Leveraging Social Media for Financial Sustainability of Polish Migrant-Aid Nonprofit Organizations

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Master Thesis

June 27, 2024

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ABSTRACT

This study finds its purpose in understanding the consequences of budgetary cuts experienced, and fundraising adjustments made by Polish nonprofit organizations during and in the aftermath of the right-wing populist Law and Justice party governance from 2015 to 2023. It aimed to understand if, how, and why migrant-aid nonprofits in particular have started to use the power and potential of social media for fundraising purposes and the retainment of financial longevity in a politically hostile climate. To this end, this study asked the question: "How do Polish migrant-aid NPOs utilize social media to secure their financial sustainability in the aftermath of the 2015-2023 elite replacement in civil society?". To do that, 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews with nonprofit communication professionals were conducted, inquiring about the functioning and social media activity of NPOs during the elite replacement. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts disclosed three main themes describing the purpose of social media utilization by migrant-aid organization, namely: brand building, community building, and storytelling. Remarkably and contrasting theoretical expectations, none of the participants reported social media as their most important funding source, despite all of them confirming that their respective organizations were present on social media platforms. Nevertheless, the results of this study did reveal that Polish migrant-aid NPOs focus on building their brand, expanding their community, and using storytelling as secondary means to support their efforts in securing financial sustainability. Several future study suggestions are presented to drive the research on nonprofit organizations in Poland and internationally further, like conducting studies on other minority-focused nonprofits or a doing a content analysis on social media posts. This was the first study to investigate the use of NPOs' social media in the political context of elite replacement.

KEYWORDS: social media, nonprofit organizations, elite replacement, Poland, financial sustainability

Word count: 19,691

PREFACE

Studying in Rotterdam has been an unexpected journey of self-discovery for me, very hard at times. Therefore, I am over the moon to finally put this thesis out into the world.

First, I would like to thank my parents, grandparents, and the rest of my family. For the opportunities, for the support, for encouraging me, and for picking me up. I would not have done it without you. Kocham Was.

Second, to my supervisor, Willemijn Dortant. Thank you for believing in me, pushing me and always being there when I needed it the most, both academically and emotionally. I cannot even put into words how much your guidance meant to me.

Third, to my friends. Thank you for giving me advice and for listening to me talk about my thesis process – whether in person or through voice notes. Thank you for making me smile, I love you all.

Last but not least, thank you to the Participants of this study. Your work to help those in need inspired me to write this thesis.

I am very proud of this project and hopefully, everyone I mentioned is, too.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Problem

Poland, 2015: the right-wing populist Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS – Law and Justice) party wins the overall majority in Parliament, followed by a governing period of eight years marked by democratic backsliding and ideological turmoil (Tworzecki, 2018, p. 102). Following their victory, PiS institutes repressive structural changes, including a de-facto abortion ban, weakening judicial independence due to a series of judicial reforms, and a reduction of the role of Parliament, leading to the deterioration of the rule of law and human rights issues (Bodnar, 2023, p. 174; Korolczuk, 2023, p. 881). PiS also starts promoting an anti-immigrant discourse to "protect" Poland from refugees (Krzyżanowski, 2017, p. 87), which becomes a well-articulated rhetoric in the advent of the 2015 migration crisis (Dahl, 2019, p. 210). Public service media only amplifies this discourse, threatening the nation with the prospect of migration-related diseases and security threats that will follow if the country accepts refugees (Piotrowski, 2023, p. 195). Looking back at the PiS era of governance from 2015 to 2023, it is evident that anti-migration sentiments and policies were a prominent feature of the party's agenda.

To stifle the opposition, PiS has been identified to have formed its own elites in civil society through a strategy of pressure and coercion, marginalizing dissenting organizations, while almost exclusively supporting those considered loyal to the party (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 888). During its governance, PiS changed the allocation of funds within civil society toward right-wing initiatives, while reducing support for leftist and liberal causes, such as migrant-aid organizations (Flis et al., 2023, para. 2; Margolis, 2023, para. 8). By weaving a negative discourse around minority issues into their political narrative, PiS vilified the liberal and left-wing opponents to facilitate the process of *elite replacement* (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 887).

With the rise of anti-migrant attitudes in Poland as a result of the nationalist rhetoric and policies during the rule of PiS, the PiS administration has been found to have left refugee organizations without support, while the aid organizations on their end still tried to provide services crucial for the public interest (Bodnar, 2023, p. 174). As migrant-aid organizations faced attacks from the Government and the state-funded media, they had to adjust their communication strategies and fundraising approaches (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 889) to continue their work. In a scream for survival, nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and migrant-aid organizations particularly, voiced the significance of other income streams, as the scarce public funding was not enough to support them (Prończuk, 2018, para. 4).

Literature on the ways and means to diversify funding streams within the non-profit sector is well-established (Carroll & Stater, 2008, p. 947; Hung & Hager, 2018, p. 5). While incorporating social media use into NPOs' communication strategy has been found to enhance stakeholder

engagement, a mere social media presence does not guarantee increased donations. Instead, to enhance their donation levels, NPOs should actively participate in social media (Elvira-Lorilla et al., 2023, p. 22), while considering the context of their environment (Dumitrica, 2021, p. 75). The local political context not only shapes the operational dynamics of NPOs (Dimitrova & Ozdora-Aksak, 2022, p. 940) but also determines the expected level of donations (Nageswarakurukkal et al., 2019, p. 287). This becomes particularly relevant in a situation where the Government is openly opposing a specific group.

There remains a research gap in understanding the context of Polish migrant-aid groups and their reliance on and use of social media to retain or create a supporter base in a landscape of elite replacement and cut-off funding, both connected to the anti-migrant politics of the PiS Government. In addition, to this day, PiS continues to exert great influence as the second largest party in the Parliament, while still having an ally in the presidency, thereby perpetuating the persistence of their rhetoric in Poland and threatening the future of migrant-aid NPOs. Consequently, the diversification of funding streams and an exploration of the role social media may have in this matter, remain of vital criticality to NPOs' survival.

Hence, this thesis aims to answer the question: "How do Polish migrant-aid NPOs utilize social media to secure their financial sustainability in the aftermath of the 2015-2023 elite replacement in civil society?".

1.2. Relevance of Research

After the revolutions in 1989, one of the three primary goals of modern-day Poland was to develop civil society (Gliński, 2011, p. 271). The Polish civil society compared to most European countries was still relatively small scale, even after 20 years of post-communist transformation (Gliński, 2011, p. 282). Therefore, previous research has focused extensively on the development, condition, and role of civil society in post-communist Poland, among other Eastern Bloc countries (Jakubowicz, 1996, p. 39; Magner, 2015, p. 49; Piotrowski, 2009, p. 166).

Ever since PiS came into power in 2015 and the democratic backsliding commenced, there has been growing research on how the Polish Government has been trying to direct the growth and development of civil society toward right-wing ideologies and how these changes have affected activism (Jezierska, 2022, p. 259; McMahon & Niparko, 2022, p. 1355). Much current research about Polish civil society focuses on NPOs' fights for women's (Gwiazda, 2021, p. 129; Król & Pustułka, 2018, p. 366) and LGBTQ+ (Azis & Azarine, 2023, p. 21; Grabowska-Moroz & Wójcik, 2022, p. 85) rights. A rather new stream of research has started to shed light on how Polish civil society actors responded to the anti-refugee stance of the PiS Government (Follis, 2019, p. 307; Narkowicz, 2018, p. 357).

Yet so far, there is no explicit research on social media use for the financial sustainability of nonprofits in the Polish setting. Koc-Michalska et al. (2024, p. 2) analyzed how digital technologies offer the potential to enhance democratic cultures in Central and Eastern Europe, but no research investigates how migrant-aid nonprofits use social media to their advantage during the challenging times marked by migration crises.

What makes this discussion more relevant today is the socio-political situation in Poland. In the past two decades, the significance of Poland as a country of emigration, immigration, and transit has evolved, as it has also become an important immigration destination (Klaus & Szulecka, 2022, p. 467). The 2015 migration crisis coincided with the victory of PiS. The momentum created by PiS' political overtake combined with the demographic pressures migration put upon Polish society, already impacted the rewriting of Poland's political approach to migrants. However, it was not until February 2022 that Poland became the main destination for millions of refugees from Ukraine. Before, the overall number of asylum seekers had never been particularly high, marginally exceeding 15,000 applicants (Klaus & Szulecka, 2022, pp. 472–473). The enhanced influx of refugees during this new wave of migration has given a boost to the narrative of a 'migration crisis' in various European countries, including Poland, linking it to the backlash against multiculturalism in Europe (Grabowska, 2023, p. 10). These narratives used by right-wing and populist parties have led to tensions and conflicts, the introduction of societal dangers, such as aid fatigue, othering, and the incorporation of anti-migrant sentiments in the political agenda of ruling parties (Grabowska, 2023, p. 10).

Although concerning, such difficult situations can be a learning opportunity for organizations – "where the state withdraws, a civil society steps in" (Grabowska, 2023, p. 11). In an attempt to empower migrant-aid organizations in their fundraising attempts and foster their financial survival, this research aims to "strengthen civil society resilience in the context of democratic backsliding" (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 890), by providing insights into migrant-aid NPOs' best social media practices. The goal is for these insights to guide migrant-aid organizations in maintaining continuous support for their clients, regardless of the ruling Government's political ideology, especially amid the ongoing migration crisis.

1.3. Research Outline

The next chapter presents the existing research from the area of NPOs, politics, and social media research. It defines what NPOs are, presents the political and societal context that is so crucial to this thesis, and explains the resource dependence of Polish NPOs. It follows on with delving into the role social media may play as a fundraising, networking, and advocacy tool and how humanitarian narratives are presented within the online domain. Following this, the third chapter presents the methodological approach chosen to address the formulated research question. To answer the research

question mentioned above, in-depth interviews were conducted with communication specialists working in Polish migrant-aid organizations. This chapter includes a description of the sampling approach and criteria, further justifications, operationalization, and the researcher's reflection on positionality to understand how the researcher's views, cultural background, and social identity influenced the research (Bourke, 2014, p. 2). The fourth chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis that was done on the transcripts of the interviews conducted for this study. The fifth chapter is the last and provides the conclusions drawn from the research and presents its limitations, as well as suggests the direction for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This thesis incorporates theories from previous research to build a theoretical lens through which the research question will be investigated. Such a theoretical framework is important in qualitative research since it allows for the creation of an intersection between existing theories, a methodically analytic approach, and an articulation and definition of the researcher's epistemological perspectives (Collins & Stockton, 2018, p. 2). The theories are laid out in this framework, while the methodical approach and the researcher's perspective are detailed in the following chapter.

This theoretical framework draws upon scholarly literature in the domains of NPOs, politics, and social media research. It integrates empirical evidence from news articles and reports to address the specific context wherein Polish migrant-aid organizations exist and work, as well as their context-defined utilization of social media following the elite replacement period. Initially, the framework explicates the nature of NPOs and contextualizes the current political landscape in Poland, serving as a foundation for subsequent analysis. Providing a description like this offers context that makes the experiences and opinions of research participants more relevant (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 275). It then explores the concept of resource dependence of NPOs and highlights the significance of financial sustainability within this sector. Furthermore, it examines the potential of social media as multifaceted tools for fundraising and networking in the NPO realm. Lastly, the framework explores how nonprofits can use social media as a broadcasting channel to narrate stories with the purpose of impacting audiences.

2.1. Defining Nonprofit Organizations: Navigating Charity Work amid Political Pressures

Firstly, in order to understand the focus on NPOs in this research, a clear understanding of the term NPOs is required. A wide range of features has been proposed as characteristic of such organizations (Salamon & Anheier, 1992, p. 135). Firstly, NPOs are institutionalized to some extent, as they operate under established structures and legal frameworks. Secondly, the sector in which NPOs operate is private. These organizations are not owned or controlled by the state but can be governmentally supported. Thirdly, the nonprofit sector is nonprofit distributing, meaning that any surplus generated is reinvested to advance their mission, not returned to the managing board or owners. This distinguishes NPOs from other businesses present in the private sector, which mainly focus on generating profits for stakeholders. Additionally, the organizations control their activities, meaning they are self-governing – they have the autonomy to make their own decisions. Lastly, the nonprofit sector is characterized by a meaningful degree of voluntarism, with many people choosing to participate in its activities on a voluntary basis, i.e., as volunteers or donors. In addition to scholarly discourse, governmental bodies such as the Central Statistical Office in Poland have adopted this definition of NPOs (GUS, 2009, p. 3). The degrees to which the five conditions identified in this

definition vary in the practical reality of NPOs, and certain organizations may find it easier to qualify as an NPO based on one criterion than another (Salamon & Anheier, 1992, p. 136). However, for an organization to be considered part of the nonprofit sector according to this definition, it must reasonably demonstrate adherence to all five of these criteria.

In addition to the previous five criteria, NPOs come together to either influence the policy of the Government, fulfill public tasks entrusted to them by the Government, or carry out public duties that the Government or businesses are unwilling to take on (Hall, 1987, as cited in Macedo & Carlos Pinho, 2006, p. 535). Since NPOs step in to deal with the shortcomings of states and markets, they are regarded as the third player in the governing structure (Clarke, 1998, as cited in Duong, 2017, p. 120). Despite NPOs assuming the responsibilities of the authorities, their public funding opportunities are decreasing (Helmig et al., 2014, p. 1512), which is also the case for Polish NPOs (Bodnar, 2023, p. 174). What is worth noting is the fact that this was not pertinent to *all* organizations in Poland, as PiS played favorites, allocating large sums to certain types of nonprofits, while leaving the others stranded (Baczyński, 2020, para. 2).

2.2. The Political Context of Polish NPOs

Right after coming to power in 2015, the PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice) party implemented personnel changes in various sectors including the judiciary, civil service, public media, state-owned companies, cultural institutions, and other public bodies (Bill, 2020, p. 118). They aimed to eliminate what they considered to be a "bad" elite within social institutions and replace predominantly left-wing civil society organizations with a "good" new elite that supposedly represented the interests of the nation (Bill, 2020, pp. 118–119). Since Party leader Jarosław Kaczyński claimed that liberal organizations are a monopolized power of foreign influences to go against the people, organizations like migrant-aid nonprofits were scapegoated, scrutinized, and politically controlled to ensure the protection of national values. Since civil society organizations are not under arbitrary state control, PiS adopted a multifaceted strategy that combines negative pressure with positive promotion (Bill, 2020, p. 119). The negative pressure manifested itself in smear campaigns by state-controlled public media, police raids, and the withdrawal of state support for NPOs (Bill, 2020, p. 119) in the form of abolishing consultative bodies within ministries, dismissing funding competition committees and competitions themselves, changing and adding priorities at the moment when funding decisions were to be made, failure to resolve competitions or altering decisions, and vague justifications for denying grants, awarding them to entities that did not meet formal criteria (Wilk, 2016, para. 3). On the other hand, organizations affiliated with the PiS party or sharing their ideological views started to receive positive promotion in the form of public funding and other institutional support (Bill, 2020, p. 119). PiS contented that the strengthening of Polish civil society was imperative and long overdue, highlighting the historical lack of state involvement in its

development (Bill, 2020, p. 121). Consequently, PiS accorded favorable treatment in its allocation of public funding to right-wing, Christian, and nationalist entities, while liberal and left-wing organizations, which diverged from the party's ideological stance, faced discriminatory attitudes. In addition, PiS established the National Freedom Institute – Center for Civil Society Development (NFI), which acted as a governmental executive agency to achieve equalization, democratization, and pluralization in civil society (Bill, 2020, p. 122). This last goal was connected to the assumption that liberal and left-wing civil society organizations had been monopolizing public funding opportunities. This resulted in the promotion of right-wing profiles and a shift away from supporting "gender ideology, sex education, and minority rights" to prioritizing "national and Christian values" (Bill, 2020, p. 122). In reality, the NFI served as a proxy of the Government, now managing the allocation of ministerial and European funds controlled by the Government (Bill, 2020, p. 122). Previously, the allocation of public funds to civil society organizations was decentralized, involving various ministries and local governments (Gall, 2017, p. 26). However, the establishment of the NFI transferred the control to the Prime Minister, operating through a plenipotentiary. Consequently, the Government gained authority over the composition of the Center's governing bodies, including the Director and Council, and over the programs for civil society development. In the aftermath of the NFI's founding, human rights organizations started to report difficulties in accessing public funds due to unexplained delays in transfers. For instance, in April 2017, the Association for Legal Intervention, which focused on asylum seekers' and refugees' rights, informed Human Rights Watch of a nine-month delay in receiving funds without any explanation or indication of when the funds would be transferred (Gall, 2017, p. 27). This is one of the many examples manifesting how the Government, via the mandate of NFI, progressively cut down on left-wing and liberal NPOs' budgets, in favor of the organizations that followed the ideology of PiS.

Facing ceding Government investments in PiS-ruled Poland, NPOs became concerned about financial sustainability and the need to find alternative sources of revenue. Fundraising campaigns on social media emerged as one potential solution (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 891). Many organizations started to reevaluate their fundraising strategies to reduce their reliance on grants from the state, with their representatives highlighting that they should not have become so dependent on public funding in the first place (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 891), especially given the growing competition in the market (Helmig et al., 2014, p. 1516). In the case of Poland, this escalating competition between NPOs is closely related to the substantial growth in the number of organizations in Poland, which surged from 103,000 in 2014 to 138,000 in 2021 (Charycka et al., 2022, p. 19). These observed dynamics were unprecedented (Charycka et al., 2022, p. 20). The sheer increase in the number of NPOs led to a crowded landscape, making the competition for financial resources amongst left-wing NPOs even more intense than the political shift in budget allocation had caused. To add even further to the financial stress experienced by NPOs, the need for social and humanitarian assistance was rising

rapidly in the wake of the migration crisis (Nageswarakurukkal et al., 2019, p. 288), without a comprehensive document outlining Poland's migration policy existing to address demographic challenges. With the Government slacking in its responsibility to guide and strategize migrant-aid support, the integration of foreigners became a burden on the shoulders of under-funded migrant-aid NPOs (Łodziński & Szonert, 2023, p. 6). This hostile political climate, characterized by elite replacement and funding cuts, shaped the migrant-aid organizations' functioning, which struggled in the face of the migration crisis.

2.3. The Societal Context of Polish NPOs: Working in a Migration Crisis

With the start of the full-scale Ukrainian-Russian war in 2022, Poland has been accepting refugees from Ukraine, granting them safe passage, and legalizing their extended stays. Ukrainian refugees were eligible for multiple types of financial aid (e.g., the child benefit "500+") and medical and psychological care (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022, pp. 8–10). They also gained access to higher education, as they were charged no fees for attending. Additionally, the Government introduced several changes to existing regulations, including waiving the VAT tax for goods and services that aided Ukrainians (Ociepa-Kicińska & Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj, 2022, pp. 11–12). This is in stark contrast to reports indicating that Polish authorities have been engaging in unlawful pushbacks and even violence against migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Southwest Asia and North Africa via Belarus since 2021 (Human Rights Watch, 2024, para. 3). Moreover, volunteers who were assisting stranded individuals in the border area of Poland and Belarus faced criminal charges, harassment, and intimidation from border officials. In this paradoxical reality wherein Government support and authority xenophobia coexist, Polish NPOs have been stepping up to provide humanitarian aid for people in need (Rumieńczyk, 2023, para. 7). Thereby, NPOs give continuation to an approach of assistance to vulnerable migrants, despite the limited resources (Fejfer, 2017, para. 13).

After the war in Ukraine broke out in 2022, approximately 30,300 NPOs took action to assist refugees who arrived in Poland (GUS, 2023, p. 5). About 73.9% of NPOs were and continue to be involved in providing social and humanitarian aid to Ukrainians (GUS, 2023, p. 6). In total, these entities have helped approximately 17.5 million recipients until today. NGOs also supported local or municipal administration bodies and healthcare facilities in their operations (GUS, 2023, p. 6). One of the primary forms of aid provided in connection with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been the donation of material goods. The estimated value of donated material support amounted to 1.2 billion PLN (GUS, 2023, p. 6). Another significant form of support has been the provision of food – one in five NPOs has provided aid in this form. Additionally, organizations have provided medical assistance, healthcare, childcare, or educational support, and have assisted in providing accommodation. Financial assistance was provided by 12.8% of NGOs engaged in aid efforts, with a

total estimated amount of 469.7 million PLN (GUS, 2023, p. 6). All of these efforts and investments were made in the absence of sustainable Government funds.

In the subsequent sections, a closer examination will be undertaken regarding theories explaining the financial dependency of NPOs on governments and the private sector, with particular emphasis on the role of social media in strengthening the financial position of NPOs. Such exploration is particularly relevant as the Polish political climate requires a step away from Government reliance, and the exploration of alternative funding streams instead.

2.4. Resource Dependence: Understanding the Self-Sufficiency of Polish NPOs

In recognizing the crucial role of financial sustainability for NPOs, we must acknowledge their inherent dependencies on resources, which are in nature arbitrarily provided and assigned. According to the Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), organizations depend on their environment to provide them with resources essential for their survival (Verschuere & De Corte, 2015, p. 225), and that very dependence shapes the behavior of the organizations (Macedo & Carlos Pinho, 2006, p. 534). RDT assumes that organizations strive to take control of resources to reduce their dependence on external parties (Arik et al., 2016, p. 51). This can be achieved through in-sourcing, which involves developing an in-house capability to provide services that the organization relies on (Drees & Heugens, 2013, p. 1670).

A qualitative analysis, conducted by Jarosz (2024), of the state of the third sector in Poland after experiencing a series of humanitarian crises from 2021 to 2023, highlights some of the in-house capabilities that were particularly important in enabling NPOs to adapt and respond effectively to the challenges posed by these crises. Polish migrant-aid NPOs have experienced rapid growth in the scale of their activities and staff, including volunteers, in the face of two crises on Poland's borders with Ukraine and Belarus (Jarosz, 2024, p. 8). They were found to have recognized the need to streamline internal processes such as internal communication, recruitment, and safety standards (Jarosz, 2024, p. 8). Some organizations that previously had no experience in certain areas have started training their volunteers in direct assistance, first aid, or documenting human rights violations. For instance, organizations operating on the Polish-Belarusian border have taken steps in this direction (Jarosz, 2024, p. 18). More than half of the managerial staff have expressed a desire to improve their skills in managing large teams (Jarosz, 2024, p. 18). Additionally, due to a significant increase in new donors in the form of businesses and international organizations, some NGOs have developed a mutual assessment and partner recommendation system. This system has facilitated other organizations in making decisions or negotiating terms of cooperation with donors (Jarosz, 2024, p. 38). NGOs have also learned to conduct screening of potential partners before accepting donor offers (Jarosz, 2024, p. 39) and acquaint themselves with the new terminology of the private sector (Jarosz, 2024, p. 34).

However, despite the comprehensive nature of the report addressing the expansion of in-house capabilities, there is little information regarding the utilization of social media by migrant-aid NPOs to raise financial donations. This highlights a significant gap in the understanding of the social media strategies employed by these organizations to engage with stakeholders and promote their causes in order to secure their financial sustainability, which this thesis will try to establish. In the following sections, the various functions of social media within the marketing strategy of NPOs will be explored – specifically, how social media platforms aid in raising funds, engaging with their audience, and advocating for their cause.

2.5. Social Media as a Fundraising Tool

Over the two years since the start of the war in Ukraine, refugee-focused organizations in Poland received substantial financial backing from businesses and international organizations, which helped them to operate in the context of elite replacement. However, the sustainability of this support is in question, given indications that certain international donor organizations intend to withdraw their assistance from Poland (Jarosz, 2024, p. 40). In light of this prospect, Polish NPOs proactively seek alternative revenue streams (Jarosz, 2024, p. 40).

Apart from applying for public funding and grants, the literature describes how NPOs can more traditionally contact their potential donors by phone, or with the evolution of technology, they can take advantage of digital fundraising through digital platforms (Dadić Fruk, 2023, p. 87) to complement their offline fundraising efforts (Nageswarakurukkal et al., 2019, p. 288). This is for example done by implementing social media into their communication strategy (Dumitrica, 2021, p. 85) and using it as a fundraising tool (Elvira-Lorilla et al., 2023, p. 20).

Guo and Saxton (2014, p. 70) analyzed the use of one of the social media platforms (Twitter) by advocacy NPOs. A three-stage process has been identified for using social media. Firstly, organizations disseminate information and raise awareness of their cause within their network (providing information). After that, they focus on maintaining and expanding their community of supporters, ensuring continuous engagement (expanding community). Finally, when the time is right, they mobilize their supporters to take action (calling to action). Engagement with an organization's social media presence has been shown to yield higher donations and attract a greater number of donors, as evidenced by Bhati and McDonnell's (2019, p. 86) research. They discovered positive correlations between fundraising success and various metrics of an organization's Facebook presence, such as network size (number of likes), activity level (number of posts), and audience engagement (number of shares). As suggested by the signaling theory, being active on social media shows the donors that the organization appreciates them, by paying attention to them and decreasing information asymmetries between them (Elvira-Lorilla et al., 2023, p. 6). Levine and Zahradnik (2012, p. 36) discovered that nonprofits with an increased online presence (assessed through metrics such as the

quantity of media, donor, and volunteer pages, as well as the diversity of communication tools and links) experience enhanced financial sustainability. Arik et al. (2016, p. 48) conducted a study on the impact of different strategies adopted by NPOs during the 2008 economic crisis. The results showed that organizations with limited funding sources tend to have a lower level of strategic reaction to the crisis and external uncertainties (Arik et al., 2016, p. 67). Furthermore, the study found a significant relationship between visibility and website presence and the ability of a nonprofit to maintain or increase its resources. The authors recommend developing, maintaining, and strategically utilizing digital presence as a valuable resource to attract additional resources (Arik et al., 2016, p. 68). A financially sustainable NPO can ensure a continuous pursuit of its mission, even in unfavorable financial circumstances, because it has various income streams and strong relationships with various stakeholders (Gajdová & Majdúchová, 2018, p. 34).

A notable example of a Polish nonprofit using social media to its financial advantage is the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity in Poland, which experienced smear campaigns from the PiS Government and a subsequent lack of governmental funding. Nevertheless, through collaboration with media outlets, big brands, and social media influencers, the organization manages to raise millions annually, making significant contributions to public medical care (Sieradzka, 2019, para. 7). The instance of the Great Orchestra represents an exceptional case when juxtaposed with the fundraising endeavors of Polish migrant-aid NPOs. According to the report assessing the requirements of refugee-focused organizations, the annual budgets of the surveyed entities predominantly fall below 50,000 PLN, with approximately 28.9% of organizations operating with limited to no financial resources (Majbroda & Syrnyk, 2022, p. 15). Merely 19.3% of these organizations boast budgets exceeding 200,000 PLN annually. Donations from private donors constitute 28.9% of the primary sources of funding among these organizations (Majbroda & Syrnyk, 2022, p. 17). To the best of the author's knowledge, there are no other analyses of the social media use of migrant-aid organizations, especially in the fundraising context.

Generally, Polish NPOs utilize the two most popular social media platforms in Poland, Facebook, which has a reach of 81.08% (IAB Polska, 2023, p. 23), and Instagram, which has a reach of 50.07% (IAB Polska, 2023, p. 37), to engage with their target audiences and serve the interests of the represented social groups. According to Smoliński (2021, p. 65), who investigated the use of social media in the advocacy of Polish NPOs, Polish NPOs prefer Facebook, because it is highly effective in running paid social campaigns, and its user base consists of their typical demographic that engages with their content. Instagram serves as a relational and engaging medium that fosters support and allows for the formation of long-lasting alliances with followers (Smoliński, 2021, p. 65). While Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are marked by consistent usage, platforms like LinkedIn, TikTok, and YouTube pose more significant challenges. For instance, LinkedIn often features content already published on other social media platforms, lacking relevance to the professional audience it targets

(Smoliński, 2021, p. 65). Similarly, organizations struggle with content selection and regular utilization of TikTok. Surveyed organizations share similar concerns about YouTube, where content tends to be unstructured (Smoliński, 2021, p. 66).

It is evident that social media holds significant potential as a fundraising tool for migrant-aid organizations. These observations will contribute to understanding how information is shared to foster community growth and encourage supporters to take action, including making financial donations.

2.6. Social Media as a Networking Tool

Today, NPOs function within an environment characterized by growing interconnectivity. In the communication mix adopted by Polish migrant-aid organizations, social media stands out as the predominant channel, accounting for 72.3% (Majbroda & Syrnyk, 2022, p. 20). Technology empowers nonprofits to organize digital networks both online and offline (Hall et al., 2019, p. 160), fostering relationships between them and their donors (Elvira-Lorilla et al., 2023, p. 2). Research shows that NPOs that communicate their fundamental values typically experience increased levels of charitable giving, fundraising efforts, and engagement (Mirzaei et al., 2021, p. 186). Thanks to SM's interactivity, NPOs can more easily engage with their current donors, attract new ones, and ultimately involve all of them in their initiatives (Nageswarakurukkal et al., 2019, p. 291). As Schmitz et al. (2020, p. 182) point out, engaging supporters online eventually leads to increased organizational efficiency, through enhancing civic agency and greater legitimacy of demand.

Although numerous NPOs maintain a presence on social media, it is important to note that more than simply owning a social media account is needed to guarantee meaningful interaction with stakeholder groups (Maxwell & Carboni, 2014, p. 311). Carboni and Maxwell (2015, p. 18) analyzed a sample of youth development organizations' Facebook posts to determine what predicts stakeholder engagement. Further research revealed that as NPOs enhance their capacity to communicate with external stakeholders, there is a corresponding increase in total post engagement (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015, p. 25).

Xu and Saxton (2019, p. 29) argue that investing in relationship-building on social media leads to a unique form of social capital called "social media capital". This term refers to the valuable connections and relationships that organizations establish through their social media activities (Saxton & Guo, 2020, p. 6). This social media capital can then be converted to deliver other resources or organizational outcomes, such as improved organizational resilience or higher charitable giving (Xu & Saxton, 2019, p. 29). According to their research, the effectiveness of acquiring social capital depends on the quality and extent of organizations' engagement with stakeholders (Xu & Saxton, 2019, p. 43). Another finding is that the success of social capital acquisition relies more on the diversity of stakeholder engagement rather than the quantity (Xu & Saxton, 2019, p. 43). The study introduces two primary tactics for stakeholder engagement: content-based and connection-based –

both tactics have been shown to be significant. Connection-building tactics involve targeting communication recipients deliberately, which enhances reciprocity, closeness, and trust in online interactions (Jang & Stefanone, 2011, as cited in Xu & Saxton, 2019, p. 31). An example could be tagging users in comments made on social media (Xu & Saxton, 2019, p. 31). On the other hand, content-based tactics involve organizations carefully crafting their messages in terms of content, timing, and delivery method, which was suggested to increase network embeddedness, indicating strong and meaningful relationships (Yang & Taylor, 2015, as cited in Xu & Saxton, 2019, p. 35). A content-based tactic could be posts with reach visual cues (Xu & Saxton, 2019, p. 31).

Saxton and Waters (2014, p. 294) discovered that the types of messages an organization chooses to send are highly significant. These authors found that the public preferred dialogue over one-way information transmission. Messages that focus on community building and dialogue, which involve efforts to create relationships through interactivity and dialogue, are viewed more positively and receive more likes and comments compared to informational messages. However, not all mobilizational messages are equal. Organizations should recognize that messages designed to promote upcoming events, as well as those aimed at soliciting donations and sales, are unlikely to increase levels of dialogic engagement. Despite the need for NPOs to raise funds and encourage event attendance, these messages do not generate significant interest among their Facebook followers. On the other hand, messages that request the public's assistance in lobbying, advocacy, or volunteering efforts are likely to increase levels of dialogic engagement.

These findings may contribute to understanding how Polish migrant-aid organizations strategically utilize social media to foster community engagement, encourage active participation, and ultimately garner support for their causes. By interviewing communication specialist at these NPOs, this research aims to shed light on the approaches adopted by Polish nonprofits to leverage social media for enhancing audience engagement and support for their initiatives.

2.7. Social Media as an Advocacy Tool

Digital technology greatly improves NPOs' ability to engage with a large audience (Dimitrova & Ozdora-Aksak, 2022, p. 943) and offers a new way for political participation for the organizations (Dumitrica & Hockin-Boyers, 2022, p. 3319). However, according to RDT, the dependence on the environment for resources may make NPOs hesitant to criticize a Government that controls their access to resources (Verschuere & De Corte, 2015, p. 225). The power of social networks in the digital realm offers new opportunities for weaker actors to disrupt and challenge the existing order (Hall et al., 2019, p. 160). For example, social media played a crucial role in the organization and dissemination of the Arab Spring (Khondker, 2011, p. 677). Scholars investigating the phenomenon argue that political events leading to social change are often followed by increased social media use, bringing about further changes in the political landscape (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013, p.

121). This could be observed in Poland during the Black Protests in October 2016, organized to oppose the parliamentary motion to fully ban abortion and put women who attempt it on trial. The seemingly insignificant act of sharing messages on social media played a crucial role in mobilizing collective action (Nacher, 2020, p. 264), which took the shape of inclusive and intersectional country-wide protests. To understand this interplay, researchers highlight the importance of investigating the political context before attempting to analyze the role of social media in collective action, as political events typically precede the heightened use of social media (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013, p. 129). Nacher (2020, pp. 267–269) also underscores the significance of the narrative spread on social media through hashtags, as in the case of the Black Protests, where the narrative served as a collective expression of dissent against the restrictive abortion laws, with people also sharing their personal stories and support for women. Social media activity supported and maintained street action (Nacher, 2020, p. 266).

According to Smoliński (2021, p. 65), the main goals of the surveyed nonprofits' social media activity in his study on Polish NPO advocacy are to educate, raise awareness about important issues, and promote socially responsible attitudes. Educational topics and political messages are prevalent in their shared content. Interviews and post analyses show that Polish advocacy organizations use social media mainly to reach and engage with their audience. Content primarily serves an informational purpose across platforms, often combining functions like informing, mobilizing, and expressing solidarity. Politicians and other public figures are frequently approached not with challenging questions, but with expressions of gratitude for their support and collaboration; consequently, NPOs miss the chance to share their thoughts in front of a broader audience and gain transparent positions (Smoliński, 2021, p. 65).

These insights will be used to see how Polish migrant-aid NPOs use social media as a tool for advocacy and community engagement. This paper will examine if social media serves or fails to serve as a critical tool to raise awareness and mobilize support for their cause. During the interviews, topics such as fostering dialogue, challenges in maintaining their online presence, and fulfilling the organizations' roles through social media activity will be covered, which will help in identifying the best practices for leveraging social media to secure financial sustainability.

2.8. Unveiling Social Media Narratives

The previous shows that NPOs' presence and interaction on social media are essential to raising the level of financial donations, but it is also crucial to consider the substance of what is shared. Rather than solely acknowledging the importance of engagement, attention should be directed toward the narratives constructed through social media channels that can be less or more impactful. Understanding the content of these messages provides insight into the stories told and perspectives presented that influence public discourse and perceptions.

Nacher (2020, pp. 267–269) underscores the significance of the narrative spread on social media through hashtags, as in the case of the Black Protests, where the narrative served as a collective expression of dissent against the restrictive abortion laws, with people also sharing their personal stories and support for women. The emotional stimulation that comes from engaging with stories increases the likelihood of individuals absorbing the subject being communicated within the narrative (Nicoli et al., 2021, p. 159). Storytelling is one of the tools employed to produce more engaging content. It involves intentionally using stories to enhance the comprehension of the message being spread while promoting mental participation in the narrative (Frenzel et al., 2006, as cited in Mang et al., 2021, p. 145). It facilitates the transfer of both cognitive understanding and emotional connection from the organization to the audience (Brown & Patterson, 2010, as cited in Mitchell & Clark, 2020, p. 142).

Stories consist of key elements that must be included for it to be a story and not just a sequence of sentences. According to Bublitz et al. (2016, p. 241), it must contain characters, chronology, and causality. The protagonist is the nonprofit itself that hopes to achieve future goals and other characters might be involved in the narrative, i.e., employees, nonprofit clients, and even donors. Chronology is utilized to illustrate the organization's past, present, and future, encompassing both short-term objectives and long-term missions. Causality, or plot, takes the form of a goal-oriented narrative that highlights how characters overcome obstacles to fulfill the organization's objectives, driven by a desire for a better future. Once a metanarrative is developed by a responsible master storyteller, the nonprofit ought to assemble a story portfolio – a compilation of authentic stories – to showcase the expertise and distinctiveness of their organization (Bublitz et al., 2016, p. 242). These stories subsequently serve as a toolkit to propel progress toward accomplishing its mission. Adapting the storytelling process to align with these guidelines enhances the likelihood of a nonprofit attaining greater financial support and influencing policy change (Bublitz et al., 2016, p. 242). Parker et al. (2024, p. 8) discovered that Gen Z is interested in data-driven narratives about NPOs. They recommend that NPOs use narrative-based messages to demonstrate how even a small donation can make a significant impact on their mission and to explain how the donated funds are used to benefit real people. Merchant et al. (2010, p. 760) confirmed with their findings that the use of storytelling by charities can be an effective tool for attracting donations. Mang et al. (2021, p. 147) conducted an analysis of content shared by Austrian NPOs on Facebook and Instagram, focusing on the utilization of digital storytelling. Their findings underscore the significant role that digital storytelling already plays in the communication strategies of these organizations. Specifically, the research highlights that the primary objective of NPOs' digital storytelling efforts is user mobilization, aimed at encouraging actions such as donations, petition signings, campaign support, event participation, and post-sharing. Additionally, the study reveals that storytelling serves as a means for informing users about the organizations' work, particularly in the realms of public relations and

advocacy. However, it is noteworthy that user engagement emerged as a goal in only a minority (5%) of the analyzed posts, suggesting potential areas for further exploration and optimization of digital storytelling strategies within NPOs.

The role of narratives emphasizes their potential in shaping public opinion, with storytelling amplifying the emotional connection between NPOs and their audiences. Storytelling aims to engage audiences and foster empathy – its primary goal is to connect with individuals on a personal level. The theoretical qualities of storytelling give this thesis the foundation to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how NPOs pursue their mission and fundraising efforts on social media platforms.

2.9. Summary

By blending insights from RDT, nonprofit fundraising theory, and online engagement strategies, this theoretical framework sought to unravel the interplay between NPOs, social media, and financial sustainability in the wake of elite replacement. The framework was structured into four key sections: first, a contextual description of the Polish case; second, exploring the role of social media in enhancing organizational longevity; third, examining the effective utilization of social media; and fourth, emphasizing the importance of crafting the right content. A corresponding topic list derived from the mentioned insights was developed to address the research question through qualitative questions and served as an interview guide (see Appendix A). However, by adopting an inductive research approach, this study aimed to create space for unexpected insights that might have arisen through the participation of migrant-aid stakeholders.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore how Polish migrant-aid NPOs utilize social media to secure financial sustainability in the aftermath of the 2015-2023 elite replacement in civil society. Therefore, a rigid research design and methodology were developed. This section provides a detailed explanation of the methodology used to answer the research question. It also offers further justification for the chosen methodological approach. This chapter discusses the choice of method, the sampling and data collection, the method of analysis, the operationalization, and the credibility and ethical considerations of the study.

3.1. Choice of Method

This was the first study to investigate the use of NPOs' social media in the political context of elite replacement that took place between 2015 and 2023. Thus, the research had an explorative purpose as it aimed to understand new territories of nonprofit and social media research and sought to offer initial insights into the research topic (Babbie, 2018, p. 90).

Since the aim of this study was to identify patterns that reveal how Polish migrant advocates use social media to obtain more funding and maintain financial sustainability, it was concluded that employing a qualitative approach was the most suitable choice to answer the research question. This is because this approach and its operational methods entailed the interpretation of meaningful relationships, considering diverse perspectives and factors influencing social reality (Brennen, 2021, pp. 4–5). In this thesis, the relationships that were of topical interest were associations between the strategies used by nonprofits on social media, and how these strategies helped in obtaining funding and ultimately securing financial sustainability, all in the context of PiS' elite replacement. Qualitative methods are useful for investigating social processes and exploring aspects of social life that cannot be easily measured through quantitative research; this is particularly valuable for gaining insight into nonprofit communication specialists' views and opinions (Pope & Mays, 2020, p. 7). While quantitative research involves identifying variables and deductive testing of hypotheses to produce statistics, qualitative research searches for meaning and ways to talk about experiences within a specific context, let it be historical, cultural, economic, or political (Brennen, 2021, pp. 14–15). Qualitative researchers prioritize context as the central part of their interpretive process in order to comprehend the meaning people assign to their choices and the understanding of their outcomes (Brennen, 2021, p. 21). Here, the context is related to the elite replacement commenced in 2015 by the Law and Justice Party, described in-depth in the previous chapter. Given the fact that the research question was situated within and inherently attached to this particular socio-political context, qualitative research emerged as the most methodologically sound choice.

The research method chosen was that of semi-structured in-depth interviewing of experts in NPO social media strategizing, i.e. people who are responsible for the social media strategy in migrant-aid organizations. Conducting qualitative interviews with experts in the field helped uncover deeper insights into the thought patterns and reasoning behind social media implementation, going beyond a surface-level examination of media artifacts, akin to the approach taken by Dumitrica (2021, p. 77) in her research on Dutch NPOs and the integration of social media in their strategic communication. Choosing this method enabled Dumitrica (2021) to comprehensively map the use of social media by these nonprofits. It allowed for an in-depth exploration of various topics and created the opportunity to gather opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of social media use, which is also what the author of this paper hopes to achieve.

While focus groups could have helped this study in identifying a wide range of perspectives and participants to clarify or expand on their contributions in response to points raised by others, therefore enhancing contributions that might have been left underdeveloped in a one-on-one interview (Powell & Single, 1996, p. 504), there was a potential drawback to conducting research in a group setting. Participants may have felt pressured to conform to the most popular opinion within the group due to a fear of being judged (Acocella, 2011, pp. 1133–1134). This was particularly relevant in the socio-political context of the thesis and financial matters discussed, as there existed a risk of the participant fearing competition, which could have impacted the quality of the results, hence the choice of in-depth interviews.

As Nathan et al. (2019, p. 392) point out, qualitative interviewing allows us to enhance our understanding of a particular set of experiences. It is usually guided by an interpretive research framework, which recognizes that the information shared by research participants is not applicable beyond the specific context in which it is given. Instead, the goal of qualitative interviewing is to collect historically and culturally specific perspectives on how individuals perceive their environment — here, migrant-aid organizations functioning in a hostile socio-political context. However, Nathan et al. (2019, p. 396) also emphasize that interviews have limitations – the most significant one is that interviews do not capture the objectivity of everyday practices. Instead, they provide an account of an experience, which is influenced by cognition, culture, and context. Observational methods could have been more effective in studying people's actual actions rather than relying on self-reported information. However, due to the timeframe of the research question (2015-2023), it was not possible to use these methods. Lastly, using secondary data and analyzing social media posts qualitatively could have provided insight into the visible activities of NPOs during this timeframe. However, it could not have captured the complexities of financial sustainability and the issue of elite replacement, as these may not have been apparent from the content alone. Additionally, interpretative bias regarding the intentions behind social media content choices could have been a concern. By having collected primary data through interviews, this study remained closer to the authentic perspectives of

the interviewees. After careful consideration of all available methodologies, in-depth interviews emerged as the most suitable approach.

Semi-structured interviews were hence selected as the preferred method for conducting the interviews. This offered the needed flexibility to explore their experiences and provide deeper information (Johnson, 2002, p. 3) on things that were not noticeable right away (Babbie, 2018, p. 311), such as moral concerns about certain strategies. This approach promoted a balance between the researcher's and participant's interests, as the questions covered a variety of topics while allowing the interviewer to be responsive and flexible in asking additional questions about emerging subjects (Nathan et al., 2019, p. 393).

The interview was based on a pre-established set of questions (see Appendix A). The interview guide was developed according to five phases listed by Kallio et al. (2016, p. 2959), which included: identifying the appropriateness of the method for the research, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the subject, creating the preliminary interview guide, testing the guide and finally, presenting the complete guide in the thesis. The theoretical framework guided the interview questions by indicating topics interesting and relevant to the discussion, yet the flexible structure prevented the occurrence of tunnel vision. This allowed the researcher to stay open to unexpected insights, such as the existence of the echo chamber effect. The goal of the guide was to elicit spontaneous and detailed responses; these answers were encouraged by asking what, who, where, when, how, and why questions (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2960). The researcher varied the order of the questions and asked follow-up (pre-planned or spontaneous) questions to explore the answers in more depth or provide clarification. This approach fostered openness to experts defining meanings and identifying relevant concepts that may not have been anticipated in existing literature. This then revealed how the organizations navigated their financial situation amid the elite replacement by using social media.

3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

Since this thesis was to examine social media usage in a specific context, the process of purposive selection of participants able to adequately reflect on their experience with the subject under study was employed (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140). This sampling approach enabled the selection of 'information-rich cases' that shed light on the questions being investigated (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

The first step, the selection of organizations for this research was facilitated through the spis.ngo.pl website with a list of over 150,000 NPOs in Poland. Using the platform's search engine, the researcher applied specific filters to narrow the options on the list of NPOs in Poland. These filters included selecting "recipients of organization's aid" as "refugees, migrants, returnees" and specifying the "sphere of activity" as "human rights, democracy, law" and "aid to Ukraine." Ten organizations agreed to participate in this research – all of them adhered to the five conditions of the nonprofit

sector outlined by Salamon and Anheier (1992, p. 135). They were then asked to select a representative (see Appendix B) who would be the most suitable person to participate in the study — preferably a communications specialist as the paper focuses on the use of social media, but due to time constraints, it was not always possible. This completed the second step of the sampling.

The interviews were conducted in April 2024, using the Google Meet platform — all interviews were conducted online. The duration of the interviews ranged from 35 minutes to one hour and 20 minutes. The interviewees held various roles in organizational communication, including communication managers and specialists, marketing specialists, and fundraising specialists (see Appendix B). Each interview began with a casual conversation to establish rapport. The researcher then explained the research's goals, her motivations, the roles of the researcher and the participant, and the confidentiality of the study. She outlined that the main objective was to understand how migrant-aid organizations use social media for financial sustainability in the elite replacement context. She emphasized her interest in the topic but made sure that her role as the person guiding the interview without partiality was clear. Following this, the researcher asked for the participants' consent to take part in the study. The interviewee was assured that the data gathered would be kept confidential and that they were free to share their experiences and opinions, but that they also could stop at any point. The first part of the interview focused on the participants' roles within their organizations and the work of NPOs within a political context. The second part of the interview explored the use of social media for financial sustainability, while the final part was about the content and storytelling strategies employed by NPOs. The idea was to go from general ideas and work toward specific ones.

All interviews were conducted in Polish. The participants were given the choice of English and Polish, but they all chose the latter as the preferred option. This meant that the data collected reflected their experiences better and potentially allowed for richer insights. Each meeting was audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Although the researcher took some notes, she mainly relied on the recording so as not to miss key points (Jamshed, 2014, p. 87).

3.3. Method of Analysis

To answer the research question, a qualitative analysis of the transcripts of interview data was conducted. This allowed for the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns in the data in a detailed manner (Boeije, 2010a, p. 76). Specifically, thematic analysis was chosen as it is flexible and can be applied to various types of data to gain a deeper understanding of the overall topic, making it an appropriate choice for analyzing the data gathered on the subject of study (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). A thematic approach benefited this research more in comparison to discourse or narrative analysis. Discourse analysis focuses on how language constructs meaning, creates reality, and influences power relations (Burck, 2005, p. 249) and this research would not have benefited from that,

since its goal was not connected to language nuances. Narrative analysis investigates the storytelling process and how personal narratives add to the meaning-making process (Riessman, 2008, pp. 24–25) and therefore would not have helped in capturing the recurring patterns in the gathered data. Thematic analysis, on the contrary, helped in identifying similarities and differences in interviewers' experiences, while summarizing the key features of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). For instance, a recurring feature of the data set was the moral concern connected to storytelling or the use of targeted paid advertisements, as will be further elaborated on in the results chapter of this thesis. This analysis provided a deeper insight into the use of media for fundraising and generated unexpected insights.

An understanding of the subject was gained by breaking down the data into specific categories, labeling them with codes, and organizing and connecting these codes (Boeije, 2010b, p. 95; Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) with the help of the qualitative software, Atlas.ti. To do that, the analysis process described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) was used. It is a six-step approach that includes reading and re-reading the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, and defining and naming the themes that emerge. It was chosen for its ability to provide a clear analytical framework while also allowing themes to emerge organically from the interviews. A theme is a pattern of meaning found in data, which can be made up of manifest or latent content (Joffe, 2011, p. 209). In the initial stages of coding, the analysis primarily focused on the more explicit parts of the data. However, the analysis became more implicit as the immersion in the data progressed (Terry et al., 2017, p. 11), as detailed below.

Important to the distinction of themes in qualitative data is whether it stems from preconceived theoretical notions (deductive) or emerges directly from the data gathered (inductive). While themes rooted in theory allow researchers to build upon and challenge existing studies, naturally occurring themes in the data cannot be overlooked — disregarding these organic themes would have undermined the purpose of qualitative inquiry (Joffe, 2011, p. 210). It was crucial to approach each data set with knowledge of prior findings to avoid duplicating existing research. However, it was equally important to take seriously any findings that contradicted previous frameworks, as they offered valuable insights capable of reshaping our comprehension of the subject at hand (Joffe, 2011, p. 210). Hence, this thesis incorporated an inductive approach.

A topic list was developed based on the literature review, which served as a structure for the interviews and the subsequent coding procedure (see Appendix A). The initial steps of the analysis involved the researcher's comprehensive familiarization with the dataset through iterative (re)reading it and noting down first reflections. Immersion was crucial to the process since it facilitated a deeper understanding of the gathered information. Subsequently, the researcher established 154 preliminary codes. For instance, the quote from Participant H: "By keeping [the donors] informed regularly, we strive to build some kind of bond and show how much we are doing." was given the code "nurturing

the relationship with regular donors." Then, the codes that were similar to each other were merged into subthemes and subthemes into themes (see Appendix C). Following the given example, the codes "nurturing the relationship with regular donors" and "being authentic in their communication to strengthen relationships," along with 12 others, were merged to create the subtheme "maintaining good relations". This subtheme was then made part of the theme along with 4 other subthemes. The fourth step entailed refining the emergent themes to ensure their coherence and validity within the entirety of the dataset. Then, the overarching themes were defined and named to finally be presented in a report that provided a compelling argument in relation to the research question. The showcased theme was called "community building."

What is worth noting, the interview transcripts were not translated as certain meanings would have been lost. The coding was however done in English to facilitate the analysis across different language contexts. Keeping the original language of transcripts with coding done in English helped preserve the authenticity of the experiences while making the analysis accessible to an international audience.

3.4. Operationalization

Demonstrating the researcher's definitions of key concepts from the research question was essential for shaping the research itself. The key terms within the context of this research were defined as follows and incorporated into explanations of terms within the interview context where needed:

Social media utilization: leveraging social media to enhance the organization's communication with stakeholders through targeted content for mobilizing, cultivating meaningful relationships, and fostering engagement with the aim of securing donations (Klafke et al., 2021, p. 298; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 338).

Securing financial sustainability: employing diverse strategies to secure financial resources, including but not limited to social media campaigns (Elvira-Lorilla et al., 2023, p. 7) and diversifying their revenue portfolio (Carroll & Stater, 2008, p. 962), to ensure the organization's operations.

Elite replacement: refers to the systematic actions taken by the PiS Government in Poland between 2015 and 2023 to stifle liberal and left-wing civil society stakeholders, including the deliberate reduction of financial support, engagement in smear campaigns, and other measures aimed at suppressing opposition and reshaping the societal landscape in alignment with the government's political ideology (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 880).

These definitions were used to examine the various ways in which Polish migrant-aid NPOs use social media platforms with the goal of obtaining more funds. The interviews included questions about their current sources of funding and the effectiveness of their campaigns on their financial goals, which helped explore the concept of securing financial sustainability. Identifying how the

political decisions of the PiS Government affected the functioning of the NPOs helped draw the picture of elite replacement.

3.5. Credibility and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the validity and reliability of this research, different criteria were applied to perform a rigorous investigation. For that, a rigid research design and methodology were developed. Participants were given the needed information to understand the nature of the research — they were informed about the details in an email and also at the beginning of the meeting. The participants could ask the researcher additional questions and then decide whether they would agree to partake in it by ultimately giving their informed consent (Israel & Hay, 2006, pp. 60–62). They were reassured of confidentiality as there would have been little validity if it had not been respected (Israel & Hay, 2006, p. 78). Transcriptions of the interviews with a 200-word summary of each were provided to both the thesis supervisor and the second reader. The gathered data was managed with care and a detailed account of the coding process was provided. The constant comparative method suggested by Silverman (2011, p. 76) was employed to ensure validity. Considering the precise scope of the research topic, the external validity (e.g., for NPOs working in other countries) is greatly limited (Andrade, 2020, p. 87), but it was not the purpose of this study, as it focused on a specific political context. While elite replacement can happen anywhere else in the world, other events, such as the crisis on the Polish-Belarussian border that started in 2021 or the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, make it a very *Polish* study.

For the reader to make a better judgment on the influence of the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions on this paper, the author acknowledged her personal and professional experiences (Holmes, 2020, p. 3). The author of this thesis was born in Poland and lived there her whole life until starting university. She is therefore familiar with the political context of the elite replacement and the struggles of migrant-aid organizations. It is worth noting the author's left-wing political stance, which may have influenced the perception of NPOs and their struggles. The author grew up bilingual, therefore there was no language barrier in the interpretation of the data. As a master's student in Media and Business, the researcher held previous assumptions about the effectiveness of social media for obtaining funds, which she aimed to keep to a minimum in her conversations with the interviewees.

What needs to be taken into account is that while a reflection on positionality helps clarify the researcher's position, it is in no way "a guarantee of more honest, truthful, or ethical research" (Holmes, 2020, p. 4).

Chapter 4: Results

This section outlines the findings of the qualitative thematic analysis described in Chapter 3. First, this section will present some general findings, regarding the functioning of migrant-aid organizations. Subsequently, it will describe the interpretations of these findings, connecting them to the three main themes that emerged from the step-by-step inductive coding of the transcript data: brand building, community building, and storytelling.

4.1. General Observations and Findings

Despite all 10 interviewees confirming that their respective organizations were present on social media platforms, none of the participants reported social media as their most important funding source. Instead, the participants reported that donor support solicited via social media makes up only a small percentage of NPO streams, right after grants and, for some organizations, support from the local authorities. When asked about the most crucial funding source, Participant A said: "Of course, it is grants. I think all non-governmental organizations rely on them for their livelihood."

While most nonprofits may be exploring the potential of social media as a fundraising tool in-depth, some respondents acknowledged the lack of in-house capabilities to do so, primarily due to limitations connected to funding, staff, or time, as mentioned by Participant I: "We have a bit of a problem in that no one has ever had time to focus on fundraising in our foundation."

The scale of the organizations' efforts, including their support for migrants and being active on social media, was reported to always depend on the amount of available funding. The level of donations generated through social media was insufficient to substantially support the organizations; instead, these donations primarily served as a supplementary resource for financing specific, one-time projects.

Although social media fundraising is not a primary objective of NPOs, all migrant-aid organizations were found to have *some* experience in soliciting funds online. Yet, rather than using social media as a means to generate individual donations, the interviewees reported that they used social media predominantly to help their organizations fulfill their roles as migrant-aid organizations. This is done by sharing information via social media regarding the integration and activation of migrants, providing legal, financial, and psychological support, and educating society about migration challenges, as Participant C pointed out: "[Social media] is the main channel for sharing information, building a community around our organization, and communicating what we do. It also serves as a valuable source of expert knowledge." This quote shows social media is predominantly used to address beneficiaries, rather than donors. Each interviewee commented that their NPO specialized in a specific area of support for the migrant population and utilized social media to communicate and promote their efforts. Facebook and Instagram were the most used platforms for this purpose, with

LinkedIn emerging as the third most popular, which is in line with the findings of Smoliński (2021, p. 65).

The previous shows that social media is a salient tool for migrant-aid organizations in communication with and information sharing for beneficiaries, i.e. migrants and refugees. It was moreover reported that the use of social media has been growing, especially during the uncertain times that create information gaps and the quest for information provision, such as the crisis on the Polish-Belarussian border or the breakout of a full-scale war in Ukraine. During these challenging times, NPOs recorded an almost exponential growth in their social media use, primarily for information sharing, as reported by Participant E:

> Our social media have grown significantly. ... I can even say that Instagram, I remember when I was making a report, grew by 300%. Our Instagram was very small before, before the crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. And Facebook also surged a lot, and for us, social media is mainly for information sharing

While no organization had a foolproof way of conducting its direct fundraising efforts on social media, there were three main ways in which social media was instead employed via indirect channels to support their efforts in securing financial sustainability, which will be further explored below.

4.2. Brand Building

Due to the migration crises that have emerged in Poland since 2021, the migrant-aid NPOs have grown significantly as they had to increase their efforts. All interviewees subscribed to this change, with each one noting a rapid increase in their staff numbers. As Participant E stated: "We have really grown from a 4-person organization to an organization of around 50 people." Because the issue of migration became more prominent with the offspring of the crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border and the war in Ukraine, the interviewees reported that their organizations focused first and foremost on building their brand. Participant I illustrated this point by saying: "I did not see the possibility of starting with fundraising campaigns when people did not even know who we were."

Because these organizations were previously unknown, the interviewees reported that the main goal for their social media utilization was to build brand visibility and exposure. They recognized the need to establish their organizations' identity before investing in fundraising campaigns and asking people for help. The participants referred to organizations that had already obtained visibility, mentioning it was less complicated for these nonprofits to secure funding. For example, Participant D stressed: "It is well known that it is much easier [for that organization to get funding] and that it is easier to collaborate with them because they have greater visibility." This shows that the interviewees recognized that building the nonprofits' brand and hence enhancing their visibility could have a positive influence on obtaining funding. One notable discovery was that one way in which the NPOs tried to achieve greater brand visibility was through social awareness or

educational campaigns run on social media and sometimes also promoted by other media outlets (also on their social channels), as evoked by the experience of Participant F: "Articles appeared both in OKO Press and in Wyborcza, newsletters were created, there were some banners on the website, and there were posts encouraging people to donate." This finding can be better understood with the model suggested by Laidler-Kylander and Simonin (2009, p. 63). It appears that concentrating efforts on increasing the visibility of the organization's brand enhances public trust and therefore brand equity. With the organizations being more engaged in social media and showcasing a portfolio of their organizational efforts, possible working relationships were coming *to them*. The experience of Participant E subscribed to this idea:

> The power of social media gives us the opportunity to show that it is worthwhile to collaborate with us and that these initial results are beginning to shift the burden from us reaching out and asking for something. This is starting to change, and large funding entities are beginning to approach us on their own. So, I see a correlation here and the influence of social media in that offers are simply coming to us, or the American embassy is reaching out to us on its own.

What Participant E described is the assumption that NPOs held that with more exposure of the NPOs' activity on social media, more funding opportunities would present themselves, as for-profit organizations would be more familiar with the nonprofits' cause. Enhancement of social media presence could influence the perceived relevance of their brand, attracting more entities interested in partnering with nonprofits. Similar trends were noted by Laidler-Kylander and Simonin (2009, p. 64), who found that when a brand is perceived as more relevant, it is able to attract more partners. Furthermore, the quality of these new partnership opportunities reflected the relevance of the organization. These partnerships, in turn, had an impact on the funds raised (Laidler-Kylander & Simonin, 2009, p. 64), which was also reflected in the findings of this study, as shown above with the statement from Participant E.

Although the NPOs were looking for "serious" business partners, meaning they had to keep a professional image, at the same time, they did not want to have a strictly formal image and they tried to find a balance between professionalism and emphasizing the human aspect of the organizations, with Participant E highlighting: "We are constantly building, I think, a professional yet approachable image of an organization that is alongside other people, not one that is very high above everyone." This quote highlights the type of image migrant aid NPOs want to communicate, i.e. the image of NPOs being small, non-corporate entities that also experienced struggles, especially with funding. As further elaborated on by Participant E:

> And we receive feedback that we have the image of an organization that has developed significantly and has money, which is absolutely... This is not forever. We are constantly working on what will happen next year because that is how NGOs operate, and people do not

know that. It is also a challenge for us to communicate in a way that does not lead to a situation where people think, 'Okay, you are already at a stage where you do not need anything at all, so even if you organize a fundraiser, we will not donate because you already have enough.'

This shows that the NPOs recognized the need to continuously curate their image and communication to make sure that their audience would understand their needs. Therefore, keeping the non-corporate image emerges as crucial since too much success would result in people supporting them less.

To highlight their dedication to their mission, NPOs reported on their social media their efforts, activities, results, and achievements, as well as to show how the funding they obtained was spent. The interviewees mentioned that they posted about their professional engagements regularly on their social media, to introduce themselves to people who did not know them yet as indicated by Participant G: "A constant element of the content is definitely information about where the foundation is located, how we help, what we do to attract new clients and reach new migrants and immigrants in the region." This showed that brand establishment was built around endeavors and action, implying that media representatives made an effort to make NPOs' brand and name a facade of the organizations' mission and work.

The organizations also posted on their social media out of grant reporting obligations, showcasing their work relationships with other organizations, as reported by Participant H: "We have an obligation [to the funders] to inform about projects and ongoing activities." Thereby they demonstrated their effectiveness and enhanced their credibility in the eyes of potential future partners. With the exponential growth of their social media in the last three years of reporting on their humanitarian aid efforts, they started building their advocacy brands to show their values. As Participant F put it:

We want to speak out on important issues. In this way, we aim to build our brand, not just as an organization or foundation that simply organizes events, but also as one that can and wants to influence the political narrative.

This implied that the organizations represented by the participants wanted to extend their influence and establish themselves as influential entities that shape the public discourse. To further promote their efforts and build their visibility, organizations used paid advertisements, primarily on Facebook. Interestingly, it was observed that, while not all organizations were successful in utilizing Facebook ads because of a lack of a sufficient budget, for those who *were*, paid advertisements proved to be highly effective. Paid ads were mentioned to increase visibility and enhance brand recognition, but only if the organization could allocate a significant budget for such a campaign, which was highlighted by Participant E:

But overall, [paid advertisements] did not work out for us; it did not translate into greater engagement. However, I have the impression that it is also a matter of finances because we

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did not place much importance on funding [the paid advertisements], meaning these were small amounts.

Since the resources allocated to the paid campaigns were not significant enough, the ads were possibly less effective, implying that with bigger amounts, there could have been a better chance of success. Nevertheless, this tool was predominantly used to promote events or workshops, focusing on soft conversions. However, for those who used it to promote fundraisers, these paid ads were highly effective, as they observed an increase in donations. As Participant G succinctly put it: "I am a fan. It works for us." The previous insights show that as NPOs sought new funding opportunities, they tended to leverage social media to attract potential collaborations more than soliciting the direct contributions of individual donors. By sharing their daily activities and achievements, the interviewees mentioned that they aimed to demonstrate the value of partnering with their respective NPOs: "The communications department takes care of highlighting specific topics so that, for example, people who are trying to raise funds have something like a portfolio, so to speak, and can say 'look, things are happening.'" (Participant I).

For business engagement, nonprofits mainly used LinkedIn, where they created more serious and professional content to put their potential in the spotlight. Additionally, they were open to collaborating with people from outside, which helped them gradually "expand their bubble" (Participant H), referring to the broadening of their partnership possibilities.

Unexpectedly, what stood out as an important element of the migrant-aid NPOs brand building, was their visual and communicative coherence, which helped them to be more identifiable. According to the interviewees, maintaining a consistent communication style on social media was an integral part of their brand establishment. Although consistency in organization profiling was mentioned to have been failing at times, some of the organizations have undergone a rebranding process to achieve greater consistency, which in Participant C's experience involved: "Simply changing the logo, redesigning the website, and setting specific templates for our social media posts. So, unifying our communication in this way."

In addition, an unanticipated finding regarding social media decisions by NPOs was that the interviewees laid emphasis on the notion that their content had to be aesthetically pleasing and their communication style clear and accessible. Participant I used a metaphor to explain their organization's approach:

I operate on the assumption that I imagine a lecture hall filled with people with varying levels of knowledge. When I, or the campaign, stand before them, everyone must understand it, including those at a beginner level. In my opinion, the messages must be very clear and straightforward. But, of course, they should not treat people like fools, because that can be off-putting and irritating.

This shows that NPOs aimed to help people understand the realities of migration and educate them on the topic in a way that is understanding and respectful to those who had not had the opportunity to learn more about it.

In conclusion, obtaining direct and individual online donor support using social media communication was not a priority in migrant-aid NPOs' activity at the moment of interviewing. Instead, the interviewees reported that more implicit brand building to secure financial stability in the form of establishing sustainable partnerships was at the point of gravity in their social media presence. Brand building was attempted by increasing NPOs' online visibility through sharing achievements and initiatives and utilizing paid ad campaigns. Via this brand establishment, media managers tried to attract potential partners. A key element of their success in establishing such partnerships was maintaining coherent and aesthetically pleasing content, which the interviewees mentioned as essential to attracting partners and communicating effectively. NPOs' comprehensive branding efforts were reported to help expand their network, allowing them to connect with potential collaborators and ultimately support their pursuit of financial sustainability.

4.3. Community Building

While brand building to maintain or expand partnerships seemed to be the foundation of migrant-aid NPOs' existence on social media, these organizations also paid a great deal of attention to building their community for the future. Guo and Saxton (2014, p. 70) identified a three-step process in which NPOs use social media, which is reflected by the interviewees' accounts of establishing their future follower base.

According to the experiences of the interviewees, to obtain the interest of a wider range of donors and gain more dedicated followers, NPOs must expand their outreach efforts. This goes beyond just increasing the number of followers, as it also involves improving the quality of relationships with their potential supporters. This is different from establishing a brand as described to be an indirect means toward eventual fundraising by the interviewees (see previous section). That is: brand building was described as the creation of a consistent and recognizable identity through communication that also helps in establishing partnerships with other entities. On the other hand, community building, as described by the interviewees, focuses on growing and engaging with the support base of the nonprofits, which cannot be done without fostering relationships and creating a sense of belonging among individual supporters.

The use of social media as a means to expand outreach efforts as described by Nageswarakurukkal et al. (2019, p. 291) found resonance in the account of the participants who described trying to raise awareness about the cause of their nonprofit and sharing information using social media channels. The respondents presented themselves as being deeply committed to their clients and their issues, hence aiming to create a platform where minority voices could be heard, as

highlighted by Participant I: "Social media should also serve to build an ally movement. I think the approach is that the voice of the minority, without the support of the majority, has no chance of being adequately heard and creating the necessary social change."

This account of Participant I showed that the NPOs wanted to amplify the voices of their clients to raise awareness about their issues. The interviewees moreover mentioned they leveraged the potential of education on social media to inform their Polish community about current affairs and various topics related to the challenges of migration. By doing so, they sought to positively influence attitudes toward migrants and that would ultimately spark social change. The NPO representatives believed that their audience trusted them as a source of education on social media, and they aimed to use this trust to build a strong community of allies, as stated above by Participant I. This aligns with Smoliński's (2021, p. 65) findings, which indicate that education topics are commonly shared by Polish nonprofits. Participant D described education as an essential part of increasing the likelihood of eventually obtaining regular donor support:

> I imagine that, ideally, there would be many people who regularly donate to us. However, for this to happen, there needs to be education about migration, an understanding of the issue, and a recognition of its importance, along with identifying with this cause.

Participant C also pointed out that education was something that incited interest in people: "I think that this attracts individuals — a narrow circle of people — but it attracts individuals who may support us financially." When the interviewees tried to educate people on social media, it raised interest in the organization and brought in more people to the community. As stated by Participant C, there was a potential that these people might donate to support the cause.

Attracting a more diverse and broader audience, or as Guo and Saxton (2014, p. 70) put it, expanding NPOs' community is the first stage of the process of NPOs using social media. Unexpectedly, the research revealed that Polish migrant-aid NPOs struggled with being in what Terren and Borge-Bravo (2021, p. 100) called an echo chamber — a situation in which users mostly communicate with like-minded others on social platforms. Two problems could be identified in relation to NPOs' failure to bring together new, yet like-minded people in their online realm. Firstly, Participant A mentioned that their follower base is predominantly client-centric: "It is hard there, for example, to reach donors exclusively, because, for example, we have 18,000 followers on Instagram, and I know that the majority, 95%, are our clients." The problem described by this interviewee is that social followers are mainly beneficiaries who follow NPOs out of the need for information provision and help, whereas, for the expansion of donors through social media campaigning, the following base needs to be diversified with followers that are *not* those in need. Beneficiaries themselves are not responsive to appeals for monetary support, they need to eventually benefit from available funds themselves. Moreover, the interviewees reported that even the existing donor base they can target is insufficiently capable of ensuring financial viability. As pointed out by Participant H: "We have

inflation and the educated people from our bubble who have the necessary sensitivity simply do not have this kind of money most of the time." Given the circumstances, the organizations recognized the urgent need to gradually get out of their echo chamber to broaden their community and increase donations. Advertising their posts on social media, mainly through Facebook Ads, was one way they tried to expand beyond their echo chamber, and for most organizations, it has proven to be an effective, yet rather expensive tool. This was because these technologies are not free — digital ads need a budget for an ad campaign to be set up. As Participant E said:

> During the last two weeks of December, we ran a campaign for two thousand zlotys, and it was a success. We reached accounts that we would never have reached otherwise. This was evident not only from the comments but also from the traffic and statistics, especially the negative comments we received. It was great because we managed to break through a certain bubble, but it cost us two thousand zlotys.

Even though the results were noticeable, the tools required a significant investment. The organization that Participant E voiced for could no longer rely solely on organic reach, and because of that, the cost of participating in social media started growing.

As NPOs were trying to find a way to leave their echo chamber, they also had to think of ways to build a connection with their newly gained audience and nurture their relationship with existing members. As Guo and Saxton's (2014, p. 70) research indicates, the second stage of the process of NPOs using social media consists of ensuring continuous engagement. The interviewed organizations focused on creating regular audience engagement, as Participant G highlighted: "We publish regularly, ensuring continuity without any interruptions. Even when I sometimes run out of ideas, I create a monthly schedule and make an effort to stick to it." This approach ensured that the organizations remained active and visible to the people who followed them. Because the organizations represented by the interviewees essentially had two distinct audiences – their clients and the Polish community, including donors, they had to customize their content. Clients mostly engaged with posts informing them about potential opportunities for them, like courses, workshops, or events, and the organizations saw significant engagement levels that came with it. On the other hand, content for the Polish community focused on education:

> When it comes to education, we primarily focus on social media, trying to educate by creating educational content that reaches beyond our bubble. ... Some educational videos, posts that explain basic concepts, explain what discrimination is, what prejudice is, what racism is, what xenophobia is. (Participant H)

Through this approach, the interviewees not only educated on migrant-related issues but also engaged a wider audience. But regardless of the target audience, the interviewees tried to incorporate current social media trends and interactive engagement strategies, like asking questions, soliciting feedback,

and generally inviting people to participate in discussions with the NPOs' niche, unexpected topics seemed to be a dark horse for starting conversations, as Participant C pointed out:

> We wrote simply about banks and the significant difficulties foreigners face when trying to open an account in Poland. Suddenly, it turned out that this generated quite a lot of comments because many people, including those from other aid organizations, and refugees or other foreigners in Poland — not all of them are refugees — encounter this problem. It suddenly became apparent that something seemingly niche sparked interest on our social media.

Such topics were assumed to generate significant interest, as they have the potential to resonate with a broader audience. According to the interviewees, talking about seemingly small or overlooked issues could be a conversation starter and help in reaching new audiences.

From the accounts of the interviewees, it was shown that the organizations strived to be close to their community to foster a sense of belonging. To the interviewees' surprise, people were highly interested in the human aspect of the organization and preferred behind-the-scenes posts over purely educational or professional content. Participant H illustrated this by saying: "However, the posts where we emotionally describe our daily lives, what we do, our successes, and even our difficulties, perform very well. I feel that they really make an impact." Building the human aspect of the organizations completed building their non-corporate image, as mentioned in the brand building section before.

According to Guo and Saxton (2014, p. 70), the last element of the second stage of the process in which NPOs use social media is maintaining the community. This last stage was reflected in the accounts of the interviewees as well, proving that social media was used as a tool to engage their followers. Based on the interview data, it seems that NPOs made an active attempt to cultivate an intimate and secure social media environment. To this end, they used multilingual communication to include every member of their audience in the community and tried to be direct, open, and friendly in their communication. Participant G encapsulated this approach: "We focus on direct, more friendly, soft, and multilingual communication. For instance, when something is addressed to our clients, it should be in at least four languages: Polish, English, Ukrainian, and Russian." Using multiple languages in their communication ensured that information was accessible to everyone who was interested in the organization, enabling them to participate in discussions, if they wished to do so. Ultimately such inclusive communication fostered a more inclusive environment. Authenticity and transparency about their operations were also essential in NPOs' communication efforts, especially when it came to building strong relationships with regular donors. NPOs aimed to empower their community through clear and effective communication to highlight their importance to their community. As Participant I explained: "I think an important element, especially for individual donors, is to show people they have influence and agency, that their involvement can truly make a difference. So, building awareness and a sense of agency is, in my opinion, essential." This showed

that empowering donors and making them feel like their actions matter could lead to actual change. Surprisingly, the interviewees also pointed out that the quantitative data gathered from targeted paid ads helped them to tailor their communication strategy better, Participant D said:

> There is an indicator for targeted ads on Facebook that shows whether the place of birth is in Poland or outside of Poland. We looked, for example, at how many people who listed their place of birth as outside of Poland saw the ad and how many messages we received. This is an important metric for us.

The interviewees were trying to understand their audiences and evaluate the impact that their paid ads campaigns had on different demographics. This account proves that looking at social media metrics was an important part of building the NPOs' community as it helped the social media specialists assess the impact of their ads, allowing them to refine their outreach strategies.

Finally, the last, third step of the process in which NPOs use social media described by Guo and Saxton (2014, p. 70) is mobilizing NPOs' supporters to take action. Even though the interviewed nonprofits did not have enough regular donor support to give up all other sources of funding, thanks to their brand building and community building efforts they mentioned to have developed a collective spirit of mutual support and solidarity. Participant E addressed: "People are very happy and congratulate us when we receive a grant. It is incredible. First, they really cheer us on. A lot." This expressed support was also felt whenever the organizations were in times of need. Occasionally, the nonprofits would post about their needs themselves, and people would respond. Participant B recalled the situation during the 2016 migration crisis: "When the migration crisis was at its peak, a lot of people reached out to us wanting to help, to become volunteers, mentors, anything. They were practically breaking down the doors and windows to show their support." Although this was not monetary support, the nonprofits still appreciated the dedication their community showed to the cause.

In conclusion, although Polish migrant-aid NPOs did not rely on social media as their main source of income during the investigated period, the interviewees stressed the importance of leveraging social media to build a diverse community — an approach shown to result in acquiring social capital by Xu & Saxton (2019, p. 43) — and secure future financial sustainability. While social media fundraising was beneficial, it is important to note that the main financial support for nonprofits still came from other organizations and businesses. Funds raised within the community served as additional support rather than the primary source of revenue. This highlights the importance of community building, which was found to follow the three stages described by Guo and Saxton (2014, p. 70) in the reality of Polish migrant aid organizations: providing information, expanding the community, and ultimately calling to action. These efforts indeed turned out to be perceived as crucial for ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of NPOs in the eyes of NPO social media experts.

4.4. Storytelling

So far, the analysis found that presence and interaction on social media are essential for Polish migrant-aid NPOs in their attempts to both build their brand and community for the future. The analysis revealed that all interviewed organizations used storytelling in their campaigns to produce more engaging content that influences public discourse. In line with what Bublitz et al. (2016, p. 241) suggested, two characters involved in the storytelling narrative of these nonprofits are either clients or employees.

4.4.1. Client Stories

The stories presented on the social media accounts of these NPOs were mainly focused on migrants. These were almost always personalized narratives showing a specific case or a problem, such as the "three stories of Svetlana, Natalia, and Kyrylo" evoked by Participant A. The stories were carefully selected to shed light on personal experiences of three different Ukrainians to show a human being living through these hardships. Participant I highlighted the importance of such an approach: "It was very important to show a flesh-and-blood person because it is harder to discriminate against such a person and assign stereotypes to them." \When the humanity of migrants was clearly shown, the interviewees found potential donors to be more prone to see the struggles that these people had to face. Most of the shared stories were goal-oriented narratives about clients and how they overcame obstacles with the support of NPOs, which showcased the real-life impact of the organizations' daily efforts in helping migrants. This approach aligns with the plot elements suggested by Bublitz et al. (2016, p. 241), namely characters, chronology, and causality, and is encapsulated by the experience of Participant E:

> We have an idea to actually present these individuals and present the so-called success story, illustrating how they have benefited and what they are doing now. For example, many people have started their own businesses in various fields after taking our courses or participating in the leadership school we organize for foreigners. There is a lot to show, and we tend to focus on these positive stories.

In addition to the anticipated results, the focus on the positive stories is a new finding. The interviewees mentioned that nonprofits kept away from using sad stories and exploiting their clients' traumas as they wanted to provide a respectful representation of their clients without objectifying them, as pointed out by Participant C: "[The issues of refugees] should be central, and we should aim to objectify these issues as little as possible, essentially placing these people at the center with great respect for the topic." The interviewees often voiced their moral concerns about what they called the ethicality of storytelling. They were careful with using storytelling to their advantage as they did not want to cross the boundaries of their clients, even though in their experiences it would bring better fundraising results, as explained by Participant I: "In terms of our ethical conduct, there is no

possibility of doing that. It is known that a drastic photo can evoke more emotions and potentially raise more funds, but for us, that is not ethical." The participants were conscious of the potential dangers that could arise from including clients in their storytelling efforts and made it their mission to protect them.

Most of the time they did not reveal the identity of the main character of the story and sometimes changed their name or even other details of the story, such as when or where it happened. Participant E elaborated on the ethical considerations involved:

> Sometimes we change certain details. When it comes to the country, usually not. We typically stick to the exact story. However, if it could be dangerous for the person — for example, if they are persecuted in their country and someone might find out that they have reached Poland and have protection here — then we obviously cannot disclose any details that could in any way endanger them. This is always discussed with the lawyer. What can be said, what cannot? And of course, we check with the person to see how much they agree with it.

When telling the stories of their clients, the organizations did not want to pressure people into sharing anything, so they preferred to work with those who were ready to share on their own. This new finding can be better understood in light of research conducted by Clough et al. (2024, p. 360) on international development NGO adverts, negative messaging reduces people's belief in the agency of those in need. This, in turn, negatively affects the support offered to address their situation and the specific ways in which it is provided and contradicts the goals and objectives of many aid organizations. Therefore, Clough et al. (2024, p. 360) suggest using more empowering narratives.

The client stories tactic was a tool on which Polish migrant-aid NPOs relied the most to get the message about their mission across. Although they had some concerns and pay attention to clients' well-being, they still found ways to incorporate such narratives into their social media posts.

4.4.2. Employee Stories

Although stories about employees appeared less often and did not hold the same importance, the research also revealed that they were a part of the storytelling efforts of the organizations.

No organization mentioned that employee stories influenced in any way the donation willingness of their follower base, yet whenever they were posted they did generate a lot of engagement, which was confirmed by Participant E:

> It is so effective to present ourselves — most importantly, photos of people, photos of employees, and also those who have been with the association for a long time and have their own audience as individuals. Showing the team is always something that, unfortunately, people here do not like to do when I ask or consult a post with someone specific. It is sometimes difficult for people to open up like that. But those who agree receive very positive feedback.

Surprisingly, this goes against the findings of Mang et al. (2021, p. 147), as user engagement was not at all an important objective for the analyzed Austrian NPOs. In the case of Polish NPOs, the organizations did not want to be too far away from their audience or present themselves as highly professional, as was mentioned before in the community building section and as explained by Participant A:

> To also connect with our audience, we posted, for example, that we have employees who come from Kharkiv and Kyiv. Then people would respond, and the person from Kyiv who works with us would say, for example, 'My favorite place is this and that.'

> Telling stories about their employees helped the NPOs show the human aspect of the nonprofit. It was yet another way to connect with their audience. Just as suggested by Mang et al. (2021, p. 147), storytelling was used in public relations to inform users about an organization's work.

4.4.3 The Emotion of Storytelling

Polish migrant-aid NPOs recognized the salience of emotion present in storytelling, which attracted people more than regular posts without a narrative form. These nonprofits knew that their audience was often emotion-driven and tried to evoke engagement through emotional stories. They used visual content to enhance the storytelling potential, which qualifies as a content-based tactic suggested by Xu & Saxton (2019, p. 31). The emotional aspect of engagement was often considered to be an important success factor in achieving different advertising goals in the current media environment, as different studies assume that it could have an impact on consumption processes such as selection, usage experience, and the memory of the situation and context as supported by Chan-Olmsted and Wolter (2018, p. 423).

The organizations tried to show their clients as real people behind a difficult story. This approach sought to enhance the relatability to their audience's own experiences and emphasized that the story's events were realistic and could have occurred in their lives as suggested by Kang et al. (2020, p. 48) and confirmed by Participant H:

> I think, as I mentioned earlier, they have the greatest impact. Because people want to feel that it is something close, that it is something that... That can really happen to anyone. And it kind of breaks down that barrier, removes that mask of exoticism, of foreignness, and shows that we are basically the same.

These findings support the results of the study on NPOs' television commercials by Martinez-Levy et al. (2020, p. 65), highlighting the importance of using appropriate emotions to create empathy in potential donors. The interviewees were convinced that a good campaign, meaning it generated user engagement, was an emotional one, as Participant I asserted: "Well, I have done quite a few campaigns in my life, and I believe that without emotions, there is no good campaign. A campaign simply has to evoke certain feelings in people."

Interestingly, the interviewed NPOs also preferred to conduct campaigns based on hope and not on fear, as stated by Participant I

> From what I observed, while researching the effectiveness of the campaigns I conducted, those [campaigns] which, in the political context and the PiS era, were based on some fear of what might happen were either ineffective or less effective than those which offered hope that things could get better.

This was connected to the NPOs wanting to raise the morale of their audience, as they often felt that there was no satisfactory solution to the migration crises. Although the NPOs still showed the reality of the migrants' situation, Martinez-Levy et al. (2022, p. 67) emphasize the inclusion of this reality in messaging, rather than solely focusing on either the positive or negative aspects, to increase donation interest.

4.4.4. Crafting Impactful Narratives

Storytelling played a vital role in the communication of the interviewed nonprofits. Even though there were some moral concerns connected to that, such as crossing clients' boundaries or putting the migrants in danger, some NPOs have used creative and unconventional ways to minimize the risk for the clients, e.g., hiring an artist to draw the client based just on description or hiring a photographer to show emotions present, rather than the person. Participant C said: "We invited an illustrator to collaborate with us, precisely so that we would not have to use photos. ... This illustrator drew our characters without having seen their photos beforehand, simply based on the descriptions we provided." Visuals were prioritized to capture attention, with mainly long-form content used for videos. Such an approach worked for the NPOs as they regarded storytelling as the most effective tool for visibility, which enhanced reach and engagement. As being in an echo chamber was a problem for the interviewed organizations, they used paid advertisements to promote their storytelling narratives, so as not to rely on organic reach and waste the potential of the narratives, as pointed out by Participant I:

> And it is obvious that organic reach is limited, and it would be a shame to waste the investment, funds, and time by not using paid promotions to increase that reach. … For such a large undertaking, it would be a significant loss not to take advantage of it.

NPOs incorporated hard data and statistics into their storytelling, recognizing that some people responded better to factual information than to purely emotional appeals. A novel aspect is that storytelling was used to simplify complicated concepts and make data more consumable for their audience which is in line with the findings of Erete et al. (2016, p. 1277). By using numbers and facts, the organizations tried to display transparency and accountability, an aspect of their functioning stressed by Ortega-Rodríguez et al. (2020, p. 13). This emphasis on transparency was especially

important for NPOs, as maintaining credibility was critical to their ability to secure donations and engage in successful fundraising efforts, which was stressed by Participant E:

> We showcase numbers, meaning we write reports. We had such a report at the end of 2023, which illustrated all of our work from the previous year. Additionally, we had an entire campaign — a series of infographics — which depicted various areas, described these areas, and included the corresponding figures. Within these descriptions were also excerpts of quotes from individuals who either received assistance or were coordinators of support initiatives.

Since NPOs did not earn their own money and had to rely on funds obtained from other entities or private donors, they had to be transparent about what they did and how they spent their funding. Additionally, another reason why they did it could be explained by the research of Braddock and Dillard (2016, as cited in Parker et al., 2024, p. 8) that suggested that individuals exposed to narratives, compared to unexposed individuals, reported attitudinal changes in the direction advocated in the narrative. Therefore, storytelling was most often used by the interviewed NPOs in the period of submitting the annual return since Polish taxpayers can donate 1.5% of their tax to a selected public welfare organization. The nonprofits stressed the importance of supporting them in that way, through storytelling, as said by Participant D:

> Also, for the 1.5% campaign last year at [the organization], we published posts like 'Kizir dreams of going on an overnight trip' and 'Help us make Kizir's wish come true,' etc. It was a way to tell a story, showing that the kids usually do not leave the help center and that their only form of entertainment is going to school.

Using stories, like the one of Kizir, was the backbone of the 1.5% campaigns, although moral concerns about the ethicality of such storytelling were mentioned by the participants.

To conclude, the results of this analysis revealed that Polish migrant-aid NPOs focused on building their brand, expanding their community for the purpose of longevity, and using storytelling to support their efforts in securing financial sustainability. While solely relying on donations from social media users is not enough for the survival of a nonprofit yet, investing in their social media presence is a good choice in the light of securing a donor base for the future. The interviewees assumed there was a potential for social media-facilitated attraction of individual donors, in addition to social media being used for the building of partnerships once followers were more exposed to migrants' stories and educated about their struggles. Already, social media showed the ability to excite business entities for partnerships thanks to their brand awareness campaigns. The next step would be building a strong circle of individual supporters, which is especially crucial as a supplementary support system in challenging times when help is most needed. Storytelling, through demonstrating the measurable impact of the organization's efforts in driving change, was suggested as the most effective strategy to capture the attention of followers.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This research paper aimed to analyze the social media use of Polish migrant-aid NPOs in the specific political context of the PiS Government rule, through the prism of theory drawn from the existing literature on NPOs, politics, and social media research. The process of elite replacement of 2015-2023 brought about a difficult situation for NPOs, particularly migrant-aid organizations, trying to help migrants when smear campaigns against them started and public funding was cut off (Korolczuk, 2023, p. 887). With the increase of scholarly interest in the state of civil society in Poland (Jezierska, 2022, p. 259; McMahon & Niparko, 2022, p. 1355), this research aimed to shed more light on struggles of migrant-aid organizations in right-wing Poland. This research additionally aimed to empower Polish migrant-aid nonprofits toward a viable independence of public funding, whilst understanding how to leverage social media for private donor attraction.

The necessity of such empowerment research was further enhanced by events such as the crisis on the Polish-Belarussian border that started in 2021 or the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, which have affected the operations of migrant-aid NPOs in Poland. The growing migration in Europe and consequently in Poland will only increase the significance of these nonprofits' existence. It was therefore concluded that there was a highly relevant academic and societal need to answer the research question; "How do Polish migrant-aid NPOs utilize social media to secure their financial sustainability in the aftermath of the 2015-2023 elite replacement in civil society?". This thesis identified three ways in which these organizations leverage social media for financial sustainability, which provides insights for further strategic utilization of social media in the future.

The main findings of this study show that so far, the efforts of Polish migrant-aid NPOs focus on using social media to build their brand, expand their community, and tell compelling stories about migration-related issues. For now, no fundraising on social media could replace funding obtained from other entities and organizations in the form of grants, but nevertheless, social media presence was still found to be an important steppingstone in securing the financial sustainability of these NPOs.

First of all, the results show that migrant-aid nonprofits have grown significantly through the period of elite replacement, which lasted from 2015 to 2023. Once the organizations' assistance in addressing the migration situation in Poland became essential due to the inability of the Government to deal with it on its own, they began to attract the attention of the general public via social media. Before that, these organizations were largely unknown. Therefore, the organizations focused on building their brand via social media to establish their presence. To present their operations to the general public, they used social media to post about their achievements, efforts, and the results of their work. This built the portfolio of their organizational efforts and — in the experience of the interviewees — increased their chances of establishing new working relationships, especially with

for-profit entities that could prospectively support them financially. This is in line with trends noted by Laidler-Kylander and Simonin (2009, p. 64), who found that when a brand is perceived as more relevant, it can attract more collaborations. The statements of the interviewees put importance on having clear, accessible communication, alongside aesthetically pleasing content to enhance the brand image. This suggests that migrant-aid NPOs need to think about growing their brand visibility via and on social media so that potential donors know who they support financially.

Even though, as already mentioned, funds raised through social media were not enough to significantly sustain the functioning of an organization, but rather singular projects, migrant-aid NPOs should focus on establishing a strong support group on their social media channels. Clients constituted a big part of some of the interviewed organizations' audience and they were not able to donate to the nonprofits, as they often needed financial assistance themselves. Therefore, building on the accounts of the interviewees, it is suggested that organizations must find ways to expand their reach and connect with a larger audience of potential donors. The process revealed in this paper is in line with the three-step process of Guo and Saxton (2014, p. 70). To build awareness of their needs, NPOs should leverage the potential of education on issues connected to migration. This is in the hope that through educating the Polish community, the nonprofits can make their outlook more sensitive to the migration issue and positively impact the image of migrants, all for social change. Ultimately, education can bring in new people to their community, who are interested in learning more about migration-related topics which can eventually increase the likelihood of appealing to them for financial support. Paying for post promotion on social media was considered to be the most effective, yet costly way of expanding their reach. Using this tool allows NPOs to reach accounts they would never have reached otherwise, which is a direct step toward 'bubble'-expansion and audience diversification. Once NPOs manage to expand their audience, the interviewees reported that NPOs should focus on ensuring continuous engagement through crafting tailored content and direct, inclusive, and transparent communication. Having a close-knit community was assumed to help in obtaining regular support for the organizations' causes when needed. While calls to action were effective in mobilizing short-term support, the financial sustainability of these NPOs relied on the trust their supporters had in them.

Finally, to facilitate both brand building and expanding their supporter base, this research confirms the usefulness of storytelling to encourage donations and support, which is in line with the literature (Mang et al., 2021, p. 147; Merchant et al., 2010, p. 760). The interviewees presented specific cases where social media was used to illustrate that the migration crisis affected real people, not merely abstract figures depicted in the media. By showcasing the genuine struggles behind these narratives, they aimed to reduce discrimination by fostering empathy among their followers. These stories revolved mainly around overcoming obstacles and how the organizations helped the clients in order to showcase the expertise and distinctiveness of their organization (Bublitz et al., 2016, p. 242).

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Promoting these narratives that they shared on social media could also help mitigate the echo chamber effect and help them reach new people who could become part of their donor base.

To conclude, this research uncovered that while fundraising through social media has not been the biggest source of income, Polish migrant-aid NPOs have progressively tried to use social media to secure their financial sustainability for the future. The findings of this research suggest that these organizations should focus on developing brand building, community building, and storytelling and build their communication strategy around them to set the scene for enhancing their fundraising efforts for the future.

5.1. Limitations

Notwithstanding that this study made several contributions to understanding the current state of Polish civil society and also its use of social media, its limitations have to be taken into consideration. Given that this research utilized a qualitative methodology and concentrated on a specific socio-political context, it does not claim broader generalizability to other NPOs, including those in Poland. However, these findings may give valuable insights into other minority organizations in Poland and migrant-aid organizations that function in a similar, hostile political climate.

Secondly, only one in-depth interview was held per nonprofit organization. Given the intention to conduct a single interview with the person responsible for the communication strategy, some participants either did not work at the organizations during the specified period of 2015-2023 or joined the organizations toward the end of this period. This meant that they only passed on the experiences of other people who would have been more competent to answer the questions but could not participate in the research because they no longer worked at the organization or were simply unavailable. Additionally, this means that the existence of personal biases of the interviewed employees cannot be ruled out. Despite this, establishing rapport aimed to encourage candid responses, contributing to the authenticity of the findings.

Thirdly, the method of data analysis has to be questioned. Given that all interviews were held in Polish, the coding process and the creation of themes emerging from the data were conducted by the author of this study only. Intercoder reliability checks were not possible, as there was no effective way of translating the transcript of the interviews into English and keeping the nuanced meaning, especially since the context was a crucial element of the study. Hence, the researcher's personal biases can influence the interpretation of themes and result in a lack of reliability in the data. To address this issue, the sample data was analyzed on two separate occasions. Any discrepancies between the two thematic analyses were carefully examined and resolved at a later date. However, readers need to exercise caution when interpreting the results of this paper due to this limitation.

5.2. Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study shed light on how Polish migrant-aid NPOs use social media to secure financial sustainability in the aftermath of the 2015-2023 elite replacement in civil society. However, they also indicated that none of the interviewed nonprofits leverage social media to its fullest potential. Therefore, further research is necessary to explore this topic in more depth. The limitations of this thesis also present several interesting possibilities for future research.

As this study only focused on 10 Polish migrant-aid organizations, it would be interesting to also interview employees from other organizations, not included in the sample, to see how they use social media for financial sustainability and uncover potential discrepancies or support the findings of this study. This would give a full overview of the functioning of the migrant-aid NPOs in Poland.

This paper uncovered that while social media helps in obtaining financial sustainability in three distinct ways, the NPOs are still not capable of using its full potential and changing it into the most important funding source. Future studies could go deeper into the reasons behind the inhibition and provide guidance on how to leverage this potential.

A relevant angle to deepen this area of study would be to conduct similar studies on other NPOs that were controlled by the PiS government, namely LGBT+ and feminist ones. As they were also made the scapegoat of the government's smear campaign, it would be interesting to see how they dealt with the situation and if their social media practices were different from the results of this study. A comparative analysis between migrant-aid, LGBTQ+, and women rights NPOs could enable them to utilize social media for financial sustainability even more effectively.

To further explore the practices of migrant-aid NPOs, a qualitative content analysis could be conducted. Investigating social media posts and looking into how specifically they build their brand, community, and narratives could offer valuable insights. This would allow for the study of the audience's reception and interpretation of the content shared by nonprofits. It would enable the examination of whether the intention behind the posts aligns with their actual understanding. Ultimately, the effectiveness of NPOs' social media posts could be better understood.

In this paper, storytelling was found to be one of the three most important tools that help leverage social media usage for financial sustainability. While storytelling is a well-established technique, its application in the digital age requires innovative approaches to maximize its impact. Therefore, future studies could explore the effectiveness of different formats to enhance the potential of social media for the financial sustainability of Polish migrant-aid organizations.

<h1 style="text-align:center">References</h1>

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

1. Intro
- Introduction to research: purpose, motivation
- My role in the interview
- The role of the interviewee in the interview
- Anonymity and consent form
- Questions from the respondent before we begin
- Briefly describe your role within the organization and your experience with social media management.

2. Work of NPOs in a political context
- What do you perceive as the primary objectives of Polish migrant-aid nonprofit organizations?
  - follow-up: Given your understanding of the primary objectives of Polish migrant-aid nonprofit organizations, could you elaborate on how your organization contributes to these objectives?
- What are the primary sources of funding for your organization?
  - follow-up: Do you experience any challenges in securing funding? If yes, what are they?
- Considering the political changes during the period of PiS governance (2015-2023), how do you perceive these changes may have influenced the functioning of your organization? (changes in the judiciary, opposing EU migration pacts, how the Government handled the borders crisis and the war in Ukraine)
- In light of the changing political and societal conditions, has your organization explored the possibility of utilizing social media as a potential source of funding?
  - follow-up: Can you discuss any strategies or considerations your organization has had regarding this matter?

3. Social Media Use
- Can you describe the role of social media within your organization?
  - Which social media platforms do you use?
- Can you describe social media's impact on achieving your organization's goals?
- How does your organization currently utilize social media platforms for fundraising purposes?
- How does your organization use social media to engage with stakeholders and build connections?
- Can you discuss any experiences or insights regarding the use of social media for fundraising?
  - follow up: Can you describe any challenges or obstacles your organization has encountered?
    - follow-up: How have you addressed them?
- Can you provide an example of a particularly successful fundraising campaign driven primarily through social media channels?
- Can you discuss your experiences or insights on using social media for fundraising?
  - follow-up: Can you describe challenges or obstacles that your organization has encountered in this context?
  - follow-up: How have you dealt with them?

4. Storytelling
- When crafting social media content for your organization, how do you ensure that it effectively communicates your mission?
- When crafting social media content for your organization, how do you ensure that it resonates with your audience?
  - follow-up/clarification: How do you strengthen the relationship with your audience?
- Can you share an example of a social media post or campaign that you believe effectively conveyed your organization's message? For instance, you might consider factors such as clarity of messaging, resonance with the target audience, or the ability to inspire action.
  - follow-up: How do you think the specific elements of that content contributed to its impact?
- When developing social media content, do you incorporate stories with characters? (An example could be telling the story of a client/your employee)
  - follow up: How do you believe these personal stories enhance your organization's communication efforts?
  - follow up: In your experience, what types of stories or themes tend to generate the most engagement from your followers on social media?

5. Closing
- Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss regarding your organization's use of social media?

APPENDIX B: Information about the Interviewees

Table B1

The interviewees

Participant	Role	Social Media Used by the NPO
A	PR Specialist	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter/X, YouTube
B	Communications Specialist	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
C	Fundraising Specialist, Communications Assistant	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter/X
D	Communications Specialist	Facebook, Instagram
E	Communications Specialist	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn
F	Communications Specialist	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok
G	Marketing and Communications Specialist	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube
H	Marketing and Communications Specialist	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X
I	Communications Manager	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter/X, YouTube, TikTok
J	Board Member	Facebook, Instagram

APPENDIX C: Coding Tree

Table C1

Coding Tree

Example Quote	Example Open Code	Axial Code	Selective Code
"Building a brand is a very important element, communicating the activities of the organization and the various departments that... The different types of activities that we carry out."	Reporting on Their Work's Outcomes	Talking About Their Achievements	Brand Building
"However, I somewhat perceive the matter of social media in the context of financing in such a way that, along with the visibility and exposure of what a given foundation does, it can consequently raise funds."	Brand Exposure for Future Fundraising Endeavors	Brand Exposure and Visibility	
"There was also the issue of the overall communication strategy. How do we want to talk about the situation of refugees, to use feminine forms, to always speak about refugee individuals... In the sense of not putting ourselves as employees in the foreground, but rather talking about the refugees, their problems, and how we are	Standardizing Their Communication Style	(Visual) Communication	

trying to address them, right?”			
“I mean, we do not want to look like a bureaucratic organization, but rather present ourselves more as individuals and not as one specific organization.”	Emphasizing the Human Sspect of the Organization	Humanizing the Brand	
“And it was clear that it worked. People saw our advertisement, because we communicated only there, and they donated.”	Paid Ads Proved Effective as People Were Donating	Using Paid Ads	
“So definitely continuity, building engagement among the audience, encouraging them to find out what we are up to, what our work is like on a daily basis.”	Creating Regular Audience Engagement	Audience Engagement	
“Primarily because of education. I mean, it is known that young people do not read articles in Gazeta Wyborcza every day, they just scroll through Instagram, and it would be great if they could learn something from there, not just watch cat videos.”	The Educational Role of Social Media	Leveraging Education	Community Building
“And we try to maintain authenticity and really just be as close to these people as we can.”	Being Authentic in Their Communication to Strengthen	Maintaining Good Relations	

	Relationships		
"And basically, it is not possible for us to radically break out and suddenly reach a completely different audience from another field. Instead, we are trying to gradually expand the bubble."	Gradual Community Growth	Expanding Their Reach	
"In some posts that thematically fit, there is a call to action stating that the organization can be supported financially."	Calling to Action to Donate and Support	Calling to Action	
"Even if it is a photo, it should be taken from behind, without a visible face, or maybe more, I do not know, collective, something symbolic or some kind of image."	Client Protection in Storytelling	Client-Centric Storytelling	
"Whenever someone joins our team, we always try to publish a post about them, i.e. about us, because we know that just such stories of specific people bring people very close to the organization, but we do not want to publish the stories of, for example, children specifically, but we focus more on the people in our team."	Telling Stories about Their Employees	Employee-Centric Storytelling	Storytelling
"Successful posts that positively influence any	Emotionally Charged	The Emotional Impact of Storytelling	

donations are definitely those in which we emotionally describe what we do."	Storytelling		
"When you see our campaign, on one hand, there is a person, but on the other hand, we evoke a very specific statistic from recent research that 72% of Poles do not know any person from the Roma community."	Using hard data in storytelling	Crafting Impactful Narratives	

APPENDIX D: Abbreviations

NFI – National Freedom Institute – Center for Civil Society Development

NPOs – Nonprofit Organizations

PiS – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)

RDT – Resource Dependence Theory

APPENDIX E: Consent form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Aleksandra Morka, 662862am@eur.nl

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in research about how migrant-aid non-profit organizations in Poland use social media to ensure their financial sustainability in the aftermath of political transitions. The purpose of the study is to understand how these organizations utilize platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to raise funds, engage supporters, and navigate challenges posed by changing political landscapes.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, my questions will be related to the strategies, challenges, and successes of these non-profit organizations in utilizing social media platforms.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will make a video recording of the interview.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observations exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings, and publications.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will not use your name or other identifying information, such as the name of your organization, in the study. The participants in the study will only be referred to with pseudonyms, and in terms of general characteristics such as age and gender, etc.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 40-60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— Willemijn Dortant (dortant@eshcc.eur.nl)

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be recorded during this study:

Name   Signature   Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name   Signature   Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

APPENDIX F: Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information
Name: Aleksandra
Student ID: Morka
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000
Supervisor Name: Willemijn Dortant
Date: June 6, 2024

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
-   Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
-   Writing improvements, including grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
-   Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
-   Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
-   Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically Grammarly (Free), DeepL and ChatGPT in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]
Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

Extent of AI Usage
☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity
☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to

distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: Aleksandra Morka
Date of Signature: June 6, 2024

Prompts:
Can you find a synonym for [word]?
Could you explain the difference between [X] and [Y]?
Can you define [concept]?
What does [quote] mean in the context of [X]?