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Online Fundraising for Nonprofit Organizations via Social Media Marketing: A Critical Success Factors Analysis in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Despite its relevance for nonprofit and fundraising practices, there is no evidence of the drivers of nonprofit social media marketing success. We address this research gap by empirically identifying the critical success factors in nonprofit social media marketing using structural equation modeling to analyze data from 116 social media marketing professionals in nonprofit organizations (NPOs) across Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Disaggregate analysis confirms seven success factors, while the more holistic aggregate analysis confirms three factors: Community and Dialog Orientation, Quality of Content Implementation, and Organizational Framework. We use importance-performance map analysis to provide an additional performance dimension and identify the most crucial levers of nonprofit social media marketing success. Measures of Community and Dialog Orientation prove to be the most important. This study contributes to theoretical understanding, and the managerial implications benefit an understanding of which measures NPO marketers or fundraising professionals should prioritize to increase success.

1 | Introduction

The reach of Social Media is massive: In 2024, the number of social media users worldwide is 5.04 billion (We Are Social et al. 2024), which is an increase of 2.7 over the past 10 years. Online social networks have largely taken over from traditional media as channels for direct communication (Jansen et al. 2021).

Social media allows for two-way communication, interactivity, and the ability to engage in dialog with audiences (Albanna et al. 2022; Goldkind 2015). NPOs can use social media to reach and interact with relevant stakeholders and supporters, and to foster relationships with them (Nelson 2019; Saxton et al. 2007; Taylor et al. 2001). As with other internet-based technologies, social media provides comprehensive data about audiences, which NPOs can analyze and use in their social

media practice to specifically target their messages (Saxton et al. 2007; Sutherland 2021). In this context, continuously measuring the social media marketing performance and using analytics to adapt the strategy are essential (Pour et al. 2021). In fundraising, social media is primarily a communication channel, but it has also become increasingly important as a sales channel (Urselmann 2023). An experiment demonstrated that a Facebook campaign can increase the willingness to donate (Adena and Hager 2025).

Reichenbach (2020) identified social media marketing as the most intensively used digital fundraising instrument, ranking fourth in total effect but needing optimization. While previous research related to digital fundraising has addressed nonprofit social media marketing, it has done so rather selectively without providing a comprehensive analysis of its success

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Summary

- What is currently known about the subject matter
 - Social media is an important communication channel in NPOs' digital fundraising.
 - Evidence on the drivers of nonprofit social media success is limited.
 - Prior studies focus on isolated aspects of social media marketing or specific platforms.
 - Dialog, community-building, and supporter engagement are key motivations for NPOs on social media.
- What this paper adds
 - The paper provides an empirical model of nonprofit social media success.
 - The study provides the first comprehensive overview of success factors in NPOs' social media marketing.
 - A strategic focus on dialog and community orientation enhances overall social media marketing success.
- Implications of the study findings for practitioners
 - NPOs should prioritize low-performing, high-impact measures to increase social media marketing success.
 - The most important levers for increasing success lie in community and dialog orientation.
 - High-quality content and a functional organizational framework are important success factors.
 - NPOs can draw on the findings to enhance their on-line fundraising via social media marketing.

factors. Albanna et al. (2022) observe that Jordanian NPOs extensively use social media for community engagement. Zhang et al. (2023) examine how NPOs can promote public engagement on Twitter through interactive and emotional communication. With an experiment, Xiao et al. (2022) assess the effect of fundraising message characteristics on donation intentions and prove, *inter alia*, that concrete messages have a positive impact on donation intention and amount. Bilgin and Kethüda (2022) find that interacting with donors on social media can foster repeat giving. Lee and Shon (2023) investigate how the size of a nonprofit's online communities on Facebook and Twitter relates to individual donations, suggesting a strong link between online community building, especially on Facebook, and charitable support.

This study examines the critical success factors in the social media marketing of NPOs and contributes to available knowledge in two ways, thus offering value to scholars and practitioners. First, it provides empirical evidence to the discourse on social media marketing as a component of NPOs' digital fundraising. By addressing the lack of a comprehensive overview of success factors, the study fills a theoretical gap. Second, the study includes valuable findings and insights for NPO and fundraising practices on improving social media marketing efforts to accomplish higher social media marketing success.

For the empirical identification of critical success factors, we use a structural equation model. Social media marketing success is operationalized via an index serving as the final endogenous variable. Potential success factors function as latent exogenous

variables and are measured by their indicators representing specific actions. Using an importance-performance map analysis, we pinpoint the measures that are crucial for social media marketing success and where performance improvements are most sensible and effective.

2 | Theoretical Framework

2.1 | Social Media Marketing Success

To achieve a holistic measurement of social media marketing success, we conceptualize it by combining the goal and the multiple constituency approaches, two widely used frameworks in management and nonprofit research (Fritsch 2007; Fritz 1992; Molnar and Rogers 1976; Reichenbach 2020). The goal approach is highly operationalizable and applicable at both organizational and sub-organizational levels (Fritsch 2007). It assumes that organizations pursue explicit or implicit goals, and success is defined as the extent to which these goals are achieved (Cameron 1980; Price 1972). As in other areas of digital fundraising, the sub-discipline social media marketing necessitates goal-setting. Accordingly, we assess success by measuring the degree to which predefined goals are achieved. The multiple constituency approach defines success as the extent to which the interests of external and internal stakeholders are met (Connolly et al. 1980). This approach thereby responds to a common criticism of the goal approach, that is, its insufficient consideration of stakeholder interests (Reichenbach 2020). As NPOs inherently serve multiple stakeholders, the approach is especially suitable in nonprofit contexts (Mc Farlan 1999; Moss Kanter and Summers 1994). Furthermore, the multiple constituency approach emphasizes the importance of considering the individual weighting of goals for each organization (Connolly et al. 1980), which we evaluate by querying the importance of each goal. This compensates for the goal approach's lack of differentiation in goal weighting and meets nonprofit practice, where goal priorities vary. For instance, some NPOs may prioritize donor acquisition over donor retention or vice versa. Incorporating the multiple constituency perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of success as a dynamic and organization-specific collection of both monetary and non-monetary goals.

For the type of goals, focusing solely on economic goal variables does not seem sensible. An NPO that has just begun to use social media marketing as part of its digital fundraising might have low revenue from it but could still be successful in more indirect ways. However, economic goals are crucial in fundraising and, therefore, must be included. Generally, non-economic goals can serve as a means to achieve economic goals, e.g., fostering a relationship with prospects, which can serve the economic goal of acquiring donations. Consequently, a multi-dimensional goal construct for social media marketing success, combining economic and non-economic metrics, is necessary.

There is no secondary data that could serve as a foundation for studying the social media marketing success of NPOs in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Only subjective indicators are viable, given the absence of universally applicable objective indicators for NPOs' social media marketing success in fundraising. Hence, we utilize subjective judgments of NPO employees.

TABLE 1 | List of social media marketing goals.

Goal
Strengthening of image and brand
Reach increase
Winning prospects in existing target groups
Winning prospects in new target groups
Strengthening of relationships with stakeholders/supporters
Increase involvement/engagement of existing donors
Community building
Winning new donors
Revenue growth of social media marketing generated donations
Profitability and cost efficiency of social media marketing

Various studies have demonstrated that subjective judgments provide valid information (Baumgarth and Evanschitzky 2009; Harken et al. 2024; Venkatraman and Ramanujam 1987).

To measure social media marketing success, we use a success index. Success could potentially also be assessed by separately considering multiple objective variables or by using a composite global measure. But as not all organizations pursue identical goals with the same weighting and there is the danger of an arbitrary selection of objectives (Richard et al. 2009), an isolated consideration of goals is not suitable for measuring NPOs social media marketing success. A global measurement is challenged by several factors, including the lack of comparability due to the absence of a consistent measurement rule, limited transparency, and the high demand on respondents to independently aggregate and weigh various goals (Fritsch 2007; Richard et al. 2009). When considering the goal approach, it is important to know the specific goals—something the success index provides, unlike a global measure. A success index that combines goal importance and goal achievement multiplicatively accounts for the assumption of a bundle of goals with different weights, as well as for the multidimensionality of success and is therefore a realistic and nuanced method (Fritz 1992; Reichenbach 2020). In our success measurement, the importance and achievement of individual goals are multiplicatively linked to degrees of goal achievement, which are then summed to form a weighted index value. Consequently, essential goals that are achieved to a high degree lead to a high success index. Following the approach of success measurements from other success factor studies (Fritz 1992; Harken et al. 2024; Urselmann 1998), the formula for our success index Social Media Marketing Success for NPO k is

$$SMMS_k = \sum_{j=1}^m I_{jk} \cdot A_{jk}$$

where I_{jk} is the importance of goal j for NPO k , A_{jk} is the achievement of goal j by NPO k , and m is the number of goals in this study, which is 10.

Table 1 presents the goals for social media marketing in fundraising, which are derived from the following. Firstly, branding

is very important, as branding and identification with an NPO's brand positively influence donation intention (Bilgin and Kethüda 2022; Millán et al. 2024). Social media marketing contributes to brand-building goals, as social media communication raises brand awareness and can strengthen an NPO's reputation (Di Lauro et al. 2019; Mohammadian and Mohammadreza 2012; Quinton and Fennemore 2013). Expanding an NPO's reach contributes to branding efforts by enhancing brand visibility. Accordingly, NPOs should aim to increase the size of their online constituencies (Saxton and Wang 2014). Prospects are to be won in existing as well as new target groups (Di Lauro et al. 2019; Reddick and Ponomariov 2013).

Social media platforms have made it easier for stakeholders to connect with NPOs (Wiley et al. 2022). Via social media, NPOs can strengthen the relationship with stakeholders and supporters (Hackler and Saxton 2007; Nelson 2019; de Vries et al. 2012) and even use it to increase the involvement of existing donors (Di Lauro et al. 2019).

As a fundraising communication channel, social media should be used to increase donation revenue. Specifically, social media marketing can aim to win new donors (Young 2017). NPOs must use their financial resources effectively (Reichenbach 2020) and therefore keep social media marketing activities profitable.

2.2 | Success Factors in Npos' Social Media Marketing

Based on an extensive literature review, we derive seven success factors with a total of 38 indicators, all of which are discussed below and presented in Table 2. Fundraising is “the systematic analysis, planning, implementation, and control” of activities aimed at raising resources for public benefit organizations (Urselmann 2023, p. 1). Prior studies have demonstrated that planning and controlling are important success factors in fundraising (Reichenbach 2020; Urselmann 1998). Also, in social media, NPOs need to act strategically, define measurable short-term and long-term goals, and report on their progress (Sutherland 2021; Wiley et al. 2022; Young 2017). Our first hypothesis is thus:

TABLE 2 | Overview of success factor constructs and indicators.

Quality of planning and controlling	Quality of technical implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed written strategic planning • Detailed written operational planning • Written qualitative and quantifiable goals for social media marketing • Operative controlling: timely controlling of the individual social media marketing measures using key figures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile first • Suitable formats of images and videos • Subtitles/closed captions • Compelling visuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic controlling: controlling achievement of social media marketing goal achievement as a whole • Community and Dialog Orientation • Acknowledging and thanking donors and supporters • Dialog-oriented content, which encourages interaction between NPO and followers • Reliable community management • Targeting different target groups • Encourage sharing 	<p>Data Centricity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyses and evidence-based planning • Conversion tracking • Relevance and audience knowledge • Targeting/retargeting • Donation analysis • Testing
<p>Quality of Content Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current content • Donation impact • Clear messages • Transparency • Storytelling • Platform suitability • Regularity of the posts 	<p>Donation/Conversion Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donation tools—own collection • Donation tools—peer-to-peer • Care and thanks supporters • Ads/paid reach
	<p>Organizational Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and personnel resources • Financial resources • Technical resources • Know-how/professionalism/skills
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of social media strategy in overall (marketing) strategy • Clear responsibilities • Adaptability

Hypothesis 1. *The higher the quality of planning and controlling of social media marketing, the greater the success of social media marketing.*

Organizations should place the engagement, participation, and dialog of members at the center of their public-oriented activities (Greenberg and MacAulay 2009). Enhancing interactions between charities and donors on social media is likely to lead to repeat donations (Bilgin and Kethüda 2022). Bhati and McDonnell (2020) found that more likes and shares positively influenced the donations for an online giving day. In addition, community management (Wiencierz et al. 2015), addressing different target groups (Saxton and Guo 2014), and the acknowledgment and thanking of supporters as an important part of NPO communication (Lovejoy and Saxton 2012) should also be mentioned in the context of community and dialog orientation. Consequently, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. *The more distinct the community and dialog orientation, the greater the success of social media marketing.*

For nonprofit email marketing, the quality of content realization is a proven success factor (Harken et al. 2024). An experiment showed that concrete messages have a positive impact on donation intention and amount (Xiao et al. 2022). The majority of donations are initiated as a result of a direct ask (Litofcenko et al. 2023). Generally, transparency is important (Amtzis 2014; Mohammadian and Mohammadreza 2012; Quinton and Fennemore 2013). Additionally, content should include storytelling and be suitable for the chosen platform (DeMasters et al. 2024; Lee 2022; Sutherland 2021). Content should be up-to-date and keep people informed; a study of crowdfunding success found a positive correlation between number of topical project updates and campaign success (Pan and Dong 2023).

In addition to the quality of content implementation, we expect technical implementation to have a positive impact on success. Users predominantly access social media platforms through mobile devices (Statista 2024) and are particularly responsive to compelling visuals (Mitrović et al. 2020). Therefore, NPOs should create visually appealing, mobile-optimized content pieces in suitable formats, which might include subtitles (Dunkel and Meid 2020; Pour et al. 2021; Sutherland 2021). Therefore, we expect positive relationships between the quality of content as well as technical implementation and social media marketing success:

Hypothesis 3. *The higher the quality of content implementation, the greater the success of social media marketing.*

Hypothesis 4. *The higher the quality of technical implementation, the greater the success of social media marketing.*

Managerial decisions may fail to produce desired outcomes when data is limited (Moon and Azizi 2013). A study of NPOs' email marketing concludes that NPOs lack a data-driven approach and that a more extensive use of data would allow for a more precise donor approach (Harken et al. 2024). Fundraising and social media marketing should be based on evidence that can either come from scientific findings or self-collected and analyzed

data (Mertins and Waldner 2020; Sutherland 2021). Generating and using data allows for a crucial understanding of the target audiences as well as their interests and using this knowledge to tailor content to their needs (Maxwell and Carboni 2016; Sutherland 2021). Tracking conversion, analyzing donations generated via social media, conducting tests, and targeting and retargeting the audiences of ads are recommended measures for data centrality (Gupta 2019; Prescher 2020; Sutherland 2021). This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5. *The more distinct the data centrality of social media marketing, the greater the success of social media marketing.*

As a component of digital fundraising, social media marketing should naturally aim to generate donations, aka conversions. Adena and Hager (2025) provide evidence that paid Facebook ads can be used to generate donations. When the Meta donation tools still existed, and the Meta platforms served as distribution channels, conversions could be realized on the platforms either as a collection of the NPO itself or by the community via the peer-to-peer options (Martin and Schlereth 2024). Accompanying the use of the donation tools should be the care and acknowledgment of donors on the platform: Thanking initiators of fundraisers and providing them with tips can positively impact conversions (Harken 2022; Urselmann 2023; Waddingham 2013). In line with the above arguments, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 6. *The more substantial the donation/conversion focus of social media marketing, the greater the success of social media marketing.*

Bhati and McDonnell (2020) find positive correlations between budget size and number of donations and donors. Reichenbach (2020) can prove that resources positively affect online fundraising success, with personnel resources having the most significant impact. Social media personnel need relevant know-how and skills (Amtzis 2014; Di Lauro et al. 2019). Also, the responsibilities within the team need to be clearly defined (Quinton and Fennemore 2013). The social media strategy is to be integrated into an NPO's overall (marketing) strategy (Quesenberry 2020; Quinton and Fennemore 2013). As social media evolves rapidly, Sutherland (2021) emphasizes the importance of staying on top of industry trends and platform developments. Finally, we thus hypothesize:

Hypothesis 7. *The more conducive the organizational framework is, the greater the success of social media marketing.*

3 | Data and Method

3.1 | Methodological Approach

As a confirmatory procedure, structural equation modeling is used to check whether the relationships derived from the theory correspond with the empirical data (Backhaus et al. 2015). In our study, social media marketing success is the final endogenous variable, which the exogenous constructs load on. In our case, these are the seven success factors, which are measured

by 38 indicators in total. The seven hypotheses come with the assumed relationships between the exogenous constructs and endogenous variables. As this is a success factor study with indicators shaping the success factor constructs, the measurement models are operationalized formatively. A variance analytic approach, as in the estimation of structural equation models, is necessary not only for formative measurement models but also for studies with decision-relevant, management-oriented research questions, which aim at explaining the change in or prediction of a target variable or deriving practical action recommendations (Hair et al. 2021). Our analyses were executed with the software SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al. 2024).

3.2 | Research Design

For data collection, we used an online questionnaire with a seven-point Likert scale. Respondents ranked all statements of the scales concerning their NPO. We measured the importance and achievement of social media marketing goals and the application of success factors using construct-appropriate anchors. All questionnaire items were directly derived from the conceptualized social media marketing goals and success factors as outlined in the theoretical framework. An English translation of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix A.

We collected data from 116 social media marketing professionals of NPOs in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in the last quarter of 2023. Due to the lack of a comprehensive population database, the study participants are an arbitrary selection. The sample size far exceeds the minimum requirement for SEM with formative constructs (Chin 1998).

4 | Results

4.1 | Model Evaluation

As a single-item construct, the SMMS_k index requires no quality testing (Hair et al. 2021). The average bivariate correlation between goal importance and goal achievement is 0.401, indicating the multiplicity premise—independence of importance and achievement—is not fulfilled, though this is expected since more important goals are pursued with greater intensity and consequently have a higher degree of achievement (Fritz 1992). The average correlation of 0.433 between individual goal achievements shows that the additivity premise, requiring independent goal achievements, is unmet. This is acceptable, as goal interdependencies can prevent independent consideration of their achievements (Fritsch 2007). However, the linearity, compensation, and plausibility premises remain unaffected.

The lowest and highest index values of SMMS_k achieved in the sample are 58 and 462. The average index value is 220.3 (median: 214), with the standard deviation being 74.98. The vast majority of the NPOs only achieve low to medium social media marketing success. There is, therefore, great potential for improving success.

Model evaluation of the measurement models of the success factors consisted of different analyses. Convergence validation

of formative constructs requires conducting a redundancy analysis to assess whether the formative construct is strongly correlated with an alternative measure of the same concept (Cheah et al. 2018). Therefore, the questionnaire included a global item variable for each success factor construct, reflectively capturing the essence of the associated formative construct. We then evaluated the correlation of the formative constructs to their respective global items. All constructs passed convergence validity testing. To ensure the independence among the indicators within each construct, we conducted multicollinearity testing by checking the bivariate correlations and calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF). To determine the relevance, we examined the weights and loadings of the indicators on their constructs by running bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples. We followed the procedure described by Giere et al. (2006) and Hair et al. (2021) to decide about the deletion of indicators.

The quality testing of the measurement models included the combination of several indicators and the deletion of one indicator due to multicollinearity issues. Afterward, the model consists of still seven success factor constructs with a total of 33 indicators.

4.2 | Analysis of Success Factors

4.2.1 | Disaggregate and Aggregate Analyses

The relationship between an individual success factor construct and SMMS_k is examined using a disaggregate analysis. All seven path coefficients have a positive sign and reach a significance level of at least 5%. A positive direction of impact was assumed for all hypotheses. Thus, all success factors can be confirmed in disaggregate analysis, which verifies all hypotheses and proves that each success factor alone has a direct positive impact on SMMS_k. This also provides the insight that the key success factors have been identified.

The combined variance resolution of the constructs is 135.5%. A variance explanation that exceeds 100% proves that the success factors are not independent of each other, but that there are interdependencies (Fritsch 2007).

In reality, the success factors do not affect social media marketing success in isolation, as assumed in the disaggregated analysis, but rather there are correlations of effect between the success factors. Accordingly, we also examine the structural model with aggregate analysis, which considers the interdependencies of the exogenous constructs. There are no multicollinearity issues. The variance of social media marketing success as an endogenous variable explained by the success factors is 39.5%. This value just exceeds the guideline value of 0.33 for an average explained variance (Chin 1998). All effect sizes f^2 are positive but very low. This could be due to the interdependencies shown by the disaggregated analysis. The PLS_{predict} procedure confirms that the model has predictive relevance.

The path coefficients in the structural model, as shown in Figure 1, represent the hypothesized relationships between the success factors and social media marketing success. For attesting a substantial relationship, 0.1 or 0.2 can be taken as threshold

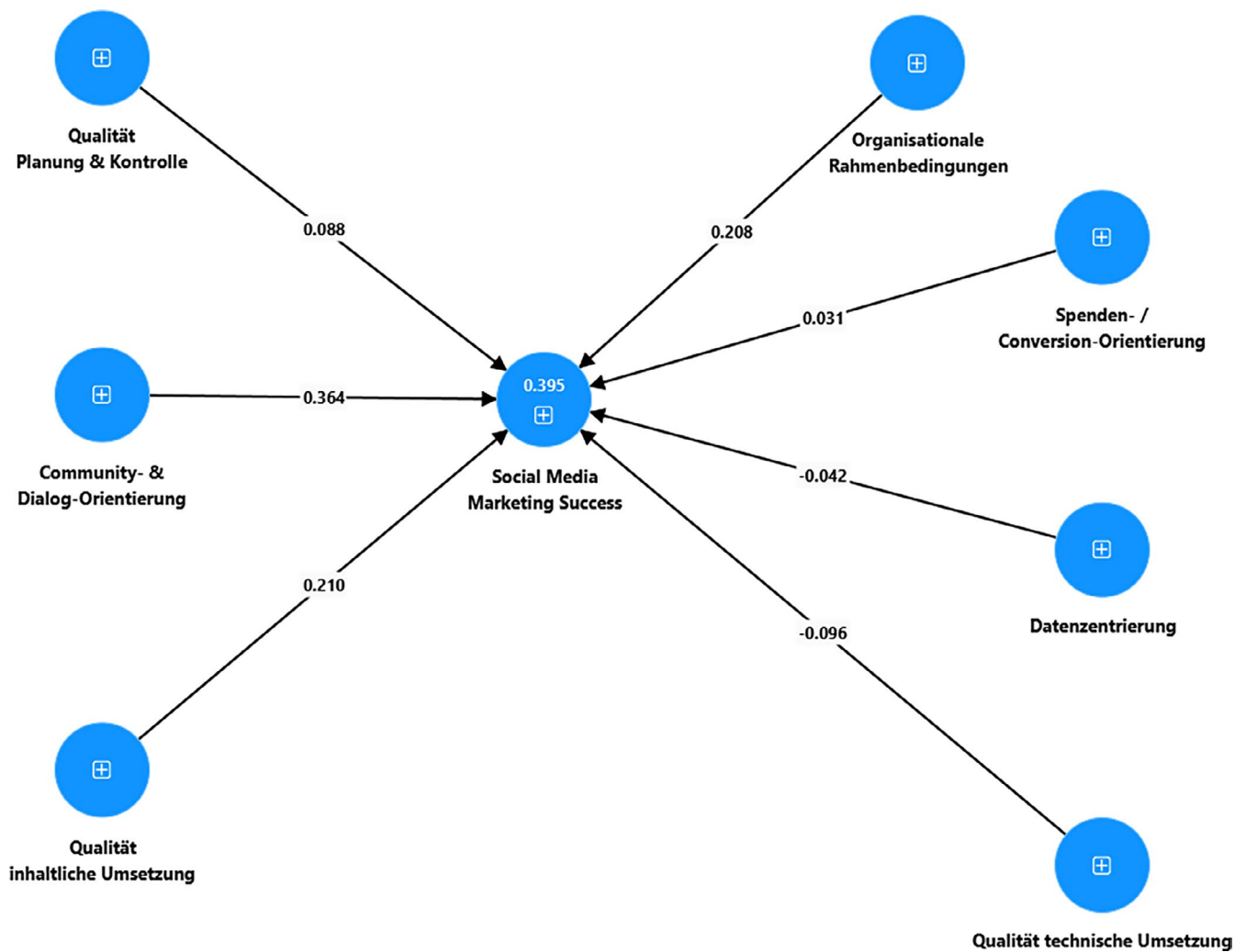


FIGURE 1 | Estimated structural model.

values (Chin 1998; Lohmöller 1989). As shown in Figure 1 and Table 3, three of the seven success factors significantly exceed the more conservative guideline value 0.2, proving substantial effects on social media marketing success: *Community and Dialog Orientation*, *Quality of Content Implementation*, and *Organizational Framework*. Thus, Hypotheses 2, 3, and 7 can be confirmed. The remaining path coefficients are below the threshold values or insignificant. Accordingly, Hypotheses 1, 4, 5, and 6 need to be rejected.

Incorporating the results of disaggregate and aggregate analyses yields a meaningful overall picture of the success effects and can prevent misinterpretations. Disaggregate analysis opposes a hasty rejection of success factors that are not or less significant in the aggregate analysis: All factors individually contribute to explaining the variance of success (Reichenbach 2020). Even though the four success factors do not show a significant positive impact in aggregate analysis, they prove to have a direct effect on social media marketing success and should, therefore, not be neglected. Their diminished statistical significance can be explained by overlapping effects among constructs in the aggregate model, which reduce the unique contribution of individual factors (Reichenbach 2020). Moreover, aggregation can obscure effects that only emerge

at a more detailed (disaggregated) level or within specific subgroups (Bagozzi and Heatherton 1994). Their impact may vary by organization type, affecting only certain NPOs, such as small or large ones. Furthermore, these factors may influence other success factor constructs indirectly. Such possible indirect relationships are not captured in the current simple-effect model.

4.2.2 | IPMA

The success factors and indicators particularly strong in the aggregated analysis may not align with the most relevant levers for improving success, necessitating an examination of performance values and total effects to identify key measures for enhancing social media marketing success. Utilizing an importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) contrasting the performance and total effect of constructs on the endogenous latent variables, areas of action can be pinpointed in an importance-performance matrix, which enables prioritization of recommendations for action and can serve as a foundation for managerial decisions and strategy development (Höck et al. 2010; Martensen and Gronholdt 2003; Völckner et al. 2010). For the IPMA, Likert-scaled performance values are rescaled to

TABLE 3 | Summary of results from disaggregate and aggregate analyses.

Success factor	Disaggregate analysis				Aggregate analysis			
	Path coefficient*	Explained variance R ²	Hypothesis	VIF	f ²	Path coefficient	p**	Hypothesis
Quality of planning and controlling	0.419	0.175	Confirmed	1.655	0.141	0.088	0.357 (0.178)	Not confirmed
Community and dialog orientation	0.589	0.347	Confirmed	2.451	0.001	0.364	0.000 (0.000)	Confirmed
Quality of content implementation	0.509	0.259	Confirmed	2.738	0.028	0.210	0.044 (0.022)	Confirmed
Quality of technical implementation	0.235	0.055	Confirmed	1.766	0.009	-0.096	0.353 (0.177)	Not confirmed
Data centrality	0.383	0.147	Confirmed	2.022	0.007	-0.042	0.732 (0.366)	Not confirmed
Donation/conversion focus	0.366	0.134	Confirmed	1.961	0.040	0.031	0.793 (0.396)	Not confirmed
Organizational framework	0.488	0.238	Confirmed	1.729	0.001	0.208	0.067 (0.034)	Confirmed
					Explained variance R ² _{corr}		0.395	

*p < 0.05 with two-tailed test.

**Two-tailed test (one-tailed test).

a 0–100 range, allowing percentage-based interpretation (Ringle and Sarstedt 2016). Ceteris paribus, a performance improvement of a construct by one percentage point leads to an increase of the target construct by the amount of the (unstandardized) total effect of the influencing construct (Hair et al. 2024). The higher a construct's total effect, the more potential there is for improving the target variable's performance.

In the matrix, performance is depicted on the y-axis, importance on the x-axis (Hair et al. 2024). The further right a construct or indicator is positioned in the matrix, the higher its total effect and, thus, its importance for the target variable. Based on the mean values of the total effects and performance, the matrix is separated into four quadrants, from which the prioritization of the measures can be derived (Hair et al. 2024; Martensen and Gronholdt 2003; Martilla and James 1977): The *Low Priority* quadrant reflects below-average performance and importance, making improvements here less impactful due to the low total effect. The *Possible Overkill* quadrant shows above-average performance but low total effects, suggesting that maintaining these measures is not essential. *Keep Up the Good Work* contains the strengths of the organizations that should be maintained. *Concentrate Here* identifies high-impact opportunities where low performance meets high importance. Enhancing performance will considerably boost success due to high total effects. Slack's (1994) adaptation of the matrix offers four less rigid zones: Improve, Excess?, Appropriate, and Urgent Action.

The IPMA includes three constructs with significant total effects. Figure 2 shows the matrix at the construct level. The performance values range from 38.8% to 63.9%, with a mean of 49.1%. *Organizational Framework* and *Community and Dialog Orientation* show below-average performance, indicating that social media marketing cannot be considered professionalized. There is excellent room for performance improvements.

Quality of Content Implementation is within the *Appropriate* zone in the *Possible Overkill* quadrant. NPO performance (63.9) is at around two-thirds of the maximum, while the importance of the construct (13.1) is just under average. With regard to the other constructs in the IPMA, it does not seem reasonable to put less effort into the one construct with above-average performance. Instead, NPOs should maintain the performance level.

Even though the total effect (10.4) is below average, results indicate that NPOs should improve their *Organizational Framework*. It might be in the *Low Priority* quadrant, but performance (38.8) is below average. According to the zones, the aim should be to increase performance toward the *Appropriate* zone. However, interpretation according to the quadrants suggests that the improvement efforts should not be conducted with the highest priority. Improvements require changes on an organizational level. For example, an increase in resources certainly needs to be conducted at some managerial level.

NPOs should highly prioritize improving the performance of *Community and Dialog Orientation*. With a below-average performance (44.5) but importance (20.2) above average, the construct is in the *Concentrate Here* quadrant and *Urgent Action* zone. By increasing performance by one percentage point, NPOs can improve success by an effective 20.2 points.

The IPMA indicator at the level allows to infer precise recommendations for action for the individual measures (Streukens et al. 2017). Significance can only be proved for three indicator total effects, all of which are part of *Community and Dialog Orientation*. Figure 3 displays the matrix for those indicators. All indicators appear very close to the mean value lines. Still, profound conclusions can be drawn.

The indicator *acknowledging and thanking donors and supporters* is located within the *Concentrate Here* quadrant and *Urgent Action* zone with around average performance but an over-average total effect. Improvements in the performance offer leverage for increasing success. An increase in performance by one percentage point can increase success by a good 7.5 points. Therefore, NPOs should prioritize performance improvements for this measure.

NPOs should also give high priority to improving the performance of the other two indicators, as a performance increase of one percentage point would lead to a rise in success by 5.2 and 6.3 points. *Targeting different target groups* is placed almost at the intersection of all four quadrants. The zones, placing the measure in *Improve*, allow for a more precise interpretation.

Including more than three measures in the IPMA is desirable to have a more comprehensive data basis to determine where the levers for increasing success lie. This would also allow us to verify whether the three indicators examined in the previous matrix, even when compared with more indicators, are the measures with a significant leverage effect. For this reason, we now include the indicators with unproven significance of the positive total effects in the importance-performance matrix. The results are presented in Figure 4. Due to the lack of

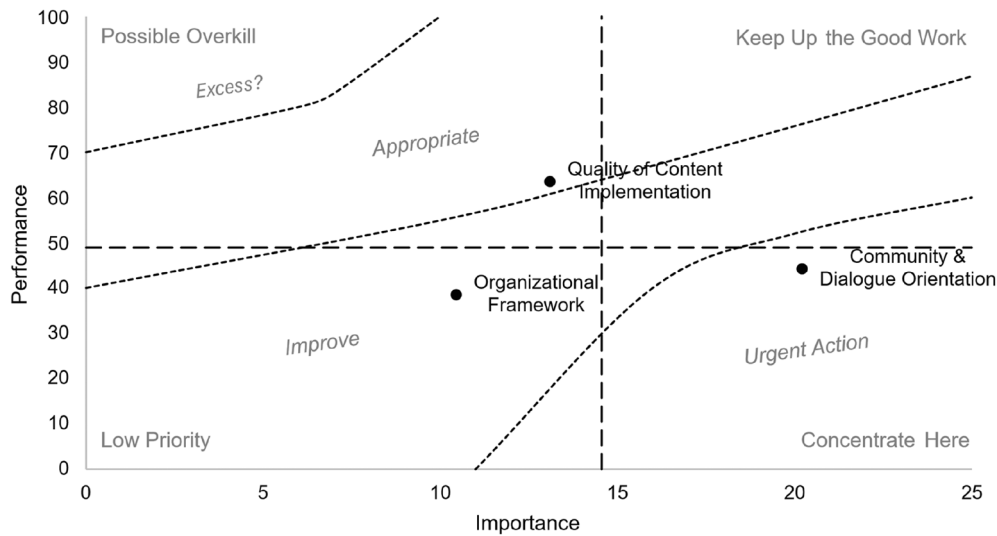


FIGURE 2 | Importance-performance matrix on construct level.

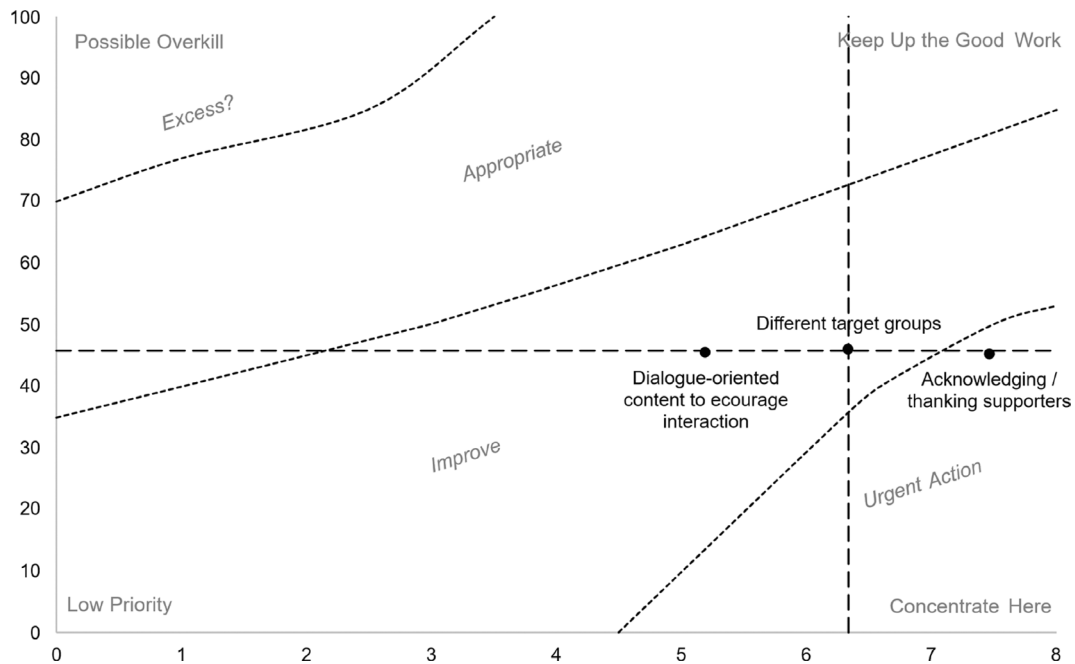


FIGURE 3 | Importance-performance matrix on indicator level.

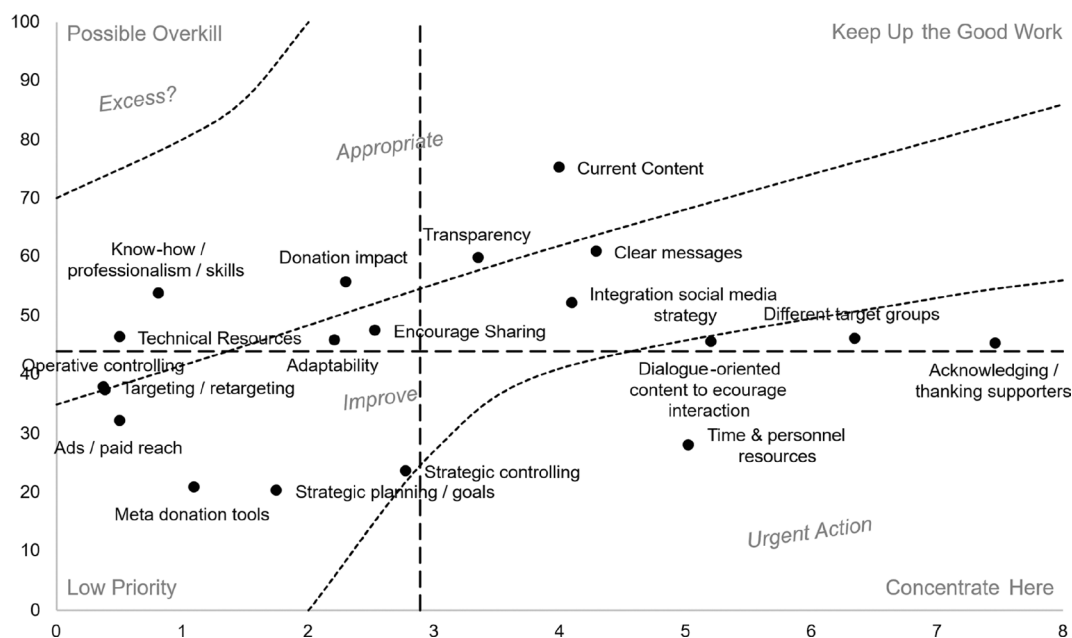


FIGURE 4 | Explorative importance-performance matrix on indicator level.

significant evidence, we emphasize the exploratory nature of the following part of the study. The fact that significance cannot be proved does not mean that no effect is present; it merely limits the verifiability. The performance values still provide insight into how well the surveyed NPOs perform in the individual measures.

The three indicators with proven significant total effects remain those with the highest impact, also when compared to others. All three measures are located in the *Urgent Action* zone. This analysis, therefore, confirms that improving the three measures of success factor *Community and Dialog Orientation* should be given high priority.

The measure *time and personnel resources* are also located in the *Urgent Action* zone. An improvement in performance by one percentage point would increase success by five points. Additionally, the eight indicators in the *Improve* zone need enhancement. Performance of the measures, *clear messages*, and *integration of social media strategy in overall (marketing) strategy* are below 62% and not highly above average. Thus, there is potential for performance improvement, as the total effects are above average. The existing performance levels should at least be maintained.

With performances only marginally above average, the indicators *encourage sharing* and *adaptability* are slightly within the *Possible Overkill* quadrant. A performance improvement of one percentage point would increase success by 2–3 points. Performance increases should be pursued but not with the highest priority. The same applies to *written strategic planning* as well as *qualitative & quantifiable goals* and *strategic controlling*. The results of the three other indicators in the *Improve* zone do not suggest a great need for improvement, as the total effects are significantly below 1, and performance increases lead to only minor success improvements.

5 | Discussion

The first task of our research was to provide a comprehensive, empirically grounded overview of success factors in NPO social media marketing as part of digital fundraising. To our knowledge, this is the first study to do so, thereby addressing a key theoretical gap. This also responds to prior calls for a more systematic examination of online fundraising effectiveness (Adena and Hager 2025). Our findings expand upon Reichenbach's (2020) finding that the use of social media marketing as an online fundraising tool has optimization potential. Our analysis confirms that most organizations achieve only low to moderate social media marketing success, indicating substantial room for improvement.

While aggregate analysis confirmed three success factors, all seven factors are essential, as each shows a distinct positive impact in the disaggregate analysis. The contrast between disaggregate and aggregate reveals that effectiveness results from the interaction of multiple factors, rather than from isolated measures, thus extending prior research that often examined components of nonprofit social media marketing in isolation.

Despite the interplay between factors, our analysis highlights the importance of three success factors. Beyond the importance of high-quality content and a functional organizational framework, an aspect that has been little studied in this context and that demonstrates that social media marketing success is not just content-driven, community and dialog orientation emerge as particularly influential. This finding aligns with existing research, as community focus and dialog orientation are key motives for NPOs' social media use (Albanna et al. 2022). Our results extend previous research that has linked deeper engagement of followers in online conversations to increased support of an organization (Nelson 2019). Extending this user-level perspective, our study adopts an organizational perspective and shows that

a strategic focus on dialog and community orientation enhances overall social media marketing success. Furthermore, our study not only highlights the importance of community and dialog orientation and explores how this can be achieved, as previous research has done, but also shows that German-speaking NPOs struggle to implement this key aspect effectively.

The second task of our research was to derive actionable recommendations for NPOs to enhance social media marketing success. Contrary to the anecdotal nature of much existing guidance in the field (Adena and Hager 2025), our IPMA-based recommendations provide an evidence-driven foundation for strategic decisions in nonprofit social media marketing. With IPMAs, we identified key areas for improvement and the main levers for nonprofit social media marketing success enhancement. The construct of *Community and Dialog Orientation*, and mainly three of its measures, prove to be the most critical levers for increasing success, given that the total effects are high and the performance values are merely average.

The observed importance of targeting different target groups aligns with findings from Lee and Shon (2023), who emphasize that NPOs must take into account platform-specific cultures and intended audiences when engaging in social media activities. Optimizations for the measure of dialog-oriented content, which encourages interaction between NPO and followers, do not require additional effort but rather a change in content. Our findings on the importance of dialog-oriented content for NPOs extend existing insights regarding approaches to implementing dialog-oriented content. For example, NPOs can open discussions with the public and post on events (Albanna et al. 2022). To promote interaction, NPOs can encourage followers to share information and their ideas and perspectives on the NPOs' social media profiles (Bilgin and Kethüda 2022). Regarding TikTok, DeMasters et al. (2024) find that higher engagement occurs specifically when community-building content is aligned with a corresponding community-building strategy. Furthermore, evidence suggests that emotional strength in content fosters engagement (Zhang et al. 2023). Yet, there is evidence that financially stable NPOs tend to achieve higher levels of community engagement on social media (Suh 2022). This may suggest that improvements in community engagement are more easily attainable for larger NPOs with greater financial stability.

Our new findings and recommendations enable NPOs to adjust their social media marketing based on scientific evidence. Particularly considering the often limited personnel and financial resources, it is essential for NPO practice to allocate resources to high-impact measures. NPOs can utilize the insights of the IPMA analyses and the emerged managerial implications to enhance their online fundraising via social media marketing and increase their success.

6 | Limitations and Future Research

Our study sample is a diverse group of NPOs in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. A more differentiated investigation through multiple-group analysis (e.g., distinguishing between small and large organizations) would likely provide even greater insights, as potential group-specific success factors could be

identified. This could enable more specific action recommendations. However, the size of the sample does not allow such analyses.

The study cannot claim to capture all potential success factors in the social media marketing of NPOs, particularly not with longer-term validity. Given the rapidly evolving digital landscape, especially in social media, these factors are likely to change over time, making their relevance situational.

Ultimately, the study can serve as a foundation for future research on (nonprofit) social media marketing. Additionally, our developed success concept and the structural equation model can be applied as a framework for studying the success factors in other digital fundraising disciplines.

7 | Conclusion

Analyzing data from 116 nonprofit social media marketing professionals via structural equation modeling, we empirically identified the critical success factors in NPOs' social media marketing. On a theoretical level, our research enhances the body of knowledge on nonprofit social media marketing. On a practical level, findings provide NPOs with empirical evidence for improving their social media marketing as part of digital fundraising. We created evidence on the key drivers for improving NPOs' social media marketing success, whose performance enhancement should, therefore, be prioritized in practice. Measures of *Community and Dialog Orientation* have proven to be particularly important in this regard.

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Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire.

See Appendix A

Various goals can be pursued through social media marketing. Please indicate how important the following social media marketing goals are for your NPO. For each goal, please rate its importance using the provided scale.

	(No importance at all) 1	2	3	4	5	6	(Very high importance) 7
Strengthening of image and brand							
Reach increase							
Community building							
Winning prospects in existing target groups							
Winning prospects in new target groups							
Winning new donors							
Strengthening of relationship with stakeholders/supporters							
Increase involvement/engagement of existing donors							
Revenue growth of social media marketing generated donations							
Profitability and cost efficiency of social media marketing							

You have just indicated how important the various social media marketing goals are for your organization. Now, please indicate the extent to which your NPO has achieved each of these social media marketing goals so far. For each goal, please rate the level of achievement using the provided scale.

	(Not achieved at all) 1	2	3	4	5	6	(Fully achieved) 7
Strengthening of image and brand							
Reach increase							
Community building							
Winning prospects in existing target groups							
Winning prospects in new target groups							
Winning new donors							
Strengthening of relationship with stakeholders/supporters							
Increase involvement/engagement of existing donors							
Revenue growth of social media marketing generated donations							
Profitability and cost efficiency of social media marketing							

To what extent do the following statements about the planning and controlling of social media marketing apply to your organization? Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

Strategic planning: We comprehensively document our social media marketing planning in writing for a medium-term period (2 to 5 years).

Operational planning: We comprehensively document our social media marketing planning in writing for a short-term period (up to 1 year), e.g., by using an editorial plan/content calendar.

We have a detailed, written set of SMART goals for our social media marketing.

We monitor the success/performance of individual social media marketing activities promptly and comprehensively based on defined metrics.

We evaluate the overall success of our social media marketing over a medium-term period (2 to 5 years) based on clearly defined target indicators.

Overall, the planning and control of our social media marketing is of high quality.

To what extent do the following statements regarding the community and dialog orientation of social media marketing apply to your organization? Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

We use social media intensively to thank and acknowledge our donors and supporters.

We actively use dialog- and community-oriented posts that encourage interaction with our followers.

Our community management is reliable: we respond to all relevant comments and messages.

We specifically address different target groups on social media.

We regularly encourage users to share our content.

Overall, we implement numerous community-oriented and dialog-promoting measures in our social media marketing.

To what extent do the following statements regarding the content implementation of social media marketing apply to your organization? Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

Our content is always up to date.

We regularly show the impact of donations on social media.

Our messages on social media are always clear and, when fitting, formulated with calls to action.

We make extensive use of social media to create transparency and build trust (e.g., by sharing information about the organization or how donations are used).

To what extent do the following statements regarding the content implementation of social media marketing apply to your organization? Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

We intensively use storytelling on social media.

Our content is always adapted to the different platforms in terms of format, content, and tone.

We regularly post on all social media channels we use.

Overall, the content implementation of our social media marketing is of high quality.

To what extent do the following statements regarding the technical implementation of social media marketing apply to your organization? Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

Our content consistently follows a mobile-first approach (optimized for display on mobile devices).

Our content is consistently adapted to various image and video formats (aspect ratios, etc.).

We always use subtitles for spoken content.

Our content consistently includes appealing and relevant visuals (photos, videos, graphics).

Overall, the technical implementation of our social media marketing is of high quality.

To what extent do the following statements regarding the data centrality of social media marketing apply to your organization? Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

Our social media marketing is evidence-based: We take current scientific findings into account and/or systematically collect and evaluate our own data.

We intensively use conversion tracking, e.g., with Facebook Pixel/Google Analytics.

We ensure that our content is highly relevant to our target audiences by thoroughly researching their needs and preferences.

For our paid social media ads and posts, we actively use the available targeting and retargeting options.

We comprehensively analyze all donations generated through social media.

We intensively use available testing options, such as A/B testing for ads.

As part of our social media marketing, we collect extensive data, analyze it thoroughly, and use the available insights to improve our activities.

To what extent do the following statements regarding the donation and conversion focus of social media marketing apply to your organization? Dear Swiss NPOs: For the first three statements, please select “does not apply at all” on the far left, as Meta donation tools are not available in Switzerland. Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

We make full use of the Meta donation tools' built-in fundraising features (donate button, own fundraising campaigns, posts & stories with donate button on Facebook & Instagram).

We intensively use and promote peer-to-peer fundraising options on the Meta platforms.

We use the available options for engaging with and thanking donors/initiators (e.g., thank-you comments and tips for peer-to-peer fundraisers).

We intensively use ads/paid reach for donation-relevant topics and fundraising campaigns.

We use social media intensively to generate donations.

To what extent do the following statements regarding the organizational framework of social media marketing apply to your organization? Please rate each statement using the provided scale.

(Does not apply at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Fully applies) 7

We have sufficient time and personnel resources for professional social media marketing.

We have sufficient financial resources (budget) for professional social media marketing.

We have sufficient technical resources (software, tools, hardware, etc.) for professional social media marketing.

Our staff responsible for social media marketing possess a high level of expertise and the necessary competencies.

Our social media marketing is strategically closely linked to overall marketing.

In our NPO, responsibilities for the different aspects of social media marketing are clearly assigned to specific staff members, and the processes are clearly defined.

We consistently adapt quickly to the often sudden changes and trends on social media platforms.

Overall, our organizational conditions are highly conducive to successful social media marketing.