

Digital Dialogues:
The Role of Co-Creation and Storytelling in Donor Engagement of Water Non-Profits

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Abstract

On a global level, water nonprofit organizations (NPOs) strive to solve a cross-cutting global issue that are rather intangible to the public. Social media provides NPOs, who often struggle with human and financial resources, with low-cost and easy-to-use interface for attracting donors for their fundraising goals. Remarkably, the social media use of water NPOs remains poorly researched. This thesis therefore aimed to explore how American water nonprofit organizations define their purpose to attract donors through an analysis of co-created posts on Instagram and the role storytelling plays therein. Applying the principles of dialogic communication theory, value co-creation, and storytelling, a qualitative content and semiotic analysis of Instagram posts were conducted to identify *what* purpose statement NPOs manifest, and secondly, *how*, i.e., through which methods and strategies, this purpose is communicated. The data for analysis consisted of Instagram post that included co-creation, communicated by three US registered charities, *Water.org*, *Waves for Water*, and *Charity Water*. The analysis identified the overall intention of all NPOs to end the global water crisis by providing clean in-house water supply globally. The improvement of socioeconomic areas of health, education, empowerment, and finances were communicated as steppingstones towards the ending of the global water crisis. Regarding the *way* this purpose was communicated, this research found the utilization of co-created posts on Instagram, wherein different stakeholders were incorporated as co-authors to aid in storytelling. Co-authors chosen were mainly stakeholders of high importance such as beneficiaries, brand partners, and donors, but NPOs were found to be the lead co-author in the production of posts. Usefulness of information and conservation of visitors were most used by NPOs to engage donors in a two-way communication. Visual analysis, through social semiotic analysis found that NPOs seemed to employ photographs and graphic elements to tell the story of how water transforms lives to attract donors. Through positive facial expressions, NPOs positioned viewers in the story of ending the global water crisis. The findings of the thesis reveal the multitude of strategic collaboration, dialogic principles, and visual tools endorsed by NPOs to stand out on Instagram to increase donorship.

KEYWORDS: *Water NPOs, Co-creation, Instagram, Storytelling, Dialogic Donor Engagement*

Preface

Firstly, I would like to thank God for His grace and provision throughout the process of this master's program and thesis writing journey, for whom I am nothing without. To my parents and brothers for the prayers and support. A special thank you to my supervisor, Willemijn Dortant, MSc., for her academic guidance, continued support, and kind encouragement throughout the process of writing and finalizing this thesis. Finally, to my friends in Vienna and the Netherlands, especially those in the Media & Business program, thank you for your encouragement and for making the student life in Rotterdam a memorable experience.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definition
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GWC	Global Water Crisis
NPO	Nonprofit Organization
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SM	Social Media
SSA	Social Semiotic Analysis
UGC	User Generated Content
UGS	User Generated Stories
UN	United Nations
VCC	Value Co-Creation
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is no secret that marketing strategies on social media (hereinafter: SM) are continually changing in adjustment to trends, customer demands, and the online activities of competitors (Murshed, 2020, p. 728). Organizations, whether those being for profit or not are required to find innovative ways to enhance interactions with customers, especially on social media (Kao et al., 2016, p. 1; Ravazzani & Haze, 2022, p. 1). A recent trend is the utilization of content co-creation and sharing via SM to have an impact on customer engagement (Rathore et al., 2016, p. 10-11). In SM, content co-creation is the collaboration between brands and users, fostering community participation by acquiring knowledge from users to produce content, also known as user-generated content (UGC). UGC takes different forms including online customer reviews, testimonials, and blogs (Dineva, 2023, p. 107-108). 61% of businesses say that co-creation results in successful products and contributes to consumer trust (Sindhvani et. al, 2014, p. 42; Why co-creation, 2023, para. 4). Co-creation allows businesses to rely on outsiders in developing products, including internal and external stakeholders (What is co-creation, 2023, para. 1). This process leads to successful products, improves financial performance, and the increase of customer loyalty.

If co-creation is the future, how would nonprofit organizations (NPOs) understand this shift of collaboration with different stakeholders in their communication strategy (Johnson, 2022, para. 4)? Just as companies adapt to new marketing strategies, NPOs are also trying to implement new communication strategies to remain relevant and allow for sustainable existence in a competitive climate over funding in the digital world. Literature reveals that NPOs use SM to share information, build community, and encourage participation in their charitable work (Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2433–2457). However, it is also found that NPOs have not optimized SM as a tool for communicating their mission and donor engagement because they viewed their mere presence on SM sites as “enhanced dialogic communication” (Waters & Lo, 2012, 300).

NPOs play a crucial role in providing aid, education, and care to underdeveloped communities as the world faces health, security, and financial crises (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 1). Currently we face a growing crisis is the Global Water Crisis (GWC) with 1.1 billion people worldwide lacking access to water and only 3% of the world’s water being fresh water, adequate for consumption (Water Scarcity, 2023, para. 1). As the United Nations (UN) declare that water is essential for health, preservation of human rights, poverty reduction, and education (Water and Sanitation, para. 6), the persistence of water pollution,

overextraction, and climate change worldwide are of social concern. Access to water and sanitation for all is hence one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) formulated by the UN (Water and Sanitation, para. 1). Water NPOs play a crucial mediating role in targeting this SDG by implementing projects that benefit local communities in their water sanitation needs (Alonso-Canadas, 2019, p. 1-2). Without any profit objectives, these organizations develop activities aimed at alleviating water scarcity and its consequences. Overcoming the GWC would require immediate action by water NPOs through the development and implementation of Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs which address the civic needs for water infrastructure and build the required relationships between private and public sectors (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 2; Power & Wanner, 2017, p. 213). Water NPOs missions are therefore dedicated to providing access to water which is a prerequisite for the cultivation of healthier communities, reduction of poverty, and nurturing of education (Waterhouse, 2018, p. 69).

Despite the significant role of NPOs in tackling the water crisis, their area of work remains a niche topic for academic research, especially regarding online communication of water NPOs (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 2). A better understanding of how water NPOs can use SM, co-creation and storytelling to effectively brand their mission and generate public awareness, is a highly relevant for water NPOs to attract donors to gain visibility and recognition. Conducting ground-breaking research into the unknown territory of water NPOs online communication, serves the societal objective to disclose effective SM strategies that may alleviate water NPOs from their unknown and mysterious public image.

Therefore, this thesis aimed to understand how water NPOs define their purpose and attract donors by using SM as a communicative portal. By analyzing NPOs use of co-created content on Instagram, the author hoped to provide NPOs in niche fields of work, such as the water sector, with valuable insights regarding the development of SM strategies to effectively engage donors and generate funding. Plenty qualitative and quantitative research on SM practices of NPOs, derive data from Facebook or Twitter to examine content production and the impact on donor behavior (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, p. 1-3). The application of dialogic principles on Instagram has been analyzed specifically for political party organizations (Filimonov et al., 2016) and theater institutions (Arlsan, 2019). However, to date there has not been a study on the use of dialogic practices on Instagram of water NPOs in specific. This is remarkable given the popularity of Instagram, hosting a community of two billion active worldwide users a month (Biggest Social Media, 2024) and with 73% of NPOs globally using Instagram according to the Nonprofit Tech For Good (2024, p. 14). In 2017, 24% of NPOs

shared one post weekly on the platform (Matthews, 2023, para. 5). Instagram as a photo-sharing platform, has a great potential to reach audience through images, in contrast to Facebook and Twitter where text and captions are emphasized (Duenas, 2020, p. 49). Being primarily defined by visuals, images and photographs shared via this platform, Instagram host a multitude of power tools for effective communication (Davison, 2005). Previous research shows that NPOs endorse the sharing of photos online as storytelling tools to ‘humanize’ and ‘dignify’ beneficiaries resulting in higher engagement (Dencik & Allan, 2017, p. 1186). Yet, the utilization of visual tools in the campaigning of water NPOs remains understudied, as there is only one quantitative study on SM practices of water NPOs conducted by Alonso-Canadas et al. (2019). Apart from being a *quantitative* study in nature, the authors moreover only examined the organizations’ use of dialogic principles based on the level of stakeholder engagement on *Facebook* (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 1-19). *Qualitative* research with a focus on Instagram SM strategies is hence an unexplored territory. This thesis, therefore, explored SM practices on a new social network utilized by water NPOs, since Instagram provides great possibilities in communicating organizational mission and goals through images and storytelling. The scholarly relevance is evident in applying the yet underexplored concept of value co-creation (VCC) to a niche branch in the non-profit sector to uncover the role of collaborative storytelling in marketing strategies. The thesis thereby aimed to provide valuable insights to social media practioners in the water management field, through analyzing co-created posts. Lastly, the thesis contributed to the water NPO literature by qualitatively studying the dialogic practices on Instagram in organizations’ effort to carry out their mission through online interactions.

1.2 Research Question

The thesis was an exploratory study as content co-creation is a recent phenomenon with limited scholarly attention. This required the researcher to pull sources from different academic fields, such as, marketing, communications, and international development studies. To answer the research question, the theoretical lens of dialogic communication theory and value co-creation were employed, to create a framework for understanding NPO communication and co-creation on SM. The research and sub-questions are formulated as follows:

RQ: How do American water non-profit organizations define their purpose to attract donors, through co-created posts on Instagram?

Sub-question: What is the role of storytelling in co-creation of content by these nonprofit organizations?

Three American water NPOs were selected for the study: *Water.org*, *Waves for Water*, and *Charity Water*. The 501(c)(3) registered charities all have a mission to tackle GWC by mitigating its effects on underdeveloped communities, offering programs and collaboration with stakeholders across South America, Asia, Oceania, and Africa. American NPOs were selected as organizations of interest considering the USAID and US Department of Justice's commitment to improving water management and access at home and abroad as part of their Global Water Strategy. Together, USAID and the Department of Justice planned to invest 700 million USD in 22 high-priority countries across Africa and Asia, in which the three NPOs also operate (US Global Water, 2024, para. 5). The American government and NPOs' alignment in solving the water crisis highly has a high potential to elevate the 'often-forgotten issue' that is critical to protecting our global public health and environment (USAID Launches, 2023, para. 3). Analyzing American water NPOs' SM practices indicated their approaches to communicating the severity of GWC. Perhaps with the US' commitment to tackle the issue by partnering with governments, we can redefine the international community's participation to actualizing access to water as a sustainable goal.

The rest of the thesis is outlined as follows. Chapter 2 will address the theoretical framework in relation the main topic of the research question, including literature discussions on water NPOs and NPOs' SM use. Key concepts of dialogic communication theory, value co-creation, and storytelling will be discussed in relation to SM communication strategy which guided the methodology and analysis chapters. Chapter 3 will outline the method used to conduct the qualitative research, data collection and process, and methods of analysis, i.e., qualitative content analysis and social semiotic analysis. Chapter 4 will describe the findings from the analysis. Discussions of the findings, research limitations, and implications for further research will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

To answer the research question, key concepts are described as part of the theoretical framework, including dialogic communication theory, value co-creation (VCC), and storytelling. The theoretical framework also informed data collection and analysis, by looking out for manifestation of key concepts in the data. For example, observing the presence of dialogic theory of co-created posts could reveal specific narratives about the water crisis. First the role of water NPOs will be described in relation to GWC to set the context of the thesis and define the case study which are embedded in the research question

2.1 Water and Sanitation Non-profit Organizations

2.1.1 *Global Water Crisis Context*

Around 1.1 billion people globally lack access to safe drinking water and 3.6 billion people are without safely managed sanitation systems (Sanitation and Hygiene, 2024, para. 1; Water Scarcity, 2024, para. 1). Inadequate access to drinking water and proper sanitation poses a high risk on people's health and livelihoods. With only 3% of the world's water deemed suitable for drinking, experts predicted that by 2030, the global demand for freshwater will outstrip supply by 40% (Harvey, 2023, para. 1). Factors contributing to water scarcity include climate change, urbanization, pollution, and overextraction of groundwater (Harvey 2023, para. 2). Groundwater in water-stressed countries around Central and Southern Asia, and North and Sub-Saharan Africa is drying up, thereby challenging the likelihood demands will be met (As Shortages Mount, 2024, para. 9). Moreover, climate change is causing longer dry seasons and drought, threatening for countries without proper water management systems (As Shortages Mount, 2024, para. 12). The United Nations (UN) declared water as essential for health, preservation of human rights, poverty reduction, and education (Water and sanitation, 2023, para. 6).

To encourage international cooperation, intervention, and awareness among member states, private sector, and local governments, the objective to "ensure water and sanitation for all" is listed as number six of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Key strategies to tackle the water crisis include sector-wide investment, capacity building, and adopting a more integrated and holistic approach to water management (Water and Sanitation, 2023, para. 5). The goal of UN SDGs is to expand capacity-building to support developing countries in their water and sanitation-related activities and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management as long-term solutions.

Support outlined by the UN SDGs to increase water access includes water harvesting, desalination, wastewater management, recycling, and reusing technologies (SDG 6 Portal, 2024). Access to water is valuable for preventing diseases, boosting economic growth and empowering women and girls. By installing and teaching water and sanitation systems in communities, the UN SDGs aim to decrease the medical burden on low- and middle-income areas, improve water management and distribution, and increase school attendance amongst children (WASH – water, sanitation, hygiene, 2024). The success of WASH implementation requires cooperation between international organizations, local governments, and nonprofits. Challenges in providing water and sanitation services is due to poor water governance, as governments are not able to provide technology, financing, or infrastructure (Herrera, 2019, p. 2017). This challenge relates to the inability of programs to be locally adapted because local governments are insufficiently incorporated into debates about their role in achieving global monitoring success. If local governments are not involved in designing and implementing long-term solutions to water problems and fail to regulate water provision in rural areas, there remains unequal distribution of water resources, and communities lack tools to become self-sufficient (Anderson et al., 2022, p. 2, 10; Herrera, 2019, p. 107). Water NPOs, therefore, play a crucial role in filling the gap where governments fall short to ensure equal distribution of water and sanitation by collaborating with local authorities.

2.1.2 Role of Water NPOs

Water NPOs are defined as nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that develop activities and programs that contribute to alleviating the effects water scarcity (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 2). They implement programs, build water and sanitation systems, and establish relationships with private and public sectors to tackle issues of water access (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 2; Ghosh et al., 2021, p. 1; Power & Wanner, 2017, p. 213). The detrimental effects of unavailable adequate water in underdeveloped communities globally make water NPOs essential to society (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 1). NPOs are key players in supporting for better governance of water management including civic needs and building relationships with stakeholders to combat the crisis (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 2). The role of water NPOs includes funding, technical support, implementing WASH intervention programs, community engagement, and collaborating with local governments. Funding NPOs received from donors can support local governments in subsidizing implementation and community management where local tax is allocated for basic administrative public service

costs (Jones, 2013, p. 357). Community engagement involves monitoring, knowledge sharing, and managing conflicts to increase participation and effectively deliver services such as wells, water tanks, and pit latrines (Haque & Freeman, 2020, p. 5). Water NPOs play a significant role in linking rural water committees with lawmakers to ensure that water policy also benefits those in rural areas by managing relations between municipalities and communities (Herrera, 2019, p. 114). Because access to water is a human right, NPOs must also approach the crisis from a human rights-based lens to expand access to vital hygiene facilities and knowledge (WASH – water, sanitation, hygiene, 2024). With the challenge of proper water governance, water NPOs have a significant role in successful implementation by ensuring participation and alignment from governments and local communities to define systematic measures (Herrera, 2019, 107).

2.1.3 Mission Statement of Water NPOs

How individual NPOs aim to combat the global water crisis differs. Table 1 outlines the different mission statements from the three American water NPOs: *Water.org*, *Waves for Water*, and *Charity Water*. For example, based on their website, *Water.org* focuses on providing affordable financing for communities to be able to access water (About us, 2024, para. 2). By working together with financial institutions in areas where people need water access, *Water.org* provides technical assistance, connections, and resources for the institutions to offer alternative solutions. Through small loans, families can install tap or toilet, and the repaid loans will be used to lend to another family (WaterCredit, 2024, para. 3). On the other hand, *Waves for Water* focuses on implementing programs related to building and knowledge sharing of water filtration systems, bore-hole wells, and rainwater harvesting systems (Waves for Water, 2024). Similarly, *Charity Water* chooses to work with local partners and governments to plan, fund, and implement different technologies (e.g., hand-dug or drilled wells, rainwater catchments, latrines, or piped systems) to provide communities with access to water (Charity: Water Clean, 2024). How water NPOs carry out their mission differs; however, their activities and programs reflect their mission to provide access to water in underdeveloped communities and will aid in cultivating healthier communities, reducing poverty, and nurturing education. Moreover, how they articulate their mission to rally support from donors depends on their use of online communication, including SM, a topic that will be of primary focus in this study.

Although there is limited literature on water NPOs' SM practices, Alonso-Canadas et al. (2019) found how three other water NPOs use Facebook to communicate the benefits of their work (p. 9). Effective communication was challenged by a mismatch of the organization's posting behavior and stakeholder online behavior (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 13). Alonso-Canadas et al. (2019) found that for water NPOs, being active on fewer social networks is more effective in gaining a higher level of stakeholder commitment (p. 12). The authors contribute to the large work of scholars investigating the use of Facebook and Twitter by NPOs in engaging stakeholders. Effective communication relates to how NPOs can use SM to promote their projects, engage their donors, and demonstrate accountability (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 3). Accountability increases visibility which will help grow NPOs in size and funding (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 11). Through SM, NPOs can reach a wider audience and engage in reciprocal, dialogic, and feedback-providing tradeoffs, allowing them to remain ahead in a highly competitive race for fundraising (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 11).

The next section dives deeper into SM practices and challenges faced by NPOs in their communication strategy.

2.2 Non-profit Organizations' Use of Social Media

2.2.1 *NPOs on Social Media*

SM platforms are low-cost and easy-to-use online interactive communication channels that NPOs and companies use to communicate their mission to their stakeholders, followers, and the public (Akatay et al., 2017, p. 65). SM channels provide NPOs with inexpensive ways to create and disseminate promotional campaigns and positively influence donors at different stages of decision-making process (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, 1). Literature observes that NPOs use SM for information sharing, advocacy, resource mobilization, accountability, and community building toward donor engagement (Amelia & Dewi, 2021; Guo & Saxton, 2017; Lover & Saxton, 2012; Sheombar et al., 2018, Tripathi & Verma, 2017; Zhou & Pan, 2016). Any organization can utilize any SM to build their brand, promote donor satisfaction, and increase donations (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, 1). For example, Yoga & Bumi (2020) highlights the storytelling opportunity photo sharing via Instagram offers, providing possibilities for NPOs to tell the story of their organization and beneficiaries (p. 3557; Systrom & Krieger, 2011). Additionally, through content marketing, SM can offer NPOs a platform to connect with the right supporter base (Yoga & Bumi, 2020, 3558).

For NPOs, information sharing primarily involves posting text, images, or videos resources to inform relevant stakeholders about the organizations' activities, such as events, news, and reports (Klafke et al, 2021, p. 286; Lover & Saxton, 2012, p. 343). Lover and Saxton (2012) note that information is a powerful tool for sharing the history, vision, and objectives of an organization to get stakeholders onboard with their mission (p. 343). For water NPOs, this means posting about how and why the organization came to be, their strategy for tackling the water crisis, and clarifying the impact of their active programs. Furthermore, organizations may also distribute advocacy messages to bring awareness about their cause (Guo & Saxton, 2017, p. 8). In the case of water NPOs, promoting how the water crisis relates to social justice issues and human rights could invite civic participation and institutional changes in the long run (Sultana, 2018, p. 498). Advocacy communication consolidates followers and encourages collective action by pulling people together (Guo & Saxton, 2017, p. 6-8). In the case of water NPOs, this would pertain to audience activation by addressing the global water crisis and its effects on other development issues (e.g., education, gender equality, and climate change).

Information sharing via SM is also a strategy that NPOs use to build trust among donors and volunteers. Tripathi and Verma (2017) note that stakeholders want accountability for their contribution and demand that information is shared regarding how their donations contribute to beneficiaries (p. 5). Some organizations may disseminate short-term reports, such as updates on current programs, or long-term plans related to organizational strategy (Amelia & Dewi, 2021, 329). The accountability that is thereby created is an important factor that contributes to positive brand image (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, 5). By sharing how funds are allocated and sharing impact reports on their website, NPOs try to outline how donations help build effective water and sanitation programs in underdeveloped communities (Amelia & Dewi, 2021, 322). The ability of water NPOs to prove their accountability influences their ability to grow, attract stakeholders' attention and funding (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 12). SM moreover enables anyone in the world with access to the internet to be addressed recruited as potential donors (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020, p. 76-77).

It is the interactive nature of SM particularly that enables NPOs to build a community of supporters from online followers. Organizations can engage with followers by crafting posts that humanize them, meaning applying a personal and approachable communication style, to reduce the distance between them and their audience (Sheombar et al., 2018, 12; Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2453). Doing so helps NPOs to attract more followers, build closer relationships, and open new avenues for mobilizing resources for their beneficiaries (Tripathi

& Verma, 2017, p. 1; Zhou & Pan, p. 2453). NPOs encourage follower participation by asking them via SM posts to support their cause, including making donations, becoming volunteers or employees, buying products, attending events, signing petitions, and more (Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2459). Purchasing products as a form of donation can be considered as participation. For example, *Charity Water*, a water NPO with a focus on ending the walk for water, published a post promoting their collaboration with Aveda, a cosmetics company, where proceeds from leave-in treatments would be distributed as donation. Purchasing the product as well as engagement with the advertisement post (i.e., likes, comments, shares, clicking links) can be considered sign of support toward NPOs mission.

In summary, despite aiming to share information, raise awareness, maintain accountability, build a community, and mobilize resources through social media, the ultimate objective for NPOs using SM is to attract donors. SM provides the possibility for organizations to market their mission through posts and see the response from stakeholders. The potential of SM to attract donors, signals the importance of exploring the establishment of stakeholder engagement as a means towards donor engagement in more detail.

2.2.2 Social Media for Stakeholder Engagement

SM provides a space for NGOs to interact with stakeholders committed to their cause, including but not limited to, supporters, donors, volunteers, employees, and more (Sindhu et al., 2022, p. 3356). SM engagement would be measured based on the likes, comments, and shares of NPOs posts. Another form of stakeholder engagement would include the increase of donation willingness and action (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, p. 7). Tripathi and Verma (2017) would argue that donor engagement is instigated via the cultivation of an emotional bond (p. 3). They find this crucial because social bonding executed through a well-designed stakeholder experience can trigger positive emotions that would have positive effect on donor retention and supporter loyalty (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, p. 3). Furthermore, nurturing relationships with individuals is made possible through SM features of sharing information or opinions via text, photo, or videos (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, p. 3). Bhati and McDonnell (2020) also note that besides network size and activity, fundraising success is positively related to audience engagement (p. 76). As NPOs become more aware and active in leveraging SM for generating donations, organizations can use platforms to employ crowdfunding approach to gain large number of smaller donations and leverage loyal supporters to reach out to their network with donation requests (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020, p.

76-77). There is an array of elements of SM practices that would influence donor engagement, including dialogic principles, co-creation through user-generated content, and storytelling which will be discussed in the next sections. Overall, it can be stated that SM platforms, via all their utilizations, require interactions between organizations and users which aid in NPO stakeholder and donor engagement. Scholars, however, note that organizations do not often take advantage of the dialogic features of SM platforms because they focus on information sharing rather than two-way interaction (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, 318; Lover & Saxton, 2012, p. 349). Nevertheless, Alonso-Canadas et al. (2019) note that using SM technologies for water NPOs is beneficial in increasing interactive communication and thereby achieving greater online commitment from stakeholders (p. 14). It is hence important to take a closer look at the barriers which provide obstacles to a fruitful utilization of SM channels by NPOs.

2.2.3 Social Media Challenges for NPOs

Scholars agree that what hinders NPOs from optimizing SM to communicate their visions, attain their goals, and optimizing SM dialogic features is also due to their lack of financial and human resources (Akatay, 2017, p. 66-67; Tripathi & Verma, 2017, p. 1). Some NPOs do not have the resources, time, and talent to build the in-house capacity for SM marketing. To overcome this issue, Bortree and Seltzer (2009) suggest that hiring an employee would be beneficial (p. 319). Aside from financial constraints, in praxis often employees seem to lack the technological know-how to effectively use SM and time to manage their SM channels (Akatay, 2017, p. 66-67).

Literature also notes that NPOs are primarily using SM to market organizational activities, instead of participating in the essential two-way communication with stakeholders (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, p. 318). Organizations seem to not interact with their stakeholders dialogically as there is a lack of understanding regarding how their stakeholders are using SM (Akatay et al., 2017, 65). Klafke et al. (2021) mention the detrimental effects of insufficient communication and relationship with stakeholders can harm donor perception of organizational activities (p. 296). Some NPOs still use SM as a bulletin board, focusing on information dissemination and not stakeholder dialogue (Akatay et al., 2017, p. 66). They use SM to promote themselves and create transparency to gain donorship, without paying attention to the feedback and dialogue opportunities that SM essentially offers (Waters et al., 2009, p. 105; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 349).

In conclusion, NPOs' SM practices are limited to sharing information, making donation appeals, and updating on their activities, instead of maximizing the platform's participatory culture where two-way communication with donors can occur (Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2436). The next section will describe dialogic communication theory to explain the effectiveness of dialogic communication on SM to create donor engagement. Understanding this two-way communication potential via SM is important to inform NPOs of effective implementation of communicating and achieving their mission. This thesis tried to disclose if and how water NPOs try to enhance their SM practices through dialogic communication to tackle the water crisis by investigating their use of collaborative posts with stakeholders. The manifestation or absence of two-way communication elements in their Instagram posts, such as, involving donors to tell their story to inspire new donors, was explored.

2.3 Dialogic Communication Theory

2.3.1 *Principles of Dialogic Communication Theory*

Dialogic Communication Theory by Kent and Taylor (1998) looks at dialogue as the exchange of ideas and opinions (p. 325). The five principles inherent to this theory are widely used by scholars to understand how NPOs implement two-way communication strategies to build relationships and attract donations in the digital age (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Rybaldo & Seltzer, 2010; Arslan, 2019). Their exploration of dialogic practices by NPOs confirms the importance of stakeholder engagement in achieving the organizational mission and objectives. SM provides organizations with the space to interact with their publics, stimulating dialogic communication with stakeholders (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, p. 317; Watkins, 2017, p. 165). The application of dialogic strategies in NPO-donor communication is related to positive outcomes, such as network growth, and have the potential to increase the number of stakeholders and potential donors (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, p. 318). By optimizing dialogic interactions within their network, organizations can reach a wider audience by breaking through their stakeholders' social network.

Kent and Taylor (1998) identify five dialogic principles relevant for NPOs' approach to social media which are: provision of useful information, conservation of visitors, creation of dialogic loop, and generation of return visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998; p. 321-334; Arslan, 2019, p. 88; Rybaldo & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337-338; Wang & Yang, 2020, p. 2; Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2437). Usefulness of information relates to whether organizations' communication

satisfies stakeholders' need for information (Watkins, 2017, p. 164). Conservation of visitors is evident when organizations link information to their website or social networking sites (Wang & Yang, 2020, p. 2). Dialogic loop is the interactions between organizations and followers visible in the comment sections (Arslan, 2019, p. 95). Lastly, generation of return visits deals with providing regularly updated information, encouraging multiple page visits by users (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 337). Dialogic principles are relevant to the thesis because they inform if and how water NPOs define their purpose and engage donors through Instagram content as a two-way communication. Alonso-Canadas et al. (2019) argue that water NPOs should make use of SM to create dialogue and reach wider audiences (p. 13). What is still unknown, and questioned in this research, is how water NPOs apply useful information, conservation of visitors, dialogic loop, and generation of return visits.

2.3.2 Application of Dialogic Communication Theory on Social Media

Dialogic communication inherently includes dialogue as negotiated exchange of ideas that represent interactions of honesty, openness, and ethical give-and-take between actors (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 324; Waters & Lo, 2012, p. 300). Scholars have applied dialogic principles to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube since they have ready to use interactive features (Arslan 2019, p. 88; Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2437).). For example, Bortree and Seltzer (2009) applied dialogic principles in a study of nonprofits use of Facebook and found that NPOs who use dialogic principles can create opportunities for stakeholder engagement by optimizing stakeholder interaction and increasing social network (p. 2). Stakeholder engagement is crucial since NPOs rely on donors to provide services to beneficiaries as part of their mission. A challenge however is that while two-way interaction leads to higher engagement, NPOs fear losing control how their work is communicated, exposing themselves to negative content that could hurt their cause (Oksiutycz & Mwadiwa, 2023, p. 102). Organizations can no longer control what users do with the messages shared on SM platforms when there is symmetrical dialogue (Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2437). However, scholars do mention that two-way communication is also an opportunity for dialogue with 'free agents' (e.g., bloggers or other platform users) which invites opportunities for funding by tapping into their networks. Two-way communication moreover enhances organizations' propensity in building stronger relationships with stakeholders, including volunteers, donors, and partners it leads to sharing of ideas and opinions (Briones et al., 2011, p. 41). By interacting with the public, organizations can provide relevant information in a timely

manner, mobilize support, and receive feedback from the community about their mission (Briones et al., 2011, p. 41).

This thesis tried to disclose if water NPOs try to enhance their SM practices through dialogic communication to tackle the water crisis by investigating their use of collaborative posts with stakeholders. The manifestation or absence of two-way communication elements in their Instagram posts, such as, involving donors to tell their story to inspire new donors, was explored.

2.4 Value Co-creation and Co-created Content

2.4.1 *Value Co-Creation in Content Marketing (Co-authoring and User-Generated Content)*

An ‘emerging phenomenon’ in the digital landscape is the practice of value co-creation (VCC), specifically, content co-creation on SM as a marketing strategy (Rashid et al., 2018, p. 762). Sadyk & Islam (2022) observe the shift in logic of economics from product-domain to service-domain yielding the notion of VCC as a prominent concept in marketing literature through the frameworks of service-dominant logic. Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) define VCC as the collaborative dialogical process of creating products together through direct interactions between two actors (p. 208). The understanding is that companies no longer have their own authorship in products or services to offer customers, but the ideas, knowledge, and products are co-created or co-produced in close relationships with customers (Sadyk & Islam, 2022, p. 2-3). Ideas, knowledge, and products are the shared value produced because each actor contributes something during the process (Sorensen, 2017, p. 899). An example in the nonprofit context involves volunteers as co-producers in services rendered by NPOs to underdeveloped areas and underprivileged individuals (Tripathi & Verman, p. 9). Through this process, volunteers do not gain monetary value but internal satisfaction and emotional fulfillment while organizations receive human resource support (Tripathi & Verman, p. 9). Co-creation process helps organizations build relationships with customers and maximize their lifetime value (Payne & Frow, 2005 as cited by Sindhwani, 2014, p. 42). Successfully managing the relationships by implementing ideas would result in increased brand loyalty, positive impact on customer emotional connectivity, and satisfaction level (Sindhwani, 2014, 43).

Sorensen et al. (2017) observe VCC on SM through the practices of social media-based brand community, revealing that SM platforms are hosts, in which VCC materializes (p. 902). For organizations, co-created value is a result of using customers’ experiences,

knowledge, and competencies to create a product or service, achieved through interactions between firms and customers on social media (Rashid et al., 2018, 762). VCC is also evident through user-generated content (UGC) in which users collaboratively create content with external organizations who disseminate to their own network. SM users and customers can bring their own expertise, by telling stories about their lived-in experiences of a brand to their audience on SM (e.g., beauty product reviews) (Fujita et al., 2019, p. 52). Marketers can engage in what Fujita et al. (2019) call co-authoring with consumers, by identifying and asking influential individuals (e.g., bloggers) to talk about pre-selected topics, to transform marketing messages to information that resonates by the community they represent (p. 52). The value of UGC is that it can contain both educational and entertainment values to viewers which distinguishes content in a competitive attention economy (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012, p. 78). Other forms of co-creation on SM by marketers include reposting posts from followers, co-authoring guest blog articles and customer interviews, and finding UGC pieces. Marketers also decide what stories to publish about the content they curated, and whether they are relevant to the organizations' brand or interesting for the audience (Fujita et al., 2019, p. 52).

Most research on VCC or co-creation on social media focuses on commercial companies. However, there is limited research on NPO use of co-creation such as done by Numisango et al. (2020). This study reveals that SM enables service co-creation for NPOs through co-ideating, co-advocating, and co-resourcing services that help organizations advance their mission (Namisango et al., 2021, p. 798-800). It is, therefore, crucial to explore if VCC is evident through water NPOs; and how the use of VCC support NPOs in achieving their mission.

2.4.2 Utilizing Co-creation to Attract Donors on Social Media

The interaction process that takes place in co-creation online can be understood as a product of dialogic communication between organizations and potential donors. NPOs can rely on their community to share their stories in a co-creation process. Co-created content on SM can contribute to NPO's brand strategy because it invites participation from different stakeholders, including donors, employees, corporate partners, and beneficiaries (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018, p. 985). A concrete example is found in co-branding posts as part of a private company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative by partnering with a nonprofit. Burton et al. (2017) note that VCC can be materialized through communication

that involves NPOs and their partner through co-branded or co-created posts mentioning each other on social media (p. 323). In CSR studies, companies would achieve their brand-building agenda by improving brand image and awareness and portray social responsibility as a transactional act, whereas NPOs receive donations and promotions through CSR partners' network (Burton et al., 2017, p. 323). UGC has been linked to an array of marketing performance indicators including sales, acquiring consumers, and higher retention rates (Tian et al., 2019, p. 491). Furthermore, UGC is a powerful communication tool because it represents a factor of credibility in which consumers that do not receive monetary compensation shape viewer perception of content as trustworthy for reflecting the creator's personal opinions (Tian et al., 2019, 491). In the water NPO context, co-creation invites stakeholders to become active agents in developing content that defines and spreads the organization's mission to then attract donations (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018, p. 986). Incorporating stakeholders in the content production process may be a cost-effective strategy that water NPOs can explore by relying on others to collaborate with approved organizational messages.

SM collaboration between NPOs and stakeholders can be viewed as manifestation of VCC because the content co-produced by the two actors result from the sharing of ideas, expertise, and resources that add value to both parties. VCC on NPOs' SM is visible through co-created content between the organization and different stakeholders (e.g., co-branded content with brand partner). While NPOs gained monetary value or material support, brands may benefit from having a positive brand image through collaborating with a charity. Namisango et al. (2019) summarize NPOs' motivations to co-create content include engaging donors, knowledge sharing, sharing experiences and storytelling, and gathering feedback on service quality (Co-creation & Innovation section, Table 6). For each partner in the collaboration, the desired output is different. NPOs' value is achieved when they receive donations and support that fulfills their mission. For corporate partners on the other hand, improved brand image through association with the good cause is an attainable value, while volunteers emphasize internal satisfaction perceived through contribution to an NGO effort, as an aim (Tirpathi & Verma, 2017, p. 5,9). Whilst being particularly interested in the value co-creation has for water NPOs, this research particularly looked out for Instagram posts that involves collaboration between the NPO and their donors, partners, volunteers, and other nonprofits, in an aim to understand how the phenomenon might affect donor attraction and fulfilling their mission.

2.5 Storytelling on Social Media

2.5.1 *Storytelling as a Social Media Marketing Strategy*

Storytelling plays an important role for NPOs as a tool for engaging stakeholders to fulfill their social mission (Mitchell & Clark, 2020, p. 143). Specifically, stories allow organizations to articulate what they believe as the best way to achieve their objectives (Mitchell & Clark, 2020, p. 143). For water NPOs, storytelling is a method for sharing their mission to gain support online by evoking emotions in donors (Merchant et al., 2010, p. 360). The interactive nature of SM gives way for common users to create content and share stories. User-generated content (UGC) is an umbrella term that captures different types of content (e.g., photos, videos, comments) that consumers create on social media. The process of creating content can either be initiated by consumers themselves or in response to a firm's actions or solicitation (Tian et al., 2019, p. 490). Specifically, user-generated stories (UGS) are stories that consumers or audience create *themselves* and found lead to long-lasting user engagement (van Laer et al., 2019, 138-140). An example of UGS in the case of water NPO social media messaging would be a post produce by donors informing viewers of their motivation for supporting a specific water NPO and their cause.

As UGC opens opportunity for consumers to generate stories and become storytellers, the role of storytelling on SM is worth examining. In, UGC organizations often seek out collaboration with influencers or someone who represents a group of people whilst creating content. Endorsing the input and authenticity of a collaborative, first-person speaker, allows organizations to create trust between creator and follower, yielding positive impact on online purchase intention (Hajli et al., 2017, p. 139). Storytelling using customers' personal account of experiences in content production plays a role in consumer engagement through narrative transportation (van Laer et al., 2019, p. 143). Storytelling that involves plot, character and verisimilitude can trigger consumer cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019, p. 192). NPO storytelling practices reveal that the incorporation of stories is used for information sharing about what the organization does and mobilizing donors to donate and participate in events (Mang et al., 2021, p. 145). Furthermore, stories that hold a certain degree of conflict were found to be most captivating as they indirectly attempt to encourage the audience to solve conflicts through participation (Mang et al., 2021, p. 148). Organizations can, thus, strategically use the storytelling to influence audiences by promoting the ideas of helping and altruism (Kaczorowska et al., 2024, Managerial Implication section).

2.5.2 Storytelling Use in NPO Communication Strategy and Effects on Donors

Employing direct storytelling of NPOs' mission is a relevant way that water NPO can use to attract donors through Instagram. Robiady et al. (2021) find that the inclusion of storytelling in public outreach is a strong predictor for donation performance (p. 497-498). First-person stories about how the organizational work aligns with its mission in tackling the water crisis can influence donors' positive emotion and promote altruism (Robiady et al., 2021, p. 498). Additionally, Zhang et al. (2023) find that co-created storytelling as a marketing strategy plays a role in stakeholder engagement (p. 293). The study notes that consumers' posts or stories behind their posts make them lead characters within a brand story (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 293). For water NPOs this mean that through managing successful relationships with stakeholders, they can curate, create, and share stories from beneficiaries, partners, and donors that align with their mission. Furthermore, storytelling can enable NPOs to reach a wider pool of potential donors (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 293). In return, stakeholders are recognized for their contribution through SM posts which leads to creation of shared value and engagement.

For water NPOs, their Instagram posts are expected to reflect the narrative they formulate about the water crisis and how their organization is tackling the issue. The thesis looked out for Instagram posts of NPOs' activities and achievements with stories of and from stakeholders (e.g., beneficiaries, donors, and partners) and the organization's journey, to understand how water NPOs utilized stories for donor engagement.

Conclusion

In summary, approaching the thesis with a dialogical communication theoretical lens is vital because of the affordances of the interactivity and engagement of SM that NPOs can leverage. As NPOs invest in online communication strategies for fundraising and mobilizing, research has indicated they will require a larger network to help them achieve their goals (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020, p. 76-77). Dialogic communication theory helps understand the participatory nature of SM platforms in which information is no longer disseminated in one way, unlike websites or other traditional media. This participatory culture makes space for production of co-created content, bringing value to both organizations and donors. Knowing that NPOs often lack the financial or human resources to optimize SM, exploring VCC in posts could provide insight to how NPOs could navigate the digital landscape through this rather commercial practice. This thesis on Instagram use by water NPOs contributes to the

water management literature, hoping to illustrate how NPOs utilize digital communication tools promote their mission statements. Additionally, the thesis also contributes to the marketing literature by understanding how VCC is applied in the nonprofit sector. Investigating the use of co-creation by nonprofits can reveal how water NPOs use online communication to foster visibility, engage audiences, and ultimately generate financial support.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Case for Qualitative Research

The research question focuses on how water NPOs represent their mission statements through co-created content on SM and the role that storytelling play in describing their purpose. Therefore, the qualitative method of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was suitable to uncover the meanings of their organizational objectives produced through Instagram posts. Flick (2018) describes how qualitative research methodologies allow the disclosure of meaning-making processes through data interpretation (p. 4). By qualitatively interpreting the Instagram posts of water NPOs, this study hoped to reveal how specific organizations purposefully designed SM communication to manifest their purpose and influence audiences. The choice for analyzing water Instagram posts was to disclose the self-representations produced by NPOs. The content was assumed to show reflections of NPOs' purpose in the form of carefully crafted stories, activities, and impact to influence donor engagement. Furthermore, Instagram posts provide secondary existing data not produced for this research. Relying on existing data is important because it possesses readily available visual and textual information published by NPOs. Because water NPOs' posts are public, they can be accessed by anyone without concern of privacy. It allows the researcher to provide a credible analysis of their Instagram posts from an external perspective, without bias or influence from the organizations in analyzing data. While interviews as a primary source would yield interesting findings to NPOs' SM use, this approach would risk involving framing bias and deviation from the focus of the research question. The aim of the thesis is to observe how water NPOs are utilizing SM marketing strategies from an external perspective, therefore, obtaining answers from the organizations directly could potentially influence the findings.

Additionally, to enrich the analysis of QCA, Social Semiotic Analysis (SSA) was employed to help understand the choices of images used for donor engagement on SM. Because Instagram places more emphasis on visual content compared to other SM platforms (e.g., Facebook), where images are the main units for conveying messages and user engagement, a visual analysis was crucial in understanding water NPOs use of co-created content (Koutromanou et al., 2023, p. 608). SSA looks at the considerations for how visuals are used to communicate meanings and stories. In particular, the thesis focused on analyzing photographs of water NPOs in co-created posts using a framework by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) that appeared on Aiello and Parry (2020). The framework consist of three tools to

uncover levels of meanings NPOs' posts that may be established through the visuals (p. 12-13).

3.2 Data Sampling and Collection

Instagram was chosen as a particular realm for research as different SM platforms provide different information on how meanings are produced through posts. Boczkowski et. al (2018)'s study of SM practices reveals that through Instagram posts, meanings of a polished self-representation are produced and circulated (p. 252). While Instagram deals with stylized and carefully constructed visual posts of a person, posts on Facebook often reflects one's milestones in life within their social circle (Bockzkowski, 2018, p. 251). Because purpose statements reflects organizational objective, Instagram was chosen to uncover if and how organizational self-representations were present in NPOs' posts.

To collect data, purposive sampling was employed to select Instagram content from three organizations registered in the US as a nonprofit (through the 501(c)(3) tax code) rooting their purpose in tackling the water crisis by giving access to clean water and sanitation in underdeveloped communities globally. The selected organizations were *Water.org*, *Waves for Water*, and *Charity Water*.

To collect a sample for analysis, data was retrieved from the identified NPOs' Instagram official pages which were detected through the NPOs' websites. It was generally observed that all three NPOs had a considerable degree of audience engagement through their social media channels. Overall NPOs had over 50,000 followers and posted at least 2-3 times a week. This observation made it likely that all three NPOs were familiar with using SM to attract followers, to share mission-related information about the organization, their activities, and other interesting and relevant information for followers (Zhou & Pan, 2016, p. 2451; Saxton & Waters, 2014, p. 288). Descriptive statistics on the number of Instagram followers, average posting behavior, and number of co-created posts per organization are outlined in Table 1. Mission statements found on their websites were included in the table to ensure they meet the criteria as a water NPO which centers their services to provide water globally.

Table 1. Water NPOs Case Analysis.

	Water.org	charity:water	Waves4Water
Mission Statements	“To bring water and sanitation to the world through providing affordable financing (e.g., small loans) to local communities.”	“To bring clean and safe water to people and end the global water crisis by funding constructions of WASH programs through local partnership.”	“To correct the imbalance of water scarcity and tackle the global water crisis by providing emergency support and designing programs that create immediate impact.”
Follower Count	576,000 followers	513,000 followers	73,500 followers
Overall Post Frequency	Average 8.6 total posts per week	Average 3.3 total posts per week	Average 3 total posts per week
Total number of posts in the sample	45	68	5

As the research question addresses the topic of co-created content, only co-created posts were considered. The total research units yielded 118 co-created posts, both static images and the supplementing captions posted by the three identified NPOs. Data collection took place between 15 March 2024 – 4 April 2024. The sample obtained were posts published between 1 January 2023 – 31 December 2023. The timeframe for the posts was chosen as to obtain a decent size sample of recent co-created posts. As not all Instagram posts shared within this timeframe included co-creation, the width of the timeframe allowed to still yield a sufficient amount of data for the sample. Only static co-created posts were selected for analysis to limit the research scope for feasibility purposes. Moreover, from a theoretical point of view, this thesis focuses on Instagram because literature describes it as a popular image-based communication platform among the public (Arslan, 2019, p. 89). Although a big volume of video content (e.g., Reels) is available on Instagram, people do not always have time to watch videos (Yoga & Bumi, 2020, p. 3575). Instead, powerful images with touching stories can better attract audience attention and become a source of fresh air when one’s Instagram page is bombarded with videos (Yoga & Bumi, 2020, p. 3575). Moreover, photos remain powerful tools of expressing experience and feelings, enabling users to share important life events more easily compared to using words (Morton, 2016), p. 51.

Furthermore, visual imagery is crucial in influencing and contesting existing meanings, especially in the NPO context (Dogra, 2006, p. 169). Through images, NPOs have the power to represent development issues in a particular way that can influence the public's understanding of stated issues. By analyzing NPOs' co-created Instagram posts, the author hoped to discover how NPOs use collaboratively produced images to represent the water crisis and their role in tackling the issue to create a story that attracts donorship.

Data was retrieved directly from the Instagram profiles of the three NPOs including images and captions, because text-based caption can supplement the image by giving context and allowing tagging of other authors involved in the image making (Morton, 2016, p. 53). The main criteria for posts' selection in the sample were that posts were considered if they indicated co-authors. An Instagram post was selected from the NPOs profile as relevant data if its content indicated that two or more actors were involved in the content production. Based on Fujita (2019), co-authored content is between NPOs and donors, corporate partners, influential individuals, and users (p. 52). For example, posts that mentioned a partner's Instagram account (e.g., photographer or brand and program partners) in the caption, post with photos of and from collaborators (e.g., beneficiary, donor, local partners, other nonprofits), and the use of *Collaboration Post* feature on Instagram were included in the sample. *Collaboration post* demonstrate that the post appeared on two or more profiles with both account names on the post (Hirose, 2023, para. 4). Additionally, posts that involve quotes were also included in the sample because this signified some process of co-production. Quotes were mostly found in posts with organizations' founders and stories from beneficiaries. The sample did not include any tagged posts by other creators that did not appear on the Instagram profile because the thesis was concerned with how NPOs themselves describe their purpose, not how they are portrayed by others. Posts that appeared on the profile were curated by the NPOs which contributed to answering how they described their purpose statements.

Finally, the posts that fit the criteria were saved in folders using the *Saved* feature on Instagram profile of the researcher, which automatically categorized the data according to the three organizations. Each folder was migrated into Microsoft Office for analysis and categorized by the three organizations for the convenience, according to the organization with the least to most data. Table 2 outlines the number of occurrences of co-created content considered as data in the sample. In the sample, Water.org and Charity Water had the most co-created content with their beneficiaries. Waves for Water had the most co-created content

with their brand partners compare to other stakeholders. Charity Water is the only organization that were found to have co-created content with their donors.

Table 2. Types and number of occurrences of co-created content and collaboration considered in the analysis across the identified water NPOs.

	Waves For Water	Water Org	Charity Water
Beneficiary x NPO	-	37	23
Brand Partner x NPO	2	4	13
Donors x NPO	-	-	14
Organization & Community x NPO	1	1	7
Internal Stakeholder (Founder, Task Force) x NPO	1	4	-
Artists (Photographers, Fine Artists) x NPO	1	-	8

3.3 Operationalization of Concepts for Qualitative Analysis

Considering the qualitative context of this research, key terms from the research question were utilized to induce meanings through data collection. It was still important to find practical definitions of the concepts at stake. Operationalization of concepts were clearly defined and informed by the theoretical framework provided to guide interpretations and ensure credibility. Within this research, *dialogic communication* was understood as a two-way communication process based on Kent and Taylor (1998)'s five principles which Arslan (2019) and Wang and Yang (2020) applied to NPO's SM practices. Within the study, dialogical communication principles were considered to identify how Instagram content focused on active donor attraction. Manifestations of useful information, conservation of visitors, generating return visitors, dialogic loop, and ease of interface were observed in the selected Instagram content. Dialogic principles were observed in the sample with Table 3 describing the number of occurrences for each principle.

- Useful information is related to what is assumed the public wants to know from the NPOs. Posts that contained information on NPO mission, work (e.g., development

and fundraising programs), donation options, and effects of global water crisis were, thus, considered for analysis.

- In conservation of visitors typology, users are expected to keep visiting NPO profiles or posts. In this regard, posts that tell users to visit NPOs' Instagram profile (e.g., link in bio) or includes a link to websites were considered. Links directed users to donate, read stories, watch videos, or find more information about the organization.
- Generation of return visitors is understood as the means used to increase repeated interactions to help build relationships. Posts that showed appreciation to donors, updates them about new projects were included in the sample. Donor appreciation was also manifested in posting images from donors as it invited donors to visit NPO profiles more often.
- Dialogic loop from NPOs was enabled by asking and answering questions from followers. Interactive features of Instagram's interface allows this. Re-posts of content from donors, partners, or followers, where content from another account is reposted on the NPO's feed, along with posts that contain questions to followers were considered in the analysis. Linguistic choices within captions including rhetorical questions and second-person point of view using 'you' were also considered in the analysis.
- Ease of interface was omitted from Arslan (2019) and Wang and Yang (2020)'s typology because the Instagram application was created with an easy-to-use interface. The mobile app has a straightforward layout and design with each post appearing in a top-down manner, where users can scroll up to see the next post. Therefore, the author also omitted this principle for this research.

Table 3. Number of (co)-occurrences dialogic principles across 118 posts in the sample.

Dialogic Principles	Total (Co-) Occurrences Detected	Occurrence Detected
Usefulness of Information	101	8
Conservation of Visitors	104	8
Generation of Return Visitors	21	1
Dialogic Loop	34	-
Usefulness of Information & Conservation of Visitors		47
Usefulness of Information & Generation of Return Visitors		4
Usefulness of Information & Dialogic Loop		1
Conservation of Visitors & Generation of Return Visitors		4
Conservation of Visitors & Dialogic Loop		4
Usefulness of Information & Conservation of Visitors & Generation of Return Visitors		12
Usefulness of Information & Conservation of Visitors & Dialogic Loop		28

Co-created content was understood as content that indicated a co-authoring process between marketers (i.e., brands) and consumers (i.e., donors) (Fujita et al., 2019, p. 52). Table 2 outlined the descriptive types of co-created content in the sample. Therefore, posts involving co-authors of NPOs and donors, corporate partners, brands, NPO staff, influential individuals, or followers (such as UGC) were considered for analysis. The sampling of data that was a product of co-creation of NPOs and mentioned partners which assured the definition of co-authored content and is adhered to this research. Co-created content included NPOs tagging supporters or partners on their post were considered because tagging shows that they have contributed value to the image which further helps donor engagement (Hu et al., 2014). Because *collaboration posts* required consent from parties involved to appear on their profile, they were also considered in the sample, showing that approval was an indication of co-production at some level.

Storytelling in this research was understood as a process of sharing information involving a character, plot, and resolution to activate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019, 184-185). Content with personal stories from donors,

partners, beneficiaries, or followers were analyzed because stories are effective strategies for donor engagement (Mang et al., 2016, p. 148). Mitchell and Clark (2019) outline a broad story construct in analyzing how NPOs reveal their strategic purpose through stories which involved: story character, story classification, and story content. Story character referred to the focal point of the story (i.e., subject) in which the narrative follows their struggles to overcome hardships to reach a major goal (i.e., conflict) (Mitchell & Clark, 2019, p. 144). Lastly, story content pertains to what the story is about which can be manifested into three themes: activities, benefits, and emotions. Through Instagram carousel post feature, where NPOs can post up to ten photos in one post, static images were utilized to tell a broad story. The analysis focused on images that contained a portrait of the main character engaged in an activity (e.g., walking to collecting water or sitting or reading in a classroom) in conjunction with images that provide context to the story (e.g., house, road to collect water, or inside the classroom). Carousel posts offered insights into how water NPOs used visual storytelling and provided medium for which narrative transportation can occur. Storytelling in the nonprofit context, has the potential to highlight NPOs' unique strategic purpose to solving the global water crisis. Mitchell and Clark (2020) describe that NPOs can utilize storytelling to either stand out from the crowd (differentiation strategic purpose) or aim to provide the best solution (typicality strategic purpose) (p. 143). As a result, storytelling was a considerable component to uncovering how NPOs employed storytelling in co-created content to define their purpose.

3.4 Method of Analyses

3.4.1 *Qualitative Content Analysis*

The research employed Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) and Social Semiotic Analysis (SSA) as formulated by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) in Aiello & Parry (2020, p. 12) to observe how American water NPOs define their purpose through Instagram co-created posts. Theories outlined in the literature review served to guide the final coding frame which helped break down, compare, and categorize codes to answer the research question (Appendix A). QCA facilitated in discovering codes within the text-based captions, while SSA was utilized to uncover meanings and representations through visuals.

QCA is a way of looking at data based on relative significance of visual features or to look for patterns in content, by adding qualitative interpretation within analysis, with the aim of discovering manifested meanings and making inferences about latent meanings (Schreier,

2012, p. 6; Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 7). In other words, QCA allowed to reveal patterns in co-created content to describe meanings present in the posts and conclude meanings that have yet to be manifested. These meanings provide insights into the definition of NPOs purpose and communication strategies of their objectives. For example, a post of donors participating in a fundraising activity indicated that NPOs need funding to define and provide their service. On the other hand, latent meaning showed up in a post of a beneficiary and their family at home next to a water pump, indicating that water NPOs are concerned with providing long-lasting service to help generations to come. Latent meanings were discovered through the interpretative process, and thus, there is a higher chance of subjectivity.

QCA required a coding frame that is structured into categories and subcategories yielding themes found through data to help answer the research question. The coding frame sought to reduce bias as it increased transparency of findings and interpretations. Boeije (2010)'s open, axial, and selective coding can support the creation of coding frame (p. 96-118). The coding process involved selecting material, structuring and generating main and subcategories, defining categories, revising and expanding the frame (Schreier, 2012, p. 8).

To begin with the coding process, the researcher selected the posts from the three NPOs that contained co-creation, as outlined in the sampling section. Concepts operationalized in Section 3.3 assisted in generating main categories of co-created posts and their frequency of appearance. Although this research is not primarily interested in the numerical presence of patterns or concepts, having insight into the relative (co)-occurrences of co-creation types gave is valuable into the operational popularity of the various techniques. Following on, the theories of dialogic communication, storytelling, and co-creation help determine relevant words, phrases, and visual aspects in the sample during the process of breaking down, comparing, and selecting open codes. The next step involved determining which codes provided insight to how water NPOs have formed and communicated their purpose statements on Instagram. Finally, based on the relationships between axial codes, selective codes were discovered. For example, as caption texts were broken down into open codes, it was found that organizations used links to their websites. Based on the theoretical framework, links are means of measuring dialogic principles as they conserve users to engage with NPOs content (Wang & Yang, 2020, p. 2). As a result, conservation of users was discovered as a theme (axial code) and part of the dialogic communication (selective code) when considering its relationship with other axial codes found. The selective codes shed light in understanding how American water NPOs define their purpose statements in two-fold: the definition of their purpose and how the statements were communicated. To guide data

analysis in a fundamentally inductive research design, the literature review was kept in mind. Where QCA may yield rigid findings, SSA was employed to analyze the role of visuals in communicating NPOs' purpose. Employing two methods of analysis enriches the findings of the thesis by sharing different interpretations guided by the analysis tools.

3.4.2 Social Semiotic Analysis

Social Semiotic Analysis (SSA) looks at how people create images in different contexts (Aiello & Parry, 2020, p. 12). SSA was used to analyze visuals to inform the storytelling aspects communicated through images. The analysis looked at these three aspects: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings found through Aiello and Parry (2020, p. 12-14). *Representational* meaning informed what (broader) story was told through the co-created posts, which relate to how the posts tell the story of the global water crisis. *Interactive* meaning discovered what aspects of the images seemed to resonate with viewers and how (potential) donors might see themselves in the story, looking at, for example, posts that require a reaction from followers through graphic elements. *Compositional* meaning considered how visual elements were placed to represent meanings on Instagram posts. For example, posts with people in front of a faucet with a jug or jerry can near them were interpreted as representing the physical, mental, and emotional weight that people used to bear for having to spend hours collecting water. Through water NPOs' fulfilled objectives, however, beneficiaries no longer need to walk long distances to fetch water, which also signaled organizational focus in tackling the water crisis. SSA helped understand why NPOs use co-created posts to showcase their journey in tackling the issue of the global water crisis.

QCA and SSA were coupled to enhance analysis of data provided. When codes revealed through QCA was too rigid, SSA helped uncover the role of visuals and text together in the data (Aiello & Parry, 2020). The analyses helped discover themes and storytelling elements within both images and text on how the meanings of NPO mission statements are produced.

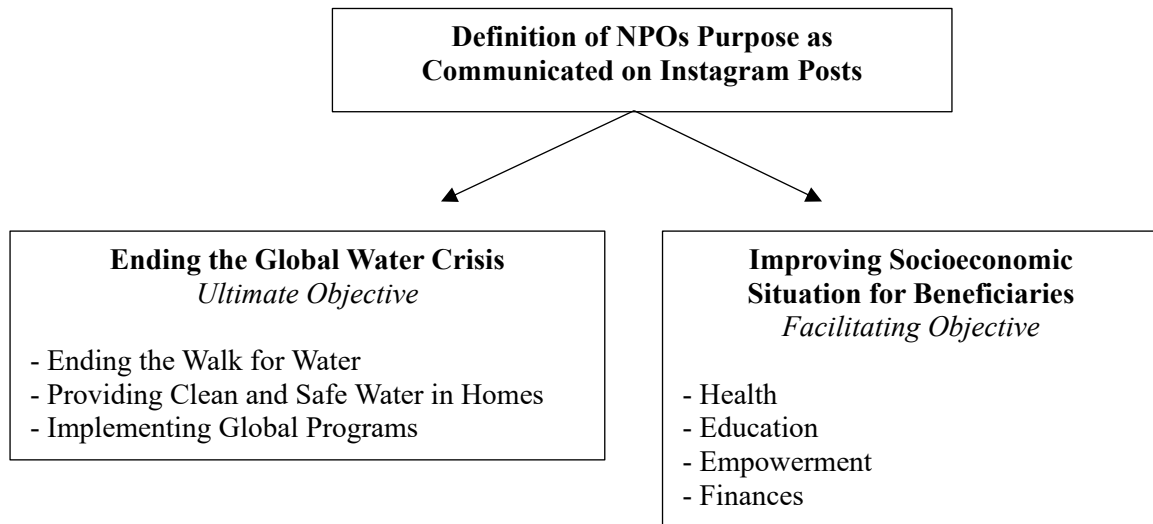
Chapter 4: Results

Whilst answering the research question how NPOs in the sample define their purpose, one must be aware that the ‘definition of purpose’ can be understood in a twofold manner: first, we can understand ‘the definition of purpose’ as a noun, i.e., the mission statements of NPOs. To infer this assertion of organization’s objective, this research looked at the self-claimed goal of NPOs’ endeavors that was communicated through Instagram content co-created by NPOs. Section 4.1 of the results analysis will describe through examples how the researcher inferred the self-defined objectives of water NPOs whilst analyzing Instagram content. Secondly, we can look at the ‘definition of purpose’ as a verb, i.e., the ways that NPOs purpose is communicated. Section 4.2 elaborates on the means exploited by NPOs to get their objectives across to audiences via the utilization of communicative strategies and means particularly 1) dialogic principles, 2) the power of co-creation, and 3) storytelling. Lastly, section 4.3 will present a social semiotic analysis of visuals that demonstrate how co-created images represent the global water crisis to attract donors through incorporating specific elements.

4.1 Defining Non-profit Organizations’ Objectives

Through analysis of the data, the author detected two definitions of water NPOs’ purpose in the sample. First, eighty-four posts were observed to describe NPOs’ possible desire to end the global water crisis, what the author deemed as their ultimate objective and structured into three themes: ending the walk for water, providing clean and safe water, and implementing global programs. Secondly, sixty-five posts were found to describe how health, education, empowerment, and finances contribute to socioeconomic situations of beneficiaries, viewed by the author as a facilitating objective. The structure of the two definitions of NPOs purpose derived from the sample is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Visualization for the Definition of NPOs' Purpose.



4.1.1 *Ultimate Objective: Ending the Global Water Crisis*

The ultimate objective of NPOs to end the global water crisis in the sample was identified as such because posts were found to recurrently mention organizational responses of NPOs to mitigate the water crisis, such as, 1) as ending the walk for water, 2) providing clean and safe water in homes, and 3) implementing global programs. As we will learn from the elaborations of all three topics, these sub-objectives fall under the umbrella goal of ‘ending the global water crisis’, since they clarify areas of focus as seen in the sample. The following closer examination of the sub-goals summarizes the main objective manifested by water NPOs in their Instagram posts which will give substance to the purpose definition identified as a core goal.

Ending the Walk for Water

Ending the walk for water was viewed as a sub-topic of the ultimate objective because nineteen out of the eighty-four NPO posts represented the issue of water collection, including emotional, physical, and mental burdens carried by beneficiaries, and organizational desire to end the walk for water. For example, a post by Charity Water below described the number of hours, frequency, and the journey it takes for beneficiaries to collect water:

39-year-old Devi used to spend four hours everyday walking through India’s Thar Desert to find and collect water for her family. Twice in the morning and twice in the evening, she’d trek over sandy dunes with a massive clay pot on her head. But not anymore. Today, a rainwater harvesting tank sits proudly in Devi’s front yard. What

used to take her hours now takes mere minutes. Generosity like yours brought the walking — and the worrying — to an end.

The example showed how having a rainwater harvesting tank, provided by the organization, was helpful in shortening the distance and time required to access water – which is assumed to contribute to bringing an end to the walk for water. Aside from NPOs reporting on their facilitation in building a new water system, the author also found that fundraising events were manifested as attempts for donor attraction to end the walk for water (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Co-organized fundraising event to stop the walk for water.



The post above by Charity Water showed a fundraising event co-organized by them and their brand partner, Aveda. The example informed donors of the physical burdens that beneficiaries endured to access water by stating it takes 3.7 miles for people to collect water. The researcher detected that the post suggested donor participation as a valuable way to bring water access to beneficiaries. Therefore, the author concluded that NPOs in the sample not only depicted the burden of water collection, but they also seemed to center their fundraising strategy around ending the walk for water. NPOs were observed to describe time as something one could give as collecting water took *time* away from beneficiaries. This observation was found in posts with captions, stating donors can “give time back” or “can give the gift of water”. NPOs in the sample seemed to illustrate that *time* is something tangible that donors can give to alleviate the burdens of collecting water. The author assumed that NPOs, through these captions, wanted to illustrate that because beneficiaries needed to walk to get water, they *lose time*, and that bringing time back was viewed as an organizational response. NPOs’ posts were found discuss how organizations and donors

could mitigate this issue. Therefore, we can conclude that ending the walk for water was an objective of water NPOs.

Providing Clean and Safe Water in Homes

Providing clean and safe water was included as a sub-topic of ending the global water crisis as an ultimate objective as thirty-five NPO posts were found to represent the issues of dirty water and organizational response of providing in house clean water systems. Scarcity in adequate quality water and poor sanitation and hygiene systems, may pose health risk for people (Drinking-water 2023, para. 3; Tzanakakis et al., 2020, p. 9). Figure 3 shows a woman filling up a jar with dirty water and Figure 4 describes the negative effects of contaminated water on health and finances.

Figure 3. Woman collecting water from unprotected or contaminated water source.

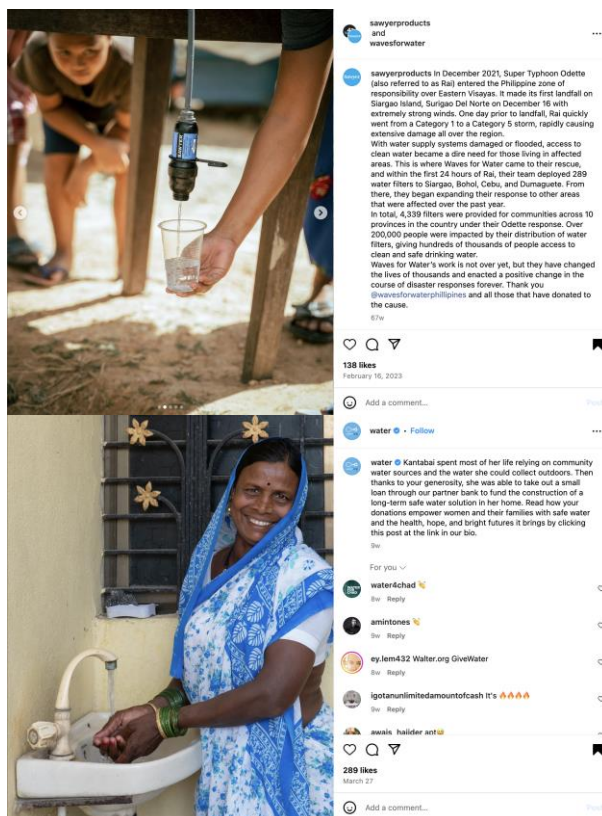


Figure 4. The lack of water's effects on health and financial situation.



From the examples above, the author made the inference that NPOs depicted the effects of dirty water as detrimental to livelihood because it causes diseases and requires people to frequently visit doctors. Moreover, Figure 4 alluded that clean water funded by donors could possibly help reduce consumption of contaminated water, thereby, decreasing the likelihood of contracting diseases. Therefore, the observation gathered from the sample was that NPOs seem to present clean water as a solution to the water crisis. This was also seen in posts that described how the provision of water filters, sinks, and pumps by NPOs would solve the issue by promoting sanitation and hygiene in homes. Figure 5 shows examples of water systems in place to provide clean water in homes.

Figure 5. Examples of water systems at use.



Through the examples above, the definition of NPOs' purpose in ending the global water crisis was observed to include providing clean and safe water as an organizational response to the crisis. The negative effects of dirty water on health and finances could be assumed as a motivation for NPOs to install water systems with clean water in beneficiaries' homes.

Implementing Global Programs

Implementing global programs were observed as part of NPOs purpose definition in twenty-eight posts which mentioned countries they are active in. Country names were found in captions, hashtags, and images throughout the sample. Figure 6 demonstrates the impact of Charity Water's brand partner's fundraising event to provide clean water in the listed countries.

Figure 6. Countries listed in the post caption.

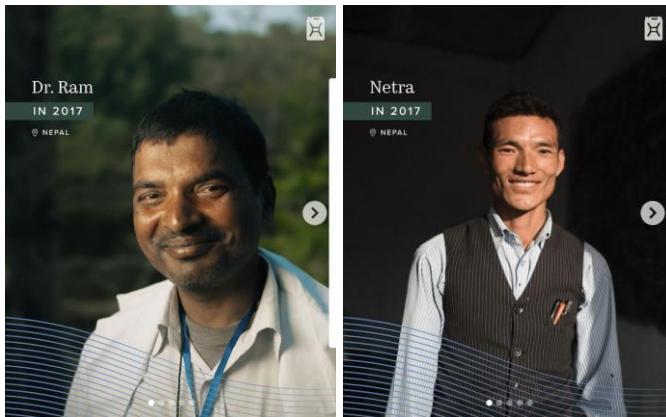


The example above described that previous donations have gone to Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mali, and Malawi. Interpreting these posts, it was assumed that NPOs in the sample may have had or currently have programs in cooperation with communities in the countries mentioned.

Hashtags were also found in the sample which informed viewers of places NPOs are working in. For example, the author found that Water.org utilized *#WhereWeWork* to categorize content that informed the countries they are currently working. In contrast, Waves for Water incorporated *#Madagascar* to inform the specific country with active programs.

Lastly, country names were also observed in images to inform viewers beneficiaries are. For example, Charity Water added *Nepal* on a post accompanied by a pin drop or location illustration (Figure 7). The author viewed the examples to imply NPOs presence in that country because the post discussed how people in that country experienced the organizational services.

Figure 7. Examples of visuals with pin-drop illustration indicating the country of NPO's program.



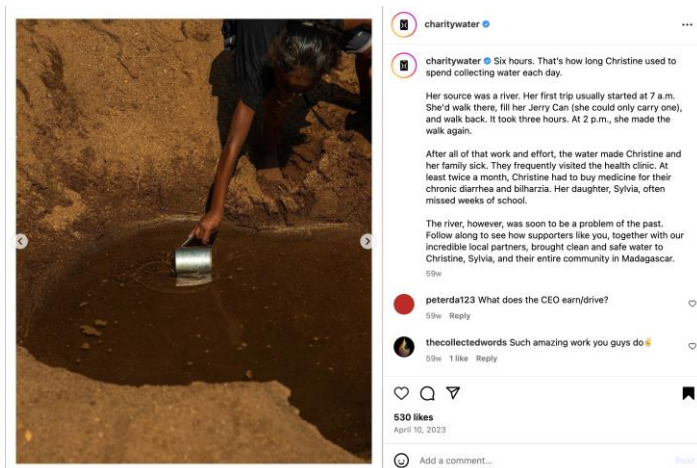
The examples above made us assume that NPOs have active programs in the countries mentioned through their Instagram posts. From the examples, the author concluded that NPOs' goal to end the water crisis required them to have active global programs.

4.1.2 Facilitating Objective: Improving Socioeconomic Situations for Beneficiaries

NPOs in the sample were observed to communicate improving socioeconomic situations as facilitating objective of ending the global water crisis. Sixty-five posts in total were found, with twenty-one posts focusing on health, twelve posts on education, fourteen posts on economic empowerment, twelve posts on affordable financing. The author gathered that NPOs use co-created posts to communicate how tackling these issues contribute to the ultimate objective of ending the water crisis.

Firstly, posts in the sample were found to discuss the effects of water on people's health and livelihoods. Figure 8 demonstrates how Charity Water communicated that collecting water from rivers made people get chronic diarrhea and bilharzia and that help from donors brought an end to their sicknesses.

Figure 8. Effects of water on health.



The example above implies that through cooperation between donors and NPOs, providing access to water could potentially alleviate health issues, and influence school attendance. Relatedly, Figure 9 describes that having access to water not only increases school enrollment because of better water quality, but also reduces the need to collect water elsewhere.

Figure 9. Water collection affects school attendance and access to education.



Figure 10 also describes how the diminished need to walk for water enabled people to feel empowered as they become entrepreneurs and expand social activities. As seen below, the woman spends her time collecting food orders to support her family instead of collecting water.

Figure 10. Clean water supports women’s economic empowerment.



The examples above implicitly imply areas of focus for NPOs in tackling their ultimate objective. The mentions of socioeconomic effects, i.e., health and livelihood, increased school enrollment, and women’s economic empowerment, seen in Figures 8-10 were viewed as NPOs’ attempt to illustrate the water crisis as a cross-cutting issue. A direct economic contribution, however, was found in the sample related to providing affordable financing for beneficiaries. Figures 11 shows an example of Water.org’s response to lighten the financial burden of beneficiaries to access safe water systems in their homes through loans.

Figure 11. Affordable financing helps get access to water.



From the example above, the author concurred that through Instagram posts, NPOs communicated financial loans as a possible solution to end the water crisis.

From the sample, it seemed that for water NPOs, confronting health, education, empowerment, and finances were important issues required to end the water crisis. By incorporating these topics into their purpose, we assumed that NPOs goal to target the

socioeconomic effects by providing clean water was a means to achieve their ultimate objective. Illustrating how the water crisis affects socioeconomic situations can be seen as NPOs' attempt to share information and build relationships with potential donors. We make this assumption because sharing information about purpose, programs, and progress to donors contributes to stakeholders perception of accountability (Tripathi & Velma, 2017, p. 5). NPOs' ability to be transparent to donors helps in reaching a wider network and builds trust in existing donors (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019, p. 11; Amelia & Dewi, 2021, p. 322). Visualizing how NPOs allocate funds to target different socioeconomic issues can help donors understand how their money is being used and gain trust in the organizations (Tripathi & Velma, 2017, p. 5).

The purpose presented in the sample of NPOs' SM posts somewhat reflect mission statements found on NPOs websites (Table 1). The main parallel is that SM posts described NPOs aim to end the water crisis by providing clean water. NPOs in the sample differed in their approach to achieving that goal, which were also found in the posts. For example, Water.org emphasized affordable financing and short-term loans which were found in thirteen posts. Secondly, only one post reflected Waves for Water's aim to deliver water-focused emergency response. Lastly, nine posts by Charity Water highlighted local partnerships which reflected their unique approach. Improving socioeconomic issues were found in the sample but not mentioned in the mission statement. Perhaps NPOs may view socioeconomic topics as effects of achieving their purpose rather than focus areas that support in fulfilling their mission

4.2 How Non-profit Organizations Communicate Their Objectives

SM proved to be a powerful tool of communication for NPOs to communicate their mission to stakeholders as it is low-cost, easy-to-use, and include various interactive features (Akatay et al., 2017, p. 65). The following section discusses the various strategies water NPOs in the sample employed to generate donorship, namely, 1) dialogic principles, 2) co-creation of content, and 3) storytelling.

4.2.1 Dialogic Communication

The presence of four dialogic principles were found in posts from NPOs in the sample. (Co)-occurrences across the sample are recorded in Table 3, including overlap of

multiple principles in one post. Findings in the sample of each principle are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Usefulness of Information

Information that is useful pertains to what NPOs assumed the public or their donors would want to know from them. Posts in the sample that discussed the water crisis, organizational services and activities, program locations, practical donation information, and organizational impact were considered useful for viewers and found in 101 posts.

The author observed that the type of information deemed useful for NPOs were related to donor attraction. For example, information about NPOs' cause, work, and impact would help donors decide to donate. Figure 12 states that, “girls and women spend an estimated 200 million hours collecting water” to describe the water crisis. In response, the example by Charity Water informed that viewers could learn more about how to mitigate the problem on their website.

Figure 12. Using statistics to illustrate the water crisis.



Moreover, informing donors on *where* the services were delivered, as seen in Figure 15, was considered an important piece of information that NPOs want donors to know. What can be concluded is that NPOs wanted to communicate that they are active globally, therefore, informing donors about the countries they worked in was viewed as useful information.

Figure 13. Information about NPOs work in different countries.



Both Figures 12 and 13 are examples of information NPOs assumed donors would want to know, i.e., organizational cause, service/activity, location, and impact. We assumed this because these topics would be important for when donors decide to donate, given the recurrent presence of such information all throughout the sample. Sharing information on various fundraising campaigns could be observed as satisfying potential donors' need to know practical donation information. Knowing “you can join them by becoming a monthly donor to water.org today,” or “100% of your donation will help bring clean and safe water to people around the world,” as mentioned in posts by Water.org and Charity Water, are both examples of useful information about the organizations' donation systems which can aid viewers' donation decision.

This sub-section showed examples of how NPOs communicated information they assumed the public would want to know and is recurrently used to satisfy stakeholders' need for information (Watkins, 2017, p. 64). The use of this technique in post-sharing seems to provide an opportunity to articulate NPOs' purpose to donors by sharing relevant information.

Conservation of Visitor

Conservation of visitor is understood in the way water NPOs in the sample encourage viewers to keep visiting their content by providing links to their profiles and websites. This principle was found 104 times in the sample in the form of website and profile links, hashtags, and frequency of posts. Charity Water's use of website links in their post, “Then, help us end her walk for water — and thousands more — by giving at charitywater.org today,” is an example of how links can inform donors on where to donate and direct them to

the homepage of the organization's website. By incorporating website links in captions, NPOs enable viewers to explore the organization's services and attempt to keep them from visiting other organizations' sites and profiles (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 338). In contrast, Water.org directed followers to their profiles to "...read why Elma's long walks for water are over by clicking this post linked from our profile". Although not as explicit, navigating to its own Instagram profile can have the same result as website links. Directing and keeping viewers on the organizations' profiles or websites are examples that hint upon the objective of conserving visitors (Arslan, 2019, p. 87), meaning that NPOs may have employed these strategies to motivate users to view related content and find more information.

Similarly, the use of hashtags such as *#WhereWeWork* and *#Madagascar* were found to keep viewers engaged in a certain topic and solicit further exploration of a theme. By tapping on the hashtag, users could explore related content posted by NPOs found on the results page as another way of keeping them hooked and engaged. The downside of having a generic hashtag could be that that non-organizational related content may also appear in the results, since any user can post anything using the same hashtags. NPOs seemed to have circumvented the blurring of hashtag use by adding an organizational hashtag to their posts, such as *#charitywater* or *#wavesforwater*. Incorporating a unique hashtag, as used repetitively within the sample of posts, could strengthen the measurement for conservation of visitor principles, because all the content would pertain to the organization.

Lastly, the frequency of posting by an organization was also considered as means to conserve visitors, because the generation of active profiles was found to facilitate in keeping stakeholders on the page (Arslan, 2019, p. 93). Table 1 describes the posting frequency of each organization. On average, NPOs in the sample posts 4.96 times per week. Regular posting of minimum three posts per week could help increase chances of reaching wider audience and resonating with them (Macready, 2024, para. 3). Therefore, the author concluded that posting almost five days a week can be considered a good indication conservation of users by NPOs.

The principle of conservation of visitors pertains to the ways NPOs in the sample contain their viewers on their web and social networking sites. Navigation to website or profiles, hashtags, and frequent posting could have assisted in exposing stakeholders to other organizational content containing NPOs' purpose. Having informational content could help motivate donors to return to the sites and engage in dialogue.

Generation of Return Visitors

Generation of return visitor is concerned with encouraging repeated interactions between NPOs and donors to build relationship and generate donations. This principle occurred twenty-one times in the sample through the observance of posts with fundraising reports and donor appreciation. For example, the following example by Water.org thanked donors for their impact:

Thanks to our generous donors, Sally was able to invest in the health and well-being of her family by getting access to safe water at home, providing greater resilience to sickness and diseases.

The example can be viewed as organizational attempt to maintain interactions with donors by appreciating donors' contribution. Donor appreciation could encourage return visitors because highlighting their efforts could inform donors of their impact and make them feel good. Another way NPOs were observed to show their appreciation is through creating visuals highlighting individual donors and their contribution as seen in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Visual example for donor appreciation posts to generate return of visitors.



NPOs were also observed to encourage return of visitors by sharing updates on fundraising efforts and progress. Figure 15 is an example by Charity Water informing donor achievement. The post signaled that there was a period between the announcement of the fundraising campaign and the result, which we could assume a strategy to bring donors back to their profile to find out the outcome.

Figure 15. Generation of visitor through fundraising report.



Reports on fundraising efforts and the impact of donations are assumed to encourage donors and viewers to return to NPOs posts or profiles. Because this type of informational post requires time to create, donor appreciation motivates users to visit the site on several occasions at a time (Arslan, 2019, p. 88). Donor appreciation was, therefore, viewed to generate return of visitors because they may want recognition for their contributions on NPOs profile. Repeated interactions measured in the generation of return visitors provides a way to build relationships with donors and set a foundation for dialogue.

Dialogic Loop

Dialogic loop principle pertains to inferences of dialogue between NPOs and stakeholders through Instagram posts. From the sample, thirty-four instances of dialogic loop were recorded. Linguistic choices encouraging dialogue were found through rhetorical questions, second-person perspective, and call-to-action phrases.

Scholars measured dialogic loop based on NPOs responsiveness to stakeholders by searching the comment sections for questions and replies by both parties (Arslan, 2019, p. 88; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 338; Wang & Yang, 2020, p. 6). The thesis, however, did not collect comments as data because the goal is to understand communication strategies employed by NPOs to attract donors only, not the effect of dialogic conversations in the comment sections on donation intention. Nonetheless, manifestations of dialogic loop were present in implicit ways through rhetorical questions, second-person perspective, and call-to-action messages. Though not as explicitly as the other principles, the presence of dialogic loop in posts was assumed to be added with the purpose of donor solicitation, like the example from Charity Water:

To see how Abrehet's day looks during the dry season, download our shared Google Calendar here: cwtr.org/WWDCalendar. Then compare it to your own and ask yourself: What would you have to give up to make time for water?

The example above demonstrates a rhetorical question posed by Charity Water to make viewers answer the question for themselves. Although this type of questions does not require a direct reply through comments, it appears as opportunity for user response (Kim et al., 2014, p. 597). We assume that NPOs attempted to start dialogue by asking viewers to answer the question for themselves hoping they would consider donating.

Dialogic interaction in the posts were found in NPOs captions with second-person perspectives whereby viewers were referred as 'you'. A post by Charity Water using, "We're inspired by you," and "If you are [inspired] too, you can join Mitchell and Corban to help fund clean water..." hinted at them speaking directly to the reader and breaking the fourth wall. It seemed as if NPOs were shifting the responsibility to the reader in which, "You can help empower women and their families...with hope, health, and opportunity that flow from safe water." The intention for referring to viewers as 'you' were considered by the author as a way for NPOs to invite them into a dialogue, hoping it would lead to donation.

Lastly, call-to-action phrases were considered dialogic because we assume that call-to-action messages were utilized to require a response of participation. Posts with text saying, "Message us at philippines@wavesforwater.org to learn more about the work we do..." or "Click this post linked from our profile to read Leah's story" are examples of action that NPOs seem to expect from donors, which was either to visit their website to learn their work or read a story.

The observation for dialogic loop does not reflect the literature that measured this principle through commenting and responding (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 338; Wang & Yang, 2020, p. 2) or enabling followers to ask questions with a guaranteed reply (Arslan, 2019, p. 95). Although dialogic loop was not observed as explicitly, it was observed by implicitly starting internal conversations with viewers, leaving them with food for thought in the form of questions. Further research into the intentions behind including dialogic loop by NPOs might serve to enrich NPO use of dialogic principles. The current analysis was however limitedly focused on how dialogic loop show up in the sample. Although the analysis does not include how the principle explicitly trigger dialogue between water NPOs, they are viewed as opportunities for user response. The examples have shown how NPOs

may have incorporated linguistic choices in their purpose communication to incite some kind of response from users.

4.2.2 The Power of Co-Creation

Co-creation of content is defined within the marketing literature as the collaborative process between two actors that produce shared value for both parties (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014, p. 208; Sorensen 2017, p. 899). Shared values range from ideas, knowledge, products, services, and in the case of water NPOs, donations, stories, and SM content. The following section provides observations of co-creation between NPOs in the sample and their stakeholders found through Instagram posts. The extent of cooperation is discussed to understand how co-creation supports NPOs’ purpose communication, the type of partnerships, and level of involvement in co-authorship. Findings on the different types of co-authors in co-creation are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. (Co-)occurrences of co-creation in posts.

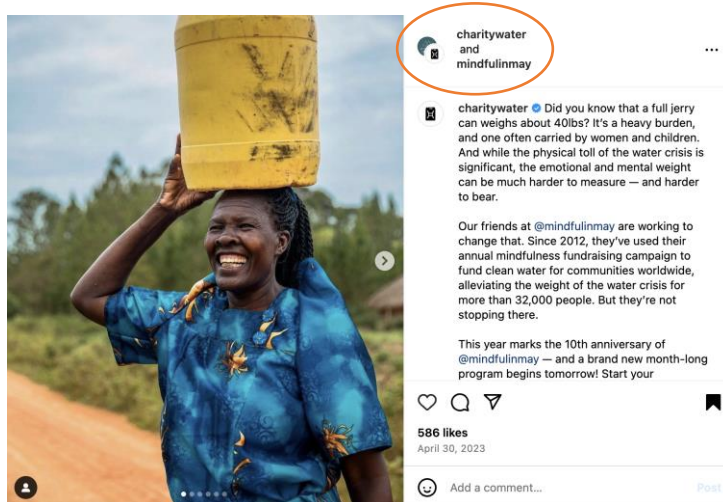
NPOs’ Co-Authors in Content Creation	Number of Occurrences in the Sample
Artists (photographer, fine artists)	4
Beneficiaries	58
Brand Partners	16
Donors	16
Internal Stakeholders	4
Local Communities/Other NPOs	10
Artist & Beneficiaries	6
Brand Partner & Beneficiaries	3
Internal Stakeholder & Beneficiaries	1

Collaboration Post

Firstly, observations of *Collaboration Post* must be clarified. *Collaboration Post* is an Instagram feature where content by different collaborators’ account names can appear on a post (Hirose, 2023, para. 4). The feature indicates that a post has multiple co-authors that agreed to have the content shown on their profiles. Although only five posts were considered, like in Figure 16 where two accounts, Charity Water and Mindful in May, were shown as the

post's authors, the feature reveals that Instagram makes room for co-creation (Sorensen et al., 2017, p. 902).

Figure 16. Example of Collaboration Post.



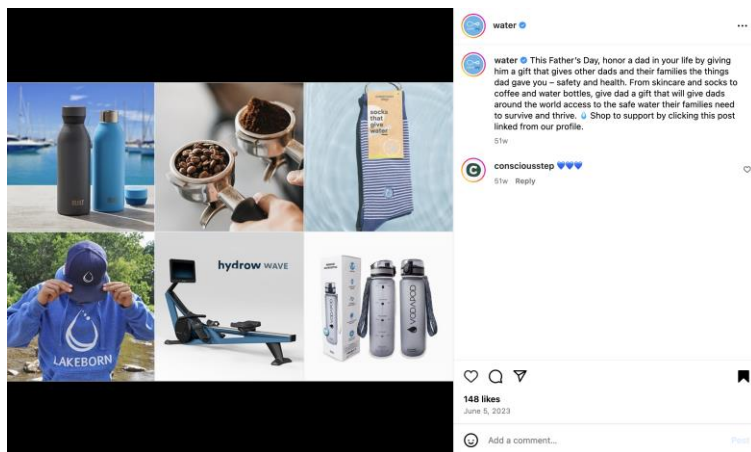
From a content production perspective, we assumed that there was low-level of co-authoring because although some interaction could be required to choose what content to upload, but *collaboration posts* are only published consent was given to allow the post to appear on individual profiles (Hirose, 2023, para. 4). While the actual producer is unknown, we assumed there was little co-authoring as it would only require checking for consent.

For water NPOs, *collaboration posts* would allow them to tap into a new network of potential donors, while their collaborator may benefit from promoting their business through NPOs' profiles. It provides opportunities for information sharing and donation solicitation. Although the type of posting is a new Instagram feature, it is noteworthy to mention because it pertains to the growing practice of co-creation on SM (Hirose, 2023, para. 4-5). SM sites are now the 'hosts' for co-created content (Sorensen et al., 2017, p. 902). Although co-creation with users is understood as user-generated content, co-creation within the sample were found to include donors, brands, and other nonprofits.

Brand Partner

Co-creation with brand partners was observed between NPOs and business. Co-produced posts with brands related to fundraising occurred sixteen times across the sample. Figure 17 demonstrates NPOs' partnership with varying brands and can be seen as a fundraising campaign for donors to purchase products as a form of donation.

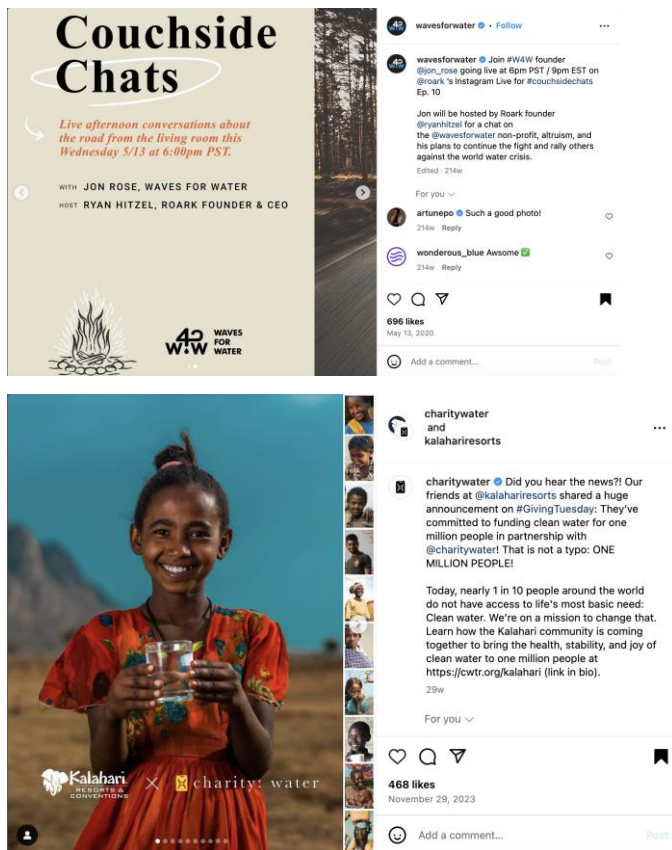
Figure 17. Fundraising campaign through product purchases.



The type of products found in Figure 17 could suggest that brand partners are mission-aligned or have products that NPOs think donors would enjoy. What is noticeable is that some of the products presented in the posts are related to water, e.g., water bottle, skin care, coffee, toilet cover. The author assumed that NPOs were intentional in their partnership strategy to articulate their mission. Stock images of the products inferred that both parties were not heavily involved, therefore, considered as low co-authoring.

Posts about co-organized events were also found to be an avenue for brand partnerships. Figure 18 depicts online talk event and fundraising campaign, showing the contribution of brand partners.

Figure 18. Event announcement between NPOs and corporate partners.



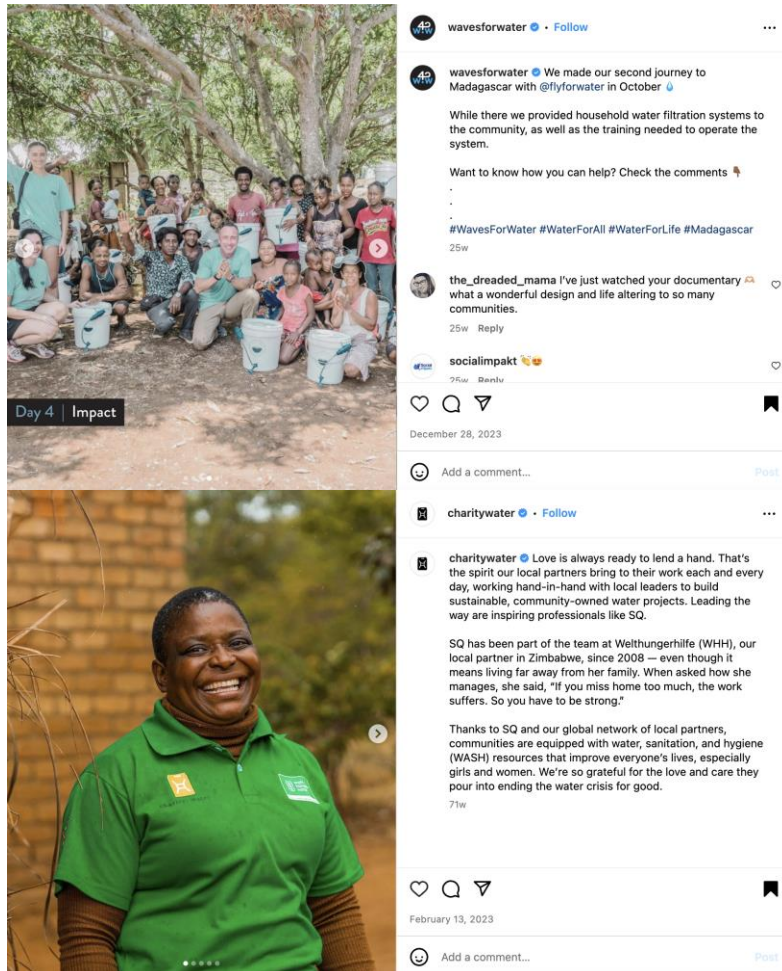
In contrast to Figure 17, Figure 18 seemed to present heavier involvement between NPOs and brand partners because event organizing would require multiple interactions. Moreover, the presence of both Charity Water and Kalahari’s logos in Figure 18 could indicate equal responsibility of the event and content production. The intention for co-creating with brand partners could be seen as NPOs’ strategy to achieving their purpose by reaching new audiences and attracting donors. For brand partners, nonprofit collaboration could increase their revenue while maintaining a positive brand (Burton et al., 2017, p. 323). Co-creation through co-branding has proved to positively influence a company’s brand image by engaging in socially responsible practices (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018, p. 985, Burton et al., 2017, p. 323). In summary, co-creation with brands vary in involvement depending on organizational goal and the type of post.

Local Communities and Other Nonprofit Organizations

Co-creation between NPOs and local communities and other nonprofits were found ten times in the sample, involving program partners and local communities. Figure 19 shows

the partnership between Waves for Water and Fly for Water, and Charity Water and Welthungerhilfe, in building community-owned water projects.

Figure 19. Evidence for co-created content with nonprofit organizations.



The example suggests a high involvement of cooperation between water NPOs, and their program partners seen in the post since they work together to build water projects. The presence of partners' logos can also be viewed as both actors heavily contributing to the projects.

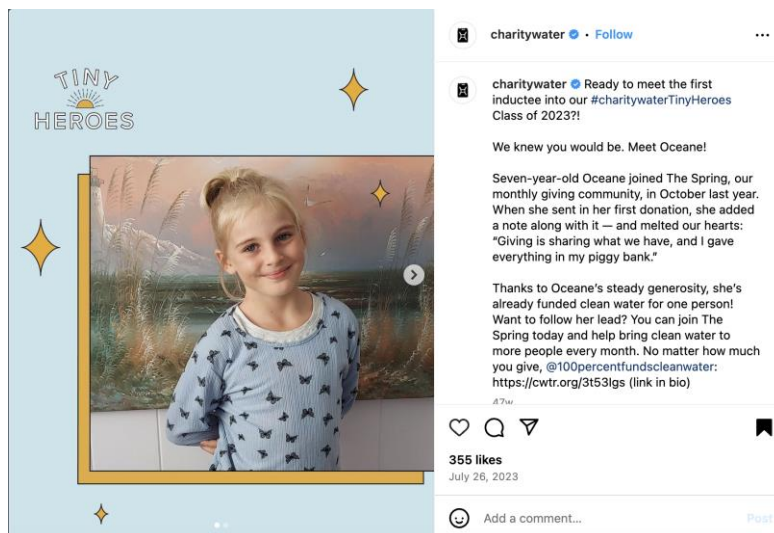
In addition to working together with other organizations, NPOs in the sample also communicated their collaboration with local community members. For example, Water.org worked with the Rwamburi Water Committee to “replace the time their community members spent collecting water...” By mentioning their cooperation with local communities and partnering with beneficiaries, like Charity Water did in having Tulasi as the secretary of his community’s water committee in Nepal, the author observed that these co-created posts have high-level of co-authoring. Sharing stories and updates of community members through posts

can be viewed as fundraising strategy with a shared value outcome. Resources, e.g., stories, updates, and funding, produced by each actor can be viewed as the shared value of co-creation (Sorensen, 2017, p. 899). Co-produced content with local communities and program partners could be intended to increase trust with donors because the posts communicate NPOs' program progress and inform donors how their donations are being utilized (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, p. 5). In summary, high-level of co-authoring was found in posts with local partners with NPOs reporting their work to generate funding for projects.

Private Donors

Co-authoring with private donors occurred sixteen times in the sample, and considered as UGC because it involved donors' photos and story submissions. For example, Figure 20 shows photo and quotes submission from a donor.

Figure 20. Co-authoring between NPOs and private donors.



Posts in the sample considered as UGC hinted that there was high-level of cooperation because NPOs could decide what content to post whilst donors as users provide the content in photos or quotes. In this case, NPOs' role as co-author is viewed as curator of stories who employed donors to help formulate their purpose (Fujita, 2019, p. 52). The responsibility of producing content seemed to fall on donors, making them co-authors. Choosing to employ UGC could be seen as NPOs' effort in increasing their credibility among viewers because donors do not get any monetary benefit in return of their contribution whilst sharing co-created content could show that NPOs are invested in their donors as well (Tian et al., 2019, p. 491-492).

Artists and Internal Stakeholders

A total of fifteen co-created content with other notable groups stakeholders were found with external stakeholders (photographers and artists) and internal (founders and task force). Artist collaboration was observed to exemplify that co-creation is about sharing ownership of stories, not of product or services, about artists' lived-in experiences of NPOs (Fujita et al., 2019, p. 52). Figure 21 demonstrates the collaboration between artists and NPOs in the sample in an art exhibition.

Figure 21. Examples of partnership between artist and NPOs.



The post above by Charity Water lets us believe that there is high involvement with artists, where they provided story and products for the art exhibit. The researcher would classify this type of collaboration as UGC because NPOs seemed to identify certain individuals to tell the organization's story while still choosing how their collaboration and purpose are communicated on SM (Fujita et al., 2019, p. 52).

Collaboration with photographers were observed in NPOs using the photos to communicate their purpose and tagging the photographers' account names. Figure 22 is an example by Charity Water using and tagging photos with respective photographers' Instagram names.

Figure 22. Evidence of co-creation with photographers.



Co-authoring from photographers was found to be limited to producing the images, assuming NPOs decide which photos communicate their purpose best. Like private donors, however, photographers' contribution can be viewed as valuable in providing a different perspective to NPOs purpose because it considers the photographers' point-of-view. Collaboration with artists and photographers gave insight into contested ownership in VCC as organizations may not have sole ownership in the products produced this group (Sadyk & Islam, 2022, p. 2-3). In summary, NPOs were found to communicate their purpose borrowing varying perspectives from their creative partners.

Internal Stakeholder

Maintaining ownership of content would be possible if NPOs co-produced content with people within their network, such as employees. Four posts in the sample were categorized where NPOs published posts with their founders and task force. Figures 23 and 24 are examples where quotes from founders were used in posts and task force was highlighted to inform organizational work.

Figure 23. Example of co-creation with founders.

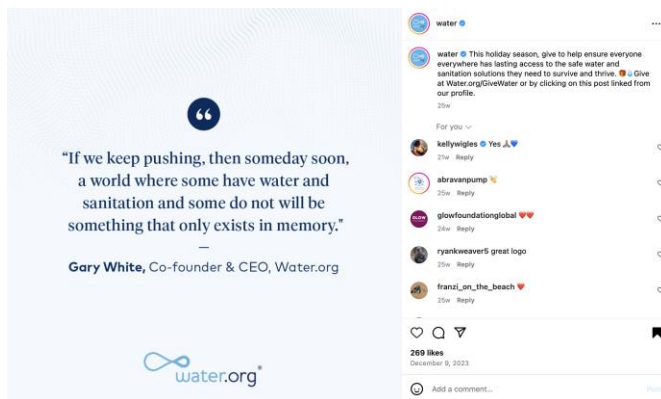


Figure 24. Evidence for co-creation with internal task force.



Figure 23 demonstrates examples Water.org as highly involved actors in co-creation process as they created quotes. The author assumed that sharing this type of post would appeal to viewers because information about organizational leaders and their motivations could be seen as strategy to build trust among external stakeholders (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, p. 5).

Figure 24 displays veterans as Waves for Water's task force which informed the people involved in achieving organizational purpose. We assumed NPOs' intention was to build donor confidence by sharing how their resources could contribute to the mission (Tripathi & Verma, 2017, p. 5). Although some shared value can be found through the posts, i.e., information and experience sharing for donations solicitation, the researcher considered this a low-level involvement because internal stakeholders are employed by the organizations and already share the same mission. In summary, co-creation can occur within and outside organizations. Observing how NPOs collaborate with external versus internal stakeholders

could give insight to how NPOs may tailor their post. How they both hinder or encourage donorship could be an interesting topic of study.

Beneficiaries

While previous sections discussed differing stakeholder groups, the following section discusses an important NPO stakeholder: beneficiaries. Fifty-eight posts involving beneficiaries were found as co-created content because they take part in co-authoring their experiences of NPO services on SM through images and stories. For example, Figure 25 shows a post by Charity Water with beneficiary testimony of how clean and safe water changed their lives.

Figure 25. Evidence for co-creation with beneficiaries through stories and testimonies.



Through the example, we assumed that NPOs employed storytelling to inform viewers about their work to generate positive donor performance, by sharing the positive effects of clean water provided (Mang et al., 2021, p. 145; Robiady et al., 2021, p. 497-498). Both beneficiaries and NPOs are considered co-authors. Beneficiaries in the post shared their story of water scarcity and life after receiving clean water, which the organization then crafted into a post. Testimonial stories can be viewed as donor solicitation. Storytelling is in this case, the product of the co-creation process between water NPOs and beneficiaries.

Co-occurrences between three co-authors were found in ten posts between NPOs in the sample, beneficiary, and one other group (i.e., artist/brand partner/internal stakeholder) as seen in Table 3. For example, Figure 26 displays a fundraising campaign post by Charity Water where they highlighted Smile Generation's, a dental savings plan company,

contribution using photographs of beneficiaries. In this example, NPOs play the ‘curator’ role by using beneficiaries as leading characters in their storytelling (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 293). Therefore, the author concluded that NPOs play the ‘curator’ role by selecting appropriate images, ‘co-organizer’ role by announcing the fundraising campaign, and ‘co-producer’ of the post by communicating how the campaign support their purpose.

Figure 26. Charity Water’s post with Smile Generation using Beneficiaries’ photographs.



To conclude this section, the main findings of the use of co-creation by NPOs in the sample tell us that the level of collaboration depended on the co-authors and the type of posts. NPOs in the sample were observed to exploit varying perspectives of external and internal stakeholders to communicate their mission. Co-authoring with external stakeholder can be viewed as high-level of cooperation because it required more interactions and resources, i.e., content submission, donations, and time, to produce the post. Moreover, different stakeholders’ messages may resonate differently with varying target audiences. For example, donor fundraising content could inspire viewers to donate or other donors to increase donation. Co-production with internal stakeholders was viewed as low level of cooperation because they are missioned-aligned and require less outsourcing of content. Beneficiary testimonials were found to reflect storytelling of their experiences of NPOs services. The next section dives into how storytelling was employed as a communication strategy to attract donors.

4.2.3 The Role of Storytelling

Storytelling as a communication strategy was found in NPO posts and presumed to incite donor intention. This section discusses the storytelling elements found in the post,

including how user-generated stories as co-created content show up in practice, and observations of narrative transportation.

Forty-eight posts with storytelling elements were found in the sample which contained character, conflict, and resolution. Figure 27 provides an example with elements of storytelling. *Character* was observed in the names of stakeholders which leads the authors to believe they were the subject of the story. *Conflict* was understood as the challenge that the character goes through in the story, which was found in them facing the negative effects of the global water crisis on the subject (i.e., difficulty in accessing quality water) and organizational challenge of fundraising. *Resolution* was found in the invitation to participate or donate as an approach to solve the conflict (Mang et al., 2021, p. 148). The story content is categorized as benefits as it incorporates testimonials of NPOs services. 5 briefly outlines the storytelling elements found in Figure 20.

Figure 27. Example of Storytelling elements.



Table 5. Breakdown of storytelling elements using Figure 29 as an example.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Conflict</i>	<i>Resolution</i>
<i>Tulasi</i> , beneficiary and secretary of his communities' water committee.	<i>Inadequate access to water</i> brought hardship for him and his family.	<i>Clean water system</i> provided by Charity Water.

From the example above, Tulasi was revealed as the character, the conflict pertained to the effect of water scarcity on his family, especially as his children could not attend school.

The resolution was presented in the having a water system which also allowed his children to move to the city for their studies.

While direct quotations suggested that Tulasi may have played a role in co-creating the post by providing a testimony, the images can be viewed to present the organization as the author in the story making process. The photo and illustrations were professional produced, which perhaps mean that NPOs were the producer of the visual. In contrast, user-generated stories from donors like in Figure 28, may be less perceived as professional but more personal.

Figure 28. Donor content as user-generated content.



The example above shows a post of two donors describing how they combined running with fundraising. The image seemed to be less professional than Figure 27, as it could have been submitted by the donors. The post included direct quotes, which was assumed to come directly from donors. If we assumed NPOs play the ‘curator’ role in co-creation, it could relate to the observation that NPOs fear the loss of control how the organization is perceived (Fujita et al., 2019, p. 2019; Oksiutyecz & Mwadiwa, 2023, p. 100). In other words, although co-creation was evident in certain aspects of content production in the sample, stories were still told from the NPOs’ perspective. Therefore, the organization may play a lead co-author role whilst choosing content that fit their mission from stakeholders. Nonetheless, NPOs employed first-person storytelling by incorporating direct quotes from donors, partners, and beneficiaries. This could be seen as an attempt to influence positive emotions and promote altruism among donors (Robiady et al., 2021, p. 498). Figure 28 demonstrates that UGC is produced within the control of NPOs. To appeal to donors, NPOs in the sample may have

employed stories from stakeholders to create trust and influence positive donor intention among their target audiences (Hajli et al., 2017, p. 139). Co-created donor content within NPO posts can conclude that organizations are curators but does not confirm that donors are the lead characters of their brand story (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 293). Instead, Figure 30 shows beneficiaries as the lead characters in NPOs' stories.

The effect of storytelling on audience transportation as an effect cannot be measured in this thesis as it requires quantitative experimental research. However, we assumed that the posts are designed to illicit transportation by publishing *carousel* posts that would allow sets of images to be published one post. The aim of transportation is to engage audience in the story and promote donation. Figure 29 shows that different angles in a set of photos attempted to transport donors into the story of a girl at school. The photos may have been employed to communicate a visually holistic definition of NPOs' purpose in providing water so that girls can spend time learning instead of collecting water.

Figure 29. Set of photos of a girl's daily life.



In summary, NPOs in the sample were observed to employ storytelling to generate donations by using direct quotes and photo sets. Direct quotes were found to provide a first-person perspective. Whereas photo sets were viewed to give incite narrative transportation by incorporating different angles and backgrounds. Although co-authoring in the story may have been present in the posts due to direct quotes, NPOs' role as the content curator of their pages deemed themselves as the lead storyteller, to maintain control over messages and brand image on SM.

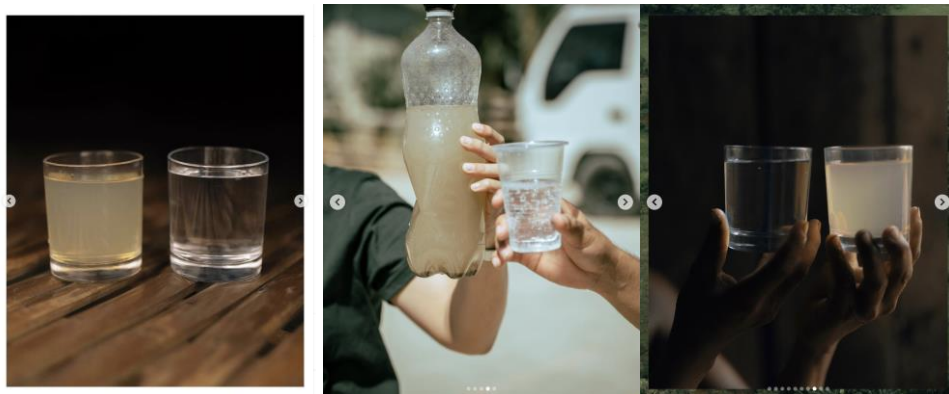
4.3 Visual Analysis

A second analysis was employed to strengthen the research and provide insights from visuals into how NPOs employed co-created content to define their purpose and attract donors. Social semiotic analysis (SSA) guided the observations of images to understand how visual elements were leveraged for storytelling that would resonate with potential donors. Representational, interactive, and compositional aspects suggested that NPOs utilized stories to determine their role and viewers' role in achieving the purpose communicated through the posts.

Representational

Representational aspect of SSA asks what the broader story is being told through NPOs' co-created posts. The story presented by the posts was found to communicate that clean water has the potential to transform lives, through the collective effort of NPOs and stakeholders. An image of two glasses – one filled with dirty water and the other with clean water – in Figure 33 can be viewed to represent the stark contrast of life before and after clean water. The author assumed that NPOs attempted to simultaneously depict health threats of dirty water and opportunities that clean water provides through the images. This inference was made because the posts linked dirty water with diseases, and clean water with opportunities (Figure 30).

Figure 30. Representation of water transforming lives – from dirty to clean.



The examples above could be viewed as NPOs' visual manifestation of the perceived purpose, to bring clean and safe water to mitigate the global water crisis. Additionally, the example could possibly explain how NPOs view the role of donors, partners, and other stakeholders in achieving their goal. Meaning, staging the two glasses together may have

been an attempt to incite reaction from viewers to feel a sense of responsibility or empathy to change the situation. The message conveyed by the author was that while clean water transforms lives, it cannot be achieved alone and that it requires collective effort between NPOs and stakeholders. How NPOs attempted to bring different stakeholders aboard was seen through appealing to their emotions.

Interactive

The interactive aspect of SSA requires the researcher to reflect on what aspects of the visuals would resonate with viewers and how viewers would see themselves as part of the story. NPOs in the sample published posts with people laughing or smiling. The happiness of beneficiaries displayed in Figure 31 while holding a glass of clean water is assumed to resonate with viewers' positive emotions. The author presumed that people's smiles and laughs are the outcomes of having access to clean and safe water. Their positive lived-in experience was found in images of them smiling, which could relate to NPOs' aim of increasing a positive brand image. The use of positive facial expressions relates to the study that these type of images of beneficiaries result in higher donation intention (Lin & Yin, 2022, p. 9). Relating to the representational component of SSA, NPOs would seem to hope that viewers position themselves as facilitators in the story to bring happiness to people around the world through clean water. The intention to use facial expressions could also be considered a compositional choice to emphasize positive expressions.

Figure 31. Positive facial expressions found in the posts.

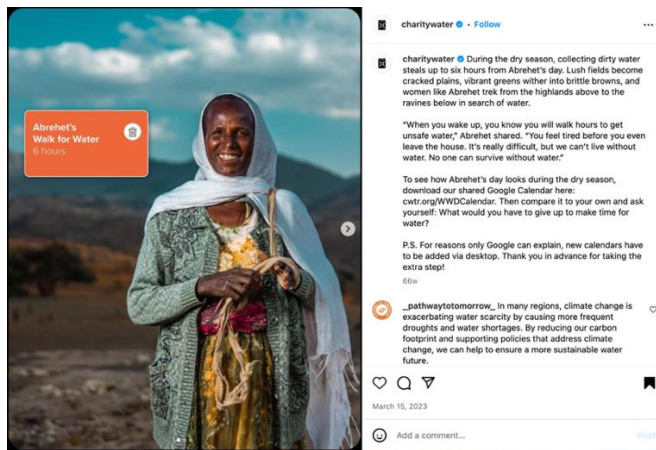


Compositional

Compositional aspect of SSA discusses how the placement of varying visual elements represent meanings. The placement of trash can icon in a Calendar widget in Figure 32 could

represent the idea or aim that global water crisis could end. The post was understood as an attempt to get viewers to ‘click’ the trash can icon, but the only way to do so is to support NPOs’ work. By placing the widget on a portrait of a beneficiary smiling and looking into the camera could be viewed as NPOs attempt to appeal to donors’ empathy.

Figure 32. Calendar widget to attract donors.



Through SSA, NPOs were observed to utilize photographs and graphic elements to tell a story of their journey in fighting the global water crisis. Moreover, by looking at the three SSA tools of representational, interactive, and compositional together, the visuals seemed to reflect NPOs desire to attract donors by communicating that their purpose is to transform lives through clean water. The objective was found in the sample by looking at how visuals depict contrasting images of dirty and clean water, positive facial expressions, and the trash can graphic element. Furthermore, the author concluded that visuals may have been employed to position donors as part of the story to aid in reaching NPOs objective. For example, positive facial expressions and calendar widget icons were observed as a possible attempt to appeal to donors and increase donations (Figure 34).

Interestingly, co-occurrences of *representational* and *interactive* tools were found twenty times in the sample, with images of people smiling while holding a glass of clean water seen in Figure 30. While dirty water was not present, the examples can still be viewed as NPOs’ attempt to visually communicate to donors their mission statement at work. Images in Figure 31 contain people smiling while holding a cup of clean water. Through the sample, the author concluded that the smiles were intended to show beneficiaries’ transformed lives. Therefore, the co-occurrences suggest that NPOs Instagram posts can be viewed to communicate their purpose to attract donorship.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The aim of the thesis was to understand how three American water NPOs utilize SM to define and communicate their purpose to attract donors. Water NPOs play a critical role in mitigating the development issues caused by water scarcity in low-income countries and less developed areas. Access to water is essential for health, preservation of human rights, poverty reduction, and education (Water and Sanitation, 2023, para. 1). American water NPOs were selected as the United States pledged to allocate funds for their Global Water Strategy to bring water and sanitation domestically and abroad, whilst the three NPOs execute projects abroad. Despite the water crisis deemed as a ‘forgotten cause’, the extent to which NPOs accomplish their goals relies on their ability to gain donorship is worth looking into. Instagram’s low-cost, easy-to-use interface, and high number of global users make this SM channel a relevant platform to study if and how NPOs utilize marketing and communication strategies to reach and build donor community. Therefore, the research question asked, *How do American Water NPOs define their purpose to attract donors, through co-created Instagram posts?* Specifically, the thesis focused on exploring the role of value co-creation, dialogic principles, and storytelling in Instagram posts, exploited as means by NPOs to enhance their fundraising goals.

To answer the research question, 118 co-created Instagram posts were analyzed through Qualitative Content Analysis and Social Semiotic Analysis to understand how water NPOs’ in the sample define their purpose to be and how they communicated it online. Purposive sampling were employed to select American charity registered NPOs. Theoretical concepts of dialogic communication, value co-creation, and storytelling guided the analysis to inform axial and selective codes, which then informed the answers to the research question. Since little research has been done regarding the use of SM by water NPOs, the thesis was exploratory research that aimed at outlining insightful observations regarding the SM use of water NPOs by looking at three organizations: *Water.org*, *Waves for Water*, and *Charity Water*.

To effectively answer the research question, defining NPOs’ purpose was observed in twofold: 1) *purpose as a noun* or the definition of their purpose and 2) *purpose as a verb* or how the purpose was communicated through co-created Instagram posts.

Looking at the posts selected for this research, it was concluded that the purpose statement of NPOs was communicated via Instagram in a two-fold way. Firstly, from the posts it become clear that the ultimate objective NPOs wanted to highlight as their purpose

was the intention bring an end to the global water crisis. Recurrent references to this rather generic goal were found in the majority of post in the form of sub-topics. Sub-purposes incorporated in posts helped NPOs to further explain the focus areas of their mission, which were the implementation of global programs that help end the walk for water and the provision of clean and safe water in homes. Facilitating objectives were considered as the means NPOs have identified to achieve their ultimate purpose in their SM communication. The mentioning of NPOs carrying out of global programs that contributed to improving socioeconomic areas, such as health, education, empowerment, and finances were observed in posts as facilitating steps towards ending the global water crisis. NPOs' purpose as communicated by their posts were found to align with topic areas outlined in the theoretical framework, namely, providing affordable financing, collaborating with local partners to build water systems, and improving health, education, and economic empowerment. In contrast, issues of water governance that contribute to water scarcity and collaboration with local governments were not present in the post. This is not in line with the observation that cooperation with local governments would be vital to proper water regulation in rural areas for communities to become self-sufficient (Anderson et al., 2022, p. 2, 10; Herrera, 2019, p. 107). Instead, occurrences of co-creation with local communities and nonprofits were found.

The definition of NPOs' purpose was communicated by employing co-authors with various stakeholders, dialogic principles, and storytelling elements. Having stakeholders as co-authors in the post seemed to help in telling the story or creating a definition of the purpose from different perspectives. While studies on value co-creation reveal shared value as an outcome, they do not mention whether co-creation was an equal process between actors. Nonetheless, the thesis found there were varying degrees of involvement between stakeholder groups in content production. *Collaboration posts* between NPOs and stakeholders were evidence for low-level of co-authoring because it required one actor to extend an invitation to collaborate on a post that was already created. This type of post can, however, be considered a manifestation of co-created content because it demonstrates how mentioning collaborators add value to organizational image (Burton, 2017, p. 323). Additionally, co-authoring with internal stakeholders, such as founders and task force, was understood as low-level involvement because they are people within the organization with the same mission and require less interactions for creating content than external stakeholders. While Sindhvani (2014) describes that co-creation helps organizations build relationships with customers for a lifetime value, the thesis found that internal stakeholders are valuable co-authors (p. 42).

Evidence for high involvement between co-authors was observed between NPOs and beneficiaries/donors/brand partners. The highest number of co-authoring with NPOs also fell on these groups which suggested that NPOs viewed them as vital stakeholders for communication strategy. Co-authoring between NPOs and beneficiaries appeared in posts with images and testimonial stories of beneficiaries by NPOs. User-generated stories by donors were also considered high involvement because donor photos were published alongside motivational stories to promote fundraising projects. Co-organizing fundraising campaigns between NPOs and brand partners was considered high level cooperation. Stories of donors, brands, and beneficiaries' lived-in experiences of the organizations tell us that NPOs involved multiple actors to tell stories about their work (Fujita et al., 2019, p. 52). This strategy implies co-creation as stakeholder engagement.

The adequate use of co-created content by NPOs in the sample did not seem to signal organizational fear of losing control of organizational messages, contrary to observation by Oksiutycz and Mwadiwa (2023, p. 100). Instead, because NPOs remained the lead storyteller, their practice of co-created content can be perceived as leveraging control by enabling different stakeholders' perspectives to shine through and enrich NPOs' brand image. In line with Briones et al. (2011)'s observation of UGC, co-created content can be perceived as NPOs attempt for dialogue with free agents which influences donor engagement (p. 41).

NPOs were observed to employ all dialogic principles, i.e., usefulness of information, conservation of visitors, generation of return visitors, and dialogic loop, to communicate their purpose. Although at least two principles were present in the posts categorized as having dialogic evidence, communication of NPOs in the sample cannot all be considered dialogic, because they did not all include dialogic loop (Arslan, 2019, p. 85). Strategies for generating return of visitors and maintaining feedback loop need to be considered if they want to engage in two-way communication. While dialogic loop was not observed through consideration of the comment sections, the intention for creating a feedback loop was present in rhetorical questions, referring to readers in the second person, and using call-to-action messages. The use of dialogic principles suggest NPOs goal in attracting donors which explains their needed to share information that satisfies viewers' curiosity about their work. To supplement the information, NPOs directed donors to their website and profiles to look through content that would trigger their intention to donate. While dialogic loop also appeared subtly in the posts, perhaps another measurement of the principle is warranted as comments were not included as data. Effectiveness of the principles on donation intention would need to be further explored

through quantitative experimental research, but the thesis has shown that NPOs understand the importance of dialogic communication to build donor relationship.

NPOs were observed to employ visual storytelling to communicate their purpose in stopping the global water crisis through the collective effort of NPOs and stakeholders by tackling socioeconomic development issues. Visuals depicted NPOs' journey in transforming people's lives and emphasized the walk for water and images of clean and dirty water. Positive facial expressions, i.e., smiling and laughing, showcased throughout the sample suggested NPOs attempt at increasing donor intention. This observation aligns with Merchant et al. (2010) in which storytelling was observed in sharing NPOs' mission by evoking emotions (p. 360). Photographs of stakeholders coupled with first-person stories through direct quotes were also considered as a storytelling strategy. This also aligns with Robiady et al. (2021)'s observation in which NPOs would utilize first-person stories to influence positive emotions in donors and promote altruism (p. 498) and a form of stakeholder engagement (Zhang et al., 2023, p. 293).

5.1 Limitations of the Research

Since the thesis was an exploratory research, limitations to research approach were warranted. Namely, the sample did not have an equal number of posts that fit the co-creation category per water NPOs. Although the thesis did not focus on comparing how different NPOs employed SM marketing strategies, obtaining an equal number of posts per organization would provide a richer distribution of findings. Additionally, because the thesis employed qualitative analysis methods, conducting a quantitative study to measure the effects of strategies, i.e., dialogic principles and narrative transportation. could be insightful for NPOs to evaluate which strategies resonated with donors. Furthermore, while scholars found that stories with conflict were most captivating for viewers as they attempt to encourage donor participation as solution (Mang et al., 2021, p. 148), studying on the effects of story elements, particularly conflict depicted by water NPOs, could be interesting to measure. Lastly, due to the limited time afforded to complete the thesis, an intercoder was not performed to validate the reliability of the codebook. An intercoder reliability test would be insightful in providing more reliable data analysis.

5.2 Implications of Future Research

As the thesis provided an academic contribution by adding to a limited number of studies on water NPOs use of SM, there is a notable implication for future research. The thesis analyzed Instagram static posts of water NPOs. Future studies could conduct a study on the use of videos to observe the use of dialogic principles, storytelling, and co-authoring as moving images also relate to consumer engagement. Long-form advertisements or short-form Instagram Reels or TikTok videos can yield interesting findings in how value co-creating and storytelling are manifested to create dialogue between water NPOs and donors.

Other marketing strategies for donor engagement can also be evaluated in future studies since the thesis focused only on co-creation, dialogic principles, and storytelling. Observing patterns and nuances for how the nonprofit sector employs commercial strategies could provide insight to NPOs toward reaching donor engagement and fundraising goals.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Codebook

Selective code	Axial code	Example	Text	Visual
Ending Global Water Crisis	Ending the walk for water	“brought walking and worrying to an end” “end walk for water”	x	x
		“And while the physical toll of the water crisis is significant, the emotional and mental weight can be much harder to measure”		
		“Every day, women and girls walk an average of 3.7 miles to collect water.”		
		“Women and girls are primarily responsible for water collection”		
	Providing clean and safe water at home	unprotected well	x	x
		“managing illness when the water made them sick”		
		“after struggling for years without access to safe water at home”		
	Implementing Global Programs	“The water crisis looks different in different parts of the world. Our solution is adaptable to the various countries where we work, like Brazil.”	x	x
		#WhereWeWork		
		Countries mentioned: Indonesia, Peru, Mexico, Nepal		
Improving Beneficiary Socioeconomic Situations	Providing new Water systems	"Over 200,000 people were impacted by their distribution of water filters, giving hundreds of thousands of	x	x

		people access to clean and safe drinking water.”		
		“rainwater harvesting tank sits proudly in Devi’s front yard.”		
	Contributing to social development	“communities are equipped with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) resources “	x	x
		“Your donations are why Anita’s daughters have access to a private toilet at home.”		
		“Her club curriculum includes all the basics of personal hygiene... We know that clean water means good health.”		
	Facilitating Economic Growth	“small affordable loan to finance water solution for her home”, “small loan with payments over a short period”	x	x
		“Honorine was able to start her own business. She now has a successful restaurant that has become a social hub in the community — and the best place to get a fresh donut.”		
		“Victorious can go to school because she has water at home”		
	Long-lasting sustainable impact	“access to safe water at home changed Selamah’s life and the lives of her neighbors.”	x	x
	Collecting and allocating funds	“Becoming monthly donor”	x	
	Raising awareness	Campaign posters on billboards across America	x	x
	Reporting impact	“raised \$940,741 for clean and safe water”	x	

		“In total, 4,339 filters were provided for communities across 10 provinces in the country.”		
Dialogic Communication	Conservation of Visitors	https://cwtr.org/3Ob6zQ5 (link in bio)!”	x	
		Click this post linked from our profile to see how affordable access to safe water changed...“		
		#charitywater		
	Generation return of Visitor	Donor appreciation	x	
		Donor fundraising campaigns		
	Dialogic Loop	Rhetorical question “Then compare it to your own and ask yourself: What would you have to give up to make time for water?”	x	
		Call-to-Action messages “Read her story to learn more”		
		Second-person point of view “But you? You had even bigger dreams.”		
	Usefulness of Information	Donation Link http://water.org/monthly-giving	x	x
		Context of global water crisis		
Storytelling by NPOs	Story character	Character Names of beneficiaries (“Jeova” “Patricia”)	x	
	Story Purpose	Crisis/Conflict “Selamah had to walk to a river to get water” “first 50 years of her life walking long distances for water”	x	
		Resolution “Thanks to our generous donors, Sally was able to invest...by getting access to safe water at home”	x	

	Story Content	Emotions in audience transportation (verisimilitude) Carousel images depicting storyline		
		Benefits: beneficiary stories from the field “Look at me! I can dance. I can go anywhere. The water is so good, so pure, and fine for the body.”	x	
		Activities: donor generated content “We ran at least a mile a day to raise awareness around this issue and asked people to match our mile count or donate whatever they could! As we near the final days of our fundraiser, collectively we (plus our dogs and a couple guest runners) have run 180 miles!” — Rachel and Stu	x	
Co-authorship on content creation	Brand Partner	Aveda, Smile Generation, Conscious Step, Vodapod, and more	x	x
	Organizations and Communities	Agro Amigo, Welthunger Hilfe, “Rwamburi Water Committee wanted to replace the time their community members”	x	x
	Private Donors		x	x
	Internal Stakeholder	Founder, Task Force	x	x
	Photographers		x	
	Artists		x	x
	Beneficiaries		x	x
	Collaboration Post			x