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ADVOCACY INFLUENCING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ADVOCACY INFLUENCING:
An exploratory study on social media influencing for social change in the Philippines

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Acceptance Page:

This paper prepared by **KATRINA MARIE S. PASCUA** with the title: **"ADVOCACY INFLUENCING: An exploratory study on social media influencing for social change in the Philippines"** is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Program.

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Biographical Sketch

Katrina Marie S. Pascua has nearly two decades of professional experience in global development, specializing in program and project management, public relations, and strategic communications. She currently serves as a Strategic Communications and Knowledge Management Consultant at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), where she leads the development of communication strategies for both internal and external stakeholders.

Ms. Pascua holds a Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Melbourne as an Australia Awards scholar and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the University of the Philippines.

Her extensive career includes previous roles with Resonance (SSG Advisors), the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Coffey International, and the Office of Senator Kiko Pangilinan. Across these roles, she has successfully managed major campaigns, built multi-sectoral partnerships, implemented outreach programs, and contributed to policy analysis and development.

Acknowledgement

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my husband, Francis, forever supportive and loving, forever encouraging and willing to be my sounding board. I also dedicate this to my two little girls, Amara and Aliya, who giggle when they hear that mommy is still in school. This is dedicated to my parents, Cathy and Nonong, who do not completely understand what I do for a living but are so proud of me.

Respectfully, I dedicate this to all current and future development communication practitioners, including my mentors and colleagues, who continue to inspire me. May our voices be heard by those who care, and echoed by those who want to see change in the world. Thank you for doing what you do.

We keep fighting for a better future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page i

University Permission Page ii

Acceptance Page iii

Biographical Sketch iv

Acknowledgment v

Dedication vi

Table of Contents vii

ABSTRACT ix

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1

- Background of the Study 1
- Statement of the Problem 3
- Objectives of the Study 4
- Significance of the Study 5
- Scope and limitation of the Study 5

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE 7

- Communications for Social Change 7
- Influencer Marketing for Behavior Change 9
- Influencers in Development 11
- Influencer Marketing in Asia and the Philippines 12
- Measuring Influence 14

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 17

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY 19

CHAPTER V: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 22

- Social Media Campaigns and Content Development 22
- Engaging the Influencer 26
- Tools and Insights for Measuring Success 29
- Redefining the Influencer 31
- Advocacy Influencing for Social Change 32

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS 35

FIGURE: Bandura's Dual Path of Communication Influence 18

REFERENCES 38

APPENDIX: The research instrument 40

Abstract

This study explores the role and effectiveness of social media influencer marketing in advancing children's rights advocacy in the Philippines. As digital platforms become increasingly central to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the strategic use of influencers—both celebrities and community-based advocates—has emerged as a key component of development communication. Anchored in behavior change communication theories and social influence frameworks, this research examined how three major NGOs—Save the Children Philippines, Plan International Pilipinas, and World Vision Philippines—utilize influencer-driven campaigns to promote child rights, increase public awareness, and mobilize support.

Using a qualitative approach that included desktop research and key informant interviews, the study found that organizations select influencers based on alignment with advocacy values, authenticity, and community relevance. Influencer engagement extend beyond visibility and awareness raising into policy advocacy, field immersion, and audience-specific content creation. Popular platforms included Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and livestreaming tools like Kumu, with storytelling, co-created messaging, and interactive formats used to sustain audience engagement. While influencer marketing has demonstrated value in outreach and community resonance, the findings also underscore the challenge of impact measurement and tracking long-term behavior change. The study findings also reveal the emergence of other influencing factors and types of influencers.

Recommendations include further study into a more deliberate use of baseline data to enhance the effectiveness of influencer strategies in the development sector. By

bridging digital reach with participatory communication, direct correlations may be made in using social media as a transformative tool in promoting social development goals.

Keywords: Social Media Influencing; Social Media Campaigns; Non-Governmental Organizations; Advocacy; Social Change; Monitoring and Evaluation

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

At the beginning of 2025, Datareportal published that there were 97.5 million internet users in the Philippines. And 95% of this number consumed social media on an average of 3.5 hours a day. In 2025, there were a reported 90.8 million active social media user identities, an impressive 78% of the total population. From 2024 to 2025, Datareportal lists an increase of 4.0 million user identities, with Facebook consistently ranking top media platform year after year (Datareportal, 2025). These numbers do not account for the bots or duplicate users, however, and yet whichever manner you crunch the numbers, it would likely equate to social media influencing yielding positive results for most marketing campaigns.

Many celebrities, both local and international, advocate for social issues and charity causes. For example, UNICEF has Anne Curtis, and the World Food Programme had KC Concepcion as their Goodwill Ambassadors. Both celebrities have done their own fund-raising efforts for their beneficiaries, such as Anne Curtis pledging donations for her running marathons or selling pre-loved fashion items for KC's closet. Other organizations outside of the United Nations network have taken to leveraging their celebrity supporters. Angel Locsin for the Philippine Red Cross, DingDong Dantes for the YesPinoy Foundation, Aga Mulach for Jollibee Foundation, Lea Salonga for World Vision, and many others. Essentially, these celebrities can mobilize an audience to act on a social issue because the public looks up to them. More than paid endorsers, they are influencers who have a steady following and credible brand image.

Celebrity diplomacy has been widely used by the United Nations agencies since the 1950s, beginning with well-known actor Danny Kaye (Alleyne, 2005). Having a celebrity spokesperson raises awareness for the cause, raises the status or brand of the institution, and raises funds through projects endorsed by the celebrity. Examples of very high-profile celebrities for the United Nations include Angelina Jolie, BTS, Bono, Madonna, and Emma Watson. The concept is the same as promoting a brand or marketing a product. The celebrity or influencer grabs the audience's attention through a media blitz, delivers a high-impact background story, and calls the public to action (Wheeler, 2011). Some celebrities genuinely believe in the product so much that they use their own resources for some fund-raising activities and even use their personal accounts to advocate for causes (Partzch, 2014). Some celebrities go the route of undergoing diplomatic training to really be able to represent a constituent. It has become a common strategy in development communication.

Influencers are genuine, likeable, trustworthy, and credible people who have a following. They are ascribed authority and credibility by their following. In 2020, many celebrities even "redefined" what it means to be an influencer by using their popularity to voice out their own opinions on current affairs and pressing social issues considering the COVID-19 pandemic (Rappler, 2020). In this post-pandemic era, more and more youth are aware of the world's social issues from school, their peers, family, and the media.

Influencer marketing is a fast-rising statistic in recent years because of social media accessibility which provides fresh and creative content, especially during the pandemic when many used social media as an outlet through content creation (West, 2021). Shareable savvy short videos went viral on various platforms. Non-celebrity

influencers are now favored by brands because of their likeability and economic affordability (David, 2019). In the Philippines, Rakuten Insight published that 70% are likely to purchase something because a person they deemed trustworthy has recommended it (Gross, 2021). Influencers are also more cost-effective which makes them the preferred marketing strategy for start-ups and small businesses.

There are different tiers of influencers depending on the number of followers: nano = >1,000, micro = >10,000, mid-tier = >50,000, macro = >500,000, and mega = >1million followers. In early 2024, online reports show that there are now over 86.98 million internet users with around 50% of the population living in rural areas (We are Social, Data Reportal and Kepios, 2024). Aside from Facebook, other top social media platforms are Instagram and Tiktok. During the pandemic, Tiktok launched their own platform called TikTok For Good. On this platform, you can see users posting videos on several social issues like education (#EduTok), animal welfare (#PetBff), Climate Change (#ForClimate), and more. It has reported billions of videos created, viewed, and translated this to dollars donated to global advocacy institutions.

This study aims to explore the impact of social media marketing on children's rights in the Philippines, a critical issue given the increasing influence of digital platforms on youth engagement and awareness.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing presence of social media as a marketing tool for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding how these strategies actually affect the protection of children's rights. Despite widespread implementation of social media strategies, persistent violations of children's rights raise critical questions about their

effectiveness. Are influencers an effective tool or strategy when it comes to advocacy and development issues?

This research will investigate the communication strategies employed by three prominent NGOs—Save the Children Philippines, Plan International Philippines, and World Vision Philippines—compared to their reported outcomes related to children's rights advocacy. Through a combination of desktop research and qualitative interviews, this study seeks to identify effective practices and potential gaps in social media marketing that may impact children's rights in the country.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the social media influencer marketing in the Philippines and its impact to the development field, particularly for children's rights and youth advocacy.

Specifically, this study will:

1. Understand the social media strategies employed by each organization, the specific campaigns and their respective goals;
2. Find out why and how organizations have selected these advocacy influencers (whether celebrity or not); and
3. Identify the outcomes and tools used to measure the effectiveness of using celebrities or influencers in their advocacy campaigns.

An analysis of the results may show trends or factors that could be used to create indicators or metrics for effectiveness of social media campaigns on development issues.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study lead towards understanding the impact of social media campaigns on social development issues in a country. Many factors would come into play, including the accessibility to internet and mobile data, the audience the campaign caters to, and the call to action of social media campaigns: awareness, engagement, attendance funding, sponsorship, etc.

This study would also validate how much or to what extent behavior change models and consumer marketing models could be used in development communication. It may recommend metrics to be used for future social media campaigns or inform development communication practitioners on how to be more deliberate with monitoring and evaluating existing strategies.

The analysis from the live interviews will support future Philippine studies on development communication and influencer marketing strategies.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on the social media campaigns and influencer marketing of three nongovernment organizations advocating for the youth: World Vision, Plan International Philippines, and Save the Children. These three international organizations are established globally and have local offices in the Philippines which have their own social media accounts. Initial desk research will be undertaken to determine social media statistics in recent years and any observations in trends. This study will be limited to the Philippine country offices of these organizations, relying on desktop research and qualitative interviews to inform a comparative analysis.

Given their similar profiles, this study will focus on only these three NGOs and exclude the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). While being the leading example on using social media strategies for fundraising, UNICEF is already established as a household name with a long history and quite a number of celebrity ambassadors. They have done extensive work in this field and have large offices globally.

This study focuses on the thought process of the communications teams of these smaller NGOs and how they navigate the Philippine setting.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The dynamic landscape of digital communication has ushered in new opportunities for social change and advocacy. This section examines existing theories and studies that underpin behavior change communication, the emergence of influencer marketing as a tool for driving social impact, and the role of celebrities and social media influencers in advancing development initiatives. By delving into various frameworks and phenomenon, this review establishes a robust foundation for understanding the potential of influencer marketing within the context of child rights advocacy in the Philippines.

Communication for Social Change

Behavior Change Communication uses a variety of communication channels to develop, promote, and sustain positive behaviors. Information Education and Communication (IEC) came into practice in the early 1990s to fill in existing gaps in education. Delivering the appropriate message through appropriate means to a target audience. Behavior change communication is the evolution of IEC and focused on translating awareness into action. It is primarily concerned with enabling positive change through a conducive environment. In this theory, people are active agents who influence their environment and vice versa. Observational learning is a major component of the theory, whereby people learn desirable and undesirable behaviors by observing others and reproducing these learned behaviors to maximize their rewards. Their own beliefs, history, experiences, will determine which observed behaviors they will reproduce. Further, if an individual was rewarded for the behavior, they will likely replicate it again versus being punished for said behavior.

Various factors including personal, social, and environmental factors influence an individual's behavior. Theories of behavior change are largely used in the health sector as medical professionals try to promote healthier lifestyles for patients. An article published by EUFIC in 2014 put forth several theories and models of behavior change. Information and advice are not enough to efficiently change an individual's behavior or attitude. Often being prescribed or told what to do will result in resistance. Over 60 socio-psychological models and theories of behavior have been identified with varying levels of success. Often, the ones cited are the Transtheoretical Model (or Stages of Change Model), Social Cognitive Theory (learning from others), and Theory of Planned Behavior. Even in the health sector, social marketing campaigns are used to influence behavior for social good. However, it cannot be the sole means of changing one's behavior. A nudge towards the positive behavior can be done through making the better option more accessible or incentivizing.

During the pandemic, digital media tools have played a very important role for Non-Government Organizations in being able to reach their beneficiaries without having to physically travel to the rural areas. Innovative online tools have given the organizations a chance to continue their work remotely. Social change is a constant process, an evolution, and it needs continuity. Social media now allows a single message to get shared and reach an audience far across nations in a single instant. In the India Regional Corporate Communications Conference, many examples were discussed on how civil society organizations have been able to continue their work through online platforms like TikTok during this pandemic. The next generation will be the future changemakers and reaching them through a platform that they can understand is transformational.

Livestreaming is another social streaming feature that was boosted by the pandemic. Livestreaming became more popular while the world stayed at home and had time to sit down and focus on one stream. Events, webinars, online classes, organization announcements, church services, and other broadcasts came into place of television watching. Livestreams can be transformed into on-demand content to maximize viewership. It can be done on any device, whether desktop or mobile.

Influencer Marketing for Behavior Change

In a pre-pandemic article written by The Times Square Chronicles, influencer marketing was hailed as the "way of the future". The article attributes this to the credibility and relatability of influencers. It also mentions the attractiveness of certain influencers to individual viewers, and the frequency of viewing specific content creators' posts which would lead to action. But the interesting concept put forth here is social proofing. It discusses the tendency to see certain actors and behaviors as acceptable because a larger group does it. Joining the bandwagon makes the individual feel like they belong.

Social proofing is a term coined by Robert Cialdini in 1984, also known as informational social influence. It is akin to behavior, conformity, and public compliance. In Cialdini's book called Influence: Science and Practice, he names six major influence factors: reciprocity, commitment/consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity. The concepts that can be linked back to today's influencers are:

- Reciprocation can be interpreted on social media as "engagement" – commenting and responding to a post.
- Commitment and consistency can be likened to the act of following and repeatedly engaging with a content creator.

- Social proof is joining on a bandwagon on what is currently trending
- Liking magnifies the effects of influencing when the content creator is likeable, attractive, gives compliments, etc.
- Authority seems a little different on social media now because authority is now an assigned value. Those who have no academic or technical knowledge of a topic can quickly become the authority on a subject if enough followers agree to their arguments.
- Scarcity has been a marketing trick – when something is limited, censored, or less available than before, the following ascribes more value to it.

Erin West (2021) outlines three reasons why influencers can be used to change behavior, namely, that (i) the right influencer can help norm a target behavior, (ii) influencers are pandemic-proof, and (iii) influencers create effective (and cost-efficient) content. In a study done in 2019, Arora et al. measure the social media influencer index. The team took insights from Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to understand the impact of influencers. The process dove deep into machine learning regression models and algorithms that were able to compute a score in terms of influencer index. Engagement, outreach, sentiment, and growth played key roles in determining the influencers. The channels used for promotions and boosting also played a factor. Interestingly, at the time of the study they have found that there is literature that highlights how social influence can be measured on social media sites.

Rachel David speaks on how marketing strategies have drastically changed over the years. In 2019, it was a $4.5B dollar industry. It was already deemed to be the next top strategy to market to millennials. But influencer marketing is what she calls the “wild west” since the profile of influencers is not determined, the audience is

not yet particularly defined, and the return of investment was not as measurable. Influencers must be credible so virtually anyone within a person's circle is an influencer. Millennials spend more and more time online and they start to bring these influencers into their sphere of trust. The influencer differs from the celebrity through relatability. She encourages viewers and audiences to support content creators who are working as influencers. This is a big industry which will only continue to grow bigger.

Influencers in Development

The United Nations has raised its profile through its use of celebrities as Goodwill Ambassadors. The likes of BTS, Angelina Jolie, Leonardo di Caprio, and other Hollywood celebrities are advocating for specific social issues. The first Goodwill Ambassador goes as far back as the 1950s. Each sub-organization has also taken to identifying its champions. No doubt that this has helped in raising awareness about peace, human rights, violence against women, world hunger, and climate change among others. Vladimira Briestenska did a study on how effective this programme is as an advocacy tool. In her master's thesis, she examines main critiques, risks, and benefits of the programme.

Richey and Budabin (2016) likewise examined the use of celebrities as actors in international affairs. They look at how some celebrities are "disaster tourists" while others really motivate the public to act on social issues. Some celebrities have the power to negotiate because of their status and others can be transformed into monetary capital for fund-raising. Some have strengths in communicating the message properly while a small group of celebrities enter the diplomatic world and become official envoys.

Another study done by Jones, et al. dives deeper into the specific communications strategies created and implemented per celebrity. Using celebrities on social media is convenient for increased engagement with the public and meeting fundraising goals, such as when U2 front man Bono tripled the US budget for Africa (Partzsch, 2014). It can, however, divert the attention from the real issue at hand and the actual communication goals of the organization. Still, given the current technological advances and number of multi-media and social platforms, Goodwill Ambassadors can create a movement and sway public opinion which can affect political action within a country. The paper concludes by recommending that the Goodwill Ambassadors be selected considering diversity, credibility, representation, and that mechanisms for monitoring, tracking, and evaluating be developed for the UN systems. It also recommends that the communications strategies be clear and closely coordinated among the number of Goodwill Ambassadors.

Influencer Marketing in Asia and the Philippines

Influencer Marketing in Southeast Asia alone has over 402 million active social media users. This is a number that spans across several diverse cultures and languages. According to KOLs.Asia, marketing strategies for brands are apt to have budget for this type of marketing if they want to drive brand awareness and conversion in the region for the predicted $300 billion internet economy. Brands would need to collaborate with local influencers for their campaigns to gain traction and establish trust and confidence. There are other social apps to think about other than the beloved Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. There is LINE, Zalo, and Wechat, among others. Strategies now go from regional to hyperlocal. Microinfluencers can generate up to 11 times the return on investment of traditional paid advertisements. Macroinfluencers

(more than 100k followers) generate brand awareness at larger scales while providing the same genuine confidence and relatability.

In the Philippines, impact.com publishes that 70% of 10,000 survey respondents purchased an item because of an influencer's recommendation. Thus, influencers are viewed as more trustworthy than other kinds of endorsements. The likes of Anne Curtis, who has over 20 million followers on Instagram, has at least one sponsored post per week. Anne is also the UNICEF ambassador in the Philippines. In 2023, the Philippines ranked as the number 1 Vlog consumer in the world, according to Meltwater and We are Social. Online retail brands like Zalora have implemented programs for influencers or brand ambassadors. For Zalora, there is no minimum number of followers to join with the tagline that "everyone can be an influencer". Encoding your current number of followers on the website (https://www.zalora.com.ph/influencer/) with your number of posts monthly will calculate your potential earnings in cash or credit. The Philippine livestreaming app Kumu has made a community of 10 million members, with majority of its users (70%) registering during the pandemic. The rise of registered users in 2020 has prompted Kumu to launch new features to allow bigger organizations to hold events. It also partnered with media giant ABS-CBN after the broadcasting corporation was shut down, transitioning some well-loved TV shows, like Pinoy Big Brother, to move to the "social TV" app.

Measuring influence

In 2007, a popular app took the internet by storm when Klout was published. The app is a mechanism for measuring influence on Twitter and across Facebook. It was used by brands to give perks to users with a high Klout score, essentially what we now know to be social media influencers. It also paved the way for critics to create their own versions such as Klouchbag.com, Kred.com, ResearchGate and SponsoredTweets.com. Now several programs have been created to measure influence across a variety of social media platforms. In their work in 2015, Rao et al. presented a revised scoring system that assigned scores across several social networks daily. The team proposed a hierarchal scoring system by analyzing 45 billion interactions daily that assigned influence scores to 750 million users across 9 different social networks. It essentially validated that those users with higher Klout scores can spread information wider in a specific network. The team created a vast feature generation framework and a hierarchal scoring structure that incorporated new sources of information over time. Rao, et al. (2015)

Another way to do social network analysis in through Centrality. The results of measuring the relevant social actors in a network is usually represented by a graph with nodes, which each node representing a user. There are criteria for degree and closeness of the nodes to each other. And where they congregate or centralize is where the influence begins. Riquelme and Gonzales-Cantergiani (2016) have written a literature study on the various ways of measuring influence on Twitter. They looked at the cascading behavior of nodes, or the spread of influence. They cite that there are several criteria for identifying influential users as well as several techniques of ranking them. There are algorithms that consider timelines and those that require content analysis. In their pioneer study, they bring together all centrality measures used in the

Twitter network. Further, in their analysis of metrics, they discussed the definition of an influential user, or lack thereof. Thought leaders, celebrities, innovators, authoritative actors, are all concepts that make an influencer. They note that an influential user is not necessarily one who writes influential tweets but whose influence can be spread through multi-layer peripheral node clusters. Active users do not immediately translate into influential users, and influential users are not necessarily influential in real life. This was quite a comprehensive study that dove into an extensive number of metrics for measuring influence on this specific social platform.

In July 2018, Jiezhong Qui et al. designed an end-to-end framework called DeepInf which predicts social influence. The authors tested this framework on different types of social and information networks and demonstrated that it significantly outperforms the traditional feature engineering-based approaches. They compared their results to the traditional cascade models and proximity models. In their own work, they studied the social influence locality which can effectively and efficiently summarize a local area in a network.

Impact.com writes that influencers are now held to the same metrics as other types of brand partners (Gross, 2021). Influencers in 2021 need to report metrics like click rates, conversions, revenue, and payout information. This type of incentivized reporting now will give the brand or organization a better understanding of the value each influencer brings, the ability to set rewards for high-performing influencers and concrete management key performance indicators.

The review of related literature highlighted the transformative potential of digital media and influencer marketing in shaping behaviors and driving advocacy campaigns. From behavior change communication models to the measurable impact

of influencers, the insights gathered point to the evolving role of social media in amplifying messages for social good. While challenges remain in terms of credibility, sustainability, and measurement, the integration of influencers into advocacy campaigns presents a compelling opportunity to engage audiences in innovative ways. However, it would seem that the potential of influencer marketing to drive social change remains a concept, without hard data backing it up. If indeed advocacy influencers are effective, why do we see prevalent issues in children's rights?

These findings lay the groundwork for the study's exploration of the efficacy of influencer-driven strategies in promoting child rights in the Philippine context, offering insights into the intersection of technology, marketing, and social development.

Chapter III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

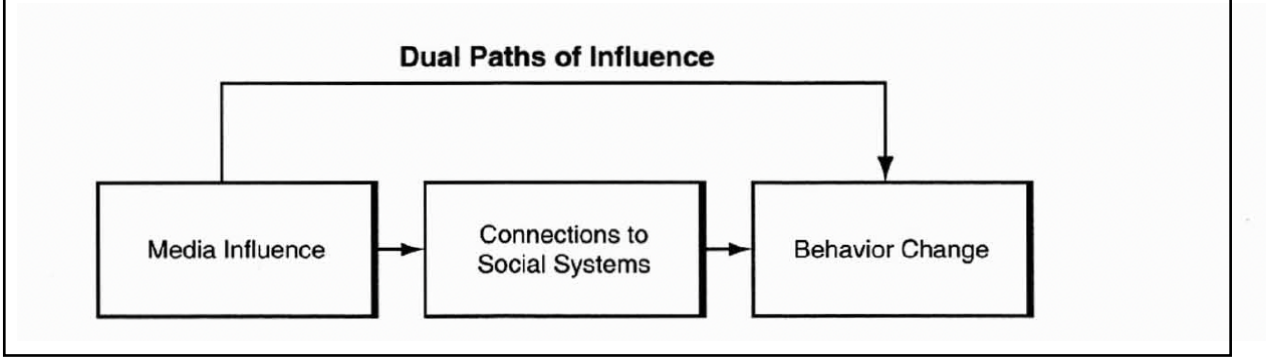
Influencer marketing has grown stronger since the onset of COVID-19 pandemic when a wave of non-celebrities took to social media to share content. Through viral posts and reels, certain YouTubers or TikTokers gained global followings. One may notice the tag about brand sponsorship when some social media personalities post about a product. The concept could be seen as digital version of celebrity endorsements, an extension of the traditional billboards and broadcast commercials, but defined by visually attractive content and direct engagement or interaction with followers for a more authentic 'relationship' (Argyris, et al., 2020).

Cialdini's six influence factors would be a good framework to base the interview discussions on. Selecting a brand ambassador based on reciprocity, commitment/consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity could give us a solid picture of why or how social media influencers could be successful in their campaigns.

The Trust Transfer Theory posits that an individual would believe the word of or buy something from someone they trust. Hu, Zhang, & Wang (2019) saw a direct correlation between a consumer's trust in a social media influencer and their trust in an application. Using the Trust Transfer perspective, the general public will follow someone they trust if that person advocates for Philippine social development.

Figure 1:

Bandura's Dual Path of Communication Influence



Albert Bandura talks about the dual paths of influence: that Media Influence may create a Behavior Change directly or *mediationally* through a Connection to Influential Social Systems (Bandura, 2009). This means that some people may be motivated to change their behavior based on something they have seen in the media, while others who have had no exposure to the media but have been exposed to the adopters will take on the new behaviors. An influencer then, may just be the key to exponentially promote an advocacy campaign if they create more and more influencers in the target audience.

These social frameworks form the basis of the interview questions and how the content creators develop their influencers or trace those influenced by the influencers.

Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

This study will employ a mixed method approach. Desktop research will be conducted on the social media campaigns among three Philippine country offices of international nongovernment organizations: World Vision, Save the Children, and Plan International. In-depth interviews with the communications and campaign teams of these institutions will dive into their process in creating social media campaigns, selecting influencers to be the face of these campaigns, and the impact or returns of these advocacy campaigns. Results will undergo a comparative data analysis. The data may be supported by relevant monitoring documents about the effectiveness of these influencers as ambassadors and spokespersons.

Desktop research will involve analyzing social media campaigns by reviewing the social media marketing strategies employed by the three NGOs, particularly looking at specific campaigns, their objectives, audience engagement metrics, types of content shared (videos, infographics, posts), and duration. Any published statistics would be helpful, such as data on children's rights impacts and outcomes linked to social media campaigns, awareness levels, engagement rates, and any reported changes in children's rights conditions in the Philippines.

Qualitative Interviews will be scheduled for the communications teams, including social media managers, communication officers from the NGOs, and, if possible, notable influencers who have engaged with these campaigns.

1. Save the Children – Liza Soberano, Actress; appointed 2021
2. World Vision – Lea Salonga, Singer and Actress
3. Plan International

Reviewing the objectives of the study, we created sample questions that are relevant to each objective to ensure a comprehensive interview.

Objective 1: Understand the social media strategies employed by each organization, the specific campaigns and their respective goals.

- How has your social media marketing been in recent years?
- Who is the target audience?
- Have you done anything differently in your social media marketing in the last two years? Are there any trends or shifts in social media or in the advocacy landscape that you have observed? Could they be related to certain phenomenon (i.e. showcasing a specific individual, a specific cause, event, etc.?)
- How long do campaigns run for and what channels are used?
- What goals are usually listed as the outcome of social media campaigns?

Objective 2: Find out why and how organizations have selected these advocacy influencers (whether celebrity or not).

- Why have you selected this person to be your ambassador or spokesperson? Were there other candidates who were considered?
- What was the process that you undertook to select the ambassador or spokesperson?
- What has this ambassador or spokesperson done for the organization? List specific activities and social media platforms used.
- Would you be able to disclose the details of your agreement with the ambassador or spokesperson for research purposes?
- Who creates the messaging for the ambassador for each social media post?

Objective 3: Identify the outcomes and tools used to measure the effectiveness or impact of using celebrities or influencers in their advocacy campaigns.

- How has the reception of your target audience been?
- Are you able to accurately measure the reach or engagement of their social media campaigns?
- What tools do you use for promotion and for measuring effectiveness?
- Is there a way to match the effectiveness of your advocacy campaign with an ambassador or spokesperson against your advocacy campaign without and ambassador or spokesperson?

The study will also analyze transcripts of the interviews and use thematic analysis to identify common themes, insights, and experiences related to social media marketing and its impact on children's rights.

Any findings in correlations to trends in social media or influencer marketing will be included in the analysis. Patterns may lead to new theories on social media influencer marketing or even a phenomenon of advocacy influencer marketing.

Chapter V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three interviews were conducted with three organizations from February to March 2025 through online meetings. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. There were a few key themes that emerged, including the approach to selecting and categorizing influencers. However, the main objectives of each organization in launching communications and media campaigns varied, and were not deemed comparative. While all three organizations were raising awareness on children's rights, engaging with the youth directly, and coordinating with local and national governments, their brand ambassadors or advocates had varying outputs.

Despite this realization that there are less similarities in the influencing strategies of these organizations, the influencer marketing theories verify what is evident in the strategies. Trustworthiness and credibility are top factors in selecting social media influencers for advocacy. And the paths of influencing, as described by Bandura, may also be applied here as the elements of media influence and connection to the social system are becoming just as critical as the influencer. The mediational influencer (those influenced by the original message) may be persons or even digital technology. This is said in recognition of artificial intelligence and algorithms to direct messages to the users or audience. This will be discussed more in the following sections.

Social Media Campaigns and Content Development

Save the Children sees social media as a tool for awareness and mobilization. In 2020, all the organizations shifted to completely online efforts and popular Filipino

actress, Liza Soberano, was launched as the new ambassador in 2021. Campaigns manager, Lei, recalls that Liza is one of the most impactful ambassadors and that the organization "*really made a difference when we engaged her*." There were a few considerations during that time period, such as shifting the whole program to digital, and segregating their audiences for the very public messaging and the targeted messaging. "*We also work with children who are very young*," Lei reiterates that they need to consider this. Save the Children pivoted entirely to digital platforms for public and child-focused campaigns. They observed changes in social media trends, audience behavior, and showcasing specific individuals and causes that were more relatable. Campaigns now include advocacy, fundraising, and awareness—with differentiated strategies per goal.

Save the Children uses influencer marketing to reach youth and mothers. They also select and train their brand ambassadors to face policymakers and advocate at Congress or at the Senate. The role of the brand ambassadors and advocates not only amplify the messages about child rights, education, and humanitarian aid, but also to drive engagement and change behavior. Their brand ambassador must capture the audience's trust with their authenticity. Save the Children sees social media as vital for emergency response and education. Lei describes that "*When Liza came in, she really drove all the conversations necessary*."

World Vision talked about their platform-specific strategies, their 65 years of operation in the Philippines, and tailoring content to maximize engagement. They engage with various sectors to improve the well-being of children and help build the nation through child and community welfare. Harriet, World Vision's School

Engagement Specialist, presents impressive numbers recorded. "*World Vision is the largest nonprofit organization in the country currently operating in 45 provinces, 19 cities and 92 municipalities. So you could find World Vision all over the Philippines. In 2024, we've improved almost 2 million children's lives and 59,273 adults reach through sponsorship sector programming emergency response and advocacy*."

As with many social media content, the challenges in engagement with the audience include difficulties in maintaining audience interest. They discussed how different digital platforms are used to reach diverse audiences, with an emphasis on adapting content to suit platform algorithms. World Vision partners with representatives from different sectors, including churches, schools, and private companies. Influencer marketing is used not only to promote social causes but also find sponsorships for the children in the poorest communities across the Philippines.

World Vision is very careful in selecting influencers who match their faith-based mission. They leverage community-driven content and interactive formats to focus on the themes of child hunger and malnutrition. The communications strategy usually comes from the international office and trickled down to the country offices. Their call to action is to sponsor a child through donations and financial support initiatives. They have very measurable impacts through this fund raising and they publish their reports on their website. When selecting influencers, they usually look at the celebrities and accomplished persons who are already a child sponsor before they approach them for an engagement. They emphasize on long-term engagement and not just engaging influencers for viral content.

Plan International Philippines does not currently engage celebrity influencers as ambassadors but rather prioritize youth leaders as advocates. Their campaigns

are to raise awareness about issues that the youth and girls face by amplifying their voices. Social media and campaigns officer, Julieanne, listed priority campaigns of the previous years, reiterating that it is largely about "*empowering girls to achieve equal rights, equal freedom, equal representation. Girls Get Equal [campaign] tries to elevate the voices and the stories of the girls*". Plan Philippines wants the messages to come straight from the ground, as relatable as possible. The organization also receives overall communication and media direction from the international office, often multi-year global strategies, but translate these key messages to local context. On how the local office comes up with a social media campaign for the Philippines, Julieanne describes it as *"…the flow from a project which is under a program which feeds into how we support the global campaign to elevate girls voices*." They favor micro- and macro-influencers for different layers of reach and hold annual co-creation events with young people and partners where topics and issues are youth-driven.

In engaging youth advocates, Plan International Philippines encourages multi-platform use, including the more active accounts on Facebook and Instagram, and less active on YouTube and Tiktok for shorts and reels. Storytelling from genuine faces and real people tend to humanize the issues and create more powerful messages. Livestreaming and interactive campaigns which include real-life testimonies and knowledge sharing are integrated into their strategies. The different platforms cater to different age groups from 13 to 40s. Plan International Philippines recognizes that there are potential risks and ethical concerns related to social media influence in development work and try to monitor these stories as much as possible to avoid any misinformation. Julieanne explains that Plan Philippines aims to "*elevate the stories of the girls and put them at the center of these issues… So we*

are not just advocating from a very technical perspective with the research and data. We do that on one side, but on the other side, our social media tries to fill [the gaps] with people who are actually speaking for themselves."

Aside from websites, Facebook offers the most flexible and versatile way to present information, while Instagram is limited with characters, links, and visual format. TikTok seems to be leaning towards the platform where people post their recommendations. If Instagram and Facebook have visuals and images that may be supported by captions or written descriptions, TikTok would need a person explaining it or talking about it as if the audience was a friend. Julieanne theorizes that no one single social media platform would work without the other. TikTok would lead to Facebook or Instagram reels would lead to Instagram posts, supporting the dual paths of influence theory that messages come from varied supporting sources to impact the end user. It would be difficult to penetrate audiences with an advocacy if only through one social media channel on its own. And all this must also be coupled with real-life situations or offline situations to translate into social change.

Engaging the Influencer

Ambassadors are chosen not just for fame but genuine advocacy and credibility. For Save the Children, they serve as voices in policymaking, joining congressional hearings and briefings. For World Vision, they are fundraisers and child sponsors. And for Plan International Philippines, they are the voices of the youth that must be heard. There's a focus on mutual benefit as opposed to any sort of payment. The organizations provide training and public speaking, media exposure, and brand alignment for the ambassadors.

For Save the Children, collaboration with key personalities is a way to drive and influence advocacy and policy. Filipina actress Liza Soberano was the biggest campaign to date. She was chosen due to her pre-existing interest in advocacy and credibility. She approached Save the Children first, and after some training, a 3-year renewable contract was established. The activities included in the contract include organic social media engagement through her personal channels (most influencers use Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Kumu), advocacy visits to Congress to support a bill or law passing, and digital campaigns like House of Hope. As with other organizations, influencer selection is guided by alignment of values, previous engagement, and reputation. Advocates are one-time or short-time engagements with influencers, while ambassadors are integrated into field visits and policy discussions, making them part of core advocacy efforts.

Other ambassadors like former beauty queen Katrina Rodriguez mounted their own fundraisers as their lives developed. During the period that Katrina was engaged with Save the Children, she eventually got married and had her own children, leading her personal advocacy to develop into “positive parenting”. She stayed the length of her engagement with them and linked Save the Children to her new networks for positive parenting and brought in other donors. She also would donate some of the earnings from her brand endorsements and turned away certain roles in shows because they conflicted with her role as ambassador. However, some topics like positive parenting would be “*viewed as Western… some topics would seem more elite*,” according to Lei. So there would be a conscious decision to get a balance of ambassadors who could appeal to different audiences. “*We had to look for celebrities who were representative of different kinds of parents*.”

World Vision has very high profile celebrities on their roster. The importance of credibility and authenticity in influencer partnerships includes ensuring the alignment with their mission. World Vision emphasizes proper ethics in their media campaigns as well as the risks of misinformation. Ambassadors are deeply engaged, often starting as child sponsors before joining campaigns. Content creation is collaborative, with World Vision provides basic messaging, but ambassadors add their voice and style. The ambassadors go through a selection process, matching personalities with specific campaigns, and running through possible risks and keeping in line with the celebrity's own image. Sharon, World Vision's Public Affairs and Brand Engagament Manager, relates the process. "*And then we review their profiles because World Vision is an international organization that really do review the risk before we engage into the different sectors, especially that we focus on children. We are a Christian organization and we work with different communities, the vulnerable ones. And for the NGOs, I believe that you're also familiar with the landscape, we changed over time*."

Social media strategy evolved post-pandemic with a shift to more relevant and creative content since there was a period of no in-person events. Currently, events like their successful donor cafés have returned but in hybrid format. Ambassadors and advocates are usually included in content creation, school caravans, and monthly community visits. More than that, the framing of poverty changed in the media. Sharon reveals that "*Before, the usual portrait of the NGOs is of helping the poor. They must show the poverty side so that people can feel the need. But then the NGO landscape changed and then they focused on empowering this community, showing them that they are dignified and respected. So that's where it comes from. That's how we also communicate it to the ambassadors and to the people that we're*

going to select that these people are not just, you're helping them, but you also empower them." On initial discussions with a potential ambassador, World Vision's communications team lays down all campaigns and goals of the organization and checks which of them resonate the most to the influencer.

During the pandemic, Plan International Philippines made a conscious shift to focus on community-based influencers and focus on community stories. The organization had to let go of the kind of engagements with notable personalities that could not be sustained without in-person events. The emphasis on youth voices, youth leaders, girls, and partnerships based on shared advocacies shaped the campaigns, which were also tailored to the specific platform. The influencer content often stems from their authentic personal experiences and Plan International Philippines provides talking points. Verified by Julieanne, "*we try to tap them because this person is very knowledgeable already and can speak for themselves in terms of the issue and they have something to say that is important. Sometimes there are youth who we collaborate with and their videos blow up so much that they have so many views for that one video*." Girls lead their own platform takeovers, depending on the partner organization, whether private sector, local government, or development agency. The organization provides talking points but give the girls their own voice or style to deliver the messages.

Tools and Insights for Measuring Success

For Save the Children, a third party agency is employed to track their key campaign metrics and measure this against their perceived campaign effectiveness. They track media mentions (interviews, unpaid engagements) and social media engagement across platforms. Their campaign impact is more about policy influence

and public discourse than set quantitative Key Performance Indicators. Their highest success metric is when other celebrities independently promote the advocacy which builds an organic domino effect, a ripple into a wave, the fifth stage of the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change. There is also a measurement of translating the engagement into the actual income using an internal formula. Some of them are a portion of the ambassador's earnings or interaction with a fan base.

Measuring success for World Vision is more sophisticated given the organization's fundraising arm, team size, and number of years' experience in the field. Key performance indicators for the social media campaigns include engagements, child sponsorships, and grant proposals. As they maintain direct and long-term relationships with their beneficiaries, they are able to gather data annually and report on the impact from the organization's efforts. They have teams for policymaking, operations, communications, and are a key informant to other development partners and government. A key point raised by World Vision is about not being able to conclude if social media campaigns have directly impacted children's rights. The organization's successes are hinged on the advocacy operations rather than social media, as rightfully it should be. Content is given to the communications or public relations team who will create digestible information for public dissemination. Some help with public dissemination is also done through the local government units (LGU). Often the local governments are hardly able to provide updated accurate and disaggregated data about children's nutrition, education, social and mental well-being on their own. They are under-resourced in terms of funding and capacity to execute annual reports for social development, so NGOs like World Vision is very important in outreach and maintaining direct relationships with rural communities.

Plan International Philippines looks at indicators of engagement and how to increase this using real-time content. What the organization would like to do is to trace the spheres of influence of the youth advocates and capturing the increased engagement through real-time content and digital storytelling. The major campaigns would have reporting mechanisms such as reach, impressions, and new follows due to campaigns. Advertising reports are varied across the platforms, with more meaningful metrics on Facebook and less so on Tiktok. The latter seems to not be as deliberate in disaggregation of audience which makes it difficult for the right audience to be reached.

Redefining the Influencer

In the course of the discussions, it became apparent that the concept of celebrity diplomacy as described at the beginning of this paper is no longer the only format of influencer marketing. The influencer in front of the lens does not need to have celebrity status in the traditional sense. The influencer may have gained popularity through TikTok doing something entirely random but somehow the post went viral. The influencer then gains traction and gains a following, which gives some of them the same reach on a social media platform as other celebrities. Furthermore, the algorithm of the social media platform also has a hand in what goes viral. The number of likes and engagements further propels a post's visibility. In an even more mind-boggling concept, this algorithm is programed according to the online profile you have created for yourself. So an individual's scrolling history and views will dictate what kind of content is marketed to them. Algorithms work on a person's choice of likes, searches, age bracket, network, and so on. But if you create an online account with a different age or gender profile, other promoted content

might make it into your feed. So this begs the question, in this modern world, who or what is the real influencing factor here?

Several influencer players now may affect and effect social change. Celebrities are now not the only ones with the platform to voice their opinion and sway the public trust. Celebrities are not the only ones who can influence social issues. If the influencers in advocacy may push for social change, there are also players that can push against social change. “Cancel culture” is a phenomenon when an anti-campaign against a person, concept, venue, brand, among others, becomes viral. A groundswell of negativity eventually leads to the “cancellation” of said person. Is this to be considered as a factor of influence? One anonymous netizen speaks their opinion and others follow, essentially creating an online mob or picket line. And that online social mobilization will affect the person or venue’s real-life income or situation. This is easily applied to advocacy issues – for example, climate change advocates who being seen as non-credible hippie tree-huggers who only make noise and cannot make a difference.

While messaging, mode of delivery, communications channels, influencer credibility, and audience impact are still key, other critical factors have emerged in media and communications. Currently, one must think of the potential to go viral, understand what is trending and how to leverage it, and explore the algorithms of various social media platforms.

Advocacy Influencing for Social Change

Save the Children and World Vision employs the use Cialdini’s social proofing and authority when it comes to selecting their brand ambassadors. They follow the

influence theory of Trust Transfer that if a person who is idolized practices good behavior, the followers will model their behaviors after them. Social proofing also suggests that the engagement with the audience, creating relatable storytelling, and when a social media campaign gains traction, these positive behaviors may influence those watching them. Plan International is harnessing the power of the youth and their ability to raise awareness and advocate for issues through social media. Plan International Philippines encourages the sharing of stories about social change and involvement in activities so that peers may be inspired to do the same, linking us back to the Bandura's Paths of Influence.

All of the organizations use the influencer theories on Social Proofing and Trust Transfer by selecting ambassadors and advocates who are credible and with reputable images. All of the ambassadors and advocates are briefed, trained, aligned on communications, and their style bears considerations on how and what content will be published. All three organizations leverage influencer credibility to drive engagement, particularly with younger audiences. World Vision carefully selects influencers who align with their mission to preserve authenticity, reinforcing the principle of authority in Cialdini's framework. Plan International Philippines highlighted that influencers create viral movements, reflecting the bandwagon effect of social proofing. Save the Children mentioned livestreaming and real-time interaction as vital tools to maintain influencer engagement and sustain audience trust.

All three organizations emphasize influencer credibility and relatability. All organizations acknowledge the risk of the celebrity overshadowing the social cause. World Vision discussed how influencers must align with their values to maintain

authenticity. Plan International Philippines emphasized how social media personalities create trends that drive action. All the communications strategies employ audience engagement, interactivity, promotion and marketing to the right people, fundraising and policy advocacy, to some extent. They all use as many platforms as relevant to their organization.

On evaluation, organizations all agree that numbers of likes and engagements may not be enough to measure success. There are other soft metrics such as online discourse, influence of other influencers, volunteerism, advocacy shifts, media exposure, and legislative wins.

Chapter VI

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored how social media influencer marketing is utilized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to promote children's rights in the Philippines. Through interviews with Save the Children Philippines, Plan International Philippines, and World Vision Philippines, key insights were gathered on strategies, influencer engagement practices, content development, and campaign evaluation.

All three organizations recognize the growing importance of digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and livestreaming apps. Influencers—ranging from macro-celebrities to community-based youth leaders—play a vital role in driving awareness, fostering engagement, and influencing behavior around children's rights advocacy. Authenticity, relatability, and alignment with organizational values were consistent factors in selecting influencer partners across the three NGOs.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Measuring the direct impact of influencer-led campaigns, particularly on actual behavior change and policy influence, remains difficult without standardized metrics or baseline data. NGOs acknowledge that social development advocacy differs significantly from consumer marketing: success is often more qualitative and long-term, requiring sustained engagement rather than immediate action.

The findings affirm that influencer theories like Social Proofing and Trust Transfer theory remain highly relevant in the digital age, where social proofing, authority, and observational learning play significant roles in advocacy effectiveness. However, the findings also present a different definition of an influencer. One that

does not have to involve celebrity, one that involved credibility or popularity or virality. How can we now pinpoint the one central factor where the influence came from?

Social media influencer marketing is a powerful tool for driving engagement and raising awareness in children's rights advocacy. However, true success requires deliberate planning, ethical influencer selection, co-creation of content, and long-term relationship building. Beyond metrics like reach and impressions, NGOs must also seek to influence public discourse, build community trust, and contribute to lasting policy change.

Following the best practices of the three organizations, some recommendations are offered for other NGOs who would like to create social media campaigns:

- **Develop baseline metrics for advocacy campaigns**

  NGOs should establish clear starting points to better track changes in awareness, engagement, and behavior attributable to their campaigns. This should be done in partnership with government and other development partners to be transparent across the board.
- **Differentiate between influencer roles**

  Organizations should classify influencer partnerships based on level of engagement: whether as celebrity ambassadors, micro-influencers, or community advocates.
- **Invest in long-term measurement**

  Short-term metrics like likes and shares are insufficient. Organizations should track advocacy influence over time, especially as it relates to community action and policy shifts.

- **Prioritize co-creation and authentic storytelling**

  Campaigns should empower influencers to share stories in their own voices, enhancing credibility and audience trust.

- **Advance monitoring and evaluation tools**

  NGOs can integrate more advanced social network analysis and digital tracking tools to capture the real spread and influence of advocacy messages. They may need to build government capacity on how to do keep better tracking of data or coordinate more closely with local government to share the data that they have.

Social media will continue to evolve, but the need for strategic, ethical, and impact-driven communication remains critical. The need to recognize the other factors as influencing factors is also necessary. The idea of celebrity diplomacy is still around but is not the only influence stream. This study offers a foundation for NGOs, communications practitioners, and researchers to build more effective influencer-driven campaigns for social change.

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APPENDIX: The research instrument

On social media campaigns	• How has your social media marketing been over the past two years? • Who is the target audience? • Have you done anything differently in your social media marketing in the last two years? Are there any trends or shifts in social media or in the advocacy landscape that you have observed? Could they be related to certain phenomenon (i.e. showcasing a specific individual, a specific cause, event, etc.?) • How long do campaigns run for and what channels are used? • What goals are usually listed as the outcome of social media campaigns?
On influencer marketing	• Why have you selected this person to be your ambassador or spokesperson? Were there other candidates who were considered? • What was the process that you undertook to select the ambassador or spokesperson? • What has this ambassador or spokesperson done for the organization? List specific activities and social media platforms used. • Would you be able to disclose the details of your agreement with the ambassador or spokesperson for research purposes? • Who creates the messaging for the ambassador for each social media post?
On monitoring and evaluation	• How has the reception of your target audience been? • Are you able to accurately measure the reach or engagement of their social media campaigns? • What tools do you use for promotion and for measuring effectiveness? • Is there a way to match the effectiveness of your advocacy campaign with an ambassador or spokesperson against your advocacy campaign without and ambassador or spokesperson?