The Impact of Technology on Voluntourism:

Implications for International Volunteering, Photography Ethics and Social Media Engagement

Centre for European Volunteering

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CEV Policy Trainee Findings: Maximising the Impact of Volunteering and Ethical Voluntourism.

This research report will discuss the potential integration of volunteering and ethical voluntourism into the European Union's (EU) policies, both internally and externally. The research sheds light on the growing significance of organised volunteering activities, with 34% of the EU's youth participating in such initiatives in 2019. This trend underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to incorporating volunteering into policy agendas.

Through this report, the distinction between volunteering and voluntourism will also be elucidated, underscoring the importance of ethical engagement and the mutual benefit for both volunteers and the communities they serve. While volunteering, in its most common format, is rooted in a long-term commitment to contribute skills or support to a community, voluntourism often involves short-term experiences that may prioritise the volunteer's experience over sustainable community development. The findings emphasise the need for responsible and culturally sensitive practices, ensuring that volunteers actively contribute to meaningful projects and respect the local context, fostering a positive impact on both sides. The report draws attention to the ethical considerations necessary for voluntourism to have a positive impact, stressing the reduction of neo-colonial practices and the promotion of genuine intercultural understanding.

In conclusion, through this research, the need for a strategic approach to leverage volunteering and ethical voluntourism within the EU's policies, will become clearer. . By embracing ethical engagement and mutual benefit, the EU can tap into the immense potential of volunteering to foster positive change, strengthen intercultural ties, and contribute to inclusive global integration. The findings serve as a roadmap for policymakers to harness the power of volunteering for the betterment of both EU member states and their global partners.

1. Introduction

 Voluntourism is defined as a form of tourism in which individuals participate in voluntary activities or community service while travelling, typically for a short duration. In the context of this report, voluntourism is a model of volunteering , often emphasising short-term engagements with a primary focus on the volunteer's experience. On the other hand, volunteering is defined as a more traditional and sustained form of community service, where individuals commit their time and skills to contribute meaningfully to a cause or organisation over an extended period. It is important to note that voluntourism often involves individuals, typically middle-class, white, Europeans, volunteering in developing countries, often in Africa or Asia (Cassandra Verardi, 2013). This demographic aspect adds a layer of complexity to the voluntourism phenomenon, raising questions about power dynamics, cultural sensitivity, and the potential impact on local communities.

Voluntourism is becoming increasingly popular in EU member states, with a notable surge in participation rates over recent years. A 2008 study by Tourism and Research Marketing counted over 1.6 Million people volunteering internationally every year (TRAM, 2008). This trend underscores the growing interest and recognition of the unique benefits associated with combining travel experiences and community service. As we explore the impact and implications of voluntourism, it is crucial to consider this upward trajectory in participation, indicating a shift in societal preferences towards more immersive and socially conscious travel practices within the European Union. This trend is particularly targeted towards younger generations, who are often approached through selling such experiences as 'making the difference', involving the 'travel to developing countries to aid poor communities, to enjoy sights and tastes of the distant and exotic' (McGloin & Georgiou, 2015). The BEV2030 report contributes to the matter by stating that digitalization and social networks have facilitated an increased number of non-formal volunteering activities (CEV, 2021). This method of presenting opportunities and the simplicity of recruitment is crucial because the process only necessitates three fundamental elements: the comfort of one's home, access to a digital device, and the individual we are targeting. Simplifying this recruitment process makes it more approachable, breaking down barriers and ensuring accessibility for a wider audience.

 This point can be seen in practice when analysing the role of influencers as several critical factors emerge. The platform or website through which an individual connects with a volunteering opportunity plays a pivotal role. The choice of platform can influence the type of offers available, the organisations behind them, and the overall voluntourism experience. Additionally, it is imperative to scrutinise the organisations that send out these offers, as their motives and practices can significantly impact the effectiveness and ethicality of the volunteer experience. Notably, platforms like Instagram and TikTok wield substantial influence in this realm, where reality is often obfuscated by carefully curated images and videos.

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Influencers, in particular, leverage these platforms to project a carefully constructed brand image, which may not necessarily reflect the nuanced reality of their voluntourism activities. To further examine the ethics associated with photography, this report will also consider the case of "Barbie Saviour", an Instagram account featuring 'the doll that saved Africa'. This phenomenon underscores the need for a critical examination of the intersection between celebrity, social media, and voluntourism. Academic studies, such as those conducted by Smith et al. (2020) and Jones & Jenkins (2019), have revealed that portrayals of voluntourism on platforms like Instagram can foster unrealistic expectations among potential volunteers. This, in turn, may result in disillusionment among said volunteers when they discover a reality very different to their expectations, and, more significantly, potential harm to local communities. This issue is particularly pertinent when considering the parallel with Instagram users who monetize their content through collaborations with brands. Both scenarios underscore the importance of addressing and understanding the potential consequences of idealised portrayals, emphasising the need for responsible and transparent communication about volunteer experiences. For instance, while influencers have typically interacted with specific products, such as clothing, make-up, or technology, it is becoming increasingly common for influencers to focus on travelling experiences, in many cases commodifying this experience just as with the clothes and other products. Travel agencies, recognizing the potential for positive change, collaborated with influencers and organisations, including for-profit NGOs, to promote voluntourism experiences that purportedly aimed to make a meaningful difference in local communities. However, the inclusion of for-profit NGOs in these collaborations inherently adds a layer of complexity to the intentions and outcomes of such initiatives.

While this trend may have originated with well-intentioned agencies recognizing the potential for positive change through voluntourism, data reveals an increasingly revenue-focused current landscape A notable percentage of travel agencies, initially motivated by the promise of heightened bookings and revenue, have deviated from their initial ethical aspirations. The shift towards a more profit-driven approach is underscored by the Global Wellness Institute's report on voluntourism, which states that the industry is estimated to be worth 10 to 20 billion euros ("Statistics & Facts," 2017). This significant valuation raises concerns about the potential exploitation of voluntourism for financial gain. This shift has the potential to compromise the integrity and impact of these initiatives, emphasising the need for comprehensive, data-driven assessments. This evolving dynamic underscores the importance of reevaluating and reinforcing ethical considerations within the voluntourism industry to ensure that the primary focus remains on genuine positive contributions to local communities.

Influencers, once seen as advocates for genuine, community-driven projects, have at times become complicit in the promotion of voluntourism experiences that prioritise photo opportunities over authentic engagement. One of the reasons behind this issue is underscored by the IT policy statement of CEV (Conseil Européen du Volontariat) for 2023, which points out that the absence of a unified European legal framework for Social Enterprises, with due consideration for volunteering, has resulted in volunteers inadvertently contributing to the personal financial gain of individuals through business dividends. This occurs frequently without the volunteers' knowledge, consent, and/or understanding of the implications involved. Moreover, the connection between the humanitarian and celebrity sectors has been accentuated by an increasingly popular method of engagement, whereby 'NGOs and other international agencies approach celebrities to represent their cause' (Richey & Ponte, 2014). Including celebrities and influencers in discussions about voluntourism is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, their involvement often brings significant attention and awareness to the issue, reaching a broader audience and potentially inspiring more individuals to engage in volunteering activities. Their influence extends to diverse demographics, making them powerful advocates for social causes. Additionally, celebrities and influencers can use their platforms to highlight ethical considerations and responsible volunteering practices.

Engaging in discussions allows celebrities and influencers to shape public perceptions and encourage responsible involvement in voluntourism, fostering more meaningful and impactful experiences for both volunteers and host communities. Examining the role of celebrities and influencers in voluntourism not only highlights their potential to positively influence public engagement but also sheds light on the potential pitfalls and ethical challenges associated with their involvement, particularly in the context of their engagement with for-profit NGOs and creating unrealistic pre-conceptions as discussed previously. This critical analysis is essential for developing guidelines and best practices that ensure voluntourism initiatives are conducted in a manner that benefits local communities and respects their autonomy and dignity. In essence, involving celebrities and influencers in discussions about voluntourism serves to amplify awareness, encourage responsible engagement, and foster a more informed and conscientious approach to volunteering abroad.

The findings of this report illuminate the existing policies and initiatives in the European Union that actively promote volunteering, notably programs like the European Solidarity Corps. These initiatives form a strong basis for addressing not only traditional volunteering but also the changing landscape of voluntourism. The European Union's proactive approach to this subject gains significance as it not only acknowledges the value of cultivating volunteering experiences but also underscores the importance of responsible and sustainable practices within the broader framework of community engagement. The subsequent sections will delve deeper into the dynamics of how the European Solidarity Corps utilized photos for their advertising and engagement campaigns.

This report will be addressing the dynamics of voluntourism through a review of the evolution and motivation behind, the role of celebrities in, and their complex relationship with, promoting voluntourism in social media by travel experiences. Thus, to address this topic, this essay will provide a critical analysis looking at celebrity posts, recruitment strategies, and employing language analysis, with a specific focus on Instagram. In particular, this report will examine the representation of travel experiences through volunteerism in social media, once again, predominantly focusing on Instagram. Yet it is crucial to highlight that the majority of studies have focused on European-based volunteerism, but not celebrity-volunteer dynamics. Therefore, while it is not within the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive answer or solution, the report could provide a basis for further discussion and research.

2. The Evolution of Voluntourism: Navigating the Complex Savior Narrative and Unpacking Colonial Undertones

During the 1980s and 1990s, the phenomenon of the fusion of volunteering and tourism experienced a critical point of popularity (Sin, 2009). The humanitarian incentives employed included a wide range of education, nutrition programs, healthcare, and fauna conservation.

However, voluntourism reading can also be approached using a decolonization lens. The activities undertaken in such volunteerism ventures are often characterised by a mix of cultural exchange and community service. Participants may engage in activities like building infrastructure, teaching English, or assisting with local development projects. While these activities are designed to be of assistance to host communities, they can sometimes inadvertently perpetuate a narrative of dependence, reinforcing preconceived notions of Western superiority. One notable aspect that warrants consideration is the payment structure. Participants in voluntourism programs are usually required to pay a fee, ostensibly to cover accommodation, meals, and logistical arrangements.

This practice, while necessary for program sustainability, has raised ethical concerns, as it can sometimes create economic imbalances and contribute to a transactional dynamic between volunteers and local communities. Furthermore, the brevity of these engagements can hinder their long-term impact. Effective development and sustainable change often require a sustained commitment and understanding of local contexts, which short-term voluntourism experiences may not afford. This temporal limitation can result in a lack of continuity and consistency in the efforts to effect positive change.

Gray and Campbell (2007) highlight that voluntourism can inadvertently reproduce neoliberal and neo-colonial agendas. This phenomenon has been critically labeled as 'the new colonialism,' suggesting a dynamic where the desires and preferences of local communities are disregarded to cater to the interests and motivations of volunteers. The counteraction of local wishes by volunteers may stem from various factors. For instance, volunteers, often hailing from more economically privileged backgrounds, might arrive with preconceived notions of how to address local issues, unintentionally imposing solutions that may not align with the genuine needs of the community. This is a factor which is only amplified by the, often incorrect, impression volunteers may receive from social media and celebrity promotion, being another barrier to recognising the real needs of the community. As a contemporary experience, voluntourism is playing an 'important role in exploiting the Global South through religion and white superiority' (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). Firstly, one striking resemblance lies in the power dynamic between volunteers and local communities. Volunteers, predominantly hailing from affluent, Western backgrounds, can sometimes unwittingly assume a posture of superiority, positioning themselves as benevolent saviours coming to the aid of less privileged communities. This financial exchange, though essential for covering program costs, can inadvertently amplify the disparity in economic resources, potentially perpetuating a sense of dependence and imbalance.

Furthermore, the concept of the "white saviour complex" adds another layer to the development of these representations, impacting the personification of unequal power dynamics, often reproduced by volunteers even unconsciously. The "white saviour complex" can be defined as a patronising and problematic attitude wherein individuals, often from Western backgrounds, believe they must save or aid people from less privileged communities, reinforcing stereotypes of superiority and inferiority (Hunt, 2018; Cameron, 2011).

The advent of social media, a turning point in this panorama, gave rise to a new phenomenon termed 'Celebrity Volunteerism.' Motivated by organisations such as the UN or UNICEF, this phenomenon involves using public and influential figures to amplify their messages. However, the dynamics introduced by the "white saviour complex" can unconsciously influence behaviour, as volunteers may inadvertently replicate colonial-era attitudes of perceived superiority. This behaviour, though unintentional, reinforces power imbalances, shaping the volunteer's actions and interactions with local communities in ways that may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and undermine the principles of authentic collaboration. One factor that motivated and contributed to this phenomenon is the desire to leverage the influence and reach of celebrities for the greater visibility and impact of humanitarian causes.

3. UNICEF Ambassador versus the new concept of influencer content analysis.

 On one hand, a cursory examination of UNICEF's most prominent ambassadors' social media profiles unveils a recurring pattern: the portrayal of children engaged in play, adorned with smiles, or participating in educational activities. The vast majority of these depictions represent positive environments on UNICEF's posts posted on the ambassadors' Instagrams. However, on the other hand, some distinct posts explicitly illustrate malnourished children or mothers and their children – 'a type of image that reproduces colonial stereotypes of a privileged North versus an unprivileged South' (Salvador-Almela, 2023). Volunteers and staff from UNICEF also appeared in these posts, emphasising the collaborative efforts between celebrities and the organisation. This engagement with celebrities on platforms like Instagram and social media serves a crucial purpose in the context of volunteerism. By leveraging the influence and expansive reach of celebrities, UNICEF aims to amplify awareness, encourage public involvement, and foster a sense of global responsibility towards humanitarian causes. Annex 1 provides a numerical overview of the influence that these celebrities have on their social media. Each influencer listed brings a substantial following to the table, leveraging their massive social media presence to raise awareness and support for UNICEF's initiatives. Katy Perry, with an astounding 199 million Instagram followers, joined UNICEF in 2013. Similarly, Orlando Bloom, David Beckham, Ricky Martin, and Leo Messi, with followers numbering in the millions, have played pivotal roles in promoting UNICEF's causes. Their extensive reach has enabled them to share UNICEF's messages with a global audience, emphasising the importance of humanitarian efforts. This prompts the question of whether we are witnessing celebrities engage in a form of volunteering that promotes and encourages volunteerism, stemming from their roles as the public faces and implementers of these activities. Some pictures included UNICEF's logo or added information about the causes to which the celebrities were committed.

 Moreover, we can affirm that most celebrity posts referencing children involve similar activities, namely: playing, moving, showing affection, etc. From these images, it is evident that celebrities are making an effort to humanise the situation, emphasising the real faces and stories behind the challenges. However, the delicate balance between humanising and unintentionally romanticising the circumstances becomes apparent. While celebrities may genuinely intend to shed light on the harsh realities faced by communities, there's a risk of inadvertently romanticising these challenges. This distinction lies in the portrayal—humanising seeks to foster empathy and understanding, whereas romanticising might unintentionally glamorise or simplify complex issues, potentially overshadowing the nuanced and often difficult realities experienced by the communities. This distinction is crucial to ensure that the representation remains authentic, respectful, and does not inadvertently perpetuate harmful stereotypes or oversimplify the complexities of the situations being depicted.

Annexe 1. UNICEF Celebrities

Influencer 9/Celebrities name	Instagram Account (starts with @)	Do they have other social media?	Number of followers (M=Million, K=Thousands)	Number of UNICEF posts	Year of UNICEF association
Katy Perry	katyperry	Yes	199M	3	2013
Orlando Bloom	orlandobloom	Yes	6,8M	78	2009
David Beckham	davidbeckham	Yes	79,2M	37	2005
Ricky Martin	Ricky_martin	Yes	18M	6	2003
Leo Messi	Leomessi	Yes	463M	9	2010

Meanwhile, on the other side of Instagram, it's worth noting the substantial audience of users who identify as 'influencers.' It's important to distinguish between official celebrity ambassadors and the broader field of social media-focused influencers. While celebrity ambassadors are often associated with established organisations like UNICEF, influencers operate within the broader landscape of social media, leveraging their brand and reach to influence their audience. This distinction underscores the diverse ways in which individuals contribute to shaping public perceptions and engagement on platforms like Instagram, with both groups playing unique roles in disseminating messages and promoting causes. Furthering the discussion, these new lifestyles promote independent economic living conditions by monetizing posts or stories on almost any social platform. Nevertheless, the travel influencers (TIs) are the ones to be in the spotlight of this analysis. In fact, voluntourism content communicated via social media, 'is intriguing and people that feel responsible will increase their participation in volunteer tourism activities and develop positive emotions' (Kılıç et al., 2023). Yet it is indispensable to approach the issue with an analysis of where and how these motivations assemble within a potential volunteer. In order to address this gap, it is important that we refer to the Cognitive Response Theory by Greenwald (1998). The theory is based upon the foundations of 'the role of valence thoughts in influencing attitude' (Ibid).

"Valence thoughts" refer to mental processes that are influenced by the positive or negative emotional charge associated with a particular concept or idea. These thoughts are pivotal in shaping attitudes, perceptions, and decision-making. The valence of a thought can significantly impact an individual's behaviour and emotional responses towards a given subject. For instance, positive valence thoughts may lead to favourable attitudes and behaviours, while negative valence thoughts can result in aversion or avoidance. This concept has been extensively studied in psychology, particularly in the field of affective neuroscience, where researchers investigate the neural mechanisms underlying emotional valence processing (Davidson, 2004). Understanding valence thoughts is crucial in various domains, including clinical psychology for the assessment and treatment of emotional disorders (Watson et al., 2007), as well as in marketing and advertising to influence consumer preferences and decisions (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

Furthermore, persuasion is effective not because people acquire the messages or source cues, but because of positive or negative thoughts that they cognitively develop (Petty & Briñol, 2008). In the context of volunteerism, valence thoughts play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes and motivations towards participating in charitable activities. Positive valence thoughts associated with volunteerism, such as the satisfaction derived from helping others or the sense of fulfilment from contributing to a greater cause, can greatly influence a person's decision to engage in volunteerism. These positive emotions create a favourable attitude toward volunteering, making individuals more likely to dedicate their time and effort towards community service (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Conversely, negative valence thoughts, such as concerns about time constraints or doubts about the impact of their contributions, can act as barriers to volunteer engagement. Understanding and harnessing the valence thoughts associated with volunteerism can be instrumental in mobilising and sustaining a motivated and committed pool of volunteers, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of volunteering initiatives.
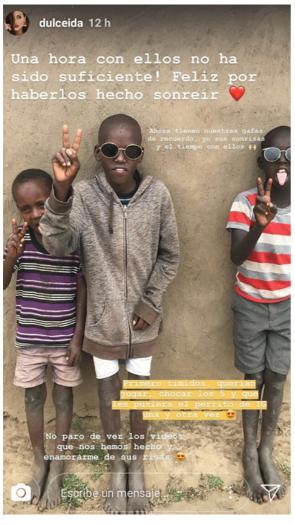
4. The nuanced interplay of ethical considerations in photography involving humanitarian celebrities and their presence on social media platforms.

Previously it has been established that altruism is the main motivation for volunteers (Salvador-Almela, 2023). While others have argued that distinct, inherent stimuli such as personal growth or living abroad were, in some way, involved in the cognitive processes that motivated individuals to engage in humanitarian aid programs.

Yet, the media has affected how volunteerism is represented as it has created a 'platform for broader forms of solidarity, particularly in showing images and describing people's situations in other parts of the world' (Ibid). Denoting the various means of representation, photography has been key to the study. Digital photography itself is harmless, but it is the when, how, or who appears in the image that accentuates and perpetuates certain ideas about what poverty looks like in a lasting way. For instance, in the 1990s, images of children from the Global South were used for humanitarian campaigns and reproduced globally through the media. However, the evolution of imagery in social media has put into question the ethics of photography. Is it moral for photographers and influencers to illustrate situations of vulnerability while benefiting economically from it? Do the photographer and the photographed have an unequal level of power?

Having outlined unethical exploitation, it is important to now delve into a common misrepresentation that often falls under the category of 'poor but happy'. This perception suggests that individuals in economically disadvantaged communities are content and satisfied with their circumstances, despite facing significant challenges. While this portrayal may stem from a well-intentioned desire to highlight resilience and positivity in the face of adversity, it can inadvertently oversimplify complex issues and diminish the urgency for meaningful, sustainable support. It's crucial to recognize that genuine empowerment and progress require more than just surface-level assistance, which volunteerism can provide; they demand an understanding of the nuanced realities and a commitment to addressing the systemic factors perpetuating poverty. Photography, often used as a tool, can inadvertently oversimplify complex issues, contributing to the perpetuation of the 'poor but happy' narrative. This oversimplification, coupled with the emphasis on surface-level assistance in voluntourism, can create a disconnect between the actions taken and the deep-rooted, systemic challenges faced by communities. Therefore, it becomes essential to move beyond the superficial portrayal of issues and engage in more comprehensive, sustainable approaches that address the underlying causes of poverty and inequality.

For instance, in 2018 a Spanish influencer known on social media as Dulceida, was the subject of a lot of criticism during a trip visiting Africa, in which she published images on her Instagram showing various children wearing the sunglasses from her own brand. In the post, she stated 'Now they will have our glasses as souvenirs, but I will have their smiles and time with them' (See Annex 2). This controversial example highlights a new question: Is the developing word being used as a marketing tool? The controversy was not only linked to this unique post, but more recently she published a video in which she was being hosted in a luxury hotel in South Africa taking a bath. The context of the past year was crucial for the local citizens as the devastating draughts left thousands of families with no accessible water. Subsequently, the influencer apologised, and she explicitly highlighted the decision of 'centrifuging' her image. Social pressure and image rebranding appear to question some of these actions, especially by the users and followers of social media.

Annex 2:

In the realm of voluntourism, the critical consideration of photography ethics takes on paramount importance. Many images captured during such engagements may lack clear consent from their subjects, raising significant ethical concerns. Photography has also become a ubiquitous aspect of tourist behaviour, often seen as a modern counterpart to tourism itself (Larsen, 2006). These photographs serve as powerful conduits that bridge different social worlds. Within this context, child iconography emerges as a central focal point of societal representation in photography. Children are often depicted in ways that align with colonial ideological standards of 'innocence, dependence, and protection' (Manzo, 2008). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of such representations. As Burman (1994) argues, while some may argue that any means are justifiable to promote action, the reality often yields a result of 'sympathy for passive suffering' (Moeller, 1999).

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) adopts a significant ethical stance in its use of photos within the realm of voluntourism. At the core of its approach is a commitment to responsible and authentic representation. ESC recognizes the power dynamics inherent in voluntourism and strives to present images that accurately convey the collaborative nature of its initiatives. Ethical considerations are paramount in ensuring that the portrayal of volunteers, local communities, and the overall experience is respectful and devoid of reinforcing stereotypes or imbalances. By prioritizing responsible image usage, ESC not only aligns with ethical standards but also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of voluntourism. The organization's emphasis on transparency and authenticity in its visual communication underscores its dedication to fostering genuine partnerships and dispelling any misconceptions that may arise from misrepresentations. This ethical approach not only enhances the credibility of ESC but also sets a positive example for the broader voluntourism sector, encouraging a more thoughtful and conscientious depiction of volunteer experiences.

4.1 The Barbie Rescuer and Hashtag Voluntourism Trends.

The emergence of the 'Barbie rescuer,' also known as the 'Barbie Saviour' (Annex 3), serves as a vivid exemplification of the trends in volunteerism depicted through social media. This representation, which gained notoriety upon its posting in 2016, satirically portrays a Barbie figurine approaching a young Black child against the backdrop of an under-construction building. The satire cleverly captures the perceived essence of the voluntourism movement, highlighting the problematic dynamics and stereotypes associated with it. The image critiques the notion of 'white saviours' in voluntourism who, despite good intentions, may inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes and oversimplify complex social and economic issues. The Barbie Saviour satire underscores the need for a more thoughtful and nuanced approach to volunteerism that avoids reinforcing harmful narratives and focuses on sustainable, community-centred initiatives.

This development in social media representation represents a significant shift from the portrayals seen in traditional media. Whereas now, social media images are taking on a far more nuanced angle, emphasising various aspects and as highlighted, in some cases taking a more critical lens to the field of voluntourism, in the past images of children in developing regions were often dichotomized between either displaying cheerful, hopeful faces or depicting stark, heartbreaking scenes of destitution. This trend, prevalent in mediums like television advertisements, was further perpetuated through celebrity endorsements that utilised brands as a form of incentive, projecting an image of celebrities aiding in the development of these countries. As Susan Sontag aptly noted, "The way people go about representing the world is always at least as important as what they are representing." This transition in media representation reflects a broader evolution in how we perceive and engage with volunteerism and humanitarian efforts.

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Moreover, regarding the trends that posts include, it's important to acknowledge hashtags. Hashtags are usually employed to provide context and categorise content; however, their use can be both enlightening and, in some cases, rather ambiguous. For instance, the hashtags #stoporphantrips or #attachmentproblemsarentcute strongly convey an opposition to certain forms of volunteerism, shedding light on concerns about the ethics and impact of such endeavours. The hashtag #attachmentproblemsarentcute suggests a critical perspective on voluntourism, emphasising that certain activities, despite good intentions, may contribute to attachment issues rather than providing genuine assistance. Similarly, #stoporphantrips reflects a call to end voluntourism activities that involve orphanages, raising awareness about potential negative consequences and ethical considerations associated with such practices. This use of hashtags demonstrates a growing online conversation that challenges and questions certain volunteerism practices, emphasising the need for ethical and responsible engagement in humanitarian efforts. These tags challenge the subjective acceptance and casual celebration of encounters with poverty and developing states through voluntourism, where individual children with real names and identities can sometimes become overshadowed by the broader narrative of the volunteerism participant projecting their care and generosity (Sin & He, 2018).

Annex 3: Example of Barbie Saviour, Instagram, 2016.

Furthermore, hashtags such as #volunteeringresponsibly and #ethicalvolunteering have emerged as voices advocating for more thoughtful and considerate approaches to volunteer engagement. These tags reflect a growing awareness within the online community about the importance of responsible volunteerism practices, emphasising the need for cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and genuine contributions to community development. In contrast to the more critical and cynical hashtags like #stoporphantrips or #attachmentproblemsarentcute, which highlight concerns and opposition to certain voluntourism practices, #volunteeringresponsibly and #ethicalvolunteering contribute to a positive and proactive discourse.

While the critical hashtags draw attention to potential issues and pitfalls in voluntourism, the positive ones aim to guide individuals towards more conscientious and impactful volunteerism. The analysis of attached images to these hashtags further reveals the contrasting narratives: the critical hashtags may be associated with images challenging stereotypes and questioning the impact of voluntourism, while the positive hashtags may feature images showcasing responsible and impactful volunteer experiences. This duality in hashtag use signifies a dynamic and evolving online conversation that encompasses both critique and encouragement, shaping a more nuanced understanding of responsible and ethical volunteer engagement in the digital age.

5. Solutions proposed to challenge misinterpretation and romanization of volunteerism.

5.1 Change of language dynamics.
This report underscores the significance of delivering the appropriate message. To delve into the intricacies of language dynamics, it's crucial to recognize the influence wielded by the individual setting the caption, who holds the power of language, especially in the context of social media. In other words, describes the situation and challenges by clearly referencing them in the post caption or reel subtitles. Some of these examples 'In Mali, I have witnessed enormous challenges that face people, in particular children' (Sin & He, 2018); 'one of my favourite activities when on a Goodwill Ambassador mission for @UNICEF was when I do get to hang out with former #childsoldiers' (Ibid).

The research conducted for this report has revealed a noteworthy aspect concerning language usage, particularly regarding the personal pronouns 'I' and 'they'. It has been observed that the frequent use of these pronouns tends to reinforce a dichotomy, creating a divide between 'us' and 'them', effectively segregating the Global South, established as passive beneficiaries of humanitarian volunteering, from the rest of the world. To counteract this, the report strongly advocates for the adoption of inclusive pronouns like 'we' and 'you'. These pronouns possess significant efficacy in engaging individuals in humanitarian issues, as they serve to invoke a sense of shared responsibility for instigating change and striving to make a positive difference. By employing such language, it fosters a sense of collective endeavour and emphasises that global challenges require collaborative solutions, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. This shift in linguistic approach contributes to a more inclusive and united stance in addressing complex global issues.

5.2 Reversing the Gaze: Shifting Roles to Combat Inequality.
Drawing on Gillespie's research (2006), this report will also encourage the presentation of the 'reverse gaze' as an instrument of counteracting these social behaviours by focusing on the behaviour of locals.

The reverse gaze denotes a temporary U-turn of the photography preconception of relations; this will involve the prolongation of a stare or a questioning expression. The aim here is that it shames and triggers a moment of repositioning in which tourists turn their gaze on themselves to reveal a gap within their idealised view of themselves and the reality of their, often careless, behaviours as just another visitor. Lastly, Maoz (2007) argues that the power of the photographer is never complete; rather, the gaze is 'mutual' since locals may blatantly refuse to be photographed or insist on payment.

Connecting this to the next paragraph, the reverse gaze serves as a powerful tool to make voluntourists reflect on their actions and confront the impact of their presence on local communities. However, the problem arises when unequal situations force individuals to engage in this gaze as voluntarism becomes a significant income stream. Diverse households and, on occasion, entire localities rely on voluntourism as a means of economic support. Specifically, voluntourism, when not approached sustainably, can inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of dependency on Western assistance. As a rule, diverse households, and on occasion localities, rely on this as a support to maintain themselves economically. Specifically, voluntourism, when not approached sustainably, can inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of dependency on Western assistance. This is particularly evident in scenarios where short-term volunteer efforts do not align with the long-term development goals of the communities they aim to serve.

The influx of well-meaning but transient volunteers can sometimes lead to an overreliance on external aid, as local communities may come to expect immediate, short-term solutions to complex and deeply rooted issues. This can hinder the development of sustainable, self-reliant solutions and potentially perpetuate a sense of dependency on Western intervention (Luntamo et al., 2020). Furthermore, the emphasis on Western-led initiatives can sometimes undermine the agency and expertise of local communities, inadvertently reinforcing a narrative that implies external solutions are superior to local knowledge and capabilities. Therefore, to break free from the cycle of dependency, voluntourism initiatives must prioritize sustainable, community-driven approaches that empower local populations and build capacity for lasting change (Lyons, 2019).

4. Crafting Meaningful Volunteer Activities: Balancing Design and Impact.

There is a critical need for a comprehensive redesign of volunteer activities, within the voluntourism context. This entails careful consideration of the skills and resources volunteers bring, ensuring their contributions align with the actual needs and long-term goals of the local community (Simpson & Dando, 2017). Additionally, a heightened awareness and education campaign on the pitfalls of voluntourism is essential, particularly on social media platforms.

By shedding light on the potential harm caused by perpetuating false images of poverty and misrepresenting the impacts of volunteer efforts, we can foster a more discerning and informed volunteer base (Lough et al., 2019). Moreover, a parallel emphasis should be placed on crafting volunteer experiences that are genuinely meaningful and impactful. This involves engaging in activities that prioritize sustainability, local empowerment, and genuine collaboration with community members (Benson et al., 2020). By implementing these measures, we can work towards a more conscientious and effective approach to volunteerism, mitigating the negative consequences associated with voluntourism.

5. The need for the integration of Voluntourism into Human Rights Policy Agendas.
The incorporation of voluntourism into policy agendas is imperative, as it intersects with fundamental human rights principles. Voluntourism encompasses a range of activities that directly impact local communities, particularly in developing regions. These activities often involve education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and other essential services. As such, they touch upon core human rights, such as the right to education, the right to health, and the right to an adequate standard of living, among others (United Nations, 1948). Therefore, policy frameworks must be established to ensure that voluntourism initiatives align with and uphold these fundamental rights.

Such policies should emphasise ethical engagement, informed consent, and the empowerment of local communities, safeguarding their dignity and autonomy throughout the volunteer experience. Furthermore, integrating voluntourism into policy agendas can facilitate monitoring and regulation, holding organisations and volunteers accountable for their actions and contributions. This oversight is crucial in preventing potential negative consequences and ensuring that voluntourism endeavours genuinely contribute to sustainable development and the realisation of human rights for all.

However, the question arises: can the blame also be attributed to social media institutions that oversee content and administration, seemingly disregarding such critical matters? These platforms enforce strict guidelines, banning the display of female nipples, yet they permit users to freely share images where children's identities and vulnerable situations are exposed.

This discrepancy underscores the need for social media platforms to reevaluate their content policies, prioritising the protection of vulnerable individuals, especially children, over arbitrary and inconsistent guidelines. The potential harm caused by the exposure of vulnerable situations should be acknowledged and addressed with the same diligence applied to other content restrictions. Social media institutions play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and influencing behaviours; hence, they bear a responsibility to contribute to the ethical portrayal of voluntourism activities.

5. Conclusion

This report has delved into the intricate dynamics of voluntourism, highlighting the evolution of celebrity-driven efforts and the ethical considerations that surround them. Through a critical examination of social media representations, it becomes evident that the intersection of voluntourism, celebrity endorsement, and digital platforms yields both positive and potentially detrimental consequences. The portrayal of poverty and humanitarian efforts through the lens of social media raises pertinent questions about the responsibility of influencers, the ethics of photography, and the potential impact on local communities.

 A key revelation is the role of valence thoughts in shaping attitudes towards volunteerism. Positive valence thoughts, associated with the fulfilment derived from helping others, significantly influence individuals' decisions to engage in volunteer work. Conversely, negative valence thoughts, such as doubts about impact, can act as barriers. This underscores the importance of understanding and harnessing valence thoughts to mobilise a motivated and committed pool of volunteers.

 The report also uncovers the influence of celebrities and influencers in shaping public perceptions of voluntourism. Their involvement brings significant attention to the cause, reaching diverse demographics. However, it necessitates a nuanced understanding of the potential pitfalls and ethical challenges associated with their engagement. It is crucial to develop guidelines and best practices that ensure voluntourism initiatives genuinely benefit local communities.

 Moreover, this report emphasises the need for policy frameworks to align voluntourism with fundamental human rights principles. Such policies should prioritise ethical engagement, informed consent, and the empowerment of local communities, safeguarding their dignity and autonomy. Integrating voluntourism into policy agendas facilitates monitoring, accountability, and prevents potential negative consequences.

 In light of the potential misrepresentation of the communities receiving voluntourists as 'poor but happy', the report advocates for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by communities in need. It underscores the importance of crafting volunteer activities that align with actual needs and long-term goals, as well as educating potential volunteers about the potential harm of perpetuating false images.

 To combat the perpetuation of unequal power dynamics, the report proposes adopting the 'reverse gaze' to prompt self-reflection among volunteers. By encouraging a deeper understanding of the impact of voluntourism, we can work towards more meaningful and sustainable community-driven solutions.

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In conclusion, this report calls for a conscientious and informed approach to voluntourism. It emphasises the need for responsible representation, ethical engagement, and genuine collaboration with local communities. Through these measures, we can move towards a more equitable and impactful model of volunteerism, one that truly makes a positive difference in the lives of those we aim to help.

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