



Put a Positive Spin on Your Social Media

Christina Athineos and Debra Harkins with Ashley Simons-Rudolph

Social media represents a growing portion of social movements, with the possibility to quickly and easily reach large groups of people on a global scale.



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Understanding how to engage and activate one’s online audience holds substantial implications for those looking to advocate for social justice. This knowledge will allow social movement leaders to better communicate with their followers and more effectively build global support through social

media. Similarly, identifying the emotions behind this action will better inform social media leaders of what type of feelings they need to elicit from their audience in order to receive the most impactful reaction. Having this knowledge would allow social movements to expand more quickly, leading to greater involvement of the public and heightened awareness of social justice issues.

Instagram can pull passive followers into active advocacy through effective use of emotional content. Unfortunately, nonprofits can struggle to emotionally engage their followers

without overwhelming them to the point of inaction. While the relationship between action and emotion is well documented, research has shown that when faced with issues of mass suffering people tend to feel and show less compassion for victims due to self-protective emotion regulation. When helping is too costly, be it psychologically or physically, we automatically regulate our emotions to protect ourselves from becoming overwhelmed. This protective strategy leaves us feeling less for those in need and thus less motivated to act, both on-and off-line.

"Nonprofit organizations are most likely to receive support on social media when posting content that will inspire and enthuse the public."

Highlights

Social media is an important way in which nonprofit organizations engage in activism and raise money.

Social media posts with positive emotions, like inspiration, draw attention as measured with likes and comments.

Social media content with negative emotions, particularly fear, draws fewer likes and comments.

Methods

In this study, we proposed that nonprofits might receive more activity on social media if they posted content that elicited positive emotion. To test this hypothesis, we surveyed participants on their emotional reaction to content posted by the nonprofit [Voices of Homeless](#) we collected two months' worth of data (60 images posted on Instagram) and surveyed participants on which emotions they felt each of these posts elicited. We then compared these responses to the number of likes and comments each post had received to correlate social media engagement with emotion.

Early Results

- Content that elicited inspiration and enthusiasm received the greatest amount of activity (likes and comments) on social media, contradicting previous suggestions that guilt is a primary motivator for pro-social action
- Content that elicited fear received the least amount of activity on social media, suggesting that fearmongering is not an effective means for getting individuals motivated to act on social media.
- Content that elicited positive emotions were generally more successful in gaining likes and comments on social media than negative content overall, suggesting that nonprofits may be more successful if they highlight what is already being done rather than focusing on what still needs to be done.

What Does This Mean For?

Social Action: This research is extremely important for organizations looking to boost awareness and activism with the possibility to quickly and easily reach large groups of people on a global scale. However, the success of a social movement is highly dependent upon how well media users are able to mobilize their followers, making the communication process critical.

Connect with us for more information:

www.linkedin.com/in/christina-athineos
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/debraharkins/>
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Debra_Harkins

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES, RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS?

This project partnered with a budding nonprofit to determine ways they could engage community members in advocating for the homeless population of Boston. This project's efforts extended outside of this organization into the global community to promote positive change at the individual, organizational, and legislative levels, while focusing on empowerment for both the nonprofit and those whom they aim to serve and support. This work was inspired by community psychology's community-based, nontraditional approach toward relieving social problems and advancing marginalized peoples.

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