

The Power of Narrative: A Mixed Methods Investigation of Storytelling in Social Media Based Social Cause Campaigns and Its Impact on Audience Engagement Among Young Adults

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Abstract

Background: The proliferation of digital platforms has fundamentally transformed how social cause organisations communicate with their target audiences. Storytelling has emerged as a strategic tool for driving emotional resonance and behavioural change among young adults a demographic that is both digitally native and increasingly socially conscious. This study investigates (1) how storytelling in social media-based social cause campaigns influences the digital interaction behaviour of young adults, and (2) whether such storytelling shapes their behavioural intentions toward supporting social causes in real life. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. In Phase 1, a structured quantitative survey (n = 100 young adults aged 18–35) was administered to measure engagement patterns and behavioural intentions. In Phase 2, semi-structured in-depth interviews (n = 12 purposively selected participants) were conducted to contextualise and explain the quantitative findings. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation; qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. Quantitative findings revealed that 62% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that story-based posts capture more attention than informational posts, and 94% reported being at least sometimes influenced to take real-world action after encountering storytelling-based campaigns. Four qualitative themes emerged: (1) Emotional Resonance as an Engagement Catalyst, (2) Authenticity and Trust in Narrative, (3) Platform-Specific Storytelling Behaviour, and (4) From Awareness to Action Narrative-Driven Prosocial Behaviour. Storytelling significantly drives both digital interaction and real-world behavioural intentions among young adults. Authentic, emotionally resonant, and platform-tailored narratives are the most effective. Social cause organisations should adopt strategic storytelling frameworks to maximise engagement on digital platforms.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, social media engagement, social cause campaigns, young adults, mixed methods, narrative transportation, prosocial behaviour, behavioural intentions

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Received Date: March 25, 2026

Accepted Date: July 14, 2026

Published Date: July 15, 2026

Citation: Nidhi Sharma, Divya Singhal. The Power of Narrative: A Mixed Methods Investigation of Storytelling in Social Media Based Social Cause Campaigns and Its Impact on Audience Engagement Among Young Adults. Recent Trends in Social Studies. 2026; 3(2): 37–48p.

INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has redefined how individuals interact with information, narratives, and social causes [1-11]. Social media platforms Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have become primary arenas through which non-profit organisations (NPOs), government bodies, and civil society groups communicate their causes, mobilise support, and inspire collective action. Among the arsenal of digital communication strategies, *storytelling* has garnered increasing scholarly attention as a uniquely powerful mechanism for engaging

audiences at both cognitive and emotional levels (Losada Díaz & Almela-Baeza, [11] 2026; Kaczorowska et al., [10] 2024).

Young adults broadly defined as individuals between 18 and 35 years of age represent both the most active demographic on social media and one of the most important segments for social cause campaigners [12-16]. This generation has grown up surrounded by digital storytelling in the forms of vlogs, reels, personal testimonials, and visual essays. They are not passive consumers; they are meaning-makers who share, comment, and take action when content resonates with their values and identity (Atiq et al., [1] 2022; Hui et al., [16] 2024). Yet, despite the intuitive appeal of storytelling, empirical understanding of the precise mechanisms by which narrative content drives engagement and behavioural intentions remains fragmented particularly in the Indian digital media context.

Existing research has largely adopted either purely quantitative approaches (measuring engagement metrics) or theoretical frameworks without grounding in lived audience experience. There is a notable absence of mixed-methods studies that triangulate quantitative patterns with rich qualitative explanations of *why* and *how* storytelling works in social cause contexts. This study addresses that gap by employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to answer the following research questions.

Research Questions

- To what extent does storytelling in social media-based social cause campaigns influence the digital interaction behaviour of young adults?
- Does storytelling in social cause campaigns influence young adults' behavioural intentions toward supporting social causes (e.g., donating, volunteering, sharing)?
- What qualitative mechanisms explain the relationship between narrative content and engagement among young adult audiences?

Research Objectives

- To understand how storytelling in social cause campaigns influences young adults' interaction on social media.
- To analyse whether storytelling influences young adults' behavioural intentions toward supporting social causes.
- To explore the experiential and psychological mechanisms underlying narrative-driven engagement through in-depth qualitative inquiry.

Research Hypotheses

- **H1:** Storytelling in social media social cause campaigns does not significantly influence young adults' digital interaction behaviour.
- **H2:** Storytelling in social media social cause campaigns does not significantly influence young adults' behavioural intentions toward supporting social causes.
- **H3:** Emotional authenticity of storytelling content does not moderate the relationship between narrative exposure and engagement.

The study makes several contributions: it advances the theoretical understanding of narrative persuasion in digital social cause contexts; it bridges the quantitative-qualitative divide in digital engagement research; and it provides actionable insights for campaigners targeting young adult audiences on social media platforms in emerging economies such as India [3].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature and Power of Digital Storytelling

Storytelling is one of humanity's most ancient forms of communication, but its migration to digital platforms has created new opportunities and complexities. Losada Díaz and Almela-Baeza [11]

(2026) demonstrated that emotional digital storytelling content in higher education social media contexts doubled engagement rates, reporting an 80% increase in interactions compared to non-narrative content. Similarly, Huang, Li, and Yao [8] (2023) found that visual storytelling formats including infographics and short-form videos increased user engagement and time-on-page by up to 70%. These findings underscore the potency of narrative structure in commanding and sustaining audience attention in an environment characterised by information overload [4].

The distinctiveness of digital storytelling lies in its capacity for interactivity, co-creation, and multimedia integration. Podara et al. [14] (2021) documented how interactive multimedia storytelling can sustain long-term audience engagement in cultural heritage contexts, while Barbosa, Simões, and Leal [17] (2022) identified that peer-shared narrative content spread through social networks rather than broadcast commands disproportionately higher attention, though they cautioned that unclear linkages between narrative and organisational cause can erode trust [5].

Storytelling in Social Cause Campaigns

The application of storytelling to prosocial campaigns occupies a distinct strand within the literature. Kaczorowska, Conduit, and Goodman [10] (2024) provided a comprehensive account of how narrative transportation the psychological experience of being immersed in a story generates both cognitive and affective engagement with charitable causes, leading to both high-involvement (volunteering) and low-involvement (micro-donations) support behaviours. This work reinforces the foundational role of narrative transportation theory (Green & Brock, [7] 2000) in explaining why stories "work" for social cause communication [6].

Mang, Pfeiffer, and Bezzina [18] (2021) found that NPOs employing storytelling primarily for public relations purposes nonetheless produced measurable indirect increases in donor willingness, suggesting that the persuasive power of narrative operates even when audiences are aware of its strategic intent. Hui, Singh, Lin, and Dillon [16] (2024) extended this understanding to online contexts, demonstrating through a systematic review that emotional digital content shapes social norms that in turn predict real-world prosocial behaviour including donations and volunteering [7].

Platform-Specific Engagement Dynamics

Platform architecture significantly conditions how storytelling operates. Atiq, Abid, Anwar, and Ijaz [1] (2022) showed that Instagram influencer storytelling enhances engagement among millennials and Gen Z by leveraging relatability and parasocial trust a form of intimacy that followers develop with digital content creators. Suryani [19] (2024) found that visual and community-centred storytelling strategies on public health social media accounts improved engagement but highlighted that the spread of misinformation through emotionally compelling but factually inaccurate narratives remains a significant challenge.

Ersoy [20] (2025) explored the ethical dimensions of digital storytelling for social impact, finding that while strong characters, emotional appeals, and clear calls-to-action increase empathy and engagement, stereotypical or exploitative narrative portrayals of vulnerable groups can undermine long-term campaign credibility. This foregrounds the importance of authentic, ethically grounded storytelling in social cause communication [8].

Young Adults as a Target Audience

Young adults (18–35) occupy a unique position in the digital media ecosystem. They are the primary consumers of short-form video content (Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts), personal testimonials, and cause-related content. Research consistently shows this cohort to be more likely than older demographics to translate digital engagement into real-world action when the cause aligns with their identity and values (Hui et al., [16] 2024; Atiq et al.,[1] 2022). However, they are also more

sophisticated in their consumption habits, more likely to detect inauthenticity and less tolerant of blatant commercial or manipulative messaging (Barbosa et al., [17] 2022).

Theoretical Frameworks

This study draws upon three complementary theoretical frameworks:

- Narrative Transportation Theory (Green & Brock,[7] 2000) posits that when individuals become absorbed in a narrative, their attitudes and intentions shift in the direction of the story's message. This theory predicts that higher narrative transportation will be associated with greater engagement and prosocial behavioural intentions a relationship tested in this study's quantitative phase [9].
- The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, [21] 1986) distinguishes between central (logical, argument-based) and peripheral (emotional, heuristic-based) routes to persuasion. Storytelling predominantly activates the peripheral route, leveraging emotional appeal, source credibility, and narrative coherence to produce attitude change particularly relevant given young adults' tendency toward rapid, heuristic-based information processing on social media [10].
- Social Learning Theory (Bandura, [2] 1985) provides a framework for understanding how exposure to narrative portrayals of prosocial behaviour (e.g., characters who donate or volunteer) can inspire observational learning and behavioural imitation among audiences, bridging the gap from narrative engagement to real-world action [11].

Research Gap

While individual studies have addressed components of this problem, a unified empirical investigation combining quantitative measurement of engagement patterns with qualitative exploration of underlying mechanisms particularly in the Indian digital media context and with a clear social cause focus remains absent. This study fills that gap by using a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design [12].

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, [5] 2009), in which quantitative data are collected and analysed first (Phase 1), followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in Phase 2, which is used to explain and contextualise the quantitative results. This design is particularly suitable when initial quantitative findings raise questions about the "how" and "why" that cannot be addressed by statistical data alone (Figure 1).

Phase 1: Quantitative Component

Participants and Sampling

A total of 100 young adults aged 18–35 residing in Delhi NCR, India, participated in the survey. Non-probability convenience sampling was employed due to the exploratory nature of the study and access constraints. Participants were recruited through university networks, social media announcements, and peer referrals. Inclusion criteria: (1) aged 18–35; (2) active social media user (minimum 30 minutes daily); (3) prior exposure to at least one social cause campaign on social media [13].

Instrument

A structured 17-item questionnaire was developed, comprising: (1) socio-demographic items (4 items); (2) social media usage items (3 items); (3) attention and emotional engagement items (4 items, 5-point Likert scale); (4) behavioural intention items (4 items: action, donation, following, sharing); and (5) content preference items (2 items). The instrument was pilot tested with 10 respondents and minor wording adjustments were made for clarity.

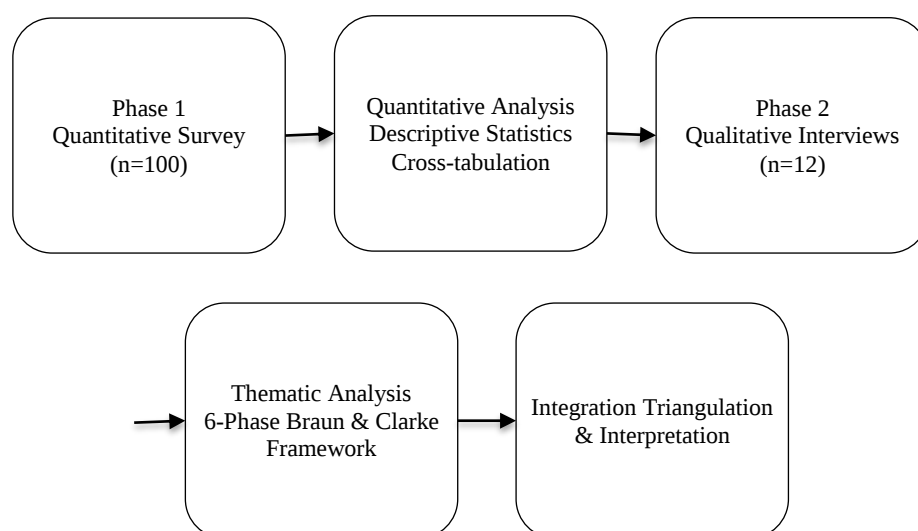


Figure 1. Explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and cross-tabulation. Data were processed in Microsoft Excel. Responses to Likert-scale items were coded (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and frequency distributions were computed. Results were visualised using bar charts and percentage tables.

Phase 2: Qualitative Component

Participants

Twelve participants ($n = 12$) from the Phase 1 survey sample were purposively selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews based on maximum variation sampling: four who reported high engagement (strongly agreed across engagement items), four who reported moderate engagement, and four who reported low engagement or scepticism. This strategy ensured rich, diverse perspectives. Participant ages ranged from 19 to 33 ($M = 24.5$); 7 were women and 5 were men; platforms primarily used included Instagram ($n = 6$), YouTube ($n = 3$), and Facebook ($n = 3$).

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually, either face-to-face ($n = 7$) or via video call ($n = 5$), lasting 30–50 minutes each. The interview guide covered: (1) recalled experiences with social cause storytelling content; (2) emotional and cognitive responses; (3) motivations for and barriers to engagement and action; (4) platform preferences for narrative content; (5) perceptions of authenticity. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim [14].

Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke [4] (2006): (1) familiarisation with data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; (6) producing the report. Two researchers independently coded a subset of transcripts, achieving an inter-coder reliability of Cohen's $\kappa = 0.81$, indicating strong agreement.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board of RDIAS. All participants provided written informed consent. Anonymity was maintained through the use of pseudonyms (P1–P12). Participation was voluntary and withdrawal was permitted at any stage without consequence. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes [15].

RESULTS

Phase 1: Quantitative Findings

Socio-Demographic and Social Media Usage Profile

The majority of respondents belonged to the 18–21 age group (29%), followed by 31–35 (24%), 22–25 (27%), and 26–30 (20%). Instagram was the most-used platform (35%), followed by Facebook (31%), YouTube (30%), and X/Twitter (4%). The largest proportion (30%) spent 3–4 hours daily on social media, and 30% reported encountering social cause campaigns "often" on their feeds (Table 1).

Attention and Emotional Engagement (RQ1 / H1)

When asked whether story-based social cause posts grab their attention more than regular informational posts, 36% strongly agreed and 26% agreed a combined 62% majority. Only 18% disagreed. Similarly, 41% strongly agreed that relatable stories increase their interest in a social cause, yielding a combined 58% agreement rate. (Table 2) These findings provide support for H1₁ that storytelling significantly influences digital interaction behavior [16].

Regarding emotional connection, 31% strongly agreed and 24% agreed (55% combined) that emotional stories foster a stronger sense of connection with social causes. For trustworthiness, 45% agreed or strongly agreed that real-life stories increase trust in campaign organisations (Figure 2).

Table 1. Respondent profile and social media usage (n = 100).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–21 years	29	29%
	22–25 years	27	27%
	26–30 years	20	20%
	31–35 years	24	24%
Primary Platform	Instagram	35	35%
	Facebook	31	31%
	YouTube	30	30%
	X (Twitter)	4	4%
Daily Usage Time	Less than 1 hour	22	22%
	1–2 hours	22	22%
	3–4 hours	30	30%
	More than 4 hours	26	26%
Campaign Frequency	Very often	22	22%
	Often	30	30%
	Sometimes	25	25%
	Rarely	23	23%

Table 2. Engagement and attention: frequency distribution of likert-scale responses (n = 100).

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Story-based posts grab my attention more than informational posts	36	26	20	18	0
Emotional stories foster stronger connection with causes	31	24	28	17	0
Relatable stories increase my interest in social causes	41	17	20	22	0
Real-life stories increase my trust in the organisation	22	23	26	24	5
Storytelling helps me better understand social issues	19	22	22	20	17

Content Type and Engagement Action

Real-life experiences were identified as the most engaging storytelling content type (42%), followed by short videos/reels (33%) and emotional narratives (25%). In terms of most attention-grabbing narrative elements, personal/emotional stories were ranked first (29%), ahead of facts and statistics (27%), images/videos (24%), and influencer recommendations (20%). The most common engagement actions reported were commenting (30%), sharing (28%), liking (22%), and passive viewing (20%) (Table 3).

Behavioural Intentions (RQ2 / H2)

The data revealed strong support for H2₁. A striking 94% of respondents indicated they had been influenced to take real-world action (share, donate, volunteer) either "yes" (48%) or "sometimes" (46%), with only 6% reporting no influence. Similarly, 77% (Yes: 39%, Sometimes: 38%) reported a willingness to donate or volunteer following exposure to storytelling campaigns, and 92% reported being likely to follow an organisation whose storytelling campaigns resonated with them. Notably, 89% (Yes: 41%, Sometimes: 48%) reported that storytelling had motivated them to support a cause (Table 4).

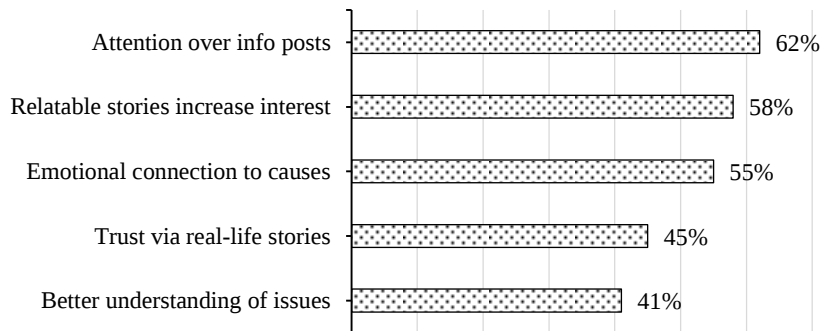


Figure 2. Combined agreement rate (agree + strongly agree) for engagement statements.

Table 3. Engagement action and motivational drivers (n = 100).

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Most Engaging Content	Real-life experiences	42	42%
	Short videos / Reels	33	33%
	Emotional narratives	25	25%
Engagement Action Taken	Comment	30	30%
	Share	28	28%
	Like	22	22%
	Just View	20	20%
Engagement Action Taken	Awareness about cause	29	29%
	Emotional impact of content	27	27%
	Social influence / Peer pressure	24	24%
	Visuals and aesthetics	20	20%

Table 4. Behavioural intention outcomes (n = 100).

Behavioural Intention Item	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)	Combined Yes+Sometimes (%)
Motivated to support a cause after storytelling content	41	48	11	89%
Willing to donate / volunteer after narrative campaigns	39	38	25	77%
Influenced to take action (share, donate, volunteer)	48	46	6	94%
Likely to follow an org whose storytelling resonates	42	50	8	92%

Phase 2: Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the 12 interview transcripts yielded four overarching themes, as presented below. Representative quotations from participants are included (pseudonyms used throughout).

Theme 1: Emotional Resonance as an Engagement Catalyst

The most prominent theme across all participant groups was the centrality of emotional resonance in determining whether a social cause campaign held their attention and prompted further engagement. Participants consistently described encountering narratives that "hit differently" from standard informational posts, emphasising the affective dimension of storytelling.

"When I saw that video about the girl who was denied education because of her gender it wasn't statistics, it was her face, her voice. I cried. I shared it. I think I donated like ₹200 that same evening. You just feel something and you act."

P4 (Female, 21, Instagram user, High Engagement group)

"I follow a lot of organisations on Instagram. Most of their posts I scroll past. But when they share a real person's journey someone who actually benefitted that's when I stop. It feels real."

P9 (Male, 25, Instagram user, Moderate Engagement group)

This theme aligns with narrative transportation theory: participants who reported higher emotional immersion also reported higher engagement. Even sceptical participants (Low Engagement group) acknowledged the power of emotion, though they noted that cynicism sometimes constrained their response.

"I know they're trying to get me to feel something and it works. But sometimes I wonder if the story is even real or just scripted to manipulate emotions."

P11 (Male, 28, YouTube user, Low Engagement group)

Theme 2: Authenticity and Trust as Prerequisites

A second dominant theme was the critical role of perceived authenticity in determining whether emotional engagement translated into trust and action. Participants drew clear distinctions between what they perceived as "genuine" narratives and "manufactured" or "polished" stories [17].

"I can tell within seconds if a video is authentic or not. If it's too perfectly edited, too well-lit, if the person seems coached I tune out immediately. The ones that affect me are raw, imperfect, sometimes shaky footage."

P2 (Female, 19, Instagram/YouTube user, High Engagement group)

"There was this NGO that posted a campaign where the villager was clearly told what to say. Her expressions felt rehearsed. I didn't trust the organisation after that. I didn't donate, didn't share."

P7 (Female, 30, Facebook user, Low Engagement group)

Across all groups, participants valued transparency about how funds would be used, first-person testimonials, and unscripted speech. This finding extends Barbosa et al.'s [17] (2022) warning about narrative-brand disconnects to encompass the broader authenticity expectations of young adult audiences.

Theme 3: Platform-Specific Storytelling Behaviour

Participants exhibited clearly differentiated storytelling preferences and engagement patterns across platforms. Instagram Reels and short videos were described as optimal for initial awareness and emotional triggering, while YouTube was favoured for deeper, longer-form narratives that sustained engagement over time. Facebook was associated with cause-related content shared by community members, lending social credibility [18].

"Instagram is where I first see the cause. But if I want to understand it deeply go beyond the 30-second clip I go to YouTube. Some documentaries there have changed how I think about environmental issues."

P3 (Male, 23, Multi-platform user, High Engagement group)

"On Facebook, when my mum or my aunt shares a campaign story, it feels more credible somehow. It's not some algorithm pushing it it's someone I trust personally vouching for it."

P10 (Female, 31, Facebook user, Moderate Engagement group)

These findings suggest that social cause organisations benefit from adopting platform-differentiated storytelling strategies: short, emotionally punchy content for Instagram; immersive long-form content for YouTube; community-sharing facilitation for Facebook.

Theme 4: From Awareness to Action Narrative-Driven Prosocial Behaviour

The fourth theme addresses the process by which narrative exposure translates into prosocial action. Participants described a progression from passive consumption emotional engagement identity alignment action. Critically, the path to action was not always immediate or linear; many described a process of accumulation repeated exposure to consistent narratives gradually eroding resistance to action.

"I didn't do anything the first time I saw those climate stories. Or the second. But after seeing them repeatedly, something shifted. I signed the petition, then I attended a rally. It wasn't one moment it built up."

P5 (Male, 22, Multi-platform user, Moderate Engagement group)

"Sharing feels low-cost I click and it's done. But then I remember sharing that water crisis story and my friend saw it and actually donated. So even my small action had a ripple effect. That made me more likely to share the next one."

P1 (Female, 20, Instagram user, High Engagement group)

Participants who reported taking more tangible actions (donating, volunteering) consistently described a sense of narrative-identity alignment the story had connected with a cause that felt personally meaningful or tied to their social identity.

DISCUSSION

The integrated findings of this mixed-methods study offer a richly textured account of how and why storytelling in social media social cause campaigns drives audience engagement among young adults, while also surfacing conditions under which its effectiveness is constrained.

Storytelling, Attention, and Digital Interaction (H1)

The quantitative finding that 62% of respondents agreed that story-based posts command greater attention than informational content corroborates a growing body of evidence (Huang et al., [8] 2023; Losada Díaz & Almela-Baeza, [11] 2026) and supports H1. The qualitative data add granularity to this relationship: attention is not merely a function of narrative format but of emotional specificity stories that feature identifiable individuals, tangible settings, and emotionally coherent arcs generate the deepest attentional investment. This is consistent with narrative transportation theory's emphasis on the importance of narrative vividness and character identification (Green & Brock, [7] 2000).

The finding that personal/emotional stories were ranked as the most attention-commanding element (29%), ahead of even visual aesthetics or influencer endorsements, is particularly significant. It suggests that in the social cause context, the *content* of storytelling (human authenticity) outweighs the *format* (production quality) in driving attention a nuance rarely captured in purely quantitative studies [19].

Storytelling and Behavioural Intentions (H2)

The near-universal finding that 94% of respondents had been at least sometimes influenced to take real-world action strongly supporting H2 must be understood alongside the qualitative insight that the path from narrative exposure to action is rarely immediate. The "accumulation model" described by participants (Theme 4) has important implications for social cause campaign planning: short-term engagement metrics (likes, shares) may not capture the full impact of storytelling on behavioural change, which often operates on a longer temporal horizon. This resonates with Mang et al.'s [18] (2021) finding that NPO storytelling impacts donor intention indirectly and over time.

The distinction between low-cost actions (sharing, liking) and high-cost actions (donating, volunteering) is also illuminated by the qualitative data. Theme 4 reveals that even ostensibly low-cost sharing behaviour can have amplifying effects when content reaches trusted social networks (Facebook peer-sharing), aligning with Hui et al.'s [16] (2024) finding that online prosocial norms shape real-world behaviour through social contagion.

Authenticity as a Moderating Condition (H3)

The strong emphasis on authenticity in the qualitative data particularly its role in determining whether emotional resonance was followed by trust and action, or by scepticism and disengagement provides qualitative support for H3. Authenticity functions as a critical moderating condition: when emotional resonance is accompanied by perceived narrative authenticity, the likelihood of engagement escalates; when emotional resonance is paired with perceived inauthenticity, it may actually deepen distrust. This finding extends the work of Ersoy [20] (2025), who identified ethical stereotyping as a barrier to campaign credibility, by offering a process-level account of how authenticity perceptions are formed and how they shape behavioural outcomes.

Platform Architecture and Storytelling Effectiveness

The platform-specific engagement patterns documented in Theme 3 have direct practical implications. The dominance of Instagram (35% primary platform) and YouTube (30%) among this sample, combined with the qualitative finding that each platform serves a different phase of the engagement journey (awareness → depth → social validation), suggests that effective social cause storytelling campaigns require a transmedia strategy coordinating narrative content across platforms to guide audiences through progressively deeper levels of engagement and action [20].

Theoretical Contribution

This study advances theoretical understanding on three fronts. First, it applies narrative transportation theory empirically in a social cause digital media context in India, a setting largely absent from existing literature. Second, it extends ELM by demonstrating that, for young adults in digital environments, peripheral processing cues (authenticity signals, emotional resonance) are not merely secondary routes to persuasion but may be primary determinants of engagement quality and depth. Third, by documenting the accumulation model of narrative-driven behaviour change, it contributes a temporal dimension to Social Learning Theory's account of observational learning and imitation in digital contexts [21].

CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study provides robust evidence that storytelling is a potent mechanism for driving both digital engagement and real-world prosocial behavioural intentions among young adults exposed to social media-based social cause campaigns. The convergence of quantitative breadth ($n = 100$) and qualitative depth ($n = 12$ interviews) reveals a nuanced picture: storytelling's effectiveness is neither universal nor automatic, but is contingent upon emotional specificity, perceived authenticity, and strategic deployment across platform architectures suited to different phases of the engagement

journey.

The key conclusion, supported by both phases of the study, is that *authentic, emotionally resonant, platform-tailored narrative content* is the single most effective communication strategy for social cause organisations seeking to engage young adult audiences on social media. Statistical findings confirm that such content significantly influences attention, emotional connection, and behavioural intent; qualitative insights explain *how* this influence operates through emotional transportation, authenticity-mediated trust, platform-specific narrative immersion, and a gradual process of narrative accumulation that builds toward action.

Practical Implications

1. Prioritise real-life testimonials over scripted, polished narratives audiences detect and reward authenticity.
2. *Design platform-differentiated storytelling*: Instagram/Reels for awareness and emotional triggering; YouTube for depth; Facebook for peer-mediated social validation.
3. Include clear, low-barrier calls to action early in the narrative to capitalise on peak emotional engagement.
4. Plan for long-term narrative arcs rather than one-off campaigns: repeated, consistent storytelling accumulates influence over time.
5. *Measure impact beyond likes* track sharing, volunteer registrations, and donation intentions to capture the full behavioural scope of storytelling campaigns.

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