

Social Media Utilization of Public Benefit Organizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Submitted: 23.04.2023 | Accepted: 19.09.2023

Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of the research was twofold. First, it was to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the publishing activity of Polish public benefit organizations on Facebook. Second, to determine the impact of content published in a crisis situation on the public reaction.

Design/methodology/approach: During the investigation, the financial reports of public benefit organizations were analyzed. Further the basic parameters of the organization's Facebook profile and the content published on Facebook were analyzed (1025 organizations were covered by the research). From the reports, financial data of organizations has been collected. Both in 2020 and in 2021, posts of the same organizations were analyzed.

Findings: The Covid-19 pandemic did not have a significant impact on the publishing activity of the surveyed organizations. Although interest in the Facebook profile of organizations during the Covid-19 pandemic increased, the results indicate that Facebook's potential in the crisis stage was only used to a small extent.

Research limitations/implications: The research is limited to one social networking site – Facebook. It would also be worth scrutinizing other social media sites (e.g. by comparative analysis).

Originality/value: The paper fills a research gap regarding the behavior of non-profit organizations concerning the utilization of social media during the crisis consisting in losing direct contact with the public and the inability to operate in an offline environment (due to the lockdown). It shows what opportunities exist in such situations in social media and how the managers of non-profit organizations could use them for the benefit of the organizations they handle.

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Suggested Citation: Szamrowski, P., & Oliński, M. (2023). Social Media Utilization of Public Benefit Organizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *European Management Studies*, 21(3), 119–144. <https://doi.org/10.7172/2956-7602.101.6>.

Keywords: social media, COVID-19, non-profit organization.

JEL: L31, M15, M30

Wpływ pandemii COVID-19 na wykorzystanie serwisów mediów społecznościowych przez organizacje pożytku publicznego

Streszczenie

Cel: główny cel badań miał dwojaki charakter. Po pierwsze, była to ocena wpływu pandemii COVID-19 na aktywność publikacyjną polskich organizacji pożytku publicznego w serwisie społecznościowym Facebook. Po drugie, ustalenie wpływu publikowanych w kryzysowej sytuacji treści na reakcję odbiorcy.

Metodyka: w trakcie badania przeanalizowano sprawozdania finansowe i merytoryczne organizacji pożytku publicznego. Następnie poddano analizie podstawowe parametry profilu organizacji oraz treści publikowane na Facebooku (badaniem objęto 1025 organizacji). Z utworzonej bazy danych zebrano dane finansowe organizacji. Posty tych samych organizacji pożytku publicznego przeanalizowano zarówno w 2020 r., jak i w 2021 roku.

Wyniki: pandemia Covid-19 nie miała istotnego wpływu na działalność publikacyjną badanych organizacji. Choć zainteresowanie profilem organizacji na Facebooku w czasie pandemii COVID-19 wzrosło, to wyniki wskazują, że potencjał Facebooka w fazie kryzysu został wykorzystany tylko w niewielkim stopniu.

Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze: badanie ograniczono do jednego serwisu społecznościowego – Facebook. Wskazanym byłoby przyjrzenie się innym portalom społecznościowym (np. poprzez analizę porównawczą).

Oryginalność/wartość: artykuł wypełnia lukę teoretyczną dotyczącą zachowań organizacji non-profit dotyczących wykorzystania mediów społecznościowych w czasie kryzysu polegającego na utracie bezpośredniego kontaktu z ich publicznością i niemożności działania w środowisku offline (lockdownu z powodu COVID-19). Artykuł ukazuje, jakie możliwości istnieją w takich sytuacjach w mediach społecznościowych i jak menedżerowie organizacji non-profit mogą je wykorzystać z korzyścią dla obsługiwanych przez siebie organizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, COVID-19, organizacja non-profit.

1. Introduction

In the last couple of years due to the perpetual lockdown threat caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the running mechanisms of both for-profit and non-profit organization have changed dramatically. It was especially onerous for the latter ones. For most of them, the practice of raising funds through charity outdoor events like concerts, football matches, retreats for the disabled and street collections almost completely came to a halt, which badly impeded the building of social relations and public engagement. Non-profit organizations are therefore very complex institutions with financial arrangements and rich governance systems (Coupric, 2012). “The lockdown certainly took place through the mechanisms, reducing the social complexity and the possibilities of individuals to have an experience and actively take part” (Stanzani, 2020, p. 922). On the other hand, the world is becoming more and more digitalized. “New applications, new services, new platforms,

new data and new devices have become a crowded playground for all kinds of companies that want to tap the emerging opportunities” (Zott & Amit, 2017, p. 19). For profit-oriented companies, a digitalized world should be perceived as a unique place for the development of mutually beneficial long-term relationships with clients and other stakeholders and in consequence might be a deciding factor in achieving a competitive advantage (Domazet et al., 2010; Day & Bulte, 2002; Siggelkow & Terwiesch, 2019; Karlsen, 2008; Hazra et al., 2017; Chakrabarty, 2020). The same philosophy applies to non-profit organizations (Balsler & McClusky, 2005; Pickard, 2007; Van Huijstee & Glasbergen, 2008; den Hond, 2010; Burchell & Cook 2013; Smillie et al., 2013; Zaharrudin & Zakaria, 2022). The decision to press the “donate” button on the website or social media platform of the non-profit organization is nothing more than the decision to “add to cart” a product on the website of a profit-oriented organization. A large number of non-profit organizations have already reshaped their current business models, and many will do so. The models will be focused primarily on Internet utilization not only as the main source of mission accomplishment, but also as part of the daily routine. Social media will play a key role in the process as it provides non-profit organizations with unique opportunities to engage with their audience, mobilize support, and amplify their efforts. Their role will also be relevant in crisis scenarios and such was undoubtedly the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, there have been very few studies analyzing the impact of the pandemic outbreak on the utilization of social media by non-profit organizations especially in Central European countries. The article aims at partially filling the gap.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, the theoretical background is established. It is divided into four parts. The first part describes the notion of a specific form of non-profit organization that is a Public Benefit Organization (PBO). The second part discusses the importance of social media in the operating of non-profit organizations (with particular emphasis on Facebook). The third part analyzes the theory of social media utilization in non-profit organizations. Afterwards, scientifically backed hypotheses are developed. Then the research methodology is laid out, involving methods, the selection of a research sample, and a method of coding and data analysis. Finally results are presented, followed by discussion part. At the end, conclusions are provided with an emphasis on how our work impacts the existing practice.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Public Benefit Organizations as Specific Kind of Non-profit Organizations

One of the specific entities that can be distinguished within the Polish landscape of non-profit organizations are public benefit organizations (PBOs). They are important Polish non-profit organizations constituting approximately 10% of all registered non-profit organizations in Poland. To get the status of a PSO organization, a number of conditions must be met, from which according to the “Polish Act of 24 April, 2003 on public benefit and voluntary work” the most important are:

- they perform public benefit work to the benefit of the entire society or of a specific group of individuals provided that such group can be distinguished from the society due to difficult living conditions or financial situation (activity for the benefit of the community as a whole should be understood as such activity of an organization that is directed to a certain broad group of recipients, distinguished due to various criteria, e.g. ethnic, religious, geographical criteria);
- they may pursue business activity solely as an activity auxiliary to public benefit work;
- the entire income of the organization (the excess of revenues over costs) is allocated to public benefit work;
- they have a statutory collegial audit or supervision body, separate from the management body and not reporting thereto in matters related to internal audit or supervision (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 2018).

According to the data contained in the National Court Register (NCR), at the end of 2021, there were over 9,082 registered entities with a PBO status (the actual number is slightly smaller due to the fact that in a given year some organizations ceased their activities).

Possessing PBO status involves the possibility of using certain privileges. One of the most important is the right to receive 1% of personal income tax. With the introduction of the PBO organization into the Polish tax system, individual taxpayers obtained the right to transfer 1% of their income tax to a specific public benefit organization indicated by them. In 2021, such a decision was made by 15 million 337 thousand taxpayers, 3.7% more than in 2020. In total, in 2022, public benefit organizations received exactly PLN 1 billion 114 million from the source. The average amount donated to the organizations by an individual taxpayer amounted to PLN 70 (Ministry of Finance, 2022).

2.2. Social Media and Non-profit Organizations

“The power of social media to engage with user communities is a key benefit for organizations that use the tools” (Given et al., 2013, p. 1). Many non-profit organizations use social media as a main communication channel with the public and stakeholders (Wang & Yang, 2020). Regardless of the COVID-19 issues, “social media nowadays play an important role in the further development of civil society and the enhancing of people’s awareness of their social responsibilities” (Akatay et al., 2017, p. 64). The issues related to COVID-19 and possible future epidemic diseases will probably increase the intensity of the utilization of the kinds of tools. For non-profit organizations, the use of social media is of particular significance, because they usually do not have sufficient monetary and human resources for large-scale campaigns or mass media advertisements. “Therefore, they use social media functions that enable them to communicate with many individuals quickly and cheaply” (Kim, 2022, p. 2). So, “the non-profit organizations can operate close to the community, and they are gaining many benefits from information shared on social media such as Facebook” (Masdar et al., 2022, p. 168). Other social media like Twitter (Neu et al., 2020; Kim, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022) or Instagram (Cobos, 2022; Bernardi & Alhamdan, 2022; Najafizadeh et al., 2022) are important as well. Nevertheless, as compared to Facebook, they are used much less frequently. “The Facebook application has become a standard for non-profit organizations to express their activities. It allows them to convince donors for fundraising purposes” (Masdar et al., 2022, p. 167).

Social media seems to be a particularly useful tool in building relationships between non-profit organizations and various stakeholder groups (Chen, 2016; Armstrong & Butcher, 2018; Saraite-Sariene et al., 2021). The reasons for the potential are: faster and easier information delivery, dissemination of information and knowledge, connectivity and network creation, efficiency and transparency gains, transformation of people’s lives and lastly decentralization and empowerment (McNamara, 2003; Yamamichi, 2011; Sheombar, 2015). Previous studies on the utilization of social media in the public relations activities of non-profit organizations focused primarily on identifying the organizational role of social media based on the opinion of public relations practitioners (e.g. Wright & Hinson, 2017; Russmann & Lane, 2020), the extent of its applications and an attempt to find an answer to the question of what attributes of an NGO influenced the greater utilization of the services (e.g. Nah & Saxton, 2013). Subsequently, the research concerned an analysis of static elements of an organization’s profile on a social media service (e.g. Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lane, 2018; Smith et al., 2018), and then the content and its impact on the level of public engagement (e.g. Saxton & Waters, 2014; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Huang et al., 2016; Van Wissen & Wonneberger, 2017; Bellucci & Manetti, 2017; Hellsten et al., 2019, Tao et al., 2021; Oliński & Szamrowski, 2021). The research

also brought up the role of social media in crisis management, although the most common studies focused on the significance of the communication channels in minimizing the negative image caused by the activities of the organization itself. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic did not have its origin in the activities of the organization itself, it was an independent occurrence, although it had a significant impact on the way it operates. There are only a few studies on the impact of a crisis situation arising independently of a non-profit organization. In the context of COVID-19, they mainly concerned motivations that influenced attitudes toward online donations related to the COVID-19 response (Bin-Nashwan & Al-Daihani, 2021) showing the participation of non-profit organizations in information policy concerning the COVID-19 pandemic (Diab, 2021; Chen et al., 2022). With few exceptions, there are no studies scrutinizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the publishing activity of non-profit organizations in social media, as well as its influence on the public engagement level expressed in the case of Facebook by the number of likes, shares and comments (e.g. Banker & Park, 2020). Therefore the research gap in this respect is clearly visible and the following paper is an attempt to fulfill it, thus providing a stimulus for other researchers to conduct similar research.

2.3. Theory of Social Media Utilization in Non-profit Organizations

There are no ground rules of conduct that will guarantee success for an organization in every situation. This is especially true in various crisis conditions (COVID-19 can be a good example here). Therefore, in explaining the adaptability of organizations to crisis conditions, the contingency theory is a helpful approach to studying organizational behavior. It elucidates how factors like technology, culture, and the external environment influence the design and functioning of organizations (Islam & Hu, 2012). Thus, the contingency theory paradigm postulates that organizational outcomes are the consequences of a match between two or more factors, like publishing activities and audience reaction (Van de Ven, Drazin, 1985). Besides utilization of social media in non-profit organization has made significant theoretical contributions to various aspects of management. The contributions have expanded the understanding of management practices, communication dynamics, organizational behavior, and stakeholder interactions. Some key theoretical contributions of social media in management include:

- Communication and information flow: social media have reshaped communication patterns within organizations and between organizations and their stakeholders. They have facilitated faster and more direct communication, breaking down hierarchical barriers and enabling open dialogue. Theoretical models have been developed to study the impact of social media on information sharing, knowledge dissemination, and decision-making processes in non-profit organizations (Guo & Saxton, 2020; Jung et al., 2014);

- Customer Relationship Management (CRM): social media have revolutionized how non-profit units interact with their audience. Theoretical contributions in CRM have emerged, focusing on understanding customer engagement, sentiment analysis, and the role of social media in building and maintaining customer relationships (Go & You, 2016; Hussain et al., 2014);
- Network Theory and Social Capital: Social media platforms operate based on networks, leading to the emergence of a network theory and its application in management research. Social media has also been linked to the concept of social capital, investigating how it influences non-profit organizational success and resource acquisition (Xu & Saxton, 2019; You & Hon, 2019);
- Social Media Marketing and Branding: Social media has introduced new dimensions to marketing and branding strategies. Theoretical contributions have explored the role of social media in non-profit units brand building, consumer behavior, and the impact of influencer marketing (Bernritter et al., 2016; Asencio & Sun, 2015);
- Crisis Management: As discussed earlier, social media have transformed crisis management practices. Theoretical models have been developed to understand the dynamics of crisis communication on social media and the effects of them on a non-profit organization's reputation (Luna, & Pennock, 2018; Brengarth & Mujkic, 2016);
- Organizational Resilience: Social media's impact on organizational resilience, which refers to an non-profit organization's ability to adapt and recover from crises, has also been a subject of theoretical exploration (Herrero & Kraemer, 2022; Singh et al., 2022).

Overall, social media have expanded the theoretical landscape in management studies, influencing various domains and providing new avenues for research and understanding. As technology and social media continue to evolve, management theories will continue to adapt and incorporate these advancements to improve organizational practices and outcomes.

The study contributes to the following crisis communication theory – the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC). It emphasizes the role of social media in managing and responding to crises. The model points out effective ways of content distribution in social media environment (Liu et al., 2012).

2.4. Hypotheses Development

The main purpose of the research was twofold. First, it was to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the publishing activity of Polish public benefit organizations on Facebook. Second, to determine the impact of content published in a crisis situation on the public reaction. Due to the significant prevalence of Facebook in relation to other social media used by PBOs, the research focused entirely on the medium.

The lack of physical interaction with the recipient of organizational messages means that the role of social media in crisis situations seems particularly important. As described in the Introduction section, the subject of the research was a specific group of non-profit organizations, i.e. only those with the status of a public benefit organization. Their unique feature, which is the possibility of getting 1% of personal income tax, means that organizations of this type should pay special attention to the group of their stakeholders with the status of individuals. This group is usually very dispersed, which means that for a public benefit organization the process of continuous communication and sharing with the surrounding values and ideas becomes of special importance. In the process of communicating professed values and ideas, organizations should use as many communication channels as possible. Since the activity of many organizations has moved to cyberspace during the pandemic, one should also expect greater publishing activity among PBOs. As noted by Peter Raeymaeckers and Stijn Van Puyvelde, as a result of Covid-19, “non-profit organizations experimented with alternative ways of staying in touch with their target groups” (2021, p. 1309). Research results have also indicated that the size of the organization is an important contingency factor improving an organization’s general information technology capacity (Finn et al., 2006; Hackler & Saxton, 2007; Oliński & Szamrowski, 2020). The use of IT technology including social media only seems to be cost-free. It requires not only equipment but, above all, experienced employees. “The ties of an internet network model are treated as costless” (Urry, 2004, p. 116), but other researchers have emphasized that non-profit organizations are particularly affected by the limited availability of spare resources. Smaller organizations have an especially limited capacity, which causes differences in IT adaptation between small and large entities (Baird et al., 2012). Moreover, as it grows in size, the organization becomes more visible, attracting more attention from outside stakeholders such as the media and the public, and even the state or local government (Nah & Saxton, 2013). This, in turn, on the basis of feedback, forces the organization to be more active in content dissemination to meet audience concerns. We thus posit the following hypothesis:

H1. Publishing activity of non-profit organizations during the pandemic increased, and the scale of the increase was determined by the size of the organization, measured by the total annual revenue.

The importance of social media should be particularly evident in crisis management. As noted in section 1.1, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic limited the functioning of the entire socio-economic sphere, causing economies to close for months and creating general difficulties in relocating. The role of online channels in the activities of both commercial and non-commercial organizations has clearly increased, representing the

main channel enabling organizational messages to reach stakeholders. The lockdown meant that it was not possible to organize mass sports or cultural events, concerts, public endowment collections, trips for the beneficiaries of the statutory activity of the organization etc. We thus posit the following hypothesis:

H2. Operating under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, rendered an increased stakeholders interest in the Facebook profile of non-profit organizations.

From the beginning of their existence, non-profit organizations have played the role of binding individuals around a specific social problem. In practice, therefore, they act on behalf of individuals or organizations. Moreover, they represent and mobilize them to collective action around common goals (Bimber et al., 2005; Bimber, 2017). Prior research included the analysis of post function which led to the identification of those that had the greatest impact on the total engagement measured by the number of likes, shares and comments (e.g. Cho et al., 2014; Guo & Saxton, 2018). “It simply involved counting the number of reactions to prove the effectiveness of specific social media strategies” (Ihm, 2022, p. 103). Under the current conditions, it would be interesting to check whether, regardless of the type of post, COVID-19 and the associated lockdown resulted in a higher level of response from the public. The necessity of staying at home and spending more time in front of the computer should contribute to the phenomenon. We thus posit the following hypothesis:

H3. Facebook posts during the COVID-19 pandemic were characterized by a higher level of response from the public, as compared to the period before its appearance.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Sample

The process of selecting the research sample consisted of several stages. The first step was to identify the public benefit organizations that were entitled to receive 1% of personal income tax for 2020. All of the data was gathered from the National Freedom Institute website. The database contained 8,833 organizations that were the subject of further research (as of December 8, 2021). Having the status of a PBO means the necessity to conduct accurate reporting overt to the public, which allowed access to data relevant from the research point of view. During the research, 241 organizations were excluded from the analysis because they did not include their annual financial statement in the database, or because they started

the process of shutting down. Thus, 8592 organizations were covered by further research. From the database, among the others, the following data was collected: total revenue, revenue from gratuities and paid public benefit activities, revenue from business activities, revenue from 1% of personal income tax and sources of income broken down into private and public.

The second stage of the research process focused on determining the utilization scale of social media in the daily activities of Polish Public Benefit Organizations. First, all the organizations were checked in terms of running their own website. The level of the organization's involvement in the utilization of social media was analyzed through the organizational website, but also with the employment of google.pl search engine, because some organizations only used social media services in their activities without using the organizational website at all. Facebook was the most popular social media service embraced by Polish non-profit organizations and it was the only subject matter of further research. It was pulled into activities of over 60% of all Polish public benefit organizations (N = 5184). The second in line, YouTube was used by only 8% of Polish non-profit organizations.

Public benefit organizations were clustered into four groups depending on the amount of total revenue in 2020 (Tab. 1).

Table 1
Public benefit organizations by size

Number of the cluster	Size of the organization	Number of organizations	Total annual revenue
I	Micro	1927	below PLN 100 thousand
II	Small	2073	from PLN 100 thousand to under PLN 1 million
III	Medium	1047	from PLN 100,000 to less than PLN 1 million
IV	Large	136	revenue of PLN 10 million and more

The size of the minimum sample for a finite population (for a confidence level of 0.95 and a maximum error of 0.05) amounted to 1025 entities (320 from cluster I, 324 from II cluster, 281 from cluster III and 100 from cluster IV). The selection of the non-profit organizations from each of the layers was performed using the Research Randomizer algorithm.

To analyze social media users' behaviors the netnography method was used in the third stage of the research. Netnography is a qualitative research method that involves the study of online communities, interactions, and behaviors on the internet. It is a combination of "net" (from internet) and "ethnography" (a traditional research method used in anthropology

to study cultures and societies). Netnography focuses on observing and understanding the behavior, attitudes, and social interactions of individuals within virtual communities, social media platforms, forums, blogs, and other online spaces.

The post database consisted of content that organizations published on Facebook throughout February 2020 and 2021. The choice of the month of February was not accidental. February 2020 was the last full month before the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. The activity of Polish non-profit organizations was not inhibited in any way at that time. In turn, February 2021 was the time of the lockdown, which was associated with significant restrictions in their daily activities. The restriction process was gradual and began in March 2020, with only minor interruptions until the end of May 2021. From the public benefit organizations point of view, the most important barriers during the time included: a practical ban on public gatherings, remote education in primary and secondary schools as well as university education (with some exceptions), significant impediments in the running of the entire economy, including the tourism industry, collective accommodation, numerous difficulties or the inability to organize sports and recreational events, numerous difficulties in the organization of events of cultural importance, widespread social fear of movement and the associated risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

The analysis included the basic parameters of the organization's Facebook profile, i.e. the number of followers, the frequency of publication on Facebook for the two periods analyzed, and the public reaction to the content published by the organization (the public reaction was measured by the number of likes, shares and comments on a single post). Including the parameters in the analysis made it possible to verify the research hypotheses set.

Both in 2020 and in 2021, posts of the same organizations were analyzed. As a result, we gathered reliable information concerning the utilization scale of the Facebook social networking site, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was especially important because most of all socio-economic activity moved to the online environment due to an almost complete lockdown. In the case, the role of social media in maintaining social relationships should be particularly important. At the same time, the adoption of the month of February 2021 for the analysis, and not e.g. April 2020, where many types of restrictions were introduced, gave the entities much more time to switch activities related to building relationships from the offline environment to online milieu. Thereby, it was possible to gather valuable information on how Polish non-profit organizations deal with a crisis situation, having almost 12 months at their disposal to adapt to it.

3.2. Data Coding and Analysis Scheme

The collected data was exported from a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27, where it was checked for correctness and completeness. Then, the SPSS program was used to carry out a statistical analysis for the data we gathered. The following statistical procedures were used: analysis based on standard parameters and the study of the dependence of selected variables (Kruskal-Wallis tests, non-parametric median tests). The classic p value < 0.05 was assumed as the significance level in the analyses. P scores ranging from 0.05 to 0.1 were considered to be close to statistical significance (statistical trend level). The following variables were included in the analysis: selected characteristics of the organization, i.e. the basic features of the organization's Facebook profile, i.e. the number of followers before and during the lockdown, publication frequency on Facebook before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, public reaction to content measured by the number of likes, shares and comments before and during the lockdown, and the level of annual revenue of non-profit organizations.

Due to the lack of possibility to compare the organizational use of the Facebook social network before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, 22 organizations (2.15%) were excluded from further research. The reason for it was twofold. Firstly, in 2021, they lost the status of a public benefit organization and did not publish their financial statements in the database, or they set up a new Facebook profile, eliminating the previous one. The two factors made it impossible to conduct a comparative analysis, hence exclusion from the study. This group included three entities from Cluster II, thirteen entities from Cluster III and six entities from Cluster IV.

4. Research Results

4.1. Publishing Frequency Activity of Public Benefit Organizations

The public benefit organizations published 12,790 posts on their Facebook profile in February 2020 (before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland). On average, it was 12.48 posts per entity. The COVID-19 pandemic did not have a significant impact on the publishing activity of the surveyed organizations. In February 2021, they published a total of 12,850, which is practically the same as in the same month of the previous year. On average, each organization posted 12.54 posts over a period of 28 pandemic days.

Additionally, the organizations were divided into four clusters, taking the total annual revenue as the parameter for the division. The results make it possible to easily identify the leading trend. As the level of the annual total revenue of the organization decreased, the frequency of publication also decreased. Such results were observed both before and during the pandemic, i.e. in February 2020 and February 2021. On average, in February

2020, within the largest organizational cluster a single post was published with a frequency of 23 hours and 31 minutes, within the medium-sized organizational cluster the frequency was every 1 day 15 hours and 5 minutes, for small organizations it was every 2 days 15 hours and 10 minutes, and within the micro-organizational cluster it was every 5 days 2 hours and 11 minutes.

In February 2021, the publication frequency, as compared to 2020, for the largest and smallest entities was slightly higher, by 2.1 and 0.8%, respectively. In the cluster of medium-sized entities, the difference was greater and amounted to 5.3% in favor of the pandemic year 2021. Explicitly different results were observed among the smallest entities, where publishing frequency activity decreased by as much as 18.5%, as compared to 2020. Less than 33% of the largest entities increased their publication frequency in February 2021, and 4% of organizations maintained it at exactly the same level. The remaining 63% of organizations with an annual total revenue greater than PLN 10 million decreased their publishing activity on their Facebook profile. Ultimately, the 37% of entities whose publishing frequency was higher during the pandemic resulted in a 2% increase in the overall publishing activity in the cluster, as compared to the pre-pandemic period.

In the cluster of medium-sized entities, 40.8% of them increased their publication frequency, and 5.6% of organizations kept it at exactly the same level. Ultimately, organizations whose publishing frequency activity was greater during the pandemic resulted in a 5% increase in the overall publishing activity in the cluster, as compared to the pre-pandemic period. In the cluster of medium-sized entities, several spectacular increases were observed. For example, there were 400 or even 700 percent surges, but they were small increases if we express them in absolute terms, e.g. from 1 to 7 posts or from 2 to 10 posts in February 2021. In the cluster of small entities, 33.7% increased their publication frequency, while in the case of 4.9% of organizations it remained at exactly the same level. In summary, the years 2020 and 2021 in terms of the publishing frequency activity of small public benefit organizations remained practically at the same level (minimal increase by 0.8%). Again, there were some very large surges in publication frequency, but except for one case, they were small in absolute terms.

Only 22.5% of the smallest organizations increased their publication frequency in February 2021, which ultimately reduced the total publishing activity in the cluster of entities by as much as 18.5%.

Due to the large variation in the publishing frequency activity of the organizations, Kruskal-Wallis tests were additionally carried out, they are resistant to extreme observations and allow an answer to the question of whether the arithmetic means actually confirm the thesis that along with the decrease in the level of total revenue, the publishing frequency activity of the organization decreases, too (table 2). Each line in the table tests the null hypotheses about whether distributions of Sample 1 and Sample

2 are the same. Asymptotic significance (two-tailed tests) are displayed. The significance level is 0.05 and the significance values for many tests were corrected by the Bonferroni method. The tests were performed for both 2020 and 2021. The results indicate that for both periods of time the size of the organization measured by the level of annual total revenue had an impact on the publication frequency. The test value for February 2020 totaled $\chi^2(3) = 130.786$, $p < 0.001$; (mean rank for cluster I = 307.51; for cluster II = 425.76; for cluster III = 505.53, and mean rank for cluster IV = 618.59). The pairwise comparison proved that the largest organizations in terms of annual total revenue were characterized by higher publishing frequency activity, as compared to the organizations from all other clusters ($p < 0.001$ for clusters I and II, and $p = 0.021$ for cluster III, significance level adjusted with the use of the Bonferroni method). The pairwise comparison also proves that the smallest entities are clearly characterized by the lowest publishing frequency activity. It is lower in comparison not only to the largest entities (cluster I), but also to entities from cluster II and III ($p < 0.001$ in each case). In turn, the largest entities were characterized by higher publishing frequency activity, as compared to all other clusters of organizations (in two cases $p < 0.001$, in one case $p = 0.004$, as compared to medium entities). Kruskal-Wallis tests also confirmed that entities from cluster III were characterized by a higher publication frequency, as compared to organizations from cluster II ($p = 0.001$). The exact same results were observed for 2021. Again, large entities were the most active in terms of frequency of publication activities, explicitly distancing themselves from the small and smallest entities, and to a slightly lesser extent the medium ones (see Table 2). The smallest ones clearly lagged behind.

Table 2
Pairwise comparison of publication frequency activity depending on the size of the entity – February 2021

Group X-Group Y	III-IV	II-IV	I-IV	II-III	I-III	I-II
Test statistics	93.111	179.960	304.253	86.849	211.142	124.293
Standard error	33.140	32.456	32.661	21.508	21.816	20.764
Dev. test statistics	2.810	5.545	9.315	4.038	9.678	5.986
Statistical significance	0.005	<.001	0.000	<.001	0.000	<.001
Corrected statistical significance	0.030	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

4.2. Size of an Organization and the Number of Followers of the Facebook Profile

In the studies, the number of followers of the organization's Facebook profile was measured twice. This made it possible to execute a comparative analysis both for the period before the COVID-19 pandemic and the time when its impact on the socio-economic sphere was the greatest.

On average, in February 2020, the Facebook profile of public benefit organizations was observed by 8,820 so-called "followers". Half of the profiles were observed by less than 1011 followers (by "followers" we mean humans, although a different organization or entity may also be an observer, but the decision to observe the Facebook profile is always made by a human being). The profile of $\frac{1}{4}$ of the organizations was observed by less than 453 followers (the profile of 25% of organizations was observed by more than 2527 followers). The disproportion between the mean values, the median, and especially between the first and third percentiles is substantial. The large dispersion of the results is also confirmed by the very high value of the standard deviation ($SD = 67130.274$). The results for February 2021 indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic could have had an impact on the number of followers of Polish non-profit organizations. On average, during that period, the Facebook profile was observed by 10,126 followers, which is almost 15% more than in the period before the pandemic. The number of followers within the organizations was, similar to February 2020, highly varied. The standard deviation value reached 71454.275 followers (6.4% more than in February 2020), the median for the period amounted to 1230 followers (21.7% more than in February 2020), the 25th percentile did not exceed 574 followers (26, 7% more than in February 2020), and the 75th percentile reached 3,241 followers (28% more than in February 2020). To sum up, it can be stated that the size of the organization significantly influenced the number of followers of its Facebook profile. Along with the organizational size increase, the average number of profile followers observing and the median value also rose. For instance, in 2020 on average in the cluster of the largest entities, the Facebook profile was observed by over 50 thousand people, and in the cluster of the smallest entities by only 1055 (more than a 50-fold difference). Thus, the disparity is substantial in this respect. Slightly smaller differences were noted for the median, although they were still large. The difference between large and micro entities was over nine times in favor of the former (the median value was 5225 for large entities and 559.5 for micro entities). Similar results were observed in February 2021.

Additionally the Kruskal-Wallis test confirmed that the size of an organization measured by the level of annual total revenue had an impact on the number of followers of its Facebook profile ($\chi^2(3) = 180.409$, $p < 0.001$; (mean rank for cluster I = 286.90; for cluster II = 405.28;

III = 510.17 and IV = 655.56). The pairwise comparison showed that the largest organizations in terms of annual total revenue have a greater number of Facebook followers compared to organizations from all other groups ($p < 0.001$ for groups 2, 3 and 4, Bonferroni corrected significance level). The pairwise comparison also shows that the Facebook profiles of the smallest entities are clearly characterized by the lowest number of “followers”. It is lower, as compared not only to entities from cluster IV, but also from cluster II and III ($p < 0.001$ in each case). Differences in the average number of followers of the Facebook profile were also observed in the case of organizations from clusters II and III, in favor of the latter. The same results were obtained both for 2020 and 2021.

4.3. Impact of Content on the Public Level of Engagement

The research also took into consideration the impact of the Facebook content on the level of public engagement. The public’s response was measured by the number of likes, shares and comments for each post published by the organization at the time selected for analysis (the period before and during the COVID-19 pandemic).

The public reaction to the content was also analyzed with respect to the organization’s size measured by the level of total annual revenue. The average values for both periods are misleading (e.g. the number of likes for medium entities increased in February 2021 by over 50%, but the median decreased by 9%, from 24 to 22 likes). In the case of large and small entities, a similar situation was observed, although the increase in average values was clearly smaller, as compared to medium-sized entities. The smallest entities were the only exception, both the average and the median decreased in terms of likes. In the case of shares and comments, the median for both February 2020 and February 2021 remained practically the same, and only the average values were subject to certain fluctuations, due to extreme observations.

Kruskal-Wallis tests were carried out to verify the hypothesis regarding the influence of the size of an organization on the public response to the Facebook content. Due to extreme observations, the tests were additionally verified with the non-parametric median test. In 2020, the Kruskal-Wallis test confirmed that the number of likes, one of the types of public reaction, was influenced by the size of the examined entity ($(\chi^2(3) = 742.727, p < 0.001$; mean rank for cluster I = 3905.77; for cluster II = 4690.05; III = 6090.10; IV = 5786.69).

The pairwise comparison shows that the posts of the smallest entities are clearly characterized by the lowest number of likes, both in relation to large, medium and small entities ($p < 0.001$ in each case). The Facebook content of small entities was characterized by a smaller number of likes, as compared to medium and large entities ($p < 0.001$). The most compelling is the comparison of medium and large entities. Although the average

values indicate that the posts of large organizations are more often “liked” than the posts of medium-sized organizations (146.82 vs. 103.7), the tests indicate exactly the opposite situation. The posts of medium-sized entities were liked more often than those of large entities ($p = 0.002$, corrected by the Bonferroni method). Nonparametric median tests confirmed the Kruskal-Wallis tests ($(\chi^2(3) = 489.325, p < 0.001)$). Pairwise comparison also shows exactly the same relationships. The Kruskal-Wallis tests and non-parametric median tests were then performed for February 2021. The results were exactly the same as for 2020. No significant differences were observed between the pre-pandemic and its advanced phase.

The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that for the posts from February 2020, the size of the organization had an impact on the “shares” number ($\chi^2(3) = 430.583, p < 0.001$; mean rank for cluster I = 4407.53; II = 4745.62; III = 5851.50; IV = 5809.71). Again, posts by the smallest organizations are characterized by a smaller number of shares in comparison to posts published by medium, large and small organizations ($p < 0.001$, as compared to medium and large entities and $p = 0.002$ for small entities, significance corrected by the Bonferroni method). Posts of small entities were also shared, less frequently than posts of medium and large entities ($p < 0.001$). With regard to medium and large organizations, the average number of shares was the same. Nonparametric median tests confirmed the results of Kruskal-Wallis tests ($(\chi^2(3) = 338.200, p < 0.001)$, with one small difference. Posts of small entities were shared less often than posts of the smallest entities ($p = 0.035$). For February 2021, Kruskal-Wallis tests and non-parametric median tests were also carried out. The results were exactly the same as for 2020. In terms of the number of “shares” there were no significant differences between the pre-pandemic state and its advanced phase.

The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that for the posts from February 2020, the size of the organization had an impact on the “comments” number ($\chi^2(3) = 278.050, p < 0.001$; mean rank for cluster I = 4720.34; II = 4880.35; III = 5789.76; IV = 5491.53). The pairwise comparison produced very similar results to likes and shares. The posts of the smallest entities were commented on the least often, as compared to large and medium entities, but not small ones ($p = 0.386$). Posts of medium-sized entities were the most commented on, even when compared to large entities ($p = 0.001$). In turn, posts of small entities were commented on less often than posts of medium and large entities ($p < 0.001$ in both cases). Nonparametric median tests confirmed Kruskal-Wallis tests ($(\chi^2(3) = 226.226, p < 0.001)$, with one small difference. Posts of small entities were commented on to the same extent as posts of the smallest entities. Kruskal-Wallis tests and non-parametric median tests were then performed for February 2021. The results were exactly the same as for 2020, with one exception. Posts of the smallest entities, unlike in 2020, were commented on less often than the posts of small organizations ($p = 0.026$, corrected by the Bonferroni method).

5. Discussion

The hypothesis that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the publishing activity of non-profit organizations has only partially been positively verified. The number of posts published during the period of the “hard” lockdown remained basically at the same level as in the period just before the outbreak of the pandemic. On the one hand, someone may put forward an argument that the role of social media in the period of constricted face-to-face contact should be clearly greater, but on the other hand, the period of such drastic restrictions meant, for example, the inability to organize all kinds of charitable events and other events promoting professed values and ideals. This fact alone shows that an organization may have great difficulties with content on the social networking sites that is interesting from the public point of view. A similar situation was observed in studies of information dissemination strategies by organizations on Twitter during a crisis caused by a natural disaster (Liu et al., 2018). Moreover, the results indicate that the Facebook publication activity of Polish non-profit organizations was highly diversified. At the same time, those organizations that were active before the pandemic (at least 2 posts per day) also published a lot during the pandemic. This mainly applies to organizations related to ecology and animal protection; as well as the protection of natural heritage. This publication diversity has a number of practical implications. It also requires caution when making statistical conclusions. In the case, it is legitimate to take into account the median value when interpreting the results, and not only the arithmetic mean, which due to its stratification clearly differs from the median in terms of values. Despite statistical difficulties, the results make it relatively easy to identify a leading trend. The largest organizations in terms of total annual revenue were clearly more active on Facebook (they publish more content). As its level decreased, the publishing frequency level on the Facebook profile also diminished. Thus, the smallest entities were clearly characterized by the lowest publishing frequency activity. The largest increases in publication frequency activity during the pandemic (February 2021) were observed in the cluster of medium-sized entities, in the cluster of large entities, and especially in the case of small entities, they were clearly smaller. The worst case concerned the smallest entities, the publication frequency activity during the pandemic clearly decreased. The results indicate that the distance in this respect between medium and large entities, and small and especially the smallest entities is growing. For the latter, it means serious impediments in reaching the public with their message, which ultimately translates into a weaker financial result.

The hypothesis assuming that interest in the Facebook profile of public benefit organizations increased during the COVID-19 pandemic has been verified positively. The number of followers of the Facebook profile was

greater in all four clusters (the largest total increase concerned small entities, over 23%). However, there is one important fact one has to take into account. A person who follows a specific profile, at the time of its low or very low activity, will not simply receive notifications about the appearance of new content on it. Therefore, there is a minimal probability that this person will click the “unfollowing” button for that particular Facebook profile. The research results have proven it. Inactive profiles were followed by practically the same number of people both in February 2020 and February 2021. So if the increase in the number of followers in the analyzed sample was small and oscillated around 2–3%, hypothesis no. 2 should be rejected. The research results indicate that it was, however, clearly higher, hence the hypothesis was verified positively. The results also indicate that the size of the organization had a significant impact on the number of entities following the organization’s Facebook profile. The larger the entity, the greater this number (both in 2020 and 2021). There may be at least several reasons responsible for that. Firstly, large organizations can use both traditional forms of communication as well as the ones based in cyberspace or mobile devices in managing relationships with the public. Therefore, information about large non-governmental organizations may appear in the press, radio and television. In addition, they have a substantial enough budget to run billboard campaigns or leaflet campaigns concerning their main activities. Such activities make it easier for organizations of this size to remain in the awareness of the public as an entity, which effectively implements its mission, also attracting the people or other institutional entities to the Facebook profile. Secondly, they have access to qualified management staff or have a budget large enough to allow them to use the services of external entities in their public relations activities. The gained knowledge allows them to effectively expand the base of entities that follow their Facebook profile.

The third research hypothesis that posts during the pandemic were characterized by a higher level of engagement from their recipients should be rejected. A similar situation was observed in response to posts by non-profit organizations related to a crisis event not caused by the organization itself (Fortunato, 2018). Fortunato emphasizes that a successful crisis response doesn’t commence when a crisis first emerges. Instead, an organization must acquire essential capabilities well in advance of any potential crisis (for example the number of active followers). Therefore, in our own research, the audience’s response to content posted on the social media platform Facebook remained at a similar level as before the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is indicated not by the average values, which were distorted by extreme observations, but by the median values which, as compared to the pre-pandemic period, either remained at the same level (shares and comments), or slightly decreased, as in the case of likes. In addition, Facebook content was generally characterized by a low average number of likes, almost a five times lower average number of shares and

a ten times lower average number of comments (in the case of the median, the differences were even greater). The research results indicate that the majority of Facebook users of Polish non-profit organizations are passive recipients, and the pandemic did not affect their greater activity, despite such large restrictions in moving and remote types of work. A clearly greater number of likes on posts also indicates that the behavior of the recipient of the message sent by the organization may be characterized by an attitude, referred to as “slacktivism”. This notion refers to political or social activism that does not cause significant practical effects, but only contributes to the complacency of the person – the recipient of the message. The activities comprehended as “slacktivism” are usually very simple and do not require much commitment from the participants. For example, by clicking the “like” button on the Facebook profile of an organization, a recipient expresses their approval for a specific initiative, but his involvement is limited only to the action, without providing any real value to the organization. The benefit is only for the recipient of the message, complacency is what it meant to that person, and they got it in the simplest possible way. So “slacktivism” assumes that people who seemingly support the activities of an organization by performing very simple activities are not really committed and are not able to make sacrifices in order to achieve the desired results from an organizational point of view. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the size of an organization, measured by the level of total annual revenue, significantly influenced the level of audience engagement to the Facebook content. Medium and large entities clearly distanced small organizations and especially the smallest ones, in this respect. This was the case both in 2020 and 2021.

6. Conclusions

The cognitive gap that the article sought to bridge was both theoretical and practical in nature. The theoretical gap sought to explain the importance of contingency theory in crisis management through the adaptability of organizations to crisis conditions. The results indicate low adaptation of Polish public benefit organizations to the crisis situation in the area related to the utilization of Facebook. This article also comes with several managerial implications trying to answer the following question: How to cope with the altered operating conditions induced by Covid-19? One of the obvious answers seem to be: “tilize the potential of social media more intensively.” The results indicate that their potential has not been sufficiently exploited. This is all the more surprising given that at a time of such severe crisis organizations should have a well-thought-out crisis communication strategy that includes guidelines for social media use. The results of the study indicate that this was not the case. Organizations’ publication activity both before the pandemic and during the “hard” lockdown remained at

a comparable level. Besides crisis situations often evoke strong emotions in stakeholders. Managers handling social media communications must exhibit empathy and emotional intelligence in their interactions, showing concern and understanding for those affected. The results indicate, however, that the response to the content was at a comparable level both before and during the pandemic.

Nonetheless, the study encountered some limitations. Firstly, the research is limited to one social networking site – Facebook. Despite the clear Facebook prevalence in maintaining relationships with stakeholders, it would also be worth scrutinizing other social media sites (e.g. by comparative analysis). Moreover, the division into micro, small, medium and large organizations was made on the basis of only one parameter. It was the total annual revenue of the organization. Although this criterion reflects the size of the organization quite well, it could also be extended to other parameters (e.g. employment or type of non-profit activity) in the future.

Acknowledgements

The publication was written as a result of the authors' internship in Western Michigan University co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund (Operational Program Knowledge Education Development), carried out in the project Development Program at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (POWR.03.05. 00-00-Z310/17).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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