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DIGITAL MARKETING AND VOLUNTEERING INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLES OF EMPATHY AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL IMPACT

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Abstract: Nonprofit organizations increasingly depend on volunteer labor to sustain their operations, yet evidence-based strategies for digital volunteer recruitment remain insufficiently examined in the academic literature. Although digital marketing instruments such as search engine optimization, social media marketing, and content marketing have gained widespread adoption, their psychological influence on individuals' intention to volunteer within the Indonesian context has received little empirical attention. This study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing strategies on volunteering intention, mediated by empathy and perceived social impact, using the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework. A quantitative approach was employed, using a structured questionnaire distributed to 300 Indonesian respondents with prior experience searching for and encountering information about social volunteering on social media, selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS. The results demonstrate that empathy and perceived social impact, acting as organism variables, successfully mediate the relationship between digital marketing strategies as stimuli and volunteering intention as response within the S-O-R framework. These findings highlight the importance of psychologically driven digital campaigns in fostering volunteering participation within nonprofit organizations.

Keywords: Volunteering Intention, Perceived Social Impact, Empathy, Digital Marketing, Nonprofit Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organizations are key drivers of social welfare and civic engagement, addressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, and limited access to public services (Maier et al., 2025; Rimawati & Soewarno 2025). They depend on active volunteers as their primary human capital (Ayyildiz et al., 2017; Inouye & Agnello, 2020), yet the way they reach prospective volunteers is increasingly shifting from traditional channels based on relational networks and face-to-face activities toward digital environments (Merritt & Zhao, 2022; Saura et al., 2020). This shift is fueled by a critical drop in engagement through conventional recruitment channels, where formal organizational volunteering has experienced a significant decline (Febriani & Selamet, 2020). In Indonesia, this transition toward digital ecosystems is evident in the success of aggregator platforms like Indorelawan, which has mobilized over 321,000 registered volunteers across 6,500 nonprofit organizations (Indorelawan et al., 2024), aligning with social media and video networks becoming the primary news source for 48% of respondents (Egan, 2026). In this crowded digital ecosystem, organizations face intense competition for public attention, where information overload often suppresses prosocial responsiveness (Olson et al., 2021). Some previous studies conclude that this digital shift creates an urgent research imperative without an empirical understanding of how specific multi-channel digital strategies systematically convert passive online attention into active volunteer commitments; nonprofit organizations face severe operational stagnation and a diminished capacity to serve vulnerable communities (Busca & Bertrandias, 2020; Cetindamar et al., 2024; Husin et al., 2022; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Philips, 2022).

To systematically explain how digital communication translates into prosocial action, this study applies the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, which posits that environmental cues trigger internal psychological evaluations that subsequently shape behavioral intentions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Within this paradigm, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Social Media Marketing (SMM), and Content Marketing function as external Stimuli (S) that enhance information accessibility, interactive engagement, and narrative depth (Erdmann & Ponzoa, 2022; Yoon, 2024). Specifically, SEO acts as a functional stimulus by maximizing information exposure and reducing search friction, which enables prospective volunteers to seamlessly access narrative-rich digital content. When individuals encounter these stimuli, they undergo dual internal psychological processing (O), comprising distinct affective and cognitive evaluations. Empathy represents an affective state generated through immersive storytelling and community interactions, whereas Perceived Social Impact reflects a cognitive evaluation of how one's effort generates meaningful societal change (Laghi et al., 2018; Nardini et al., 2022). Existing empirical studies have primarily evaluated digital channels separately or relied on single-mediator constructs, such as examining empathy independently in prosocial contexts (Cao et al., 2025; Morgan et al., 2024) or measuring direct effects of content characteristics on volunteering outcomes (Bennett, 2017a; Mandala & Kusumasondjaja, 2022). Within the scope of the empirical literature reviewed, research that simultaneously models these multi-channel digital strategies alongside parallel affective and cognitive mechanisms remains relatively under-explored. Modeling Empathy and Perceived Social Impact as parallel mediators helps account for the affective and cognitive evaluations triggered by digital exposure. Consequently, these dual internal evaluations synthesize to drive the ultimate behavioral Response (R), operationalized in this framework as Volunteering Intention

Nonprofit organizations serve as the empirical focus of this study because their operational success directly depends on converting public awareness into voluntary human capital rather than commercial purchases. Indonesia offers an exceptionally relevant context for examining this digital recruitment dynamic. According to the World Giving Index (2024) in Global Trends in Generosity by the Charities Aid Foundation, Indonesia has been recognized as the world's most generous country for seven consecutive years, with 65% of citizens actively volunteering their time and 90% making charitable contributions. This demonstrates that prosocial behavior is deeply embedded in the

national culture. Furthermore, the Indonesian social sector presents a unique context characterized by strong socio-cultural norms that promote a collective prosocial orientation. Within this landscape, civic participation interacts with rapidly evolving levels of digital literacy, which remain highly heterogeneous across demographic groups (Cohen-Mansfield, 2022; Lee & Won, 2017). Investigating Indonesia's nonprofit sector provides crucial insights into how modern digital marketing strategies interact with local socio-cultural characteristics to foster civic participation in an emerging digital economy.

Despite the growing literature on digital marketing, prior empirical studies exhibit distinct theoretical and structural gaps when evaluated against the proposed framework. First, while researchers such as Çetinkaya et al., (2025) and Schultheiß & Lewandowski, (2025) examined the direct impact of digital media visibility on public engagement, their models omitted the underlying psychological mechanisms connecting functional tools like SEO to internal user states. Second, although Febriani & Selamet, (2020) demonstrated that social media marketing influences volunteer interest, their study treated individual internal processing as a black box, failing to account for how content type alters mental evaluations. Third, psychological inquiries by Laghi et al., (2018) and Nardini et al., (2022) established that empathy and perceived social impact independently predict volunteering behavior, yet these constructs were investigated in isolation from digital marketing stimuli. Crucially, to the best of our knowledge SEO, SMM, and Content Marketing alongside empathy (affective) and perceived social impact (cognitive) as parallel organism variables within a single structural S-O-R model to clarify how information retrieval and interactive communication simultaneously trigger dual psychological pathways.

In summary, current research remains fragmented regarding how multi-channel digital strategies ignite distinct emotional and cognitive evaluations to drive volunteer recruitment. The novelty of this study lies in establishing a comprehensive S-O-R structural framework that models Empathy (affective) and Perceived Social Impact (cognitive) as parallel mediating pathways connecting specific digital marketing tools (SEO, SMM, Content Marketing) to Volunteering Intention. Practically, this research provides nonprofit practitioners with actionable insights to optimize digital content, enhance campaign visibility, and design targeted recruitment strategies. This study aims to systematically analyze: (1) the direct effects of SEO, SMM, and Content Marketing on Empathy; (2) the direct effects of SEO, SMM, and Content Marketing on Perceived Social Impact; (3) the direct effects of SEO, SMM, Content Marketing, Empathy, and Perceived Social Impact on Volunteering Intention; and (4) the parallel mediating roles of Empathy and Perceived Social Impact in linking each digital marketing stimulus to Volunteering Intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework explains that external environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal states, which subsequently generate behavioral responses (Huang, 2023; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The framework consists of three components: stimulus, organism, and response. Stimulus refers to external factors that attract attention and influence individuals' perceptions and evaluations. In digital marketing contexts, stimuli may take the form of online communication activities, information exposure, and interactive content that shape individuals' experiences (Bigne et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2022). Organism represents the internal cognitive and affective processes that occur after individuals are exposed to external stimuli (Wang et al., 2024). These internal processes determine how individuals interpret, evaluate, and emotionally respond to the information they receive (Safeer, 2024). Meanwhile, response refers to the behavioral intention or action that emerges as a consequence of these internal evaluations ((Kıymalıog˘lu et al., 2024).

Theoretically, the transition from stimulus to organism is not a direct or automatic process; rather, it operates through a sequence of information processing. When individuals are exposed to a stimulus, they first engage in an attentional and elaborative process in which the content of the stimulus is evaluated for personal relevance (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Stimuli that

are perceived as personally relevant and socially meaningful are more likely to be elaborated cognitively and to trigger an affective reaction, whereas stimuli that are processed only peripherally tend to produce weaker internal responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This elaboration process explains why digital marketing stimuli that convey social meaning, such as stories of beneficiaries, campaign narratives, or visual evidence of social impact, are capable of generating both cognitive (perceived social impact) and affective (empathy) among individuals who encounter them (Ahmad & Lilani, 2025).

In the context of this study, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Social Media Marketing (SMM), and Content Marketing are conceptualized as stimuli because they are organizational actions that originate outside the individual and determine whether, how often, and in what form nonprofit-related information reaches them, and their effects on attitudes and behavior are necessarily mediated by internal interpretive processes. They are modeled as separate exogenous constructs because each operates differently in how it reaches individuals, how much social interaction it involves, and what kind of information it provides. SEO is a pull mechanism that increases discoverability when individuals actively search with existing intent, SMM is a push mechanism that delivers messages through feeds within a social environment of interaction and social proof, and Content Marketing concerns the depth and narrative substance of what is communicated, regardless of channel. These differences imply different pathways to the organism and response variables: SEO, which signals legitimacy through search ranking; SMM, which combines exposure with interaction and social validation; and Content Marketing, which communicates mission and impact.

The organism component is represented by empathy and perceived social impact, reflecting affective and cognitive responses that arise after individuals process digital marketing stimuli. Empathy reflects emotional concern toward social issues, whereas perceived social impact reflects individuals' evaluation of the potential social value generated through volunteer participation (Chung et al., 2021; Nguyen-phuoc et al., 2025). Volunteering intention is positioned as the response because it reflects an individual's willingness to engage in volunteer activities. Therefore, the S-O-R framework provides a relevant theoretical foundation for explaining how digital marketing strategies influence volunteering intention through individuals' emotional and cognitive processes. While this general elaboration-based mechanism applies to all three stimulus variables, the pathway from SEO to empathy and perceived social impact warrants separate theoretical treatment, since SEO operates on visibility and accessibility rather than on emotionally or evaluatively meaningful content directly; this distinct mechanism is elaborated in the SEO section below and further developed in the hypothesis development section.

Although empathy and perceived social impact are both positioned as organism variables, they reflect distinct psychological processes rather than a single undifferentiated response to digital marketing stimuli: empathy is fundamentally an affective, other-oriented reaction in which an individual's own emotional state comes to mirror, at least partially, the emotional state attributed to others (Chung et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2024), activated primarily by emotionally and morally salient content such as narratives, imagery, or testimonials (Xie & Bagozzi, 2014), whereas perceived social impact is fundamentally a cognitive-evaluative belief about the effectiveness, credibility, and magnitude of the change an activity such as volunteering is expected to produce (Jensen, 2017; Mayr, 2017) shaped more by the informativeness and evidentiary strength of the content encountered, such as demonstrated outcomes, statistics, or an organization's track record (Ramkissoon, 2023). Because these two internal states arise from different underlying psychological routes, affective versus cognitive, this study models them as parallel, rather than sequential, mediators: consistent with dual-process accounts of information processing, affective and cognitive evaluations of a stimulus can be activated concurrently and relatively independently, rather than one being a necessary precursor of the other, particularly when a single piece of digital content (e.g., a campaign page combining a beneficiary

story with impact statistics) simultaneously carries both emotionally evocative and evidentiary elements (Huang, 2023; W. Li et al., 2022; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Accordingly, SEO, SMM, and Content Marketing are conceptualized as stimuli capable of triggering empathy and perceived social impact concurrently as two distinct, but not mutually dependent, internal responses, both of which independently contribute to shaping volunteering intention.

Volunteering Intention

Volunteering intention refers to an individual's willingness and readiness to participate in volunteer activities by contributing time, effort, and skills to support social causes or organizational missions (Miller-Stevens & Ward, 2018). Inouye & Agnello, (2020) state that in the nonprofit sector, volunteering intention is particularly important because volunteers represent a vital resource that supports organizational sustainability and service delivery despite limited financial and human resources. Previous studies suggest that individuals' intention to volunteer is influenced by various personal and social factors, including altruistic values, the desire to help others, meaningful social connections, and alignment with an organization's mission and goals (Bartosova & Podhorska, 2021; Breen et al., 2024; Muñoz-Llerena et al., 2025; Nowakowska, 2025). Furthermore, positive engagement experiences have been found to strengthen individuals' commitment and willingness to continue participating in volunteer activities (Lorente et al., 2024). However, much of this literature examines antecedents of volunteering intention as personal dispositions or offline engagement experiences, with comparatively less attention paid to how digital marketing activities shape volunteering intention through the intervening psychological states of empathy and perceived social impact being a gap this study addresses by embedding volunteering intention within the S-O-R framework as a response variable.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) refers to a strategic process of improving a website's visibility in organic search engine results through the optimization of content, keywords, and website structure (Das, 2021). Khraim, (2015) identified four key dimensions of SEO, namely SEO connectivity, SEO competitiveness, SEO experience, and SEO techniques, which collectively contribute to enhancing a website's search performance and online visibility. In the nonprofit context, SEO plays an important role in increasing the accessibility of information related to social causes, campaigns, and volunteer opportunities, enabling organizations to reach individuals actively seeking such information online (Erdmann & Ponzoa, 2022; Zhang & Cabage, 2017). Furthermore, effective SEO practices have been shown to strengthen organizational visibility and reputation, thereby increasing opportunities to attract and engage potential stakeholders (J. Chen & Senechal, 2023).

Despite this evidence, existing SEO studies have predominantly examined outcomes such as website traffic, visibility, and organizational reputation (J. Chen & Senechal, 2023; Das, 2021). rather than downstream psychological or behavioral outcomes such as empathy or intention to volunteer. Moreover, the dimensions identified by Khraim, (2015) were developed primarily within commercial and for-profit contexts, raising the question of whether they translate directly to nonprofit settings where the goal of visibility is prosocial engagement rather than commercial conversion. Studies situating SEO within a nonprofit context have largely treated SEO as an operational or reputational outcome rather than as a stimulus embedded within a broader psychological process model (Erdmann & Ponzoa, 2022; Zhang & Cabage, 2017). This leaves a gap in understanding how SEO-driven visibility translates into individuals' internal cognitive and affective states a gap this study addresses by positioning SEO as a stimulus within the S-O-R framework rather than as a terminal outcome variable.

Because SEO functions as a visibility and accessibility mechanism rather than a generator of emotional or evaluative content, its effect on empathy and perceived social impact is indirect: greater discoverability (Das, 2021; Khraim, 2015) increases exposure to nonprofit content (Erdmann & Ponzoa, 2022; Zhang & Cabage, 2017), and greater exposure deepens cognitive elaboration and affective response (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986),

consistent with Wald et al., (2021) that found exposure to accessible information increased empathy and prosocial intention. SEO creates the opportunity for such processing, while accompanying content shapes its direction, as developed in the Hypothesis Development section.

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social media marketing (SMM) is defined as a series of communication activities that utilize social media platforms to build relationships, increase audience engagement, and positively influence user behavior towards an organization (Bilgin & Kethuda, 2022). Çetinkaya et al., (2025) state that SMM consists of five key dimensions: awareness, interaction, timeliness, customization, and advertisement, which have been proven to encourage pro-environmental behavior and increase public interest in getting involved as volunteers. In a nonprofit organization, SMM is a strategic instrument because it is able to disseminate information, build awareness, and mobilize public participation at a relatively low cost compared to traditional media (Melirotra & Siraj, 2021). Strategic social media marketing is emerging as a critical approach for nonprofits to address declining donations and volunteer shortages by raising public awareness of their missions (Thomas & Duffett 2025).

While Çetinkaya et al., (2025) provide evidence that SMM dimensions can encourage pro-environmental behavior, this finding was established in the context of environmental campaigns and has not been widely tested for other prosocial outcomes such as empathic concern or perceived social value of volunteering. Additionally, existing SMM research tends to focus on behavioral outcomes (engagement, participation, mobilization) without explicitly modeling the intervening affective and cognitive mechanisms through which these behaviors are produced (Bilgin & Kethuda, 2022; Melirotra & Siraj, 2021; Thomas & Duffett, 2025). This creates a gap regarding the psychological pathway between SMM exposure and volunteering intention, which the present study addresses by positioning SMM as a stimulus that operates through empathy and perceived social impact as parallel organism mechanisms.

Content Marketing

Content marketing is a marketing approach that delivers informative and valuable content to educate target audiences about an organization's offerings, build stronger connections through storytelling, and positively influence audience attitudes and behaviors (Xiao et al., 2019). Sourcing and content strategy are also important practices that organizations can leverage to improve outcomes related to a brand or organization (Bubphapant & Brandao, 2025). The effectiveness of content marketing is largely determined by the quality of the content, the relevance of the message, and the timeliness of delivery, and the effectiveness of each content format depends heavily on audience segmentation, communication goals, and an organization's ability to personalize content distribution (Salonen et al., 2024). Meaningful content can form a psychological path from engagement on social issues to engagement with the organization, thereby strengthening the audience's intention to support social programs in a sustainable manner (Kaczorowska et al., 2024; Sánchez et al., 2023).

Although Kaczorowska et al., (2024) and Sánchez et al., (2023) suggest that meaningful content can psychologically bridge issue engagement and organizational support, these studies do not clearly disentangle which psychological state, affective concern or cognitive evaluation of impact, is primarily responsible for this bridging effect. (Salonen et al., 2024) similarly emphasize content quality and personalization as effectiveness factors but stop short of specifying the internal mechanism through which well-crafted content translates into prosocial intention. This ambiguity in the literature underscores the need to explicitly separate the affective (empathy) and cognitive (perceived social impact) pathways through which Content Marketing influences volunteering intention, which is the gap addressed in the present study.

Empathy

Empathy has been defined as a combination of interrelated aspects of recognizing oneself and others, responding emotionally by sharing the emotional experiences of others, and taking perspective by cognitively understanding

the perspectives of others (Chung et al., 2021). In the context of social communication, empathy appears as a natural response when individuals are exposed to messages about people in need, thus giving rise to empathetic concern that drives the tendency to help (Kim & Kim, 2024). Emotional and moral mechanisms triggered by empathy, such as gratitude or anger at injustice, can drive individuals to support the nonprofit organization as a form of prosocial action oriented to moral values (Xie & Bagozzi, 2014). Empathy serves as an important psychological mechanism that mediates the relationship between social influences and prosocial behavior, explaining how external stimuli can encourage individuals to engage in actions that benefit others (Li et al., 2025). Although empathy is well established as a mediating mechanism between social stimuli and prosocial behavior (Chung et al., 2021; Khalid, 2024; W. Xiao et al., 2021) most of this literature centers on empathy triggered by narrative or emotionally framed content, such as storytelling, appeals featuring identifiable victims, with limited attention to how the *visibility and accessibility* of such content, as shaped by SEO, contributes to whether empathic responses occur at all. This points to a gap regarding the upstream digital-marketing antecedents of empathy, which this study addresses by modeling empathy as an organism variable shaped jointly by SEO, SMM, and Content Marketing.

Perceived Social Impact

Perceived social impact refers to an individual's belief that their involvement in an activity, including volunteer activities, can make a real contribution to the well-being of others and society at large (Jensen, 2017). This perception of social impact is also reflected in the attitude of volunteers towards beneficiaries, where the belief that the activities carried out bring positive change strengthens the prosocial orientation of volunteers (Mayr, 2017). Further, perceived social impact related to various outcomes, other social factors, such as interpersonal beliefs, attachment to place, prosocial and pro-environmental behavior, support for community development, and community quality of life (Ramkissoon, 2023). At the experience stage, nonprofit organizations play a role in facilitating communication and managing volunteer expectations so that the perception of the social environment and volunteer activities becomes more positive (Aquino & Andereck, 2024; Wu et al., 2023).

Existing studies on perceived social impact largely examine it as an outcome of direct volunteering experience or organizational communication during participation (Aquino & Andereck, 2024; Benjamin et al., 2023; Mayr, 2017; Usman et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2023), rather than as a belief that can be shaped prior to participation through pre-engagement digital marketing exposure. This leaves underexplored how individuals form evaluative beliefs about potential social impact before they ever volunteer, simply through exposure to an organization's online visibility and content. The present study addresses this gap by positioning perceived social impact as a cognitive organism state that can be shaped by SEO, SMM, and Content Marketing prior to behavioral engagement.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Search Engine Optimization and Volunteering Intention

Search Engine Optimization enables nonprofit organizations to improve the visibility and accessibility of information related to their missions, programs, and volunteer opportunities. SEO helps nonprofit organizations increase online visibility and credibility, allowing individuals to access information about social causes and volunteer opportunities more easily (Bennett, 2017; Kwak et al., 2022) . Furthermore, SEO optimization has been shown to enhance website visibility, search engine performance, user engagement, and overall user satisfaction, highlighting its important role in influencing online user behavior (Kowalczyk & Szandala, 2024). Higher search rankings and clearer site structure reduce the effort needed to find registration and program details, thereby lowering perceived barriers to acting on an initial interest in volunteering.

H1: Search Engine Optimization has a positive effect on Volunteering Intention

Social Media Marketing and Volunteering Intention

The social influences found on social media platforms positively affect empathy and the intention to donate (B. Li et al., 2022). Social media marketing communication plays a crucial role in increasing a nonprofit organization's reach and great potential in terms of raising awareness of the organization's services and activities nonprofit about health (Thomas & Duffett 2025). Research results from (Çetinkaya et al., 2025) found that the components of the social media marketing activities influence the intention to volunteer. Features such as sharing, comments, and event invitations make volunteer opportunities visible within individuals' social networks, which strengthens perceived social norms and lowers the cost of joining.

H2: Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on Volunteering Intention

Content Marketing and Volunteering Intention

Content marketing refers to the strategic creation and distribution of narrative, story-based, and informational content designed to build emotional resonance and normative motivation among audiences rather than to promote a product directly. Prior studies indicate that nonprofit digital content differs substantially from for-profit content in orientation and that narrative-driven content can effectively motivate action and reshape audience cognition toward prosocial behavior (Bennett, 2017; Ma et al., 2023; Mandala & Kusumasondjaja, 2022; Sánchez et al., 2023; Sulthan et al., 2025). Nonprofit organizations often use storytelling, testimonials, and mission-driven narratives to help audiences internalize the relevance of a cause. These narratives increase audiences' emotional engagement and encourage them to translate that engagement into concrete behavioral intention. In addition, concrete accounts of volunteers' experiences help audiences imagine themselves in the volunteer role, making the intention to act more specific and attainable. Therefore, content marketing is expected to positively influence volunteering intention.

H3: Content Marketing has a positive effect on Volunteering Intention

Empathy and Volunteering Intention

Empathy can increase an individual's tendency to engage in volunteer activities (Chung et al., 2021). Other research from (Chang et al., 2022) also found that the nonprofit's helping behavior relies on empathy and emotional compassion. Empathy helps maintain the general public's willingness to volunteer in the long term, making it a targetable aspect of recruitment initiatives for volunteers (Nowakowska, 2022). Theoretically, empathy generates an other-oriented motivation to relieve the suffering of others, and volunteering is a direct behavioral channel through which this motivation is expressed. Based on the findings of previous research, further testing is needed on the role of empathy in increasing a person's intention to volunteer.

H4: Empathy has a positive effect on Volunteering Intention

Perceived Social Impact and Volunteering Intention

Perceived social impact positively relates to volunteer engagement, which indicates that perceptions of social contribution drive higher voluntary engagement (Mayr, 2017). In line with that, other findings reveal that perceived social impact has a significant effect on social entrepreneurship intention, affirming its role in encouraging the intention of individuals to engage in broader social initiatives (Usman et al., 2022). When individuals believe that an organization's work produces tangible benefits for beneficiaries, they expect their own contribution to be meaningful, which raises their motivation to volunteer. Furthermore, the development of empirical evidence on the health and social impacts of volunteering emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the socio-cultural context and characteristics of participation (South et al., 2022).

H5: Perceived Social Impact has a positive effect on Volunteering Intention

Search Engine Optimization and Empathy

Search Engine Optimization refers to the practice of improving a website's discoverability and structural clarity so that relevant content reaches its intended audience more effectively. Prior studies indicate that a well-optimized, easily

navigable website increases users' substantive engagement with content and shapes the quality of visitors' experience with a nonprofit's digital presence (Flavián-blanco et al., 2011; Lewandowski & Schultheiß, 2023; Liu et al., 2017; Saenz et al., 2024). A discoverable and well-structured website encourages users to spend more time engaging with content about beneficiaries and social causes rather than disengaging prematurely. This sustained engagement provides the attention and elaboration needed for an empathic response to form. From a stimulus–organism–response perspective, SEO acts as an external stimulus that shapes the user's internal affective state, namely empathy, by determining whether emotionally relevant content is reached at all. Therefore, Search Engine Optimization is expected to positively influence empathy.

H6: Search Engine Optimization has a positive effect on Empathy

Social Media Marketing and Empathy

Social Media Marketing refers to the use of social platforms to disseminate socially embedded content, such as comments, shares, testimonials, and peer reactions, that carries visible social-influence cues. Prior studies indicate that exposure to such content increases empathy and is strongly associated with individuals' willingness to donate time and increase their involvement in social activities (Jung & Im, 2021; Kim & Kim, 2024; Safeer, 2024; Weiss & Cohen, 2019). The interactive nature of social media content prompts users to actively relate to and personally process the emotional experiences of others rather than merely observing them. Peer reactions also function as emotional cues that are easily shared and mirrored among users, which amplifies empathic responses beyond what individual exposure would produce. Therefore, Social Media Marketing is expected to positively influence empathy.

H7: Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on Empathy

Content Marketing and Empathy

Content marketing involves the delivery of narrative- and message-based content intended to be interpreted rather than merely observed. Prior studies indicate that content marketing positively affects empathy toward the conveyed message and builds emotional closeness between organizations and their audiences, and that audiences who receive empathic support are themselves more likely to produce empathic content (Bennett, 2017; Y. Chen & Xu, 2021; Kato, 2023; Sulthan et al., 2025; Wald et al., 2021). Well-crafted narrative content encourages audiences to emotionally identify with the people or causes being portrayed. This identification process strengthens audiences' capacity to understand and share the emotional experiences conveyed in the content. Narratives that present beneficiaries as specific individuals, rather than abstract statistics, make it easier for audiences to take their perspective and feel concern for them. Therefore, content marketing is expected to positively influence empathy.

H8: Content Marketing has a positive effect on Empathy

Search Engine Optimization and Perceived Social Impact

Perceived social impact refers to individuals' cognitive judgment regarding the extent to which an organization's activities generate meaningful social contribution. Prior studies indicate that increased digital exposure expands the reach of organizational messaging and accelerates audience awareness and responsiveness toward social-value content (Confetto & Covucci, 2021; Usman et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2021; Zhang & Cabage, 2017). Greater visibility and accessibility of a nonprofit's mission-related content enable audiences to access the information necessary to evaluate an organization's social contribution. Because SEO places program reports and outcome information at the top of search results, it increases the likelihood that audiences encounter credible evidence of impact before forming their judgment. Therefore, Search Engine Optimization is expected to positively influence perceived social impact.

H9: Search Engine Optimization has a positive effect on Perceived Social Impact

Social Media Marketing and Perceived Social Impact

Social Media Marketing refers to the use of firm-generated and visually engaging content to communicate an organization's mission and outcomes to its audience. Prior studies indicate that such content strengthens community and trust, reduces uncertainty about an organization's mission, and increases perceived closeness and emotional engagement through visual and social-presence cues (Dienlin et al., 2025; Poirier et al., 2025; Tian et al., 2019; Zogaj, 2023). Consistent and credible signals of an organization's outcomes reduce the inferential effort audiences need to conclude that the organization is making a genuine social contribution. Regular posts showing activities and results, together with visible audience reactions, also serve as social proof that the organization's work is real and valued. Therefore, Social Media Marketing is expected to positively influence perceived social impact.

H10: Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on Perceived Social Impact

Content Marketing and Perceived Social Impact

Content marketing refers to the delivery of informative, emotional, and interactive content designed to engage audiences beyond simple exposure. Prior studies indicate that such content shapes audiences' social perception and that meaningful digital content increases perceived social value and individual engagement toward collective goals (Bu et al., 2021; Cao et al., 2025; He et al., 2021; Nardini et al., 2022). Content that requires active processing and interpretation encourages audiences to reflect on an organization's outcomes and their own role in relation to its cause. This reflective engagement strengthens audiences' perception that the organization generates genuine social impact. Impact stories and beneficiary testimonials translate abstract program outcomes into visible, concrete changes, which makes the organization's contribution easier to judge as meaningful. Therefore, content marketing is expected to positively influence perceived social impact.

H11: Content Marketing has a positive effect on Perceived Social Impact

The Mediating Role of Empathy on Search Engine Optimization and Volunteering Intention

Search engine optimization (SEO) operates through audience-initiated information search, in which individuals who look for a social cause are already goal-oriented. Its contribution is therefore primarily one of access and perceived credibility rather than direct affective stimulation. People commonly interpret higher search rankings as an indicator of source credibility (Schultheiß & Lewandowski, 2025). Empathy emerges when the content reached through search conveys the circumstances of beneficiaries, because empathy is an affective response that translates message exposure into motivation to act (Chung et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2024). Recent experimental evidence indicates that empathic concern influences intentions to donate both time and money in digital settings (Cho et al., 2024), which supports extending this mechanism to volunteering intention. Given that SEO mainly secures visibility and credibility, its affective pathway is expected to be weaker than those of social media marketing (SMM) and content marketing. Therefore, empathy is expected to mediate the relationship between SEO and volunteering intention.

H12: Empathy mediates the relationship between SEO and Volunteering Intention

The Mediating Role of Empathy on Social Media Marketing and Volunteering Intention

SMM is characterized by continuous, interactive, and socially mediated communication, through which audiences encounter the circumstances of beneficiaries via personalized and peer-validated exchanges that foster emotional closeness (Morgan et al., 2025). Social influence on social media has been shown to positively affect empathy and donation intention (T. Zhang et al., 2022), and social media use has been found to shape empathy and self-efficacy in nonprofit fundraising (Lee & Li, 2023). At the behavioral level, following nonprofit organizations on social media is positively associated with volunteering (Duckwitz & Zabel, 2024). Empathy subsequently links audience engagement to prosocial intention (Jung & Im, 2021) . Because this affective experience is

socially amplified, empathy is expected to constitute the principal mediating pathway for SMM. Therefore, empathy is expected to mediate the relationship between SMM and volunteering intention.

H13: Empathy mediates the relationship between SMM and Volunteering Intention

The Mediating Role of Empathy on Content Marketing and Volunteering Intention

Content marketing provides the substantive message, and narrative content in particular encourages audiences to imagine the experiences of beneficiaries, thereby eliciting affective empathy. Experimental evidence shows that greater story immersion is associated with higher affective empathy and more prosocial behavior (Wald et al., 2021), and a content marketing fundraising experiment found that concrete message content increased donation intention partly through empathy (Bennett, 2017; Bubphapant & Brandao, 2025; Sulthan et al., 2025). Empathy therefore transmits the effect of content on behavioral intention when the content is appropriately framed (Lee & Li, 2023). Therefore, empathy is expected to mediate the relationship between content marketing and volunteering intention.

H14: Empathy mediates the relationship between Content Marketing and Volunteering Intention

The Mediating Role of Perceived Social Impact on Search Engine Optimization and Volunteering Intention

Individuals who arrive through search are engaged in information seeking, and high rankings function as a heuristic cue of expertise and trustworthiness (Confetto & Covucci, 2021; Lewandowski & Schultheiß, 2023). When the pages reached present program outcomes, these cues lead audiences to judge that the organization generates genuine social change, and broader digital exposure increases the opportunity for such evaluation (Cohen-Mansfield, 2022). Perceived social impact strengthens intentions to contribute money and time (Saenz et al., 2024; Schümann et al., 2021) and fully mediates the relationship with volunteers (Nguyen & Lai, 2026). Therefore, perceived social impact is expected to mediate the relationship between SEO and volunteering intention.

H15: Perceived Social Impact mediates the relationship between SEO and Volunteering Intention

The Mediating Role of Perceived Social Impact on Social Media Marketing and Volunteering Intention

SMM provides cognitive evidence of impact through two mechanisms: the regular reporting of activities and outcomes, and visible engagement that signal social endorsement of an organization's effectiveness (Cao et al., 2025; Tian et al., 2019). Repeated exposure and social endorsement therefore strengthen judgments that the organization makes a meaningful difference, which in turn promotes prosocial behavior (Kim & Kim, 2024; Poirier et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2023). Therefore, perceived social impact is expected to mediate the relationship between SMM and volunteering intention.

H16: Perceived Social Impact mediates the relationship between SMM and Volunteering Intention

The Mediating Role of Perceived Social Impact on Content Marketing and Volunteering Intention

Content that requires active processing encourages audiences to reflect on organizational outcomes and on their own role in relation to the cause, thereby strengthening perceived social impact (He et al., 2021; Sánchez et al., 2023). Experimental evidence indicates that concrete, outcome-oriented messages increase intentions to act through perceived credibility, transparency, and cognitive elaboration (Aydinli-karakulak et al., 2016; L. Xiao et al., 2019), which are cognitive mechanisms closely related to impact judgments. Perceived Social Impact strengthens intentions to contribute time and money (Kim & Kim, 2024) and mediates the relationship with volunteers (Nguyen & Lai, 2026). Therefore, perceived social impact is expected to mediate the relationship between content marketing and volunteering intention.

H17: Perceived Social Impact mediates the relationship between Content Marketing and Volunteering Intention

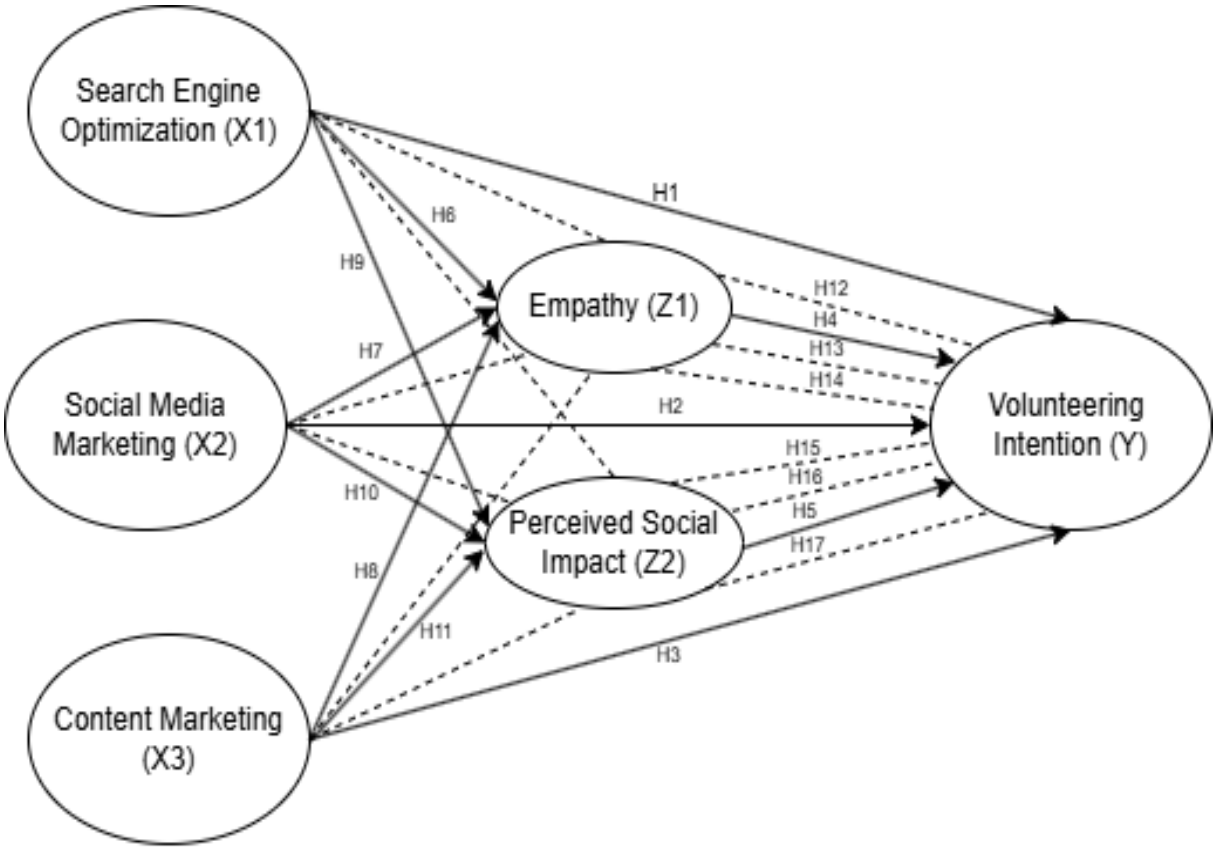


Figure 1. Research Framework
Source: (Çetinkaya et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025; Putri, 2021; Usman et al., 2022)

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design using a survey approach to examine the effects of digital marketing communication on volunteering intention through empathy and perceived social impact. Volunteering intention is specifically examined rather than actual volunteering behavior because individuals often engage with digital recruitment content and develop behavioral readiness long before participating in volunteer activities. A structured questionnaire was constructed based on established measurement scales adapted from prior empirical literature. The study was conducted in Indonesia using cross-sectional data collected at a single point in time from January 2026 to February 2026.

Data Sources, Population, and Sampling Technique

Primary data were gathered using a structured online questionnaire created via Google Forms and distributed across online volunteer communities, digital networks, and social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Google Forms administrative settings were configured to require user sign-in, strictly limiting submissions to one response per Google account to prevent duplicate submissions and response distortion. A total of 356 raw responses were initially collected. Following data screening and multivariate outlier removal using Mahalanobis distance evaluated in, 56 invalid cases were excluded, resulting in a final clean dataset of 300 valid respondents for model estimation.

The target population comprises social media users in Indonesia across diverse

professional and educational backgrounds who possess potential interest in social or nonprofit volunteer initiatives. Because no centralized or official database exists for potential volunteers among the general public in Indonesia, probability sampling was unfeasible due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame (Etikan et al., 2016). Thus, non-probability purposive sampling was employed to recruit eligible respondents who met specific predefined operational criteria. Respondents were recruited through purposive sampling, with eligibility determined by a series of screening questions administered prior to the main questionnaire. To be classified as eligible, respondents had to (1) be Indonesian citizens; (2) have searched for information about volunteering on a search engine at least once within the previous six months; (3) ever intended to become a volunteer; (4) social media platforms that use to obtain information about volunteering activities; (5) having encountered volunteer-recruitment content from a nonprofit organization on digital media within the previous six months; and (6) be able to name at least one nonprofit organization with which they were familiar. Only respondents who satisfied all criteria proceeded to the main questionnaire. Nevertheless, this sampling strategy has limitations. Because respondents were selected on the basis of prior interest, exposure, and familiarity, they were likely to report higher volunteering intention than the general population, potentially restricting variance in the outcome variable (range restriction) and attenuating the observed relationships among constructs. The strategy may also introduce selection bias, as individuals with no interest in volunteering or no digital exposure were systematically excluded. Accordingly, the findings should be generalized only to digitally exposed individuals with some prior interest in volunteering, and future research is encouraged to employ probability sampling with more heterogeneous levels of interest and exposure.

We evaluated sample size adequacy using an RMSEA-based power analysis for covariance-based SEM, which accounts for model complexity through the model's degrees of freedom. The proposed model comprises six latent constructs measured by 46 indicators, yielding 1,081 distinct sample moments (46 × 47 / 2) and 106 freely estimated parameters, and therefore df = 975. The effect size was defined as the discrepancy in RMSEA between the null and alternative hypotheses (MacCallum et al., 1996) . The test of close fit specified H_0: RMSEA = 0.05 and H_a: RMSEA = 0.08, with a significance level of α = 0.05. With N = 300, the statistical power exceeded .999, well above the conventional threshold of .80, and the minimum sample size required to achieve power of 0.80 was N = 34. The test of not-close fit (H_0: RMSEA = 0.05; H_a: RMSEA = 0.01) likewise yielded power > .999 (minimum N = 52). Under a more stringent specification (H_0: RMSEA = 0.05; H_a: RMSEA = 0.06), power remained high at 0.996, with a minimum required N of 140. Because the model's degrees of freedom are large, the final sample of 300 respondents provides ample power to detect model misspecification and is therefore adequate for the proposed model. This analysis was conducted to confirm the adequacy of the final sample and was not performed prior to data collection.

Measurement and Operational Definition of Variables

This study evaluates six primary latent constructs measured via multi-item scales adapted from prior literature using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The exogenous construct consists of three digital marketing-related variables, each operationalized separately to capture distinct marketing mechanisms: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which measures prospective volunteers' perceived visibility, accessibility, content relevance, credibility, and engagement likelihood of the organization's website in search engine results; Social Media Marketing (SMM), which measures prospective volunteers' perceived awareness, interaction, timeliness, customization, and promotional appeal of the organization's social media presence; and Content Marketing (CM), which measures prospective volunteers' perceived familiarity, usefulness, attentiveness, impressiveness, and trustworthiness toward the organization's shared content. Empathy reflects emotional and cognitive alignment with beneficiaries, captured through perspective-taking, emotional concern, and sympathetic awareness. Perceived social impact assesses the

evaluated effectiveness and community value created by nonprofit initiatives, measured via organizational credibility, program efficiency, and tangible societal benefits. Finally, volunteering intention represents behavioral readiness and commitment to participate, operationalized through personal willingness, signup likelihood, and advocacy to peers. The operational definitions of variables are presented in Table 1.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) with Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation executed via IBM SPSS AMOS version 29. A two-step analytical approach was applied to evaluate the empirical model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In the first step, measurement model assessment was conducted via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to verify construct validity, reliability, and data distribution. Univariate normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis thresholds, while multivariate normality was verified using the multivariate critical ratio within ±2.58. Standardized factor loadings ≥ 0.50 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 established convergent validity, whereas Construct Reliability (CR) ≥ 0.70 confirmed. Goodness-of-Fit indices, including CMIN/DF, RMSEA, CFI, and TLI, were evaluated against standard threshold criteria.

In the second step, the structural model was evaluated to examine direct, indirect, and overall causal relationships among the latent variables. Direct hypotheses were assessed using path coefficients, critical ratios, and significance levels ($p < 0.05$). To test the mediating effects of empathy and perceived social impact, a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 bootstrap resamples at a 95% confidence interval was conducted in AMOS version 29, where mediation effects are confirmed significant if the lower and upper confidence bounds do not straddle zero ($p < 0.05$).

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 356 responses were initially collected through the online survey. Following a data screening process, 56 responses were excluded due to incomplete responses, failure to meet the predetermined respondent criteria, or indications of inattentive response patterns, resulting in a final sample of 300 valid responses used for subsequent analysis.

This study did not obtain prior ethical approval from an institutional review board or research ethics committee. The authors acknowledge this as a limitation of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed of the study purpose, the intended use of their data, and the anonymity of their responses, also informed consent was indicated by proceeding to complete the questionnaire. Respondents were free to discontinue participation at any time without any consequence. Data were collected and stored in Google Forms, with access restricted to the researcher team only, and are reported in aggregate form only. All respondents in the final analytical sample (N = 300) were aged 18 years or older.

The respondents were individuals across Indonesia who expressed an interest in volunteering for nonprofit organizations. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents were aged 23–27 years (68%), followed by those aged 28–32 years (12%), 18–22 years (12%), and 33–37 years (8%). With respect to gender, female respondents constituted the majority of the sample (76%), while male respondents accounted for 24%. Regarding educational attainment, most respondents had completed senior high school or its equivalent (53.67%), followed by those holding a bachelor's degree (36%), a master's degree (6%), a diploma (2%), junior high school (1.33%), and a doctoral degree (1%). In terms of occupational background, students represented the largest proportion of respondents (65.67%), followed by civil servants (13.33%), entrepreneurs (6.33%), educational workers (6.33%), private-sector employees (5.67%), and healthcare workers (2.67%).

With regard to geographic distribution, the final sample consisted of respondents from 37 provinces representing all major island regions of Indonesia, namely Sumatra (25.33%), Java (43.67%), Bali/Nusa Tenggara (6.00%), Kalimantan (8.33%), Sulawesi (9.67%), Maluku

(2.33%), and Papua (4.67%). Although the sample encompasses the majority of Indonesian provinces, its distribution is proportionally concentrated in Java, whereas regions such as Papua and Maluku remain underrepresented. This geographic imbalance indicates that the findings of this study should not be interpreted as nationally representative, and it is explicitly acknowledged as a limitation of the present research. Overall, the demographic profile shows that the respondents were predominantly young adults, female, and students, with diverse educational backgrounds. This distribution provides a general descriptive overview of the characteristics of the respondents represented in the study.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Test Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement model employed in this study. CFA aims to assess whether the observed indicators adequately represent their respective latent constructs. The measurement model was specified with each construct measured directly by its observed indicators, which remains consistent with the theoretical framework and research objectives, since the S-O-R hypotheses concern the relationships among the constructs themselves. Accordingly, the measurement model consists of six constructs, namely search engine optimization, social media marketing, content marketing, empathy, and perceived social impact, and volunteering intention.

Table 1. Operational Definitions of Variable

Construct	Operational Definition	Questionnaire Item
Search Engine Optimization (Hoo et al., 2023; Khraim, 2015)	Individuals' perception of how easy it is to find a nonprofit organization's information through search engines.	(SEO1) The nonprofit organization's website appears among the top results when I search for volunteering-related information (SEO2) I can easily find the nonprofit organization through a search engine (SEO3) The nonprofit organization's website is easier to notice than similar organizations when I search online (SEO4) The website address of the nonprofit organization shown in the search results is clear and easy to understand (SEO5) I can quickly navigate to the information I need on this organization's website (SEO6) The nonprofit organization's website is well-organized, making information easy to locate (SEO7) The search results for the nonprofit organization match the information I was actually looking for (SEO8) The page title and description shown in search results accurately reflect the organization's content (SEO9) The topics associated with the nonprofit organization's website are relevant to the volunteering information I search for (SEO10) The nonprofit organization's website is also referenced or linked by other websites I consider trustworthy (SEO11) Seeing The nonprofit organization rank well in search results increases my confidence in it (SEO12) The nonprofit organization appears more credible than similar organizations when I search online (SEO13) I am more likely to visit this organization's website because it appears early in search results (SEO14) I recognize the nonprofit organization more easily (SEO15) Finding this organization easily online makes me more interested in learning about its volunteering opportunities
Social Media Marketing (Çetinkaya et al., 2025)	Individuals' perception of a nonprofit organization's social media in building awareness, interaction, and engagement.	(SMM1) The nonprofit organization's social media posts provide useful information about relevant social issues (SMM2) The nonprofit organization's social media posts highlight the importance of the causes it supports (SMM3) The nonprofit organization's social media posts clearly explain the significance of its mission (SMM4) The nonprofit organization's social media allows me to easily express my opinions

		(SMM5) The nonprofit organization's social media facilitates the exchange of ideas and opinions among users (SMM6) The nonprofit organization's social media allows me to easily share information with others (SMM7) The nonprofit organization's social media makes it possible to track its ongoing activities (SMM8) The posts shared on the nonprofit organization's social media reflect the most recent updates (SMM9) The information shared in the nonprofit organization's social media posts is up to date with current issues (SMM10) The nonprofit organization's social media posts show the outcomes/impact of its programs (SMM11) The nonprofit organization's social media posts are relevant to my personal interests (SMM12) I can easily find the information I need in the nonprofit organization's social media posts (SMM13) The nonprofit organization's social media posts clearly communicate its future goals and plans (SMM14) The nonprofit organization's social media posts present a clear overview of its achievements (SMM15) The nonprofit organization's social media posts are presented in an emotionally engaging way
Content Marketing (L. Xiao et al., 2019)	Individuals' perception of an organization's content in terms of familiarity, usefulness, attention, impressiveness, and trustworthiness.	(CM1) The nonprofit organization's content provides enough information to familiarize me with its volunteer programs (CM2) The nonprofit organization's content is useful to me (CM3) The nonprofit organization's content captures my attention (CM4) The nonprofit organization's content leaves a strong impression on me (CM5) I find the nonprofit organization's content credible and trustworthy
Empathy (Yang & Yen, 2018)	An individual's tendency to feel concern and emotional responsiveness toward others facing difficulties or hardship.	(EM1) When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them (EM2) When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes feel pity for them (EM3) I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me (EM4) Sometimes I feel sorry for other people when they are having problems (EM5) I am often quite touched by things that I see happen
Perceived Social Impact (Usman et al., 2022)	An individual's belief that their involvement will generate a significant positive social impact.	(PSI1) I believe my involvement as a volunteer has a high possibility of creating social impact if successful (PSI2) If my volunteering activities succeed, I believe the social impact on me personally will be high (PSI3) Assuming my volunteering activities create a social impact, I believe it will be significant
Volunteering Intention (Çetinkaya et al., 2025)	An individual's intention to allocate time and participate in volunteer activities organized by nonprofit organizations.	(VI1) I intend to take the time to participate in volunteer activities at nonprofit organizations (VI2) I am willing to volunteer for social activities through nonprofit organizations (VI3) I intend to volunteer in activities organized by nonprofit organizations in the future

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

Following the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the full structural model was evaluated to examine the hypothesized causal relationships among the latent constructs. Figure 2 depicts the structural path model and its corresponding estimated parameters.

Validity and Reliability Tests

Based on standard measurement criteria, an indicator demonstrates construct validity when its factor loading exceeds 0.50, while convergent validity and reliability are confirmed by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50 and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeding 0.70. As detailed in Table 2, all constructs in this

study met these thresholds, confirming satisfactory model validity and reliability.

Normality Tests

Prior to structural modeling, data normality and outlier assessments were performed. Univariate and multivariate outliers were evaluated using Z-score thresholds and Mahalanobis. Consequently, 56 extreme responses were removed, resulting in a final usable dataset of 300 observations. Data normality was subsequently evaluated by examining the critical ratio (c.r.) values for skewness and kurtosis, where values within the threshold of -2.58 to +2.58 indicate adequate normal distribution. As presented in Table 3, most indicators fell within the acceptable range, except for PSI1, PSI3, and EM4, which showed univariate skewness c.r. values below -2.58, indicating a mild negative skew. All univariate kurtosis c.r. values remained within the threshold, and the multivariate kurtosis c.r. of 1.905 was also within the acceptable range. Because the deviations were limited to three indicators and involved skewness rather than kurtosis, the departure from normality is considered modest. Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation has been shown to produce reliable parameter estimates under mild departures from normality, particularly when kurtosis is not severe (Kline, 2016). Nevertheless, standard errors and fit statistics should be interpreted with some caution.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), as presented in Table 4. All HTMT values ranged from 0.513 to 0.807, below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct. The highest value was observed between Empathy (EM) and Volunteering Intention (VI) at 0.807, followed by VI and PSI at 0.732 and VI and SEO at 0.721. Overall, the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory discriminant validity.

Goodness-of-Fit Result

Goodness-of-Fit analysis was used to assess the extent to which the constructed structural model was in accordance with the research data. The results of the Goodness-of-Fit test are presented in detail in Table 5. The Goodness-of-Fit assessment indicates that the proposed model demonstrates an acceptable fit to the data. These findings imply that the structural and measurement models accurately depict the observed data. As a result, the model as a whole can be deemed appropriate for further structural analysis and hypothesis testing. Although the GFI value is in the marginal range, fulfilling every fit index is not mandatory in CB-SEM, provided that primary indices (CMIN/DF, RMSEA, CFI, and TLI) satisfy the threshold (Hair et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2005).

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Results

Variables	Indicator	Loading Factor	Description	Loading Factor^2	Error	CR	AVE	Conclusion
Search Engine Optimization	SEO1	0.780	Valid	0.608	0.392	0.960	0.617	Reliable
	SEO2	0.758	Valid	0.575	0.425			
	SEO3	0.772	Valid	0.596	0.404			
	SEO4	0.799	Valid	0.638	0.362			
	SEO5	0.807	Valid	0.651	0.349			
	SEO6	0.768	Valid	0.590	0.410			
	SEO7	0.786	Valid	0.618	0.382			
	SEO8	0.798	Valid	0.637	0.363			
	SEO9	0.793	Valid	0.629	0.371			
	SEO10	0.792	Valid	0.627	0.373			
	SEO11	0.816	Valid	0.666	0.334			
	SEO12	0.771	Valid	0.594	0.406			
	SEO13	0.786	Valid	0.618	0.382			
	SEO14	0.769	Valid	0.591	0.409			
	SEO15	0.788	Valid	0.621	0.379			

Social Media Marketing	SMM1	0.779	Valid	0.607	0.393	0.962	0.627	Reliable
	SMM2	0.828	Valid	0.686	0.314			
	SMM3	0.809	Valid	0.654	0.346			
	SMM4	0.792	Valid	0.627	0.373			
	SMM5	0.801	Valid	0.642	0.358			
	SMM6	0.797	Valid	0.635	0.365			
	SMM7	0.811	Valid	0.658	0.342			
	SMM8	0.804	Valid	0.646	0.354			
	SMM9	0.792	Valid	0.627	0.373			
	SMM10	0.810	Valid	0.656	0.344			
	SMM11	0.743	Valid	0.552	0.448			
	SMM12	0.743	Valid	0.552	0.448			
	SMM13	0.760	Valid	0.578	0.422			
	SMM14	0.818	Valid	0.669	0.331			
	SMM15	0.787	Valid	0.619	0.381			
Content Marketing	CM1	0.745	Valid	0.555	0.445	0.895	0.630	Reliable
	CM2	0.794	Valid	0.630	0.370			
	CM3	0.835	Valid	0.696	0.304			
	CM4	0.812	Valid	0.666	0.334			
	CM5	0.780	Valid	0.608	0.392			
Empathy	EM1	0.763	Valid	0.582	0.418	0.885	0.607	Reliable
	EM2	0.787	Valid	0.619	0.381			
	EM3	0.788	Valid	0.621	0.379			
	EM4	0.740	Valid	0.548	0.452			
	EM5	0.815	Valid	0.664	0.336			
Perceived Social Impact	PSI1	0.798	Valid	0.637	0.363	0.838	0.633	Reliable
	PSI2	0.826	Valid	0.682	0.318			
	PSI3	0.762	Valid	0.581	0.419			
Volunteering Intention	VI1	0.794	Valid	0.630	0.370	0.831	0.621	Reliable
	VI2	0.772	Valid	0.596	0.404			
	VI3	0.798	Valid	0.637	0.363			

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 3. Normality Results

Variable	Min	Max	Skew	C.R.	Kurtosis	C.R.
VI1	2.000	5.000	-.307	-2.169	-.275	-.972
VI2	2.000	5.000	-.068	-.478	-.478	-1.692
VI3	2.000	5.000	-.237	-1.679	-.235	-.831
PSI1	1.000	5.000	-.391	-2.766	.042	.149
PSI2	2.000	5.000	-.068	-.480	-.440	-1.557
PSI3	2.000	5.000	-.372	-2.633	.011	.038
SEO1	1.000	5.000	-.251	-1.778	-.279	-.987
SEO2	2.000	5.000	-.180	-1.274	-.203	-.719
SEO3	1.000	5.000	-.235	-1.661	-.180	-.638
SEO4	1.000	5.000	-.196	-1.389	-.125	-.443
SEO5	1.000	5.000	-.215	-1.524	-.245	-.865
SEO6	1.000	5.000	-.143	-1.010	-.235	-.829
SEO7	1.000	5.000	-.124	-.874	-.350	-1.238
SEO8	1.000	5.000	-.163	-1.152	-.103	-.366
SEO9	2.000	5.000	-.174	-1.230	-.403	-1.427
SEO10	2.000	5.000	-.178	-1.258	-.324	-1.145
SEO11	1.000	5.000	-.258	-1.824	.001	.004
SEO12	1.000	5.000	-.219	-1.548	-.050	-.178
SEO13	1.000	5.000	-.113	-.802	-.091	-.323

SEO14	2.000	5.000	-.075	-.527	-.541	-1.912
SEO15	2.000	5.000	-.112	-.793	-.321	-1.137
SMM1	1.000	5.000	-.275	-1.942	-.127	-.449
SMM2	2.000	5.000	-.144	-1.016	-.518	-1.831
SMM3	2.000	5.000	-.207	-1.464	-.145	-.514
SMM4	2.000	5.000	-.231	-1.632	-.151	-.534
SMM5	2.000	5.000	-.260	-1.841	-.193	-.683
SMM6	2.000	5.000	-.064	-.453	-.371	-1.311
SMM7	2.000	5.000	-.070	-.496	-.421	-1.489
SMM8	2.000	5.000	-.304	-2.151	-.096	-.339
SMM9	2.000	5.000	-.158	-1.116	-.268	-.949
SMM10	2.000	5.000	-.063	-.442	-.399	-1.412
SMM11	1.000	5.000	-.174	-1.232	-.109	-.387
SMM12	2.000	5.000	-.222	-1.570	-.097	-.342
SMM13	2.000	5.000	-.098	-.690	-.355	-1.257
SMM14	2.000	5.000	-.245	-1.733	-.182	-.642
SMM15	2.000	5.000	-.219	-1.546	-.339	-1.197
CM1	2.000	5.000	-.109	-.771	-.429	-1.517
CM2	2.000	5.000	-.130	-.917	-.402	-1.420
CM3	2.000	5.000	.064	.453	-.689	-2.435
CM4	2.000	5.000	-.045	-.315	-.596	-2.107
CM5	2.000	5.000	-.072	-.506	-.516	-1.825
EM1	2.000	5.000	-.041	-.290	-.529	-1.871
EM2	1.000	5.000	-.263	-1.862	.102	.360
EM3	2.000	5.000	-.199	-1.410	-.299	-1.056
EM4	1.000	5.000	-.417	-2.950	.383	1.353
EM5	2.000	5.000	-.213	-1.503	-.443	-1.567
Multivariate					14.619	1.905

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Result

	SEO	SMM	CM	EM	PSI	VI
SEO						
SMM	0.513					
CM	0.601	0.524				
EM	0.676	0.648	0.649			
PSI	0.675	0.556	0.603	0.578		
VI	0.721	0.627	0.640	0.807	0.732	

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 5. Goodness-of-Fit Result

Goodness-of-Fit Index	Cut-off Value	Result	Evaluation Model
CMIN/DF	< 2	1.106	Fit
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.872	Marginal
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.019	Fit
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.989	Fit
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.990	Fit
PNFI	0.60 – 0.90	0.850	Fit
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.0329	Fit

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis test in this study aims to analyze the relationship between variables and evaluate the influence caused. This analysis consists of direct effect testing and mediation testing to examine the relationships among the independent, mediating, and dependent variables.

The results of direct effect tests are presented in Table 6.

As shown in Table 6, most hypothesized relationships were significant. SEO significantly influenced volunteering intention, empathy, and perceived social impact, whereas the direct effects of social media marketing and content marketing on volunteering intention were not significant. Furthermore, empathy and perceived social impact were found to have significant positive effects on volunteering intention.

Table 6. Direct Effect Test Result

Relationship	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
H1: SEO → VI	0.144	0.073	2.012	0.044	Significant
H2: SMM → VI	0.059	0.065	0.980	0.327	Not Significant
H3: CM → VI	0.028	0.070	0.417	0.677	Not Significant
H4: EM → VI	0.473	0.094	5.719	***	Significant
H5: PSI → VI	0.312	0.084	4.170	***	Significant
H6: SEO → EM	0.344	0.057	5.494	***	Significant
H7: SMM → EM	0.330	0.055	5.787	***	Significant
H8: CM → EM	0.269	0.059	4.249	***	Significant
H9: SEO → PSI	0.423	0.065	5.992	***	Significant
H10: SMM → PSI	0.215	0.060	3.475	***	Significant
H11: CM → PSI	0.235	0.067	3.362	***	Significant

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 7. Specific Indirect Effect Test Result

Relationship	Estimate	Bias-Corrected 95% CI		P-Value
		Lower Bounds	Upper Bounds	
H12: SEO → EM → VI	0.167	0.111	0.243	< 0.001
H13: SMM → EM → VI	0.169	0.105	0.253	< 0.001
H14: CM → EM → VI	0.135	0.077	0.212	< 0.001
H15: SEO → PSI → VI	0.135	0.078	0.208	< 0.001
H16: SMM → PSI → VI	0.073	0.035	0.129	< 0.001
H17: CM → PSI →VI	0.078	0.037	0.137	< 0.001

Source: Processed Data (2026)

Table 8. Total Indirect Effect dan Total Effect

Relationship	Total Indirect Effect	Lower and Upper Bounds	Total Effect	Lower and Upper Bounds
SEO → VI	0.302	[0.213,0.407]	0.450	[0.338, 0.561]
SMM → VI	0.242	[0.165, 0.335]	0.306	[0.208, 0.405]
CM → VI	0.213	[0.141,0.301]	0.243	[0.133, 0.355]

Source: Processed Data (2026

Table 9. R^2 Endogenous Result

Endogenous Construct	R^2
PSI	0.547
EM	0.622
VI	0.768

Source: Processed Data (2026)

To rigorously assess the indirect effects and the mediating roles of empathy and perceived social impact, a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples at a 95% confidence level was conducted using AMOS. As presented in Tables 7, all hypothesized indirect relationships demonstrated statistically significant effects. This significance is further corroborated by the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval bounds reported in Table 7, where none of the estimated intervals include zero between their lower and upper bounds, thereby confirming

robust empirical support for the proposed mediating mechanisms. Comparing the two psychological mechanisms, the magnitude of indirect influence through Empathy is consistently higher than through Perceived Social Impact across all independent variables. Finally, by examining the significance of the direct path alongside these indirect effects, we established distinct mediation categories. Full mediation was confirmed for H13, H14, H16, and H17, as the direct relationships between SMM and CM and volunteering intention became non-significant. Conversely, partial mediation was established for the remaining hypothesized paths, such as H12 and H15, where both direct and indirect effects remained statistically significant.

R Squared Endogenous Tests

To evaluate the explanatory power of the structural model, the coefficient of determination R2 was calculated for all endogenous constructs. As shown in Table 9, the R2 values demonstrate varying degrees of variance explained by their respective predictor constructs. Specifically, Perceived Social Impact (PSI) achieved an R2 value of 0.547, indicating that 54.7% of its variance is explained by its antecedent exogenous constructs. Empathy (EM) recorded an R2 value of 0.622, reflecting a 62.2% explained variance. Lastly, Volunteering Intention (VI), as the primary target endogenous construct, yielded an R2 value of 0.768, demonstrating that 76.8% of the variance in individuals' intention to volunteer is accounted for by the combined predictors in the model. According to standard SEM benchmarks, R2 values above 0.75 represent a substantial level of explanatory power, whereas values between 0.50 and 0.75 indicate moderate explanatory strength. Consequently, the proposed structural model exhibits robust predictive and explanatory capability.

DISCUSSION

Search Engine Optimization and Volunteering Intention

The results indicate that SEO has a positive and significant association with volunteering intention, and Hypothesis 1 is therefore supported. When individuals can easily find relevant information through search engines, they are more likely to develop an interest in participating in volunteer activities. This finding is consistent with (Kowalczyk & Szandala, 2024) and (Kwak et al., 2022) who found that website optimization in nonprofit organizations can encourage prosocial behavioral intentions, including donating and participating in social activities. However, (Saura et al., 2020b) reported that the identity, reputation, and visual elements of nonprofit websites do not directly influence users' willingness to support nonprofit platforms. But SEO not only increases information accessibility but also strengthens positive perceptions of nonprofit organizations, ultimately fostering greater volunteering intention. While prior studies have predominantly examined SEO in relation to website traffic, this study contributes to the volunteering literature by demonstrating that SEO's functional role extends to prosocial contributions, a behavioral outcome that carries a higher commitment cost than donation and has rarely been examined as an SEO outcome in its own right.

Social Media Marketing and Volunteering Intention

The results indicate that the direct association between SMM and volunteering intention is not statistically significant, and Hypothesis 2 is therefore not supported. This finding suggests that exposure to social media marketing activities alone is insufficient to encourage individuals to engage in volunteer activities, that is often driven by intrinsic motivations, personal values, and emotional involvement rather than external promotional stimuli. This result is consistent with (Q. Li, 2024) who found that social media use does not directly influence prosocial behavior, as such behavior is primarily guided by personal norms. Although social media marketing communication has been recognized as an effective tool for expanding the reach of nonprofit organizations and increasing public awareness of their services and activities (Thomas & Duffett 2025) increased awareness does not necessarily translate into a direct intention to volunteer. However, Çetinkaya et al., (2025) found that social media marketing activities significantly influence volunteering intention. The present study suggests that social

media marketing may operate indirectly by first stimulating psychological responses, which subsequently encourage volunteering intention. As the mediation findings below clarify, SMM association with volunteering intention in this study appears to operate entirely through empathy and perceived social impact rather than through a direct pathway. This clarifies, rather than assumes, how SMM operates in a volunteering context, distinguishing this study from research treating SMM as a direct predictor.

Content Marketing and Volunteering Intention

The results indicate that the direct association between content marketing and volunteering intention is not statistically significant, and Hypothesis 3 is therefore not supported. This finding suggests that content dissemination alone is insufficient to encourage individuals to participate in volunteer activities. This result is consistent with (Sulthan et al., 2025), who found that content marketing does not significantly influence donation intention. In contrast, (Ma et al., 2023) and (Senevirathna et al., 2023) demonstrated that narrative-based social media content can effectively motivate individuals' thoughts and actions. This suggests that content marketing's effectiveness may be contingent on the behavioral cost of the outcome being studied, a boundary condition that the existing content marketing literature, largely focused on attitudinal or donation outcomes, has not addressed in the higher-commitment context of volunteering. The full-mediation pattern reported below lends further support to this interpretation.

Empathy and Volunteering Intention

The results indicate that empathy has a positive and significant association with volunteering intention, and Hypothesis 4 is supported. This finding indicates that individuals with higher levels of empathy are more likely to engage in volunteer activities. Empathy enables individuals to understand and share the feelings of others, thereby fostering concern for social issues and motivating them to contribute through voluntary actions. This finding is consistent with Liu et al. (2017), who identified empathy as one of the key determinants of prosocial intentions, including charitable support. Similarly, Chung et al. (2021) found that empathy increases individuals' tendency to participate in volunteer activities, which can subsequently contribute to improved mental well-being. Chang et al., (2022) and Nowakowska, (2022) further emphasized that helping behavior in nonprofit settings is strongly associated with empathy and emotional compassion. These factors sustain individuals' willingness to volunteer. Rather than treating empathy as a dispositional trait, this study situates it as a state shaped by digital marketing activity on prosocial behavior. These findings suggest that empathy serves as a crucial psychological driver that transforms concern for others into a willingness to actively participate in volunteer activities.

Perceived Social Impact and Volunteering Intention

The results indicate that perceived social impact has a positive and significant association with volunteering intention, and Hypothesis 5 is supported. This finding indicates that individuals are more likely to participate in volunteer activities when they believe their contributions can generate meaningful social outcomes. When individuals perceive that their actions can make a tangible difference to the lives of others or to society as a whole, they are more motivated to invest their time and effort in volunteer activities. This finding is consistent with Mayr, (2017) and Usman et al., (2022), who found that perceived social impact is positively associated with volunteer engagement, suggesting that perceptions of social contribution encourage voluntary involvement. Furthermore, South et al., (2022) emphasized the importance of understanding the social impacts of volunteering within specific social and cultural contexts, highlighting that individuals are more likely to engage when they recognize the value and significance of their contributions. These findings suggest that perceived social impact serves as an important motivational factor that strengthens individuals' willingness to participate in volunteer activities. While prior studies have largely examined perceived social impact as an outcome of organizational performance or program design, this study contributes a novel angle by positioning

it as an outcome of digital marketing activity specifically on nonprofit organization and volunteering intention.

Search Engine Optimization and Empathy

The results indicate that SEO has a positive and significant association with empathy, and Hypothesis 6 is supported. This finding indicates that SEO not only enhances the visibility and accessibility of nonprofit information but also contributes to the development of emotional engagement with social issues. By making relevant information easier to discover, SEO enables individuals to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by beneficiaries and the missions pursued by nonprofit organizations. This finding is consistent with Liu et al., (2017), who found that high-quality nonprofit websites, including accessible content and user-friendly features, play an important role in building user empathy. Similarly, Schultheiß & Lewandowski, (2025) argued that SEO can utilize achieve social objectives, such as social issues, which can enhance public awareness and emotional connectedness. Regarding the relationship between SEO and Empathy, the observed statistical association warrants a cautious interpretation. While SEO primarily enhances search visibility and information discoverability, it does not directly capture psychological mechanisms such as information exposure, message comprehension, or emotional processing. Rather than serving as a direct psychological trigger, SEO is more appropriately conceptualized as a structural facilitator that increases the likelihood of users encountering compelling social narratives, which may subsequently foster empathy. Therefore, SEO serves not only as a technical strategy for improving online visibility but also as a communication mechanism that helps individuals connect emotionally with the social causes promoted by nonprofit organizations.

Social Media Marketing and Empathy

The results indicate that SMM has a positive and significant association with empathy, and Hypothesis 7 is supported. This finding indicates that social media can facilitate the development of emotional connections between individuals and the social issues communicated by nonprofit organizations. Through repeated exposure to social campaigns, beneficiary stories, and information about community challenges, individuals become more aware of the conditions experienced by others. This increased awareness enables individuals to better understand others' perspectives and emotional states, thereby fostering empathy. The finding is consistent with B. Li et al., (2022), who found that social influence on social media platforms positively contributes to empathy. Similarly, Weiss & Cohen, (2019) reported that social influence through social media can enhance empathy, although the emotional effects of empathy-based messages may be less pronounced among individuals who already possess high levels of empathy. These findings suggest that social media marketing serves not only as a communication channel but also as a mechanism for increasing social awareness and emotional understanding. The present study extends previous research by demonstrating that social media marketing can effectively foster empathy within the context of nonprofit organizations and volunteering, and distinguishes the study from prior work centered on donation or general prosocial settings.

Content Marketing and Empathy

The results indicate that content marketing has a positive and significant association with empathy, and Hypothesis 8 is supported. This finding indicates that content developed by nonprofit organizations can foster emotional understanding and concern for social issues. By presenting stories, experiences, and information related to beneficiaries and social challenges, content marketing allows individuals to better understand the circumstances faced by others and emotionally connect with those situations. The finding is consistent with Chen & Xu, (2021) who found that audiences who receive empathy and social support through content are more likely to express empathy and support toward others. Therefore Sánchez et al., (2023) state that nonprofit digital media possess distinct content characteristics compared to for-profit media, particularly in terms of content environments and journalistic approaches. This difference suggests that nonprofit content is often designed not only to inform but also to communicate social values and societal issues, making it more capable of eliciting

emotional engagement from audiences. This study reframes content marketing's role as primarily affective rather than directly conversion-oriented, a distinction with practical implications for how nonprofit organizations design and evaluate their content strategies. Therefore, content marketing serves as an important communication tool that helps nonprofit organizations cultivate empathy by creating meaningful connections between individuals and social causes.

Search Engine Optimization and Perceived Social Impact

The results indicate that SEO has a positive and significant association with perceived social impact, and Hypothesis 9 is supported. This finding indicates that greater visibility and accessibility of nonprofit information can strengthen individuals' perceptions of the social value generated by an organization. When information about nonprofit programs, activities, and achievements is easily discovered through search engines, individuals are more likely to recognize the organization's contributions and perceive its initiatives as creating meaningful benefits for society. This finding is consistent with Zhang & Cabage, (2017) who found that SEO strategies can enhance audience awareness and responsiveness, thereby strengthening perceptions of organizational contributions. Similarly, Confetto & Covucci, (2021) and (Al-Haraizah et al., 2025) emphasized that increased digital exposure expands the reach of organizational messages and promotes public engagement, particularly when organizations communicate social value and positive societal impact. These findings suggest that SEO contributes not only to information visibility but also to the formation of positive perceptions regarding the social impact created by nonprofit organizations. This finding extends prior SEO research, which has generally stopped at awareness- and engagement-level outcomes, by testing SEO's association with a more downstream evaluative construct. This study contributes evidence that SEO's role in nonprofit communication may reach beyond visibility metrics into how audiences judge organizational effectiveness, a relationship not directly established in earlier SEO-focused studies.

Social Media Marketing and Perceived Social Impact

The results indicate that SMM has a positive and significant association with perceived social impact, and Hypothesis 10 is supported. These findings suggest that social media marketing shapes individuals' perceptions of an organization's social contribution through both emotional and cognitive pathways. This is consistent with Poirier et al., (2025), who explain that visual approaches and social presence cues enhance emotional engagement, perceived closeness, and positive responses toward organizational messages, which logically strengthens the perceived value and meaning of the organization. In addition, Tian et al., (2019) emphasize that social media activity can build trust, strengthen a sense of community, and reduce uncertainty by consistently communicating the organization's social mission. These findings suggest that both affective and informational content qualities correspond with individuals' impact perceptions. Unlike prior studies that typically examine these affective and informational pathways in isolation, this study's contribution is to demonstrate that both operate concurrently within a single nonprofit volunteering model, suggesting that SMM influence on impact perception is not attributable to either emotional or informational content alone but to their combined presence. It can be concluded that the effectiveness of social media marketing in enhancing perceived social impact lies in the integration of affective and informational communication strategies.

Content Marketing and Perceived Social Impact

The results show that Content Marketing has a positive effect on Perceived Social Impact, and Hypothesis 11 is supported. These findings suggest that content delivered by organizations is capable of building audiences' engagement with the social issues being communicated. This result is in line with Bu et al., (2021) who state that content marketing can shape audiences' social perceptions through informative and interactive content. Furthermore, this finding is also supported by Cao et al., (2025) in the context of sustainable tourism, who emphasize that

meaningful digital content can enhance perceived social value and strengthen individual engagement toward collective goals. This implies that when content is perceived as meaningful and value-driven, it not only informs audiences but also encourages emotional alignment with broader social issues. This suggests that content requiring active audience interpretation, rather than passive exposure, is what corresponds with stronger social-impact evaluations. While previous studies examined the relationship between content marketing and perceived social impact primarily within general business and sustainable tourism contexts, this study extends this pathway directly to the nonprofit volunteering sector.

The Mediating Effect of Empathy

Empathy significantly mediates the association between each digital marketing activity and volunteering intention, though the mediation type differs by pathway. For SEO, both the direct effect (H1) and the indirect effect via empathy (H12) are significant, indicating partial mediation. For SMM and content marketing, the non-significant direct effects (H2, H3) combined with significant indirect effects (H13, H14) indicate full mediation, suggesting that these two activities are associated with volunteering intention only insofar as they shape empathy, with no discernible direct pathway. These findings suggest that digital marketing strategies do not directly translate into volunteering intention, but instead operate through an affective psychological process, namely empathy, which is formed in response to exposure to digital content. Therefore, SEO, SMM, and content marketing function as external stimuli that increase visibility, engagement, and message resonance, which then evoke emotional concern and empathy toward the social issues presented. This empathetic response becomes the key psychological driver that transforms passive exposure into an intention to engage in prosocial behavior such as volunteering.

This mechanism is consistent with Li et al., (2025), who explain that empathy can mediate the relationship between social influences and prosocial behavior, indicating that external messages first trigger an emotional response before leading to social action. However, Aji, (2025) adds an important nuance by showing that although storytelling-based marketing can generate positive emotional states, these emotions do not always automatically translate into behavioral outcomes such as participation in crowdfunding campaigns. This highlights that emotional arousal alone is insufficient without an internal psychological bridge. Therefore, Lee & Li, (2023) further confirms that empathy serves as a mediating mechanism that connects engagement with behavioral intention, particularly in donation-related contexts. Therefore, in this study, empathy plays a central explanatory role by transforming digital marketing exposure into meaningful emotional engagement, which subsequently encourages the formation of volunteering intention as the critical psychological link that bridges external digital marketing stimuli and prosocial behavioral outcomes. This contributes by comparing empathy's mediating strength across three marketing activities within one model, rather than testing a single pathway in isolation.

The Mediating Effect of Perceived Social Impact

Perceived social impact significantly mediates the association between each digital marketing activity and volunteering intention, with the same pathway-dependent pattern: partial mediation for SEO (via H1 and H15), and full mediation for SMM and content marketing (via H16 and H17). These findings suggest that digital marketing strategies do not directly generate volunteering intention, but instead work through individuals' cognitive evaluation of the organization's social contribution, namely their perceived social impact. In this context, perceived social impact reflects an individual's assessment of the extent to which an organization's actions produce real and meaningful benefits for society. Logically, when individuals are repeatedly exposed to digital marketing content, whether through SEO visibility, social media communication, or content marketing narratives, they first process and interpret the extent of the organization's societal contribution before developing an intention to participate in volunteering activities.

This mechanism is consistent with Kim & Kim (2024), who state that perceived social impact influences individuals' intention to donate

time and money, highlighting its role as a key driver of prosocial behavior. In addition, Nguyen & Lai (2026) and Wu et al. (2023) further strengthen this argument by showing that perceived social impact fully mediates the relationship between antecedent factors and volunteering outcomes, indicating that behavioral intention emerges primarily through cognitive evaluation of impact rather than direct exposure effects. Supporting this, Heponiemi et al., (2023) also emphasize that perceptions of social impact act as a bridging mechanism that connects available resources and digital engagement with actual participation in social activities. Therefore, in this study, digital marketing strategies function as informational and persuasive stimuli that shape individuals' understanding of organizational impact, which then becomes the decisive factor in forming volunteering intention. Overall, perceived social impact serves as the central cognitive pathway that transforms digital exposure into meaningful prosocial behavioral intentions. Differing from existing literature that analyzes perceived social impact as a solitary mediating mechanism, the present study simultaneously examines it with empathy.

CONCLUSIONS

This study employs the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on individuals' intention to engage in volunteering within nonprofit organizations. The findings indicate that not all external stimuli exert a direct effect on behavioral response. Specifically, only Search Engine Optimization (SEO) demonstrates a significant direct influence on volunteering intention, whereas Social Media Marketing and Content Marketing do not exhibit a statistically meaningful direct effect. Nevertheless, all digital marketing stimuli are found to exert indirect effects through organism variables, namely empathy and perceived social impact, which operate as parallel mediators. The results suggest that volunteering intention is not merely driven by exposure to digital marketing activities, but is primarily shaped by internal psychological processes involving emotional engagement and cognitive evaluation of social value. Accordingly, the findings provide empirical support for the application of the S-O-R framework in nonprofit digital marketing, with empathy and perceived social impact functioning as two parallel mediating pathways that translate external stimuli into behavioral responses.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the predominance of psychological mechanisms over direct marketing stimuli in influencing volunteering intention. Empathy and perceived social impact are empirically shown to have a positive effect on volunteering intention while also serving as significant mediators in the relationship between digital marketing strategies and prosocial behavior. The absence of significant direct effects from Social Media Marketing and Content Marketing further indicates that informational exposure alone is insufficient to stimulate volunteering intention without the presence of emotional resonance and perceived societal relevance. Within the Indonesian socio-cultural context, these findings are particularly relevant, as prosocial behavior is strongly rooted in collectivistic values such as gotong royong, social solidarity, and communal responsibility. Consequently, individuals are more likely to engage in volunteering when they perceive meaningful social impact and experience emotional alignment with the issues communicated. Therefore, the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in nonprofit contexts in Indonesia depends on their ability to foster empathy and strengthen perceived social impact, rather than merely disseminating information.

IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the nonprofit marketing literature by extending the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework to the digital prosocial context. The findings indicate that Empathy and Perceived Social Impact function as distinct and parallel psychological mechanisms linking digital marketing stimuli to Volunteering Intention, representing separate affective and cognitive pathways. The findings also indicate that SEO has a significant direct association with Volunteering Intention, in addition to its indirect association through the psychological mechanisms examined. Thus, the results provide empirical evidence that digital marketing stimuli may relate to volunteering

intention through both direct effects and indirect effects involving psychological mechanisms. Future research may extend this framework by examining additional psychological mechanisms, such as moral narrative framing and psychological ownership.

From a practical perspective, the empirical findings provide evidence-based implications for nonprofit organizations. The significant association between SEO and Volunteering Intention indicates that search engine visibility is relevant to volunteer recruitment, while the significant roles of Empathy and Perceived Social Impact indicate the importance of digital communication that supports emotional engagement and communicates social impact. Based on these findings, nonprofit organizations may prioritize improving digital visibility and developing content that fosters empathy and clearly conveys the social impact of their activities. More specific approaches, including first-person testimonials, interactive short-form videos, empathy-oriented search queries, and data-driven impact dashboards, may further support these objectives; however, their effectiveness extends beyond the relationships examined in this study and should be validated through future empirical research.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the scope is limited to only a few strategies of digital marketing, so it does not capture the full range of possible approaches that may influence volunteering intention in nonprofit organizations. Second, this study uses a quantitative approach based on self-reported questionnaires, meaning that the results rely on respondents' subjective perceptions and may not fully reflect actual behavioral outcomes; relatedly, this study measures volunteering intention rather than actual volunteering behavior, and although intention is a well-established predictor of behavior, the intention–behavior gap documented in prior literature suggests that the findings should not be interpreted as directly reflecting real volunteering participation. Third, the sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, which does not guarantee that the sample is representative of the broader population and may introduce selection bias; this is compounded by the composition of the sample, which was concentrated among young respondents and students, skewed toward female respondents, and limited in geographic coverage, thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, occupational backgrounds, gender distributions, and regional or cultural contexts. Fourth, this study employed a cross-sectional design, in which data were collected at a single point in time, so the relationships identified among variables should be interpreted as associative rather than causal, since this design cannot establish the temporal precedence required to determine causality. Finally, because all variables were measured using the same self-reported instrument administered at the same time, this study is potentially subject to common method bias, which may inflate the observed relationships among variables; taken together, these limitations indicate that the findings should be interpreted with caution, particularly with respect to their generalizability to more heterogeneous populations and their causal interpretation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that future research develop a more comprehensive research model by incorporating additional variables that are theoretically and contextually relevant to volunteering intention, such as trust, attitude, and social norms, which may further explain variations in individuals' willingness to engage in volunteer activities. In addition, future studies are encouraged to expand the research context beyond the current scope by examining different forms of social volunteering behavior in various nonprofit settings, in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, considering demographic characteristics and cultural factors is also important, as these aspects may shape how individuals perceive nonprofit organizations and respond to volunteering opportunities

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

DECLARATION STATEMENT

We conducted this research objectively, without being influenced by any particular interests, and if AI was used, it was only to improve the language, not to generate the research content.

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