Activism online
A qualitative study of the social media strategies at UNA Sweden

MA thesis
Journalism Connected
Supervisor: Åsa Kroon
Author: Lydia Andersson
Abstract

Social media has in a short period of time become an increasingly big part of peoples’ everyday life. For organisations and companies, it is practically essential today to be active online to be able to survive. Social media offers cheap and effective advantages compared to traditional marketing, but also increasing challenges in finding strategies and content that works in the changing opportunities of the platforms.

This study has researched the social media strategies at the Swedish non-governmental organisation UNA Sweden, through interviews and observation studies at the organisation’s communication department in Stockholm. The result shows that social media is a necessary and important tool for the organisation’s communicational work, but the presuppositions for communicating online has changed since when social media was first launched. Despite both benefits and challenges with social media, the world of today seems to be too dependent and used to social media for the organisation not to incorporate it in their daily work and communication.
Contents
1 Introduction................................................................................................................. 4
  1.1 Background........................................................................................................... 4
  1.2 Social media......................................................................................................... 4
  1.3 Non-governmental organisations.......................................................................... 4
  1.3.1 United Nations Association of Sweden, UNA Sweden .................................. 5
  1.4 Purpose ............................................................................................................... 5
    1.4.1 Research questions....................................................................................... 5
2 Literature review ..................................................................................................... 6
  2.1 To make a good social media strategy ............................................................... 6
    2.1.1 Customer relationships .............................................................................. 6
    2.1.2 Marketing.................................................................................................... 6
  2.2 Activism online................................................................................................... 7
    2.2.1 Social media strategies for NGOs.............................................................. 8
    2.2.2 To engage through digital media.............................................................. 9
    2.2.3 Handling criticism online......................................................................... 10
3 Methodology ........................................................................................................... 11
  3.1 Interviews .......................................................................................................... 11
  3.2 Observation study ............................................................................................. 11
    3.1 Analytic process............................................................................................... 12
4 Results and analysis............................................................................................... 13
  4.1 Interviews .......................................................................................................... 13
    4.1.1 How UNA Sweden uses social media today........................................... 13
    4.1.2 Challenges of social media today............................................................ 15
    4.1.3 Trolls and negative critic online ............................................................... 16
    4.1.4 Future improvements............................................................................... 17
  4.2 Observation studies ......................................................................................... 19
5 Discussion ............................................................................................................... 22
6 Conclusion and future research .......................................................................... 24
  6.1 Future research ................................................................................................. 24
7 References ............................................................................................................ 25
8 Appendences ......................................................................................................... 27
  8.1 Interview questions.......................................................................................... 27
1 Introduction
The following introduction chapter will explain the background of the study, present the topic, the purpose and the research questions.

1.1 Background
Social media has made it possible for people all over the world to communicate, interact and exchange opinions, news and information with each other without any interaction in the real world. Through the internet we today get access to knowledge of global and personal issues all around the world and a possibility of helping each other and collaborating in unique ways.

This essay will therefore focus on how the Swedish non-governmental organisation United Nations Association of Sweden (UNA Sweden) uses social media to interact with their followers and create public awareness of their issues.

1.2 Social media
Social media can be defined as platforms or meeting points where people can communicate, network and create their own content online. Communication online separates itself from traditional one-way communication - like news from TV or printed papers that are being created by journalists and broadcasted for the audience - and instead creates a two-way communication between the users (Leigert, 2013). Van Dijck (cited in Olsson, 2017, p. 12-13) divides social media into four different categories: social network sites, SNS, like Facebook and Twitter with the aim of social interaction, user generated content sites, like YouTube and MySpace for sharing content like music or movies, sales and marketing sites for selling or exchanging products, and game sites with the main purpose of playing games but also offering social interaction between players.

For non-governmental organisations, further known in this thesis as NGOs, social media offers a new possibility for activism online. Through social media they can mobilize, encourage followers to donate money, become members of organisations, sign petitions, publish information and knowledge of campaigns, events etc (Hammarlin and Miegel, 2017).

1.3 Non-governmental organisations
NGOs are organisations free from governmental influences that often work globally and with a non-profit purpose (www.nationalencyklopedin.se). Every organisation has their own field of interest that often concerns the society, the environment or other global issues. In this thesis I have chosen to examine how UNA Sweden uses social media. I chose this NGO since I
became a member merely because of their work on social media and therefore think it is a very interesting aspect of their social media usage.

1.3.1 United Nations Association of Sweden, UNA Sweden
The United Nations Associations are not part of the UN system. The international United Nations Associations were all started by request from the UN as non-profit organisations in each member country. The purpose of the associations are to offer an opportunity for the population in every member country to engage in questions concerning the UN and be a supportive and critical friend to the UN. The UNA Sweden started as Svenska Föreningen for the League of Nations in 1929. In 1946, WFUNA, World Federation of United Nations Associations, was created and Svenska Föreningen became a member in 1947, changing their name to UNA Sweden in 1957. Today, UNA Sweden have around 6,000 members in 100 local organisations divided into 20 UN-districts, with a headquarter placed in Stockholm (www.fn.se). The organisation works with spreading information and knowledge about the UN, debating questions concerning UN’s work and review how Sweden is fulfilling their commitments as a member country in the UN. The organisation also supports and run their own international projects supporting humanitarian operations. The employees of UNA Sweden have a close communication with the Swedish government, politicians and authorities in questions concerning Swedish UN politics (www.fn.se).

1.4 Purpose
The purpose of this research is to study the social media strategies at UNA Sweden. This will be done by semi-structured qualitative interviews with employees as well as observational studies of the communication team at UNA Sweden’s headquarter in Stockholm.

1.4.1 Research questions
1. For what purposes are UNA Sweden using social media?
2. What social media platforms are they using and why?
3. What difficulties and challenges can an NGO face while using social media?
4. Has UNA Sweden noticed any change in the public attention for the organisation and their issues, or changes in the society because of their use of social media?
2 Literature review
This chapter will present studies of social media strategies for companies and NGOs related to the area of the research.

2.1 To make a good social media strategy
Most researchers agree that the first step any company or organisation needs to take to develop a good social media strategy is to listen to the public and their customers/followers to be able to understand what they are expecting from their social media interaction (Holloman, 2012). According to Holloman, organisations’ and companies’ use of social media are mostly for interacting with customers, for relationship building, marketing purposes, information spreading, etc. Organisations that are successful online are often the ones with many platforms used for different purposes that provide their followers with a variety of content. Content popular to followers can be “hints and tips” sections, competitions, feature articles, online information, “Questions&Answers”, guides and how-to videos. Ström (2012) recommends companies to use the same platforms by many employees and for certain purposes, to be able to reach a wider audience. The company might for example have one national Facebook page, website and Twitter account, but also create individual accounts or pages for their local businesses or employees. Employees from different departments or expertise can have their individual blogs, Instagram- or Twitter accounts where they can communicate and spread information on their topic but under the company name.

2.1.1 Customer relationships
When working with customer relationship building online an organisation needs to start with finding out what targeted groups they want to reach and where to find them. Once started with online platforms the company needs to be prepared to listen and interact with both positive and negative comments to keep an open communication with their followers or visitors (König, 2012). According to a survey from Accenture (cited in König, 2012, p. 11), companies loses 2/3 of their customers because the customers do not feel valued or properly seen and listened to by the customer service (König, 2012). To use social media in an active way by responding and recognizing the customers may therefore make them feel more important to the organisation and willing to stay as clienteles or followers.

2.1.2 Marketing
When using social media for marketing purposes there are two well established strategies in marketing that today is more relevant than ever due to social media (König, 2012):
PUSH – Means to use a “megaphone” to reach as many people as possible with your information, whether the receivers have asked for it or not. Push marketing might be advertisements online or messages demanding to buy products, like or share posts. The problem with push marketing tactics is the constant information stream online that can often drown your information or make the receivers annoyed.

PULL – When using a pulling strategy, you only send information to people who have asked to receive it. This might be through newsletters or updates your followers sign up for. By using pull strategy, you focus on creating content for an audience you already know is interested in the topic. This often involves an interactive communication that shows you care about your followers and your shared interest and values. Pull is often the most successful strategy online since it creates a relationship with your followers and make them want to keep following you and share your content (König, 2012).

2.2 Activism online
Since its start, social media has frequently been used for activist mobilisation, like the Arabian spring in 2011, the protests in London 2009 or the protests during the election in Iran the same year (Olsson, 2017). Some critics say social media has been given too much credit for these revolutions, others argue that even if social media itself does not start any revolutions, the uprising effect might have been less if not for the possibility of organising online.

Paolo Gerbaudo (cited in Olsson, 2017, p. 91) shows in his study that social media is used by social movements for two purposes: for practical reasons like coordination and information, and for emotional reasons where the collective identity and feeling of belonging is essential to any non-profit organisation (Olsson, 2017). Today, it is the social media that provides us with the information we create our conception of the world with (Hammarlin and Miegel, 2017). Digital media can therefore be used by people who want to create change in society by commenting and sharing news articles and posts that engage them, providing us with a great opportunity to evolve the democratic society, but also increases the risk of separation, since social media can be just as useful to spread extremism or violence, as seen with the riots in the UK in 2011 (Stakston, 2011). It is more common that people use social media to express their dislike against something than state what they favour. With the opportunity to shout out fears or prejudices almost anonymously, the individual moral becomes even more important online (Hammarlin and Miegel, 2017).
2.2.1 Social media strategies for NGOs

Many social media platforms are free to use and are often easy to get started with, which makes social media excellent tools for organisations (Holloman, 2012). Through social media organisations can reach multiple individuals and focus groups in a short period of time in a less expensive way than with traditional information and marketing campaigns (Holloman, 2012; Kankainen and Ljubisic, 2012). Social media can also increase the lifetime of an organisation’s event or information campaign, by working with teasers and building expectations before an activity, and afterwards post updates, photos, videos and articles of its outcome (Stakston, 2011).

But because of the massive engagement online the competition to be heard has become tougher. It is therefore more important than ever for organisations and especially non-profit organisations to use social media to be able to survive and develop a sustainable economy (Kankainen and Ljubisic, 2012). By encouraging followers or members that are already active online to use their own channels – blogs, Instagram or other social media platforms – to spread information or events, the organisation gains more attention for their issues (Stakston, 2011).

Waters’ (cited in Wickström 2013, p. 6-12) study of how non-profit organisations use Facebook to engage and interact with their followers shows the organisations mainly used Facebook in three categories: Disclosure, Information dissemination and Involvement. Waters showed that most organisations were aware of the benefits with being on Facebook but did not use the full potential of the network service. The organisations mostly used Facebook to inform about their work, but not many provided their followers with information of how they could get involved as well. To build a good relationship with followers, organisations should therefore maintain a dialog, answer questions, ask for their audiences’ opinions and thank them for their interest and participation in the subjects they work with (Wickström, 2013).

Kankainen and Ljubisics (2012) show in a survey about social media usage for followers, that 37% percent of the respondents believe it is Pretty important that organisations and companies use social media, while 32% believed it to be Very important. Only 5% of the respondents did not believe it to be important at all. When asked what content they preferred from organisations’ and companies’ social media channels, 73% answered that they want to obtain Information and News, while 69% wanted to receive customer services and 62% preferred Inspiration.
2.2.2 To engage through digital media

Stakston (2011) argues that any organisation operating online needs to decide whose everyday life they want to be a part of, and once being a part of it, how to nurse it. Stakston has investigated the “Pyramid of engagement”, divided in six steps of how and why people are engaged in organisations (see Image 1). According to the pyramid, step 1 is where someone is reached by the organisation’s brand through advertisements, articles, blogs etc while on step 2 the interest for the organisation has grown and the organisation has the potential to gain a new follower or subscriber at newsletters, blogs, etc. At level 3, the follower considers the organisation to be trustworthy enough to support the organisation in public, for example by liking posts or recommending the organisation to others. What is important for the organisation here is to encourage the follower to continue the engagement in small and not time-consuming ways, like signing a petition or asking them to share a post. In step 4, the follower is now a member ready to contribute with both time, money and engagement, which should be met from the organisation by offering involvement on the member’s premises, by clear goals and missions with activities and events. On step 5 the member has developed a sense of co-owning with the organisation and feels a responsibility for the organisation and their issues. This member is probably an employee or long-term volunteer. At the highest level, 6, is the leadership of the organisation.

Image 1. Pyramid of engagement (Stakston, 2011).
According to Stakston (2011), most organisations put most of their effort and communication with their followers on the two highest steps, instead of nursing and value the interested groups on the lower levels. The information is often too detailed and advanced for unversed followers that might therefore feel excluded or unskilled enough to take further part in the organisation’s issues or engagements.

2.2.3 Handling criticism online
Since the option to leave comments is a natural part of social media usage, an organisation always faces the risk of receiving negative criticism or comments online in front of a huge audience (Kankainen and Ljubisic, 2012; Leigert, 2012). But criticism and negative comments can also help the organisation realise faults or mistakes that might be prevented or solved for future improvements. It also strengthens credibility if the company can answer negative comments online in a professional manner that might help customers and give them a more positive experience of the company brand (Leigert, 2012).
3 Methodology

The study applies qualitative semi-structured interviews and observation studies with two employees at the communication team at UNA Sweden’s headquarter in Stockholm. By using qualitative methods, the researcher often gets closer to the people and the environment necessary to the research and through this receives more direct access to the wanted information (Ahrne and Svensson 2015). Dalen (cited in Larsson, J 2018, p. 9) says semi-structured interviews gain the researcher control over the interview by prepared questions that cover the general area of the topic, but also allows the conversation to develop with the possibility for the interviewees to share their own thoughts and opinions of the matter.

One of the boundaries with qualitative interviews is that an interview can only give a limited depiction of a situation. Qualitative interviews are always influenced with personal preferences and interests and might not give a completely objective view of the subject. The researcher can therefore never be completely sure of what the interviewee say is true or is an objective understanding of the situation (Ahrne and Svensson 2015).

3.1 Interviews

Two interviews of 32 and 42 minutes have been conducted with employees at UNA Sweden’s communication team, Lena Hansson and Eva Andréasson, Responsible for Fundraising and Communication (internal and external) and Responsible for digital media content. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The number of interviews were limited to two since Lena and Eva are the employees most responsible for UNA Sweden’s content online and therefore the only ones relevant to my study. Complementary questions were also asked during the time for the observation studies to gain a deeper understanding of their work. These questions and answers were documented through notes.

3.2 Observation study

As a complement to the interviews, the study conducted a two-day observation study of the communication team at UNA Sweden’s headquarter. Observation studies are often used to confirm what is said during an interview, since observation studies will gain the researcher a larger understanding for the interviewee and the topic (Ahrne and Svensson 2015).

During the observation study the interviewees were followed in their daily work, by me attending their meetings, observing from behind when they were working at their desks, studying their content on social media etc. The observations were documented through notes and later analysed together with the results from the interviews in four categories: How they
work with social media today, Positive aspects with social media, What challenges they face, and Future improvements and ideas on how to develop a good social media strategy.

Since the study were focusing on one organisation and the amount of days to study it were limited to two, the mixing of these two methods were chosen to be able to gain as deep understanding of UNA Sweden’s social media strategies as possible during the short amount of time.

3.1 Analytic process
The study applied qualitative analysis on the data to analyse the results of the research, with the use of an inductive process where the researcher proceed theories from the collected data rather than a deductive process where the researcher tries different theories and hypothesis. Since I have conducted interviews and observations to see how UNA Sweden works with social media instead of trying different social media strategies myself, I believe the inductive process works best for me as it is mostly used for qualitative values.

The analysis have been conducted with a hermeneutics point of view where the decoding is important for the understanding of the results. The hermeneutic process is used for decoding peoples’ actions in a social context (Watt Bolsen 2007). When using hermeneutic it is important to be aware that the researcher will conduct the analysis from their own knowledge and understanding, which might lead to a different result than from another researcher. It is therefore important for the researcher to be as broad and deep going as possible conducting the analysis, trying to see the data from all different angles and point of views.
4 Results and analysis
Since UNA Sweden works with delicate questions, I have chosen to let my interviewees be anonymous using fake names and not mention what title each interviewee has. The results are presented in two sections; interviews and observations.

4.1 Interviews
4.1.1 How UNA Sweden uses social media today
When asked why UNA Sweden uses social media both Lena and Eva talk about the importance of social media for communication purposes, and the need for them to be where the public are, which is online. Just like noticed in Kankainen and Ljubisic (2012), Eva also mentions the advantage of advertising on social media compared to traditional marketing, with the possibility of adapting advertisements after certain target groups on both Facebook and Instagram. When they have an event in Örebro they can focus their online advertisements to that region and not pay for a national audience, which is very cost-effective compared to traditional marketing.

According to both interviewees, they previously did not work with any special strategies for how they use social media, which lead to a lot of information being posted online without a clear intention or plan. Today they are revaluating their use of social media to get a clearer cause for their different channels. Lena says that one of the main reasons for them to use social media used to be to gain more members, and therefore their main focus were to direct people to the UNA Sweden’s website where this function is available. But they have now noticed that most people visiting their website search for information about their work and international projects rather than becoming members which has led to the necessary for a reconstruction of their needs for the website.

Today, UNA Sweden uses multiple platforms with national accounts at Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Youtube. In line with the ideas of Holloman (2012) and Ström (2012), some of their employees also have personal accounts, like the responsible for the Youth-section who runs the Facebook account UNg and the Secretary General who is very active on LinkedIn. Even if both interviewees claim they do not have any special social media strategies for the moment, they still seem to have well organised ideas for their different channels. Eva says their national Facebook account is used like their main information channel or newspaper. Here they can inform about events or encourage visitors to take action or continue reading articles. Eva also mentions the separate Facebook page “Child marriage”, created mainly to inform about their work with ending child marriages. Lena sees Facebook
as a channel to lift complex questions like international events and conflicts, in contrast to the Instagram account that is used with a more personal aspect - to create awareness of the organisation, for relationship building with their followers and specially to attract a younger audience. The LinkedIn account is used for advertising of available positions at the office while Twitter is used for political and opinion building purposes. The Youtube channel is the least used one and is mainly functioning as a tool for their local organisations to upload videos.

When it comes to content, Eva says they work a lot with the UNA Sweden’s three issues which is Peace and Security, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, posting updates of world events or information of their international projects concerning these three issues. They upload their magazine Världshorisont to the website and connect it with Facebook by posting articles with an encouragement to read more at the website. They also work with the special UN days during the year, for example by sending out a digital material package to all local organisations for the International Women’s day with ideas of how to pay attention to the day.

When asked about interactions with their followers, Lena answers that they get mostly likes but not many comments on their posts on Facebook. They receive more interaction on Twitter where people retweet their tweets and are more involved, but she also points out that Twitter in Sweden reaches a limited group of users who are already interested in the same topics. On Instagram they usually get likes but not so many comments, but Lena observes that Instagram in general not is used for commenting. Since Instagram is mainly used for photos it can sometimes be difficult to use Instagram for more complex issues even if the UNA Sweden works with complicated questions, and it can therefore be a challenge to find a good balance in their content for this platform.

One of my main questions conducting this research was if an organisation can create change in society because of their work on social media. Since both Lena and Eva say it is hard to tell how and why people become aware I have not been able to answer this question. Even if many people today see social media as their main source for news it is difficult to find out if people get more aware because of social media or not. This also goes in line with Olsson (2017) saying that some argue that social media are given too much credit for revolutions and social movements, since it is hard to find the true source for peoples’ engagement. Eva mentions that they often get the reaction from people that they have seen something the organisation has done on social media and think their work is important, but they have not been able to investigate if this awareness has led to any changes.
4.1.2 Challenges of social media today
Both interviewees frequently come back to the challenges of using social media as an NGO. In contrast to what my previous research said, social media and especially Facebook no longer seems to be the easy and cheap advertising tool it used to be. Even if Eva agrees with Holloman (2012) that social media is cheaper to use than traditional marketing, she says it has become harder for NGOs to use Facebook than when the platform was first launched. In the beginning of Facebook, everything you posted automatically ended up in a timeline where the most recent post was shown first. Today, Facebook’s algorithms decide what is probably the most relevant information to the followers and therefore arrange the timeline in what the algorithms expect people to be wanting to see. This means that popular posts with a high number of likes, comments or other interactions get higher up in the newsfeed than less popular posts. Today the posts are seen by only 0.4% of the followers, and to get more time in the spotlight the organisation needs to pay. The amount of money needed differs because of the organisation’s popularity and expected relevance; the more popular posts they add, the less they need to pay. This means that organisations today need to be aware of what to post to make sure that they will not sink in the algorithms popularity. If Facebook senses the posts have not received much attention lately, they will automatically believe that the organisation is outdated and therefore let the posts sink even more. An organisation therefore needs to be very aware of what they post and only post content they believe will gain a lot of attention, or decide what posts are important enough to finance to reach a wider audience. Lena believes this might be a huge challenge for NGOs today since many small organisations have a limited budget and limited resources to spend on social media.

The fact that Facebook now charges for posts to be exposed shows that everything on the Internet is changing fast. Today it is therefore no longer as profitable to use Facebook for marketing purposes as it were when Kankainen and Ljubisics’ (2012) and Holloman’s (2012) research were presented. Even if Facebook is free for organisations to use, they have no use for it if their followers will not be exposed for their content because of the algorithms. Stakston (2011) said social media can increase the lifetime of an event if the organisation posts updates during preparations and after the event, but this is only still relevant if the organisation that is using Facebook is popular enough or can pay for the posts to reach higher in the newsfeed. Facebook advertisements might be cheaper to use than traditional marketing campaigns for bigger and well-established companies and organisations, but the cost might still be great to small grassroot movements who are dependent on social media to interact with society and reach out with their information.
Lena argues that one of the biggest challenges for NGOs online is to present information in a way suitable for social media and its algorithms. She says UNA Sweden has a lot of good content, but they need to improve how to deliver it in a way that feels relevant and easy to grasp for their followers, which requires high communicational skills. They used to be less aware of what they posted online and posted almost anything happening in the office or the organisation on Facebook, but because of the algorithms they now need to become much more conscious of what content they share and how they present it, which is very time consuming.

Eva mentions the technical difficulties with social media. Today all technology advances fast and it can be hard to keep up in the progress. She also mentions the challenge of always being updated on news. Because of social media and the Internet, international news flies in a rapid speed and since UNA Sweden is very affected by developments in the rest of the world it is important for them to always be updated of world events to be able to make statements and post updates online, which is extremely time consuming. Lena also mentions the lack of time to analyse and follow up their activities online as a big challenge when using social media.

4.1.3 Trolls and negative critic online
Kankainen and Ljubisics (2012) argue every organisation needs to have a clear strategy for handling negative critic on social media since discussions online easily can escalate in a very rapid speed. Lena and Eva say that formerly all kind of comments from what seemed to be trolls were immediately deleted, but they both agree this should not be the first step. Eva says they always try to answer comments as long as the comments do not contain any personal attacks, discrimination or illegal content. Lena argues that anyone expressing racism or using an unacceptable language should immediately be blocked, but if someone can communicate in an objective manner, even if they do not share your opinions or values, it is still of value to respond in a professional and informative way. She also mentions the possibility of others reading the same comments and might share that person’s values, and she therefore believes it is important to show them her perspective and give them an option for another point of view.

It can be difficult to realise who is a troll and who has an actual interest for a serious discussion but might just have a harsh way of expressing themselves. She gives an example:

Often when we write about a topic that might be a bit controversial, people find a way to deteriorate that. The other day a man wrote, speaking of child marriages, something about what we think of the Swedish institute darkening a rape. Of course, that is terrible, but not connected to our work. I therefore replied “What you are writing about is of course totally unacceptable and
should not happen to any woman, but this concern is not in our field of work. I hope you will find someone else who might help you answer your questions.” Previously I think his first comment would have been deleted but now he replied, and it was clear that he was not against our organisation or our work, but will continue working for his agenda, which is his right to do.

But answering and following up discussions online is very time consuming, and Eva therefore talks about the importance to realise when to quit. Lena mention a situation from the same morning:

We had posted an event [on Facebook] about a tutoring for Världskoll\(^1\) for teachers and had invited Carolina Klüft and Fanna Norrby, a black woman who is very active online and works against racism. Then there was a woman commenting something like “I do not understand, is Fanna an example of someone who does not have Världskoll [translation “world awareness”] or why is she invited?” Then I felt that this woman is probably not interested in this event but just wants to argue, but I cannot be sure of that. So, I answered: “We have invited Fanna because we believe she has Världskoll, she will be talking about racism etc. We think it will be a very interesting event, I hope you want to attend!” But she was not interested in the event at all, and then she starts to question our political view at the organisation. It then became a bit hard to understand where to draw the line because she did not say anything clearly wrong even if the tone of the conversation became rougher. But after a few comments the woman started to offend me and became clearly mean, so then I told her that this behaviour is not acceptable at our site and I would therefore block her.

4.1.4 Future improvements

To develop their social media strategies Lena will start organising workshops to identify what their purpose of social media is and what their targeted groups are. She mentions the necessity of clarifying the purpose for each channel and not just put them all together in a “social media bucket”, since there are different advantages with every channel. When using Facebook, she believes it is important to ask Should this be on Facebook? and thereafter When should this be on Facebook and how? She also stresses the importance of spending resources on making good content on Facebook and think of how they can present a story in a short format that will work on Facebook and encourage their audience to continue reading.

Lena also talks about the importance for NGOs to embrace a more business-like mindset when it comes to communication. She believes many who are involved in NGOs are highly engaged in their issues but might forget that others might not be as well informed or interested in their concerns. This can result in a lack of communicational strategies and understanding

\(^1\) Världskoll = translation “World awareness”, an online tool for teachers provided by the UNA Sweden.
for financial issues. She therefore believes it is important for NGOs to think more like a company to be able to reach a wider audience. If not, it is very likely that the organisation is spending money on advertisements or Facebook activities without any visible results.

When asked what content works best on social media, Lena in general believes personal stories and field stories where complex issues can be delivered in a personal way works better than more informative content like “There is a war in Rwanda”. She argues that very few people are interested in such specific topics or specific countries, it is necessary to humanize the information for the audience to be able to relate. Even if they want to communicate about difficult topics she believes that the receivers will not be able to cope with too much negative stories. Instead she believes they should be less reporting in how they deliver news, even if it is important to always be accurate in all facts, and use more storytelling to give people something to relate to. According to Eva’s experiences, the content getting least attention online is the content that is too formal or strict in its presentation. The posts that gain least attention are those about their fundraising, whereas she believes they need to figure out how to make the fundraising material more as content using videos or other interactive tools.

Since the main purpose for UNA Sweden’s work online is to access more members, Lena believes their Facebook account should be much more connected to their website in order to guide their followers there. According to Stakston’s (2011) “Pyramid of engagement” there is a risk of the organisation focusing too much on their followers in the higher level of the pyramid where they are already interested and well-informed and might therefore lose the opportunity of attracting new members. Lena is already on the same line believing the recruitment and the fundraising should be delivered subtler and not be the first thing welcoming a visitor at the website, especially if the visitor does not even know who they are or what they work with. If they instead are met with interesting articles and information about their work, it might be easier for them to want to become members or donate.

When asked what she believes is most important for NGOs which want to start working with social media, Lena thinks it is very important to look at data and analyse what works and what does not online, and to follow up how their activities online have been received. And to be more creative with the content and invite people to learn more about the organisation and issues in an easy way. Eva believes it is important not to just “copy and paste” how others are doing, but to figure out what use you want from the different platforms and to try to think more of what sort of content you are interested in and would like to see more of on social media. She also stresses the importance of always testing and analysing content online,
comparing images, headlines, targeted groups, etc, and not being afraid of saying no to content you do not believe will gain the wanted effect.

4.2 Observation studies
Through the observation study I noticed that social media was well incorporated in almost every other department of the office. Employees often came to get help with Facebook advertisements for courses, events or seminars, etc.

At the communication meetings they mostly discussed how to pay attention to world events on their social media channels. On the day for my first observation, the UN Safety Council and Antonio Guterres\textsuperscript{2} arrived to Sweden for their annual unofficial meeting and the communication team therefore discussed how to best report this in social media. They decided to have a theme week about the safety council, posting a “6 Questions and Answers about the Safety Council” with more briefly information together with a longer video explaining more. They had also posted an interview from ExpressenTV done with the UNA Sweden’s Secretary-General broadcasted the same morning. They also discussed if they should have a separate section at the website explaining what the Safety Council is, since the most common thing visitor search for at the website is “What is the UN?”

During the day Lena also prepared a picture and quote from Dag Hammarskjöld with a humoristic approach that would be published on Instagram during the weekend, just to see what sort of reaction it would receive. She also made a short movie about Guterres for publication on Facebook with a link to the “6 Questions and Answers” on the website for those interesting in reading more. Just like Holloman (2012) and Ström (2012) suggest they worked a lot with different platforms and tools, using the Q&A, short videos linked to more information or a longer movie, and the funny quote on Instagram, showing an understanding of using both easy and amusing content as well as informational and factual.

Eva arranged with advertisements for different courses on Facebook since they had not gained as many responses as wanted for one of their upcoming courses. She then rewrote an advertisement on Facebook and changed the target groups to engage more people. The target group “Human Rights” reached too few but “Sustainable development” reached more so she added that one as well. She also showed me different tools to see statistics of their exposure

\textsuperscript{2} Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2017-
online and how many people and target groups they reach. Posts containing videos reached most responses.

After the weekend the result from the Dag Hammarskjöld quote was very good, with 130 likes on Instagram. During the weekend they had also broadcast live and done some Instagram stories from the press conference.

During the day they had several meetings about upcoming world events connected to the UN and the Swedish government and how to bring this forward on social media. One of the biggest events was the hearing in Genève of how the Swedish government fulfil their commitments toward the UN. They discussed what sort of public interest the hearing is, if they should report or blog from Genève, or if they should wait till after the hearing and post a summary and comments of the result online afterward.

They also discussed whether to make a Facebook event about an upcoming movie night but felt there was a risk of not reaching enough attention on Facebook to be worth it. They decided to instead email members in the local organisations near the cinema. But for social media they will take pictures during the event to show on Instagram afterwards.

During the afternoon another employee made a slide with pictures to be published on Facebook, showing that they have raised 10 million Swedish crowns to UNFPA. Eva adjusted the newsletter about the international project “Girl” that will be sent out with the annual payment for all members. She chose “Girl” since there has been a lot of focus on child marriages in media lately and thought it suitable to lift how the UNA Sweden works with this issue.

Through the observation studies I noticed the opportunity to decide what targeted groups will be reached by the information or advertisements. Just like König (2012) that talks about the pull strategy as the most effective communication strategy, the UNA Sweden used the special tools on Facebook to choose to only pay for advertisements in a certain region instead of the whole country. They were also very aware of the benefits of emailing members instead of creating public events on Facebook to reach an audience for the movie night.

I was very interested in studying how UNA Sweden works with what Paolo Gerbaudo (cited in Olsson, 2017, p. 91) talks about with practical and emotional reasons for NGOs use of social media. I did not notice an active work with a collective feeling of belonging in the relationship between UNA Sweden and their followers, but this might be because most
comments they received during my observation came from the so-called trolls and did not lead to any relationship building dialog. Just like Hammarlin and Miegel (2017) mention it seems that people were more eager to comment if they disagreed with a post than interact if they liked it. But when I looked at the UNA Sweden’s Instagram I did notice that most comments were friendly with a lot of positive emojis and signs of appreciation of the organisation, so maybe they do have a community but a rather small one because of the lack of interactions from more followers. As Eva said they often get the reaction that people appreciate their work, this shows that people respect and value what they do. But maybe the close association to the UN might lead to a distance between the organisation and their followers. Perhaps people feel disconnected to such a world spread and powerful unit.
5 Discussion
One of the aims of this thesis was to study if UNA Sweden’s activism online could lead to a change in society. I soon realized that it is too difficult to measure what impact UNA Sweden’s usage of social media have in the public and what is the actual source of a change. What I did discover that I did not expect were all the difficulties and challenges social media can bring. Even if I were aware of the algorithms of Facebook I did not know the magnitude of the impact the algorithms have or how the organisation needs to pay to cope with them. Since the conditions are applicable for all organisations, this means that the strive to create content that can reach high in the newsfeed on Facebook could turn into a popularity contest and lead to a headline hunt for organisations. There seems to be a huge risk of important information and serious topics getting lost in the search for content that resolves in many likes, shares or comments. Surely the use of soft news might open peoples’ eyes to an NGO and awake an awareness or interest in their issues. But perhaps this could mean consumers become used to being nursed with soft content if only exposed to stories the organisations are forced to provide them with to fit the algorithms. One could argue that this is risking organisations only posting fortunate stories or stories with a happy ending, which could create in the consumer a sense that everything is already alright and nothing more needs to be done. Hammarlin and Miegel (2017) saying that the information we receive on social media is the material we use to create our concepts of the world with is alarming considering how easy it is to share any kind of information online no matter the source or factual correctness. The responsibility for both organisations and consumers in what content they publish or how they interpret it is huge. Only posting positive stories, even if true, could lead to a disoriented worldview. On the other hand, only showing negative stories can lead to the exact same result, making consumers believe the state of the world is worse than it actually is. It therefore seems to be very important for organisations to find a balance in their content using both easy topics mixed up with more serious ones, or the ability to present complex information in a relatable way for the consumers to cope with.

My research has shown both positive and negative aspects of using social media, but since my previous research contained mostly handbooks in social media strategies for companies I believe my results from the study of UNA Sweden show that social media usage is much more complex than any of my literature research expressed. I do believe Ström’s (2012) and Holloman’s (2012) ideas to use multiple platforms by many employees is a good idea to reach a wider audience and provide followers with different angles of information suitting different
groups, but this requires both time and resources at the organisation or company. If a lot of the organisations’ time and effort is moved online, that could mean they have less time to spend on working in the field or in grassroot activities which is what most NGOs rely on. On the other hand, without involvement on social media, the organisation might never reach out with information about their activities and achievements in the real world and therefore lose active members or participants.

Olsson (2012) talks about the practical and emotional purposes of social media usage for NGOs and I believe the emotional aspect is incredibly important. To me, the sense of belonging is very important in any organisation I am a member with or follow online, and I value to feel connected to the organisation through shared values and ideas. Just like Stakston (2011), I think it is very important for organisations to catch potential followers or members early and provide them with simple options for involvement. To uphold a two-way communication by encouraging followers to interact by asking them questions or ask for their opinions, and not just provide them with information, I believe could be a great way for organisations to create a stronger sense of community.

When studying the benefits and disadvantages of social media it seems that even if the challenges and difficulties in using it are problematic, the society of today is too dependent on social media not to use it. The benefits of interacting and reaching out with information and mobilize from all over the world seem hard or even impossible to emulate in any other area of communication. Still, it can be a frightening thought how dependent the world has become of an online society in such few years’ time. One the interviewees said that “we are all in the hands of Facebook” when speaking of the endeavour to be valued by the algorithms. This quote shows how much influence the digital world has gained over peoples’ and organisations’ lives in our days.
6 Conclusion and future research
This study has investigated social media strategies at UNA Sweden by interviews and observation studies with two employees at their communication team.

The study has showed social media is an important tool for UNA Sweden to communicate with followers and members, for information spreading, fundraising, recruiting and advertising of events. But even if the benefits with social media marketing are cheap and effective compared to traditional, the disadvantages with algorithms and creating content suitable for the algorithms contribute to a big challenge for the organisation.

These challenges of social media could also apply to other organisations. Despite the ideas that social media connects and increases peoples’ awareness, the risk of organisations rushing into a “headline hunt” and neglecting important information to create popular content can lead to consumers of social media losing substantial knowledge of the world. But even if the disadvantages of using social media are difficult to cope with, society today seems to be too dependent on it for organisations not to incorporate social media in their communicational work.

Interviewees at UNA Sweden argue the necessity for organisations to attend a business-like approach when working with social media. Since this study has researched social media strategies for companies and compared the result with how UNA Sweden uses social media, I believe this study is suitable as a complement to social media strategies research and can be used to interact the social media usage for companies with the strategies for social movements and NGOs.

6.1 Future research
The focus of this study has been how and why UNA Sweden works with social media and the choices they make online. To get a deeper understanding for an organisation’s impact through social media, future research should focus on investigate how their followers or visitor experience their content online and if this has had any impact on their lives or awareness of the organisation’s issues.
7 References


Larsson, J 2018, ’Föräldern som en aspekt i undervisning’, Thesis on advanced level, Örebro University, retrieved 18 May 2018, DiVA.


8 Appendences

8.1 Interview questions.

**Their social media strategies.**

1. Why are you using social media?
2. What social media platforms are you using and for what purposes?
3. What response do you usually receive from your followers on your social media channels?
4. What does an ordinary day look like at your communication department?
5. How do you work with campaigns for social media?
6. Do you have any specific guidelines for your national and local work with social media?

**Effects in the society.**

7. Have you noticed any changes in the society in the interest for your issues due to your work on social media?
8. Have you noticed any changes in the public awareness of your organisation due to your work on social media?

**Challenges.**

9. Have you met any challenges or difficulties when using social media?
10. If you receive negative comments online, how do you usually respond?
11. (If anything happens in tradition media or press, do you ever comment it through your social media channels?)
12. Do you believe it is difficult to reach out through the media buzz online?
13. What sort of content have you noticed works best and not on social media?

**Tips.**

14. What do you consider an NGO should think about when using social media?