

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING VOLUNTEER INITIATIVES AND SHAPING COMMUNITIES

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The Role of Social Media in Promoting Volunteer Initiatives and Shaping Communities

The aim of the article is to study the impact of social media on the development of volunteer initiatives and the formation of long-term volunteer communities. The article examines the role of social media in promoting volunteer initiatives and shaping long-term communities. Considered are the communication mechanisms in social networks that contribute to the mobilization of volunteers, coordination of their activities, and support of interaction among community members. An analysis of the impact of social media on attracting new volunteers and transforming short-term civic engagement into sustained participation in volunteer projects has been conducted. The methodological basis of the research is an interdisciplinary approach that combines content analysis of social platforms, study of successful volunteer initiatives, and analysis of literary sources. An analysis of the functions of various social media in the context of informing, engaging the audience, and building trust has been carried out. Special attention is given to studying strategies for the efficient use of social media for volunteer activities, including methods of engagement, audience interaction, and building public trust. The factors contributing to active user engagement have been analyzed, and key approaches to building successful digital volunteer campaigns have been identified. The study demonstrates that the effectiveness of using social media in volunteer activities is determined by factors such as communication speediness, interactivity, visual components, and information transparency. It is determined that digital platforms can create sustainable volunteer communities, ensuring long-term citizen participation in social initiatives. Based on the obtained results, recommendations have been developed to optimize the use of social media to enhance the efficiency of volunteer projects, particularly regarding platform selection, content strategies, and audience interaction methods.

Keywords: social media, volunteer initiatives, civic engagement, digital platforms, resource mobilization, volunteer communities.

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Єфімова Г. В., Пащенко К. О. Роль соціальних медіа у просуванні волонтерських ініціатив і формуванні спільнот

Метою статті є дослідження впливу соціальних медіа на розвиток волонтерських ініціатив і формування довготривалих волонтерських спільнот. У статті досліджено роль соціальних медіа у просуванні волонтерських ініціатив і формуванні довготривалих спільнот. Розглянуто механізми комунікації у соціальних мережах, які сприяють мобілізації волонтерів, координації їхньої діяльності та підтримці взаємодії між учасниками спільнот. Проведено аналіз впливу соціальних медіа на залучення нових волонтерів і перетворення короткочасної громадянської активності на стійку участь у волонтерських проєктах. Методологічною основою дослідження є міждисциплінарний підхід, що поєднує контент-аналіз соціальних платформ, вивчення успішних волонтерських ініціатив та аналіз літературних джерел. Здійснено аналіз функцій різних соціальних медіа у контексті інформування, залучення аудиторії та формування довіри. Особливу увагу приділено вивченню стратегій ефективного використання соціальних медіа для волонтерської діяльності, зокрема методи залучення, взаємодії з аудиторією і формування громадської довіри. Проаналізовано фактори, що сприяють активному залученню користувачів, та визначено ключові підходи до побудови успішних цифрових волонтерських кампаній. Дослідження демонструє, що ефективність використання соціальних медіа у волонтерській діяльності визначається такими факторами, як швидкість комунікації, інтерактивність, візуальна складова та прозорість інформації. Встановлено, що завдяки цифровим платформам можливо створювати сталі волонтерські спільноти, забезпечуючи довготривалу участь громадян у соціальних ініціативах. На основі отриманих результатів розроблено

рекомендації щодо оптимізації використання соціальних медіа для підвищення ефективності волонтерських проєктів, зокрема щодо вибору платформ, контентних стратегій і методів взаємодії з аудиторією.

Ключові слова: соціальні медіа, волонтерські ініціативи, громадянська активність, цифрові платформи, мобілізація ресурсів, волонтерські спільноти.

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Introduction. In today's world, social media play a significant role in communication, information exchange, and the mobilization of civil society. Volunteer initiatives based on social networks can rapidly disseminate information, attract new participants, and maintain connections within communities. However, the effectiveness of these processes and their impact on the formation of long-term volunteer communities have not yet received sufficient academic attention. It is essential to explore how social media contribute not only to engaging volunteers but also to creating cohesive, stable civic formations that operate in the long term.

Scientific studies in the field of social media and volunteer activities highlight their significant potential in mobilizing the population, promoting civic initiatives, and strengthening social capital. For example, in the work "Le volontariat, un engagement sans frontières" by Amandine Thibergien, the global nature of volunteering is emphasized, particularly how social networks help overcome geographical barriers and create international volunteer communities [1]. In the UNICEF study "Digital civic engagement by young people", authors Alexander Cho, Jasmina Byrne, and Zoë Pelter analyze the role of social media in activating civic participation among young people [2]. Marc Hasselwander and his colleagues, in the study "Digital civic engagement, open data, and the informal sector", explore the mechanisms of interaction between volunteer communities and other sectors through digital platforms [3]. Research also confirms that social networks can enhance civic engagement and stimulate the formation of new communities through openness and accessibility of information.

The theoretical foundations of this study are based on the works of scholars and practitioners who have examined the role of social media in supporting and promoting volunteer initiatives. In particular, the studies of such authors as Rudyk M., Stepanets I., Cho A., Byrne J., Pelter Z., and others were used [2; 4; 5].

Identification of Previously Unresolved Aspects of the General Problem. Despite a significant number of studies on social media in the field of civic engagement, several open questions remain. First, the mechanisms by which social

networks contribute not only to attracting volunteers but also to retaining them in long-term initiatives have not been sufficiently explored. Second, there is a lack of systematic research on how exactly social media can form stable social connections that sustain volunteer engagement even after specific projects conclude. Third, it is crucial to understand which digital tools are most effective in ensuring the stable functioning of volunteer communities, particularly in crisis situations.

Formulation of the Article's Aim (objective setting).

The objective of this article is to investigate the impact of social media on the development of volunteer initiatives and the formation of long-term communities. The study focuses on analyzing the communication mechanisms that social media employ for volunteer mobilization, examining the tools that maintain connections among members of volunteer communities, and identifying the factors that facilitate the transition from one-time participation in volunteering to sustained engagement. Additionally, the article explores effective methods of using social media to create unified, resilient, and engaged communities. The research findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of social media in volunteering and will help develop practical recommendations for organizers of volunteer initiatives regarding the effective use of digital platforms in civic activities.

Research Methodology Description. The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The primary methods include content analysis of social media, surveys of volunteers and leaders of volunteer initiatives, and a comparative analysis of successful cases involving the use of digital platforms in volunteer activities.

The content analysis focuses on identifying key functions and features of various social media platforms in volunteer activities. The study examines platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram to determine their role in information dissemination, audience engagement, and community building. Special attention is given to the speed of communication, interactivity, and transparency as key factors influencing volunteer participation.

The case study analysis explores successful volunteer initiatives that have effectively leveraged social media to mobilize resources and coordinate actions. Examples include projects like "Bad Street Boys" [8], which used humorous social media content to raise funds, and the rapid volunteer response to the missile strike on the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital in Ukraine, where platforms like Telegram and Facebook played a crucial role in coordinating aid. By analyzing these cases, the study identifies best practices in volunteer engagement and digital storytelling.

The literature review examines prior research on the impact of social media on volunteerism, digital civic engagement, and crisis response. Sources include studies by UNICEF, academic publications on social media activism, and reports on digital volunteer networks. This review provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how digital platforms influence volunteer participation and community resilience.

By combining these methodologies, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of social media's impact on volunteer initiatives. The findings contribute to developing recommendations on optimizing the use of digital platforms to enhance volunteer mobilization, coordination, and long-term community sustainability.

Presentation of the main material and obtained scientific results. Social media is a group of Internet applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, enabling users to create and share content [5].

Among social media platforms, one can identify personal blogs, microblogs, social networks, video hosting services, photo-sharing platforms, internet forums, and more. The primary prerequisite of social media is the ability of an author to communicate with a large audience. The nature of network communication is determined by the characteristics of the social media platform and its content. For instance, the use of video in TikTok or various posts on Facebook. Any form of content, its technical specifics, and the target audience of a message influence individuals. Since social media functions as a dynamic ecosystem of communities, it establishes evaluative mechanisms of reality and reflects public sentiments. Through social networks and personal online blogs, the public can track topics and issues that are being discussed openly. At its core, social media emphasizes effective communication by uniting audiences based on shared goals, i.e., common interests of a group. Communication on the Internet also has distinct features. Most notably, it is characterized by speed of interaction, the rapid exchange of large volumes of information, immediate feedback, commenting, and other interactive elements.

Various types of social media platforms offer distinct advantages and unique functionalities in promoting volunteer initiatives. Social networks such as Facebook and X, along with personal blogs, facilitate the rapid dissemination of news and announcements, thereby enabling the swift and broad-scale dissemination of information to large audiences. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok, on the other hand, foster visual and emotional engagement, as they primarily feature short videos, vibrant images, and interactive elements that encourage immediate emotional response and user interaction.

For coordinating activities among participants and managing large groups of volunteers, Facebook groups and com-

munities established within various messaging platforms are frequently employed. YouTube channels, in turn, serve as platforms for showcasing the outcomes of volunteer work, sharing stories of assistance, and providing training materials for new participants. Furthermore, they enable the publication of documentaries, reports, and video blogs that highlight the impact and scope of volunteer activities.

Therefore, each social media platform offers unique capabilities for supporting volunteer initiatives. Due to the diversity of functions, mass media not only inform the public about important social issues but also foster a sense of unity and encourage participation in various activities. The effectiveness of social media use is significantly influenced by the chosen platform, target audience, and content format.

Thanks to platforms such as Instagram and X, organizations can rapidly inform large segments of the population about their initiatives. This is particularly crucial during crisis situations, such as the war in Ukraine. In a study by Myroslava Rudyk, it is emphasized that social media played a key role in mobilizing the population after February 24, 2022, by uniting citizens for humanitarian aid efforts [4]. The visual component of social networks is also of great importance, as it enables the creation of "visual narratives" that strengthen trust in the organization and help to better communicate the project's objectives [5].

A notable example of the successful use of this approach is the project Bad Street Boys by Ukrainian comedian Vasyl Baidak. Its concept is based on creating a recognizable humorous image of "street boys" with a social mission. The use of social media, particularly Instagram and Facebook, enabled the wide dissemination of visual content, including team photos, eye-catching merchandise with humorous slogans, and emotionally engaging videos. Firstly, the humorous undertones of the project's imagery evoke positive emotions, fostering a closer emotional connection with the audience. This, in turn, motivates people to participate in fundraising efforts, as they already feel like part of the project and wish to deepen their involvement. Secondly, the use of social media platforms makes the volunteer project more interactive—viewers actively comment, share content, and purchase merchandise, thereby becoming part of the community. Thirdly, the project builds trust through transparency, as Vasyl Baidak regularly publishes visual reports and updates on the project's progress, including photos and videos documenting the delivery of aid. According to KyivPost, one of the group's projects, titled "Zbir Liubovi na 5 Milioniv Hryven" ("Fundraising for Love for 5 Million Hryvnias"), initially aimed to raise this amount. However, due to the overwhelming response from the public, the target was raised to 7 million hryvnias within 12 hours [6].

Social media platforms frequently serve as the foundation for coordinating the actions of volunteer communities. According to UNICEF, the use of Facebook groups and messaging app communities also helps engage young people in active civic participation, fostering a sense of responsibility and solidarity [7].

A striking example of the speed and efficiency of social media in coordinating volunteer efforts is the immediate response to the missile strike on the Okhmatdyt children's hospital on July 8, 2024. Volunteers who actively used social media

facilitated rapid communication between victims, medical staff, and the public. Immediately after the attack, platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, and Twitter became the primary channels for organizing aid. Specifically, Telegram channels dedicated to volunteer coordination enabled the swift delivery of medical supplies, the transportation of patients to safer locations, and psychological support for those affected. Additionally, volunteer groups located nearby used Google Maps to share information about building damage and access to the hospital, which significantly accelerated evacuation and resource distribution [8]. Furthermore, the UNITED24 platform, in collaboration with Monobank, launched a large-scale fundraising campaign aimed at raising 100 million hryvnias to support the hospital. Social media became the main channel for spreading information about the situation and attracting donors. In the first few hours after the campaign's launch, a significant portion of the funds was raised, confirming the effectiveness of these tools in crisis situations.

Transparency is a crucial factor in the success of volunteer organizations in utilizing social media. This transparency is achieved through regular updates on the progress of projects and the use of collected funds [9]. Tools such as YouTube, Facebook, and other social platforms allow volunteers and organizations to report to their audience through video content, photo reports, and text updates. Organizations must regularly publish information about how the collected funds are being spent. For example, this may include photos or videos of purchased equipment, provided aid, or restored infrastructure. Such reports create a "window effect," enabling the public to see how the organizations operate. During large-scale fundraising campaigns, live streams and real-time updates allow supporters to follow the progress of fundraising efforts, fostering a sense of involvement and solidarity. This approach is actively employed by United24. Transparency not only helps maintain trust but also motivates new donors. When people see concrete results from their contributions, they are more likely to support similar projects in the future. For instance, the charity fund "Come Back Alive", which has supported the Ukrainian military since 2014, actively uses social media for detailed reporting. On Facebook, they publish photo reports of transferred equipment and humanitarian aid. This consistent transparency has built a reputation of reliability, increasing their capacity to mobilize substantial support [10].

Digital platforms have revolutionized volunteer initiatives, transforming them into a global phenomenon. Social media enables collaborative initiatives from any location, opening up opportunities for international cooperation [1].

A notable example of global volunteerism facilitated by social media is the Online Volunteering initiative by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program. This platform allows organizations and volunteers to collaborate in addressing global challenges related to sustainable development [11]. Volunteers undertake a wide range of tasks, including conducting research, developing web resources, providing translations, creating informational materials, and even programming mobile applications that support peacebuilding initiatives. For instance, under the "Youth-led Peace and Reconciliation in Colombia" project [12], developed by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), volunteers produced short videos

to promote peacebuilding efforts among Colombian youth. This initiative strengthened resilience and conflict prevention among marginalized communities and young people.

Such initiatives demonstrate how online volunteerism unites people from different countries to solve critical global issues. The use of social media in these projects helps expand the audience, engaging both youth and professionals in joint peace and development actions. It also facilitates the development of inclusive communication, making volunteer programs more accessible and effective. This approach fosters a shared perspective on global problems, uniting people with diverse experiences and ensuring successful project support. During emergencies such as earthquakes or floods, global volunteer groups quickly mobilize through social media, coordinating resources and assistance. Therefore, social media not only serves as a tool for raising awareness but also functions as a connecting link that unites societies in support of global causes.

Social media is a key factor in the development of civil society. It encourages citizens to engage in socially significant projects by motivating them through personalized calls to action and the ability to see the real impact of their participation. This is achieved by creating and distributing information that clearly reflects society's actual needs [5].

Furthermore, participation in volunteer projects through social media contributes to improving volunteers' mental health by enhancing social connections. This is particularly relevant in times of isolation or crisis when people seek ways to feel valued [13]. For example, during the COVID-19 lockdown, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter were used to create volunteer groups like "Mutual Aid Groups" in the US and the UK [14]. These groups gathered people to help neighbors in need of grocery or medication deliveries. Studies indicated that involvement in such initiatives made volunteers feel useful, established new social connections that were otherwise unavailable during the lockdown, and reduced levels of stress and anxiety.

Since social media ensures effective communication with audiences, resource mobilization, and coordination of actions, it has become a crucial tool for supporting volunteer projects. In modern conditions, the volunteer movement must quickly adapt to new challenges, and social platforms help solve various tasks rapidly in different crisis situations. Social media supports the growth of volunteer activity across different fields through interaction, global reach, and easy access – from local aid to global campaigns. The versatility of social media functions allows different organizations and activists to leverage these platforms to maximize the impact of their initiatives.

To better assess the potential of these platforms, it is necessary to examine how they perform their key functions. It is essential to identify the key aspects through which social media can support volunteer initiatives and analyze their impact depending on the type of platform and the mode of interaction.

The following key functions in supporting volunteer initiatives can be distinguished:

- Informing – Prompt dissemination of news about initiatives or needs;
- Visualization – Establishing an emotional connection through visual materials;

- Coordination – Organizing actions through groups and channels in messengers;
- Transparency – Reporting that enhances audience trust;
- Globalization – The ability to engage international participants;
- Psychosocial support – Creating a sense of community and overcoming isolation.

For convenience, social media will be analyzed based on their dominant functions and characteristics (Table 1).

The effectiveness of social media use in volunteer activities depends on numerous interrelated factors that influence goal achievement, audience engagement, and process organization. The integration of social media into volunteering has created new opportunities for rapid response, resource mobilization, and the formation of sustainable communities. However, the success of such initiatives is determined not only by the availability of technical infrastructure or platforms but also by a complex set of factors encompassing technological, content-related, audience-related, organizational, and social aspects.

Table 1

Social Media by Their Dominant Functions and Features

Type of Platform	Example	Main Function	Content Features
Social Networks	Facebook, X	Informing and coordination	Text posts, group discussions
Visual Media	Instagram, TikTok	Visualization and emotional engagement	Short videos, vivid photos, interactivity
Video Hosting	YouTube	Transparency and education	Documentary videos, vlogs, tutorials
Messengers	Telegram, WhatsApp	Rapid coordination	Chats, channels, fast information exchange
Blogs	Medium, personal blogs	In-depth analysis and trust-building	Long articles, analytics, personal stories

Source: compiled by the authors based on [15; 16].

The systematization of these factors not only provides a deeper understanding of the impact of social media but also establishes clear criteria for assessing the effectiveness of volunteer initiatives. This systematization enables the improvement of communication strategies, the expansion of outreach, and the enhancement of the impact of volunteer campaigns. Below are the key factors influencing the effectiveness of social media in volunteer activities, along with a graphical illustration of their systematization (Table 2).

The study of social media functions and the factors that enhance their effectiveness in volunteer activities helps us understand how platforms can best support various aspects of volunteering. Social media play a crucial role in providing up-to-date information, organizing events, showcasing projects, and building trust through transparency. The systematization of key elements contributing to success—such as technology, content, audience, organization, and social factors—enables the improvement of volunteer project effectiveness.

Table 2

Systematization of Factors in the Use of Social Media in Volunteer Activities

Category	Description
Technological	Speed of information exchange, platform accessibility
Content-related	Engagement, quality of visual and textual materials
Audience-related	Audience size and characteristics, content relevance to audience needs
Organizational	Coordination convenience, integration with other platforms
Social	Trust-building, emotional engagement, community unity formation

Source: compiled by the authors based on [15; 16].

These findings can be used to develop more diverse communication strategies, enhance audience engagement, and design integrated approaches to volunteer interaction. This approach allows volunteer initiatives to respond more effectively to challenges, mobilize resources, and foster a stronger sense of community among participants.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research.

Social media play a crucial role in modern volunteering, providing new opportunities for engagement, organization, and support of initiatives. They not only facilitate the dissemination of information and resource mobilization but also help create

cohesive and resilient volunteer communities capable of effectively responding to emergencies. As practical examples show, social media platforms contribute to the formation of global support networks, enabling people from different parts of the world to unite in addressing humanitarian issues such as disasters or social crises.

One of the key functions of social media is information dissemination, allowing for the rapid spread of news and real-time coordination of efforts. This ensures high efficiency in crisis response, as demonstrated by the case of the United24 platform following the shelling of a children's hospital in Ukraine.

The swift response and organization of volunteers through social media were crucial in providing assistance to the victims. The transparency that social media offer through the publication of reports and activity results enhances trust in initiatives and fosters a sense of mutual responsibility, which is essential for the stability of volunteer projects.

Another important aspect is the support of volunteers' psychosocial well-being. Social media help maintain connections between people, reduce stress levels, and sustain motivation during challenging periods, which is critical for long-term initiatives. Moreover, social media enable volunteer initiatives to expand on a global scale, attracting participants from different countries and fostering a sense of unity in the pursuit of shared values.

The success of volunteer campaigns largely depends on technological, content-related, organizational, social, and audience-related factors. Evaluating these aspects helps determine which social media functions are most effective for specific tasks. For instance, platforms that offer quick coordination and integration with other communication tools can yield the best results in emergency response situations. Additionally, content quality, relevance, and emotional appeal can play a decisive role in attracting new participants to initiatives.

Thus, social media not only facilitate volunteer engagement but also contribute to the creation of organized, interactive, and sustainable communities. They play a vital role in crisis situations by helping to mobilize resources and ensure prompt assistance.

Given the continuous advancement of content personalization technologies and analytics, social media have the potential to become strategic tools for managing volunteer initiatives in the future. They enable not only responses to current challenges but also contribute to long-term societal changes, such as addressing social inequality and combating climate change.

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