

# STORYTELLING AND SOCIAL MEDIA- A MODEL FOR PLANNING AND EXECUTING SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS

By

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This document puts forth a model for social media campaign strategy for nonprofit organizations of all sizes to better frame their narratives and deliver their stories to the wider public. By presenting this model, the aim is to increase online engagement, attract potential donors and boost fundraising campaigns. This model was designed by analyzing three successful nonprofits and their most recent social media campaigns across three different social media platforms. This model was developed as part of a Major Research Paper at Ryerson University. The campaigns each had varying goals and objectives and garnered varying levels of success. Success here is defined as 'meeting the objective or goal of the campaign. The three campaigns analyzed were Sick Kids vs. the Undeniable by Sick Kids Hospital, #Notatarget by Doctors Without Borders Canada and #iDefy by Planned Parenthood Association of America.

## 1. The Case Studies

### 1.1- Sick Kids vs. The Undeniable

Sick Kids is widely known in nonprofit healthcare circles as the fundraising mammoth. The goal of this campaign, therefore, was to target and engage more Canadians to become donors to the organization with a specific focus on segments of the population who were not currently huge donors using specific emotional triggers. Their goal was to specifically, reach more males especially those ages 35 – 60 as they are the portion of the population they are not a huge part of their donor base. They also wanted to engage more millennials, again exploring a different part of the population that was not a huge part of their donor base and ultimately raise more money by increasing the average amount donated online.

The campaign as articulated by the launch video was bold and fierce. In the centerpiece anthem, titled "SickKids VS: Undeniable," ailing children, alongside their families, doctors, nurses and other hospital staff, all gird for battle—as medieval soldiers, pro wrestlers taking baseball bats to dialysis machines, and comic-book superheroes.

The soundtrack, "Undeniable" by Donnie Daydream featuring Richie Sosa, features bone-crushing rap, driven by a steadily pounding kick drum, perpetually crescendoing synth bass, militaristic snare patterns, and haunting, echoing crashes and yelps. Powerful imagery was also carefully selected to simulate real situations with real patients who either were currently or had been in the situations being filmed.

The campaign shifted the attitude and image of the Sick Kids brand from sick to fierce by featuring patients and staff posing bravely in the face of debilitating illnesses. The use of positive and uplifting words was evident throughout as can be seen in Fig 2. In other words, the campaign was not just speaking to specific kids' battles, but the call to action was to a broader goal—to win the fight against them all and highlight the kids fighting in a positive light.



February of 2016. When it was time to raise awareness and apply pressure to the United Nations Security Council in early May, the body managing MSF's post-Kunduz response decided that it was time to take the beta-tested #NotATarget and scale it up internationally for the UNSC resolution. It has since become widely used both inside and outside of MSF, most recently for the one-year anniversary commemoration of the Kunduz attack, as was intended and is one of the most (if not \*the\* most) prolific hashtag campaign MSF has ever undertaken.

In Early May, the social media campaign was launched in the act of solidarity to stand up for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, patient's, medical staff and hospitals in conflicts. Close to 100 health structures belonging to or supported by MSF have been bombed since 2015, most of them in Syria. MSF's health workers and health structures have also been targeted in Yemen, South Sudan and Afghanistan, among other countries, causing intolerable suffering, death, and destruction.

These horrific attacks contravene humanitarian law and have a catastrophic impact on people already made vulnerable by war and violence. When hospitals are bombed, civilians are often severely maimed or killed, and those who survive lose access to the medical help they desperately need.

UN Security Council met to discuss the implementation of resolution 2268 on the protection of medical facilities and later adopted the resolution.

The campaign was created and managed largely in-house, the MSF Canadian office engaged diverse members of staff to shoot the video. Subjects looked directly into the camera, and the landscape was stark with a soft backlight to illuminate the subject and to draw attention. The video was then shared with MSF international partners and supporters who had rallied behind the UN resolution the year prior.

### **1.3- Planned Parenthood Association of America- #Idefy**

On November 8th, 2016, the US held its most recent presidential election and Republican candidate Donald Trump was elected president. Throughout his campaign and ultimately in the first few weeks after taking office, Donald Trump has criticized Planned Parenthood, threatening to defund it based on some of its policies concerning abortion. As a response to some of the policies of the incoming administration at the time, Planned Parenthood launched #Idefy on January 22nd via Facebook Live hosted by celebrities and influencers. #Idefy is a 5-year campaign aimed at identifying, mobilizing and training young people and bringing them into the Planned Parenthood family providing them with affordable health care, sex education and prepare them for a life of activism.

#Idefy is a call for defiance, defiance against outdated norms and being told what one person can do with their body. The call to action is for young people to defy hate and ignorance and live the life they want to live. The defy campaign asks young people to use social media to tell the world what they defy, whether it's hate, discrimination, bigotry, slut shaming, abortion among others.

Using social media, the goal was to let politicians know that young people will stand in defiance of their outdated policies and norms. Launched the day after the women's march in November 2016, the #idefy movement was specifically geared towards training young people and get them involved in activism as well as to fight against the potential defunding of Planned Parenthood

The campaign further encouraged young people to take pictures holding posters with the word #Idefy and to tell the world which of the 'isms' they defy on social media, e.g., racism, classism, sexism, etc. It was officially launched on Facebook live hosted by celebrities and influencers.

An interactive art installation was live streamed on Facebook with artist covering the wall with a

visual representation of what young people stood up against. After this was done, the wall was destroyed in a symbolic act of defiance. Videos were then produced by Planned Parenthood of people telling the world what they defy.

A website was created for the campaign (defynow.org) where people can sign-up to join the fight, anyone signing up will receive content and memes they can share online in their act of defiance. Posters, stickers, and gifs are also being provided as part of the campaign. Individuals just need to sign up with their email and phone number to receive different content for social media.

The model rest on five pillars, these are the Campaign Architecture, Narratives, Platforms and Delivery, Third Party Resources and Media Awareness. Below is a representation of the model with a more detailed description below.

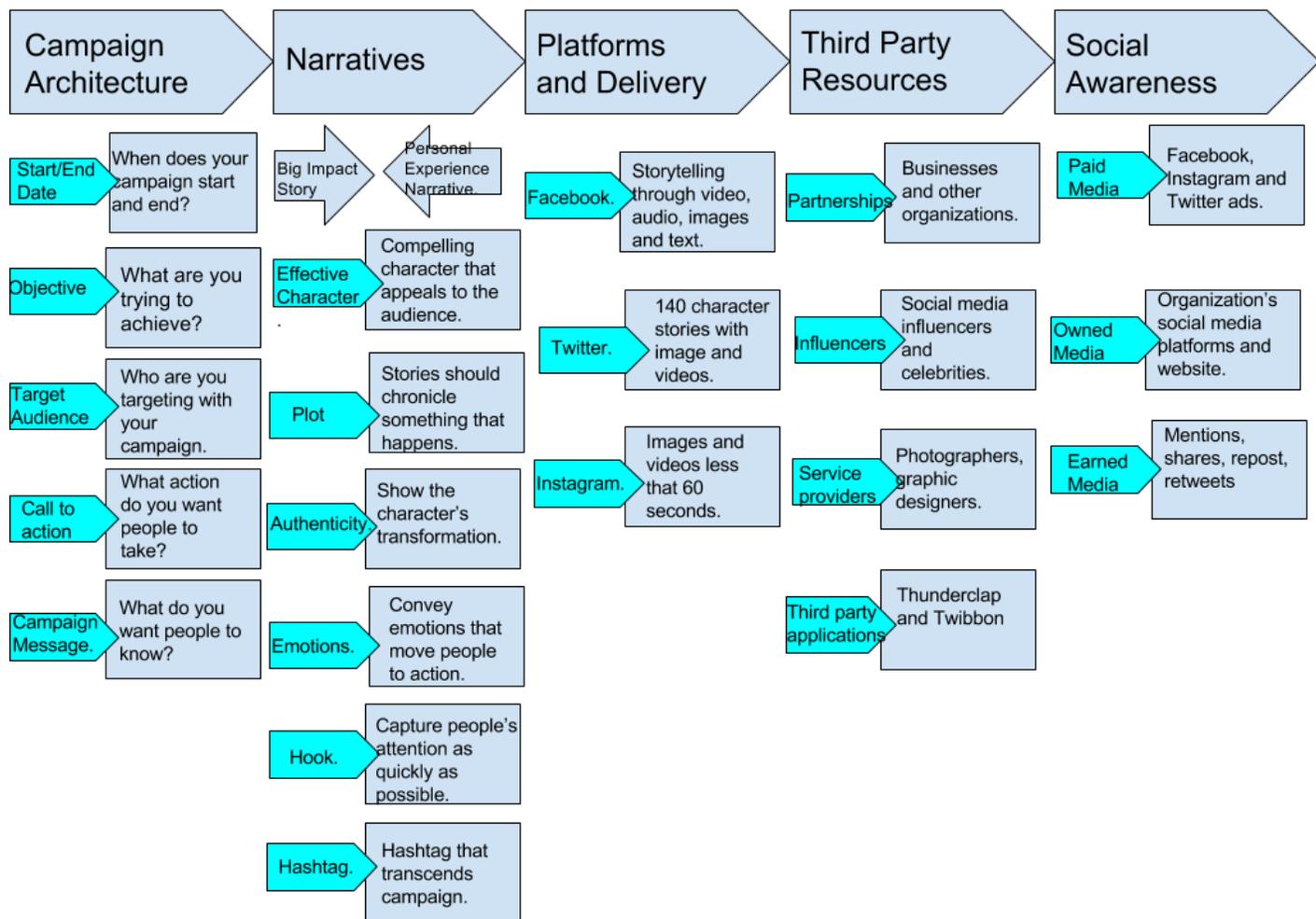


Fig 3- Storytelling-based Social Media Campaign Model developed as part of this research project

## 2. Campaign Architecture



*Fig 4- Showing elements of the campaign architecture*

The campaign architecture looks at some of the basic information that a campaign will need.

**Start and End Date-** The campaigns studied as part of this research all had definite start and end dates. The belief behind this is when users know that a campaign is ongoing and they can participate at any time, they will be a bit more laid back with their participation, however, if they know that they are working with a time-period, then the probability of them taking action at the moment increases.

**Target Audience-** One of the reasons why “SickKids VS. The Undeniable” was so successful is because they had a defined audience. They wanted to reach millennials especially males who in the past has made up a minor subset of their total donor base. Hence, they designed the campaign to do just that. Having a defined target audience makes it easier to design the campaign message as the organization will know who will be consuming the message. They will be able to do research to know exactly how to communicate with this group.

**The Objectives-** The objectives of the campaign takes a look at what the organization is trying to achieve, whether that is trying to raise funds for Sick Kids or Influence a United Nation resolution like doctors without borders or take a stand (advocate) against a Government’s actions like Planned Parenthood. The bottom line is social media campaigns need to have a reason for its existence.

**Campaign message-** The campaign message is closely tied to the campaign objectives, in the case of Doctors Without Borders, their objective was to get the UN to sign a resolution to stop the bombing of hospitals around the world. Their message was, doctors, patients, and medical facilities are not a target and should not be a target of any bombings. The message in the case

of all three case-studies was something that people could relate to. It needs to appeal to an individual need to be part of something greater than themselves.

**Clear Call to Action-** Organizations need to have a clear call to action for their campaign to get their message across on social media. That can be in the form of asking stakeholders to donate as was the case with Sick Kids or whether it was helping spread awareness about injustice as was the case with Doctors without Borders. A clear call to action will tell stakeholders exactly what they need to do to support the campaign.

**A hashtag that transcends the campaign-** Social Media experts such as Evan Lepage from Hootsuite, the social media management platform, suggest that when choosing a hashtag, it should be memorable, short and easy to remember. The case study in this research has shown that a hashtag also needs to have the potential to transcend the campaign. The hashtag #Idefy became a calling card online for anyone who felt their rights or way of life was being targeted as well as #Notatarget became a movement for organizations that serve people who are being unfairly targeted.

### Design Your Campaign Architecture

Start and End Date	
Target Audience	
Objectives	
Campaign Message	
Call to Action	
Hashtag	

*Table 1- This is a blank table to create the campaign architecture*

### 3. Narratives



Fig 5- Showing elements of the narrative pillar

From the case studies, there are two types of Narratives used throughout the social media campaigns analyzed; these are The Big Impact Story and Personal Experience Narrative.

**Big Impact Story-** The big impact story focused primarily on the overarching mission of the nonprofit and how the campaign ties back to that overarching mission. It tells the story of the campaign and what the organization is trying to achieve. The big impact story appeals to a person's need to be part of something bigger than themselves while at the same time being relatable. The central theme is a call to be part of something that will have huge positive impact on the social, environmental or economic well-being of one's society or the environment.

**Personal Experience Narratives-** The primary characteristic of a personal experience narrative is that it relays and reflects on an individual's personal experience: The focus of the text is a central, main character and that character's first-hand experiences, reported in either first-person or third-person narration. This type of personal experience narrative is reflected throughout all three campaigns analyzed as part of this research.



Fig 6- Personal experience narrative from Sick Kids Vs. Campaign highlighting one patient fight against Intestinal failure.

### 3.1- Elements of a Great Story

In a joint initiative with the Meyer Foundation, Researchers from Georgetown University's Center for Social Impact Communication surveyed 81 non-profits to find out more about how they think about, plan for and perceive the effectiveness of their current storytelling efforts. The results of this study led to the creation of a guide to strategic and sustainable nonprofit storytelling and identified five key elements of a compelling story.

These five key elements were analyzed and applied to the stories emanating from the case studies, and it was found that each story had all five elements, both personal experience, and big impact stories. The breakdown of these elements are as follows:

**1- An effective character-** "Stories should contain a single, compelling character that is relatable to the audience and who is comfortable relaying specific details, memories, and experiences." (Goren, N et al. 2015).

This character doesn't always have to be the client or beneficiary; this can be any of the non-profit stakeholders such as volunteers, staff or even advocates. Since the people consuming the story will likely never experience the character's story first hand, it needs to be framed in terms of a universal need such as belonging, or self-respect. The character also needs to be relatable so that people can be engaged with his/her journey through their imagination. The character also needs to be willing to recall and share specific memories and experiences in their own words.

**2- Trajectory (Plot)** - “Stories should chronicle something that happens—an experience, a journey, a transformation, discovery—but they don’t need to be a linear, sequential recounting every time.” (Goren, N et al. 2015).

For the story to be compelling, it needs to capture the ‘what happened?’ factor. This “what happened” can be a journey, discovery, transformation or experience and should follow the beginning, middle and end basic storytelling structure at a minimum.

**3- Authenticity-** “Stories should show—rather than tell—the audience about the character’s transformation, using rich details and featuring the character’s voice, devoid of jargon.” (Goren, N et al. 2015).

Being authentic is what will sustain the connection between the character and the readers throughout the story. Authenticity cannot be manufactured; the Meyers Foundation recommends telling the story from the character point of view as much as possible as opposed to from the organization’s point of view. However, to ensure a story is authentic, focus on the details. Authentic stories will show not tell; this can be done by trying to engage as many of the senses as possible. For instance, when describing something, try describing what it looks, feels, smells, tastes and smells like, characters should avoid the use of Jargons as much as possible.

**4- Action oriented emotions-** “Stories should convey emotions that move people to act, and marry these with clear, easy-to-find pathways to get them to those desired actions” (Goren, N et al. 2015).

To truly influence people and get them to take action, storytellers need to be able to stimulate their emotions. But not just any emotions, stories need to be structured towards action-oriented emotions. Some emotions like anger, anxiety, and excitement can motivate us to act more than others. Other emotions such as sadness are low arousal; they stifle action, when we are sad, we do not want to do anything.

**5- A Hook-** “Stories should capture the audience’s attention as quickly as possible, giving them a sense of whose story it is and what’s at stake.” (Goren, N et al. 2015).

We have just a few seconds to grab someone's attention and get them interested in our story. Lisa Cron in her book “Wired For Story” (2012), says that a solid narrative hook must answer three questions for the audience, Whose story, is it? What’s happening?, What’s at Stake?

It should also be noted that according to Denning (2006) “There is no single right way to tell a story.” That is because a wide variety of narrative approaches are each suitable for a different business purpose or function: a success story or “springboard story,” for instance, may prove effective in moving people to action, but will be less effective at communicating tacit knowledge that would benefit the learning needs of an organization’s members (Ibid.; Kadembo 2012, Denning, 2006).

## 3.2- Storytelling Structure

One of the key findings was the lack of a defined storytelling structure for social media. There was no one way to tell a story to make it ideal for social media. A defined storytelling structure does not matter when telling stories on social media as much as creating a culture of storytelling does. The basic elements of a story such as the beginning, middle and end still apply, however, these were done differently as every story was different. While there is no special structure to use, however, when in doubt, I'd recommend the "Hero's Journey" storytelling structure especially for personal experience narratives.

Joseph Campbell, a mythology scholar, devoted a large part of his life reading ancient mythology, fairy tales, Arthurian romance, modernist fiction, and works of religious doctrine and philosophy. He coined the term hero's journey after studying hundreds of these ancient myths and stories. Campbell observed that the most popular stories all followed a similar pattern. This pattern can be found today in movies, books, and talks, the elements of the hero's journey are presented below. Every story may not fit perfectly in this structure and in many cases, elements may have to be rearranged or removed.

**1- The status Quo-** This is where the story starts, the normal life of the main character. Something eventually happens to disrupt this.

**2- Call to adventure-** Something happens to disrupt the status quo, a desire or an invitation to be part of something more. That can also be a problem that forces the character out of their comfort zone, which ultimately needs to resonate with the audience consuming the story. Accepting the call to adventure requires the help of someone.

**3- Mentor-** The main character receives help or assistance from someone or something to help get them started on their journey. When they receive this help, they get started on their journey.

**4- Departure-** The main character or the Hero of the story departs on their journey, whether that's deciding to tackle the problem or join something bigger than themselves. Whatever that is, it will not be easy to overcome.

**5- Trials and Setback-** The initial struggle begins, the main character experiences some setback here as they begin their journey.

**6- Approach-** Here things are getting tough, setbacks after setbacks are being experienced, the character have doubt and is experiencing fear and the pain the audience will like to overcome.

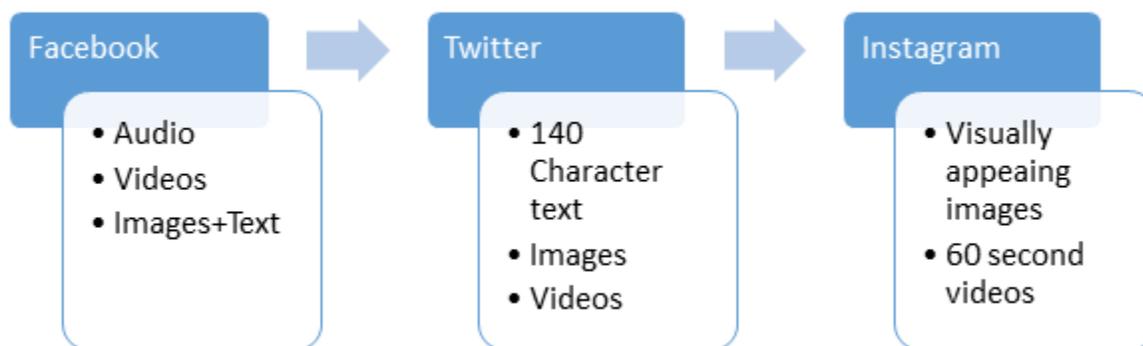
**7- Crisis-** Things goes from bad to worse, the pain being experienced gets critical, and the main character hit rock bottom and is about to give up. However, there is still hope this can be overcome.

**8- Reward-** At this point, the main character finds something that will help him/her overcome the crisis they're experiencing. That can be an idea, a tool, a new way of looking at things or process and in this case the services of the non-profit organization.

**9- Results-** Using this newfound treasure (Nonprofit Service), the main character decides to take action to overcome whatever problem or issue is. The main character will start seeing results, which is the results the audience craves.

**10- Return and Resolution-** New results with the newfound tool, nonprofit services, process, idea or whatever it found in the reward stage. Things are hopeful, and the solution is something that anyone can use, and it's within their reach.

## 4. Platforms and Delivery



*Fig 7- Shows the different of the platforms and delivery pillar*

Three main Platforms Studied in this research are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

### Facebook

Gary Vaynerchuk (2013) believes people go to Facebook to connect, socialize, and catch up on what the people they know and presumably care about are doing. Facebook wants users to see things that they find relevant, fun, and useful, not annoying and pointless. To do this organization need to create content that's relevant, fun, and useful.

On Facebook, each of the campaigns analyzed had a strong focus on the big impact narrative of their campaign. There was also a strong focus on personal storytelling from each campaign otherwise known as the personal experience narrative. Users play two roles; they are both consumers and producers of content. All videos, images and other type content posted were all done natively, no link to third party sites or applications.

## **Twitter**

To differentiate yourself and your organization and get people interested is through your unique context. Breaking out on Twitter isn't about breaking the news or spreading information—it's about deejaying it. News has little value on its own, but the marketer who can skillfully spin, interpret, and remix it in his or her signature style can often tell a story that is more powerful and memorable than the actual news itself. (Vaynerchuk, 2013)

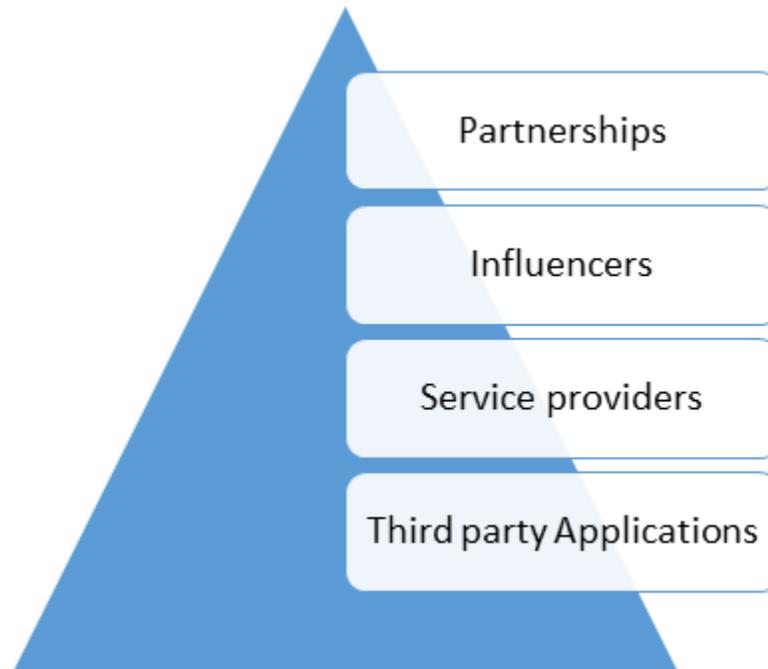
On Twitter, the focus was on having a hashtag that transcended the limits of the social media campaign. Doctors without borders hashtag of #Notatarget was adopted by the International Red Cross and was able to reach an even bigger audience. The campaigns were all reactionary, meaning that people were reacting to the campaign narrative in the form of retweets and likes. There were a few key advocates with the message being distributed through retweets. On Twitter, the tweets were also directed at third-party users.

## **Instagram**

Instagram is used best to portray a more transparent view of the organization through photos and 60 seconds videos. These videos and photos can be tweaked directly inside Instagram using filters.

On Instagram with each campaign, there is a focus on the visual aspect of campaigns. Users played two roles; they were consumers and producers of content. The campaign hosts focused on the big impact narrative of each campaign coupled with personal experience narratives. On Instagram, many of the campaign partners held their own contest and ran their own mini-campaigns in support of the main campaign. That provided an easy way for people to get involved in the campaign without going out of their way. Campaign service providers such as photographers also took to Instagram to share content they have captured from their participation in the campaigns. Conversations were also happening around influencers and celebrities that pledge their support to the different campaigns.

## 5. Third Party Resources



*Fig 8- This figure shows the elements of the third part resources pillar*

A key theme of all campaigns analyzed was the use of third-party resources which helped play a crucial role in the overall success of the campaigns. These range from including other organizations and influencers to software and applications. These can be broken down into;

**Business and Other Organizations-** A common theme throughout the case studies and data collected was the involvement of partner organizations. These partner organizations used their influences both online and offline to help support the campaigns.

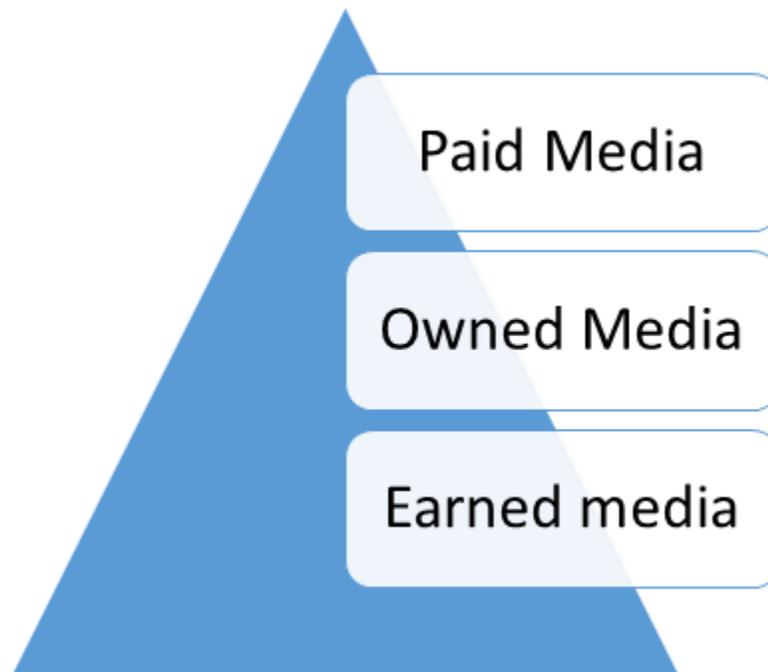
**Social Media Influencers and Celebrities-** The use of social media influencers and celebrities in social media campaign has become a common practice for many organizations. Sick Kids and Doctors Without Borders both made use of influencers like Ryan Reynolds throughout their campaign. These influencers can reach and activate their communities to take action about a cause they care about which makes them an integral part of any social media campaign whether it's for a non-profit or a for-profit organization.

**Service Providers-** Service providers such as photographers, took to Instagram, in particular, to share their contribution to the campaigns such as photos they would have taken. While this may not always be a requirement for every campaign, it can be an integral-added advantage when used.

**Third Party Applications-** Different third-party applications were used throughout the campaigns, ranging from social media scheduling tools, social monitoring tools as well as crowdfunding of social media profiles. Two of the more common applications recommended based on campaign data are Thunderclap and Twibbon. Thunderclap allows anyone with a big or small following to be able to amplify their message online. It is a social media crowd-speaking

platform that allows people to donate their social reach for ideas and causes that are important to them. Twibbon, on the other hand, allows charities, brands, and individuals to raise awareness, money and brand awareness about their campaign on Facebook and Twitter. Online users get to add a filter to their profile picture to support their favorite causes.

## 6. Social Awareness



*Fig 9- Shows elements of the social awareness pillar*

After a campaign is launched, raising awareness about its existence to motivate people to take action is the final step in this social media campaign model. This step is closely related to the step above. However, it can be further broken down into;

**Paid Media-** Paid media refers to the use of advertising online; all three campaigns analyzed made use of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter advertising. That means when preparing to launch a social media campaign, it is recommended that every organization have a budget to help them amplify their message. Paying to promote a campaign can help get the initial word out and raise much-needed initial awareness.

**Owned Media-** Owned media refers to web platforms and social media profiles that are owned by the organization. Even though all three campaigns studied as part of this research focused on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the more owned media an organization have, the more chances it has of getting the word out about the cause. Each campaign also had a web page dedicated to their campaign, in the case of Sick Kids, they built an entire website dedicated to the campaign ([fundthefight.ca](http://fundthefight.ca)).

**Earned Media-** Earned is word of mouth online, usually in the form of retweets, shares, mentions, likes, regrann, recommendation and different content curated by third-party sites.

Throughout the research for this document, the use of earned media was prevalent especially retweets, which showed that stakeholders were able to connect with a story and validate it. The type of content shared helped determine how successful an earned media strategy is.

## 7. Measuring the Results of Social Media Campaigns

There are different goals that an organization may want to achieve when launching a social media campaign. This can be to increase Brand Awareness in which case they are trying to get their name out to the public some more. To measure brand awareness, organizations need to look at metrics such how much views they receive on their videos, how many people are talking about them or the number of people they are reaching online.

Brand engagement is another goal, in this case, organizations want their community to interact with them online. Engagement can be measured through retweets, comments on post or how many people are sharing and engaging with the brand.

Fundraising is another goal, and the idea is to collect a certain amount of money. In this case, this is measured directly by looking at how much money was collected from the campaign vs. how much was expected.

Advocacy is another goal of nonprofit social media campaign efforts, in this case, they are trying to get people to engage with their cause. Or they are trying to raise awareness about something, and this can be measured by the number of traffic they are driving to a website; how many people are engaging with their content online or whether anyone is signing up for their cause.

Activism is also another goal, and the idea is to raise awareness about a cause and motivate people to take the desired action. This is measured by whether the right person took that desired action.

<b>Social Media Campaign Goals</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
Brand Awareness	Views, mentions, reach, impressions, number of people talking about your organization.
Engagement	Retweets, likes, comments, shares, mentions, comments, replies
Fundraising	How much money was raised- Expected vs. Actual
Advocacy	Post engagement, website traffic, number of people signing up for your cause, number of people talking about your organization online.
Activism (Raising awareness about something to get people to take action)	Was the desired action taken by the right person/group/organization?

*Table 2- Table showing social media goals and different metrics for measurement*

## 8. Final Thoughts

This document is geared towards professionals in the non-profit industry looking to plan and execute social media campaigns successfully. The model presented aims to increase online engagement, brand awareness, attract potential donors and boost fundraising campaigns. The key strategic pillar here is the use of storytelling to power these campaigns. While storytelling is not the only variable of success in social media campaigns, it is indeed an integral part of it.

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