



The adoption of social networks by nonprofit organizations in crisis period: A scoping review

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ABSTRACT

During the Covid-19 crisis, the nonprofit world has been strongly impacted, with a near-total shutdown of some nonprofit activities. Faced with the risk of losing their revenues and the disengagement of their members and volunteers, nonprofit organizations have resorted to digital tools such as social networks to maintain their charitable activities. The objective of this research is to review the work conducted in this area and trace the evolution of the growing interest in this topic over the last few years. More concretely, the aim is to collect, analyze and synthesize published research on the adoption and use of social networks by nonprofits in times of several pandemic, economic and political crises. This search referred us to 816 published studies in credible databases, 14 of which are eligible covering the period 2010-2022. By providing a broad review of these practices and their contribution, this research can present a roadmap for future research in addition to its usefulness for nonprofit leaders and members to understand the utility and contribution of social networks in enhancing the attainment of their actions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organizations perform important economic, social and political functions (Boris, 2006). They play a key role in the country's solidarity dynamics and the achievement of sustainable development goals. In the context of the digital revolution, the proliferation of social networks and the succession of several pandemic, economic and political crises, nonprofit organizations have been driven to be agile in terms of reinventing and adapting their charitable practices. Indeed, over the last decade, and particularly during the Covid-19 health crisis, these nonprofit organizations, which play a vital role in social dynamics, began to explore new ways to communicate, raise awareness and solicit engagement by leveraging the opportunities offered by digital devices.

Among the most popular digital devices used by nonprofits to improve the reach, dissemination and attractiveness of their actions; hereby reduce the effect of the health crisis on their activity as well as the relationships with beneficiaries, members, donors and volunteers, are social networks. As a matter of fact, social networking sites have become easily accessible portals for different organizations to design their

marketing strategies and reach a larger number of users. Eventually, with the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofits intensively start trying out social networks to mobilize support, engage volunteers and raise funds in the form of donations. Our objective is to conduct a scoping review (Denyer et al., 2008), which is a specific methodology that encompasses existing studies, selects and evaluates contributions, analyzes and synthesizes data, and reports evidence in a way that allows reasonably clear conclusions to be drawn about nonprofit organizations' adoption of social networks in crisis, on account of answering the following question: How can nonprofits benefit from social networks in times of crisis?

More specifically, our systematic review proposes to provide answers to the following questions: Q1: How do nonprofit organizations integrate and use social networks in times of crisis?

Q2: What are the main contributions of social network adoption in times of crisis?

While the first question attempts to shed light on the nature of the practices and solutions implemented by nonprofits to maintain their activities in times of crisis, the second one aims to identify the contribution of the use of these social

networks by nonprofits in terms of strengthening their donor outreach strategy, community awareness and interaction with volunteers and members. To accomplish this, the first section will outline the methodology for selecting and ranking the articles and the protocol for their review. The second section will present the results of the scope review and discussion of the content of the selected articles. Conclusions are also provided with challenges for future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nonprofit organizations, which are an integral part of any modern society, serve the purpose of contributing and creating "social value" in society. Through public services and charitable activities, nonprofits effectively work to support communities and advance a particular mission or cause (Rathi et al,2016). Equally, they are confronted by budgetary, infrastructure and resource constraints, which push them to consider low-cost strategies in order to offer quite considerable added value to the society (Namisango et al, 2019). Eventually, most nonprofits face one or more crises in the course of their activity. They notably face operational and paracrises crises that could impact their priority objectives. A crisis, by definition, is an event or series of events that threatens priority goals, increases uncertainty, and generates opportunities that are normally unavailable (Fuller & Rice, 2022).

Crises have a profound impact on the nonprofit sector, relative to other sectors, because of its heavy reliance on public financial support. Thus, economic downturns or the loss of a major stakeholder could be particularly perilous (Fuller & Rice, 2022). To address this crisis situation, nonprofits can use a variety of external communication channels to provide information, access public funding, generate support, and interact with stakeholders. Importantly, social networks, have played increasingly frequent and influential roles in organizational communication with their audiences, in general, and in crisis management, in particular (Austin, & Jin, 2017). These digital channels can increase interactivity, have a well-targeted audience, foster relationships with citizens, provide information, enhance donations, and stimulate and mobilize social support (Guo and Saxton, 2014).

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE SCOPING REVIEW

To ensure the reproducibility of our scoping review, the methodological protocol adopted was based essentially on the guidelines of the PRISMA STATEMENT method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) (Moher et al, 2009). Initially, our study focused on defining the key words of the research in order to obtain a scientific literature that was fairly representative of our problem. We chose the following queries: "social media", "nonprofit organizations", "crisis". According to the requirements of advanced search on digital databases, we also established the following search string based on the two search questions: (("Social media") AND ("Nonprofit organizations") AND ("Crisis")).

All the keywords thus formulated were mobilized to search 6 international online databases, indexing several disciplines, considering the interdisciplinary character of the problem. They are as follows: Taylor and Francis Online, Science Direct, JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, DiscoverED.

Based around the idea of this work and in accordance with our research objectives, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to accurately identify all studies that answered our questions:

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Date of publication	Articles published between 2010 and 2022 (both years included).	Articles published before 2010
Languages	French et English	Others
Type of studies	Literature review articles Empirical research articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theses and Dissertations • Books • Conference papers • Book chapters
Context of study	All crises	Literature that does not address the topic in the context of the crisis.
Discipline	Business, management,NTIC, social sciences.	Others

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

After conducting database search and analyzing titles, articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria for this study were eliminated. Next, duplicate articles were removed to avoid duplication in our ranking. The remaining articles were ranked according to their importance to ensure inclusion of the most impactful work. Each remaining article was

carefully analyzed throughout the deep content reading stage.

To structure the articles selected following our review, a bibliographic list of all articles was developed in the form of an Excel file. The articles obtained were classified according to the following criteria: title of the article, authors, year of publication, country, abstract, keywords, research method adopted, types of networks and nature of the crisis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To start with, 816 studies were reviewed from the selected electronic databases. In the first place, duplicates were excluded, i.e., the same studies available in all databases, by eliminating 13 copies, and then an assessment via title, keywords, and abstracts generated 173 articles that were likely important for review. Afterwards, we conducted a detailed review to remove articles that did not meet our inclusion criteria; 44 studies left during this stage. The final step involved further and more in-depth critical reading, assessing the entire article so as to determine its relevance to this study, which resulted in 14 articles selected for our final analysis (see: Figure 1)

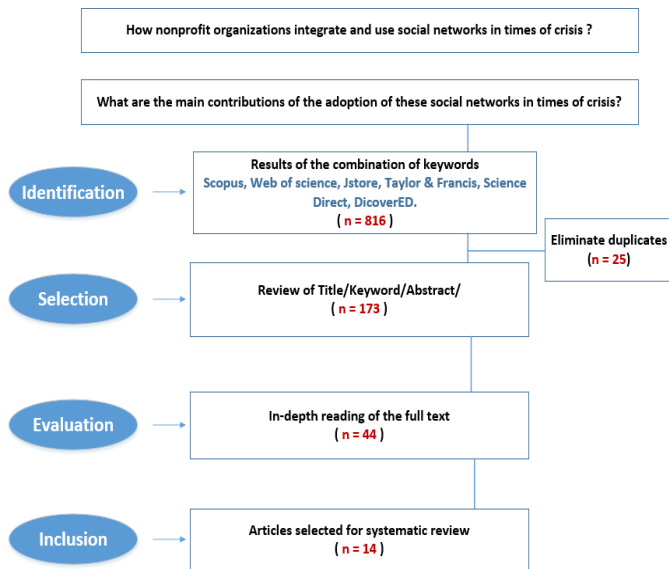


Fig.1. Research protocol (source authors)

1. Years of publication

Articles were categorized by year from 2010 to 2022 to identify the trend of academic research publication on the adoption of social networks by nonprofits in times of crisis. The first study was published in 2011, and considered a starting point. Hence, the topic started to have importance with two publications (n=2) until 2014. A regression of

publication during 2 years with one publication (n=1) in 2016, then a stagnation of research during three years (2016-2018) with (n=1) each. Then, a significant increase of (n=2) papers in 2019, thereafter the number of (n=2) publications spread over the remaining three years. As the analysis indicates, it seems that research in this area has gradually increased over the years. In this respect, the growing number of research shows that the digitalization of nonprofits in crisis, as a research area, is receiving increasing attention due to the pandemic crisis of Covid-19. (See Figure 2)

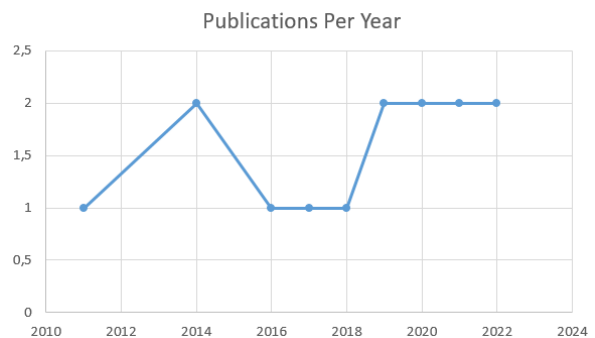


Fig. 2. Distribution of articles by publication's trend (source authors)

2. Distribution of articles by country

The purpose of this breakdown is to provide an overview of countries that have the most and least research trends on associating digitalization in times of crisis. This research topic was only published in 13 countries based on the data collected. In connection with the 14 articles selected for this stage of analysis, (n=6) empirical work was conducted in the United States, two in Kuwait (n=2), followed by Morocco which gave birth to this topic with a publication of an article (n=1), as well as Hong Kong (n=1), Lebanon (n=1), Bahrain (n=1), Haiti (n=1), Australia (n=1) and also countries in the following continents: Asia, Africa, North America and of course Central America with the same number of articles. (See figure 3).

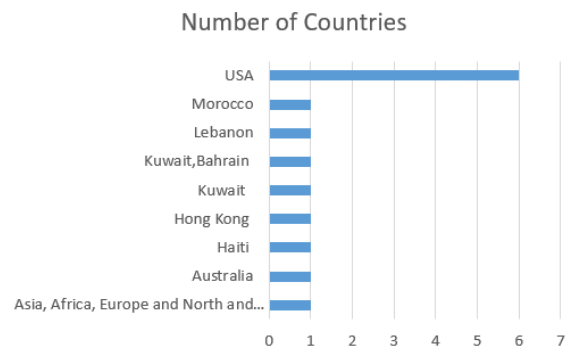


Fig.3. Distribution of articles by studied countries (source: authors)

3. Distribution according to the methodology used

Research on the adoption of social networks by nonprofits in times of crisis has been conducted using different methodological approaches. This study distinguishes between three research approaches adopted by the 14 empirical articles: the quantitative, qualitative, and hybrid approach. Figure 4 shows that (n=7) studies adopted the qualitative approach, (n=6) studies opted for the quantitative approach and only one study that decided to work with the hybrid approach that consists of combining the qualitative and quantitative.

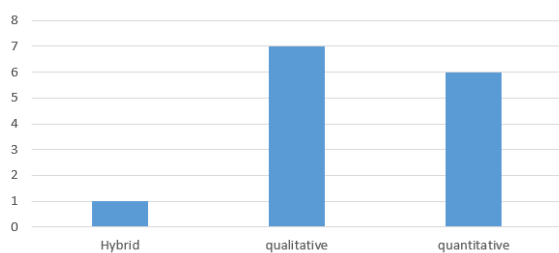


Fig.4. Distribution by methodological approach adopted (source authors)

4. Distribution according to the nature of the crisis

This graph presents the nature of the crises addressed in the 14 studies. Certainly, the current pandemic crisis (Covid-19) was examined in almost half of the studies (n=6), this is due to the changes induced by the Coronavirus on a global scale which has disrupted social life in all its facets. Also, another study (n=1) addressed the Ebola pandemic crisis. The two natural crises represented research contexts for three studies Earthquake (n= 2) and Fire (n=1). Additionally, although two research studies chose political crises (n=2); one focused on the Libyan revolution of Mr. Gaddafi and the other on Rohingya Refugees. The rest of the studies worked on one social crisis (n=1) and one on all types of crisis (n=1).

Number of crisis types

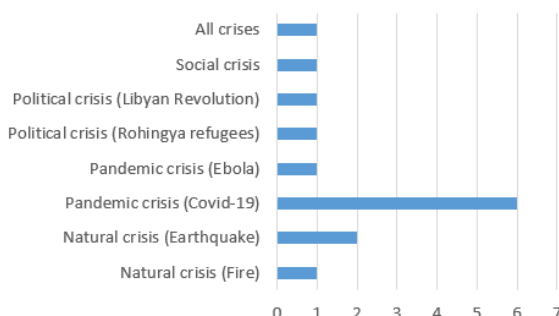


Fig.5. Distribution of articles by the nature of the crisis (source authors)

5. Types of social networks

This graphical distribution aims to specify the type of social network used by the nonprofits and being the object of study of the selected articles. Firstly, we note that the inevitable to communicate on the web and the famous Facebook is at the head of the pack of social networks studied by the articles in question (n = 5). Meanwhile, Twitter is of considerable interest in the strategy of adoption of social networks in times of crisis by nonprofits (n=5), through hashtags that serve to centralize tweets around a term or a specific theme. YouTube videos and shorts also show a moderate adoption by nonprofits (n=2). For the case of Snapchat (n=1) and Instagram (n=1), these two networks were each only studied once. Weibo, the Chinese microblogging site (n=1), was examined in a single study conducted in China during COVID-19. Taking into consideration the possibility of nonprofits to implement multi-network strategies, (n=4) studies carried out were not limited to the consideration of a single network as a research object, but rather their choice was to study several platforms.

Type of social network

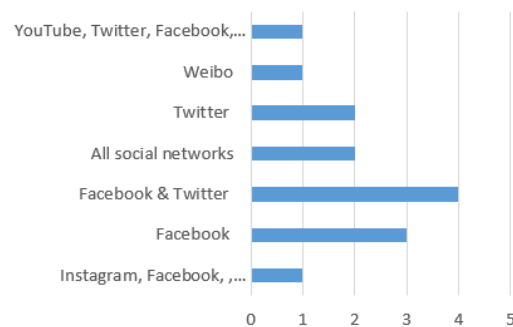


Fig.6. Distribution of articles by type of social networks (source authors)

6. Content analysis

Following our scoping analysis, we will proceed in what follows with an in-depth examination of the content of the selected articles in order to provide answers to our research questions.

A. The strategy of adoption of social networks by nonprofits in times of crisis

The actions and charity campaigns published on social networks are an important support element for nonprofits. Indeed, with the new connected and trendy generation, the nonprofits have been leaning on social networks by sharing contents that appeal to the commitment in its different forms. But how do nonprofits really integrate this into their strategy in order to achieve their objectives and ensure the continuity of their activities in times of crisis?

The content analysis of the reviewed research works allowed us to affirm that nonprofits, in order to respond quickly to humanitarian needs and to improve and promote online fundraising campaigns, tend to implement an integrative strategy proposing to use simultaneously various social networking sites that often aim to distinct targets and propose different solutions and possibilities of content creation adapted to the audience.

Regarding the content published by nonprofits on social networks, several studies have shown that positive emotions, based on morality, can encourage crisis relief strategies. This being said, the emotional has become an inevitable ingredient in charity practices at the digital level. In this regard, nonprofits often tend to direct their content (videos, photos, posts, etc) towards touching publications in real crisis situations.

The study conducted by Ritesh chugh (2019), proved that, in one day, the support from various people was quite large, and a lot of clothes and blankets were received, as the messages were intentionally designed in a touching manner to trigger, inform and encourage responses, with the purpose of inspiring the fundraising effort. This shows that awareness and call to action messages, designed by nonprofits on social networks, need to be formulated in a very methodical way while focusing on humanitarian motives to give rise to greater effectiveness in times of crisis. The contribution of social network adoption by nonprofits in times of crisis.

B. The contribution of social network adoption by nonprofits in times of crisis

Our in-depth review of the literature has allowed us to highlight the considerable contribution of the adoption of social networks by nonprofit organizations in times of crisis. In reading the various articles, we have noted that social networks represent solutions for nonprofits not only to activate their donation collection campaigns, and launch urgent charitable appeals to donors for alleviating the socio-

economic impact of the crises, but to support relief efforts for vulnerable communities as well. Fundraising on social networks has helped to reach geographically dispersed people around the world, inspire peer-to-peer giving, and create a network effect that encourages solidarity. According to the results of several studies, Facebook has been widely used to increase donations and interactivity among members of the association's page.

This is due to the designed advertising content appealing to viewers' emotions and empathy as a persuasive mechanism to receive voluntary donations. Overall, social networks have been identified, by several authors, as a positive motivator to strengthen attitudes towards online giving and, therefore, support existing donors and attract new ones (Saeed-Bin-Nashwan, Meshari Al-Daihani, 2020).

In the same vein, the study conducted by Li et al. (2020), confirms that a Chinese feminine nonprofit uses social media to launch an online fundraising campaign. Within one day, the donation goal was successfully achieved; around 2.4 million RMB. The results showed that the project use positive emotional expressions (63.74% of words were positive) to promote their argument, praising the kindness and benevolence of female medical staff and volunteers when launching the project.

For his part, Ritesh chugh (2019), whose study focused on the political crisis of the non-resident Nepalese community in Australia, concluded from a theoretical and practical perspective, that social media, Facebook in particular, played a major role in raising funds and emergency relief materials for the affected communities in Nepal. Furthermore, the study by de Kinsky et al. (2014) explains that, through social networks, several nonprofits were able to collect online donations to provide aid to Rohingya refugees.

Volunteer engagement strengthening is another contribution of social networks that was revealed through the analysis of the literature in our systematic review. In their study, Li et al (2020) considered volunteering online and on social networks as a new form of engagement that nonprofits can mobilize and take advantage of to face crises, in order to ensure effective coordination and improve relief. Other researchers (Tully, Dalrymple & Young, 2018) have highlighted the role played by the Twitter platform, during the Ebola crisis in West Africa, in raising community awareness of the importance of engagement in nonprofits work and activities. Research by

(Attouni, Mustaffa, 2014) shows that Facebook, especially during times of crisis, is becoming an essential channel for communication between nonprofits and stakeholders.

In addition to raising donations and strengthening the engagement of volunteers and online communities, social networks can also represent platforms for sharing information and communication on the actions carried out by the nonprofits, not only to contribute to the enhancement of their notoriety, but also to raise awareness among the communities. Saeed-Bin-Nashwan, Meshari Al-Daihani (2020) confirmed that social networks have been widely used for supervision, administration, communication, and information sharing with the aim of providing additional benefits to the ecosystem to cope with the pandemic.

V. CONCLUSION

Given that our starting point was to be able to provide elements of answers to the following questions:

Q1: How do nonprofit organizations integrate and use social networks in times of crisis?

Q2: What are the main contributions of social network adoption in times of crisis?

To do this, we conducted a scoping review that collected, analyzed, and synthesized the body of published research on the adoption of social networks by nonprofits in times of multiple crises.

Regarding the question of how nonprofits organizations integrate social networks in their communication and fundraising strategy, our review of the scope and in-depth reading of previous research content allowed us to observe that most nonprofits tend to combine different social networks in order to amply benefit from the solutions offered by the different platforms.

Furthermore, it was explained that in order to raise funds faster, engage and raise awareness among online communities, the content designed by nonprofits in times of crisis should play the emotion card which can be an important predictor of engagement and involvement.

As for the second question of our research work, our analysis showed that nonprofits adopt and use social networks in times of crisis mainly to increase their financial resources by organizing online donation campaigns.

Indeed, the scoping review revealed that social networks are considerably important tools for nonprofits. They solicit Internet users to engage in voluntary actions such as donations and volunteering. They also appear, from our review, that the emotional aspect in the content published on social networks can be a weapon to elicit empathy from Internet users, persuade donors, and influence their attitudes.

Overall, the results of the review prove that social networks play a key role in maintaining the survival of nonprofit organizations and improving the impact of their charitable actions.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

While this scoping review helps to shed new light on nonprofits' use and contribution of social networks in times of crisis, it is also accompanied with some limitations. First, the results of the study may be potentially limited by the inclusion and exclusion criteria used, i.e., the keywords and languages chosen (French and English) do not guarantee fully comprehensive results. This may be a limitation of the study in that, despite all measures taken, it fails to comprehensively capture all relevant studies on the topic.

Second, with respect to the search methodology, it is clear that selecting only articles published in recognized databases ensures the quality of the work included. However, doctoral dissertations and reports published on reputable websites were not examined.

This review helps to highlight some issues, suggest recommendations and directions for future research to further develop the nonprofits sector. We present an updated proposal of possible research directions that are emerging to guide researchers in this area.

There is a lack of research on the determinants of social networking adoption by nonprofits specifically in times of crisis. It would be wise to develop a model that examines the explanatory factors that may hinder or encourage the implementation of such a strategy by nonprofits.

Based on the review of the literature, we found that the majority of studies were conducted only in certain countries (n=13). This study offers an avenue for future research to take into account other contexts or benchmark the practices developed by nonprofits in different contexts in order to

understand the particularities of their online charitable actions.

It is also essential to conduct more in-depth mixed-methods research using a hybrid methodology that combines both qualitative and quantitative studies.

Future studies can also focus on studying the adoption of a single social network and clearly demonstrate the appropriate methodology and best practices to ensure success on that specific network.

VII. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Research articles published between 2010 and 2022 were systematically analyzed. Relevant information from the literature on the adoption of social networks by nonprofits in times of crisis was highlighted. Theoretically, this analysis followed an objective approach in collecting data. The data thus collected came from recognized journals, which guarantees the quality of the articles reviewed. Also, the categories of classification of the literature differ from those of previous studies, providing readers with a new review of the scope of works that have addressed the issue of the adoption of social networks by nonprofits in times of crisis. Another contribution is based on the presentation of a review of different practices and the techniques most often adopted by nonprofits on social networks in times of crisis to develop their communication strategy, collect donations, raise awareness and solicit the commitment of volunteers.

From a managerial point of view, this study could be a starting point for practitioners, and particularly nonprofit organizations, who would like to rise on the digital path and especially social networks, to benefit from the positive contributions of these platforms on their activities and their impact.

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