Using Social Media to Drive Greater Teen Engagement in Unicef India Programs

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ABSTRACT: This research paper seeks to understand how UNICEF India could step change the extent to which it harnesses the power of teens in bringing about positive change and the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically by engaging them on social media, a critical touchpoint for a generation of digital natives. It does so through primary research that uncovers current levels of teen awareness and engagement with UNICEF programs, and then through an analysis of UNICEF India's social media content, specifically Instagram, to uncover opportunities and insights on how UNICEF could use social media to create stronger engagement among teens and drive stronger teen participation in social impact programs. The author has had an association with UNICEF, including working as a Summer Youth Volunteer in 2023, and believes that engaging more fellow teens in fulfilling the SDGs through participation in UNICEF programs can be a powerful catalyst for positive change. This paper seeks to provide pointers to UNICEF on how they might use social media more effectively to do so.

KEYWORDS: UNICEF, SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals, Social Media, Teenage Volunteerism, Volunteering, Social Impact.

I. INTRODUCTION

UNICEF is a UN organization; a global NGO that is, according to its website, committed to "enable every child born in India to have the best start in life, to thrive and to develop to her or his full potential". UNICEF India has impacted millions of children and is one of the largest NGOs in the country.

Its success is significant for India and its future- despite economic growth and progress, India is ranked 112th in the world in its fulfillment of the SDGs, indicating significant scope for improvement.

The youth are the group with the most potential to make a difference; India has an overwhelmingly young population, with 40% of people below 25 and a low median age of 28 compared to, for instance, 38 in the US and 39 in China. This is a pool of human resources that could if rallied, lead the effort to fulfill the SDGs in India and make it a better country.

The first part of the problem is that Indian youth are not too engaged. Overall volunteering is 20%, placing it 16th in the world, well below other developing economies such as Indonesia, Kenya, Uganda, and South Korea. Thus, more awareness on how to volunteer and empowerment so that they can make an impact is needed.

UNICEF seeks to change this; in collaboration with the government, it seeks to "build…adolescents as active participants…the aim is to develop their skills and bring their voices more prominently…so they can influence policies and programs." Their initiative YUWAAH involves millions of teens in skill-building and social impact opportunities, and their program Champions for Children allows teens to get involved consistently by giving regular donations and taking action. They have youth-led networks, ranging from a local to a national level, encouraging the participation and skill development of adolescents.

Secondary research indicates that engaging today's teens in any program must involve social media, especially Instagram.

- Social media is used by 80% of teens in India, according to a study by the Institute of Governance, Policies, and Politics and the Youth Online Learning Organization.
- Instagram is the most popular social media platform teens- a survey by the investment banking firm, Piper Jaffray, found that 76% of teens use Instagram, more than the 59% for Twitter and 45% for Facebook.

- NGOs use social media and understand its importance- NonProfit Tech for Good finds that 87% of NGOs globally use social media. Furthermore, the Global NGO Technology Report finds that over 70% of NGOs worldwide say social media is one of the most effective channels for online outreach.
- However, despite awareness of social media's value, only 20% of NGOs are 'extremely confident' that they are maximizing their social media potential, in a survey by Hootsuite, indicating a need for better strategies to maximize this potential.
Hence, to understand how to improve teen engagement in UNICEF programs in India, it becomes important to understand how well UNICEF is doing on social media to engage them, and what opportunities exist to improve engagement via social media.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION
How can UNICEF more effectively use social media to drive higher engagement and participation of teenagers in Mumbai in social impact programs?

III. SCOPE OF RESEARCH
This investigation shall seek to understand:
- Current social media plans of UNICEF in engaging teens.
- Level of awareness among the target audience of UNICEF activities where teens could participate.
- Levels of participation in such activities.
- The preconceptions of teens about joining and volunteering for UNICEF- what they think it means, how interested would they be to volunteer.
- The barriers to teens being more involved.
- What would incentivize or encourage them to participate in such programs through social media?

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This project involves both primary and secondary research.
Primary research includes:
- A quantitative survey of 90 teenagers in Mumbai to understand their awareness of UNICEF programs, current involvement levels, key motivators, and barriers to greater involvement.
- Interviews with people at UNICEF, such as senior people in Communications, would help

to understand what UNICEF is already doing to involve teens and to give realistic recommendations for teen outreach based on the other research.
- Analysis of current UNICEF India Instagram posts in terms of effectiveness and engagement.
Secondary research includes:
- Understanding of current UNICEF programs and opportunities for teen volunteerism.
- Research papers, existing research on teenagers and their attitudes towards making a difference. and involvement in such activities for a broad understanding of the issue.
- Initiatives that were taken in other parts of the world to increase teen engagement in social impact programs for inspiration.
- Understanding of social media habits of such teens and how to best influence them through social media.

V. PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS
Over 90% of respondents correctly identified UNICEF India's aim- to promote and protect the rights of children.

Which of these do you think best sums up the goal of UNICEF India?
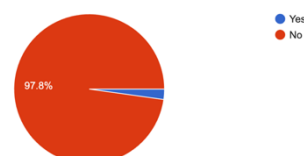90 responses
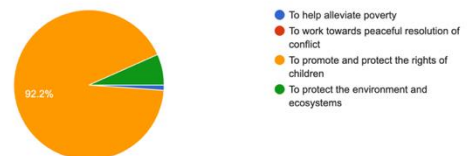
Only 5.6% of respondents were aware of the opportunities UNICEF offers to teens to get involved, and Only 2.2% had ever been involved with any UNICEF programs.

Are you aware of the opportunities UNICEF offers for teens to get involved?
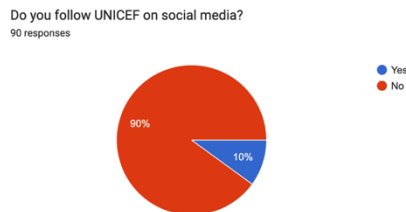90 responses
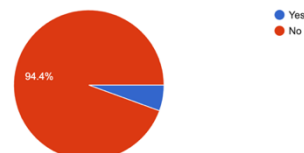
Have you ever been involved with any UNICEF programs?
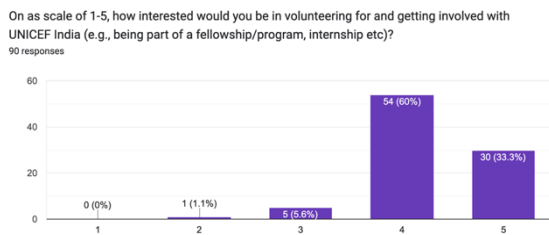90 responses

There is poor engagement on social media with UNICEF among respondents, with only 10% following UNICEF on social media.

Do you follow UNICEF on social media?
90 responses

However, there is a very high latent desire to get more engaged with an organization like UNICEF. 93.3% rated their interest in volunteering for UNICEF at 4 or 5 (60% and 33.3% respectively) on a five-point scale.


On as scale of 1-5, how interested would you be in volunteering for and getting involved with UNICEF India (e.g., being part of a fellowship/program, internship etc)?
90 responses

The top triggers for getting involved with UNICEF were:
• Seeing content about teens getting involved in UNICEF (94%).
• Knowledge of the opportunities available and the nature of participation (92%)
• Outreach from UNICEF to their schools about opportunities (61%)

What would increase your interest in getting involved with UNICEF? (Choose as many as applicable)
90 responses
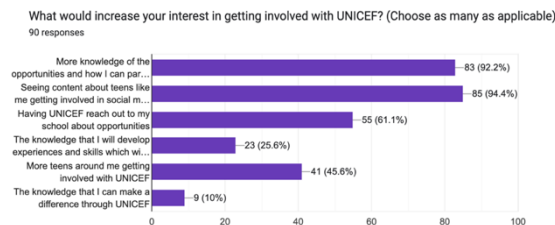
Teens surveyed learn about new ideas or opportunities of interest to them from Instagram (87%) or from friends (75%). 49% learn about them in school, with Twitter, Facebook, and TV far behind.

Where do you usually learn about events and opportunities of interest to you?
90 responses
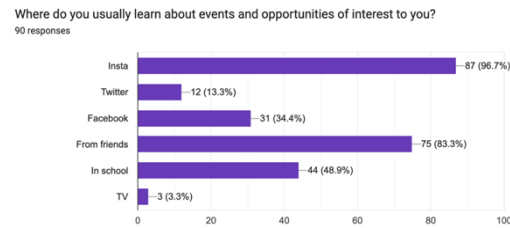
## VI. ANALYSIS OF UNICEF INDIA'S INSTAGRAM POSTS

UNICEF is very active on social media, on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It uploads content on each of these platforms on a nearly daily basis. However, Instagram is the most popular social media platform among teens, and thus is the one that poses the greatest opportunity for increasing teen involvement. The author analysed the last 50 of the latest posts on UNICEF India's Instagram page to discern any trends in engagement (based on average number of likes). Here are some trends that emerge, with graphs that show the average number of likes for each category of post.

Posts featuring teens and children have significantly more engagement (1.6X likes versus other posts).
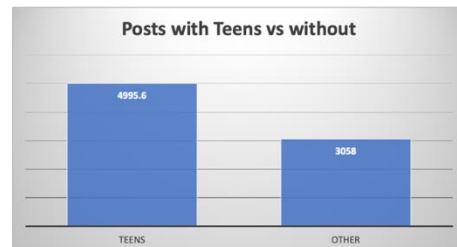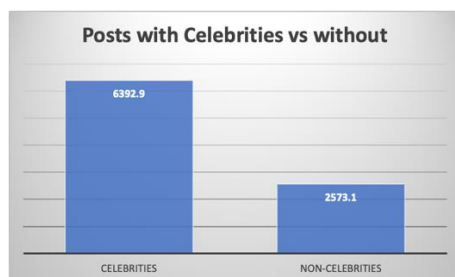

Posts with videos have higher engagement, and the highest engagement is for posts with videos featuring teens/kids (1.5X likes v/s overall videos).
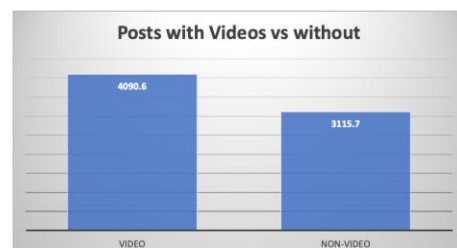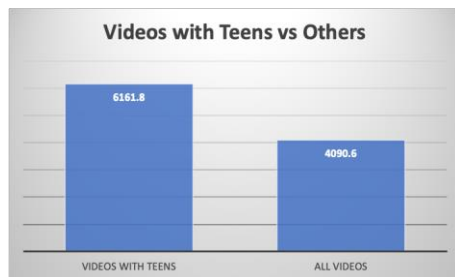
Posts with celebrities have much higher engagement (1.5X) than other posts.

VII. KEY CONCLUSIONS

There is high awareness of the general goal of UNICEF India and the cause it stands for.

However, there is extremely low awareness of the opportunities offered for teens to get involved and minimal involvement among the sample base in UNICEF programs- just 2.2% of teens surveyed have volunteered for the organization.

Relatively few respondents engage with UNICEF on social media, though social media, specifically Instagram is a key media for them to learn of opportunities of interest to them.

Despite the lack of awareness and experience of volunteering for UNICEF, there is a high level of interest in doing so, indicating a great opportunity to get them more engaged in fulfilling UNICEF's purpose.

Based on the research, the critical way of getting teens engaged would be to drive more engagement on Instagram with relevant content, share more details of opportunities for getting involved with UNICEF, and in addition, explore schools as a key venue to engage them, drive awareness and engagement with them.

VIII.   RECOMMENDATIONS

There are two main components to the potential actions to enhance the engagement of teens in UNICEF programs through social media:

1. Getting more teens to follow UNICEF on Instagram
- UNICEF could reach out to schools, such as coming as guest speakers during school events to call upon volunteers and a call to action to follow UNICEF on Instagram.
- It could also work with the school management to spread a message among the school community through newsletters, school events to drive awareness of UNICEF activities, and links to follow UNICEF on social media.
- Given the high impact of celebrities on the UNICEF Insta page, run campaigns with celebrities who are popular among teens, encouraging them to join UNICEF's efforts in bringing about positive change on Insta e.g. Insta Stories with clickable links to the UNICEF page.
2. Once on Instagram, enhancing engagement with teen followers.

Inform:
- Share more information on opportunities for teens to get involved with UNICEF, as lack of information is a key need emerging from my survey. Share details of programs, how to apply, and opportunities to get involved would be critical.
- Share information on how volunteering and being involved in UNICEF activities benefits teens- the skills they would learn and develop and how it would help in resume-building and developing them for success in the future.

Inspire:
- Share stories of teens (especially video content through Reels) who are already engaged with UNICEF, using them as role models, to inspire and encourage teens to get involved. My study shows content with teens has high engagement, as does video content.
- Instagram Live sessions perhaps featuring celebrities and teens involved with UNICEF programs to build engagement, share the work done, and give a chance for teens to interact live with celebrities and teens who are already involved in UNICEF programs.
- Encourage teen followers to reshare UNICEF Stories on their accounts with a clear call to action, to increase awareness among other teens.

IX. POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are some follow-up steps that could be investigated to further refine these recommendations, which the UNICEF team or future researchers could consider.

- Who are the 'celebrities' or role models who most resonate with teens as a target audience? That may sharpen the approach to get teens engaged through celebrities on Instagram.

- What role does timing play in creating stronger participation among teens? As a teen himself, the author surmises that campaigns run during school breaks may get higher engagement as students don't have the pressures of school and academics. This needs to be validated.

- How could these efforts be more integrated into school curricula and programs? From the research schools are a great touchpoint to engage teens. Many schools have Service Projects as part of their curricula. Could UNICEF integrate into those, e.g., students being part of group projects with UNICEF as part of service, to create a more systematic linkage with schools?

- How can a balance be created between teen-oriented content and material about broader issues and UNICEF work on social media? Both are important, to serve different audiences and purposes, but to interest teens and get them involved, more material around teens is necessary; how can changes be made to create a balance between teen-oriented and other content?

- How can more opportunities be made for teens to participate actively in UNICEF India, such as increasing the scope of internships? This will provide greater opportunities to reach out to teens and get them involved in making a difference.

- How can engagement with teens be made more interactive. Research into teen-centric design shows that today's teens are more engaged with they are part of the conversation versus being 'talked to'. Could tools like AI and chatbots be used to engage teens in a conversation on SDGs and volunteering?

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