embedded in the hardware and software of these platforms and encourage a particular form of communication. However, the platform vernacular is not dictated to the users by each platform but also by the communicative habits of its users. User practices and behaviours within a platform can shape and inform the algorithms and features of the platform. Platforms may adapt their logics and algorithms to align with the preferences and behaviours of their user, as a result reinforcing and further shaping the platform vernaculars.

Although platform vernaculars are specific to individual social media platforms, it is crucial to recognise that they can also have commonalities. These genres of communication and logics often spread across different social media platforms as new practices and features from one platform are adopted and incorporated into others. For example, Twitter users started adopting the hashtag organically to categorise their tweets and make them more discoverable. This form of expression was born from its widespread use among Twitter users rather than the platform's design (ibid). Over time, hashtags on Twitter gained popularity and spread to other social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. These platforms recognised the value of hashtags in organising content and making it easier to find relevant information.

The platform vernacular can be thought of as a group of social media logics and norms that are a consequence of the way social media operates. For instance, the abundance of information gave the need for a way for users to find topics. This is something that hashtags help with besides the popularity and trend creation that was mentioned above. Hence, the

platform vernacular of Gibbs et al. (2015) can be considered as a consequential social media logic.

The fourth media logic that Van Dijck and Poell (2013) mention is *Connectivity* (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Like the concept of media usage mentioned by Klinger and Svensson, the “connectivity” principle signifies the fact that in social media networks, users can select who they are connected to rather than it being dictated by their location and demographics. Social media platforms encourage users to build their own networks and help them to grow it. This encouragement can be thought of as a data collection exercise, telling the platforms more about the people and what/who they like to be connected to. This allows the algorithms on these platforms to infer interests and behavioural traits about their users. Connectivity is an operational social media logic and is common in these platforms as a way they work.

Figure 12 below visualises the media logics explained above and is summarised in Table 4. It also highlights the way different logics and norms derive from each other. The commercial logics influences the operational logics of the platform; for instance, datafication derives various data collection logics in the way these platforms operate, such as collecting data about the connection of people and what they like and promote (i.e., popularity). Consequential logics, as names, are not necessarily intended norms due to commercial or technical drivers but are norms shaped as a result of such logics. For instance, the algorithm imaginary and the perception of the users influencing their actions on these platforms are a side-effect of the way these algorithms operate and their impact becoming visible to the users. Of course, what derives these media logics is beyond what’s presented in the figure.

For instance, the users and other institutions also have a key role in influencing and shaping these logics.

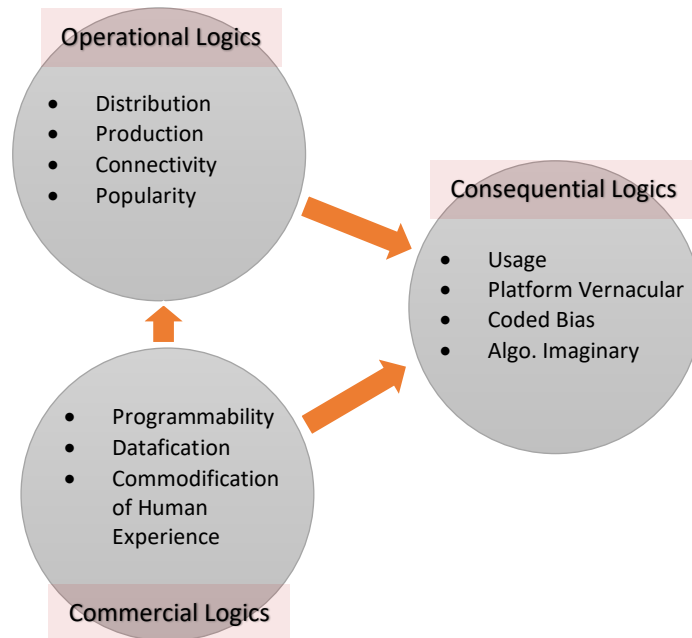


Figure 12 Categorization of social media logics and their possible dynamics

To summarise, as defined by Hjarvard, mediatization looks at the processes through which different institutions interact with media and adapt to/shape its media logics. These interactions and adaptations have the potential to bring about changes in the behaviour and culture of these institutions. Media logics are at the core of this definition; hence, this study looked at different literature on the social media logics and categorized all the social media logics mentioned in these studies into commercial, operational and consequential logics. In social media, users produce content; then, the produced content can be interacted with by

the other users on the network. The algorithms then use the interactions besides the network information to promote and distribute content. These interactions also provide a rich source of real-time data. They can allow the prediction of users' behaviours that can be exploited by the algorithms for the promotion of the content in attention-maximizing ways. The operational and commercial norms of the social media platforms had consequential implications, such as the bias dispersion coded and learned by the algorithms.

In the previous section, some of the criticisms on the concept of "media logics" have been covered; in the next section, the focus will be on some of the criticisms that mediatization has received and the discussions around them.

2.2.4 Critics of Mediatization

Deacon and Stanyer (2014) wrote a paper in which they criticised mediatization with the title "Mediatization: key concept or conceptual bandwagon?". This critique has five elements: (1) That mediatization is media-centric, overlooking the effect of allied industries such as PR and non-media players such as the government in the process of change. (2) The media is portrayed as too powerful, which may be the case in some instances but is not always the case. (3) That mediatization is deterministic, implying that institutions and society must accept and submit to media logics; whereas they have alternatives such as bypassing the media to not adhere to its logics. (4) Mediatization is a process that describes change over time, and many field scholars describe it as a process that changes society and institutions over a long period. However, there is a lack of structural studies that look at mediatization

over a time period, and most studies just look at one point in time. Some scholars like Hepp described it as a “meta-process” that cannot be researched empirically. (5) That mediatization as a concept is overtly universal, or as Deacon and Stanyer (2014) put it, it is a pseudo-universal concept with no boundaries. Everything can fit into the concept, and it does not frame anything well enough to allow for studying it. This means that mediatization is not a very useful concept for empirical research (Deacon and Stanyer, 2014).

In the first point, mediatization has been criticised for invoking a linear and causal relationship between media logics and transformation happening in every aspect of society and culture; This means that it overlooks the role of other non-media factors such as governmental policy and other relevant industries such as public relation and advertising. This perspective portrays mediatization as media-centric, focusing on the media as the driving force and leaning towards a technological determinism viewpoint (ibid).

In response to this criticism, Hepp et al. (2015) argue that the extensive work of scholars from different disciplines on the concept has led to the maturity of the concept in recent years and has moved it away from a media-centric perspective. They state that if we consider the argument of mediatization in its maturity and strongest stage, this is a misunderstanding that mediatization refers to the process of change as an under-complex phenomenon that only media interplay with it. According to them, mediatization is a media-centred concept instead of a media-centric one (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2015). This means that mediatization implies a holistic view that understands the transformation of society and culture as complex phenomena that comprise varieties of social factors. However, at the same time, it highlights

the role of media in cultural and societal change. In other words, mediatization creates a framework to analyse the influence of media on society without denying the influence of other social factors. This complexity is also mentioned by two of the main scholars who contribute to understanding mediatization, Hepp and Krotz (2014). They state that the process of change in society is a complex phenomenon that, alongside mediatization, all other macro processes such as individualization, commercialization and globalization play a part (Hepp and Krotz, 2014a).

Moreover, according to Hepp et al. (2015), given the growing significance of media in all domains of a post-modern society, the concept helps to provide a setting for interdisciplinary studies in which media and communication disciplines could be connected to other disciplines, such as politics, pedagogy and religion (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2015). The current research aligns with this perspective, acknowledging that changes in NPOs are multifaceted and influenced by interconnected social and organisational factors. However, it aims to highlight the role of social media in changes happening in NPOs. The objections regarding the determinism of mediatization are largely addressed with these points. In essence, mediatization literature does not imply deterministic change due to the emergence of new media. It looks at the wider interaction of media and institutions or society. It implies that these interactions could change the media and these institutions but does not assert that they will.

Another objection to mediatization is that media is portrayed as too powerful that can take over logics of other domains and force them to transform. This objection can be rejected by

looking at the institutionalist tradition in which media logic is one of the pillars of this tradition. According to Altheide and Snow (1979), media logic is not dictated by a one-way relationship between media to society, but it forms as a result of interaction between media users. They note that both producers and audiences use media logic to present and interpret different phenomena. They state, "It is not a case of media dictating terms to the rest of society, but an interaction between organized institutional behaviour and media. In this interaction, the form of media logic has come to be accepted as the perspective through which various institutional problems are interpreted and solved." (Altheide and Snow 1979, cited in Klinger and Svensson, 2015a, p. 3). Moreover, Hjarvard, as the pioneer of institutionalist tradition, declares mediatization as a process that "is spurred by both the development of the media and the dynamics of a variety of other institutions in which social agents try to make use of the media's resources for their own purposes" (Hjarvard 2014, cited in Hepp and Krotz, 2014a, p. 4). In addition, when mediatization of a domain happens, it does not mean the media is a winner of the battle and has not been influenced in the process of change. The logics of the domain also influences the media.

The other criticisms of the lack of historical research while mediatization is considered a process of change over time has been addressed extensively by Hepp et al. (2015). However, the point worth highlighting from their paper is that the variation among mediatization scholars in terms of the historical timespan stems from the difference between institutionalist and social-constructivist perspectives (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2015). The institutionalist perspective examines the emergence of media as an institution, whereas the social-

constructivist approach traces back to the mediation of communication throughout history. The two traditions only observe different periods, and both have some historical perspectives. The second point worth mentioning regarding this criticism is that there has been a wealth of research with a historical lens in the mediatization literature, as Hepp et al. (2015) mentioned. This research also looks at how the meaning of success may have changed for NPOs due to adapting social media logics over time. In the section 2.5 and 2.6, the present study will look at the historical context of public communication by NPOs and how the emergence of Websites, Web 2.0 and then social media platforms introduced new norms for these organisations.

Deacon and Stanyer (2014) raise a final objection to mediatization, arguing that the over-universality of the mediatization concept means it is not very useful for research. Mediatization as a concept has garnered empirical support, demonstrated by empirical studies (e.g. Frandsen, 2016; Blumler and Esser, 2019; Wagner, 2018). These studies provide substantial evidence, validating mediatization as a well-established phenomenon. Moreover, much research in different disciplines used the concept of mediatization to look at similar transformations in macro (e.g. Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999), meso (e.g. Frandsen, 2016) or micro (e.g. Turkle, 2017) perspective. The mediatization concept has provoked conversations that yielded a more holistic view of the role of media in transforming society and institutions.

It is important to highlight that the media logic in this context is not a universally unique set of logics for social media as a whole or even a specific platform. However, it is the NPOs' perception of the norms and ways to interact over social media. It is worth noting that little

attention has been paid to how social media have impacted the NPOs. This is the first study that seeks to understand this issue from NPOs' perspectives and wants to close this gap.

2.3 Concept of Attention Economy

There is a body of studies that emphasise the importance of attention and explain why attention is an important phenomenon in different disciplines such as marketing, psychology, neuroscience, media and communication (e.g., Norman and Shallice, 1986; Gardiner and Parkin, 1990; Beilock *et al.*, 2002; Engle, 2002). For example, one of the earliest and best-known hierarchical models in the marketing and advertising industry is AIDA, which stands for Attention→Interest→Decision→Action. This model was introduced by St. Elmo Lewis in 1898 as a guide for salesmen (Wijaya, 2015). The year that the model was conceived, and its popularity show the historical importance of attention.

Various scholars in the marketing discipline have emphasised the significance of capturing attention. According to Philip Kotler, author of a popular marketing textbook, “the advertiser has to turn the ‘big idea’ into an actual ad execution that will capture the target market’s attention and their interest” (Kotler *et al.*, 1999, p. 800). Likewise, Rossiter and Percy state that “... advertising associations attempt to accomplish three things: attention, brand awareness, and persuasion.” (Percy and Rossiter, 1997, p. 279). The advertising chapter in Marketing Principle and Practice book by Adcock et al. is introduced with a quote from The Tatler: “The great art of writing advertisements is the finding out a proper method to catch the reader’s eye.” (Adcock, Halborg and Ross, 1998, p. 270). Although the methods employed

to capture public attention may differ across various sectors, such as commercial industries and non-profit organisations, attracting attention remains a fundamental element. It is the crucial first step in achieving effective communication in both sectors (Guo and Saxton, 2018).

The omnipresence of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the perception and experience of human attention, sparking extensive studies and debates concerning how individuals pay attention, process, and interact with information within their environment. An important theme in the existing literature revolves around examining attention from psychological and neurological perspectives, seeking insights into how individuals allocate their attention within digital environments. The findings from these studies have been instrumental in informing the design of attention-driven social media platforms (Jablonsky, Karppi and Seaver, 2022). Sophisticated techniques like eye tracking and brainwave scanning are employed to assess and influence attention at subconscious levels. Notably, techniques like “nudges” in behavioural economics have gained recognition for their indirect influence on shaping collective behaviour, particularly regarding attention. These applications extend to various domains, including governance and public policy, presenting opportunities to exploit and shape attention. However, using these techniques has sparked concerns about the potential erosion of human agency and autonomy (ibid).

The concerns resulted in a notable shift in the perception of previously accepted practices such as personalisation and persuasive design in digital technologies. These practices are increasingly recognised as manipulative tools, with some likening them to “voodoo dolls” in research discussions (Harris, 2019). The shift gave way to a set of new studies focused on

addressing the concerns related to the implementation of techniques discovered in earlier studies, particularly within social media platforms and digital technologies. These studies shed light on the potential of addictive design patterns and advertising-driven platforms to negatively impact individual attention spans and human agency (Jablonsky, Karppi, and Seaver, 2022). For example, Carr (2011) claims the internet has caused an intellectual crisis by changing how our brains work, possibly for the worse (Carr, 2011). On the contrary, N. Kathrine Hayles (2007) asserts that hyper attention is not a cognitive deficit but useful for individuals living in the contemporary digital culture (Hayles, 2007). Crary (2001), in his exploration of attention in modern society, asserts that current patterns of attention are the result of the transformation of attention by new technologies from the nineteenth century. According to him, these new technologies aimed to control the observer experience or use attention to improve capitalism by encouraging greater consumption of goods (Crary, 2001). Furthermore, Bernard Stiegler (2010) announces an urgent battle for restructuring that happens to our cognition by technologies capturing and controlling our attention using industrial models (Stiegler, 2010). Despite having different perspectives on the analysis of attention, the first and second groups converge in considering attention as a cognitive ability, with a primary focus on visual attention. The emphasis on visual attention stems from the common psychological and cognitive understanding of attention, which is perceived as the process of selecting information for further mental processing (Bucher, 2012).

The third group of studies presents an alternative viewpoint on attention, departing from the predominant focus on brain scans and psychological perspectives; Instead, in this group, a

different approach has been adopted, acknowledging attention as a socio-technical construct. From this perspective, attention is not solely a result of individual psychology or the product of technology tools but instead emerges from the interaction between technology and society. From this perspective, detecting who or what is paying attention online, along with their intended recipients and the resulting impacts, becomes challenging in an automated environment dominated by decision-making agents, e.g., algorithms. This complexity arises due to the significant influence exerted by decision-making agents in the digital realm (Bucher, 2012).

Within the digital landscape, when considering the construction of attention, decision-making agents encompass individuals or entities who possess the power to shape the flow of information and attention across digital platforms, e.g., algorithms and content creators. For example, Bucher (2012), in her study, offers a socio-technical perspective, which she termed “technicity of attention”. In her work, Bucher explores the active role played by platforms like Facebook in generating, shaping, and automating users’ attention. Specifically, she highlights how the design and infrastructure of Facebook influence users’ attentional practices and shape their overall experiences. Studies like Bucher’s, which investigate specific mediums or software, are primarily concerned with understanding how the governance ability of software can play an active role in producing awareness and engagement in the world (e.g. Chun, 2011; Kitchin and Dodge, 2014; Bucher, 2017).

Despite all the different perspectives used in analysing attention in the literature, all the mentioned scholars agree that the essence of human attention has taken a new form. This

change has been linked in one way or another to the omnipresence of media and digital technologies in most aspects of human life and the brain's ability to process limited information at any given time (Schüll, 2022).

The inception of the idea to consider attention as a limited resource goes back as far as George Miller's (1956) reference to the limited capacity of the working memory (Miller, 1956). Hence, the rapid proliferation of various types of media usage, including social media, since the 1990s means demand for this limited capacity, i.e., attention, has exponentially increased, making it scarcer in the last decades. Georg Franck (2019) highlights the role of the media as not only a means of sending information but also of attracting attention. He argues that "the media are by no means just shunting yards of information. They are a system of channels supplying information in order to extract attention" (Franck, 2019, p.10). Gudmund Hernes (1978) argues even further that the media have changed society from a state of information scarcity to information abundance. Herbert Simon (1971) summarises this scarcity of attention concisely, saying, "a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention" (Simon, 1996, p. 41).

Social media can be regarded as a significant catalyst in transforming attention into a scarce resource within modern society. Since not only does social media facilitate the consumption of information, but its unique production logic also empowers the public to actively generate content, a role previously dominated by professional producers in traditional mass media. So the availability, accessibility and amount of information is not the only factor that increases the demand for attention, but the production of content by the public also adds to this

demand. This shift highlights the growing demand for attention as a vital component in the production and dissemination of information within the realm of social media (Klinger and Svensson, 2015a).

Moreover, with the help of technology, e.g., mobile phones, the ability to produce and consume information is not constrained by time and location, as users of mobile phones have access to social media anytime and anywhere. Subsequently, mobile phone and social media use could force individuals to become more available for various social interactions since they are reachable anytime and anywhere. According to Miller (2008), maintaining connection and being responsive is one of the norms that users of new media have been encouraged or obliged to follow (Miller, 2008a). This could lead to “social interaction overload” for users of these mediums (Laumer *et al.*, 2013). Being obliged or encouraged to be responsive and becoming overloaded by social interactions is another way social media has contributed to the scarcity of attention.

The scarcity of attention in contemporary society and the rivalry for attracting it can be best described by the “attention economy”. One of the definitions of the economy in the literature is the study of how society commodifies and exchanges scarce resources (Goldhaber, 1997). So, in the attention economy, two aspects of attention are highlighted. Firstly, it invites the assumption of the commodification of human cognitive ability, which means the attention of humans has transformed into a form that a value can be associated with it and can be treated as a commodity in a trade (Crogan and Kinsley, 2012).

Secondly, it highlights the preciousness of attention because of its scarcity. Accordingly, the attention economy concept refers to the growing competition to capture people's attention when information is abundant. As the volume of information continues to proliferate, individuals face a decreasing amount of available attention to process it all. In such an information-rich environment, engaging consumers and capturing their attention becomes increasingly critical. This is in line with Goldhaber's (2006) notion of attention economy, which is "a system that revolves primarily around paying, receiving, and seeking what is most intrinsically limited and not replaceable by anything else, namely the attention of other human beings" (Goldhaber, 2006, p. 10). He highlights the shift from information to attention in the virtual world by saying that "the economy of attention – not information – is the natural economy of cyberspace" (Goldhaber, 1997, p. 182). He proposed that modern economies have transitioned from producing physical goods to a cognitive form of capitalism.

Marazzi (2008) explains the commodification aspect of the attention economy as the essence of attention being a scarce quantifiable commodity (Marazzi, 2008). Davenport and Beck (2001) also noted that attention should be viewed as a currency: "Those who don't have it want it. Even those who have it want more. You can trade it, you can purchase it, people work to preserve and extend what they already have . . . and attention can be converted into other currencies." (Davenport and Beck, 2001, p.3).

Another attribute that Goldhaber gives to attention commodification is its recurring effects. Meaning when a user attracts attention in social media, it will make further attraction of attention easier for that user in future: "Obtaining attention is obtaining a kind of enduring

wealth, a form of wealth that puts you in a preferred position to get anything this new economy offers” (Goldhaber, 1997). Accordingly, the recurring effects of attention in a network society could be used as an example of an unbalanced distribution of power in the network society.

As described earlier, the attention economy, as defined by Herbert Simon (1997) and Goldhaber (1997), revolves around information-based activities that transcend physical production. It relies on information flows and the human capacity to focus their attention. However, Say Taffel (2012) challenges the perception of the attention economy as a purely dematerialised concept and emphasises the significance of considering the material infrastructure that forms the foundation of the attention economy (Taffel, 2012). These materials, such as internet cables, physical servers, and various hardware components, play a critical role in facilitating the transmission of information across digital platforms. Say Taffel (2012) emphasises that the attention economy’s dependence on these material resources intertwines it with the global networks of capitalism (ibid); hence, understanding the material aspect of the attention economy is essential for grasping the environmental impact and ethical responsibilities associated with the attention economy.

Throughout history, the principles of the attention economy have played a significant role in shaping media technologies. As early as the late 19th century, newspaper editors intentionally made front-page stories more sensational to boost newspaper sales (Wu, 2017). This influence continues to shape contemporary media platforms, as evident in social media’s attention-economy business model (Bhargava and Velasquez, 2021b). This model relies on

the platform's ability to capture and hold users' attention, prolonging their usage of the platform. Users who actively engage and spend more time on social media platforms generate valuable data, revealing insights into their interests, behaviours, and preferences. Social media companies can leverage this data to target specific user segments with personalised and relevant advertisements strategically. This targeted approach significantly increases the potential to convert user attention into desired outcomes, such as driving sales or encouraging specific actions (Zuboff, 2015).

Algorithms play a pivotal role in social media platforms' attention economy business model. These platforms use sophisticated algorithms to personalise the content shown to individual users. These algorithms analyse user behavior and interactions to deliver content that is most likely to capture and hold their attention. For example, algorithms of Twitter actively tailor tweets stream and prioritise tweets of companies that have paid Twitter to be promoted on this platform (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). By optimising content delivery, algorithms contribute to the addictive nature of social media. The more engaging the content, the more time users spend on the platform, and the more data is collected about their preferences and behaviour.

Drawing on the concept of animal trapping from anthropology, Seaver (2018) compares platforms, composed of algorithms, to designs of traps to entangle users. By incorporating the notion of traps, he argues that we can better understand how technical infrastructures of social media intertwine to shape cultural environments that are difficult to escape. This becomes especially relevant in today's era, where major corporations allocate substantial

resources to encourage addictive behaviours in individuals. Seaver(2018) emphasises that while at the beginning, the success of these algorithms was measured by their accuracy in predicting user ratings, this has shifted to evaluating their ability to capture and prolong user attention, which he refers to as “captivation metrics” (Seaver, 2019). As algorithms increasingly permeate the online culture, exerting subtle influence over users' behaviour, the acknowledgement of traps offers a compelling ethical framework that goes beyond the conventional dichotomy of freedom versus coercion (ibid). By acknowledging the potential manipulative aspects of algorithms and their impact on individuals, this perspective encourages a critical evaluation of the ethical dimensions associated with their widespread adoption in online platforms.

While the attraction of attention is at the core of many online platforms, the way they profit from attention is not the same. The attention-economy business model of social media platforms has key differences from the business model of many other internet-based services such as online streaming services (e.g. Disney+), Bhargava and Velasquez(2021) explain. An internet-based service such as Disney+ or Netflix doesn't profit from prolonging users' engagement with their platform but from the subscription renewals (Bhargava and Velasquez, 2021b). Of course, the renewal could have some correlation with the engagement, but they do not directly profit from this engagement.

On the contrary, for social media platforms, there is a direct correlation between the engagement and attention of the users on these platforms and how much advertisers will pay. Bhargava and Velasquez (2021), whose paper is about the ethics of the attention

economy, explain that the social media business model at its core tries to hold the users captive on the platform to the extent that it has the incentives to make users addicted and consequently harm them. They explain that although TV and radio business models had also recruited techniques to have captive users, the sophistication of social media algorithms and the personal data they gather to target users make them more effective (ibid).

The attention-economy business model of social media platforms made some scholars, such as Fuchs(2010), consider users and their time as the commodity that these platforms exploit (Fuchs, 2010). Hence, they went as far as claiming that social media users are exploited as they provide free labour to the platforms through which the owners of the platforms make money. Rigi and Prey (2015) provided a detailed criticism of this view and explained that social media businesses rent out space for advertisers, like how newspapers and TV channels rent out space and airtime to them. In this model, the users' time and labour are not sold to the advertisers, but the value is extracted from the attention and engagement of the audience. Because of this, the determining factor of the value for advertisers is not the time that audience spends but the potential of the space/time that is rented to drive future sales (Rigi and Prey, 2015).

Despite the similarities explained by Rigi and Prey (2015), the pricing regime in social media platforms is evolving and differs from other mass media. For instance, Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012) categorise the pricing regimes on these platforms into four categories the "hit", the "click", the "link", and the "like", which respectively focuses on number of views, number of clicks on an advertisement, influence of a page based on how well-linked it is and the number

of likes, retweets, etc. that also are an indication of engagement (Arvidsson and Colleoni, 2012). All these metrics are various measures of attention and engagement that social media companies sell to advertisers.

The widespread adoption of social media and its attention-economy business model has the potential to bring about significant cultural and psychological implications in society. One important impact is the emergence of what Miller (2008) terms "phatic culture," which involves incorporating human attention into the trading practices on social media platforms. As social media users are presented with the option of expressing approval through actions like "liking" a post, this form of communication becomes perceived as valuable and normalised within the medium. Consequently, users may increasingly opt for the flattened mode of communication over more substantial and meaningful forms of interaction. This transformation in communication patterns may have lasting effects on how individuals connect and engage with each other in the digital age. From Miller's (2008) point of view, "phatic culture" is problematic because of its nihilistic potential (Miller, 2008b). The shift to phatic culture can be considered a consequence of mediatization in society, brought about by the widespread penetration of media platforms with attention-economy business models.

Attention economy, the basis of the social media business model, is one of the principles of social media logic. This logic and its adaptation have consequences for the users and the society that could be studied using the mediatization framework. Since this research focuses on NPOs and their communication with the public, we can consider the possible implications of the attention economy in that context. As social media has penetrated the communication

of NPOs with the public, the attention economy could influence the behaviour and the decision-making process of NPOs when they use these platforms. The scarcity of attention and the difficulty in attracting attention could contribute to shifting NPOs' efforts from communicating a message that gains specific mission-related results to communicating to attract attention. This shift of focus for NPOs, in turn, can have consequences in the actual result they achieve and how they measure their activities' success.

This study will use a mediatization framework to answer its research questions regarding NPOs and their interaction with social media. Additionally, it uses attention economy as one of the principles of the social media logic within this framework. When adopted by organisations such as NPOs, social media logics could change their behaviour and decision-making process, i.e., mediatize them. For instance, the metrics and interactions that social media platforms introduced to serve their attention economy business model had implications on how organisations evaluate the success and impact of their social media activities. In the next section, the literature that focuses on one of these implications, i.e., slacktivism, will be reviewed.

2.4 Slacktivism in Social Media

The attention economy concept captures the reality of the contemporary digital media production that NPOs also participate in. Social media platforms amplify this reality as they place a greater emphasis on the quantification of attention through metrics such as likes, shares, followers, and more. The commodification of attention and other aspects of the

attention economy, which was mentioned in the previous section, could unintentionally strengthen the participatory culture in which these numbers are perceived to hold a real value for NPOs and their supporters. However, these numbers could encourage individuals to support a cause through relatively low-cost actions such as liking and sharing and then perceive that they have done their part, falling short of the activities hoped for by the nonprofit such as donating, volunteering or participating in a campaign. Many scholars (e.g., Morozov, 2009; Kristofferson, White and Peloza, 2014; Fatkin and Lansdown, 2015; Schumann and Klein, 2015) criticise these quick and effortless activities, asserting that these activities are results of a lack of commitment or sufficient effort for providing resources such as time and money to a cause. According to them, these activities do not have an actual impact; hence, they referred to these activities as “slacktivism” (Christensen, 2011).

“Slacktivism” has been looked at in different disciplines (e.g. politics, journalism, psychology, communication), but most discussions regarding the impact of “slacktivism” is in politics literature. In politics literature, the term 'slacktivism' originally carried a somewhat positive connotation, referring to small-scale activities undertaken by individuals with the aim of making a positive impact on society (Christensen, 2011). Critics of online activities assert that the omnipresence of the Internet and social media create a situation in which this type of activities, which had a small scale and not relatively large impact, have not been a first step towards more significant activity but rather have replaced other activities that are more impactful and are not solely online. Via these digital activities, citizens easily, in a quick and straightforward process, could express their social and political concerns. These activities

could be as simple as clicking a button on a social media platform. As a result, the term “clicktivism” emerged and has been used interchangeably with “slacktivism” (ibid). “Clicktivism” highlights the phenomenon where individuals perceive their contribution and effectiveness in a cause by engaging in activities such as clicking on social media platforms or participating in online petitions.

Although these terms refer to varieties of concepts, in the more recent literature, they have been used as a negative reference to an effortless participation process, which includes sharing content, liking a post, etc., on social media (e.g., Morozov, 2009; Shulman, 2009; Lee and Hsieh, 2013; Harlow and Guo, 2014; Fatkin and Lansdown, 2015). Rotman et al. (2011) defined slacktivism as a “low-risk, low-cost activity via social media whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity” (Rotman *et al.*, 2011, p.3). Critics of slacktivism assert that these Internet-based activities are less effective forms of activities replacing more traditional and proven forms of activities such as donating money, volunteering, etc. (e.g. , Hindman, 2008; Shulman, 2009).

A theoretical explanation of slacktivism and clicktivism is offered by the moral balancing theory that declares a good deed could satisfy an individual’s motivation to do the following good deed (Khan and Dhar, 2007; Mazar and Zhong, 2010). Hence, they are derailing supporters from being effective and performing more meaningful and impactful activities offline. Morozov (2009), as a critic of slacktivism, declared that although slacktivism has a target to affect political goals, it results in a lack of enough desire to get deeply engaged in the causes and is mostly carried out by “slacktivist” individuals (Morozov, 2009). He asserts

that online activities or “slacktivism” hurts proven ways of achieving political and social goals. Sceptics of the effectiveness of online activities claim that digital activities such as sharing or liking a post merely increase an individual’s self-esteem but have no further, broader impact (Shulman, 2009; Hindman, 2008).

A prominent example which has been used to support this assertion is KONY 2012 campaign which was started by an organisation called Invisible Children. The campaign aimed to bring awareness to Ugandan war criminal Joseph Kony and ultimately to have him arrested. Although, in just three days, the video reached 50 million views and six million shares, Kony was never arrested (Guo and Saxton, 2014). Many scholars believe KONY 2012 is an example that shows the idea of “slacktivism”, where from the perspective of the numbers, something large has been achieved, but the campaign failed. Moreover, UNICEF Sweden, in a campaign called “Likes Don’t Save Lives”, highlighted the issue of slacktivism and declared that to protect vulnerable children, UNICEF needs actual financial contributions rather than displays of support by likes (Kristofferson, White and Pelozo, 2014).

Kristofferson et al. (2014) take a more positive view of less effortful gestures and propose the phrase “token support” as an alternative term for “slacktivism”. They separated “token support” from activities with significant cost or effort that leads to actual actions, such as donations, which they referred to as “meaningful support” activities. In their study, they did not approach “token support” activities as a replacement and detracting from “meaningful support” activities; instead, they propose that certain characteristics of “token support”, such as social observability, play a vital role in whether “token support” activities lead to

“meaningful support”. They found that the public versus private nature of token support plays a critical moderator that impacts whether they lead to meaningful support for the cause.

In public relations (PR) studies, these “token support” activities, such as liking or sharing a post, have been seen as an indication of at least the start of a process of building relationships with the public. A body of research addressed the important role that social media has in building relationships with stakeholders of NPOs. It investigated how NPOs could effectively use social media as a medium to build relations. These studies have been reviewed in section 1.5. Despite these more positive interpretations, several studies in the marketing discipline emphasise that just quantifying the “token support” or “slacktivism” shown by the number of likes and shares is not enough for measuring the effectiveness of a social media platform for an organisation.

The proponents of online activities assert that these actions act as catalysts for subsequent offline actions with more significant impact. They argue that these convenient and effortless activities complement more tangible forms of engagement. For example, in his study, Christensen (2012) contests that internet participation in Finland is nothing more than slacktivism. While acknowledging the validity of critiques that reject exaggerated claims about the democratising potential of the Internet, he critically examines three key assertions against Internet participants: their detachment from formal politics and negative perceptions of the political system, their lack of involvement in offline political activities, and their incompetence in effectively influencing political decisions (Christensen, 2012).

The findings of Christensen's (2012) study reveal a mixed perspective regarding the detachment of Internet participants from formal politics, as there is insufficient evidence to support the claim that negative attitudes towards the political system significantly drive internet participation. Regarding the second assertion, his study shows that internet participation complements rather than substitutes traditional activities, encompassing genuine political engagement. Consequently, there is no substantial evidence to suggest that the Internet is to blame for the decline in civic and political engagement in established democracies. While some individuals may solely engage in online activities, Christensen's (2012) study indicates that those actively involved offline are also likely to participate online without giving up their conventional forms of engagement. Moreover, there is a need for more compelling evidence to support the notion that internet participants lack political competence (ibid).

Supporting Christensen's findings, Conroy's et al. (2012) research demonstrates a strong correlation between offline and online political participation (Conroy, Feezell and Guerrero, 2012). Additionally, the study conducted by Lee and Hsieh (2013) provides evidence for the moral balancing theory and consistency effects by illustrating that individuals who sign online petitions are more inclined to donate to related charities, while those who do not sign online petitions tend to contribute more to unrelated charities (Lee and Hsieh, 2013). These studies suggest that engagement in simple and convenient online activities reinforces offline and more tangible forms of participation.

Chadwick et al. (2015) provide a good insight into the debate regarding how the emergence of new media has impacted political communication. Their suggestion of “hybrid media systems”, where the older and new media are considered together in the studies, is an attempt to stop the dichotomies of either the new media improving the political landscape or it has hindered it. They suggest this binary view is unhelpful in understanding the complexities of how older and newer media interact and coevolve together. The newly emerged activist networks after the emergence of social media platforms, they suggest, are not purely users of this new media but are effective in combining the old and new media (Chadwick, Dennis and Smith, 2015). This insight is useful since it brings the focus on a more holistic approach to the media world rather than purely focusing on social media platforms on their own.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) provide a different perspective. Rather than focusing on old versus new media, they focus on how the dynamics of action mobilization have changed as a result of social media emergence (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). They challenge the exaggerated claims made by enthusiastic supporters and critical voices regarding online actions. They argue that to fully understand the role of digital media in large-scale protests such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, it is necessary to distinguish between two distinct types of logic: collective action and connective action. The logic of collective action is based on substantial organisational resources and the cultivation of collective identities. In contrast, the logic of connective action relies on disseminating personalised content, effectively distributing it across social networks. Social platform technologies play a vital role

in facilitating the logic of connective action by expanding and stabilising network structures while diminishing the influence of resource-rich organisations that hold a central position in the collective action (ibid). Hence, they state that more than mere modifications of collective action frameworks employed in social movements are needed for analysing online participation. Instead, for analysis of connective action, a new framework should be defined based on its unique dynamics.

The authors emphasise that while collective action based on exclusive identities and strong networks still holds relevance in today's political landscape, younger generations are increasingly disengaging from traditional political parties and broad reform movements. Instead, they choose personalised forms of engagement and self-expression. Consequently, collective action is becoming more intertwined with and occasionally supplanted by personalised connective action formations, where digital media plays a pivotal role. Recognising this shift in engagement, organisations have acknowledged the importance of personalised options for engagement and content creation through the social media (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

The connective action hypothesis has faced criticism for disregarding the differences among various social media platforms and neglecting to explore how interactions between specific internet technologies and human users may vary, influencing users' actions. Rieder (2012) suggests that each platform serves distinct purposes and embodies values that significantly impact societal practices (Rieder 2012, cited in Pond and Lewis, 2019). Critics emphasising this perspective do not deny that digital media platforms share certain affordances, but they

stress the importance of recognising the notable variations among them and considering these distinctions. For instance, a more recent study by Lee et al. (2022) focuses on a forum website LIHKG that they argue had the relevant affordances to facilitate anti-ELAB² that other social media platforms did not have (Lee *et al.*, 2022).

Another criticism regarding the connective action hypothesis is its disproportionate focus on the influence of network connections between users, disregarding the crucial role of culture in shaping social actions (Pond and Lewis, 2019). To address this criticism, Pond and Lewis (2019) conducted a comprehensive analysis of Twitter to reposition connective action analysis within the culture. Their study's findings underscore the intricate relationship between discourse and social actions. They argue that comprehending discourse is vital for understanding how digital networks can transform mass self-communications into social actions. According to them, to grasp the ideological aspects of connective action, a thorough analysis of the discourses that generate and disseminate these actions is required. For instance, the hashtags used in riots serve to reveal little about the individuals participating in the riot or their motivations. Only by carefully interpreting the discourses that shaped and defined those hashtags can we truly comprehend the process by which ideas and values drive social action (*ibid.*).

So, while Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) study highlights the role of connective action and places the concept of decentralized action through social media platforms, as the critics

² Anti-ELAB stands for Anti-Extradition Bill Movement in Hong Kong

suggest, it may be too simplistic. Many elements are at play when looking at whether social media helps or hinders mobilizing action among individuals. As mentioned, firstly, “social media” has various affordances and neglecting the differences across these platforms does not help draw any conclusions (ibid). Secondly, ignoring the cultural and social elements that turn a social media activity into an effective one will be missing another key factor (ibid). Thirdly, as Chadwick et al. (2015) argued, focusing on social media and ignoring all the existing (old) media is also ignoring another critical factor in how effectively the media is used for mobilizing action (Chadwick, Dennis and Smith, 2015). Hence, when social media activity's effectiveness, i.e., success, and its role in mobilizing action are discussed, these three elements must at least be considered. The unique perspective of this study means that I won't get engaged in assessing the activity's success but aim to understand what the NPOs considered in this assessment of their actions and why. Accordingly, these studies provide a backdrop for evaluating and placing the way NPOs measure their success and not whether they were successful.

Studies focusing on measuring the social media success of for-profit organisations stress the importance of distinguishing between different types of contributions that social media activities can make to organisations as a prior step for evaluating the success of these activities. One of the models that has been applied for measuring the success of social media activities is the “performance measurement system”. In this system, the first step is to identify the type of contribution that is targeted for measurement. The contribution of social media to organisations could be categorised into five groups: “financial, network structure,

interactions, the content of social media conversations and users' opinions." (Agostino and Sidorova, 2016, p. 1). Then, depending on the type of contribution, which is to be measured, different metrics would be used. For example, to measure network structure density, Ellison and Boyd (2013) suggest the formula of actual connections between actors inside a network divided by the maximum number of potential connections in the social media account. To measure the success of social media, this model separates activities aiming for "meaningful support", such as financial contributions, from activities aiming for "token support", such as effortless interactions. Accordingly, in any social media activity, measuring its success relies on having a clear aim that guides the measurement process.

Despite disagreement regarding the impact of these effortless and quick online activities among scholars, both optimists and sceptics have viewed offline activities as an actual and more effective way of achieving meaningful and impactful civic engagement. The heated discussion is about whether online activities derail or facilitate offline activities and in what circumstances the desired results would be achieved. As NPOs increasingly use social media platforms to organise collective action (Obar, Zube and Lampe, 2012), omitting this communication gateway from NPOs seems impossible, and it could isolate these organisations in the digital age. This is in line with Nielsen (2010), who argued, "Generalisations as to whether the net benefit is positive or negative are hard to make and probably not useful — since new technologies are increasingly ubiquitous and here to stay, rejecting them would mean a self-imposed exile from the shared built communications environment." (Nielsen, 2010, p. 196). Thus, understanding the sentiment of NPOs regarding

the meaning of successful social media activity is essential and therefore is a key focus of my study.

To have a better understanding of how NPOs utilise and perceive social media platforms, in the next section, websites and their adaptation to NPOs are reviewed. Understanding the website adaptation by NPOs, which provided the foundational technology for social media, provides a useful context and reference point for the adaptation of social media platforms. This is because the two share many features, and the websites were the new medium before social media platforms emerged. Moreover, there is 20 years' worth of literature that investigated NPOs' adaptation of websites and the way they utilise them.

2.5 How NPOs adapted the use of Websites?

By the diffusion of website usage towards the late 1990s, practitioners and scholars across public relations, management, and marketing disciplines have conducted several studies to understand whether and how NPOs use this new phenomenon. In this context, Johnson (1997) conducted a study that revealed concerns among public relations practitioners regarding the use of online communication for building relationships with the public in organisations. They feared that such communication might "depersonalize" and create distance between organizations and the public (Johnson, 1997). Opposed to this concern, Kent and Taylor emphasise the necessity of having a website for organisations, including NPOs, to build and maintain public relationships (Kent and Taylor, 1998; Taylor, Kent and White, 2001; Kent, Taylor and White, 2003). According to them, new features of the World

Wide Web provide an opportunity for organisations to employ dialogic communication, which is vital in enhancing organisations' relationships with the public.

Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed five principles to guide organisations in successfully employing dialogic communication with the public via their websites. These are:

1. The dialogic loop
2. Posting useful information for different groups of stakeholders
3. Ease of interface
4. Conservation of visitors
5. Generation of return visits

In the second principle, related to the usefulness of information, they state that organisations rely on “eye-catching” headers and graphics in websites rather than the usefulness of contents (Kent and Taylor, 1998). In other words, they propose that “contents should drive the effectiveness of a website” and not “fancy graphics”. There are a few notable consequences of this finding. Firstly, if we compare websites with face-to-face communication, the use of “eye-catching” headers and graphics instead of useful content could be considered an instance of how the new affordance of the website has shaped communication. That is, the contents being communicated between organisations and the public has changed because of the medium. The second notable point is where the medium distracted the organisations from the usefulness of the content as the primary goal and made them focus on what makes a website attractive, i.e., what merely attracts attention.

It is worth considering that there is a difference between websites and social media in the type of attention that they deal with. What might be relevant to websites regarding attention would not apply equally to social media platforms. Two models explain the main process in which humans pay attention: goal-directed (i.e. “top-down”) and stimulus-driven (i.e. “bottom-up”) model (Kinchla and Wolfe, 1979). In the former model, people seek out information, whereas, in the latter, the model explains the process of grabbing and directing attention. The website mostly deals with the goal-directed model where people want to reach out to an organisation and find an answer to their questions, such as contact details or what services the NPOs provide.

In contrast, public attention toward social media is mostly stimulus-driven, in which the distributed information needs to grab and direct public attention. Accordingly, how audiences’ attention could be caught by a post and what audiences like to see could play a stronger role in shaping the contents of social media compared to websites. Therefore, this distinction could influence the behaviour of content producers.

Studies that look at NPOs’ use of websites have covered diverse topics using different methodological approaches. These studies mostly investigate if and how NPOs have used websites and measured their effectiveness. Given that NPOs have unique human and economic resource constraints, most scholars were optimistic that websites could be used for many mission-driven activities of NPOs with various financial capacities. Their assumptions stemmed from presuming that a website is an inexpensive medium that can reach a mass audience (e.g. Taylor, Kent and White, 2001; Kang and Norton, 2004; Yeon, Choi and Kiouisis,

2007; Jun, 2011; Waters and Feneley, 2013). Some of these scholars suggested various activities such as financial and performance disclosures, creating dialogue and interactive engagement with stakeholders, recruiting volunteers and fundraising activities to be carried out via the websites of NPOs (Jun, 2011; Saxton and Guo, 2011). These activities encompass many of the communication activities of the websites, and the optimism has been that NPOs can reach a larger audience when communicating without much overhead.

The assumptions regarding the role of websites as an inexpensive medium that could be used equally by organisations with various budgets have not come true. Studies show that the extent that an NPO utilises internet technologies is correlated with its financial capacity (e.g., Schneider, 2003; Hackler and Saxton, 2007; Ingenhoff and Koelling, 2009a; Saxton and Guo, 2011). For example, Schneider's (2003) study compared small and mainstream NPOs regarding the role of the Internet in achieving their organisational mission. They argue that the Internet has widened the gap between small and mainstream NPOs, in which financial constraints in small NPOs played an important part. According to Schneider, "Given the competing expectations and structural issues within (small) NPOs, IT becomes an additional problem rather than a way to make these NPOs' work easier" (Schneider, 2003, p. 395). Like Schneider's (2003) finding, Hackler and Saxton's (2007) research showed that financial constraint is one of the main barriers to IT use among NPOs. Accordingly, the IT capacity of NPOs seems to be correlated to the financial ability of NPOs. Although some of these studies looked at small NPOs, most of the studies in the area of NPOs and websites have collected their samples from the large NPOs' platforms. This again creates a gap for my research to fill

as I will try to address the lack of focus on small/medium NPOs where the resource constraints are much more severe than for the larger NPOs.

Overall there is a consensus among NPOs studies that websites use is widespread among NPOs, and this medium has the potential to create dialogue and interactive engagement between organisations and the public (e.g., Kent, Taylor and White, 2003; Kang and Norton, 2004; Naude, Froneman and Atwood, 2004). Several studies have examined if NPOs have utilised this potential, where some of these studies tested different models of website usage among these organisations (e.g., Taylor, Kent and White, 2001; Kang and Norton, 2004; Saxton, Guo and Brown, 2007; Ingenhoff and Koelling, 2009a; Saxton and Guo, 2011). For example, Taylor et al. (2001) examined 100 environmental organisations' websites to understand how NPOs use this platform for building relationships. They found that despite implementing technical and design aspects of dialogic communication, such as fast loading times, user-friendly interfaces, and providing valuable information, these organisations often faced challenges in effectively engaging the public through their websites. Moreover, the research data showed that the websites were mostly used to inform the public, and there has been a lack of activities to mobilise the public (Taylor, Kent and White, 2001). This implies usage of websites among NPOs, more than often, was not aimed to induce any action from the public but rather share information with them in a one-to-many format.

Kang and Norton's (2004) findings echoed the same issue regarding NPOs' websites. Through content analysis of the websites of the top 100 NPOs in the United States, they found that while these organizations employed user-friendly interfaces, they were not fully utilizing the

interactive features available on their websites, such as online surveys and chat rooms, to engage in a meaningful dialogue with their supporters. Moreover, NPOs did not use the website's potential to attract new visitors (Kang and Norton, 2004). The findings of these studies show that although the websites of NPOs meet some of the technical requirements for creating dialogue with the public, NPOs were unsuccessful in creating dialogue and engagement with the public via this medium.

Similarly, Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) evaluated the dialogic capacity of the website of Swiss NPOs. To do this, they explored the extent to which these websites have used five principles suggested by Kent and Tylor (1998). The findings of the study indicated that Swiss NPOs mostly use their website to publish information that their donors need and miss out on building relationships with other stakeholders (Ingenhoff and Koelling, 2009b). According to Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009), technologies such as forums, user surveys or activities such as inviting donors to contact them by providing specific contact information or call-back options could have been used by these organisations to build relationships with their stakeholders (ibid). Saxton and Guo's (2011) study has shown that NPOs used websites more for financial and performance disclosure than creating dialogue and interactive engagement with their stakeholders (Saxton and Guo, 2011).

Having analysed the content of 117 community foundations' websites, Saxton et al. (2007) concluded that NPOs limited the content of their websites to three groups of stakeholders: donors, grant-seeking organisations and the general public. Moreover, this study revealed that NPOs have focused more on interaction with donors than the other two groups. They

proposed that community foundations have yet to tap into the full potential of their websites and fully engage a broader range of stakeholders. To achieve this, community foundations must enhance both the quantity and quality of their online content (Saxton, Guo and Brown, 2007).

Overall, most of these studies that were carried out in different countries and different sectors of NPOs indicate that NPOs are successful in implementing some technical aspects of websites but not in utilising the dialogue and engagement potential of their websites (e.g. Saxton, Guo and Brown, 2007; Ingenhoff and Koelling, 2009a; Bucci and Waters, 2014; Ibrahim *et al.*, 2018). In most cases, implementing the technical aspects of websites can be achieved through outsourcing to a one-off expert, while fostering meaningful dialogue necessitates a dedicated staff member trained in internet communication. This staff member must consistently pay attention to visitor interactions, such as reading and responding to comments from donors and potential supporters. But why did this happen in the NPOs? This could be because of a lack of continuous investment in communication through the websites. Possible reasons for this lack of investment might be because of the objectives that NPOs had in mind for using the website or/and lack of financial and human resources. Having a website became a must for NPOs; hence, they go and build one to not get behind the curve rather than aiming to utilise its full potential and engage with the public. This lack of investment could also be due to financial constraints as it is harder for NPOs to commit to a reoccurring investment in websites rather than a one-off cost.

Creating a dialogue with the public could be an indicator of engagement. However, the ultimate objective of this engagement could be categorised into two distinct objectives: to fulfil their mission-driven objectives, such as increasing environmental awareness, and to meet resource-focused goals, like donation appeals. Given the wide diversity of NPOs and their respective missions, the nature of engagement may vary significantly. Hence, the extent to which interactions via websites help NPOs attain their mission could also vary. For example, for an advocacy NPO, which is intended to generate awareness and social support, interaction with the public could have more value than a service providing NPO, for which actual actions could be more important. The extent to which these interactions result in actions to help NPOs to meet these objectives has not been assessed in studies extensively and hence, requires further exploration. For example, the mission statement of the British Red Cross is “to mobilise the power of humanity so that individuals and communities can ...recover from a crisis”. But to what extent have public interactions with the British Red Cross via their website led to the mobilisation of human power? Most research focuses on how successful an NPO like British Red Cross is in engaging the public via their website rather than the actual result they achieved by the investment in their website.

There has been an underlying assumption in many studies that a “better” and higher quality website in terms of engagement would result in more actual action from the stakeholders of the NPOs. One study that has assessed this assumption is conducted by Sargeant and Jay (2003), which examines the websites of various NPOs in the UK and USA. The study investigates how website features and investment in them have contributed to increased

donations for these organisations. They find that some features of the websites are correlated with more donations.

Moreover, they show that more investment in websites by NPOs does not always lead to a higher return on investment (ROI) (Sargeant and Jay, 2003). In this context, it is worth noting that many NPOs, when examined during that period, did not appear to evaluate the returns on their website investments. Sargeant and Jay (2003) reported that over 76% of NPOs were not monitoring the success of their websites (*ibid*). There is scant data in the literature on whether, after 20 years, NPOs' behaviours have changed regarding monitoring the success of their communication channels. My research will therefore examine changes in this space and whether NPOs have a clear definition of success when they conduct their digital activities and actively measure their progress towards their goals.

Measuring the outcome of NPOs' activities is essential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001). Hence, if NPOs are not clear about intended outcomes and are not monitoring their success, their direction on how they communicate on websites could be the result of a common and shallow perception of what a good website is. This would result in inefficiencies and a lack of actual results for the NPOs.

It should be noted that the definition of success for NPOs is more complicated due to certain characteristics of these organisations compared to for-profit counterparts (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001; Helmig, Ingerfurth and Pinz, 2014a). For example, typically NPOs provide a service, or the organisation's mission is to achieve social goals (Brown and Slivinski, 2006).

The complexity of what success means comes from the difficulty of evaluating the intangible services and missions of some NPOs (Weisbrod, 1998). This is unlike for-profit organisations, which have a more straightforward indicator of success in gaining more customers and generating higher revenues. NPOs cover diverse missions, so each needs to define and measure the specific and distinct definition of progress and success for each organisation (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001). This is coupled with the complexity of NPO's stakeholder groups. Unlike for-profit organisations, which usually focus on their customer who pays for their product, NPOs need to consider more diverse stakeholders such as donors, beneficiaries, volunteers, contracting agents for government, foundation, corporation, employees and the public (Herman and Renz, 1998). Measuring the success of all online communications, whether on websites or social media for NPOs, is not exempt from these complexities regarding stakeholder groups or goals.

2.6 Existing Literature on NPOs and Social Media

After websites, NPOs started to adopt the next generation of mediums, social media. The penetration of social media among NPOs led to rapid growth in discussion around the challenges and opportunities of social media for these organisations, resulting in several studies on this topic. The focus of these studies could be classified into two main categories: those that investigate the activities of NPOs in social media (organisational-level studies) and the second group that studies factors affecting social media users' reactions to NPOs' activities (individual-level studies).

As this research aims to explore how social media use has shaped how NPOs communicate with the public, reviewing studies in the organisational-level category is more relevant than individual-level studies. The studies researching the activities of NPOs in social media also could be split into two sub-categories: one group of researchers examined whether, why and how NPOs use social media (e.g. Abramson, Keefe and Chou, 2015; Amtzis, 2014; Bortree and Seltzer, 2009; Bürger, 2015; Edwards and Hoefer, 2010; Gao, 2016; Goldkind, 2015; Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Guo and Saxton, 2014; Gurman and Ellenberger, 2015; Hou and Lampe, 2015; Lazzeretti, Sartori and Innocenti, 2015; Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a; Lucas, 2017; Maiorescu, 2015; Quinton and Fennemore, 2013; Merry, 2013, 2014) and other studies can be categorised as assessing the impact of social media use on the NPOs' effectiveness (e.g. Davis, Rountree and Davis, 2016; Esposito and Besana, 2018; Hansen *et al.*, 2014; Hou and Lampe, 2015; PD Guidry, D. Waters and D. Saxton, 2014; Nah and Saxton, 2013; Ogden and Starita, 2009). These categories and sub-categories can be seen in Figure 13 below.



Figure 13: Taxonomy of Studies on NPOs and Social Media

Studies within the subcategory of "What, Why, and How of Usage" have revealed a growing trend among NPOs utilising social media for a wide range of purposes. These include raising awareness for their causes (Guo and Saxton, 2014; Hou and Lampe, 2015; Di Lauro, Tursunbayeva and Antonelli, 2019), fostering connections with their followers (Briones *et al.*, 2011a; Guo and Saxton, 2014) and mobilising supporters for civic engagement and collective actions (Obar, Zube and Lampe, 2012). Other studies drew on such findings and explored how NPOs use social media to achieve these goals (e.g., Waters *et al.*, 2009a; Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a; Merry, 2013, 2014; Guo and Saxton, 2014; Lucas, 2017; Guo and Saxton, 2018). For example, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) undertook a content analysis of tweets sent by the 100 largest NPOs in the United States and identified three main communication functions were used in tweets of these organisations: (1) information sharing; (2) community-building; and

(3) calls to action. Informational tweets contained news, events, reports and facts related to the NPOs. The other category of tweets is those that cover community functions, aiming to engage stakeholders via dialogue and facilitate online community formation. These tweets were messages such as thanks to donors and supporters and replies to messages sent by the supporters. Lastly, the third category of tweets contains the “action” function. That is, they intended to get the audiences to “do something” for the NPOs, such as respond to a donation appeal, buy a product or offer to volunteer.

The importance of utilising social media in NPOs for building relationships with stakeholders is denoted in a study by Briones et al. (2011), which states, “As social media tools become mainstream, organisations must update their strategies and tactics to build relationships.” (Briones *et al.*, 2011b, p. 41). The study interviewed 40 social media employees at the Red Cross to understand how the organisation effectively used social media. At the time of their research, Red Cross was the leader in the NPO sector for utilising social media. Their finding showed that Red Cross used social media to create a two-way dialogue strategy to build relationships with its stakeholders. Since this study was conducted, the use of social media has increased exponentially among the public, and this wider adaptation has made the use of social media by NPOs necessary to communicate and build relationships with the public.

In another study, Guo and Saxton (2014) examined how advocacy NPOs utilise social media. Their finding suggests that these platforms are used more to raise public awareness than for other purposes, such as mobilisation of supporters. In addition, to frame it into the three categories of Lovejoy et al. (2012), which was mentioned above, Guo and Saxton undertook

an in-depth message-level analysis of 188 NPOs' Twitter feeds. The result of this study shows that more than 66% of the tweets were informational, nearly 20% fell into the "community" category, and slightly under 12% fell into the "action" category (Guo and Saxton, 2014). This finding shares a common aspect with studies on NPOs' website usage, indicating that NPOs primarily utilise these mediums for information dissemination rather than mobilising supporters.

Guo and Saxton also examine the presence of 11 advocacy tactics found in nonprofit literature, such as public education, grassroots lobbying, public events and direct action, coalition building, etc. Based on their content analysis of NPOs' tweets, more than 52% of these messages did not use any of these 11 tactics. They call these groups of tweets "support" posts with non-advocacy intentions, such as buying a t-shirt or attending a performance. Additionally, they suggest most of the advocacy messages, which they denote as "strategic", use "indirect" strategies that are effectively advocacy tactics as an outsider of the system. An example of this would be public education. This contrasts with "insider" strategies such as legislative lobbying that are within the system. Accordingly, their study shows that advocacy NPOs mainly use social media to engage with the public (Guo and Saxton, 2014). They propose a descriptive three-stage pyramid model within the context of social activities of these NPOs, which are primarily focused on public engagement and often share informational posts. The model suggests that NPOs use social media through 3 different processes: reaching out to people, keeping the flame alive and stepping up to action (Guo and Saxton, 2014). These stages are interconnected and build upon one another, forming a pyramid-like structure, as

illustrated in Figure 14 below. That is, without the reach and keeping the connection alive; it will not be possible to induce action from the public. This indicates that although reaching a wide audience is important, more is needed to motivate action. Considering the first two steps as a pathway to the third stage highlights that success in engaging people should not be the sole measure of effectiveness for the social media activities of NPOs.



Figure 14: A pyramid of social media-based advocacy (Source: Guo and Saxton, 2014, p. 14)

As mentioned before, some of the studies on the usage of social media among the NPOs, focused on the effectiveness of their use of these platforms. For example, Ogden and Starita (2009), by surveying 256 mid-size NPOs, asked them about their participation in social media, their motivation for using social media, their results and plans. The results show that respondents found social media less effective than expected in attracting donors and volunteers, except for improving the existing relationships. For instance, the survey shows a

12% drop, from ~41% to ~29%, in how important NPOs considered social networking for attracting donors after over 12 months of using the platforms versus their initial intention in using them. This drop is not a surprise, given that just above 25% of them managed to raise anything above \$100 through social networking. However, how these organisations measured the effectiveness of their social media activities and reached this conclusion has not been investigated in Ogden and Starita's study (Ogden and Starita, 2009). Moreover, the result showed that nearly 25% of respondents did not know whether they had attracted donors or volunteers via social media. So, a number of mid-size NPOs either don't know how to measure the effectiveness of their social media activities or do not have enough human resources to allocate for this task.

In line with Ogden and Starita's (2009) study, Nah and Saxton (2013) stated that the rate of social media use by NPOs is negatively correlated with fundraising. They suggest that the substitution of traditional fundraising methods, meaning offline, by communication through social media could have been a factor that led to this negative correlation, i.e., that efforts on social media "crowd out" other more successful methods of raising funds because staff time and effort is not infinite (Nah and Saxton, 2013). Therefore, some of the applied research advises NPOs not to use social media as a substitute for traditional fundraising efforts but to use it as a complement (e.g., Warwick, 2009). However, finding out which mediums have key roles in mobilising actions is complicated, and few studies have suggested a model to measure the success of the social media activities of NPOs. These studies mostly counted the number of likes, comments and shares as a measure of success which shows the engagement of the

audience with NPOs and not the ultimate action such as donating, volunteering, or signing a petition.

Several studies show that the ways that NPOs use social media are also contributing factors to the ineffectiveness of their activities (e.g., Bortree and Seltzer, 2009; Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009; Waters *et al.*, 2009b). For example, Waters *et al.* (2009) studied 275 NPOs' Facebook profiles and found that these organisations failed to use opportunities provided by Facebook to make their supporters more involved in the activities. They found that NPOs rarely use Facebook's features to engage their supporters for their campaigns, volunteer opportunities, etc. or even organisational news. However, they mostly use it to disclose information about the organisation's history, mission, etc. (Waters *et al.*, 2009a). According to Guo and Saxton's typology, this implies that they are employing it for information transmission rather than community building or prompting actions.

Another study by Greenberg and MacAulay (2009) examined the use of social media by 43 Canadian environmental organisations (Greenberg and MacAulay, 2009). Their study indicated that these organisations did not use the full potential of social media technology that enables users to participate in two-way dialogical communications. Hence, they failed to create conversations and build relationships through social media with their stakeholders.

The investigation of 50 Facebook profiles of environmental organisations in Bortree and Seltzer's (2009) study shows a similar result that these organisations neglect building

relationships with stakeholders through their social media activities (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009). For example, these organisations neither post comments on Facebook nor respond to other users' posts. According to Bortree and Seltzer (2009), these organisations assume that creating a social media profile is sufficient for facilitating dialogue with stakeholders (ibid). The studies mentioned earlier regarding NPOs' use of websites are, therefore, in line with the findings of NPOs' use of social media, indicating that NPOs use the website as an electronic version of their brochures instead of generating dialogue with their audience.

The deprivation of resources and lack of staff knowledge could contribute to the ineffectiveness of NPOs in both online activities. Additionally, having these activities for the sake of having them without a clear and well-defined objective seems to show itself in some of the studies in this area as another possible reason that my project will explore. It is worth noting that most of the above studies were focused on countries other than the UK. There are four key studies, namely Quinton and Fennemore (2013), Maiorescu (2015), Gulyas (2016) and Lucas (2017), that were focused on the UK NPOs. These studies will be discussed in the following few paragraphs.

Quinton and Fennemore (2013) in their study explore how and why UK charities use social networks by interviewing twelve large charities and three digital marketing agencies. Their findings show that three main factors prompt UK charities to adopt social media: regaining control of a brand, external pressure and gaining new audiences. Moreover, they claim that most of the interviewed charities were not clear about what purposes could be served by communication through social media (ibid). According to them, UK charities have recognised

the potential of social media for their organisations, but they do not know how to take advantage of these platforms. Charities mentioned lack of skill and resources as the main barrier to social media use.

The findings of Quinton and Fennemore's (2013) study are more relevant to large charities. They called for further research to be undertaken on how the use of social media has impacted the communication between charities and their stakeholders and how this, in turn, may affect the marketing strategies of these organisations. The present research will respond to this call by exploring how small to medium size NPOs' communication has been impacted by attracting public attention on social media platforms and investigating these organisations' perspectives regarding successful social media activities.

The second study that explores social media use among UK non-profit organisations was undertaken by, Maiorescu (2015), who evaluated the use of social media in the case of the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS). The findings reveal that SANDS failed to take full advantage of social media, such as two-way communications with their followers (Maiorescu, 2015). The results of this research were in line with other studies regarding NPOs' use of social media in the literature.

The third study is focused on small NPOs and their use of social media, although defined by less than 250 employees rather than their income. Gulyas's (2016) study used a survey of 372 NPOs and a stakeholder forum consisting of 26 NPOs. The study aimed to explore the patterns of adoption of social media by small UK NPOs and identify mechanisms that enable these

organisations to use social media effectively. The study had four main findings. Firstly social media is part of the infrastructure of small NPOs and the primary way to communicate with the public. Secondly, they investigated eight factors that could have influenced social media adaptation among small NPOs. They found that four of these factors are significantly associated with how the NPOs adapt to social media. These were the number of employees, number of volunteers, types of finance such as relying on grants or public donations and whether the NPO is growing or contracting in terms of size or income. Additionally, they found three other factors, i.e., the age of employees, the age of volunteers and the governance of the NPO, had less significant association with their social media adaptation. They found no association between the age of clients and the adaptation of social media by these organisations (Gulyas, 2016).

The third finding of Gulyas's (2016) study was that the NPOs find social media both source of opportunities and pressure. While over 80% of their participants found social media as a source of more significant opportunities for the organisation, over a third of the participant were concerned that their organisation did not have enough resources for effective use of social media and these platforms have put extra pressure on their organisations. The last finding of the study focused on the support for the small NPOs in terms of social media adaptation. Their research revealed that NPOs can benefit from financial and human resources support, along with access to training. Interestingly, they found that free online resources play a significant role as a key training resource for these organizations (Gulyas, 2016). The study provides a useful insight into the adaption of social media by the smaller

NPOs, which is rare in the existing literature. However, the study seems to have missed an opportunity to look at the actual social media activities of the NPOs to compare their views versus what they do in practice.

The fourth relevant study, by Lucas (2017), uses case studies of the three biggest UK cancer charities to explore how charities raise funds via social media. Lucas's findings highlight that the primary focus of these organizations in using social media was to strengthen relationships with their supporters, aligning with Guo and Saxton's concept of "community building" as the second type of usage. The studied NPOs sought to achieve this goal by "humanising the brand", "fostering obligations", and "encouraging social interaction" (Lucas, 2017). Like Quinton and Fennemore's (2013) study, this research did not specifically target small and medium-sized NPOs.

Most of these studies suggest that the effectiveness of social media activities by NPOs is a result of how well these organisations conduct these activities. However, it should not be neglected that all the activities that NPOs conduct on social media are the result of a decision-making process and factors influencing that. In other words, any action is a consequence of a decision-making process. By only looking at NPOs' activities rather than what leads to decisions that led to conducting these activities in a particular way, we overlook the root cause of the issue. Prior research has barely touched on these factors and the processes that have shaped the activities of NPOs on social media. Naturally, part of any activity's decision-making process is its objectives and goals. What "success" is to NPOs when conducting their activities in social media shapes their decision-making process, for instance, whether the

attraction of attention is the primary goal or a secondary one. This research hence focuses on the definition of the success of social media activity from the point of view of NPOs.

This section reviewed various existing studies regarding the use of social media by NPOs and identified multiple gaps. Not only is there a gap in the areas mentioned above, but most studies also discussed in this chapter were conducted in countries other than the UK. Due to the limited availability of published academic studies, a significant gap exists in social media and NPOs, specifically in the context of the UK. This gap calls for further research and exploration to address this specific study area. Also, three of the four key studies that focused on social media use among UK NPOs mainly focused on the larger NPOs and did not look at the NPOs' decision-making processes behind social media activities.

The following section will review the literature that focuses on social media practices by social media users, particularly NPOs, for attracting attention to these platforms. This will provide a context for how NPOs adapted practices in social media platforms that changed their communication with the public.

2.7 Which practices attract attention on social media?

NPOs' social media activities could be influenced by their submission to the attention economy. So, findings of studies that investigate and suggest social media practices that positively correlate with the attracted attention could highlight possible behaviour and practices that NPOs adopt to win attention on these platforms. In other words, exploring these practices offers valuable insights into how NPOs have adapted their content and

communication patterns due to their integration into the attention economy driven by social media platforms. Furthermore, examining the changes in the behaviour of these NPOs resulting from adopting these practices could be seen as an aspect of their mediatization.

Only some studies could be identified that focus specifically on attracting public attention and activities of NPOs in social media. However, any studies investigating factors that draw the reaction of social media users in the form of liking, commenting, sharing, and other types of reactions could be considered relevant. The reason is simple: any reaction from social media users with respect to a post means that the post successfully attracted some level of attention from those users. Hence, social media features that show users' reactions could be used as a proxy for public attention. It goes without saying that although a reaction indicates attention, a lack of it does not indicate that the activity did not attract attention. So, using these proxies is merely an approximation.

One notable study was conducted by Chao Guo and Gregory D. Saxton in 2018. They examined factors that can help non-profit advocacy organisations to gain attention on social media by proposing a model and testing Twitter posts of these organisations against it. This model, shown in Figure 15, illustrates two broad categories, "network characteristics", such as the number of followers on Twitter, and "communication strategies", such as the frequency of the posts and other features of the posts' contents. Communication strategies have been divided into three other subcategories, namely "targeting and connecting", "timing and pacing", and "content". Guo and Saxton (2018) examined the correlation of these categories and subcategories with attention attraction on Twitter (Guo and Saxton, 2018).

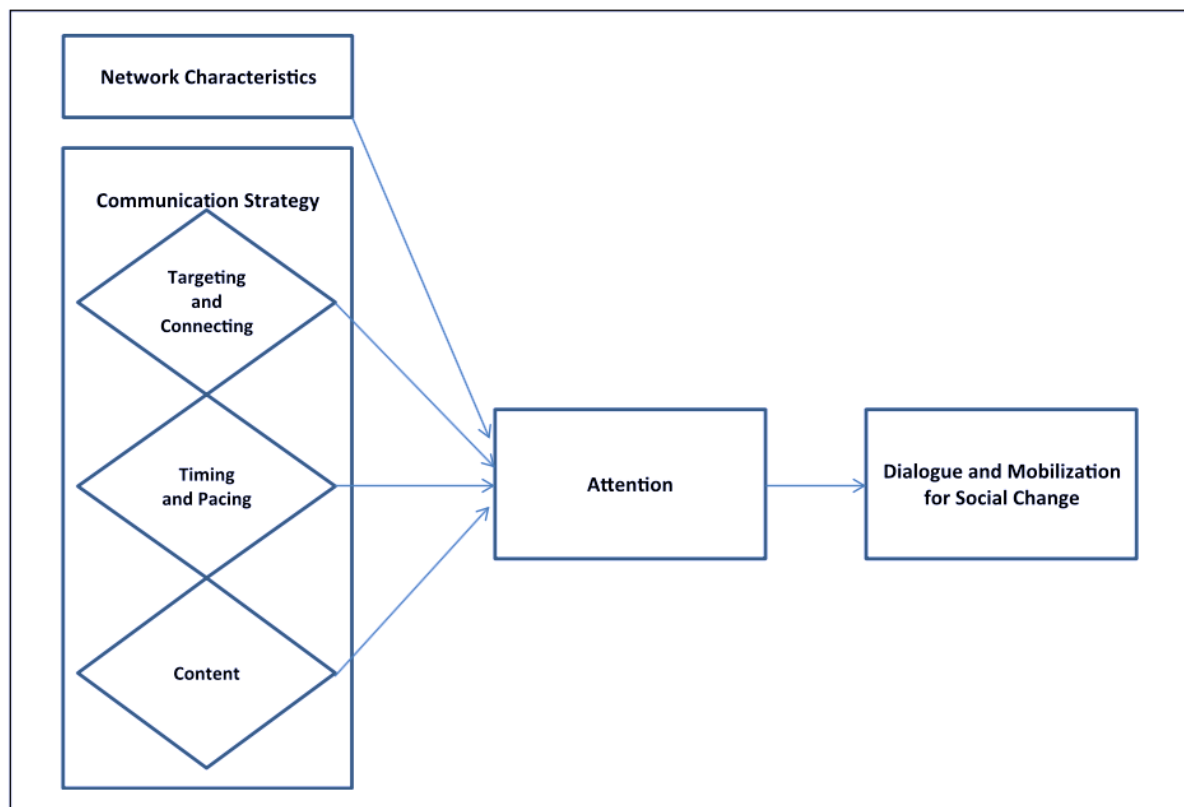


Figure 15: Factors play in attracting attention on social media (Source: Guo and Saxton, 2018, p. 10)

There are some hypotheses related to the ways of attracting attention on social media that Guo and Saxton have tested under their model. As a result, they have suggested a few ways and patterns that help attract users' attention on Twitter; for example, joining conversations by using existing hashtags and "@USER" messages, speaking often, and increasing their followers. With respect to the content, this research suggested that except for tweets with photos, providing photo or video links in the tweets does not increase the amount of attention a tweet receives (ibid).

Guo and Saxton's (2018) four-factor explanatory model is compatible with the findings of other studies. For instance, other studies looked at visual contents and the correlation they

have with more attention on social media platforms after their study. Some of these studies confirmed a positive correlation between the use of visual content and receiving more likes, shares or comments (e.g., Sabate *et al.*, 2014; Araujo, Neijens and Vliegenthart, 2015; Li and Xie, 2020). Some of the studies have looked at different aspects of visual content. For instance, Lie and Xie's (2020) study showed that professional photos positively impact social media users' engagement (Li and Xie, 2020). Another example is studies that suggest images that carry negative emotions get more attention in the form of shares and comments (Jordan *et al.*, 2019; Bünzli, 2022). Jordan *et al.* (2019) research shows that social media posts of NPOs focused on children get more attention on social media in the form of share and comments when they use sad images instead of happy ones (Jordan *et al.*, 2019).

Another example of studies compatible with Guo and Saxton's (2018) model is Bortree and Seltzer's (2009) study. They focused on the use of dialogic strategies to elicit dialogic communication. According to Bortree and Seltzer's (2009) study, to foster dialogic engagement, posting comments in dialogic spaces and maintaining frequent posting would be effective (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009). Both recommendations are compatible with Guo and Saxton's model under "targeting and connecting" and "timing and pacing", respectively.

Another relevant study is conducted by Saxton and Waters (2014). This study assesses the relationship between the type of messages, including informational, community-building and call-to-action messages, sent by NPOs on their Facebook profiles and public reactions to these messages. Like other prior studies (e.g., Webster, 2011), they defined the reactions of social media users in terms of liking, commenting and sharing. They found Facebook users prefer

two types of messages: dialogic messages, which are those that seek a conversation, e.g., through mentioning users' names, and call-to-action messages, which are those that solicit help from the public in lobbying, advocacy or volunteering effort. This research indicates that stakeholders prefer these two types over informational ones, which contain news, events, reports and facts related to the NPOs (Saxton and Waters, 2014).

While Guo and Saxton's (2018) model under "content" focused on visual content, the pattern suggested by Saxton and Waters (2014) can also be considered under the "content" part of the model, where the type and aim of the message impact the attention it attracts. Additionally, parts of what the study suggests for attracting attention is related to the element of "targeting and connecting" in the four-factor model, such as mentioning the users' name. Another study regarding the content of social media posts and its correlation with attention is the one by Gligoric et al.(2019) that suggests when tweets are 30-40% shorter than their original version; they attract more attention from social media users (Gligoric, Anderson and West, 2019).

The importance of tailoring messages to the audience is confirmed by studies such as Rowe and Alani (2014) that focus on the dynamic of engagement across different social media platforms (Rowe and Alani, 2014). The study shows that both "social features", e.g., frequency of the messages, number of followers/followings, etc. and "content features", e.g., length of the message and its informativeness, have different impacts on audience engagement across different platforms. Their findings go even further, revealing that these features have specific effects on user engagement, even when observed within the same platform but in different

contexts, such as comparing the US president's State of the Union address versus the Haiti earthquake. This research has identified that users exhibit different preferences regarding the frequency of posting across various platforms. They find a positive correlation between more frequent posting on Twitter and engagement but a negative correlation between frequent posting and audience engagement on platforms such as Facebook. An example of “contents feature” in the findings of the study is that the more unique terminologies that are used in a post, which the study suggests as a measure of informativeness of a post, there will be engagement on Twitter while on discussion-oriented platforms such as Facebook, the correlation is negative (Rowe and Alani, 2014).

As per Rowe and Alani's (2014) study, frequent posting does not always attract more attention, at least according to Facebook. This is somewhat in contradiction with studies such as Guo & Saxton (2018) that were mentioned earlier. In general, none of the studies suggests that attracting attention has a linear positive correlation with these factors without any limits, e.g., the more you post, the more attention you attract. For instance, posting frequently on social media when adequate strategies have not been used could cause donors fatigue and reduce the outcome that NPOs seek. This is supported by Van Diepen et al. (2009) study that shows an increase in the frequency of solicitation causes annoyance for prospective donors (Van Diepen, Donkers and Franses, 2009) that in turn could cause “donor fatigue” (Andreoni, 2006). This could be reconciled with studies such as Guo & Saxton (2018) that frequently posting, to an extent, results in attracting more attention, but potentially at one point, it could have a negative correlation. Another point is that Guo and Saxton (2018) were focused on

NPOs, whereas Rowe and Alani (2014) looked at social media content in the context of events and not from an organisational perspective. Understanding why they arrived at different results, of course, requires further research and is not the focus of my study.

Category	Factor	Platforms	More Attention?	Study
Network	Number of followers	Twitter	Yes	Guo & Saxton (2018)
Timing & Pacing	Number of posts	Twitter, Facebook	Yes	Guo & Saxton (2018), Bortree and Seltzer(2009)
Timing & Pacing	Number of posts	Twitter	Yes	Rowe and Alani(2014)
Timing & Pacing	Number of posts	Facebook	No	Rowe and Alani(2014)
Targeting & Connecting	Number of public replies	Twitter	Partially	Guo & Saxton (2018)
Targeting & Connecting	Number of retweets of others' tweets	Twitter	Partially	Guo & Saxton (2018)
Targeting & Connecting	Number of hashtags	Twitter	Yes	Guo & Saxton (2018)
Targeting & Connecting	Number of URLs	Twitter	Partially	Guo & Saxton (2018)
Targeting & Connecting	Number of user mentions	Twitter	No	Guo & Saxton (2018)
Content	Photo in a message	Twitter, Facebook	Yes	Li and Xie(2020), Guo & Saxton (2018), Sabate et al.(2014), Araujo, et al.(2015)
Content	Photo with negative feeling or sad content	Facebook, Platform-Independent	Yes	Bünzli(2022), Jordan et al.(2019)
Content	Link to photo	Twitter	No	Li and Xie(2020), Guo & Saxton (2018)
Content	Link to video	Twitter	No	Guo & Saxton (2018)
Content	Message types: call to action and dialogic messages	Facebook	Yes	Saxton & Waters(2014)
Content	Shortening messages	Twitter	Yes	Gligoric, et al.(2019)
Content	Informativeness of a post	Twitter	Yes	Rowe and Alani(2014)
Content	Informativeness of a post	Facebook	No	Rowe and Alani(2014)

Table 6: Practices to attract attention on social media platforms, using Guo & Saxton(2018) categorization

The four-factor explanatory model of Guo and Saxton (2018) provides a useful categorisation of practices that help in the attraction of attention on social media platforms. Additionally, studies, such as Bortree and Seltzer (2009), have examined the correlation of the number of practices in this regard and have demonstrated the existence or lack of a positive correlation

between these practices and attracting attention. Using Guo and Saxton's (2018) model, Table 6 summarises different studies that examined practices for attracting attention on social media platforms and their impact. The model and the practices help to provide context for the behaviour and change in the way NPOs communicate on social media platforms.

2.8 Summary

The measurement of success in NPOs has always been more complex than for-profit ones. This is because these organisations face challenges in quantifying their mission impact due to the diverse nature of their missions and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. There is no simple common metric, such as profit, that can define a successful NPO. As a result of this complexity, inherently, it is harder to measure the success of activities and how they contribute to the overall goals of the nonprofit organisation. One of the key and vital activities that nonprofit organisations conduct is communication with the public to inform, engage or mobilise them. This communication is increasingly happening through social media platforms where there are billions of individuals who are spending many hours of their days interacting with others on these platforms. Accordingly, communication through social media platforms for nonprofit organisations plays an important role in their success.

This literature review has shown that nonprofit organisations are not always focused sufficiently on defining success and the measurement of the success of their public communication activities. For instance, literature shows that when NPOs adopted websites for their communication with the public, 76% of them did not even monitor their success

(Sargeant and Jay, 2003). This makes it less surprising that studies suggest no positive correlation between investing in websites and return from these investments (ibid). Some early studies in social media also indicate that the time spent on these platforms for fundraising negatively correlates with the funds raised, as it substitutes the existing, proven practices (Nah and Saxton, 2013). In line with this, some other studies pointed out the tendency of social media users to replace actual action with “slacktivism” on social media platforms. That is, counting actions such as “likes” and “shares” instead of meaningful actions. While there is some evidence of a positive correlation between metrics such as “likes”, etc. and more meaningful outcomes for the NPOs, there are counterexamples where campaigns fail despite being popular on social media.

Focus on social media metrics that are a mere indication of attention to the posts could be due to the abundance of information and attention scarcity on these platforms. This is why there are notable studies such as Guo and Saxton’s (2018) four-factor model that focuses on the ways the NPOs attract attention on social media platforms (Guo and Saxton, 2018). The attention economy promoted by social media platforms seems to have influenced the focus and behaviour of nonprofit organisations regarding communication with the public through these platforms. The influences of social media platforms might not have stopped at this and could be broader and more consequential.

The influence of media on society and its institutions has always been of interest as new communication mediums have emerged and been adapted. Mediatization theories provide a good framework to study the process through which media is influenced by and influence the

institutions in a society. While there are a variety of approaches to mediatization, I have chosen Hjarvard's (2008) definition of mediatization as the best fit for understanding the impact of social media platforms on NPOs. Hjarvard's approach to mediatization revolves around increased dependency and submission to media (Hjarvard, 2008). Hence, understanding the social media logics and the degree to which NPOs have become dependent and submitted to these logics could provide insight into their mediatization.

While the literature includes valuable studies that focus on social media and the way NPOs use these platforms, few studies look at the influence of social media on these organisations in the context of mediatization. The mediatization theory allows for studying the social media activities of the NPOs beyond the way that they use these platforms and how they have impacted the organisations. While there is a gap in the literature for this approach, most studies about NPOs and social media focus on larger organisations, possibly because of better accessibility of the data. Additionally, the complexity of the mediatization process and many factors that play a role in this process implies that culture and the society within which this is happening could also have significance. This calls for a more regionally focused study. While there are studies that focus on multi-national and US-based NPOs, the focus on UK NPOs was scarcer, which this study also attempts to address.

So, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the influence of social media on NPOs and exploring how these organizations define and measure the success of their activities on these platforms. This will be done in the framework of mediatization as defined by Hjarvard (2008) to ensure the impact is not from a technological deterministic lens

and is looked at as a complex phenomenon without oversimplification. Moreover, this study delves into smaller NPOs, providing valuable insights into organisations that have been less studied. By doing so, it aims to expand the scope of future research on these vital contributors to the well-being of UK society.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In the previous chapters, the rationale and the aim of this research and the relevant literature to this research were discussed and critiqued. This enabled me to identify the gap in the existing knowledge that this research will fill. Following this, it is important to address the philosophical assumptions that have impacted all the stages of this research. Clarifying these assumptions helps to justify the chosen paradigm and, in turn, will help explain how the chosen methodological approach has been informed.

In the first section of this chapter, the position that this research chooses in relation to the nature of reality, i.e., ontology, and the valid approach to acquire knowledge related to it, i.e. epistemology, will be discussed. This section will then expand on the reasons that constructivism and interpretivism, respectively, were chosen as this research's ontological and epistemological foundations.

In section 3.2, sequential mixed methods as the research design, in which the qualitative method has the main role, will be justified and explained. In line with the philosophical foundation of this research, it will be explained that the qualitative method was the pivotal and first method used to answer the questions of this research. However, to explore any difference between interview themes and what is happening in practice, the content analysis of the social media accounts of participants was conducted as well.

The process of sampling for the interview, which comprises the sample frame, type of sampling and steps taken to recruit participants, will be covered in section 3.3. This will be followed by the benefits and aim of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method for this research, which will be explained in section 3.4. Section 3.5. explains the role of the pilot studied and how they helped with the semi-structured interviews. Next, section 3.6 will cover the characteristics of the sample and the variety of participants in the study. Then, in sections 3.7 and 3.8, the process of inductive thematic data analysis of interviews and content analysis of social media accounts of participants, step by step, will be explained, too.

Following this, it will be explained how the themes of interviews were verified as it would help the rigour of the findings in section 3.9. In section 3.10, I will share some reflections on myself and how I, as the researcher, could have impacted the outcome of the research from data collection to its analysis. In the same chapter, I will discuss how I tried to mitigate these biases and influences. Lastly, the process in which the participants were protected from being harmed will be explained under the “Ethical consideration” section 3.11. The aim of all these sections is to clarify and justify decisions and actions that I took to answer the questions, which are re-capped here:

How do social media influence the meaning of success among small to medium non-profit organisations?

- How do small/medium size non-profit organisations define a successful social media activity, and how do they measure it?

- How were the social media practices of small/medium non-profit organisations impacted by the way they perceive success?

3.1 Philosophical Foundations of this research: Constructivism/Interpretivism

This section aims to justify and describe the ontological and epistemological beliefs that I have regarding the topic of this research. In order to achieve this, two main ontological and epistemological beliefs in conducting social research will be compared. Then, the reasons that one has been chosen over the other will be explained. Clarifying the ontological and epistemological orientations of this research leads to the specific paradigm in which the valid process and method for answering questions of this research are specified. Specifying all these elements will help to design the research consistently and logically so the research problem is effectively addressed. The design of this research will be explained in the following section.

Selecting between different research methods in a study is partially related to the belief of a researcher regarding his/her ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (what is valid knowledge), methodological (the research strategy), axiological (the role of values) and rhetorical assumptions (the language of research) (Collis and Hussey, 2014). These assumptions construct the paradigm that is used in research. A paradigm is defined as a “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). In this section, from these five assumptions, the first three: ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of this research will be explained as being the key differentiators of paradigms.

The research paradigm employed guides the actions of the researcher throughout the research process, including data analysis and result interpretation. The ontological assumption explains the researcher's belief regarding the nature of reality and its relationship with external actors, whether reality should be considered as an objective entity or the reality should be considered socially constructed through the perceptions of the social actors. These two views are denoted as *objectivism* and *constructivism*. In social objectivism, the social entity exists as an external entity to the social actors. In contrast, in social constructivism, the social entity is the result of the perception of the social actors, constructed through their interactions, and it is constantly being revised (Bryman, 2016). I take the constructivist view because I do not consider an organisation and media as a reality that exists independent of those who interact with it.

So, when the concept of success of social media activities in NPOs is discussed, this “success” is defined as understood by the members of the organisation rather than being external to them. Moreover, the “activities of NPOs” is not independent or external to those performing them in the organisation. Hence, when I tried to understand these organisations and their behaviour, I sought to understand how the organisation members perceive these concepts and behave regarding them rather than studying the organisation objectively and externally. In other words, the reality that I am after is built from the perceptions of the actors and not external to them. Accordingly, the position of this research regarding ontology is social constructivism.

When it comes to successful social media activities, the staff of each NPO could have different perceptions regarding what successful social media looks like. This is shaped by internal factors such as the goals of the NPOs for using social media, the NPOs' exposure to and experience with social media, its organisational structure, mission, values and technology literacy of their staff. Also, there are external factors, such as political and social ones, that in the interaction with the NPOs could impact the meaning of success for them in different ways. The effect of social factors on the fundraising of NPOs has been highlighted in the study of Body and Breeze (2016). Drawing on this study, for instance, an NPO that perceives its cause as "unpopular" due to its focus on helping offenders or addicts may approach its actions differently compared to an organisation that perceives its cause as "popular," such as aiding children or animals (ibid). The former might unintentionally optimise for "popularity" in their social media posts. This could imply a lack of openness and clarity about their cause to ensure that it does not deter their followers and instead attracts "likes", "shares", and other measures of popularity in the social media platforms. This means that social media, as a tool that could have facilitated reaching people through their networks, has lost its effectiveness. This is because either the NPOs or individuals perceive the spread of posts about "unpopular" causes as something that will hinder their social media popularity. That is, popularity as a measure of success precedes the spread of what society perceives as "unpopular". This might not be the case for the NPO with "popular" causes. So, when an NPO with an "unpopular" cause interacts with social media platforms, where popularity is promoted as a metric of success, they would find it much harder to perceive success as anything but popularity. Whereas an NPO with a more "popular" cause could see less social resistance in promoting

its cause and hence focus on the aim of its interaction on these platforms as a measure of success, e.g., funds raised.

The political environment could also impact the perception of NPOs on the meaning of success. For instance, a government that has policies that focuses funding on certain causes, see Figure 16 for an example, could make some NPOs rely less on their social media networks to raise funds. So in line with the “crowding out” theory, the government funding results in the receiving NPO no longer putting in the same effort to raise funds from other sources that they would otherwise have done so (Andreoni and Payne, 2011). Hence, fundraising could play a far smaller role in what success means for them in their social media activities. That is, the interaction of the NPOs, and the government could have different implications for them in the way they construct the meaning of success for their social media activities.

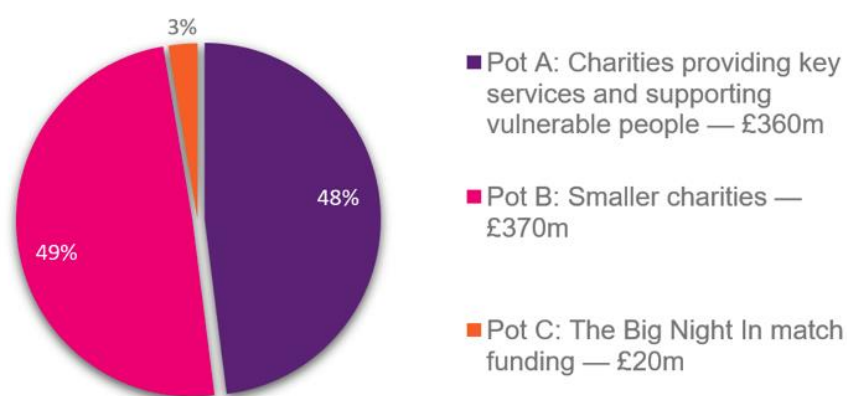


Figure 16: £750m UK government package to support charities during pandemic and its breakdown (Source: thinknpc.org, 2022)

The above two cases show that external factors, such as political and social ones, play a role in constructing the meaning of success for each NPO. That is, many internal/external factors influence the meaning of success for the social media activities of S/M NPOs. These elements do not influence these organisations in a uniform and equal way. These examples clearly show that the nature of reality of the phenomena under this study is socially constructed through the interactions of the NPOs and these factors. Accordingly, there is no absolute or universal reality about how social media have impacted the definition of success among S/M NPOs.

Moreover, by drawing on Raymond Williams's (1985) perspective, I adopt an ontological stance that acknowledges the dynamic and interconnected relationship between technology and society. This perspective emphasises that they mutually influence and shape each other's development (William 1985, cited in Cera, 2020). In the context of my research, which explicitly examines social media, it is essential to acknowledge that while each platform and its development over time may have distinct social contexts, it is crucial to recognise that social media emerged within a broader societal framework. For example, social media arose as a response to the human need for enhanced communication and connectivity. As societies became interconnected globally, there was a growing desire for new ways to connect and interact with others and share information. Another social context that could be influencing the development of social media is the desire of corporations to reach and engage with a larger population. For example, Facebook and Twitter recognised an opportunity to capitalise

on the growing demand for online communication and developed platforms to attract users and generate revenue through advertising and data collection strategies. Therefore, understanding the social contexts in which social media emerged is essential for comprehending the impact of social media on society.

In addition, Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue that social media platforms build upon media that already exist within the culture they emerge in. They highlight the interconnectedness between older media, such as the World Wide Web, culture, and social media. Consequently, it becomes evident that the evolution of digital media is an intrinsic process that occurs within cultural contexts rather than an external one. Therefore, based on “remediation” concepts by Bolter and Grusin (2000), social media is not an external agent that comes to change culture (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). Building upon the perspectives of Bolter, Grusin (2000), and Williams (1985), I adopt a constructivist ontology that underscores the notion that social media is a result of social interactions. From my perspective, social media platforms are not solely derived from technical studies. Instead, they emerge through the active engagement of individuals within a broader societal context.

Technological determinism proponents argue that as a powerful tool, social media brings about societal change. However, such explanations often overlook the role of social order and intention in developing new technology. According to determinists, sophisticated technology will ultimately impose its discipline and patterns, disregarding the intentions of specific agents using technology for their purposes (Freedman, 2002). For instance, the discovery of the printing press did not directly cause the emergence of the Enlightenment era, demonstrating

the absence of a simple causality relationship. Manuel Castells (2011) also shares the rejection of technological determinism. He asserts that technology cannot be considered independently of its social context. Castells (2004) states, "We start from a rejection of technological determinism, as technology cannot be considered independently of its social context" (Castells, 2004, p. 17). He further argues that "the dilemma of technological determinism is probably a false problem since technology is society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools" (Castells, 2011, p. 5). Therefore, this research acknowledges that technology is a product of social interactions and is influenced by the perception and interpretation of people. In this view, the impact of social media on NPOs is not solely determined by these platforms but is shaped by the choices of NPOs' staff and societal dynamics.

While the emergence of social media platforms as a technology and media can only be understood in the context of society, it is also notable that social media must not be perceived as a new media that made the old ones obsolete and hence the impact is significant. As mentioned earlier, Bolter and Grusin (2000) suggest that new media, like social media, emerges in the context of old media and expands on its existing constructs (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). Chadwick et al. (2015) expand on this view and propose the concept of the "hybrid media system", where the old and new media are studied together rather than naively assuming newer replaced the older or made it irrelevant (Chadwick, Dennis and Smith, 2015). This point of view is relevant to this study and the way I approach this research since the impact of social media on NPOs is the key point of focus. My stance in this study is not that

social media platforms are the dominant media and hence the impact of older media on NPOs is irrelevant but that social media emergence, besides many other factors, could have influenced the measure of the success of these communications and the way the NPOs communicate with their stakeholders. This is not to ignore the existing/older media but to focus on the impact of the emergence of newer technology and media. This emergence is part of an evolution and is not totally external. Still, regardless of the way it has emerged and how it came to be, the question in focus is whether this addition to the realm of media has had an impact on NPOs and, if so, how the impact has been. In many discussions like the one in section 3.2.3, when I talk about social media logics, I compare it with mass media to show what social media inherited from the old media and how the old media evolved from the social media logics. So, throughout this research, the interaction between the older and newer media is not neglected.

This ontology calls for a specific type of epistemology to generate knowledge. Resulting epistemology focuses on understanding the context of the subject in a holistic fashion. The epistemological assumption of a research project reflects its researcher's beliefs regarding what is accepted as valid knowledge and how the researcher may gain a valid knowledge of reality (Collis and Hussey, 2014). An epistemological position of a positivist is that the knowledge of measurable and observable phenomena is the only valid knowledge. Moreover, valid knowledge is independent of the researcher. Whereas, in the interpretivism paradigm, the knowledge is constructed via interaction between the researcher and other actors, so the knowledge has a subjective stance (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). It is noteworthy that

the positivism and interpretivism paradigms are positioned on the extreme side of the spectrum since many new paradigms have emerged that rest between these two and form a continuous line whereby assumptions of paradigms are changed along this line (Morgan and Smircich, 1980).

If a positivist epistemology were chosen for this research, it would focus the research on what effect social media had on the activities of the S/M NPOs. In contrast, this research is more interested in how the NPOs arrived at the meaning of success and how it impacts the way they conduct themselves on these platforms. The effort in this study is not focused on a causal relationship between the emergence of social media and the changes in the way NPOs perceive success, as that assumes some level of determinism. The exploration of this study is more on the decision-making process of NPOs in the way they arrived at the meaning of successful social media activity and how this decision-making process is manifested in the way they perform these activities. The interpretivism approach allows me to explore and understand this subjective decision-making process of the NPOs' staff and connect that with their social media activities, which fits the purpose of this research.

This research studies the social media activity of S/M NPOs in the context of mediatization. Taking an interpretivist approach ensures the points raised in section 2.2.4, the "Critics of mediatization", are also addressed. In that section, one of the key criticisms of mediatization was that it implies technological determinism. In response to this, I explained that the view of the current research follows the same point of view of Hepp et al.(2015), which emphasises the process of change in NPOs as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon in which

different social and organisational factors are entangled. This view implies no technological determinism, as explained in that section. Although this research aims to highlight the role of social media in changes happening in NPOs, other factors such as the action of other NPOs, the technological literacy of its staff or even the limitation imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic could affect the way change is happening in the NPOs. So, while this research is looking at NPOs through the lens of mediatization, as social media platforms have an increased penetration in the way communication happens, it does not look at mediatization as a causal relationship to the changes in NPOs. It uses mediatization as a context to interpret the explanation of NPOs in their decision-making process and the way they utilise these platforms. Hence, the interpretivism paradigm fits the approach of this research project.

When the target of this study is set as “understanding” the decision-making process of the NPOs and how this influences their social media activities, it could be contested that this is a positivist approach in which I claim that an objective understanding of how NPOs decide and its impact on their “real” social activities will be found out. The stance of this research in this regard is close to Van Heertum (2005), where the limitation of objectivity as outlined by post-modern theorists is well recognised and understood; however, the spirit of trying to be objective is not abandoned (Van Heertum, 2005). This does not mean that I think the outcome of this research will be a neutral, replicable and universal “truth” about the NPOs; quite the contrary, it is fully recognised that my knowledge, culture and as a whole “the researcher” is part of the process of understanding and influences it. What I suggest by the strive for objectivity is well explained by Ward (1997), when he elaborates on the benefits of

“associational realism” that allows the finding of one research to be trusted, communicated and built upon by the rest of the research community (Ward, 1997). The findings of this research are open to my influence and biases. Hence section 3.10 provides a reflection of my experience and views to allow the reader to understand the possible implication that I could have had on the outcomes of this research. This research aims to build an understanding of NPOs, their decision-making process and social media use. However, it is also open that objectivism, as is meant by more traditional epistemologies, is not what can be achieved in this study.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions of this research construct an interpretivist paradigm for it. Certain assumptions that underline each paradigm indicate what processes and methods lead to the valid knowledge of reality. In the interpretivism paradigm, often qualitative methods are being utilised whereby small samples are studied in depth, and the process of research is mostly inductive. In this process, a researcher looks for new themes which are repeated in other similar situations. These methods seek to understand the subject of research in its natural setting and focus on qualitative rather than quantitative features of the phenomenon under the study (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Moreover, the information collected in qualitative research is considered more detailed, richer and better conveying the experiences of the subjects under the study compared to findings that are quantitatively demonstrated (Glesne, 2016).

On the other hand, in a positivist paradigm, the process of research is mostly deductive and consists of observing and measuring the object in a large number of samples. From a positivist

perspective, the acquired results from this process can be generalised to predict, understand and explain other similar objects. Moreover, the accuracy of these results could be tested through validity and reliability (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

I think since the philosophical perspective of qualitative research differs fundamentally from a quantitative one, other approaches are needed for the rigour of qualitative research. Given, from a qualitative research point of view, that reality is socially constructed based on people's worldviews and experiences, the reality is unique to each individual. So, the reliability framework of quantitative research, which specifies that the same result should be obtained in similar situations, cannot be applied to qualitative research. This is in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985), who proposed alternative criteria: truth values, consistency and applicability instead of validity and reliability for the rigour of qualitative research. From their point of view, to meet the truth value criterion, the researcher needs to acknowledge the presence of multiple realities based on personal experiences and viewpoints; So, s/he needs to provide a clear and accurate report of what may have influenced her/his methodology.

The other criterion, consistency, refers to the "trustworthiness" of methods. To obtain "trustworthiness", the researcher needs to be transparent about the decisions that s/he made in the methodology. In this case, it would be reasonable for another researcher to reach the same conclusion. By applicability, the possibilities of applying findings to other groups are considered (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Moreover, the primary aim of qualitative research is to comprehend a phenomenon by exploring and giving it a complete and detailed description rather than testing a hypothesis and generalising it to a larger population (Merriam, 2002).

Therefore, according to Creswell(2007), a qualitative method is most appropriate when “a problem or issue needs to be explored” and the opinions, feelings and values of individuals are under study (Creswell *et al.*, 2007, p. 39). Both points match the topic of this research since few research have explored the influence of social media on S/M NPOs in the UK, and the current research, exploring the perception and opinion of NPOs’ staff about the meaning of success in social media, seeks to explore this phenomenon.

It is worth mentioning that the quantitative and qualitative methods and approaches could be seen as complementary to each other. What drives me to choose primarily qualitative methods is the perspective and the nature of the questions, as explained. Most of the studies which have investigated the social media effects on NPOs have been explanatory and used quantitative methods in their research (e.g. Elliott et al., 1998; Kent et al., 2003; Miller, 2010; Ogden and Starita, 2009; Saxton et al., 2007). Few researchers have consulted NPOs’ staff about their perception regarding successful social media activity. So, the use of qualitative methods in this research can complement these studies by providing another perspective as well as a rich context that helps to comprehend the influence of social media on these organisations.

3.2 Research design: Sequential mixed methods design

In the discussion of the design of this research, the rationale for choosing the sequential mixed methods design will be explained. The questions of this research and the essence of the phenomenon under the study dictates the framework of research methods and plan for

answering the questions of this research, which will be described in this section. It will be explained that the semi-structured interview is the main method of data collection. Additionally, it will be clarified that the content analysis of social media will be done to identify the gap between what participants said about the topic and what is happening in practice. Subsequently, the next section is focused on semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method of this research and its advantages for exploring the topic under study.

There are two key points to consider in the design of this research. Firstly, the review of the relevant literature shows that there are very few studies, if any, that have a similar perspective to this study, which focuses on S/M NPOs in the UK and their interactions with social media platforms. Secondly, this study is interested in the decision-making process of the NPOs in using social media and how it affects the way they behave on such platforms. This contrasts with studies that try to look at the social media activities of organisations solely to draw conclusions about the way a group of organisations conduct themselves on these platforms. Based on these two points, the exploratory nature of the research becomes apparent. According to Baran(2016), “the way in which researchers develop research design is fundamentally affected by whether the research question is exploratory, descriptive or explanatory as this affects what information is collected” (Baran, 2016, p. 67).

As explained in the previous section, the exploratory nature of this research and the fact that this research focuses on “how” social media have influenced S/M NPOs calls for qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are suitable when asking “how” questions about a phenomenon over which the researchers have no control (Yin, 1994). Accordingly, given that

social media's influence on non-profits is a complex phenomenon and comprises various factors at both the individual and the organisational level, in this research, the qualitative method is most appropriate.

In order to understand the decision-making process of the participants in this research, interviews were considered a more appropriate qualitative method compared to focus groups and observation, as explained in the next section. The interview questions were informed by the literature review, and the semi-structured nature allowed for manoeuvring beyond the pre-set questions to dig deeper into specific topics as required. Additionally, this study is about the way NPOs conduct themselves on social media publicly and their measures of success. There is a large amount of publicly available data on the social media accounts of the participating NPOs for researchers to freely access and analyse. The public data on these platforms enable me to further explore the themes that emerge from the semi-structured interviews. Therefore, I decided to include quantitative content analysis of the social media posts of the participating NPOs as the secondary part of my research design.

The results of the thematic content analysis of semi-structured interviews led to the areas that the quantitative content analysis of the posts focuses on. For instance, when the participants refer to certain metrics as their measure of success for social media activities and they consider themselves successful, their social media posts can be analysed to check whether their perceptions of success have roots in the reality that happens on social media platforms or not. Accordingly, this research is designed as a sequential mixed-methods research, focusing and starting with qualitative semi-structured interviews that lead to

quantitative content analysis, which provides more context and credibility to the outcomes of this exploratory research.

Another helpful data resource regarding the social media activities of organisations is their social media policies. However, for two main reasons, I will not look at the social media policies of UK S/M NPOs. First, the UK Charity Commission asks charities to hold a number of key policies, such as safeguarding policy, reserve policy, anti-fraud policy, etc., and the social media policy is not one of them (Charity Commission, 2018). Up to 2023, the Commission only provided a draft guidance for charities on the implementation of social media policies that, until March 2023, was still open for consultation (Charity Commission, 2023). Additionally, NCVO, in their guidance of essential policies for non-profit organisations, does not count social media policies among the minimum that is required by these organisations (NCVO, 2022). While the social media policy is not one that the UK Charity Commission or NCVO ask the NPOs to have, even those they asked for or called essential are not fully implemented by the NPOs. For example, Ohalehi's (2019) study showed that more than 60 per cent of his research participants, which were small UK charities, had no fraud policy (Ohalehi, 2019). Since small charities face limited resources, they often cannot meet the demands of increasing regulation while facing funding cuts and increased demand for their services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the high probability that a small proportion of participants in my research would have social media policy and the time constraint facing this research, it was concluded that it would be more efficient and productive to focus on interview data and social media activities of these organisations as the primary data resources of my study.

Second, the goal of social media policies is to mitigate the risks that the use of social media introduces to an NPO. It can guide NPOs to prevent posting inappropriate content, ensure their activities comply with relevant laws and regulations and help keep people safe online. Often organisations specify ethical standards in their social media policies and legal restrictions on their social media activities (Gilstrap and Minchow-Proffitt, 2017). The focus of this research, however, is exploring the decision-making process of NPOs' staff who oversee the social media platforms of their organisations regarding the meaning of a successful social media activity. Hence, the social media policies of S/M charities may not be the best data resource for answering my research questions.

The next section will explain the sampling of the participants of the study that were interviewed. Then in section 3.4, there will be more information on how the semi-conducted interviews were conducted.

3.3 Sampling

This section initially outlines the criteria of purposive sampling used in this research. I will explain how the sampling of this research was conducted in five phases in which purposive sampling, supported by snowballing recruitment strategy and maximum variation technique, was used. In phase one, I contacted NPOs that I had relations with, asking them if they were interested in participating; in phase two, a snowballing recruitment strategy was used to expand my network from participating NPOs in phase one; in phase three, I attended sessions run by the Small Charities Coalition to increase my knowledge, expand my network and build

rapport with potential participants; In phase four, I used snowballing strategy, again, from NPOs that I found in phase three, to expand my network further; Then in phase five, I tried to find more NPOs that fit into the sampling criteria of this research by using the “charitychoice.co.uk” website. Finally, in this section, I will justify the relatively small quantity of participants in this research. Then I will explain how theoretical saturation was used as a measure to decide when to stop recruiting new participants.

There are various sampling strategies in quantitative and qualitative research. While in quantitative research, often the focus is on the randomness (and thus representativeness) of the sample, the focus in most qualitative research is for the sample to be relevant to the questions of the research (Bryman, 2016). It is for this reason that the most common non-probabilistic sampling approach is purposive sampling, according to Guest et al.(2006). The purposive sampling strategy of this study included the three criteria below to ensure the relevance of the selected participants to the questions of this research:

- The annual income of the NPO is less than £1 million;
- Location of their headquarter in the UK;
- The NPO is active on social media;

The first two criteria of sampling were justified and defined in the introduction chapter of this research. For the third criterion, this research defines being an “active NPO” in social media with two characteristics: First, having at least one post on more than half of the social media platforms that they use monthly. Second, being responsive to comments in the form of

answering questions, “like”, or sharing the comments at least once a month. Being active in social media has been chosen as a criterion since this study is focused on the impact of social media on NPOs as they use these platforms and adapt them for communication. Additionally, choosing active NPOs could increase the probability that the person responsible for social media considers the meaning of successful activity on these platforms, given the time invested in the activities.

Additionally, I tried to select NPOs with maximum variation in their key characteristics. These characteristics include the sector that NPOs are active in and the types of social media platforms that they use. This technique strengthens the explorative nature of this research. According to Seidman (2012), “... the range of people and sites from which the sample is selected should be fair to the larger population” (Seidman, 2006, p. 56). In other words, the findings of this research should be related as much as possible to the diversity of small to medium size NPOs that exist in the UK. I, therefore, tried to secure a wide range of causes in the sample of NPOs in this research, which includes organisations focusing on supporting youth, relief of poverty, support for higher education, helping with issues resulting from long conflicts in the middle east, community development, religion and wildlife conservation. As shown in Table 7, the sample reflects a cross-section of the NPOs, in terms of the causes that they focus on. Similarly, it was attempted to recruit participants that are active on different social media platforms since each platform has a different feature set and user demographics, which could impact the behaviour and decision-making process of the NPOs as they

communicate through them. Table 7 shows the variation in the platforms that are used by the participants of this research.

Five phases were conducted to recruit participants who were appropriate to the sampling frame of this research. In the first phase, I wrote down the name of NPOs that I had relations with, and I checked the income of each NPOs via the Charities Commission website to make sure they fell under the criteria of annual income, which had to be below £1 million. Of the three NPOs that I had relation with, one of them did not meet the criteria, so I removed it from my list. Then via their website, I checked whether they are on social media and which platforms they are active in. Both of the two NPOs in my list had social media accounts and were active on them. I contacted these two NPOs through persons who had a relationship with me via phone and explained roughly the subject of my research. Then, I sent them the information sheet and the consent form for my research via email to check if the organisation and the staff who is in charge of social media are interested in participating (see Appendix II). Explicitly in this email, I explained that I need to interview the staff in charge of the NPO's social media platforms. They agreed to participate in my research. It is essential to acknowledge that my relationship with NPOs has the potential to influence the information they provide to this research during the interview. To minimise this potential bias, I employed several strategies during the process of interviews. First, I clarified the purpose of the study and emphasised that I was looking for unbiased information, not confirmation of any theories. Additionally, I encouraged the interviewees to provide their perspectives by using open-ended questions that allowed for more honest and genuine responses. I also assured them

that their responses would be kept confidential and their identities would not be revealed in any published work. I also tried to maintain a professional demeanour during the interview and avoid any influence from my relationships interfering in the process of the interview. I remained neutral in my tone, behaviour, and the questions I asked. By utilising these strategies, I tried my best that the information provided by NPOs was as unbiased and accurate as possible.

In phase two, after finishing the interview, I asked them to introduce any NPOs that they thought would fit the criteria of my research and would be interested in participating. This helped me to recruit one more participant that met my criteria.

In phase three, I tried to expand my knowledge and network of S/M size NPOs. In order to do this, I attended different sessions run by the UK Small Charities Coalition. In those sessions, I introduced myself and the subject of my research; then, I asked attendees whether they were interested in participating in my research. A list was written down, which included the contact details of interested individuals. Then, I sent them the information sheet and the consent form. It is worth mentioning that 8 NPOs from these sessions were willing to attend, but ultimately 5 NPOs participated in the research. Three NPOs did not participate due to their busy schedules. The limited human resource of NPOs could contribute to the time pressure that staffs were under. Moreover, the COVID-19 lockdowns imposed by the government, which began during the second year of this PhD project, made reaching the potential participants even harder.

The efforts in the third phase resulted in obtaining consent to participate from five more NPOs. The income of each NPOs was checked via the Charities Commission website to make sure they fell under the criteria of annual income. The income of all 5 NPOs in the list fell into this category; then, via their website and Google search, I established that they are on social media and which platforms they are active in. One of the five NPOs was not active on social media, so I removed it from the list. Via email, I thanked them for showing interest in my research and explained the reason for not proceeding. In phase four, again, by snowballing from the four participating NPOs in phase three, I asked them to propose other potential participants for my research. This enabled me to recruit three more participants that met the criteria.

In phase five, to ensure a holistic view of small NPOs, I used “maximum variation” criteria in the purposive sampling strategy based on the cause that the NPOs were focused on. The cause that an NPO focuses on could influence the perspective of these organisations regarding the meaning of success in social media platforms. According to Nah and Saxton (2013), NPOs use different strategies in order to fulfil their social mission and their use of new media is aligned with their strategy. For example, the Salvation Army focuses on fundraising in order to achieve its mission of providing services to the poor, whereas Greenpeace focuses on lobbying in order to fulfil its mission which is to change laws and behaviours. In other words, the way that NPOs use new media is shaped by their organisational mission (Nah and Saxton, 2013). In the case of participating NPOs in this research, from the perspective of the one that focuses on human rights, the meaning of success could differ from an NPO that

focuses on poverty. Both NPOs may perform social media activities to raise awareness of their causes. However, as raising awareness could be the main goal of the former NPO, the number of likes and shares could be more relevant as a metric of success, whereas for the latter NPO, the amount of money raised as a result of awareness generated by a social media campaign is likely to be more relevant.

Moreover, in this phase, I tried to interview NPOs that are active on diverse types of social media platforms. This is because the questions of this research seek to explore the influence of “social media”, so the sample should cover a representative set of platforms. Accordingly, I tried to cover a wide range of social media platforms by choosing NPOs which were active on platforms that differed from each other. So, the interview data become more representative of the influence of social media, as a whole, versus just one platform, on S/M NPOs. By including a broad range of causes as well as social media platforms, the findings of this research could present a more holistic view of the meaning of successful social media activity among S/M size NPOs and its implications.

To utilise the “maximum variation” technique in the sampling of this research, I started to use the “charitychoice.co.uk” website to find more participants. This website has an advanced search feature that enables its users to search NPOs based on their sector. By selecting the sectors I did not have in my existing sample, I prepared a list of 20 NPOs with diverse causes. Then I checked their annual income on the Charities Commission website. Of 20 NPOs, 12 of them fit the criteria of annual income. Then I checked the platform they were active on and added the name of the platforms to the list. I prioritised the NPOs, and the platforms that

they were active on were different from the former participating NPOs. Based on this priority and via email, I invited all 12 NPOs. Out of the 12 invitations, I recruited another 5 participants that met the criteria.

The final sample for this study included 15 NPOs. This could be considered relatively smaller than some other studies, particularly compared to a quantitative approach, though it is not untypical for qualitative studies (Hesse-Baker and Leavy, 2010). Obviously, I would have preferred to have recruited a larger sample of participating NPOs, as discussed further in the limitation discussion in the Conclusion chapter. However, I am confident that I did my best given the difficult context in which this project was undertaken, during government-ordered lockdowns when S/M NPOs were facing increased demand for their services yet had fewer staff and volunteers due to furloughing and Covid-related sickness and shielding.

Although the quantity of samples is not the sole important aspect of qualitative research, a criterion could be used for deciding when the sample size is adequate. Bryman (2016) remarked that theoretical saturation could be used as a criterion to recognise whether the sample size is sufficient to support convincing findings. When the theoretical saturation happens, by collecting further data, no new theme is likely to emerge. It is impossible to decide in advance what particular number of participants is needed before the theoretical saturation happens (Bryman, 2016). Hence, the iterative approach of this research, where the data was analysed right after each interview, helped to assess whether this point was reached or not. In this study, the lockdown caused by COVID-19 happened in the middle of the data collection phase. This made the data collection process more time-consuming and difficult.

Considering the limited time and budget of this research, I tried to continue collecting data until at least generated themes demonstrated, to some extent, a theoretical saturation.

In the next section, semi-structured interviews will be discussed in depth. Then the following section will elaborate on pilot studies that helped to finalize the questions of the interviews and how they should be conducted.

3.4 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

In this section, the reasons for choosing interviews and, in particular, semi-structured ones as the primary method of data collection are discussed. The discussion compares this method to its alternatives and justifies using semi-structured interviews over structured ones. Additionally, it looks at the shortcomings of this method. Lastly, the section will focus on the practicalities and how these interviews were conducted and the way data has been recorded.

Conducting a one-to-one interview provides three main advantages over other qualitative research methods for this research: Firstly, it prevents the point of view of one interviewee from affecting another. Secondly, it provides a more holistic view, and thirdly, it strengthens the explorative nature of this research by covering a greater number of samples. I will now explain these strengths in relation to the other potential qualitative methods.

The advantage of the one-to-one interview over a focus group is that in the focus group, the perspective of interviewees regarding the meaning of success in social media could be influenced by other participants, and this could deviate findings of this research from

exploring the decision-making process of the staff regarding their view of the meaning of a successful social media activity. Focus groups are more useful in research that seeks to understand a phenomenon based on interactions of participants in the group (Morgan, 1996).

Compared to a case study research design, one-to-one interviews can provide more holistic views regarding the topic of this research; a single or few case studies are not a good fit for the scope of this research because I am seeking to understand the broader experience of S/M NPOs in the UK.

Conducting interviews provides more opportunities to explore the topics under study in this research as it can cover more NPOs and a variety of cases. Hence, for a study such as this, which seeks to understand why and how the perspective of subjects has been shaped, one-to-one interviews are the best fit. In addition, Cassell (2004) cites the following advantages of interviewing in research: since different types of interviews, such as structured, semi-structured and unstructured, can be applied in different types of research, the interview is one of the most flexible data collection methods available; it is easy to address focused questions such as a decision process in the organisations, as well as broad issues such as organisational culture. Interviews are ideal for topics with a complex essence in which various layers, such as organisational, professional and interpersonal factors, exist. In-person interviews also have a better response rate than other methods, such as survey questions throughout the post (Cassell and Symon, 2004).

Yet, it is important to note that the qualitative interview has shortcomings as a data collection method. For example, it is time-consuming. To get useful data, a researcher needs to pass several stages, from finding participants and conducting interviews to transcribing data (Robinson 2014, cited in Alsaawi, 2014). Moreover, because interviewees are members of an organisation, they may express a positive impression of themselves and their workplaces (Qu and Dumay, 2011). For example, in the context of this study, the person responsible for the social media activities of the NPOs, to highlight the importance of his/her role, may overstate the achievements of the organisation through their social media. By choosing a semi-structured interview over a structured one, this limitation could be mitigated to some extent. For example, whenever the researcher thought the interviewee was overstating an issue, there was an opportunity to probe further using follow-up questions. In addition, by use of open questions in semi-structured interviews, the researcher wanted to increase the probability of new data and interesting issues to emerge and by probing, deepen understanding about these issues. This flexible structure of the interview strengthened the exploratory nature of this research.

Moreover, Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method for collecting a broad range of rich data directly from small/medium NPOs and specifically from the people who are more involved in the social media activities of these organisations. The research interview is a common data collection method in the qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). This data allows for understanding the perception of the staff in the NPO regarding the meaning of success in social media platforms and how and why they have come up with these

perspectives. This is in line with what Alsaawi (2014) stated if research seeks to explore participants' experiences, perceptions or identities, a qualitative interview may be used as the data collection method (Alsaawi, 2014).

There were 15 semi-structured interviews in the data collection phase of this research. Before the interviews took place, an interview guide was prepared, comprising the list of topics that should be covered in the interview and probes that could explore the new issues in detail (see Appendix I). The interview guide has been modified throughout the process of the interviews. Some questions, which did not provide any useful data on the topic of the research, were dropped, and some were modified to become more comprehensible for the interviewees.

Nearly half of the interviews were carried out face-to-face. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the video call interviews were carried out using applications such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes. The participants were asked about the importance of social media for their organisation, the reason for using these mediums, to define a successful social media activity, as well as how they measure success and try to achieve it.

The data collected in an interview went beyond just what an interviewee has said in the process, which has been recorded as audio. There is value in recording data such as body language, workplace atmosphere and other events such as interruptions and communication with other colleagues. It is difficult to capture all these factors, especially non-verbal factors, by an audio recorder. Hence, during the interviews, notes were also taken to record

everything that happened during the interview. The notes were complementary to the audio recording during the data analysis phase.

The next section will explain how pilot studies helped the process of firming up the structure and questions of the semi-structured interviews. This section will be followed by an in-detail overview of the interviewed participants and their organisations. Then in sections 3.7 and 3.8, the data analysis of both interview data and the content of social media accounts of participating organisations will be discussed.

3.5 Pilot Studies

This section aims to elaborate on the aims of pilot studies in this study. The refinement of questions, testing the interview viability and estimating the time of interviews are the main aims of conducting pilot studies that will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

According to Teijlingen and Hundley(2001), the nature of the interview as a data collection method is progressive (Teijlingen et al. 2001, cited in Ismail, Kinchin and Edwards, 2018). In other words, the quality of the later interview should be better than the earlier one. Conducting pilot studies could help accelerate this progression whereby the researcher focuses on possible ways to make the interview efficient and more focused on its objectives. Hence, two pilot studies were conducted in September 2019. The data from pilot interviews were added to the main data of this research. The reason is twofold, firstly, the interview questions were not changed radically, and most amendments were minor. Secondly, the

difficulty of finding participants during the pandemic meant that adding the two pilot studies to the research data would help the study in terms of theoretical saturation.

The purpose of the pilot studies, from two employees of different NPOs, were multiple: first, to address where a question needs to be adjusted or added; second, to estimate the time needed for conducting the interview. By assessing the question of research, there was an opportunity to amend and add some more questions. For example, question 16 was changed from “How do you try to grab public attention to increase the success of your activities in social media?” by eliminating the words “grab public attention in”. From the researcher's perspective, the eliminated words made the question a leading one that suggests the number of “likes” as a metric of success to the interviewee. Or the interviewee of the second pilot study, in describing her typical day, mentioned posting on social media as her daily task. The researcher realised the interview does not dig into the “why” of the frequency and timing of the posts on social media, which could reveal the decision-making process behind the social media strategy of an NPO. So, the additional follow-up question of “if s/he mentions posting a certain number of times a day or week, the why question is needed to be asked.” was added to question 2. The pilot studies lasted for nearly 45 minutes. Knowing the expected time length of the interview made the scheduling convenient for both researcher and the interviewees. Moreover, for the rest of the interviews, the researcher knew that 45 minutes would be roughly enough to get the interviewee involved in the research and understand his/her worldview regarding the topics of the research. This timing may seem relatively short,

as interviews often last an hour or more, but in my experience, the online interview situation is quicker because there is less need for “settling” chit-chat, ordering coffee and so on.

As mentioned earlier, the pilot data was added to the main data, although some of the questions had some alterations. The change in the questions and the context of the research were considered when analysing the data of the two pilot studies. For instance, if the question was deemed as leading, the answer from the question was either entirely dismissed or considered with the understanding that the question may have led to the particular answer.

3.6 Characteristics of the Sample

In the following section, the participants will be introduced. In order to do this, demographics, education levels, current positions and distribution of participants by the cause of their NPO are illustrated. These factors could influence how the interviewees have defined a successful social media activity. Hence, a better understanding of the phenomenon under study may be achieved by clarifying these factors.

Attribute of Participants	Frequency
Gender	
Female	11
Male	4
Age	
Under 30	8
30 - 39	4

40 - 49	2
50 - 59	1
Role	
Director	2
Manager	4
Officer	7
Volunteer	2
Education Level	
Master's Degree or Above	5
Bachelor's Degree	8
A-Levels	2

Table 7: Demographics of the participants of this research

Considering the gender distribution of the staff who oversee social media activities of NPOs in my sample, which is shown in the above table, most (more than 70%) participants were female. As can be seen in Figure 17, the sample of this study echoes what the latest HR and workforce data of the UK third sector for 2020 shows.

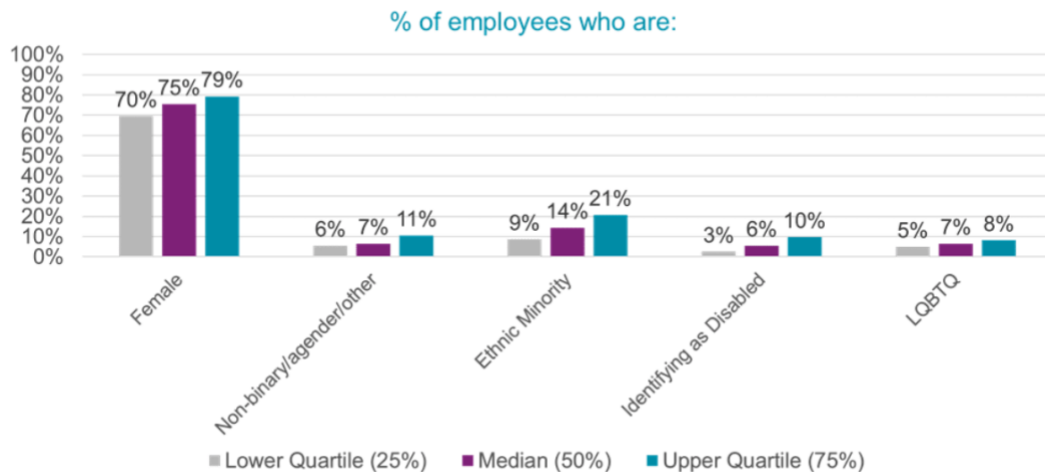


Figure 17: Workforce data of UK third sector (Source: 'Third Sector HR and Workforce Data for 2020', 2020)

According to this figure, the UK's third sector is dominated by females. Approximately two-thirds of the workforce of these organisations are women. Studies in the US and other parts

of Europe show this is because of factors such as more family-friendly practices, greater access to part-time jobs and men being attracted to for-profit organisations because of their monetary advantages (Daniels, 1988; Lanfranchi and Narcy, 2015). There is a paucity of research regarding why female employees are attracted to the UK non-profit sectors compared to for-profit organisations that future research could focus on.

It is worth noting that the age of more than 50% of participants were under 30, which place them into the Millennial and Gen Z generation. The millennial generation consists of individuals who were born between 1980 to 1995, and Gen Z was born between 1996 and 2003 (Zhitomirsky-Geffet and Blau, 2016). Millennials had exposure to smartphones and social media in their adolescents, while Gen Z had exposure in their early childhood. Studies show millennial generation uses social media as a primary means of communication, and the norms, values and culture of this generation are, to a large extent, impacted by the social media (Ardi and Putri, 2020). As millennials enter the workforce, their attitude about social media may have influenced the perspective of NPOs and even could have strengthened the mediatization of these organisations. Gen Z similarly uses social media platforms extensively, although they might prefer different platforms to those in their previous generations(Rue, 2018). This research did not seek to find out age diversity or age distribution of NPOs' workforce or generalise any of its findings regarding the age of the workforce. The sample may have been influenced by selection bias caused by the snowball sampling technique. As the first person in the chain data was in her late twenties, and she introduced the next

nominated person for the interview. This could have impacted the diversity of age of participants in the sample of this study.

Moreover, 80% of participants had Bachelor's degree or above. However, none of the degrees were related to the marketing or communications fields. Lack of formal education in relevant communication and marketing skills could imply a stronger presence of personal experiences and informal influences, such as personal use of Google and other search engines, in the factors that drive the social media activities of these participants.

Additionally, as shown in Table 8, the people responsible for the social media activities of these NPOs work at various levels of the organisation, from a director to a volunteer, which is because of the structure and size of these organisations. Given that the S/M NPOs often need more time and human resources, they cannot hire employees exclusively for different roles in their organisations. As a result, their staff usually wear multiple hats (Ohalehi, 2019). For example, a trustee could be a manager and social media marketer at the same time. Wearing multiple hats was also the case for interviewees of my research. The interviewees of my study had different titles in the NPOs; however, all of them were in charge of social media activities. Having a variety of roles/levels among participants could have both pros and cons for this research. Various roles and levels increase the possibility of inconsistent views regarding a successful social media activity, given the differences in experience and other responsibilities of the participants. On the other hand, the common themes that emerge from the interviews of people with various levels of experience and parallel roles provide more depth as it is not limited to a focused role/level. Additionally, finding all the S/M NPOs' social

activities were run by people at the same level and no additional roles not only could have been impossible but would not have been indicative of the reality of the S/M NPOs in the UK. Another crucial aspect worth noting is that, unlike larger organisations within the same sector, where the "director" title, for instance, typically indicates a consistent level of seniority and experience, in S/M NPOs, many of these titles are not directly comparable. Hence, while I have recorded the various titles and levels of each participant, it does not affect the analysis or findings of this research in terms of its validity. But it provides insight in terms of how social media activities are run in these organisations.

ID	Gender	Education	Age	Role	Sector	Head Office Location	Annual Income	Social Media Platforms
INT 1	Female	Master's Degree	Under 30	Marketing Officer	Health	Leicester	£963,029	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn
INT 2	Male	Bachelor's Degree	30 - 39	Operations Officer	Poverty	London	£839,420	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn
INT 3	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Under 30	Compliance Officer	Education	London	£962,479	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube
INT 4	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Under 30	Project Manager	Education	London	£161,807	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
INT 5	Female	Bachelor's Degree	30 - 39	Manager	Community Development	London	£51,201	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
INT 6	Female	Master's Degree	50 - 59	Communication Volunteer	Health	Ipswich	£475,905	Facebook, Twitter
INT 7	Female	PhD	40 - 49	Director	Community development	Kent	£4650	Facebook, Twitter

INT 8	Female	Master's Degree	40 - 49	Director	Health	London	£129,227	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn
INT 9	Female	A-levels	Under 30	Marketing Officer	Poverty	London	£934,867	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube
INT 10	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Under 30	Social media Officer	Education	London	£318,490	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn
INT 11	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Under 30	Marketing Manager	Education	London	£582,856	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
INT 12	Female	Bachelor's Degree	30 - 39	Social Media Officer	Human Rights	London	£879,392	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn
INT 13	Male	Bachelor's Degree	30 - 39	Project Manager	wildlife conservation	Cornwall	£2,409	Twitter, Instagram
INT 14	Female	Master's Degree	Under 30	Admin Volunteer	Religion	Manchester	£17,700	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
INT 15	Male	A-levels	Under 30	Communication Officer	Art	London	£56,800	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Table 8: Relevant information of participating NPOs in this research

As mentioned before, the cause that an NPO works on and even the type of social media that an NPO uses for its communication could have an impact on how they define a successful social media activity. So relevant information about the NPOs that participants work for is presented in Table 8. As can be seen from the data, all these NPOs fall in the category of small-medium NPOs, which are those with under £1m income. There is a concentration of NPOs that were interviewed in London or close to London that could be again the result of using snowball sampling, which started from the researcher's network who also lives in London. The lack of geographical diversity is discussed in the limitations and the "Future research" section in the Conclusion chapter.

As it is shown in the above table, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the typical platforms used by NPOs in the sample of this study. Moreover, Facebook is the most used social media among NPOs in the sample compared to the other social media platforms. This is in line with findings of other studies that show Facebook is the most popular social media among these organisations (e.g., Rathi *et al.*, 2014; Lucas, 2017; Hemphill, Million and Erickson, 2021). There is a section on Facebook, which is dedicated to charitable giving, that has been launched in the UK since late 2017. In order to collect donations, NPOs can use this section for free. This could be one of the reasons for Facebook's popularity among NPOs.

According to Salamon and Anheier (1996), based on the cause that NPOs focus on, these organisations could be classified into 12 major groups. The following table demonstrates the distribution of NPOs in the sample of this study regarding this classification.

Classification of NPOs, Major Groups	No. of NPOs in the sample
Education and Research	4
Health	3
Social Services	2
Culture and Recreation	1
Environment	1
Law, Advocacy and Politics	1
Philanthropic Intermediaries and Voluntarism Promotion	1
International	1
Religion	1
Development and Housing	0
Business and Professional Associations, Unions	0
Not Elsewhere Classified	0

Table 9: The distribution of studies NPOs based on the causes that the focus on

As mentioned in the discussion of sampling, in order to maximise the variation of causes covered in the sampling, the researcher tried to select organisations with diverse causes. The diversity of causes of these organisations, which participants of this study work for, is 70%. This could have amplified the chance of the emergence of new findings as well as reduced the impact of one type of cause on how NPOs define a successful social media activity.

The next two sections will focus on the data analysis of the data collected from the participating NPOs. Then in section 3.9, the verification of these data analyses will be discussed.

3.7 Data analysis: Inductive Thematic Coding

The approach that was used for analysing the qualitative data in this study will be explained and justified in this section. In order to conduct a precise and systematic process of analysis in this research, the six steps of Braun and Clarke's (2012) guidelines were followed and are discussed below.

The thematic data analysis method is commonly used in social research. A key reason for the popularity of this method is that the researcher has the flexibility to focus on the data in a number of different ways in order to answer a variety of research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This method has been used in this research since it can generate novel insights by emphasising similarities and differences across the perspectives of staff from different S/M NPOs in the UK regarding their perception of the meaning of success in social media activities. As akin to other research methods, it is critical for thematic analysis to be conducted in a

precise and systematic procedure to maintain the rigour and trustworthiness of its findings. In this procedure, by identifying and analysing patterns in the form of themes or categories across units of the research, the findings are developed (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Many authors have defined different pragmatic steps in order to conduct rigorous thematic analysis (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Creswell *et al.*, 2007). Hence, there is no single set of rules to be followed in research. However, the thematic coding approach involves three main steps: (1) organising data for analysis, (2) condensing data, and (3) using codes to create themes and demonstrating finding by figures or in the discussion (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The data analysis for this research has been conducted based on the six steps of Braun and Clarke's guideline, as this framework facilitates thematic analysis in a clear and usable set of steps (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

- Phase 1: Familiarizing with the data;
- Phase 2: Creating initial codes;
- Phase 3: Searching for themes;
- Phase 4: Reviewing themes;
- Phase 5: Defining themes;
- Phase 6: Writing up the report;

These six phases can be conducted in a non-linear manner. For example, Strauss and Corbin(1990) propose that researchers need to begin data analysis at the same time as the data collection process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In line with this model, in Figure 18,

Creswell and Poth(2007) represent moving in an analytical spiral rather than moving in fixed linear steps in the qualitative data analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2016, p. 186). This model is useful throughout the research process as these steps noted in Figure 15 are often interconnected and take place simultaneously (Creswell *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, from the start of the first interview, transcribing, organising and familiarising with data also began in an iterative process. In the later sections, the verification of the results of the analysis will be explained in detail.

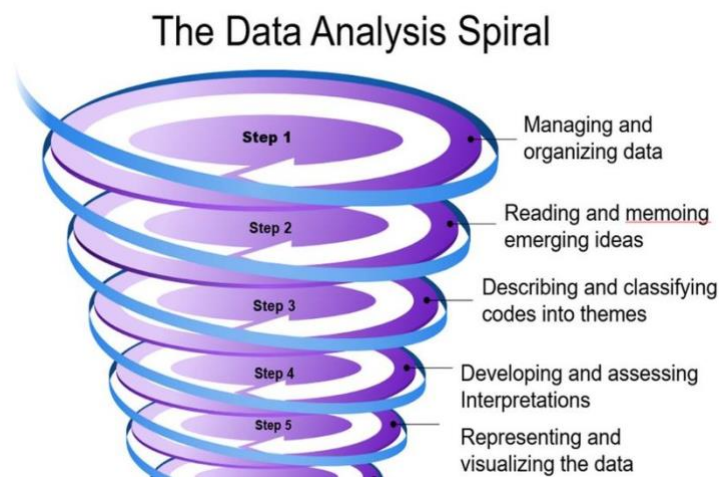


Figure 18: Data Analysis Spiral (Source: Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 186)

Phase 1, familiarising myself with the data: After each interview, the audio recording of that interview was listened to at least once and partially transcribed into a document as bullet points of the interesting quotes in addition to my initial thoughts on these points. The file was saved in a secured folder protected by a password. In order to keep the anonymity of the interviewee, a pseudonym was given to the file; for example, INT 1, INT 2 and so forth. These initial steps were taken before conducting the next interviews. Subsequently, the important

points of the interview were read, and initial impressions were noted down in that file. Below is an example of one point that I transcribed:

- *“[laughs] I would love to say that there was a really serious reason behind why we have chosen these two platforms, I think it is just what we knew how to use [laughs].”*

Then going through the rest of the interview and after putting down further points, I have noted a few of my early impressions regarding the interview, for example below is one of these comments:

- *The interviewee is vocal about the importance of social media for their organisation, however, he fails to elaborate on this point and demonstrate examples that social media has made a difference for their organisation. Maybe the topic of the research biased her to overemphasise the importance of social media and her expertise in the field.*

Moreover, where an additional question was needed for clarification, the list of questions was updated by adding it to the questions list before conducting the following interview. The identified missing questions were sent to the former interviewee immediately after to ensure the topic and discussion in the interview were still fresh in his/her mind. This is one of the instances in which the iterative essence of this process was manifested. For the two pilots, this was also done when it was applicable since some changes or modifications could not be applied retrospectively. For instance, altering the question with a leading nature and resending it would not have helped.

After finishing all 15 interviews, each was listened to again, and transcriptions were completed and organised. Transcriptions were printed and read a couple of times to get a general understanding of what the interviewees were talking about. The next step, which is explained in the next paragraphs, was to systematically convert transcriptions into a concise summary of key results using hard copies of transcripts, pens and highlighters.

Phase 2, creating initial codes: In this phase, I used an inductive coding approach by following Watts's (2014) recommendation. According to him, in order to conduct qualitative research inductively, researchers should try to put aside their subjective values and methodological and theoretical framework to answer the questions of the research (Watts, 2014). Following Watt's recommendation, starting from the first interview transcript, I went through the text and split the transcript into units without involving the framework or my own values. Subsequently, while preserving the core meaning of each unit, the units were condensed further by underlining their keywords. Following this, a code, which describes the unit's content, was formulated and put as a marginal note beside the relevant unit on the hard copy, using a pen. Then, other transcriptions were searched for the recurrence of labelled text and formulated new codes in the same way that was conducted for the first transcript. All the codes were developed and modified through the coding process iteratively. So, I allowed the codes to emerge from the interview data. When all the transcriptions were coded, then searching for the themes started.

It is worth emphasising that during this process, as much as possible, I tried to focus on the contents of the interviews rather than the framework. This allowed for the exploration of the

data by including parts of data that might not seem relevant to the framework of this research. For example, semantically, the way the interviewee explains their role and title in the organisation might not be relevant to the framework of this research, but these transcript units were also selected. From my perspective, it would give insight into the organisational structure, the resourcing for social media activities and the focus of the individual on social media.

Phase 3, searching for themes: Next, similar codes were identified and grouped together, and a theme was constructed for each group. According to Braun and Clarke(2006), a theme “represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). All the potential themes with their relevant text were entered into a table. Then, I tried to figure out the possible relation between themes and how themes could be organised in order to tell the overall story about the data. The relation between the themes is shown in a thematic map, illustrated in the finding chapter.

Phase 4, reviewing themes: In this phase, I tried to check the quality of generated themes by reviewing the relationship between texts, codes and themes. In this process, some texts were discarded, and some were moved into the other themes. At the end of this phase, all the themes, codes and texts of interviews were reviewed to check whether all of these elements fit together to convey a full and meaningful story of the data.

Phase 5, defining themes: In order to define a theme and formulate its name, the researcher tries to identify the unique essence of each one and write it down a few sentences as their

description. Following Braun and Clarke's (2012) instruction, I tried to describe the themes with a specific focus and well-defined points. The description of each theme can be found in the findings chapter. I tried to select informative and brief names for each theme. Table 10 shows an example of the process of analysis that led to the formulation of a code and a theme.

Theme	Staff have heavy workload and multiple focuses.	
Code	Time and human resource deficiency	Human resource deficiency
Condensed meaningful unit	<i>we do not have enough resources to spend time and effort on it...</i>	<i>My role tends to be a bit of everything...</i>
Meaningful unit	<i>"And even things like LinkedIn we want to sort of operating properly in there but because we do not have enough resources to spend time and effort on it, we just keep it."</i>	<i>"My role tends to be a bit of everything so I would say I often feel... sometimes I feel... I get kind of (on the) bad side of it because I don't get to be with the volunteers or working with the children."</i>

Table 10: Example of coding the interview themes

Phase 6, writing up the report: In this phase, to convey the results of my analysis, I tried to write the report with a coherent and compelling story in a way that answer the questions of the research. First, I returned to the raw data and reflected on my initial analysis. For example, I revised whether the codes given to units echoed the core meaning of units, and in some cases, codes were modified to accurately reflect the core meaning; Then, I revised the initial

structure of the report, which was built in phase 3 and 4, to ensure that it makes sense to the readers. The report has eight different sections, and each section illustrates the main themes of the interview data. I used the code of each theme as the title of each section. Next, I started to expand each section by explaining the relevant theme, providing adequate evidence using vivid examples from interview data for that theme and explaining the possible connection between the themes. This can be found in the finding chapter.

It is worth mentioning that the intuition and unconscious values of the researcher inevitably influence the data analysis process in a qualitative study. However, the researcher cautiously tried to be aware of her pre-knowledge and perspective on the research topic and invited a second researcher to “sense check” or peer review my codes, themes and findings. This is so the effects of subjective factors are minimised. My personal beliefs and any factors that may have influenced the data analysis process have been explained in the “Researcher’s self-reflection” under section 3.10.

The next section will focus on the content analysis of the social media accounts of the participant, which acted as complementary to interview data. The section will be followed by the verification of the data analysis.

3.8 Data analysis: Content analysis of social media accounts

The purpose of this section is to explain the aim, considerations and process of the content analysis of Facebook and Twitter posts. The dataset comprised all posts made by the interviewed NPOs between the 15th and 31st of May 2019 and the same period again a year

later in 2020. Then, the coding schedule and coding manual will be explained as a way to make sure the content analysis process is objective and systematic. Following this, the role of the constructed interview themes as the basis of the content analysis's questions will be clarified.

In section 3.2, I explained that another source of data for this research is the content of the social media accounts of the studied NPOs. The content of the social media accounts of these NPOs has been analysed as means of comparing the actual activities with the interview themes to identify the gap between what the participants said in theory and what happens in practice. In his influential work *"The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life"*, Erving Goffman delved into the dynamics of interpersonal interactions, revealing how individuals strategically present a favourable image of themselves during these interactions (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). This phenomenon is influenced by multiple factors, including social norms, impression management, the tension between attitudes and behaviour, and self-presentation (Charmaz, 2004). Goffman's argument emphasises that during interactions, individuals actively shape the impressions they wish to project while also unconsciously emitting impressions they did not intend to convey. This concept helped me better to understand the complexities of interviewees' interactions during the interview in my research.

This complexity is particularly evident in professional settings. In these situations, individuals try to show that their actions and behaviour follow certain standards and are of high quality (Sarangi, 2007). Accordingly, in my research that focused on the meaning of successful social

media among small/medium NPOs, it is plausible that impression management and self-presentation played a role in shaping the responses obtained during interviews. During the interviews, some participants may have strategically presented themselves in a favourable light as individuals responsible for social media management, even if their actions did not align with their statements. Likewise, others may have aimed to distinguish themselves as exceptional NPO staff members, leading them to express points of view that aligned with the image they wished to project, irrespective of their actual behaviour on social media platforms.

Consideration of these possibilities helped this study in the data collection and analysis phase. This is not to say that this study uses Goffman's dramaturgy concepts and extends the metaphors of theatre to study social media as few studies, such as Corrigan & Beaubien (2013) did (Corrigan and Beaubien, 2013). There are various criticisms of such an application of Goffman's dramaturgy, e.g. how internet audiences are present and active, unlike the theatrical setup (*ibid*). Regardless of the critics of Goffman's concepts as a tool for studying organisations, this study is conscious of these and recognises that the data collected in interviews are subject to the skews of self-presentation in the specific context. Similarly, what is happening on social media could be a result of a different self-presentation of the interviewee or the NPO within a different setup. None of these two setups is necessarily the objective reality. This study attempts to understand the context of these two setups, i.e. interview and social media platforms, and contribute to the understanding of what drives the social media activities of NPOs in these contexts and what they consider as success. The misalignments of self-presentations in these two different contexts could provide a unique

insight into the drivers that influence these self-presentations of interviewees and/or organisations. For instance, the interviewees suggest that COVID-19 increased their focus on social media activities. However, their posting frequency or quality does not show a change. Understanding that one of these two is not the “truth” and the other a misrepresentation provides a framework for hypothesising about this misalignment. Maybe this misalignment is a result of the resource pressures in COVID-19, meaning that the NPOs did focus more on social media activities, but since they had a lack of resources, the resulting activity on the platforms shows no change.

Accordingly, this analysis started right after the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, as explained in the previous section. As highlighted previously, there could be gaps between what interviewees said regarding the social media activities of NPO and what happens on these platforms. Therefore, relying only on interview data could have excluded important insights that might explain how NPOs have adapted to the social media logics. For example, an interviewee stated that the aim of most of their social media activities was creating awareness. Hence, the number of likes and comments on these posts demonstrates that they have been successful. However, most of their posts, which tried to create awareness, had a few likes that, on average, were less than 10 per cent of the number of their followers, which may indicate a lack of success by their own criteria. This example demonstrates how the content analysis of the social media posts could inform and provide more depth into the themes that emerged from the interview data. Given that the nature of the information in social media posts mostly consists of text and pictures/videos, content analysis was chosen

as the way to analyse the social media posts. Bryman and Bell (2014) suggest that content analysis is the most appropriate approach for analysing written data and pictures (Bryman *et al.*, 2014). This is why many studies that look at how and why NPOs use social media platforms tend to use content analysis (e.g. Waters *et al.*, 2009b; Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012b; Obar, Zube and Lampe, 2012; Guo and Saxton, 2014; Di Lauro, Tursunbayeva and Antonelli, 2019).

In the studies, which I reviewed in the literature review chapter, the content analysis allowed these researchers to systematically and objectively analyse the data available on social media platforms and identify patterns to gain insights into how and why NPOs use social media in their communications. For example, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), in order to understand how NPOs use these platforms to engage with their stakeholders, classified the microblogging updates of NPOs using the content analysis methods (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a). In another study, Water *et al.* (2009), by content analysis of the Facebook pages of 50 nonprofit organisations in their study, examined how these organisations used Facebook to engage with stakeholders (Waters *et al.*, 2009a). Waters & Lo (2012) used content analysis of the Facebook pages of 101 NPOs from different cultural backgrounds and identified cultural differences in terms of using Facebook features (Waters and Lo, 2012). These studies depending on their purpose, deployed different techniques to analyse the social media data. All of them consist of selecting the social media accounts and reviewing their posts, either by using the platform APIs and some code (e.g., in Python) to download the posts or by simply using the user interface. In order to do quantitative analysis on the posts, most studies use some sort of

database (e.g., SQLite) or spreadsheet to store the data so they can aggregate the data and calculate various metrics on them.

Furthermore, depending on their objectives, certain studies, like Lovejoy & Saxton (2012), developed a coding manual to categorise the posts (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012b). The coding manuals were verified similarly to this study by ensuring two or more independent people would categorise the posts similarly (see section 3.9), and if they did not, the coding manual was revised, and this step was repeated. Section 3.8.1 elaborates on the foundation of these categorisations and their comparison to the studies existing in the literature.

According to Holsti (1969), “Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectivity and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages.” (Holsti 1969, cited in Bryman, 2016, p. 14). Accordingly, Bryman (2016) states that there are two essential qualities in the process of this analysis: being objective and systematic. The use of a coding schedule and a coding manual in which rules are clearly formulated in advance, to then be applied to the messages, is one of the ways that help the objectivity of the content analysis. This reduces bias in the analysis process as much as possible. Being systematic, in this context, means the rules are applied to all messages in a consistent way. By applying these two qualities in the process of content analysis, the findings are more likely to be replicable.

Prior studies, e.g. Guo and Saxton’s (2014) and my data (see Table 8), indicate that Facebook and Twitter are two of the most popular platforms among NPOs. Moreover, they were also the common platforms among all the interviewed NPOs in this research; hence, the content

of Facebook and Twitter accounts in the form of posts, and other social media interactions, such as the number of likes, comments and shares, are the units of analysis of this research.

The spread of COVID-19 and restriction on face-to-face activities has been considered a factor that could significantly impact mediated communications of NPOs, such as their social media activities, because NPOs could have substituted their face-to-face activities with an online format. Therefore, I studied the social media activities of NPOs before and during the pandemic. The posts between 15th to 31st May 2020 were chosen as that was two months after the lockdown began when charities had become used to the new situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This data was then compared with the same period in 2019 to consider and assess the impact of any changes occurring as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This element of the research design was, of course, unplanned, but it allowed for unexpected insights into the topic of this research. Like most quantitative methods, the questions a researcher seeks to answer via content analysis need to be precisely specified (Bryman, 2016). The results of the thematic content analysis of semi-structured interviews are the basis of the questions the content analysis is trying to answer. Hence, in the following sections, there will be a brief reference to each of the themes to clarify the relevance of each question that the content analysis is trying to answer.

As aforementioned, coding is a vital phase of content analysis as it ensures the analysis is objective and systematic. A coding manual and coding schedule are the two main elements that are required to achieve these two qualities. A coding manual provides information about what needs to be done and where (Bryman, 2016). This has been briefly explained in the

following paragraphs, where the questions of the content analysis were specified. The complete version of the coding manual is available in the appendix of this research. Table 11 shows the coding schedule of this research and the relevant codes and possible values under each column. All of these codes will be explained in detail in the next section.

To assess the social media activity of each participating NPO, I conducted a thorough manual inspection of their Facebook and Twitter accounts. I carefully analysed the content of their posts on both platforms during two specific time periods: between May 15th and May 31st, 2020, as well as the same period in 2019. In order to accurately capture key factors such as the use of happy faces or the inclusion of pictures or videos, I designed a comprehensive content analysis manual (see Appendix IV). This manual was created with the purpose of providing clear and concise guidelines for the analysis of each post. After designing the manual, I reviewed all the posts sent by NPOs, one by one and analysed them according to the guidelines set in the content analysis manual. The analysis of the social media posts was not done using the platforms' API but by using the normal user interfaces of Twitter and Facebook. Throughout this process, I carefully examined a total of 909 Facebook and Twitter posts from various NPOs. All the collected data were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet where each row represented a post from an organisation and its attributes such as its date, its intent according to Lovejoy & Saxton's(2012) categorisation, whether they contained images or videos, the number of likes, comments, retweets, etc. The data in the analysis phase was aggregated in various ways to deduce different metrics per organisation and overall.

Name of the NPO	Date of Posts	Type of Post	Comprising Picture/Video	Comprising Happy image	Comprising Story	Comprising Link	No. Followers	No. Likes	No. Comments	No. Shares
	DATE	"I.C", "I.O", "C.T", "C.R", "A.D", "A.E", "A.V", "A.B"	1/0	1/0	1/0	1/0	NUMBER	NUMBER	NUMBER	NUMBER

Table 11: Coding Schedule for the content analysis of the social media activities of the participating NPOs

3.8.1 Questions and Coding Variables

This section will explain the questions that the content analysis seeks to answer and will elaborate on the coding process of this analysis. To clarify and justify these questions, the relevance of each question to the theme from semi-structured interviews will be explained.

3.8.1.1 Type of a Post

One of the themes that emerged from the interview data was that the number of likes and comments was considered a defining factor of success from the participant's point of view. These numbers, as a measure of success, could have more relevance to posts that aim to deliver information to the public, but maybe not to the same level for posts that aim to induce action. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, according to Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), the communicative function of NPOs' social media posts could be categorised into three main categories: information, community and action (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a). Conducting content analysis of the posts and quantifying the number of posts that each category comprises can provide a better understanding of how appropriate these metrics are to

measure the success of the posts based on their intended aim. Accordingly, the initial question is what percentage of each category comprises on Facebook and Twitter during the specified study periods.

In the coding process, an information post was defined as “a post that includes information about a cause or the NPO.”. These posts were respectively coded as “*I.C.*” if the information is about a cause and “*I.O.*” for those about the NPO. A community post was defined as “a post that gave recognition and thanked the donors or replied to messages.” “*C.T.*” and “*C.R.*” codes were given to each of these two types of community posts. An action post was defined as “a post that encourages the public to donate, to attend events, become a volunteer or to buy a product.” In the same order “*A.D.*”, “*A.E.*”, “*A.V.*” and “*A.B.*” codes were given to these posts. It is worth mentioning whenever more than one purpose was apparent in posts; its primary function was recorded.

3.8.1.2 Frequency of Posts on Daily Bases

Posting daily was mentioned as a way that participants of this research used to attract public attention. The question is whether, in practice, these organisations post on a daily basis, and if so, how many? Hence the date of each post was another data point that was recorded in the Excel file. Moreover, a number of interviewees noted that face-to-face restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the importance of social media for their organisations; Therefore, the number of posts for both periods of 15th to 31st May 2020 and 15th to 31st May 2019 were recorded. Comparing the number of posts in these two periods shows whether

the importance of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic was manifested in the activities of such organisations.

3.8.1.3 Picture, Videos, Happy face, Sad images and Story Present in Posts

One of the interview themes shows that including pictures/videos, portraying a happy face, an image that provokes sad feelings, and storytelling are the main ways of attracting attention from the point of view of participants. Hence, the use of each of these elements in the post was coded. A separate column was given to each of these elements, and the presence/absence of each element in a post was recorded as 1/0. The use of picture, videos, happy face and sad images in social media posts were easy to examine, whereas to decide whether a post contained a story, its content needed to be analysed to check if it featured a number of elements: a protagonist, which could be beneficiary, NPOs supporters or even the NPO itself, a goal that the protagonist needs or want to fulfil and expand the way that the protagonist did, could or would fulfil his/her goal (Burnett, 2014).

3.8.1.4 Frequency of links

Shortening the text but including a link is another way that S/M NPOs encourage their audience to read the posts. Additionally, some participants mentioned the primary use of social media was to redirect the audience to their websites that contained their main contents. So, it was investigated how many of the posts included a link. The frequency of this variable was shown using numeric numbers in a separate column.

3.8.1.5 Number of likes, comments and shares

Another theme indicates that participants of this research perceive their activities as successful on social media. The main metrics that they considered for their success are the number of likes, comments and shares of their posts. Therefore, the question at hand is how successful these NPOs have been in their social media activities based on these metrics of success. Accordingly, how many likes, comments and share each post received on Facebook and Twitter between the 15th to 31st of May 2020 and the 15th to 31st of May 2019 has been recorded.

The collection of the interview data was explained in section 3.4, and its analysis in section 3.7. This section provided further details on the content analysis of the social media accounts of the participants. The next section will provide more details on the verification of the data analysis phase. This will be then followed by the researcher's self-reflection to shed light on how the researcher could have implicated the data collection and analysis phase of this research and how these were minimized. Then in section 3.11, the ethical considerations of this research will be discussed.

3.9 Verification of Data Analysis

In order to demonstrate the value of this research, its findings must be valid and reliable. Hence, this section presents the approach that has been taken for verification of the findings of this research. It will be discussed that peer review has been used in this research to promote more valid results. It will be clarified that although peer review has been more for

verification and recommendation of quantitative research, it is also an imperative component of qualitative research.

A researcher's interpretation plays an important role in the findings of qualitative research, resulting in a situation where potentially the same data results in the emergence of different findings. One of the responses to this criticism by qualitative analysis advocates is that no research can demonstrate reality by use of an absolute objective view, and all, to some extent, are subjective presentations of reality. This issue is the core of the debate on the verifiability of qualitative data analysis. Although the verification of qualitative data is not as precise as the verification of quantitative one, scholars declared it can mitigate the researcher's bias and make the qualitative analysis more rigorous (Burnard *et al.*, 2008).

There are two main ways for validating the findings of qualitative research: interviewee validation, whereby data will be returned back to the interviewee for validation of the researcher's interpretation, and peer review, in which another experienced qualitative researcher verifies the analysis of the data (Burnard *et al.*, 2008). Interviewee validation has not been chosen for this research since it was time-consuming, and most of the interviewees struggled to find time to conduct the interview itself. Moreover, if interviewees felt their view regarding the meaning of success in social media is not as appropriate as it should be, they may amend it. Hence, the validity of this research was established through peer review validation. A doctoral student, experienced in qualitative data analysis was contacted to assess and review the identified themes from the data. As it was not practical to ask the researcher to verify constructed themes from all data, she was asked to randomly select two

numbers, which referred to the interviews. She provided comments and suggestions on each theme that helped the wording of the themes. By analysis of those two samples, the findings of this research, to some extent, were verified.

As for the contents analysis, to ensure the objectivity of the process, the coding manual and a few random posts in various categories were passed to a PhD graduate who had a background in both qualitative and quantitative research. I asked him to categorise the messages according to the manual. The results of the categorisation were compared to my own categorisations to see if there were any mismatches. Given the task is not a complex one, the categories almost matched, and the manual did not require any alterations. This provides further assurance that the results of the content analysis are reproducible using the coding manual.

3.10 The Researcher's Self-reflection

Sense-making and interpretation of collected data by a researcher is an integral process of qualitative research. Prior knowledge, life experience and values of the researcher are driving factors in the sense-making and interpretation process. The importance of these elements has roots in the ontological beliefs of the interpretivism paradigm that social reality is being constructed rather than being discovered. This is in line with Miles and Huberman(1994), who hold that the collected information is interpreted subjectively with the values of the researchers in the qualitative approach (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

A researcher in a reflexive process tries to be aware of these influences and acknowledge them. The influence of the researcher on the findings of a qualitative study could be regarded as an important limitation of these types of studies. However, a researcher, by clarifying his/her pre-understanding of the topic as well as mentioning the elements that could have impacted his/her interpretation of collected data, could reduce the subjective interpretation or at least makes it transparent. Moreover, the self-reflection of researchers could be counted as another contextual aspect of the phenomenon under study, and its declaration could provide a richer picture of the study.

According to Creswell et al. (2016), to have proper reflexivity, a researcher needs to be conscious of the inherited biases coming from his/her values, culture, experience and assumptions. Creswell et al.(2016) also emphasised that a researcher needs to explain how these elements shape his/her interpretation of data (Creswell and Poth, 2016). During the research process, the experience, assumptions, and knowledge of a researcher evolve, so it should not be considered a constant. Accordingly, the effects of these elements are not limited only to the interpretation of the researcher in the data analysis process; It happens in the form of a mutual continuous process between the researcher and the phenomenon under the study (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

Successful reflexivity requires the researcher to think about the whole process of the research and how his/her value, experience and knowledge influenced the research and vice-versa. According to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), the lens through which a researcher studies a phenomenon must be scrutinised by him/herself in reflexivity. This self-scrutiny is an essential

measure to verify the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Hence, in the following paragraphs, I will try to acknowledge my views regarding social media, the meaning of success, and non-profit organisations' activities on these platforms.

I have two accounts on social media; I rarely post on these platforms but regularly check the contents of my feeds to know the news and keep in touch with my friends. Given that there are many other social media platforms that I am not as familiar with, I could have a blind spot in terms of social media features on newer platforms like TikTok. Unfortunately, it is hard to master these features through reading guides and literature without actively using them. Given that the NPOs studied all shared the platforms I am more familiar with, i.e. Twitter and Facebook, this was not a big barrier for analysing their activities and making sense of the interviews.

My personal experience of social media has been that those who are close to me communicate and present themselves differently from how I know them on social media platforms. This is neither negative nor positive per se, but just an observation. For instance, people are much more aware of the reaction of others on social media, and I often hear the question, "How come you did not like my post/tweet?". We like to be seen and liked, of course, but the very measurable and traceable numbers on social media made this a lot more tangible and explicit. Another observation I had was the near obsession of those around me in checking how much attention their post gathered by checking their accounts tens of times in an hour or so. To summarise, my personal experience with a very small sample of close

friends and family has been that people change their behaviour as a result of using social media; some people use less and some more. The expectation that this created in my mind has been that social media could be an agent of change, not only in our communication but also in the way we behave. This could have led me to overstate the mediatization of NPOs as a result of using social media. I have tried to mitigate this by trying to stick to the data I have gathered and not neglecting other factors that could have impacted the behaviour of the studied NPOs, such as their resource constraints.

I have worked with a crowdfunding start-up for a period as a consultant to help them attract funding for the projects running on the platform. The experience has shown me that the many followers and activities on social media do not necessarily translate into more funding. However, most of the funders of the projects were also followers of the Twitter or Instagram accounts of the start-up. However, a campaign on social media getting more likes did not translate in a meaningful way to more funding for the project. This experience made an impression on me that maybe supporting a project takes more than just creating a vibe on social media about its charitable cause through getting likes, etc. This made me think these social media metrics could sometimes be misleading as the only or the key measure of success. This could have made me biased to undervalue the potential value of social media metrics in the research. I tried to overcome this possible bias by studying various literature that looks at these metrics as the measure of attention and justifies it in that context. Of course, the awareness of this potential bias made me more cautious in the interview process as well as making conclusions about these metrics that don't have a basis in the data.

As a researcher, my prior experience and assumptions about NPOs and social media could impact the outcome of my research. To tackle this concern, I took a proactive approach by openly documenting my assumptions and biases in my interview diary, which allowed me to recognise and avoid potential biases. Furthermore, these explicit explanations significantly improved the transparency of my research. Subsequently, I incorporated these reflections into the "The researcher's Self-reflection" section within the Methodology chapter.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) emphasise the significance of avoiding leading questions, as they can expose the interviewer's bias or assumption (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Accordingly, leading questions may manipulate interviewees into adopting the viewpoint of the interviewer. To address this issue and reduce the impact of my assumptions, I conscientiously formulated interview questions without leading elements and employed probing techniques to gather additional information.

Furthermore, the utilisation of open-ended sets of questions empowers the researcher to provide interviewees with opportunities to express their perspectives without the restrictions of closed-ended questions. This approach encourages interviewees to share their viewpoints openly (Chenail, 2011). The researcher's assumptions may influence closed-ended questions, hence I consciously avoided framing questions like "Do you agree that social media does not lead to mobilization of your NPO's supporters?". This is one of the reasons that I also employed semi-structured interviews with broad and open-ended questions. For example, I asked participants what they considered a successful social media activity and the pros and cons of social media for their organisations. The preparation of questions before the

interview, asking the same questions and in the same order, also helped to reduce the impact of my assumptions and biases influencing the process of the interview. Also, I did not ignore any data that contradicted my assumptions and included them in the findings of my research. For instance, I elaborated on the perspective of INT 8 (see section 4.3.4), who had a different view of successful social media activity.

To further mitigate the impact of my assumptions, I employed a sequential mixed-method design, as in the quantitative methods, there is less room for the researcher's interpretations to bias the analysis. This approach involved backing up the emerging themes from the interviews with quantitative data. I did not ignore any data that contradicted my assumptions and included them in the findings of my research. For instance, I elaborated on the perspective of INT 8 (see section 4.3.4), who had a different view of successful social media activity. Finally, to minimise the effects of biases, I asked a second researcher to "sense check" or peer-review my codes, themes, and findings. This approach ensured that my research was as objective as possible and that my assumptions did not impact the validity of my findings.

In the next section, the ethical considerations of this research will be discussed in detail, followed by section 3.12, which will conclude this chapter.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

This section emphasises the importance of ethical consideration in all research, as well as the code of ethics used in this research in order to protect the participants from harm or pressure.

In addition, since social media data was collected in this research, I will explain the ethical implications that I considered for utilising these data in my research.

According to Lee and Renzetti(1990), ethics should not only be considered in research with sensitive topics. Instead, it is a vital aspect that should be considered in all stages of any research (Lee and Renzetti, 1990). Accordingly, before the start of the data collection stage of this research, I tried to think of ethical principles involved in this research and followed ethical codes that take care of these principles.

Different forms of interactions with participants in various contexts happen in social research. To protect the participants of research from harm and pressure, a researcher needs to make ethical decisions based on his/her own context of the research. Hence, following a single set of ethical rules may not cover all the ethical issues that could arise at different stages of research. This is in line with De Vaus (2004), who states that it is not possible nor sufficient to follow a single set of ethical rules in a research (De Vaus 2004, cited in Ambrose-Oji, Atkinson and Pollard, 2020). Hence, I looked at two of the most used and cited codes of ethics which were provided on the British Sociological Association (BSA) and Social Research Association (SRA) sites and selected the relevant ethical issues that may arise in this research. The principles followed in this research include (a) voluntary participation; (b) informed consent from all participants; (c) preservation of participants' anonymity; (d) safeguarding of confidentiality. In order to make sure the research fulfilled these principles, it went through the ethical review process of the university in July 2019 and obtained full approval. The way

that these principles were applied to this research will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Two forms were given to each participant, an information sheet and a consent form. The information sheet included:

- A jargon-free short summary of the research;
- How interviewing participants can contribute to the result of this research;
- How interview data would be stored;
- Voluntary essence of the participation by emphasising on participant's right to withdraw from the interview at any point before the research publication.

Moreover, it was considered that participants may have some concerns in speaking about the techniques or methods that they are using in social media, as this information could be considered the organisation's intellectual property. Hence, the Information sheet emphasised that participants are free to refuse to answer any questions if they wish (see Appendix C. for a copy of the information sheet). The participants were fully informed about the research, and written permissions were obtained from them in the consent form (see Appendix D. for a copy of the consent form). In addition, before the start of each interview, participants were reminded of the topic of research and that s/he was free to refuse to answer any question and free to withdraw altogether if they wished.

The confidentiality of participants was fully respected. In order to keep each recorded interview anonymous, a code was given to each one, and I made sure that interviews did not

have any identifiable sign to reveal the name of the NPO or interviewee's identification. Moreover, NPOs or interviewees will not be named during any dissemination of this research.

Although the topic of the interviews is not inherently distressing or likely to cause embarrassment, the interviews were conducted respectfully; Attention was paid to interviewees' reactions, and when it seemed uncomfortable, a pause or stop was offered to them. Moreover, all the questions asked in the interviews were targeted to obtain the most relevant information for the question of the research only and nothing more.

Collecting social media data from NPOs and content analysis of them was another method used in this research. It's important to note that using social media data in research raises ethical concerns that must be addressed during data collection and analysis. To address these ethical issues, I followed the diagrammatic framework by Townsend and Wallace (2016), which is shown below (Townsend and Wallace, 2016).

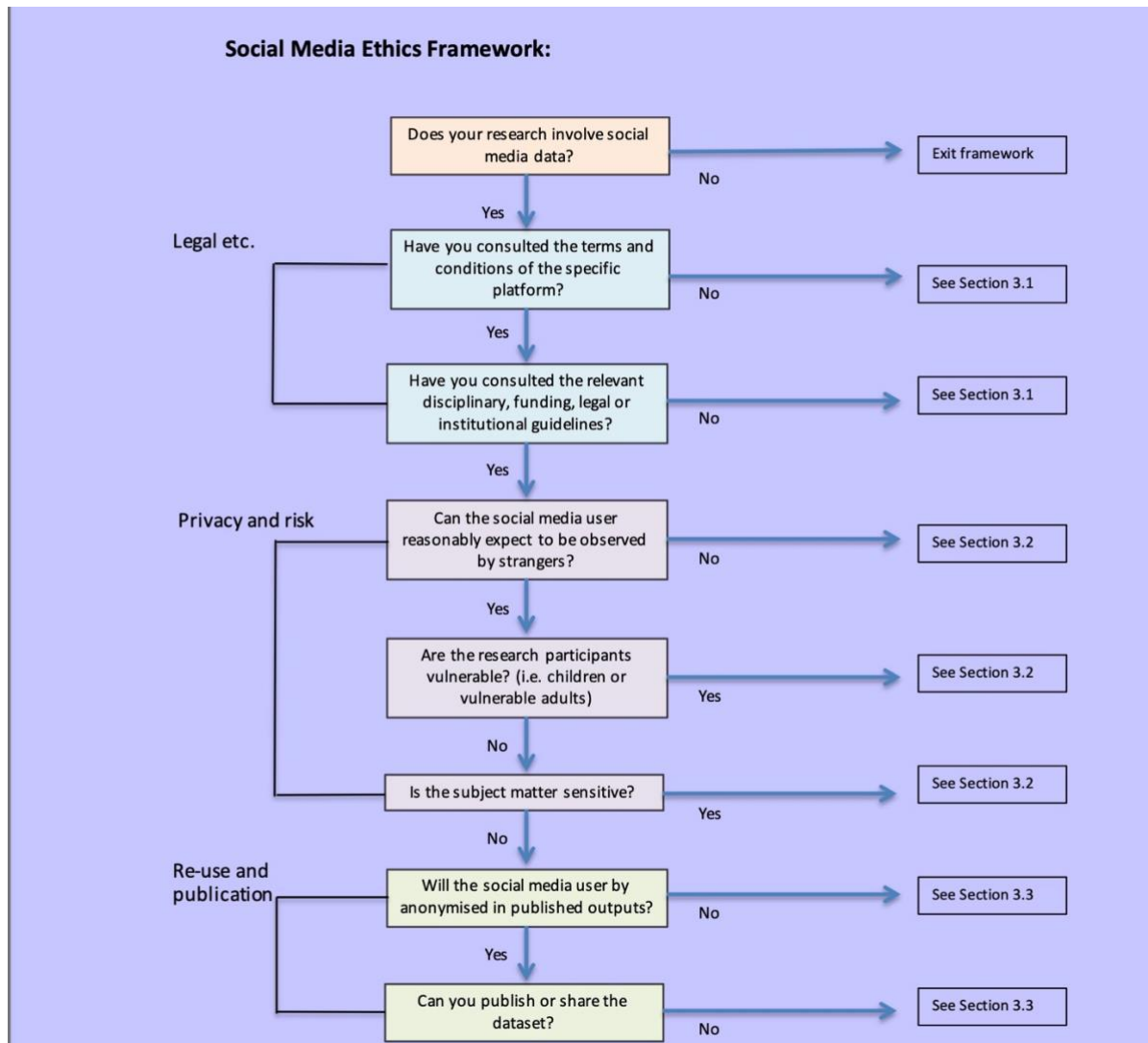


Figure 19: Social media ethics framework (Townsend and Wallace, 2016)

Following the above diagram, legal considerations were carefully considered when collecting social media data from NPOs on Facebook and Twitter. Firstly, I thoroughly read the terms and conditions of both platforms to ensure that data collection complied with their policies. It was confirmed that collecting data from public Facebook and Twitter posts of NPOs was permissible under the platforms' terms and conditions.

privacy and risk considerations were also considered. The data collected was publicly available and not restricted to a closed group or supporters of NPOs. All social media accounts from which data was collected were open to the public, and NPOs themselves intended to reach a wider audience by posting on these platforms. No membership approvals were required to access the data, and ethical issues were not a concern.

Additionally, no young or vulnerable social media users were involved in collecting data, and the data collected was not potentially harmful to social media users. To maintain the complete anonymity of participated NPOs in this research, careful consideration will be given to the use of data in any publications and presentations.

3.12 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented a detailed review and justification of my philosophical assumptions, the research design and the implementation of the methodology used in this research project. In this research, the interpretivism paradigm was used as the foundation of other stages. These stages include a purposive snowball sampling strategy to recruit participants, semi-structured face-to-face/online interviews and content analysis of relevant data on social media platforms and finally, the thematic data analysis. Having explained my assumptions and knowledge that evolved in the analysis process of this research, I then went on to explain the possible effects that my biases and perceptions could have had on the findings. I also explained the reasons for conducting pilot studies and the way that verification of findings has been done. Finally, I described the ethical principles applied in this research in

order to protect the participants. The next chapter will offer the results of the data analysis on the basis explained in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings and their connections to the research questions will be explained. These findings build upon the existing knowledge discussed in the literature review, providing a comprehensive illustration of their relevance and contributions to the field. As explained in the methodology chapter, the findings are based on qualitative data collected from fifteen interviews and content analysis of 909 Facebook and Twitter posts of the participating NPOs. This research focuses on how small to medium size non-profit organisations define a successful social media activity, how they measure it and how their social media practices are influenced by their perception of success. The findings of this research are presented alongside the interview themes and content analysis results that have contributed to these findings in Table 12. The eight findings are drawn from ten themes that emerged in the interview data that either are confirmed or complemented by the content analysis.

The findings of this research demonstrate the mediatization of the NPOs in their dependency on social media platforms, behaviour on these platforms, content production and the way they measure the success of their social media activities. Additionally, the findings point to some possible contributing factors to the mediatization of these NPOs, such as resource deficiency, the way they learn about best ways of communicating through social media and changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns.

The mediatization pattern directly addresses the questions of this research on how the definition of successful social media activity has been formed by the norms found on social media platforms rather than being driven by the NPOs' aims in undertaking these activities. Moreover, the other related findings show how this definition of success, and the focus on attracting attention, formed the activities of the NPOs on these platforms. The resource deficiency finding sets the context for the mediatization and the pressure points on the NPOs that helped and intensified this process.

In the rest of this chapter, the eight findings will be presented in detail. Each finding will be discussed in the context of relevant interview themes, and example quotes from the interviews will be provided to make the finding clearer. Additionally, the content analysis results will be shown to confirm the findings or complement them from the activities of participating NPOs. As the findings are discussed in each part, the relevant literature will be discussed, and the similarities and differences in relation to the existing literature and the finding will be outlined.

	Interview Theme	Content Analysis Result	Finding
1	Staff have a heavy workload and multiple focuses.		Human resource deficiency impact on the social media activities
2	Social Media is essential for communication with the public.	At least one post was sent on 70% of days on Twitter/Facebook.	Social media presence is viewed as essential
3	Number of likes and other similar metrics are counted as the measure of success.	Over half of the posts are “action” posts rather than “information” and “community” posts.	Submission to the values of social media in defining success
	Imitation of social media activities of other NPOs.	Less than 1% of followers react to the Twitter/Facebook posts with comments, likes or shares.	
4	Different social media platforms are used to target different demographics.	Presence on 3 different social media platforms on average.	Presence on multiple platforms without a clear or consistent rationale
	Multiple platforms are used with no clear rationale.	71% of posts on Twitter were the same as the Facebook posts.	
5	Algorithms of social media shapes some activities.	At least one post was sent on 70% of days on Twitter/Facebook.	Influence of social media algorithms on the activities of the NPOs
6	Use of imagery content, happy images and shortening the text for grabbing attention.	Over 83% of posts includes a video or a picture.	Use of happy imagery and shortening of the textual contents
		~3% of the posts contain sad images.	
		~58% of posts contain a hyperlink.	
7	Storytelling is perceived as an effective way of communication on social media platforms.	Only 7% of posts contain stories.	Storytelling is compelling but underutilised
8	COVID-19 increased the importance of social media activities.	The quantity and quality of posts did not increase consistently for NPOs.	COVID-19 pandemic made social media platforms more important

4.1 Human resource deficiency impact on the social media activities

When participants were asked about their job titles, their answers were compared to what they do on a typical day at work. It should reasonably be expected that how an employee spends their day at work would be closely related to their job title. However, more than half of the participants (11/15) mentioned unrelated tasks to their assigned titles. Hence, the broadness of tasks compared to the job title was a theme that has been constructed from interview data. For example, an interviewee who was the “compliance officer” was also in charge of the social media accounts of the NPO. Whereas a compliance officer usually is responsible for ensuring that the organisation fulfils all its legal obligations. In another instance, an interviewee was convinced that she performs multiple roles in her NPO because she works in a small organisation. The mismatch between the job title and the actual daily work can be seen in the quotes below from the participants:

INT 3: “I think that I’m doing a lot more stuff than a compliance officer and it does not make sense that I’m called under this title, because I work in the media team now [...]”

INT 4: “My role is project manager. Because we are a small charity, my role is quite broad. I’m responsible for overseeing the staff team and for overseeing the whole program of sessions and responsible for the logistics of running the sessions, operations and everything from resourcing sessions to monitoring and evaluating

them. I'm responsible for lots of work that the charity does. I'm also responsible for our communications through social media and for overseeing them and also running some of the sessions online".

INT 7: "My role tends to be a bit of everything, so I would say I often feel... sometimes I feel... I get kind of (on the) bad side of it because I don't get to be with the volunteers or working with the children."

INT 13: "My role is split into two parts. The programs side is delivering our program to young people and schools, which is now on hold because the schools are closed. So, my role is recruiting volunteers to go and deliver the programs and supporting the volunteers on the program when they are running and delivering them. The second part of my job is marketing, which revolves around social media, so I manage all the social media channels, update the websites and emails, and newsletters, and essentially do the strategy for social media and marketing approach. It is quite broad".

Lack of clear organisational process and/or lack of human resources could be two of the factors that result in the staff of an organisation being required to perform broader tasks compared to their job descriptions. However, the data from the current research suggests that from the point of participants, the latter, i.e., lack of human resources, is present in these organisations. 9 out of 15 interviewees mentioned the lack of human resources as a problem in their organisations. This could be a

contributing factor to these participants being required to perform many different tasks at the same time. For example:

INT 4: "I am also responsible for creating the sort of monitoring framework that we have for our organisation, so trying to sort of prove the impact of the work that we do. I'm also responsible for our communications (social media) and for everything outreached and also running some of the sessions, and working directly with families. We are such a small organisation, and I have already discussed we have so much to do, not that many people to do it."

INT 8: "I'm the director of a small charity, which means that we don't have many staff. So, when it comes to things like marketing, for example, I usually make decisions about that. And I run the fundraising. I run the marketing and the services. So, I'm in charge of three main things."

INT 10: "There are lots of different tasks that we have to do, and we need to make sure that we do not pay attention to one bit and take our attention from another. And there are lots of things that come up. Always because of loads of work, there are last-minute tasks. Alongside the routine that we have, there is lots of admin ... as well."

INT 11: "There is no typical day. It's quite varied. Because we are such a small organisation umm... so we don't have enough staff for doing the tasks that we need to do, so I cover some of them. A few years ago, we didn't do so many social media activities because we did not have time and staff for it."

INT 5: “[Laughed], I laughed because the typical day does not end. It is like a very interesting set of hours. We call it flexible working, but it is like constant working, so umm, because of the nature and size of the team and the kind of work that we do, there is lots of stuff that happen, and our team is too small for doing this. For example, during the evening or over the night, because there are other elements that also play.”

The human resources deficiency emerged as a theme that shows it is a challenge for participating NPOs to handle social media activities adequately. So, while the human resource deficiency was mentioned as the reason behind multitasking by the staff (see above), this deficiency was mentioned as a challenge for conducting social media activities, for example:

INT 11: “I’m a one-person communication team, so we do not have the capacity to continually post on our platforms. That’s why they’re not active as they should be.”

INT 13: “And even things like LinkedIn, we want to sort of operate properly in there, but because we do not have enough resources to spend time and effort on it, we just keep it.”

INT 15: “I’d say we have the presence on different platforms, but we are not doing enough to make sure people see us on them. So we have to make sure that umm... to use them properly the stage one is making sure that we reach a state that we are posting quality good materials, and for doing this, we need an expert”.

Of all challenges that have led NPOs to not use social media effectively, the most frequently mentioned challenge by participants of this study (9/15) was the lack of human resources. As mentioned in section 2.6, Gulyas's (2016) study on small UK NPOs, had a similar finding, where a third of their participants did not feel they could use social media effectively because of resource constraints (Gulyas, 2016). My study reveals that a significant proportion of participating NPOs, precisely two-thirds of them, experience resource constraints. The difference in the proportion of the NPOs with this concern could have various reasons, particularly the five years gap between my study and Gulyas's (2016) could have changed the landscape for these NPOs. Within five years, government funding has been cut, as mentioned in the introduction chapter. Furthermore, as discussed in the same chapter, the user base of social media platforms has experienced substantial growth, resulting in intensified competition among all organisations. This heightened competition potentially leads to an increased demand for resources to maintain a competitive and compelling presence on these platforms. While these could be the contributing factors, this study does not claim that the issue has become more significant over time, but merely that this issue is a concern among most of the small/medium size UK NPOs.

Other studies also support this finding. For example, Hou and Lampe (2015), in their study, which was mentioned in section 1.5.4, noted that limitations in time, human and financial resources are the main concerns that small NPOs have in using social media. However, the difference between my study and Hou and Lampe's (2015) study is that participants in my research mostly highlighted the lack of the human resource as the main challenge, whereas

the finding of Hou and Lampe's (2015) study emphasis on time as the primary challenges of NPOs for using social media platforms effectively.

Differences in the views found between these two studies regarding the main challenge of using social media could be explained by how they perceived social media tasks as part of their role. Participants of Hou and Lamp's (2015) study may perceive social media activities as part of their role since they emphasised time as the prime constraint. So, if they had enough time, they could have better utilised social media. At the same time, highlighting limitations in human resources as an important challenge in using social media could mean that the participants of the current study do not perceive social media tasks as their primary focus and job. So, more staff are needed to perform social media activities from their perspectives sufficiently.

This explanation is supported by my data showing a mismatch between the job role/title of interviewees in the organisations and the social media tasks that they are expected to undertake. It is also worth noting that monetary, human and time resources are linked in organisations, meaning that deficiency in one resource could cause limitation in another. In the case of NPOs, this rings true as well. Both volunteers and employees form part of the human resources in these organisations, but financial constraints may hinder their potential. Insufficient financial resources might limit the number of employees that an NPO can hire, thereby reducing the amount of time that can be dedicated to tasks.

Similarly, if unpaid volunteers replace employees, their training could require financial resources that are not adequate. Subsequently, the lack of sufficient human resources for NPOs may cause difficulty in achieving their goals. If the NPOs underachieve in their goals, they will damage the NPO's accountability. The accountability of the NPOs is vital for promoting charitable giving for their organisation. This could impact the public funding for the organisation, which was discussed in 1.4.1, which is an essential income resource for the NPOs (Connolly and Hyndman, 2013). This chain of impacts demonstrates how monetary constraints in an NPO limit human resource and vice-versa.

More than half of the participating NPOs in the current research did not have a dedicated and experienced social media manager or marketing officer. Based on the responses from interviewees, more than half of the participants (8/15) did not have marketing or communication-related job titles or experience; alongside other responsibilities and roles, they also took responsibility for social media sites. In other words, social media tasks fell on the shoulder of staff whose jobs was not intended to include marketing and communications. Phethean et al. (2013) noted the same issue: there is a lack of expert marketing or communication staff in the NPOs (Phethean, Tiropanis and Harris, 2013). Expertise in marketing can be built up over time if the staff have low turnover and experience cumulates in the organisation. However, there is a high rate of turnover among volunteers in the NPOs (Slatten *et al.*, 2021). For instance, between January 2021 and January 2022, the turnover rate of staff in the non-profit sector was the highest of all sectors, which was 12-18% (May, 2022). This high turnover could have contributed to the lack of experience in digital marketing within

NPOs. Relatedly, over-reliance on volunteers is a known challenge encountered by small NPOs (e.g., Kim and Peng, 2018). One study notes explicitly that social media tasks are mostly done by volunteers in small NPOs (Obar, Zube and Lampe, 2012). This lack of expertise and cumulation of experience in the NPOs itself can contribute to the formation of activities that match norms and values that are promoted by these platforms rather than the organisations' needs.

In addition to confirming the findings of previous studies, the research presented here extends the understanding of this phenomenon within smaller NPOs in the UK. Most of the studies in the literature focused on large NPOs and investigated barriers that they encounter for using social media. For example, Briones et al. (2011) study mentioned resource limitation as a barrier that the Red Cross faces when using social media (Briones *et al.*, 2011b). Another study that focused on twelve major UK charities concluded that the lack of skills and resources are barriers for these organisations in using social media (Quinton and Fennemore, 2013). However, few studies in the literature have explored the barriers in small/medium NPOs for using social media and have pointed out the human resources deficiency in this respect (e.g., Hou and Lampe, 2015). Moreover, most of these studies focus on US-based NPOs rather than those in the UK.

In summary, the finding of this research indicates that resource deficiency is one of the challenges that NPOs encounter in using social media effectively. Specifically, the lack of human resources was highlighted by the participants of this research. Although, lack of financial resources has not emerged as a theme from the data of this research. However, the

role of limited financial resources as a contributing factor in the ineffective use of social media by these organisations should not be disregarded. There needs to be more funding to ensure the training of staff for technology usage and the inability to retain expertise within NPOs. Consequently, ineffective use of social media could intensify the limited human resources of these organisations as they spend time without gaining the outcomes that help them to achieve their mission. This first theme is important for setting the context and providing the bigger picture for the seven other themes that emerged from the interview data regarding the social media impact on small NPOs.

4.2 Social media presence is viewed as essential

Most of the interviewees (12/15) considered social media as an essential medium for the communication of their organisation. And 5/15 of participants mentioned these platforms as one of the primary communication mediums in their organisations with the public. For 4 of the interviewees, the importance is mainly driven by the fact that their audiences are young people and primarily present and are connected on social media; 2 of these 4 NPOs work in the education sector, one in the mental health sector and the other one works in the art sector:

INT 8: "We communicate through a few things, but mostly social media. Our audience is young and definitely spends time on these platforms. So, we try to use this opportunity and communicate with them."

INT 10: "We could never give up on social media because our target audiences are on social media."

INT 11: "It is a really powerful tool, and you know we were in a network, and the way networks work is like it breeds themselves. So, for us, it is all about connections, so social media is kind of like a similar model that we have. For example, we might have a mentor whose mentees want to be a dancer, but the mentor works in the advertising sector, so she says, ok I'll connect you to my friend who is a dancer', so it is all about making those connections. That's how we have grown, and social media has accelerated that exercise."

INT 15: "...social media is quite important for us. I think actually, Umm...we can demonstrate to our funders the work that we are doing, and hopefully, people will be encouraged to nurture us, especially younger generations".

For (4/15) NPOs, social media is also used to direct their audience, who are present on these platforms, to their website:

INT 1: "Our website and social media platforms should be coherent in terms of design. [...]Because when people come to our website by clicking on the link of social media posts, we do not want to confuse them about where they have gone."

INT 10: "I think social media is an important medium. They are useful for us. We can use it as a direction to our website, and a lot of our activities are to direct people to our website so they can explore more of our content."

INT 11: "... these platforms (social media) are also useful to direct people to our website because each has different communication dynamic, and we need to use the potential of both of them to communicate properly with the public."

INT 14: "In general, there are people who find our content useful because we can see they regularly come to our website from Facebook."

Regardless of the different reasons for which the NPOs consider social media important, social media has become a key part of their communication strategy. The content analysis of the social media accounts of the participating NPOs also supports this. As seen in Table 14, in section 5.5, on average, the participating NPOs sent 1.78 posts per day. This average is diluted by more active NPOs who sent multiple posts per day or some NPOs that sent many posts on one day but not much on the other days. The other indicator in the same table is the percentage of days on which at least one post has been sent. The analysis indicates that 9 out of 15 sampled organisations make at least one post on ~70% of the days in the sample period. In light of the limited human resource theme mentioned in the previous section, consistency of sending posts in ~70% of days, which is ~24 of the 34 sample days in most NPOs, could indicate the importance of social media for these organisations in practice as well.

This finding is well supported in the existing literature. For instance, this echoes one of the key findings of Gulyas's (2016) study that social media has become part of UK small NPOs' infrastructure. Also, other US-based studies, which were mentioned in section 3.6, noted the same trend that nonprofit organisations are increasingly using these platforms to disseminate information and engage with stakeholders because of the popularity of these platforms (e.g. Waters and Jamal, 2011b; Nah and Saxton, 2013; Svensson, Mahoney and Hambrick, 2015; Guo and Saxton, 2018; An, 2019).

Media technologies are changing and evolving rapidly. Hence, the findings of the studies that focus on the impacts of these technologies need to be verified and validated after a period. Accordingly, despite this theme being similar to one of Gulyas's findings, five years gap exists between the current and Gulyas' study. Five years is a relatively long time, given the speed of development in technologies and in specific social media platforms. Accordingly, the findings of my study indicate that social media maintains its importance in 2019-2020 among small NPOs in the UK. Moreover, my study uses interviews with NPOs and content analysis of their activities on social media, whereas Gulyas used surveys and stakeholder forums (Gulyas, 2016).

The importance of social media among these NPOs has two consequences. Firstly, this increased communication through social media platforms means their communication becomes more mediated. As noted by media scholars (e.g. Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Hjarvard, 2004; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014), it is important to distinguish between mediated and mediatization concepts. Generally, as aforementioned in the literature review, a

mediated institution refers to a situation in that media become the key source of information through which the institution communicates with the public. According to Strömbäck (2008), in a situation like this, both the public and the institution rely on media to access each other's information. In this case, social media could increase the mediated communication between the public and the NPOs and contribute to the mediatization of these organisations. On the one hand, NPOs rely on media such as social media for making awareness, community building and cultivating action; On the other hand, this may lead the public to seek the information needed to support the NPOs via social media. In addition to the importance of social media, in this study, 5/15 of the participants mentioned social media as their primary way of communication with their stakeholders, so it could be an indication that they were mediated:

INT 8: "We primary use social media because the people we want to reach are young.[...] and in order to not spam people, we try to move our communication to social media."

INT 7: "We do have a website, but our social media without a doubt is our primary way of communication for us, [...] even if I am doing funding bit I forward it to the Facebook page, I might give them our website for a big overview but point them towards our Facebook, and I know they follow us[...]."

INT6: "Our communication with the public is more through social media. Our website is more like a shop window purpose for us. So it is quite static. We don't have the

capacity to continually upload new content to our website. So, It's fairly static. But through Twitter and Facebook, we can engage people with what we do on daily bases. I can say social media is primary way of communication with the public."

The mediatization process is constituted of different phases, as discussed in more detail in section 3.2, that begin with media becoming a primary channel of communication in that institution. Using social media as the main communication channel in NPOs could also create dependency on these platforms for these organisations. As illustrated by the above quotations, many participant NPOs in my study have reached this phase. Moreover, Gulyas's (2016) study supports this finding by emphasis on social media as part of small NPOs' infrastructure (Gulyas, 2016). Hjarvard (2008), in his definition, denotes dependency on media as a condition of the mediatization process; however, there is more to the process than just this. According to him, depending on or submitting to both media and media logic are other key parts of the mediatization process (Hjarvard, 2008). The following themes of the research will look at other mediatization phases that could have appeared to some degree among the NPOs under the study and their further implications.

The second consequence of the importance of social media among the studied NPOs is that they consider it a key contributor to their success. As explained in the introduction chapter, communication is key for NPOs to build relationships with individuals for various reasons, such as enhancing the image of the organisation, accountability, generating awareness of causes, engagement and transparency (Di Lauro, Tursunbayeva and Antonelli, 2019). Hence, if NPOs consider social media as an important or the most important communication channel

that they have, it means the effective use of social media could increase the success of the NPOs. In other words, the success of the NPOs in their aim and objectives is influenced by their success in social media activities. This highlights the importance of “success” in social media activities. Now, this research is well focused on the meaning of this “success” from NPOs’ point of view. Hence, it could evaluate if there is any misalignment between the “success” in social media as defined by NPOs versus what the aim and objectives of NPOs have been from these engagements. This misalignment will be demonstrated in the subsequent themes.

4.3 Submission to the values of social media in defining success

This section is split into five parts, starting with how the social media posts of the NPOs have different objectives (section 4.3.1), while they settled for attention as the metric for their success (section 4.3.2). Then in section 4.3.3, the unproven nature of this metric in the context of the studied NPOs is discussed. Section 4.3.4 discusses how the findings point to the mediatization of success, and the last section explains how the NPOs' anecdote of being successful does not match the reality based on the content analysis of this research.

4.3.1 Social Media posts have different objectives

It has been found that NPOs use Twitter for three main functions: to disseminate information, to build community, or to mobilise supporters (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a). Content analysis of social media posts of the studied NPOs shows that all the 909 posts studied in my project (which includes posts on Twitter and Facebook) fall into these three main categories, i.e.,

“information”, “community”, and “action”. However, unlike Lovejoy and Saxton’s study, which found informational posts to be the most common type, I find that “action” posts are the most common. Despite this proportion of “action” posts, the thematic analysis of the interview data shows that these NPOs measure the success of their posts by the number of likes, comments, etc., rather than by their success in prompting the intended action.

The posts that contained information about the NPO’s cause, reports of the NPO’s activities, or any information related to its audience were grouped into the information category. I paid close attention to the aim of each post to ensure exchange of information was the only aim of the posts so that they could be classified into category of information. In other words, the posts in the information category are not intended to promote any dialogue or mobilise supporters to take action except to encourage them to like, share or comment on the posts. Figure 20 provides an illustration of a Facebook post which was sent by one of the sampled NPOs of this research. The post aims to increase the accountability of the organisation by informing its audience about its activities.



Figure 20: Facebook post, which aims to make awareness.

As shown in Table 13, unlike Lovejoy & Saxton's (2012) and more recent studies such as Hou & Lampe's (2015) study, informational posts did not comprise most of the messages sent by the sampled NPOs of this research. Instead, posts that tend to mobilise an action comprise a higher percentage of the posts. Several factors may have caused the difference between these two studies and the current study: one could be the difference between the time each study was conducted. The present study was conducted nine years after Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) study and four years after Hou & Lampe's (2015). Social media usage may have evolved among NPOs, as social media is now more used to mobilise supporters' actions. An evolving trend in social media usage among NPOs could be traced in the finding of other studies in the literature. For example, Seo and Vu's (2020) findings indicate that social media is used less for delivering relevant information to journalists by NPOs compared to a decade ago (Seo and Vu, 2020). Moreover, Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) focused on the 100 largest NPOs in the

United States, and Hou & Lampe (2015) did not focus on the UK NPOs, whereas the current study focuses on S/M size NPOs in the UK. In addition, Lovejoy and Saxton's (2012) study analysed the contents of NPOs' Twitter posts only, whereas the content analysis of my research includes Facebook posts as well.

Aligned with the existing literature, the least number of messages sent by sampled NPOs were those aimed at creating dialogue and building an online community (e.g., Waters *et al.*, 2009a; Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a; Hou and Lampe, 2015). Community-building posts focus on triggering a dialogue between the public or strengthening relationships with online communities. To achieve this, these posts comprise acknowledgement of supporters' activities and thank their supporters. According to Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), four groups of tweets fulfil the community-building function: *giving recognition and thanks, acknowledgement of current and local events, responses to public reply messages and response solicitation* (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012a). Many posts under the community category also invite their audience to take some action. Hence, they could have been categorised as "action" or "community" posts. In these cases, the posts have been assigned to the action category on a case-by-case basis if it seems the ultimate driver for the post is mobilising action. The Facebook post depicted in Figure 21 is an example of a post that aims to build an online community by thanking the volunteers.

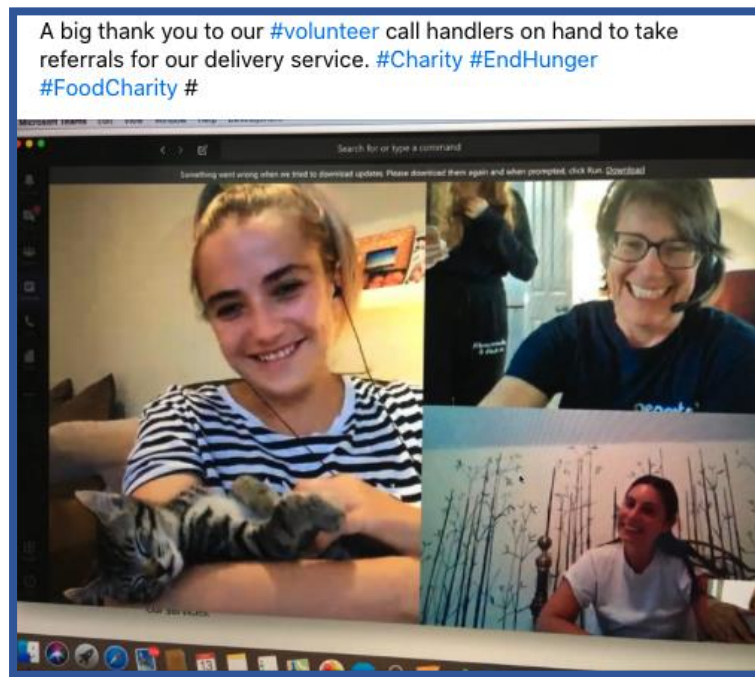


Figure 21: NPO's Facebook post, which aims to build community.

As shown in Table 13, such messages made up the smallest percentage compared to action and information categories. During the pandemic, the community category reached its highest percentage of 11%, which mostly thanked the donors or volunteers. Although the change is not significant, this could be due to the limitations posed by the pandemic, where community-building communication can no longer be performed face-to-face and during in-person events/activities. Hence more messages on social media are dedicated to this category.

The last category consists of all the messages that aim to encourage the public to carry out a more tangible action, such as donating money, attending events or buying products. These posts were classified into the action category. NPOs, by utilising social media for mobilising supporters go one step further from just informing the public; they want them to take action

to help the NPO achieve its mission. The content analysis of social media accounts of sampled NPOs shows that the “action” category comprises a greater percentage compared to the “information” and “community” categories. Figure 22 is an example of Facebook posts that belongs to the action category. Its function is to mobilise supporters by asking them to donate essential supplies to people in need.



Figure 22: NPO's Facebook posts, aimed to mobilize supporters.

Interviewee	Platform	Pre-Pandemic				Post-Pandemic				Total			
		Post#	Act.%	Info.%	Comm.%	Post#	Act.%	Info.%	Comm.%	Post#	Act.%	Info.%	Comm.%
INT1	Facebook	17	47%	47%	6%	16	38%	56%	6%	33	42%	52%	6%
	Twitter	23	26%	70%	4%	23	39%	57%	4%	46	33%	63%	4%
INT2	Facebook	19	74%	26%	0%	13	54%	15%	31%	32	66%	22%	13%
	Twitter	24	96%	4%	0%	8	38%	38%	25%	32	81%	13%	6%
INT3	Facebook	40	90%	5%	5%	39	69%	31%	0%	79	80%	18%	3%
	Twitter	19	100%	0%	0%	21	71%	29%	0%	40	85%	15%	0%
INT4	Facebook	20	65%	25%	10%	18	44%	39%	17%	38	55%	32%	13%
	Twitter	6	50%	50%	0%	18	44%	39%	17%	24	46%	42%	13%
INT5	Facebook	4	50%	25%	25%	11	64%	27%	9%	15	60%	27%	13%
	Twitter	6	83%	0%	17%	18	56%	39%	6%	24	63%	29%	8%
INT6	Facebook	48	25%	71%	4%	32	59%	34%	6%	80	37%	58%	5%
	Twitter	4	25%	75%	0%	20	45%	55%	0%	24	42%	58%	0%
INT7	Facebook	2	50%	50%	0%	26	69%	27%	4%	28	68%	29%	4%
	Twitter	25	20%	72%	8%	34	62%	32%	6%	59	44%	49%	7%
INT8	Facebook	2	50%	50%	0%	3	33%	33%	33%	5	40%	40%	20%
	Twitter	2	0%	100%	0%	8	38%	38%	25%	10	30%	50%	20%
INT9	Facebook	4	0%	100%	0%	8	0%	88%	13%	12	0%	92%	8%
	Twitter	0	0%	0%	0%	0	0%	0%	0%	0	0%	0%	0%
INT10	Facebook	24	46%	46%	8%	15	40%	53%	7%	39	44%	49%	8%
	Twitter	23	26%	70%	4%	21	43%	52%	5%	44	34%	61%	5%
INT11	Facebook	18	61%	28%	11%	23	52%	30%	17%	41	56%	29%	15%
	Twitter	9	44%	56%	0%	27	41%	44%	15%	36	42%	47%	11%
INT12	Facebook	7	43%	43%	14%	6	33%	33%	33%	13	38%	38%	23%
	Twitter	6	33%	50%	17%	11	36%	45%	18%	17	35%	47%	18%
INT13	Facebook	16	75%	25%	0%	18	44%	17%	39%	34	59%	21%	21%
	Twitter	18	94%	6%	0%	13	46%	31%	23%	31	74%	16%	10%
INT14	Facebook	5	40%	40%	20%	17	65%	24%	12%	22	59%	27%	14%
	Twitter	8	88%	0%	13%	23	57%	35%	9%	31	65%	26%	10%
INT15	Facebook	5	60%	20%	20%	3	33%	33%	33%	8	50%	25%	25%
	Twitter	4	50%	25%	25%	8	38%	38%	25%	12	42%	33%	25%
TOTAL	Facebook	231	56%	38%	6%	248	54%	34%	13%	479	55%	36%	10%
	Twitter	177	56%	39%	5%	253	49%	41%	10%	430	52%	40%	8%
	Total	408	56%	38%	6%	501	51%	38%	11%	909	53%	38%	9%

Table 13: Purpose of NPOs' Facebook and Twitter posts(Act.=Action, Info.=Information, Comm.=Community)

Table 13 provides a breakdown of the posts categorised by their intention, as explained above. Overall, 53% of all posts intended to provoke action in the audience of the posts, 38% intended to inform the audience merely, and only 9% were categorised as community posts. The breakdown is relatively stable when compared between before and during the pandemic. The posts in the action category have dropped slightly. On the other hand, the community category has experienced a significant doubling in the number of posts, which, as previously explained, may be attributed to the limitations imposed during the pandemic. However, to gain a comprehensive understanding, further research is necessary.

Regardless of this change, the action category has always dominated the overall number of posts, and the community category contained the smallest number of posts. Among the participants, 9 out of 15 had more posts in the action category than any other category. The other six had relatively more information posts than action posts. This variety is not surprising given the difference in the mission of these organisations and possibly the different ways they utilise social media.

As seen in the content analysis and Table 13, the aim of the posts, i.e., the actual action they aim to achieve, varies distinctly. Despite this variation, several participants did not mention the goal of the posts as a defining factor of a successful social media activity. Moreover, the ultimate goal of informational and community posts is to mobilise the public's action by informing and creating a sense of community. Instead of mentioning mobilising the public's activities, such as the number of collected donations or the number of people who became volunteers for the NPO as the measure of success, interviewees tended to focus on measures

such as the number of likes, comments or shares as the primary manifestation of success. This will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

In summary, the categorisation above and its results demonstrate that the NPOs under study had various goals intended for their posts.

4.3.2 Attraction of attention as the measure of success

The Figure below illustrates the pyramid of success for social media activities, which was explained in the literature review chapter in detail. It explains that the attraction of attention is a necessary step to achieve the aim of social media posts. However, other measures are required to achieve the goal of the posts because attracting attention is never the ultimate goal.



Figure 23: Pyramid of success for social media activities

As discussed in section 2.7. of the literature review chapter, Guo & Saxton's (2018) four-factor model was useful in explaining the key factors that drive success in attracting attention with social media posts. In justifying the focus of their study on attracting attention, Guo & Saxton (2018) mention that in the context of information overload, attention and the type of attention are key for measuring the success of any message/post. However, when they explain "Dialogue and mobilisation for social change" in their model, they clarify that "attention is a near-term and/or immediate goal for advocacy organisations on social media - The ultimate goal is often to mobilise its online network to support the cause" (Guo and Saxton, 2018, p. 9). Accordingly, the attraction of attention is necessary. It even might be very challenging, but this is not sufficient for the goal of the post to be achieved, even for the posts that aim solely to distribute information. "Attention to a post" could simply mean that it was read, with no way of knowing if the information was delivered in the way that it was intended or whether it was misunderstood/misinterpreted.

There is a long history of marketing campaigns that were misunderstood and had a negative impact. Smith (2006) brings up the example of an HIV campaign in the Philippines that resulted in reduced sympathy with HIV+ people, while the aim was to inform people that mosquitos cannot infect individuals (Smith, 2006). He highlights this example to demonstrate that the unintended effects of social campaigns are well-noted but understudied. However, the existence of various examples as such shows that the fact that a post grabbed attention does not translate to the fact that it was understood in the way it was meant to, and there could be unintended consequences. There are several studies in marketing and particularly

social marketing that focus on the unintended consequences of social campaigns. The study by Peattie et al. (2016) is solely focused on the unintended consequences of social marketing. It provides a diagnostic matrix, as seen in Figure 24. The key takeaway from the study is that there could be and often are positive and negative unintended consequences from the social marketing (Peattie, Peattie and Newcombe, 2016). This means those conducting these types of activities should consider these consequences and, for the negative ones, try to mitigate them as much as possible.

Outcome Nature	Positive	<u>Bonuses</u> E.g. Successful interventions leading to better long-term relationships between sponsors and targets;	<u>Serendipitous</u> E.g. Beneficial changes affecting a non-target group or sponsoring organisation;
	Negative	<u>Contingencies</u> E.g. Social marketing messages 'normalising' undesired behaviours or generating 'message fatigue';	<u>Surprises</u> E.g. 'Backlash' effects where campaign targets respond perversely to messages or incentives;
		Foreseeable	Unforeseen
		Predictability	

Figure 24: Diagnostic Matrix for Unintended Consequences in Social Marketing (Peattie, Peattie and Newcombe, 2016).

The study of Peattie et al. (2016) on the negative consequences discusses the three categories of “boomerang” effects provided by Pechmann and Salter (2005), namely:

1. Counter-informative effects: where information is misperceived by its audience.
2. Backlash effects: where a message achieves the opposite of its intent.

3. Inherent social marketing problems: where a message promotes an undesired behaviour as prevalent, or the message achieves its goal but offsets it by promoting another opposing result. e.g. promotes fastening seatbelts but unintentionally makes fast/dangerous driving considered normal (Pechmann and Slater, 2005).

It is key to consider that in all the above three categories attention of the audience is achieved. However, the message had unintended and sometimes the opposite impact from what was desired. So, if attention is used as the only measure of success and the goal of the posts is ignored, the measure could consider many of the negative consequences that, in fact, were against the goal of the organisation and the post as the success. Keeping this in mind, 14/15, almost all the participants of this study missed mentioning the goal of a post as a defining factor of its success. Instead of measuring success against the intended goal, such as mobilising actual actions in case of the “action” category, e.g., the number of collected donations or the number of people who became volunteers for the NPO, quick and effortless activities of the public, e.g., liking, have been mentioned as the manifestation of success. The following quotes are examples that show the definition of a successful social media activity by the participants of this research:

INT 5: “I would say to be successful, it needs to have over 12 likes and maybe a couple of comments or things like that, but yeah, as long as it got over ten likes and it’s not done badly, 20 to 30 is like really good.”

INT 2: "I would say Facebook is the most successful platform that we have used. I would say that only because it has the most followers and likes. That's why we tend to focus on it more than other platforms."

INT2: "I think being varied in your content, you are less likely to get unfollowed or unlinked so that you would be more successful. And you are more likely to attract a variety of people."

INT 3: "For example I realised there is engagement in one of the posts that was very successful. We had hundreds of likes and tens of comments and immediately realised that and then we reposted something very similar to that post and again the same amount of engagement. So realised that this is actually working."

INT 4: "It is really easy to see... so when you post something umm... sometime it is not something that you understand why because the algorithms do this on them, but it is easy to see like umm... this doing well because there are lots of like, there is lots of new followers and comments, there are lots of shares, it is obvious, it is a measurable thing."

INT 10: "We have some analytics. We look at how people are engaged in terms of the number of likes, comments and these sorts of things. That's pretty much what we look at. We don't break down all the posts, but over the month, how we did. We look at how many more followers we have."

INT 13: "I've seen a lot of other charities that they have more views and followers. They are more successful because they tend to have more variation between videos and just pictures, and we don't have lots of videos on our page."

INT 14: "I think in comparison to where we were before COVID, now we have much more engagement, and it has increased significantly. We have a lot more followers, a lot more comments on our posts a much bigger response. So, we are more successful in terms of our impact."

In the "Slacktivism in social media" section of the literature review chapter, it was explained that defining the goal of an activity is the prior step for measuring its performance. However, most of the interviewees of this research did not define a successful social media activity based on the extent that the activity achieved its goals. In other words, the goal of activity as a vital step in measuring success has been missed in their decision-making process. This research found that the attention economy, promoted in social media platforms as the number of likes, shares and followers, has influenced the perspective of UK S/M NPOs. These organisations count on "Slacktivism" or "Clicktivism", in which an individual, by clicking on social media platforms, feels she/he has been effective and contributed to the cause for defining the success of their activities.

It has been discussed in the same section of the literature review chapter that there are critics and adherents regarding the effectiveness of online activities. Critics of "Slacktivism", e.g. Morozov (2009), argue that the omnipresence of online platforms encourages the public to

carry out small-scale digital activities in the virtual world instead of supporting the cause with more meaningful non-virtual world activities. Consequently, tangible actions have been substituted by what could be viewed as quick and effortless activities without much/any tangible impact in the non-virtual world (Morozov, 2009). Moreover, the moral balancing theory, which states that doing a good deed could satisfy an individual's motivation to do the next, has supported this criticism (Nisan and Horenczyk, 1990).

On the other hand, according to Kristofferson et al. (2014), online activities trigger tangible actions under certain conditions. For example, an individual is more likely to carry out more meaningful actions when his/her online activities have limited social observability. Accordingly, not all online activities are ineffective in contributing to a tangible action (Kristofferson, White and Peloza, 2014). However, there is a shared view between adherents and critics of the benefit of online activities that the value of these activities depends on how much it contributes to the likelihood of tangible actions for the cause.

So, the discussion revolves around whether a correlation exists between online activities and changes happening outside the virtual world. Based on the existing studies above, this correlation depends on many factors, which means this correlation is not definite in all circumstances. Given this, if a social media activity has a target, such as raising funds or raising awareness, the first thing that those conducting the activity must consider is whether the likes, shares or comments correlate to the targets they have set for these activities. After this is established, "Clicktivism" could be justified as a reasonable measure of success, i.e., it is a good proxy for getting closer to the target. However, without establishing this, the measure

is misleading as more likes, etc., would not necessarily mean getting any closer to the target. Nonetheless, the theme from the interview shows that this correlation is not considered in the decision-making process of those using these metrics as the measure of success, which is almost all the NPOs under study.

4.3.3 Attraction of attention, the unproven surrogate goal

As mentioned in the literature review, measuring success in NPOs is a complex and difficult task. Helmig et al. (2014) conducted a comprehensive systematic literature analysis covering three decades of research on the success and failure of NPOs. Their review of almost 150 studies revealed that while establishing the failure of organisations might be straightforward, understanding its success is not (Helmig, Ingerfurth and Pinz, 2014a). The success of NPOs is multi-dimensional, and according to them, “both end objectives (e.g., fulfilment of the social mission) and means objectives (e.g., resource availability mirrored in good financial ratios, stakeholder satisfaction) must be acknowledged when evaluating NPO success.” (Helmig, Ingerfurth and Pinz, 2014b, p. 1523) .

Defining success for NPOs is a complex endeavour, encompassing many factors and considerations. This means that there may not be a simple and quantifiable measure of success for the NPOs to consider. Sawhill and Williamson (2001), in their “mission impossible?” study, took a more applied approach and reviewed many NPOs and their practices in measuring success (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001). The study confirms the

practical difficulties of measuring success in these organisations and the resource intensity of sustaining such measures.

Sawhill and Williamson (2001) present a valuable framework for measuring the success of NPOs in their study. They propose a useful categorisation of areas to evaluate organisational performance, including impact, activity, and capacity. Impact measures are focused on NPO's success in achieving its mission. The activity measures assess the achievement of goals and implementation of strategies, and the capacity measures are about how well an organisation uses its resources to achieve its mission. They suggest that linking the activities of an NPO to the delivery of their mission and measuring it is very expensive and a "mission impossible". Instead, they suggest that NPOs had better success in measuring their performance by setting mission-connected goals and measuring how they performed in relation to these goals. They suggest that measuring these goals can be used as a "surrogate" for the impact measures if they are directly connected to the organisation's mission (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001).

The success of the social media activities of NPOs can be measured in the frame of impact and activity, as Sawhill and Williamson (2001) suggested. The question in each area would be:

- Impact: How did the social media activities impact the delivery of the mission for the NPO?
- Activity: How did social media activities contribute to the achievement of certain mission-connected goals?

As mentioned, per Sawhill and Williamson (2001), the impact measures are too expensive to implement. In other words, measuring the overall impact of an NPO is challenging unless its mission is narrow and easily measurable (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001). Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the contribution of a particular activity, such as social media engagement, to that overall impact. The activity measures, on the other hand, seem more practical. In the case of social media activities, there are some mission-connected goals for the organisations where social media helped to achieve one or more of these goals. Then in this context, the success of social media activities is measured by its contribution to achieving the goal(s).

Participants of the study mentioned very similar goals for their social media activities. The goals such as “promote ourselves to different audiences” (INT1), “network” (INT11) so that “people can reach to us all over the world” (INT3), “reach to both young people and adults” (INT6), “word of mouth is probably the most powerful to [help us] grow, and social media would be the second” (INT7), “our target audience are young, where can you find young people? On social media” (INT10) and “most convenient way of reaching lots of audiences” (INT9). All these goals have a commonality in reaching and communicating to the audience of the NPOs. The importance of communication and building relationships with the stakeholders of the NPOs and the public was mentioned in Chapter 1, extensively. This study is not focused on examining if the success in communication with the public will imply the success of the NPOs. But the focus is on how the success of social media activities as one of the key public communication activities is measured and thought about by the NPOs.

As per participants, let's assume effective communication with the audience of the NPOs is a worthy and mission-connected goal. The effectiveness of communication and its success is only meaningful in the context of its goal and the purpose of the communication. As mentioned earlier, the aim of social media posts had no bearing on how the participants measured the success of their social media activities. Additionally, as discussed in the last section, the correlation between attention metrics and the aim of the posts is not also examined by the studied NPOs. Hence, the question is, what merit these attention metrics had to be considered as a suitable surrogate measure for the effectiveness of communication by the NPOs?

One of the lessons in the Sawhill and Williamson (2001) study is that measures should be kept simple and easy to communicate. The simplicity of the "measures of success" allows for less effort in maintaining them continuously (Sawhill and Williamson, 2001). On the other side, it will make them less open to interpretation, allowing the whole organisation to work towards the same goal (ibid). The social media metrics indeed achieve this simplicity aspect of a measure. The platforms already provide the metrics and various ways to slice and dice them. How these metrics are measured is also well-understood and not too open to interpretation. For instance, a "like" means another social media user has pressed the button under the post. So, the simplicity and easy-to-understand could be a key driver that NPOs consider these metrics as their measure of success. However, in the same study that Sawhill and Williamson (2001) encourage the use of surrogate goals to measure success practicality and sustainability, they repeatedly mention that the connectedness of these surrogate measures

to the actual aim must be regularly assessed (*ibid*). That is, it should be confirmed that these proxy goals are indeed in line with the actual goals. This is the key issue with the way the social media metrics are used and interpreted by the NPOs studied. They do not assess or establish the link between these surrogate measures and effective communication.

It is worth noting that studies such as John et al. (2017) in marketing and the impact of social media also suggest that a measure such as “likes” on Facebook are a mere indication of getting the attention of the customers for a moment and getting any value for the brand out of this attention requires more effort (John *et al.*, 2017). Studies such as his point out that even outside of the world of non-profits, the measures such as “likes” cannot be a metric that is directly connected with the success of the activity (in his example, improved brand perception and sales). Hence these measures are not good surrogate metrics.

The study by Mochon et al. (2017) adds an extra condition to the study by John et al. (2017), where they confirm that “likes” on Facebook had no impact on the behaviour of the customers if the “likes” were “customer-driven” (Mochon *et al.*, 2017). The customer-driven “likes” are not driven by the organisational paid advertisement and promotion on the Facebook platform. They suggest that the paid “likes” have been positively impactful on customer behaviour (*ibid*). Again, the study confirms that “likes” are not a good proxy for measuring the impact since, in one context, it has no meaningful impact, and in the other, it has.

Mochon et al. (2017) have another subtle point regarding the platforms' business model and the use of the metrics such as "likes". Platforms like Twitter and Facebook are for-profit platforms that allow paid advertisers to reach and target their desired audience. The platforms collect information about users to allow targeting of them and keep them captive, so they get the opportunity to sell attention. The users are encouraged to value metrics that drive them to get more popularity and attention from other users so that the platform can sell it. The study by Mochon et al. (2017) suggests that if the platforms are used as a traditional advertising platform, then the metrics such as "likes" are correlated with the marketing goals that they measure (Mochon *et al.*, 2017). However, the correlation is not there if it is used just as a user (*ibid*). This does not imply that establishing these metrics as a substitute measure is unnecessary. However, it highlights the significance of considering the platform's business model when interpreting these metrics. It is important to note that none of the NPOs under study act as advertisers to target their audience, but they act as mere users of the platform.

4.3.4 Mediatization of Success

Counting on the "Clicktivism" or "Slacktivism" of the public as a measure of success, which was explained above, means that these NPOs are not defining their metrics based on their targets but on social media norms. This is also notable as a key phase in the mediatization of these organisations. According to Hjarvard (2008), mediatization happens when a non-media institution adapts to formal and informal rules of media to perform successfully (Hjarvard,

2008). From the “institutionalist tradition” approach to mediatization, the perspective of NPOs regarding the meaning of success has been impacted by the logic of social media.

Moreover, participants of this research, in their definition of successful social media posts, have not even mentioned achieving the prime goal of posts as a side factor that contributes to the success of their posts. Achieving the goal of posts has been totally omitted from the decision-making process of NPOs’ staff when they defined a successful social media activity. Hence, it could be concluded that based on the definition of Hjarvard (2008), direct (strong) mediatization of success has happened among them (Hjarvard, 2008). If they have mentioned that the extent that a post achieves its goal combined with the engagements that it induces from the public are indicators of the success of a post, then a weak form of mediatization would happen among them. This was not the case, however.

In other words, the usage/distribution logic of social media defined by Klinger and Svensson (2015), in which liking, sharing and commenting are valued, influences the NPOs' perception of success. Adaption of these metrics as the measure of success could also fit into Schulz's (2004) definition of mediatization. “Accommodation” is one of the four processes Schulz defined for explaining the media influence, as mentioned in the “Definition of Mediatization” section of the literature. According to him, during the accommodation process, users of media adjust their behaviour to conform to norms, routines, and formats of media.

It is worth noting that what is highlighted here is the influence of social media on the NPOs and how they define success as a contributing factor besides other factors. No technological

determinism is suggested here, meaning that the way that participants of this research have constructed the meaning of success is not solely the result of social media; it is also the result of other cultural and societal factors. Hence, the interrelationship and dynamic between social media, cultural and societal factors in the construction of the meaning of success in the current study should not be ignored. This aligns with Hepp's (2021) point of view that the mediatization approach does not relate to technological determinism (Kumar Putta and Anderson, 2021). Hence, the current study attempted to investigate other factors that contributed to the construction of the meaning of success for NPOs. For instance, by asking participants about their source of social media knowledge, the theme revealed that social media or other organisations are their sources of information. This could be considered a factor that has contributed to the meaning of success, which will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs. Another example could be the first theme noted above that highlights NPOs suffering from the lack of expertise in the use of social media activities due to human resource deficiency and approaching social media as a side task of their jobs. These factors could accelerate the NPOs' adaption to the social media logics.

Moreover, it can be seen from the following as well as the previously mentioned quotations in this section, that there is an emphasis on the role of social media as a means for attracting attention rather than disseminating information. For example, INT 11 stated:

"I will look at social media analytic and see how much attraction we've had, you know, our most liked post and how many impressions did it make on Twitter and how does it compare to our most liked post in the last year. So that tells me that something I was

doing on social media, which is where they saw it, has been successful and had an effect.”

This quote may indicate the evolving role of media, from disseminating information to attracting attention. In section 2.3, it was elaborated that scholars such as Franck (2019) and Goldhaber (1997) denoted that the role of the media has evolved from being a system of channels for distributing information into a system that aims to attract attention as well (Goldhaber, 1997; Franck, 2019). In other words, the role of media has evolved from a medium for distributing information, which emphasises the amount of distributed information as its success, to a medium that also sees success as attracting attention. In the latter role of media, the attention is not gained to serve information to the audience, but the information is there to attract attention.

To place this evolution in a historical context, the use of leaflets during history could be given as an example. Leaflets as a medium for mass communication were popular during the twentieth century (De Fleur, 1956). For example, in the Korean War, the number of distributed leaflets was referred to as a factor that each side of the war was focused on in order to employ psychological warfare. The secretary of the U.S. Department of Army has been quoted to say, “bury the enemy in paper” during the Korean War. Subsequently, 2.5 billion leaflets were distributed over the Korean army (Wook, 2004). These examples could show that the focus has been on the distribution of the information; the more information was distributed, the better. One of the reasons could be that in the early 20th century when information was not abundant in society, traditional mass media was more used to distribute

information. However, in the late modern era, which is saturated by digital media and consequently the abundance of information, the role of media has focused on attracting attention more than information distribution. Social media affordance could be another contributing factor to this change of focus on attention rather than information. Exposure to social media metrics such as the number of “likes” enables users to quantify the attention their activities have attracted easily and quickly.

It was possible for the participants of this research to emphasise on the amount of distributed information as a metric of their success. For example, they could have mentioned the number of posts per day/week as their measure of success. Nonetheless, they state a metric of attention as the way to measure success. For instance, INT5 said:

“I would say to be successful, it needs to have over 12 likes and maybe a couple of comments.”

The focus on attention, as the measure of success for social media activities, could have implications on the contents of the NPOs’ posts on social media platforms. For example, the content of disseminated information could have been changed from its original version to what attracts more attention. This change in media users' perspective can be considered a facet of mediatization. That is information abundance through the expansion and prevalence of social media usage, plus the presence of the attention economy in these platforms, forced the players in this media to compete to gain attention. This competition usually happens without investigating how this attention will serve the goals of the NPOs.

It is worth mentioning that one interviewee did suggest that the objective of a post should be counted as a key factor of how success is defined. When the question “What do you think a successful social media activity is?” was asked, participant 8; straight away answered that it depends on the purpose of the posts:

INT 8: “I’d say, having achieved its objective, and the thing about objective is, it depends. So, if you’re posting for engagement then engagement would be the thing that you look at. If you post for fundraising, then the amount of money would be. I think it depends on why you posting to see whether that was a success or not.”

Having a participant who denotes the aim of the post as the foundation for defining success shows that the interview's wording and sequence of questions of this research could provide an atmosphere in which participants could express the importance of the post’s goal in defining success.

Constraints in resources such as time, human and finances are possible elements that have motivated participants to use these easily accessible data in their definition of success. It is easier to count “likes” than to do more resource-intensive measurements, e.g., conducting surveys periodically with the public. However, lack of knowledge and culture of social media could be more prominent elements in forming this perspective. Two reasons could support this claim. First, two separate questions were asked of participants to make a distinction between what they said and what they actually did for the measurement of success in their

usage of social media. This could have allowed the participants to distinguish the constraint of resources and practicalities from their theoretical views of success.

Moreover, these two questions have been asked in a specific order. First, the question “What do you think a successful social media activity is?” has been asked and then the question “How do you measure the success of your social media activities?”. This order has been used to minimise the possible effect of their practices on their ideals in defining success. Despite this opportunity, the participants have not presented an ideal that was constrained by practicality but have talked about success as something that can be measured by metrics such as the number of likes.

Another contributing factor to the adaption of these social media metrics by the NPOs, as the measure of success could be how they source their knowledge about social media platforms. During the interview, each participant was asked, “What are the main resources to keep you up to date in the social media market?”. The answer to this question shows that the participants mostly use social media as the main resource for updating their knowledge and following other NPOs regarding new features of the platforms. Given the resource deficiency of S/M NPOs, monitoring other NPOs and referring to social media for updating the knowledge seems practical solutions for these organisations:

INT1: “We keep an eye on charities that we admire on the platforms that we use. And to see what they are doing, [and to] see what we can do differently or improve upon, through that.”

INT2: "Usually, I research similar charities to ours to see how they are performing or how they are posting. So, let's just say a charity that has a lot more followers or likes. I'll see what they are doing differently for us. And maybe it is the type of posts or how the posting, the wording is. Was it more emotional? And I'll try, maybe, to emulate them in that way."

INT 14: "We did [...] video[...]. So I was worried that people may think that this is silly. But lots of charities do; we did not randomly do this. We learnt from international charities[...]."

INT 3: "We are competing in an area where especially in our community umm... there is not, for example, umm... when I try to learn, there are very few things that I can learn from other charities in our community. When I want to learn, I need to go to international charities."

INT 4: "I do follow other organisations, and there are some out there that I am quite impressed with their social media approach[...]."

INT 5: "[...]I try to spend a bit of my time doing kind of finding what other charities are doing. And then working out how to create content."

INT 10: "We look at what other charities do regularly on social media. Especially now, in response to COVID, to look at across the sector to see what's the best practice and

what wording they used that has been really effective. Or what powerful campaigns individuals are running, etc.”

INT 15: “I follow every charity on earth, maybe 3 to 4 hundred charities. And every single day, I visit at least 10 to 15 charities. I make sure I follow what they are doing. [...] We always say this quote: good artists borrow, great artists steal.”

The behaviour of participating NPOs in copying other NPO in their social media activities is in line with the findings of the literature. For instance, monitoring other charities as the primary source of ideas was also denoted by Bennett and Savani’s (2011) study. Their study showed this is happening across all sizes of UK charities (Bennett and Savani, 2011). The finding of my study shows that monitoring other charities as a key source of ideas also happens in social media activities among NPOs. Copying successful activities of other organisations has been criticised in the literature since the organisation's mission and vision could imply that the activities of one organisation do not suit another organisation (Ansari, 2010). While the behaviour of other NPOs on social media informed the participating NPOs on how to conduct their activities on these platforms, they also use social media itself as a source of knowledge in this regard. Using social media as a main resource for updating knowledge regarding these platforms could re-enforce the existing norms in social media that define success by number of likes, etc.

Although likes and numbers were important to NPOs, as is evident in the quotes shared above, one of these interviewees also questioned the ultimate point of the virtual world and

social media likes. INT 3 expressed her views about sending posts and that it was very successful because it got hundreds of likes and tens of comments. However, she also questioned the ability of social media to transform the number of likes, etc., into actual action. It is interesting that despite acknowledging this, the participant still relies on these metrics:

INT3: “What is the point of posting online something that does not mean anything in the real world? It is really hard to get to that point where you want results, right? So what is the point of all these engagements if you are not getting people who support you to support you more, to donate more? Like the outcomes that the whole point of these things is for, you know?”

4.3.5 Anecdote of “Success” rather than a data-driven approach

The content analysis of this research investigated these metrics of the social media posts that the participating NPOs sent. This analysis of the Facebook and Twitter pages of these NPOs shows that on average less than 1% of their followers like, share or comment on their social media posts. Although academic research on the like-to-follower ratio on these platforms is limited, it is widely recognised in marketing circles that an engagement rate below 1% is not considered satisfactory. Such a low ratio could indicate a passive follower base³. These figures

³ See <https://acumen.aamplify.partners/whats-a-good-facebook-engagement-rate> as an example regarding Facebook. Also, studies like (De Vries, 2019) explain how a low like-to-follower base on platforms such as Instagram could create low credibility perception.

suggest that their activities, as defined by their own metrics of success, have not been particularly successful. However, when the participants were asked whether they think their social media activities are successful, a pattern shows that none of them considered their activities as entirely unsuccessful by their own definition:

INT 15: "Quite successful, I would say, not hugely successful because not all of our posts do amazingly, but yeah, for our followers, they do ok."

INT 6: "I can't say we have an A grade because, for A, we need to grab all the attention, but I can say our grade is B because there are people that pay attention to us."

The participating NPOs seem to have the impression of success, possibly using measures that might not be valid, e.g., the number of likes. The more likely case is that this impression of relative success in social media activities is a hunch as it cannot be traced back to their social media metrics, i.e., the number of likes to follower ratio as explained above. This could indicate overreliance on anecdotes in social media activities rather than a data-driven approach. The hunch-based approach could result from the lack of expertise, lack of time to gather data or simply result in a bias to consider an area that they are responsible for as successful. As mentioned in section 2.5, Sargeant and Jay (2003) have noticed a pattern that 76% of the NPOs they studied did not monitor the success of their activities in all (Sargeant and Jay, 2003). It seems the easy metrics that the social media platforms provide did not change this drastically. Although the NPOs provide an answer for how they monitor the effectiveness of their social media activities, they have chosen a measure that might not be

valid but is accessible. Moreover, they do not seem to systematically monitor these measures, implied by the mismatch between their impression of how successful they were using these metrics and what I found through the content analysis.

4.3.6 Summary

In summary, this study revealed that the mediatization of success has happened among participating NPOs in this research. The content analysis of their social media posts shows that “action” posts, which aim to encourage the public to carry out a more tangible action, comprise the most type of posts sent by them. While the “action” is mainly the aim, themes from the interview data demonstrate that the interviewees of the current research have invested in the usage/distribution logic of social media in which the number of likes, comments and shares defines the success. As the success pyramid illustrates, these numbers can be counted as the prerequisite of success, but they are not sufficient metrics for defining success, particularly where the aim is “action”. This behaviour indicates that S/M size NPOs have adapted to this logic of social media, and according to Hjarvard (2008), this adaptation is a facet of mediatization (Hjarvard, 2008). One driver of this adaptation is the way these NPOs source their knowledge about these platforms, which is by following other NPOs as well as learning from the information available on these platforms. Although there seems to be a misplacement of metrics for measuring success due to mediatization, there is also a misimpression of success even according to the metrics the NPOs have adapted.

4.4 Presence on multiple platforms without a clear or consistent rationale

The participants of the study were asked about the different social media platforms that their NPO is active on and the rationale behind their presence on different platforms. Interviewees' answers to these questions can be categorised into two different groups. First, those who suggested their presence on different platforms are motivated by reaching out to different demographics. The second group did not have a clear rationale on why they were present on various social media platforms and its benefits for them.

9 out of 15 interviewees stated that different platforms are more suitable for communicating with different types of audiences. These diverse audiences encompass various demographic categories, including age groups or generations, as well as individuals residing in different regions. Interestingly, the audiences also comprise those with different types of relationships to the NPO, such as supporters versus beneficiaries. The aim of reaching different types of people was mentioned as a reason for being active on varieties of platforms.

INT 1: "We have Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn to promote ourselves to different audiences. We find a lot of our interactions with a body of professional members and a lot of our interactions with other organisations around Twitter; a lot of our interaction with our families who are affected by cancer or supporters are more through Facebook and Instagram, which in themselves have different demographics."

INT 15: "Most days, I check all across the different platforms we use. Currently, the ones we use the most are Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Different platforms talk to different people, and it varies."

INT 10: "We divide our audience on social media platforms. We can see that our parents are most engaged on Facebook. They are that generation. We have moved some stuff on Instagram to be able to capture the younger audience."

INT 11: "I think our girls are more to look at us on Instagram, and our mentors and the general public are more likely to look at us on Twitter. And there are certain demographics of mentors, especially in our regions like London that will look at us on Facebook and girls' parents may look at us on Facebook."

While the ability to reach different types of people was mentioned as the reason to be present on different platforms, little evidence can be seen in tailoring the messages for different audiences by the NPOs. One of the ways the NPOs seem to keep their accounts active on different social media platforms is by replicating the same message across these platforms using software solutions:

INT 4: "When I post on Twitter, it is when I am using Hootsuite, so sometimes I use Hootsuite to program a couple of umm... you know, messages and then it will go up to all three platforms."

INT3: "[...] When we post on Twitter, it is via a program called Buffer. So, on Buffer, we schedule all of our posts. So, Buffer posts for us..."

The replication of the same message across all these different platforms is largely confirmed by the content analysis of the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the interviewed NPOs. As

can be seen in Table 14, the analysis shows that over 70% of the participants' posts on the Twitter accounts were the same as the Facebook posts. The number of duplicate posts stayed significant before and during the pandemic, respectively 75% and 69% of Twitter posts were the same as Facebook. Considering each participant, it is also notable that except INT 9, which did not have an active Twitter presence, all other participants have duplicated at least 40% of their posts between Twitter and Facebook. These figures are aligned with the above quotes that suggest these NPOs do not alter their social media content, language and activities across platforms and mostly send the same posts on all of them.

Interview	Platform	Pre-Pandemic			Post-Pandemic			Total		
		Post#	Similar to Facebook	Repost %	Post#	Similar to Facebook	Repost %	Post#	Similar to Facebook	Repost %
INT1	Twitter	23	20	87%	23	13	57%	46	33	72%
INT2	Twitter	24	24	100%	8	3	38%	32	27	84%
INT3	Twitter	19	19	100%	21	21	100%	40	40	100%
INT4	Twitter	6	6	100%	18	15	83%	24	21	88%
INT5	Twitter	6	2	33%	18	18	100%	24	20	83%
INT6	Twitter	4	4	100%	20	14	70%	24	18	75%
INT7	Twitter	25	0	0%	34	24	71%	59	24	41%
INT8	Twitter	2	1	50%	8	3	38%	10	4	40%
INT9	Twitter	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
INT10	Twitter	23	20	87%	21	16	76%	44	36	82%
INT11	Twitter	9	9	100%	27	19	70%	36	28	78%
INT12	Twitter	6	4	67%	11	3	27%	17	7	41%
INT13	Twitter	18	18	100%	13	6	46%	31	24	77%
INT14	Twitter	8	2	25%	23	16	70%	31	18	58%
INT15	Twitter	4	3	75%	8	3	38%	12	6	50%
Total		177	132	75%	253	174	69%	430	306	71%

Table 14: Similarity of Twitter and Facebook posts of the participants

The lack of tailoring of messages across the social media platforms has significance as different demographics, e.g., younger versus older audiences, may not only prefer different social media platforms but also have preferences in terms of factors such as message topics, presentation and tone. A number of studies support this in the literature. For instance, as mentioned in literature review section 2.7, Rowe and Alani's (2014) study shows that practices across different social media platforms could have the opposite effect in terms of attracting attention. For example, content or practice that works well for attracting attention on Twitter could have an adverse effect on Facebook. The example from Rowe and Alani's (2014) study was frequent posting, which provides more Twitter engagement but negatively impacts Facebook users' engagement. Similarly, the informativeness of a post provides better engagement on Twitter but has the reverse effect on Facebook (Rowe and Alani, 2014).

While the rationale of presence on multiple platforms for some NPOs is based on reaching out to different demographics, this reasoning does not seem to have translated into actions. There is no evidence that their postings are considering the differences in the demographics that are present on these platforms. One possible explanation for this inconsistency in intention and practice could be that these NPOs do not realise that these platforms have different engagement dynamics, which could render the effectiveness of their efforts. This is somewhat unlikely given that they expressly acknowledge that their presence on these platforms is intended to engage different demographics, which already implies different tastes in terms of the content and presentation.

The other possibility is that these NPOs are aware that the same content, frequency of posting, etc., might not suit all demographics, but given their limited resources, they have decided that the benefits of being on a range of platforms, however small, is more than not being there at all. In other words, the thinking could be that presence has benefits on its own, even if the engagement is not considerable. So, if they can get this small benefit through replication software or a small effort of copying messages for almost free, regardless of the suboptimal engagement, they may calculate that it is still worth doing.

The idea that just being present on a social media platform, regardless of the activities, is valuable can be traced even more strongly among the interviewees, which could not explain the rationale of having a presence on these platforms. For instance, INT 13 had notable hesitation when she tried to answer why the NPO has opened accounts on multiple platforms:

INT 13: (Clear hesitation and unclarity in the answer) "Umm...Twitter, the one that we, umm... we Just keep for the sake of it; we don't use it much."

Or INT 7 laughed and said:

INT 7: "[laughs] I would love to say that there was a really serious reason behind why we have chosen these two platforms. I think it is just what we knew how to use [laughs]."

Another example from INT2, who list four social media platforms that they are active on and then names a fifth one that they are not present on, suggesting that they must be there

without mentioning any reasons for it as if there is an obvious benefit in a multi-platform presence: a the more, the merrier approach:

INT2: "We use all of the social media platforms, basically. The most prominent one is the Facebook and then Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. Yeah, I can't think about anything else. Umm... we don't have a snap chat yet [laughed]; that is something we have to do[laughed]"

The following quotes from other interviewees also show the lack of clarity on why their NPOs have multiple social media platforms.

INT 4: "When I post on Twitter, it is when I am using Hootsuite. It will go up to all three platforms, and when it goes out to Twitter, I just don't review our Twitter feed. So, it is kind of funny I should check in on Twitter because I have no idea what is happening there."

Moreover, the following quote suggests that for these organisations, having accounts on social media is not perceived as a matter of choice but a must. This is because they consider this an integral part of what other comparable organisations are doing and, therefore, should be copied even if the reason for a multi-platform presence is unclear. This could be considered an example of mediatization:

INT 5: "..., it might not be the best route to engage with families, but I think in this day and age, you don't have a choice; you have to be on social media."

INT3: "...At the beginning, when we started with three platforms [YouTube, Instagram and Facebook], we wanted to sort of go for and focus our efforts on them, but then through our research and even spoke to other charities and they said Twitter is something that just needs to be there. But in terms of charity, it is not going to help you."

As can be seen from the above quotes, 5/15 of interviewees cannot clearly explain the rationale behind their presence on multiple platforms; either they are present for the sake of being present, or they are simply following the lead of other organisations in being present on multiple platforms without being able to justify that decision. As mentioned in the "Definition of mediatization" section of the literature review, through the process of mediatization, organisations increasingly submit to media logics without further rationalisation. In the context of the attention economy, where social media logics prompts users to seek attention, presence on more platforms implies that more attention will be gained, even if there is no meaningful engagement as a consequence of attracting this attention. It seems many of the NPOs in this research consider that the more presence, the better without thinking through its cost versus benefits and how it contributes to their organisation's short-term or ultimate goals and mission. This submission to the social media logic could indicate the mediatization of these NPOs.

In summary for this theme: the NPOs who have been interviewed in this research have an average of three social media accounts, but the rationale behind this multiple presence either cannot be well explained by those who are in charge of the social media activities of these

NPOs, or the rationale is not followed through in their actions. Both groups have one thing in common: they value the presence on more platforms without investigating/measuring the actual benefits of this presence on their ultimate goals. I argue that this situation results from mediatization and adaptation of social media logic by these organisations.

4.5 Influence of social media algorithms on the activities of the NPOs

Participants of this research mentioned that they post daily or weekly to make their communication actions recognisable for social media algorithms. According to the following participants, getting noticed by social media algorithms was the reason for some of the communication actions that took place in their social media activities:

INT 1: "Writing content for all channels takes up a lot of my time. We try to post at least once a day on Facebook and Instagram and multiple times a day on Twitter at least. We do two tweets on there a day that I'll write in advance, this increases the chance of [the name of NPO] to be seen by more people because of the way the algorithms work."

INT 11: "I try to have something from each channel on most days. The reason is just to remind people that we are there, to keep followers and make us look good. So the more we post, the more followers we get by the help of algorithms[...]."

INT 12: "We also know, very often, social media platforms, umm..., it's good for the algorithm if you use new features and if you use everything that platforms have to

offer. So, we try to take advantage of that and to use all futures as much as possible; it increases the chance of our post being seen by our followers.”

Algorithms embedded in social media platforms prioritise content for users of these platforms. Generally, prioritisation is needed when a resource is scarce. In the case of social media platforms, human attention is a scarce resource, and the abundance of information has driven algorithms to prioritise content. More personalised and relevant information will encourage users to spend more time on these platforms. Consequently, this content tailoring can increase the revenues of companies that run these platforms, i.e. by increasing their users and advertisements (Pariser, 2011).

This prioritisation of content could have side effects beyond revenue generation for its owner. As explained in section 2.2.3, although the social media algorithms do not change the content of posts, preferring some posts over others affects the users. For example, studies show that a combination of algorithms and connection to like-minded individuals reinforces users' biases by filtering opposing perspectives (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic, 2015; Adey, 2016). The algorithms could change the behaviour of the users not only through the contents they are presented with but also by their desire to be seen and hence try to do what the algorithms will prioritise. My findings show that NPOs were not exempt from these effects and have been impacted by the existence of algorithms in these platforms. These impacts will be elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

As discussed in section 2.2.3, of the literature review chapter, according to van Djick and Poell (2013), programmability is one of the aspects that differentiate the distribution logics of social media from traditional mass media. Unlike mass media that are controlled by an editorial board, social media algorithms influence the distribution logics on these platforms. The dependency of NPOs on these platforms to communicate with the public, as per finding #2, suggests that algorithms have the potential power to drive NPOs to act in a certain way. Moreover, given that S/M NPOs face resource deficiency, as explained in finding #1; and the seemingly low cost of social media activities, the dependency of these organisations on social media could be stronger compared to the larger NPOs. Consequently, in the case of S/M NPOs, the logics of algorithms could have relatively more influence over how these organisations conduct themselves on social media platforms.

The finding of my research indicates that logics enforced by algorithms in social media influences the communication action of participating NPOs. For example, interviewees report posting daily to be prioritised by algorithms. This matters because NPOs' actions are commonly thought to be driven solely by their mission, as interpreted by their volunteer trustee board. Yet, decisions made by the owners of social media companies are now influencing the daily behaviours of staff and volunteers. In other words, algorithms have made NPOs affiliated with the economic goals of the companies that own the social media platforms. Of course, algorithms are not the only agent that shapes NPOs' activities; various agents drive the process in which a communication action occurs. For example, the behaviour

of popular social media users or organisations on these platforms can influence the NPOs' behaviour.

As seen in Table 15, the content analysis of the Facebook and Twitter posts of the participants shows that they post between 0 to 3 posts on each platform daily. On average, they post just under one message daily on each platform. It is worth mentioning that the posts could be replicated across the two platforms by software, as explained before. As mentioned in section 4.2. these average numbers could be diluted by those NPOs that post more frequently in one day or those who post in concentration on some days, e.g., one of the NPOs sent eight posts in one day. The last column, namely “> one post per day %”, in the table shows the number of days in which the NPOs sent at least one post. This indicates that the participating NPOs send one post or more at least 70% of the days. The most active participants post every day, and if the average is considered, they frequently post more than one post daily. Only three participants post less than 60% of the days in 15 participants.

As explained earlier, this frequent and consistent posting could be motivated by how the algorithms favour those who post frequently and consistently in the view of participants. While frequent posting is encouraged by social media platforms, some studies suggest that over-frequent posting negatively affects organisations. For instance, McCorkindale and DiStaso's (2011) study shows that posting too much information on social media without a strategy could negatively impact the perceptions of stakeholders and even make them ignore updates of the organisation on social media platforms (McCorkindale and DiStaso, 2011). This is in line with the study by Diepen et al. (2009) that showed an increase in the frequency of

solicitation annoys prospective donors (Van Diepen, Donkers and Franses, 2009) that in turn could cause “donor fatigue” (Andreoni, 2006). Consequently, donors could contribute less to the cause.

Given the important role that public donations play in the survival of NPOs, especially smaller ones, explained in section 1.4.1 of the introduction chapter, following what algorithms promote could have significant consequences for S/M NPOs. So, what the algorithms on social media platforms promote might not necessarily be beneficial to NPOs to achieve their mission. The algorithms are ultimately constructed to help grow the social media platforms and the economic gain of their developers. Yet, they are shaping the behaviour of NPOs, with potentially damaging consequences.

Interviewee	Platform	Median	Mode	Mean	Count	>1 Post Per Day %	
INT1	Facebook	1	1	0.97	33	97%	100%
	Twitter	1	1	1.35	46	85%	
INT2	Facebook	1	1	0.94	32	76%	76%
	Twitter	0	0	0.94	32	38%	
INT3	Facebook	2	3	2.32	79	85%	85%
	Twitter	1	1	1.18	40	68%	
INT4	Facebook	1	0	1.12	38	59%	71%
	Twitter	0.5	0	0.71	24	50%	
INT5	Facebook	0	0	0.44	15	35%	47%
	Twitter	0	0	0.71	24	35%	
INT6	Facebook	3	3	2.35	80	91%	91%
	Twitter	0	0	0.71	24	47%	
INT7	Facebook	1	0	0.82	28	53%	82%
	Twitter	1	1	1.74	59	82%	
INT8	Facebook	0	0	0.15	5	15%	29%
	Twitter	0	0	0.29	10	24%	
INT9	Facebook	0	0	0.35	12	35%	35%

	Twitter	0	0	0.00	0	0%	
INT10	Facebook	1	1	1.15	39	91%	100%
	Twitter	1	1	1.29	44	82%	
INT11	Facebook	1	0	1.21	41	59%	71%
	Twitter	0.5	0	1.06	36	50%	
INT12	Facebook	0	0	0.38	13	38%	68%
	Twitter	0	0	0.50	17	44%	
INT13	Facebook	1	1	1.00	34	68%	68%
	Twitter	0	0	0.91	31	38%	
INT14	Facebook	1	0	0.65	22	53%	62%
	Twitter	1	0	0.91	31	53%	
INT15	Facebook	0	0	0.24	8	24%	47%
	Twitter	0	0	0.35	12	29%	
TOTAL	Facebook	1	0	0.94	479	59%	69%
	Twitter	0	0	0.84	430	48%	
	Total	1	0	1.78	909	69%	

Table 15: Frequency of participants' posts on Facebook and Twitter

It is worth noting that while participants discuss various techniques to enhance visibility through algorithms, none comprehensively understand how the algorithms operate. The assumptions regarding algorithm preferences are based on the experience of the individuals in charge and the knowledge they have acquired from other users. This is confirmation of the “algorithmic imaginary” that Bucher (2017) outlined in his study of how the perception of social media users plays a role in the way they interact with these platforms (Bucher, 2017). In this case, the NPOs have shaped their behaviour based on their perception of how social media algorithms operate, regardless of whether their understanding aligns with the actual functioning of these algorithms.

Hjarvard starts his definition of mediatization as *“The process whereby society, to an increasing degree, is submitted to or becomes dependent on the media and their logic...”*

(Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). My data shows that the reason S/M NPOs are posting frequently on social media platforms is to “game” the algorithms on these platforms. This influence of algorithms and change of behaviour in NPOs is a strong indicator of the mediatization process as the organisations submit to the media logics of these platforms. This adaptation of the media logics is motivated by being seen on these platforms, sometimes overlooking the known consequence that being seen and attracting attention is not always positively correlated with sustaining donors’ support and achieving their mission.

The frequent posting and participation of the NPOs on social media platforms has another important aspect to it. This regular participation, which is encouraged by the algorithms of the platforms, fuels these platforms through the data that is collected. As mentioned in the literature review, datafication is an important commercial logic of social media platforms, where they collect data from the interactions and contents produced by the users so that they can use the data for commercial purposes (Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). The NPOs, in this case, are producing content, interacting with other users, and encouraging others to produce and interact with them. While the NPOs are helping the data collection by the social media platforms, there is little evidence that they benefit from the collected data since they never use these platforms in a commercial capacity and paid advertisement.

Moreover, Van Dijck (2014) raised concerns about the normalisation and expansion of datafication by academics who see it as a goldmine of behavioural studies, ignoring the data privacy issues and data exploitation risks by the tech companies that own the social media platforms (Van Dijck, 2014). NPOs also play a pivotal societal and economic role in the society.

As explained in Chapter 1, their adaptation and encouragement to use these platforms can play into the “trust” that these platforms are independent and take care of the data they gather from their users.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Hansmann’s (1987) contract failure theory posits that consumers prefer NPOs in delivering goods and services to address situations of information asymmetry that could be exploited by opportunistic for-profit organisations (Hansmann, 1987a). The adaptation of datafication that strongly plays into information asymmetry and creates an opportunity to exploit users’ data by for-profit organisations could be somewhat contradictory to this distinguishing value of NPOs. The NPOs, particularly those in the advocacy sector, face a dilemma when adapting the datafication. On one side, datafication could be used to predict and manipulate the behaviour of social media users to achieve the NPOs’ aims and targets. On the other hand, it plays into the power asymmetry of big-tech companies that could be used to influence society in the reverse direction that the NPOs are intending.

The other aspect of participation on these platforms is the way that NPOs seemingly consider algorithms on these platforms as neutral algorithms, ignoring that not only do they have commercial targets, but they are not objective and have inherent biases based on those who coded/trained them (Amoore, 2020). These biases could be contrary to the values and missions of these NPOs. As mentioned in section 2.2.3, Bucher (2017) exemplifies mid-aged women who are constantly targeted by wrinkle cream ads (Bucher, 2017). Stereotyping and categorisation of humans are problematic, and NPOs cannot simply please these algorithms

to get their message promoted without considering these issues. As mentioned in section 4.2, the NPOs view presence on social media platforms as essential and inevitable; however, what is missing is whether they are aware of the broader implication of adaptation of these platforms by organisations such as them and do they reconcile their presence on these platforms with their values and objectives.

In summary, the activities of the participating NPOs on social media, i.e. posting on daily bases or using the new features of the platforms, are influenced by what the algorithms on these platforms encourage. While the algorithms are optimised to benefit the platforms rather than those I interviewed, their adherence to the way these algorithms work could negatively impact NPOs' missions. Optimising algorithms to promote the posts indicates the participating NPOs adhering to the social media logics and being mediatized as they become more dependent on these platforms.

4.6 Use of happy imagery and shortening of the textual contents

The norms of social media encourage participants in this research to use more images and videos in their communication. When interviewees were asked, "How do you try to be successful on social media?" the use of images in posts emerged as a theme from interview data. Some examples of data illustrating how interviewees emphasise the importance of the use of images in the posts are as follows:

INT 2: "I think clear, high-quality videos and photos are really important. And they like to see photos of the people that we are supporting. They really want to see that. We

post pictures from people benefiting from, like, food hampers, people who are receiving the food. I find that there is more engagement with these kinds of things. When they can actually see the people, whereas if you just post, like, a sentence of what you are doing, they are less likely to find it interesting.”

INT 14: “I think when I do some longer posts and a really nice picture and a really long caption, people are probably liking it just for the picture.”

INT 13: “I will never post anything without a photograph, and that is as much as I go for it, so there are attention-grabbing pictures in my posts.”

INT 15: “Good quality photographs and simple hashtags and engaging short captions, I think, are the key to attracting the attention of our audiences.”

INT 7: “I think it’s centred on visual imagery, I think it is visual, it’s the nice pictures [...], So actually it is very rare we post anything without a photo or video, definitely the use of imagery, natural imagery that is carefully selected.”

INT 8: “We try to make engaging content by mainly use of images and graphics with the posts we do.”

Given that social media becomes a means for attracting attention, as noted in finding #3, the quotes presented above emphasise the importance of visual messages rather than textual ones as a way to attract attention in social media posts. This has translated in practice to large penetration of images in social media posts. This is evident from the content analysis results

presented in Table 16 below. The results for Twitter posts show that a clear majority, i.e., 76%, of tweets sent by participating NPOs in this study contained either an image or a video. Although Twitter is a microblogging website and relies on text as the primary mode of communication, the figure of 76% shows that the use of images is prevalent in Twitter posts of NPOs. The percentage of images used was even higher, i.e. 90%, among Facebook posts. Overall, 83% of 909 analysed posts across Twitter and Facebook in my study included either an image or a video.

Interviewee	Platform	Post#	Posts that contain				Happy Face Images %	Sad Images %
			Image/Video	Hashtag	Links	Story		
INT1	Facebook	33	97%	36%	97%	18%	43%	7%
	Twitter	46	83%	48%	74%	9%	32%	5%
INT2	Facebook	32	100%	34%	63%	13%	35%	4%
	Twitter	32	63%	25%	34%	50%	42%	5%
INT3	Facebook	79	94%	52%	72%	4%	44%	0%
	Twitter	40	83%	73%	75%	0%	41%	0%
INT4	Facebook	38	55%	84%	55%	8%	20%	0%
	Twitter	24	71%	83%	50%	4%	18%	0%
INT5	Facebook	15	100%	60%	47%	0%	0%	0%
	Twitter	24	67%	75%	75%	0%	0%	0%
INT6	Facebook	80	99%	74%	10%	5%	6%	2%
	Twitter	24	42%	75%	29%	4%	0%	0%
INT7	Facebook	28	89%	89%	86%	4%	42%	0%
	Twitter	59	88%	66%	44%	0%	48%	0%
INT8	Facebook	5	100%	100%	60%	0%	40%	0%
	Twitter	10	80%	90%	30%	0%	38%	0%
INT9	Facebook	12	67%	0%	100%	0%	25%	13%
	Twitter	0	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
INT10	Facebook	39	97%	38%	97%	23%	52%	0%
	Twitter	44	84%	48%	75%	11%	35%	0%
INT11	Facebook	41	61%	83%	54%	7%	21%	0%
	Twitter	36	67%	78%	53%	3%	13%	0%
INT12	Facebook	13	100%	100%	69%	0%	62%	15%
	Twitter	17	88%	88%	24%	0%	53%	13%
INT13	Facebook	34	100%	29%	53%	12%	25%	0%
	Twitter	31	71%	23%	35%	35%	23%	0%
INT14	Facebook	22	100%	64%	50%	0%	0%	9%
	Twitter	31	74%	74%	74%	0%	0%	9%
INT15	Facebook	8	100%	100%	75%	0%	63%	0%
	Twitter	12	83%	92%	25%	0%	50%	0%
TOTAL	Facebook	479	90%	60%	60%	8%	24%	2%
	Twitter	430	76%	62%	54%	9%	23%	1%
	Total	909	83%	61%	57%	8%	23%	2%

Table 16: The content analysis of the social media posts of the participants and their contents

My findings support the importance of visual messages as part of communication through social media amongst S/M NPOs. This is in line with the study by Waters et al. (2009) that images were used more than other forms of content, such as news links and campaign summaries, in the Facebook posts of NPOs (Waters *et al.*, 2009b). My study extended Waters's findings by revealing that attracting attention is one of the reasons that participating NPOs in my research use pictures in their social media posts. The increase in the use of images as an integral part of communication has also been attributed to reasons such as conveying and clarifying the message easier and quicker or arousing stronger emotions in potential donors (Lee and Keib, 2016; Patel, Wolfe and Manikas, 2021). Of course, these reasons could also contribute to the use of pictures by my interviewees, as there is rarely a single driver. However, the context of the conversation in the interview has been the way NPOs attract attention on social media and what techniques allow them to achieve this.

The participants in my study suggest that they measure the success of their posts by how many likes, shares, comments, etc., their posts receive (see finding #3). Also, findings #4 and #5 show that the driver of many of their activities on social media platforms is attracting attention. The same participants suggest that using images is one of the best ways to attract attention, which is consistent with their social media activities, showing that 83% of their Facebook/Twitter posts included an image or a video. So, the behaviour of the NPOs is consistent with the correlation they assume between the use of imagery and attracting attention.

The positive correlation between the use of images and receiving more likes, shares, or comments has been confirmed by studies in the literature, as mentioned in section 2.7.(e.g., Sabate *et al.*, 2014; Araujo, Neijens and Vliegenthart, 2015; Li and Xie, 2020). For example, Lie and Xie's (2020) study showed that professional photos positively impact the engagement of social media users (Li and Xie, 2020). My data also shows that the use of images, and specific types of images, in terms of obtaining more likes, shares or comments compared to text in social media, is a perceived social media logic by the participating NPOs. So, the contents of mediated communication via social media have been influenced by this perceived norm that images receive more likes, shares and comments. The phenomenon observed here is that the NPOs adjust their behaviour according to the perceived norm that images receive more attention. This adjustment of behaviour is yet another indication of mediatization of these NPOs as per Hjarvard's (2008) mediatization definition.

The mediatization that has been observed in the previous findings was mainly in terms of the distribution of social media posts as well as the way their success is measured. In finding #4, the NPOs are increasing their presence across many platforms in the hope of more attention across demographics. Finding #5 shows that the frequency of their posts is driven by the algorithms on the same platforms. However, the finding here shows that the actual content of the post has also been subject to mediatization. As described in the "Four Phases of Mediatization" by Strömbäck (2008), this finding shows that phase three of mediatization is evident among participating NPOs in my research. In the third phase, Strömbäck (2008) considered how far the format, grammar, content and rhythm of communications of an

institution such as politics has been determined by the media. Strömbäck (2008) suggests that what distinguishes this phase from the second phase is that the media has the upper hand over the other institutions here. Hence, these institutions need to adhere to the media logics to communicate through the media on which they are now dependent (Strömbäck, 2008a). This is also in line with the finding that is when the main purpose of social actors in the “creation” phase becomes coverage of the media, which in the case of social media is getting likes, comments and shares; this is a facet of mediatization (Strömbäck, Esser and Lundby, 2009).

My finding goes beyond noting the use of images in most social media posts by the participating NPOs, as I also found that the nature of these images is also affected. The finding is evident in the interviews and content analysis of social media posts that participants prefer to post images that provoke happy feelings. 8 out of 15 interviewees mentioned that images that provoke happy feelings are more suitable for social media platforms. The content analysis of posts, as presented in Table 16, shows that only 2% of their posts contained sad images. The followings are some quotes from the participants who preferred to post images that provoke happy feelings:

INT 5: “Good quality photographs and simple hashtags and engaging short captions I think, is the key (to receive likes).”

INT 11: "Nice photo of faces with smiles. Especially I think like for us, is like a mentor and a mentee together, and it might look like two people that you would not see normally together... it might be like, something that is eye-catching."

INT 12: "One thing we really notice is that it is important to have people's faces. People react more to seeing faces, especially happy ones. Even if we have a quote, we always try to include the person's face. Because it is just more engaging."

Five interviewees also contrasted the use of happy images to attract public attention with avoiding the use of sad pictures, which were considered inappropriate content for these platforms. For example:

INT 1: "We've been moving away from using more stereotype images, sort of sad-looking kids at a hospital, because there is obviously lots of theory around for motive marketing messaging. I think people are recently sort of more and more acknowledging that. People don't want to be feeling upset and sad, especially with the current news cycle and the way that social media is increasingly becoming. People do not want the sort of sad guilt trap. It is becoming less and less effective. [...] So there is more of the move toward using, umm, happy images in our communication."

INT 9: "The situations of the families we support are usually heartbreaking, but when we take pictures or videos for social media, we try not to pass that sadness."

Despite interviewees' beliefs about their audiences' preference for happy images over sad images, existing literature suggests that this could potentially lead to suboptimal outcomes, including less engagement. Many studies investigating the impact of negative and positive content in televised fundraising appeals found that sad content, compared to happy ones, evokes more empathy in their audience, leading to more pro-social actions. For example, Bagozzi and Moore's (1994) study shows that empathy would be elicited stronger via content that cultivates negative emotion in audiences in order to provoke prosocial behaviour of audiences such as donations (Bagozzi and Moore, 1994). In another study, Small and Verrochi (2009) focus specifically on the facial expressions of victim portrayals in the images and conclude that sad faces evoke more sympathy than happy or neutral expressions (Small and Verrochi, 2009). So, findings suggest that negative emotion compared to a positive one, causes a greater sense of sympathy because happy faces are seen as an expression of satisfaction and therefore indicate no need for help. However, neither Bagozzi and Moore (1994) or Small and Verrochi (2009) examine the content of social media posts; instead, their studies examined this effect on different mediums, respectively, television and printed material, i.e., flyer (ibid).

The power of images in communication via social media and the impact of positive and negative content of posts on the activities of NPOs have received little scholarly attention. However, as mentioned in section 2.7 of the literature review, the studies that exist support the conclusions of studies on other mediums, which find that images showing negative emotion have generated more social media engagement in terms of number of shares and

comments (Jordan *et al.*, 2019; Bünzli, 2022). For example, according to the study by Jordan *et al.* (2019), social media posts of children NPOs, including sad photographs, receive a greater number of likes, shares and comments than posts featuring happy photographs. So, while sad images could increase engagement and attract more attention, the NPOs who use images to increase attention to their posts tend not to use sad images, believing that happy images will serve this purpose better.

Studies show that, in general, across all social media platforms, when the users play the producer role, the positive emotions were generally deemed more appropriate to be expressed compared to negative ones from their perspective (Waterloo *et al.*, 2018). For example, the study by Qiu *et al.* (2012) shows that compared to offline interactions, Facebook users were significantly more likely to disclose positive than negative emotions (Qiu *et al.*, 2012). Reinecke and Trepte (2014) coined the phrase “positivity bias in SNS communication” to denote the existence of a norm in which most online content cultivates positive feelings rather than negative ones in social network sites (Reinecke and Trepte, 2014). This established norm in the social media platforms that favour positive expressions over negative ones can potentially explain the use of positive images by the above NPOs.

The “positivity bias” can be considered a social media logic based on Asp’s definition. As discussed in section 2.2.3 of the literature review chapter, Asp (1990) proposed that the term “media logic” can be used as an overarching term to refer to the systems of norms that govern formats, practices, and rationalities in media (Asp, 1990b). The NPOs following the norm in social media platforms, which is the use of positive images, can be considered yet as another

indication of them submitting to social media logic and their mediatization. The positivity in their posts is even though most NPOs have causes related to solving social problems that may not be easily expressed with positive images.

Additionally, the use of happy images is not fully in line with their goal of attracting attention through their posts, as studies showed that negative images could attract more attention. It seems the NPOs are following the norms in social media rather than what would attract more attention. However, it is not clear that this is an informed decision as it contradicts the findings in the literature; some of the NPOs, as seen in quotes from my data, believe that positive images are more likely to attract attention. This belief demonstrates that some of the NPOs in this research build their views about social media based on the norms they observe rather than the measurable effects of their action, which was also mentioned in finding #3.

The extensive use of images - and especially happy images - were two themes that emerged in my data that indicate the mediatization of social media content produced by the interviewed NPOs. Additionally, from the answers of interviewees to the "How do you try to be successful on social media?" a theme emerged that indicates they shorten the content of their posts to attract attention. For example:

INT 2: "I've found that people might view the video but not the whole thing. They may find it boring and not interesting. So, if you are doing a video, It has to be short and really eye-catching and interesting to watch the whole thing."

INT 3: "We have kind of best practice guidelines, so I try not to make my captions long on Instagram. I used to make them long. But I found out if I make them shorter, they'll be viewed more, so I'm trying to keep them shorter."

INT 5: "Good quality photographs and simple hashtags and engaging short captions, I think, is the key (to receive likes)."

INT 10: "I always try to write less, for example, like shorter captions so people can actually read them."

INT 12: "Also, we try to keep our content short and tight. As I said, we have lots of texts because our mission is education inequality; Unfortunately, it is not something that you can show visually very well. So, we rely on text a lot, but We try to keep it short so that it could be easy to consume."

INT 15: "...I need to make the most attractive; if it's just going to be quoted, it needs to be good, it needs to be short..."

The shortening of messages could impact different parts of social media posts: it could shorten the text, caption or video of the content. Although the participants do not explain how the shortening of the content helps attraction of attention, some mentioned that this shortening helps to keep the content "interesting" and "easy to consume". This could be related to the fact that the users on social media have limited attention capacity and encounter the abundance of information on these platforms. Hence, the NPOs try to shorten

their messages and make them easier to consume so it requires less attention in order to guarantee that they at least get some.

This perception of interviewees regarding shortening the messages to attract the attention of the audience is in line with the study that was mentioned in section 2.7 of the literature review. Gligoric et al. (2019) revealed that tweets are more successful in attracting attention when they are 30-40% shorter than their original versions (Gligoric, Anderson and West, 2019). Shortening of messages also has been encouraged by some social media platforms which impose maximum lengths for a post. For example, tweets are limited to 280 characters.

Shortening the messages on social media platforms happens through different techniques, including the use of commonly understood abbreviations to shorten the text (such as “w” for “with” or “&” for “and”). However, one of the common techniques is to embed a hyperlink in the message, which gives users the option to read the expanded content. My content analysis of social media posts shows that these NPOs have more to say than their post on social media platforms but have had to shorten their message in order to become suitable for Facebook and Twitter. In my dataset, as presented in Table 16, 57% of the posts included a link which redirects users to a page with more information regarding their subject. This result echoes the result of Lovejoy et al. (2012) study, which examined how NPOs use Twitter, revealing that the majority of the NPOs’ tweets included hyperlinks to external information in order to bypass 140 characters limit of Twitter.

The data I collected in both the interviews and content analysis of social media posts show that NPOs have more to say in order to convey their messages completely. However, by shortening their message, they have tried to be more attention-friendly for the users of the social media platforms. This finding shows that social media posts prioritise attracting attention over fully conveying the message – though, of course, no message at all is conveyed if users do not engage with the post. Mediatization of content has happened in the context of information abundance and scarcity of attention, compelling NPOs to change their content to fit the prevalent social media logic across the platforms.

The mediatization of content has significance beyond just a presentation of information. The change could impact the reality that is perceived by social media users. As explained in the methodology chapter, section 3.1, I take a constructivist stance; I believe that social phenomena and their meaning are continuously being constructed by social actors through their interactions and that social media is an intermediary of these interactions. Accordingly, the increase in the use of images, happy expressions and shortening of messages as an unwritten rule of social media for attracting the public impacts the constructed reality and its meanings. I believe that the audience's perception of social reality is shaped differently when the contents are changed according to social media logics. Consequently, different actions could be elicited from realities constructed by different stakeholders of these NPOs.

In the present study, participants employed strategies such as message shortening, incorporating cheerful images, and including links to enhance the visibility and engagement of their posts. These behaviours are examples of “platform vernacular”, as described by Gibbs

et al. (2015) and mentioned in the literature review section 2.2.3 (Gibbs *et al.*, 2015). It must be considered that the way these NPOs post their content on social media platforms is not directly connected to the affordance of these platforms. For instance, they shorten their messages on Facebook, where is no character limitation and talk about shortening their Twitter messages beyond the platform limit to attract more attention. Similarly, the use of images on both platforms is optional, but the participants see it necessary as the vernacular of the platforms, without which their messages will not get the necessary attention. This compliance with the unwritten rules of attracting attention on these platforms by different participants is a significant indication of mediatization among these NPOs.

Additionally, like what Gibbs et al. (2015) suggest, although each platform has its own specific “language”, these vernaculars infiltrate different platforms (*ibid*). Many of these practices are used by the participants across both Facebook and Twitter platforms consistently, e.g., the use of images and happy images. Since this study was focused mainly on social media platforms, it can be seen that the mediatization and adherence to the rules of one platform penetrate across platforms by the users (e.g. shortening the texts from Twitter). It is also worth noting that the practices of shortening the message on Twitter have roots in older mediums such as SMM, where micro text was also used (see Gouws *et al.*, 2011; Xue *et al.*, 2011). The penetration of the communication practices on social media beyond these platforms and into other modes of communication for these NPOs is beyond the scope of this study. However, some studies suggest such penetrations to other modes of communication. For instance, a recent study by Lutviana & Mafulah (2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic in

the use of online classes found that students tended to use slang words common on social media to communicate with their classmates during online classes (Lutviana and Mafulah, 2021). The study adds that the students would not use the same words during communication with their teachers online (ibid). This study is an example where the vernacular of social media platforms has infiltrated online classes. So, while this shows the possibility of the same happening to the NPOs in their communication, it requires further study to establish whether it happens across communication channels for these organisations.

In summary, the participating NPOs are changing the content of their social media posts by using images and videos, expressing their messages through happy images and shortening their messages to ensure they can capture their audience's attention. These changes to the content are the result of NPOs following the norms of social media, yet such changes do not necessarily result in more engagement from the audience on these platforms and may have the opposite results. Adaptation of these social media norms, i.e., media logics, is a clear indication of the mediatization of these NPOs in producing content. This mediatization goes beyond changing how the content is presented but also changes the content and the reality that is constructed from it.

4.7 Storytelling is compelling but underutilised

Five interviewees mentioned the value of storytelling in the success of their social media activities:

INT 3: "For example, with the different kinds of posts, we realised that the post that we do on stories of children, which is telling their story with nice photos of them, has been very successful."

INT 1: "I think you cannot fundraise through social media unless it is an individual case story. So, for example, a great example of fundraising through Twitter is X, that tends to be individual stories, raising money for treatment."

INT 8: "It's a difficult time (pandemic), and I've noticed that our positive stories have done really well and attracted a lot of, umm, attention."

INT 9: "Another element in our posts that gets lots of likes and comments is the story of our families that we support. It seems that with stories, the public can more easily connect to them. We try not to reveal any specific information about them, to keep their dignity."

INT 13: "Story also helps us to get likes and comments on our posts. In our last post, we told the story of a young rabbit that we rescued, and people reacted to the post very well."

The power of storytelling in attracting audiences' attention aligns with established knowledge in the marketing and communication field. For example, Stubb compared the online viewing time of informational blog posts versus storytelling blog posts and found that visitors spent more time reading story-driven blogs than informational blogs (Stubb, 2018). Moreover,

storytelling has been identified as a powerful element for constructing meaning through “sense making”; since a story helps the event become clearer and easily conveyed to its audiences (Weick, 1995). The role of story in NPOs' communication has been the subject of a number of studies. For example, Clarke's (2009) study showed that combining storytelling with branding elements is an effective technique to reach fragmented audiences and achieve success in the fundraising (Clarke, 2009).

While the potential of using storytelling in social media posts is recognised by the participants of the current research, in total, only 76 of the 909 posts (8%) that I analysed contained a story. As explained in more detail in the Methodology chapter, section 3.8.1.3, the content of posts should have contained three main elements to be counted as a story: a protagonist, a goal and the action of the protagonist for achieving his/her goal. Figure 25 is an example of posts that contain a story. In this case, unlike finding #6, e.g., the use of happy faces, the understanding of NPOs in terms of what type of communication is more effective is in line with existing studies. However, this understanding does not translate into a significant number of posts using this technique. This could be due to the more complex nature of storytelling compared to the ease of adding a picture or video to a post. Storytelling requires more expertise and practice compared to simply adding visual content. This additional complexity, combined with the resource deficiency discussed in finding #1, could explain why NPOs do not use storytelling in most of their posts, even if they consider them more effective. However, in this research, there is no concrete evidence to support this, and this could be investigated in future research.

#Volunteer Jonathan is local to Brixton and knows a thing or two about bread. He's been lending a hand, with food parcel deliveries.
#FoodJustice #Covid19 #Covid #CoronaVirus #FoodPoverty
#Charity #FeedLondon #HelpTheHungry #Community #NonProfit



Figure 25: Example of a storytelling post by the NPOs

In summary, the value of storytelling in successful social media activities is well understood by some of the participants in this study. Marketing experts and the literature on the topic support the value of storytelling. While the participants acknowledge the value of storytelling and its practical benefits, they incorporate it into only a limited number of their posts. The underlying reasons for this discrepancy between their recognition of storytelling's importance and its usage warrant further investigation.

4.8 COVID-19 pandemic made social media platforms more important

My data highlights the increase in the importance of social media from the viewpoint of NPOs during the lockdown period, as this medium helped them to stay connected to the public. For example, the following participants stated:

INT 10: "In COVID-19 lockdown, we absolutely shifted towards using digital platforms more, mainly because our programs are not running in school, so half of my job that was about running programs in school has stopped, so I focus on marketing, including social media more. We post more frequently, and this hopefully would be helpful for people during this difficult time."

INT 8: "People spend more time on social media in lockdown, and I think they look to it more[...]. Everyone feels quite negative. It's a difficult time, and I've noticed that our positive stories have done really well and attracted a lot of umm attention."

INT 14: "I think in comparison to where we were before COVID, now we have much more engagement, and it has increased significantly. We have a lot more followers, a lot more comments on our posts a much bigger response. So, we are more successful in terms of our impact."

INT 15: "I think people spend more time on the internet and social media. So, I feel there is more interest from the other side."

The rise in the importance of social media for participating NPOs comes as no surprise. Many UK organisations, including NPOs, have established guidelines compelling or encouraging their employees to avoid social interactions and to stay at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, with fewer opportunities to interact in person at events such as gala dinners, silent auctions or other forms of in-person fundraising events, it becomes increasingly difficult for NPOs to stay socially connected with their potential donors and supporters. Moreover, due to lockdowns, reports show that digital media usage, especially social media, increased significantly among individuals during the first months of the pandemic (Kemp, 2020). As NPOs and individuals became more constrained in using other forms of communication, social media was widely utilised as a substitute for other forms of communication. As a result, social media platforms became more important for the communication of NPOs.

This increase in importance has consequences, including more focus on and use of social media platforms by the participating NPOs, as illustrated in the quotes above. More communication through social media should visibly show itself as more posts and content being produced on these platforms by the NPOs. Table 17 presents the results of the content analysis of the social media posts of the participants, comparing pre- and post-start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data suggest an increase of 6%, i.e., from 66% to 72%, in the number of days that the NPOs send at least one post. The same data shows all the NPOs combined sent 501 posts after the start of the pandemic compared to 408 before it, which is a ~23% increase in the number of posts.

Most of the increase in the number of posts is because of more frequent posting during the pandemic on Twitter, which is a 42% increase across the participants. This number for Facebook has been around 7%. While there is an increase in the overall number of posts, this has not been the story for all organisations in the study. 9 out of the 15 NPOs in the study either posted slightly less frequently or the same after the start of the lockdown in terms of the number of days that they sent at least one post. The number of overall posts is also down or the same across 6 of the 15 NPOs. Almost half of the NPOs have become significantly more active, while the other half reduced their activity significantly or saw no change. The overall numbers show an increase but do not reflect the reality for half of the participating NPOs. Also, in Table 14, where the number of repeated posts across the two periods is compared, a 6% reduction in repetitive posts can be observed.

The overall picture of post-pandemic lockdown is a mixed one; for almost half of the NPOs, it resulted in being more active by sending more posts, but for the other group, the number of posts stayed the same or reduced. Additionally, it might be suggested that the focus on social media during the pandemic/lockdown period should have not necessarily translated into more posts but higher quality posts. There is a slight reduction in repeating the same posts across two platforms, but the reduction is insignificant. This could suggest that NPOs did not spend considerably more time producing tailored posts across different platforms. Whilst I found no evidence of a shift in the quality of the posts during the pandemic, despite the importance of social media during this time, it requires further study and metrics to be conclusive.

Interviewee	Platform	Pre-Pandemic Post Frequency						Post-Pandemic Post Frequency					
		Median	Mode	Mean	Count	>1 Post Per Day %		Median	Mode	Mean	Count	>1 Post Per Day %	
INT1	Facebook	1	1	1.00	17	100%		1	1	0.94	16	94%	
	Twitter	1	2	1.35	23	76%		1	1	1.35	23	94%	
INT2	Facebook	1	1	1.12	19	88%		1	1	0.76	13	65%	
	Twitter	0	0	1.41	24	41%		0	0	0.47	8	35%	
INT3	Facebook	2	0	2.35	40	76%		3	3	2.29	39	94%	
	Twitter	1	0	1.12	19	53%		1	1	1.24	21	82%	
INT4	Facebook	0	0	1.18	20	47%		1	1	1.06	18	71%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.35	6	29%		1	1	1.06	18	71%	
INT5	Facebook	0	0	0.24	4	24%		0	0	0.65	11	47%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.35	6	18%		1	0	1.06	18	53%	
INT6	Facebook	3	3	2.82	48	100%		2	2	1.88	32	82%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.24	4	24%		1	2	1.18	20	71%	
INT7	Facebook	0	0	0.12	2	12%		1	1	1.53	26	94%	
	Twitter	1	0	1.47	25	71%		1	1	2.00	34	94%	
INT8	Facebook	0	0	0.12	2	12%		0	0	0.18	3	18%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.12	2	12%		0	0	0.47	8	35%	
INT9	Facebook	0	0	0.24	4	24%		0	0	0.47	8	47%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.00	0	0%		0	0	0.00	0	0%	
INT10	Facebook	1	1	1.41	24	100%		1	1	0.88	15	82%	
	Twitter	1	2	1.35	23	76%		1	1	1.24	21	88%	
INT11	Facebook	0	0	1.06	18	47%		1	0	1.35	23	71%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.53	9	29%		1	1	1.59	27	71%	
INT12	Facebook	0	0	0.41	7	41%		0	0	0.35	6	35%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.35	6	35%		1	0	0.65	11	53%	
INT13	Facebook	1	1	0.94	16	71%		1	1	1.06	18	65%	
	Twitter	0	0	1.06	18	41%		0	0	0.76	13	35%	
INT14	Facebook	0	0	0.29	5	24%		1	1	1.00	17	82%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.47	8	35%		1	1	1.35	23	71%	
INT15	Facebook	0	0	0.29	5	29%		0	0	0.18	3	18%	
	Twitter	0	0	0.24	4	24%		0	0	0.47	8	35%	
TOTAL	Facebook	1	0	0.91	231	53%		1	1	0.97	248	64%	

	Twitter	0	0	0.69	177	38%		1	0	0.99	253	59%	
	Total	1	0	1.60	408	66%		2	0	1.96	501	72%	

Table 17: Pre versus Post COVID-19 activity of participants on Facebook and Twitter

The lack of consistent increase in the production of content on social media platforms or improvement in the quality of the posts in a consistent way across most NPOs does not necessarily contradict the rise in importance of these platforms for the participating NPOs. The disconnect between the theoretical importance and practice for some of these organisations could be due to resource deficiency, as per section 4.1. Although some of the NPOs suggest that they relocated their resources from in-person events to digital communication, all of these are in the context of more resource pressure due to many factors. For instance, increased demand for NPOs to provide more services (Hyndman, 2020), staff absences due to sickness, worries about getting sick due to the elderly age of some volunteers and care for the family. Overall, the pandemic might have had a net negative impact on the resources available to the NPOs for social media activities, which could explain the situation. It is worth mentioning that given this pressure on resources, the fact that NPOs managed a similar level of activity compared to pre-COVID on social media platforms could be an indication of the increased importance of these platforms among these organisations.

Given that increased importance and dependency on media are the two first phases of the mediatization (Strömbäck, 2008a), the degree to which the NPOs are mediatized could rise during the pandemic, in a sense that the restriction of face-to-face communication provides the situation for the increase of media dependency and mediated communication in society. This includes NPOs, where the adaptation of social media logics could be deepened as a result

of this increased dependency and mediation. Another consequence is that the reality between NPOs and the public is further mediated, too.

In summary, the pandemic and lockdown increased the importance of communication through social media platforms for NPOs, and some reported shifting more resources to this medium for communicating with their stakeholders and the public. However, this shift of resources is in the context of other pressures on the human resources of these organisations due to the pandemic itself. Although the participating NPOs are focusing on the social media platform more as a result of the pandemic, it did not translate to the production of more content relative to the pre-pandemic period consistently across all organisations. Additionally, I find no indication of higher-quality posts, either. Whilst the pandemic did not alter the overall output of half of the participating NPOs on social media platforms, it has made them more dependent on mediated communication through these platforms. It could have intensified the mediatization of these organisations. This, in turn, means the NPOs are subject to the mediated reality through these platforms and are pushed to accept the logic of communication through them.

4.9 Summary

The findings of this research indicate that from the point of view of UK S/M NPOs, social media plays an important role in their communication with the public. They post to fulfil three main functions: to disseminate information, to build community and/or to mobilise supporters. However, achieving the goals of posts, i.e., raising money or getting volunteers, have been

omitted from the decision-making process of NPOs' staff when they defined a successful social media activity. In other words, they have adapted the desires and priorities of the attention economy over and above their own needs. Moreover, to ensure the success of their social media activities, based on the social media metrics, i.e., number of likes, shares and comments, they have adjusted the content of their social media posts by using images and videos, expressing their messages through happy images and shortening their messages. Additionally, they have taken steps to make their posts rewarded by the algorithms in order to enhance the visibility of their posts.

Despite their perception of success and actions that they have taken to be successful in social media, the content analysis of their social media shows their activities are not successful in terms of the number of likes, shares and comments relative to their number of followers. In addition, even though the NPOs are aware of the storytelling value in their communication via social media, in practice, they rarely use it in their posts. In addition, NPOs valued the presence on more platforms without investigating the actual benefits of this presence on their ultimate goals.

The resource deficiency, their increased dependency on social media for communication with the public and the way that they source their knowledge about social media platforms, i.e., imitation of other charities in social media, are the factors that have been identified by this research that contributed to the mediatization of these NPOs, which is evident in the way that they define success and their following actions. Taking these findings together, this research suggests that small/medium size non-profits in the UK use social media

unsystematically and rather adapt its perceived norms. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has increased the importance of social media platforms for the NPOs, although this has not translated consistently into them using these platforms for communicating with the public, more. The amplified importance could have intensified the mediatization of these NPOs compared to the time before the pandemic.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In order to draw a conclusion about the influence of social media on UK small-medium size non-profit organisations, this chapter starts with a summary of what has been stated throughout the thesis. It restates the research questions in section 5.1. Then, in section 5.2, a comprehensive overview of answers to these questions will be provided. Following this, in section 5.3, the contributions of current research to the field of NPOs and media will be discussed. In section 5.4, the limitation of current research will be explained, and then in section 5.5, some research direction for the future will be recommended. The thesis ends in section 5.6 with some final remarks about the outcome of this research.

5.1 Summary of the research problem

UK NPOs play a vital role in wider society. 82% of all NPOs are small/medium, meaning they have an annual income of less than £1 million. Therefore, this research project examines questions of relevance to most nonprofit organisations in the UK. Reports show that small to medium size NPOs and UK's population are increasingly adopting social media platforms (Gulyas, 2016); Moreover, due to the prohibition of face-to-face interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, relatively more of the NPOs' activities were moved onto these platforms. It is important to note, as discussed in section 2.3, that adaptation to using and communicating via media is not in itself new but rather is a longstanding and ongoing aspect of all organisations, including nonprofits. Throughout history, the media used by NPOs, their staff and volunteers has evolved from the use of letters, newspapers and

leaflets in the literate era to traditional mass media, i.e. TV and newspapers, and then to websites, emails and digital media in the current era. Although, these forms of communication have not replaced each other, each development in communications has introduced distinct structural features and practices that could have encouraged certain forms of beliefs and behaviours among NPOs. Likewise, the emergence and use of social media platforms may have influenced the beliefs and behaviours of the NPOs in various ways.

This research sought to understand how small to medium size NPOs have been influenced by the adaptation of communication through social media. This research suggests that the distinct structural feature of these platforms, i.e. creation and distribution of user-generated content, has contributed to the information abundance and attention scarcity in society. The scarcity of attention contributed to the formation of the attention economy in which human attention is commodified, and value is assigned to it. In social media platforms, the number of likes, comments and shares is the manifestation of the attention economy. Given that attracting attention, collecting users' data and selling it to interested companies, e.g. advertisers, is part of the business model of social media companies, the perception that these numbers hold value has been encouraged by these platforms. The assumption that these numbers hold value is one of the production and distribution logics of social media. In order to study how the small/medium NPOs have been influenced by this media logic, mediatization theory, as defined by Hjarvard (2008), has been used as the framework of this study while applying the attention economy as a key principle of social media logic within this definition.

As shown in the literature review, this research argues that the influence of social media on NPOs is understudied from empirical and theoretical perspectives. Additionally, most research has focused on the activities of the organisation on social media platforms, ignoring the decision-making process and the point of view of the organisations, which influence their activities. This gap motivated this study to understand the decision-making process behind the social media activities of these organisations and how it has been influenced by social media logics. Hence, the research has focused on the way the NPOs define and measure the success of their activities as well as how it impacts the way they conduct their activities. Understanding the impact of the mediatization process on the definition and measure of success among the NPOs as well as their practices will provide an insight into how these organisations have been influenced by the emergence and adaption of this new media. The focus of this study and the lack of other studies in this area invites an exploratory approach to this research.

To facilitate this approach, the research has drawn on two main sources of data: (1) semi-structured interview data from NPOs' staff who oversee social media activities of NPOs; and (2) content analysis of social media accounts of those organisations. The content analysis of social media enabled me to identify the gap between idealised and actual behaviour, that is, the difference between what participants said and what is happening in practice. These two sources have provided new understandings, which deepen the knowledge of media impact on the UK S/M NPOs. These findings emerged from answers to the following questions:

- How do small/medium size non-profit organisations define a successful social media activity, and how do they measure it?
- How are the social media practices of small/medium non-profit organisations impacted by the way they perceive success?

5.2 Findings of the Research

The key findings of this research are that UK S/M NPOs have adapted social media logics, which has attention economy as their basis, in the way they define and measure their success. Moreover, resource deprivation, lack of training and evidence-based knowledge mean NPOs have settled for a simple and untested measure of success for their activities. This demonstrates the mediatization of success in these organisations. The research reveals that the mediatization of these organisations goes beyond the definition and the measure of success. They frequently post on social media, shorten their textual messages by including hyperlinks in their posts, use more visual content, especially happy images and have opened accounts on multiple platforms. All these practices are the result of the adaptation of the social media logics that stems from the attention economy on these platforms.

However, their contents and how they post on social media are not necessarily beneficial for the NPOs in terms of their aims: Posting frequently could cause fatigue to donors. Sending happy images could decrease the sympathy of audiences with beneficiaries, which leads to less tangible outcomes. Having accounts in multiple platforms without having a strategy or/and a clear idea about the rationale behind doing this could burn limited resources of

NPOs. In summary, the unsystematic approach to how the organisations engage in social media activities resulted in practices that may not get these NPOs any closer to their missions, despite the resources spent on performing these activities.

5.2.1 Key Finding 1: Mediatization of success

NPOs use social media platforms to achieve a wide variety of goals, such as mobilising supporters, recruiting volunteers and attracting donations. These goals can be categorised into three types of posts, those that aim to induce actions, posts that focus on community building and those that want to spread information and create awareness. The content analysis of the NPOs in this study shows that over half of the posts by the NPOs aim to induce some type of action from social media users. Despite the variety of the goals the posts aim to achieve, the NPOs have settled for a simple and untested measure of success for their activities.

The NPOs under study define and measure the success of their activities based on the metrics such as the number of likes, comments and shares. Social media platforms provide these metrics and are a mere indicator of attention to the posts sent on these platforms. NPOs measure the success of their various activities, regardless of their goals, based on these metrics. This way of measuring success could only be valid if there were a strong correlation between attracting attention and achieving each of their goals from their activities. This correlation, at best, is not proven. Still, more importantly, the NPOs do not consider the

necessity of verifying this correlation and simply rely on these metrics as the measure of success.

The metrics that are mainly motivated by the commercial goals of social media platforms, such as selling the attention of their users to advertisers, have become part of the fabric of what guides the activities of the NPOs on social media platforms. The NPOs have effectively submitted to this social media logic, which is driven by the attention economy, in the way they define and measure their success. The finding of this study shows that these metrics are not only used in practice to measure success, but the NPOs value these metrics as a true indicator of success. The submission of the NPOs to these measures of success and the media logic is in line with the definition of mediatization, according to Hjarvard (2008). This means that through adapting social media platforms in the NPOs, the meaning of success for these organisations has been mediatized.

The mediatization of success among the NPOs has implications beyond just using an unproven measure. It influences the decision-making process and the behaviour of the NPOs on these platforms. Practically the mediatization resulted in the NPOs counting on reactive, but not necessarily productive, actions by their audience, such as “likes” and “shares”, rather than the intended results that would drive their nonprofit organisation’s missions. For instance, a campaign that aims to attract donations could theoretically be considered successful without attracting many donations if the audience liked the posts. This study doesn’t claim the possibility of this scenario in the real world but the fact that NPOs have ignored this possibility.

Additionally, the mediatization of success can be traced in other behaviour of these organisations on the social media platforms, specifically where they post, how they post and what they post on these platforms. Effectively the mediatization of success paved the way for the mediatization of the NPOs in other aspects. For example, NPOs use happy images in their posts to get more attention in the form of likes and similar metrics. Submission to this social media logic indicates the mediatization of content, which has been influenced by the mediatization of success in these organisations. This does not mean that the mediatization of success happened first and other aspects followed since mediatization is a process that involves many factors that interact with each other. However, the mediatization of success is a factor that focuses the NPOs on the attention economy in the social media platforms and guides many of their activities that embolden the wider mediatization.

5.2.2 Key Finding 2: Mediatization of small/medium size NPOs in the UK

The penetration of social media platforms and the growth in the number of active users have encouraged NPOs to become more active on these platforms. The shift of public attention to these platforms and the fundamental desire of all the studied NPOs to engage with the public made these organisations designate more resources for social media activities. The NPOs have become more dependent on these platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. The extent of the dependency of the NPOs on social media is to the degree that it is an integral part of their communication with the public. This dependency could be considered the foundation for the influence of social media on S/M NPOs, which is an important part of the process of mediatization of these organisations. As the reliance of the NPOs on social media expanded,

they aligned their activities with the “norms” of social media platforms. The norms of these platforms are a subjective matter and are as the NPOs perceive them.

The studied NPOs are on multiple social media platforms with no clear rationale or rationales that cannot be traced in their activities. Additionally, these organisations post messages while conscious of the way the platform algorithms function, which based on their understanding, gives them the best chance of being promoted by these algorithmic editors. This happens considering that most of these editorial decisions are not transparent, and the NPOs follow the common understanding of social media users. The adaptation of the NPOs to what they perceive as the norms and social media logics goes beyond how and where they post. The contents of their social media posts are also produced in a way that aligns with what they assume attracts more attention. The social media posts of the NPOs mostly contain imagery, particularly happy images, to attract more attention. Moreover, the textual contents of their posts are short, with the help of links that provide more details.

As mentioned, NPOs have adopted the desire and priorities of the attention economy over and above their own needs. Consequently, the behaviour of NPOs in how, where and what they post on these platforms is driven by attention economy rather than their objectives, e.g. getting more volunteers. Even with the goal of attracting attention, some of their methods contrast with what attracts attention based on some studies, e.g. posting happy images. Their assumptions about what attracts attention seem to be driven by norms rather than a data-driven approach. Submission to the norms and its evidence in their behaviour indicates the mediatization of the NPOs. This mediatization has happened in the context of increased

dependency and adaptation of the platforms. Dependency and adaptation are not the only contributors to the mediatization of these organisations. Other elements play a part in the mediatization processes, such as the organisational constraints in terms of resources and the way these organisations build expertise regarding social media.

5.2.3 Key Finding 3: Mediatization of NPOs in the shadow of resource deprivation and imitation of other NPOs

Mediatization is apparent in many findings of this research. However, it is important to mention that the approach of this research for understanding the influence of social media on NPOs is not technologically deterministic; rather, this research looked at the influence of social media as a more complex process. Hence, in the interviews, it has been tried to explore other factors that could have contributed to the way that social media influenced these organisations. Themes from the interviews show that in addition to the dependency of NPOs on social media, the deficiency of resources in S/M NPOs and imitating the activities of other NPOs provide the fertile ground for submission of NPOs to social media logics and hence their mediatization.

The deficiency of resources is well covered in the literature as a challenge for smaller NPOs. The findings of this research underline this challenge. For instance, the tasks the participants mentioned as part of their typical day were broader than what they were expected to do based on their job titles. This is one sign of stretched human and financial resources in these NPOs. The stretch of human resources could be traced in other findings of this research.

Particularly the gap between what they believe they should do on social media and what they do in practice.

Moreover, some of them also recognise the suitability of different platforms for different demographics, which necessitates communicating via these platforms for them. However, content analysis of their social media accounts shows that they do not tailor their content and just replicate one message among different platforms. A similar pattern has been found regarding storytelling, where the participants highlighted the importance of using it in their activities, but in practice, they do not use it in their posts.

The disparity between the point of view and what is happening in practice also arose from collected data during the pandemic. The interview theme showed that the importance of social media has increased for NPOs. However, analysis of their social media activities shows that the quality and quantity of their activities have not changed significantly. So, at least in terms of the contents and patterns of postings, this importance has not translated into practice.

Besides the resourcing constraints, the NPOs' use of social media is influenced by how they educate themselves about best practices on such platforms. Education generally can guide organisations through better use of their resources. The findings of the present study show that most participants learn the best practices of using social media by imitating the activities of other NPOs that they deem successful. Looking at the activities of other NPOs is in line with Bennett's (2011) study that shows the primary source of ideas for fundraising campaigns in

large or small charities is campaigns of other charities (Bennett and Savani, 2011). This could lead to the re-enforcement of similar practices among S/M NPOs, which may or may not prove useful for all of them. It is worth mentioning that both supply and demand of training courses for these organisations in the UK also influence the way that S/M NPOs educate themselves. On the one hand, there are few courses available for NPOs to learn about the use of social media. On the other hand, small/medium charities do not have the resources to pay for staff training.

So, while dependency on social media was a key element of the mediatization of NPOs, the lack of resources and the way they learn about social media, i.e. imitation of other organisations, are other factors that drive the mediatization of these organisations. It seems there is a vicious cycle in the ineffectiveness of the social media activities of S/M NPOs. Lack of resources makes it harder to build up the expertise for social media activities, either by providing skill training courses for staff or/and employing an expert in the field. Lack of expertise and being under-resourced encourages NPOs to imitate others in their social media activities rather than having a data-driven approach relative to their goals. Imitation of other social media, in turn, results in further submission to the norms and the logics of social media, resulting in the mediatization of these organisations. This submission to media logic implies the inefficiency of their social media activities, e.g., they aim for the number of likes rather than their actual goal. This ineffectiveness in the activities drains the already limited resources of these NPOs. Draining already limited resources sustains and even could worsen the

deficiency of the resources. Figure 26 demonstrates the cycle of ineffectiveness of social media activities.

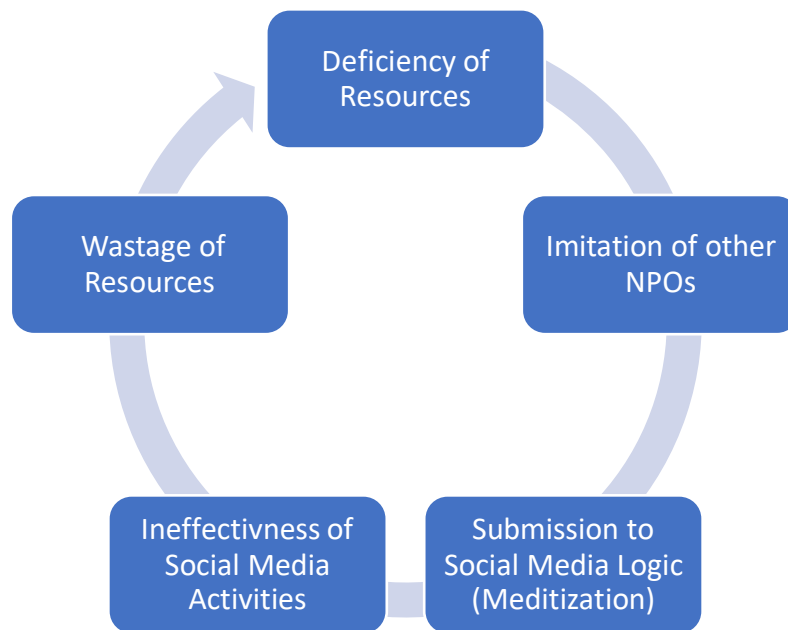


Figure 25: The cycle of ineffectiveness of social media activities in NPOs.

It is worth mentioning that although most of the interviewees consider their social media activities as successful, which by their definition was receiving likes, comments and shares, the content analysis of their social media demonstrated that relatively few of their followers like, comment or share their posts. This, based on their definition of success, is hardly successful. This disparity of definition and practice could open up a few possibilities. Some participants' responses indicated that they were improvising. Hence the measurement of success in their activities was not at the forefront of their minds and possibly was never done in practice. The other possibility is that the expectations of the participants are generally low, and few likes, shares and comments are not considered unsuccessful by them. Alternatively,

they had a theoretical view of success, but given the resource constraints, they may never manage to measure it practically.

Synthesising all the findings reveals a notable pattern: while the participating NPOs in this research acknowledged the significance of social media as a crucial communication tool with their supporters, their approach to resource allocation and utilisation of social media was inconsistent and unsystematic. At best, they relied on imitating other NPOs without establishing clear connections between their social media activities and real-world outcomes such as income generation or volunteer engagement. These observations indicate a process of mediatization within these organisations.

5.2.4 Research contribution

The findings of this research have both theoretical and practical contributions to nonprofit and media disciplines that will be explained in this section. First, this study is one of the few studies extending the limited understanding of how social media adaptation has influenced the beliefs and behaviours of UK S/M NPOs, utilising mediatization and attention economy. Most existing research on social media and NPOs is related to large NPOs and tends to focus on whether, how and why these organisations use these platforms. Despite the increase in the use of social media among S/M NPOs, there are limited studies on how social media as a social context influenced the beliefs and behaviours of NPOs, in particular concerning their activities on these platforms and their definition of success.

Second, this research shows that institutionalist tradition on mediatization can be a useful theoretical framework for analysing the influence of social media on organisations. The usefulness of this framework has been shown by the findings of this research. The findings reveal common trends among beliefs and behaviour of S/M NPOs that submission to social media logic contributes to their formation. The utilisation of this framework could potentially provide insight for other disciplines as well. As digital media is increasingly become entwined with various aspects of life, there is more need to study the influence of media in the context of other disciplines. This research is an example where I used the mediatization framework to conduct interdisciplinary research, connecting the media and the research on the NPOs. This study suggests that this framework can be useful in connecting the media field to other disciplines, which could also be useful in the development of mediatization theory.

Third, although we live in mediatized society, media does not influence all the social domains in the same way or to the same degree (Hjarvard, 2012). For example, the way that politics have become mediatized and its degree differs from other institutions such as religion. This is because the dependency of different institutions on social media could be different. For example, the dependency of politics on media is to the degree that a political system cannot function without it (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999), whereas in religion, the role that media play might not be as crucial as politics. Therefore, the degree and the ways that mediatization happens among UK S/M NPOs must be studied independently and cannot be implied from the studies on other institutions. This is what my study does and is another contribution of

this research. The result of this study also provides an opportunity to identify mutual and distinct facets of mediatization between NPOs and other institutions.

Fourth, the “mediatization of success” is a term that has been coined by this study. The interactions between media and other institutions can influence the aims and objectives through the mediatization of success. Consequently, many of the behaviours and activities of these institutions are influenced, and further mediatization is enabled. The definition and measures of “success” underpin the decision-making process behind the actions of an organisation. Hence, it deserves an explicit focus in any exploratory study about the mediatization of organisations.

In addition to these theoretical contributions, the result of the present study also could inform policymakers and the practitioners involved with the NPOs, regarding how the beliefs and behaviours of S/M NPOs have been impacted by the adaptation of social media. So, they could carry out steps that help to hinder the negative aspects of these impacts. For example, this research highlights the relationship between the way that NPOs update their knowledge regarding social media and the practices they carry out on these platforms. This emphasises the importance of training for small-medium size NPOs in order to use social media more efficiently. Additionally, this study shows the importance of having a clear metric as the measure of success among these NPOs when they are investing resources in social media activities, where without it, they can fall into the trap of counting on the “slacktivism” of their supporters.

The biggest surprise in the study was how the participating NPOs were seemingly unconscious of the business model of the social media platforms, and the decision-making process in how they use these platforms does not consider the implications of this business model. The NPOs have adopted social media for their communication activities as mere users, ignoring the paid services that these platforms provide that orient the algorithms of these platforms. Neglecting this indicates how individuals in a society accept the social media platform as a way of communication and its norms, and they bring these accepted norms to work. The mediatization that happened on a personal level in society to individuals has helped the mediatization of the organisation. For instance, if the social media platforms are full of happy images and good moments, driven by how popularity is encouraged by these platforms, the same concept is applied by those in charge of the social media activities of the NPOs. The NPOs use happy images to promote their work despite little evidence that this will increase the effectiveness of their communication. The lack of distinction between the use of social media as a user versus an organisation to communicate shows itself in the mediatization of success in these organisations. In the folklore of social media, a successful user is an influencer with more “likes”, “followers”, etc.; that’s why a single photo shared by Selena Gomez in 2018, who has over 144 million followers, is valued at \$3.8 million (Maxim, 2018).

In contrast, the NPOs do not sell the attention they attract on these platforms to others, but they need to use this attention to achieve their goals of communication. Despite this, the folklore of social media platforms on success has led them to focus on the metrics of popularity for success rather than their goal of communication. The observed dynamics here

also gives an interesting perspective into mediatization and how the mediatization of individuals in society could facilitate the mediatization of institutions and organisation in various aspects.

5.3 Research limitations

In this section, the limitations of the present study and how they may impact the conclusion of this research will be explained. First, the limitations of the research in the way it approaches certain gaps between what the NPOs want and what they do is explained; then, more specific limitations related to the collected sample and its size will be clarified. These limitations lead to suggestions for future studies that will be discussed in the next section.

The findings reveal several gaps between what interviewees said and what happened in their social media activities. One of the limitations of this study is that to explain these gaps, I have provided a few possibilities rooted in the literature and my understanding of the context, hence are not based on the data of the research. Future studies by utilising other methodologies, such as case study, can explore and help to understand why gaps exist between what NPOs want to do and what they do in their online activities. In the next section, these future studies will be proposed in more detail.

Another limitation of this study is its sample size. Due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of NPOs in the middle of the data collection stage of the current research, finding participants and conducting interviews became more difficult and time-consuming. In addition, as the focus of this research was on the S/M size NPOs, their staff

often had multiple roles and were busy to open time in their schedules for participating in this research. Consequently, the small size of the sample is a limitation of my study. Although, to some extent, data saturation happened in the thematic analysis of interviews, there was still a possibility that more participants could have added new themes and contributed to the research findings.

Additionally, one limitation of the sampling was its concentration around London due to the sampling method discussed in section 3.6. The geographical concentration in London, but not fully across the UK, could bias research towards the NPOs in a large city with potentially different access to resources compared to more remote ones. Moreover, the sample was limited to the point of view of staff in charge of social media platforms. In contrast, other staff who are in managerial positions may have different opinions regarding the questions of this research. Including data from managerial staff and wider geographical locations in the UK could strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings.

Finally, the content analysis of this research only considered the activities of the NPOs on Twitter and Facebook, while some of the NPOs used other platforms. Analysing the contents of other platforms may have revealed other patterns of usage by the NPOs or reaffirmed the patterns found in this research.

5.4 Directions for future research

Given that the nature of a qualitative study is exploratory, this type of study is mostly helpful to shed light on relatively unknown phenomena. This thesis, as qualitative research, revealed

aspects of mediatization among UK S/M NPOs, which was little-known before. The result of this research shows that mediatization happened among UK S/M NPOs, and specifically, the meaning of success has been mediatized. However, mediatization occurs in different degrees. Accordingly, this study suggests that future research could examine if there is a correlation between the degree and facets of the mediatization of NPOs and the properties of these organisations. Correlation between the degree of mediatization and the level of staff expertise and experience in social media, the demographics of supporters that NPOs try to communicate with, and the geographical focus of NPOs' missions, such as local versus international are examples of what can be explored in future research. For instance, an NPO that is focused on a local community may be less dependent on social media compared to another NPO that has a cause that it is pursuing globally. The reduced dependency could potentially mean less mediatization.

Moreover, since the focus of the present study was on the small-medium size NPOs, and its findings show that resource deprivation is one of the contributing factors in the mediatization of these organisations, it would be interesting to conduct comparative studies including large NPOs, i.e., with annual income over one million pounds in the UK. Access to larger financial resources may have implications on the degree and facets of mediatization among these organisations, so it would be interesting to compare the influence of social media between small and large NPOs.

In section 5.3, the interview data only shows the views of staff who were involved in the social media activities of NPOs. Staff in higher organisational positions, i.e., managers of NPOs, could

have different perspectives regarding the meaning of success and the use of social media for their organisations; so, exploring their views could deepen the understanding of the mediatization of NPOs. Additionally, widening the geographical diversity of the research to focus on various cities and locations in the UK could yield views from NPOs that have different access to resources and might have a different way of going about their communication with the public.

Additionally, another area that future research can expand on is the behaviour and patterns of activities of NPOs on social media platforms other than Twitter and Facebook, given that the content analysis of this study was mainly focused on these two platforms. Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube and other platforms have their own ways of encouraging the attention economy, and these could result in different behaviours by the NPOs that adopt them.

Moreover, it was mentioned in section 4.8 importance of social media increased during the lockdown period. However, the content analysis of this research did not find the increased quantity or improved quality of the social media posts across all the NPOs in a consistent way. Further studies need to be conducted to understand the contribution factors to this among the S/M NPOs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, in section 4.7, it was illustrated that interviewees emphasised the importance of storytelling, but they rarely used it in their posts. Future studies could address this gap between what NPOs desire and what they do and investigate why this is the case.

Finally, the unit of analysis in this research is at the meso level, i.e., organisations, since the focus of the research questions was on the beliefs and behaviours of NPOs. However, submission to social media logic could have happened in philanthropic activities of NPOs' supporters (micro level) or facets of UK policies (macro level). Future studies could shed light on the influence of social media at the micro and macro levels of philanthropy. Of course, these three levels, i.e., micro, meso and macro levels, are not independent of each other; hence increasing the understanding of social media influence on philanthropy in one of these levels could deepen our understanding in other levels.

5.5 Closing comment

This research aimed to explore and contribute to understanding social media's influence on NPOs. The idea for this research was sparked by the exponential growth of online fundraising, such as through crowdfunding websites and social media. My initial question was what the future might look like for the NPOs. Since crowdfunding websites and social media connect supporters to beneficiaries directly, do they pose an existential threat to the future of NPOs? Do NPOs evolve to a digital form in the future? These initial questions led me to read literature on social media and these organisations.

The literature is divided on the usage of social media by NPOs; some are more critical, and others are more optimistic. According to some scholars, social media provide NPOs with an opportunity for lower-cost, rapid and wide-reach marketing. Critics state that these platforms encourage "slacktivism" among supporters of causes, which have a relatively small impact

outside the virtual world. In exploring the impact of social media on NPOs, I used this debate as a starting point and narrowed down the questions of my research. “Slacktivism”, which highlights the difference between the impacts of actions outside and inside of the virtual world, encouraged me to refine my questions. I started to look at the impact of social media on NPOs in the context of what success means for these organisations. To answer these questions, mediatization and attention economy were selected as the most appropriate fit for the framework of this research. Mediatization theory reflects on the media-saturated society in which media has become part of most aspects of society. This is the key feature of the contemporary society in which NPOs operate. Furthermore, the attention economy best describes a key context within which social media users operate.

This thesis argues that exploring the digital media impacts on NPOs is important. However, this is not just for understanding and distinguishing the negative and positive impacts but also to depict the dynamics between media and NPOs. That is, understanding how and why these two influence one another. This study takes a step toward deepening this understanding; however, it calls for more studies to aid a deeper understanding of the relationship between media and NPOs by exploring other facets that show the bidirectional essence of this relationship. For example, how media have been influenced by the philanthropic activities of NPOs and donors.

As a final thought, the mediatization of success seems to have happened well beyond the boundaries of the small non-profit organisation that I have studied. The prevailing notion that the success of a social media post can be measured solely by the number of likes, comments,

or other engagement metrics implies its widespread reach in society. For example, in the studies about social media platforms, often, the studies focus on these metrics and how to increase them. Rarely do studies focus on how these engagement metrics correlate with tangible actions and results. It seems as if there is an over-focus on engagement that we are starting to forget what we wanted this engagement for.

Appendix I: Semi-structured Interview Guidelines

Welcome, thank you for participating and getting the consent sheet signed. Just a quick reminder that you are not obliged to answer any question you find uncomfortable.

Context of the Role

1. Can you please tell me what your job title is and explain your role within [charity name]?
2. What does a typical day in your job look like?
 - If he/she mentioned posting frequency, liking, replies to the post of the followers, etc. I need to ask why?

Place of Social Media in Communication Strategy

3. What are the ways that your charity uses for communicating with the public?
4. Which of the ways that you mentioned is the primary way for communicating with the public?
5. Have Covid-19 situation impacted your communication with the public? If yes, How?
6. Has the role of social media changed in this new circumstances?
7. Why did you choose social media as means of communicating with the public?
8. How did you come up with this decision?
9. What social media platforms you actively use? Why?
10. What are pros and cons of social media as a medium to communicate with the public comparing to other ways of communication (by leaflet or face-to-face)?

Social Media Contents

11. What are the activities of the charity on social media?
12. How many of your colleagues working in [charity name] are involved in deciding the content of social media?
 - Who decides what to post?

- Is there any process for decision making?

13. Can you briefly explain what they do?

Success in Social Media

14. Tell me what do you think a successful social media activity is?

15. How do you measure the success of [charity name] social media activities?

16. What are the use of these measurements?

Public Attention in Social Media

17. Do you think people actually read your posts? What do they read more?

18. How do you try to be successful in social media?

19. How did you come up with these strategies?

20. Are your social media activities successful? How do you know?

Final Remarks

21. Technology moves very fast, how do you keep up with all the changes in the social media technologies?

22. Do you think social has made the charitable work easier or harder? Can you explain?

23. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about how your charity uses social media for fundraising?

Appendix II: Participant Information Sheet



How have social media impacted small-to-medium size non-profit organisations in the UK.

My name is Hoda Fahimpour. I am a Ph.D. student in the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent in Canterbury. This research is based on my work experience that I had, prior to starting my Ph.D. when I worked for a crowdfunding website as a consultant raising funds for different projects running on that website. The exponential growth of online fundraising, such as through crowdfunding websites and widespread use of social media among non-profit organisations (NPOs) made me wonder to investigate how social media could have impacted small to medium size non-profit organisations.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research, but before you decide, it is important that you read this document in order to understand what this research is about and what happens to the information that you give me, if you decide to take part. Please ask question if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information.

What is the study about?

Non-profit organisations increasingly use social media platforms for communicating and constructing social relationship with the public. Yet, there is little known in regards to influence of social media on them. In brief, the aims of the research are two-fold:

1. To explore how NPOs define a successful social media activity and how they measure it.
2. To understand how small-to-medium size NPOs are tackling the challenge of being successful in social media.

Why and how you have been invited?

I would like to interview you because you are an active contributor to social media platforms of a small or medium size charity. After reading this information sheet if you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What happens to the information?

I will use a recorder to capture the interview so that I do not miss any important points that you say. The records will be transcribed and then completely deleted from the recorder. The information you will disclose during the interview will be treated as confidential, and any information about you which reveals your identity and/or your organisation, will be anonymised (for example by using a pseudonym in my written thesis) so that you or your organisation cannot be identified.

How long it will last?

The interview should last approximately an hour.

Please do contact me if you there is anything that is not clear or you have any further questions at:

Email: hf229@kent.ac.uk

Address: Hoda Fahimpour
School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research
Cornwallis North East
University of Kent
Canterbury
Kent CT2 7NF

Appendix III: Interview Consent Form

School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research
Cornwallis North East
University of Kent
Canterbury
Kent CT2 7NF

Project title: Understanding the impact of social media on small-to-medium size non-profit organisations in the UK.

Researcher details:

Name: Hoda Fahimpour **contact:** hf229@kent.ac.uk

Ph.D. candidate, University of Kent

Consent Form

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research; I have had the chance to ask questions and I received satisfactory answers for my questions.

Please initial box

2. I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without my rights being affected.

Please initial box

3. I understand that my personal details will be kept confidential and in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

Please initial box

4. I agree to take part in the above project.

Please initial box

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix IV: Coding Manual

This is the guide to code Facebook and Twitter posts, which were published between 15th to 31st May 2020 and between 15th to 31st May 2019 by the studied NPOs for this research.

Name of the NPO

Write in name of the NPO, which the account is belong to

Number of followers

Write number of accounts' followers

Find the posts

Find the posts that are sent between 15th to 31st May 2019

Date of the post

Write in the date of posts being sent in this period.

Number of likes

Write in number of likes the post has received.

Number of shares

Write in number of shares the post has received.

Number of comments

Write in number of comments the post has received.

Content category & subcategory

"I.C" "I.O" "C.T" "C.R" "A.D", "A.E", "A.V" and "A.B" codes will be used to identify whether the post belongs to "information", "community" or "action" categories and their subcategories. The posts are mutually exclusive and only one of these codes will be assigned to them. In order to achieve this, there is a precedent across the categories. If a post has contents that can fall in any other category as well as "action", action will take precedent. Similarly if a post can be categorized as either community and information, it will be categorized as community.

1. **Action posts:** Asks supporter to carry out non-virtual actions.
Write in "A.D", if the post asks supporter to donate.
Write in "A.V", if the post asks supporter for volunteering.
Write in "A.E", if the post asks supporters to attend to an events.
Write in "A.B", if the post asks supporter to buy a product.
2. **Information posts:** Information about the NPO's cause or the NPO itself.

Write in “*I.C*”, if the post contains information related to cause of NPO.
Write in “*I.O*”, if the post contain information about the organisation.

3. Community posts:

Assign “*C.T*”, if the post gave thanked the supporters.

Assign “*C.R*”, if the post replied to a question from public.

Contains imagery content

Insert “1” under the picture column if the post comprises picture or video, otherwise “0”

Contains happy images

Insert “1” under the happy images column if the post comprises happy image, otherwise “0”

Contains storytelling

Insert “1” under the story column if the post contains storytelling, otherwise “0”

Contains links

Insert “1” under the link column if the post comprises link, otherwise “0”

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