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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Online fundraising for NPOs via email marketing – A critical success factors analysis in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland

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Abstract

This study aims to empirically determine success factors in the email marketing as a sub-discipline of online fundraising of nonprofit organizations (NPOs). Hereby, it responds to the gap of knowledge as existing research has not in detail touched nonprofit email marketing. To explore success factors in NPOs' email marketing, a detailed structural equation model, in which email marketing success acts as the final endogenous variable and the nine potential success factors function as formative latent exogenous variables, was developed. A quantitative survey was conducted with employees of NPOs from German-speaking countries. For data analysis, which was carried out with the software SmartPLS, 153 responses were utilized. Using aggregate and disaggregate analyses on the developed model, various critical success factors in NPOs' email marketing could be empirically identified. Furthermore, an importance-performance map analysis allowed the identification of the most crucial measures for increasing success, as a low performance of the NPOs faces a high total effect on email marketing success. From the results of the importance-performance map analysis, it was possible to derive specific practice-relevant action recommendations regarding measures in which NPOs should prioritize an increase in performance. Therefore, in addition to its theoretical relevance, the study also has a strong practical value.

Keywords Digital fundraising · Email marketing · Online fundraising · Nonprofit marketing · Structural equation model · Importance-performance map analysis · Critical success factor analysis

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1 Introduction

Email marketing is one of the most important digital marketing tools. It is the oldest digital marketing tool (Singla et al., 2021), but still highly relevant. Email marketing is especially effective in terms of the return on investment (Hajarian et al., 2021; Tien et al., 2020). Studies prove the importance of email in for-profit marketing: 76% of Swiss and Austrian online retailers consider email marketing to be at least "somewhat relevant" as a marketing tool for their online stores (Zumstein et al., 2022a, p. 40); for 83% of Swiss companies, email marketing is a "rather relevant" or "relevant" marketing technology (Zumstein et al., 2022b, p. 13). European NPOs are increasingly using email marketing to reach donors and other stakeholders (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2019).

Online giving is growing and will be growing more in the future, and so are the digital marketing components in the fundraising mix (Chung & Hair, 2021; Sargeant & Shattuk, 2017). NPOs need to make use of digital marketing in order reach fundraising goals (Krueger & Haytko, 2015). In general, the internet provides NPOs with various opportunities to conduct fundraising without much effort or cost (Purwandari et al., 2022).

In a study of success factors in online fundraising, Reichenbach (2020) identifies email marketing as the most important online fundraising tool with the strongest contribution to success. Email marketing can be used to pursue various fundraising goals, both monetary and non-monetary. Previous research related to digital fundraising has not looked in depth at nonprofit email marketing. Individual aspects of email marketing have been studied, including success factors, but the present authors are not aware of any study that can claim to provide a comprehensive overview of the success factors in email marketing, especially in the context of NPOs, let alone give specific action recommendations. Notable exceptions include Haq (2009), who examined consumer attitudes toward email advertising and found that the content and the frequency of advertising messages have the greatest influence of any factors on consumer attitudes. Hartemo (2016) presents a systematic literature review of various email marketing and consumer empowerment studies and argues for email marketing that actively engages consumers in the communication process and whose content is relevant to recipients. Garland et al. (2016) found a higher adoption of technologies and online activities of the recipients correlates with a more positive attitude towards email advertising. Lorente Páramo et al. (2021) propose a model for measuring the effectiveness of email marketing campaigns, which is based on the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model. Goic et al. (2021) evaluate the effectiveness of triggered email campaigns for sales and inter alia found that triggered emails are associated with larger revenues and that the implementation of triggered emails influences the effectiveness.

The present study investigates the critical success factors in NPOs' email marketing. By doing so, it contributes to the existing knowledge in two ways. Firstly, it adds empirical evidence to the discourse on nonprofit email marketing as a part of digital fundraising. Thereby, it fills the theoretical gap, as in the existing literature, there is no empirical holistic overview of success factors in the email marketing of NPOs. Secondly, the findings provide valuable insights for NPO practice on how to improve email marketing to achieve greater email marketing success. Hence, the study is relevant for academics as well as practitioners as it complements the current knowledge on nonprofit email marketing with empirical evidence on its' success factors.

We use a structural equation model with email marketing success operationalized via an index, which is used as the final endogenous variable. The potential success factors, derived from a systematic literature review, act as latent exogenous variables and are made measurable by their indicators, which represent specific steps. The model allows us to empirically determine the critical success factors. With the help of an importance-performance map analysis, we identify those steps that are critical for email marketing success and where a performance increase is most vital. From this, we derive practice-relevant action recommendations which NPOs can use to improve their email marketing as part of their digital fundraising.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Fundraising and fundraising success

For NPOs that rely on donations, fundraising plays a crucial role (Burnett, 1995). Fundraising can be defined as "the systematic analysis, planning, implementation, and control" of activities to raise resources for public benefit organizations (Urselmann, 2018, p. 1). This includes the recruitment of donors as well as forming a relationship with these donors (Sargeant, 2005).

There are different layers to successful fundraising, and different goals are pursued in fundraising. A good image is a foundation for successful fundraising (Urselmann, 1998). According to information economics theory, a good reputation is important for reducing uncertainty, and it acts as a signal for high performance (Saab, 2006; Shapiro, 1983). A positive image can be a prerequisite for donors to decide to donate to a focal organization, as there is less uncertainty. According to the so-called donor pyramid, donors pass through the prospect stage before donating (Urselmann, 2018). NPOs must attract prospects in existing donor target groups as well as approach new target groups. Digital fundraising allows to recruit donors, who are not reachable through other methods (Reddick & Ponomariov, 2013).

From transaction cost theory and information economics, it is clear that recurring transactions, instruments of customer orientation, and a long-term relationship lead to a reduction in transaction and control costs, as well as a reduction in uncertainty and the limitation of opportunistic behavior (Bruhn & Meffert, 2012; Gregori, 2006). Thus, from the perspective of new institutional economics, it makes sense to increase the number of donations per donor and to strive for high donor satisfaction. Furthermore, according to the multiple constituency approach, the interests of the donors must be considered. In general, organizations always should aim to increase the revenue from donations generated, as well as the profitability and cost efficiency. Even in for-profit companies, the various sales and marketing measures are expected to be cost-efficient, while in the case of NPOs, the economical use of resources is particularly important: after all, as much revenue as possible should be directed to the purpose for which the NPO exists (Reichenbach, 2020).

2.2 Email marketing success

Email marketing plays a vital role in nowadays digital marketing mix. Email is an effective and important instrument for the communication between businesses and consumers, and fosters marketing relationships (Almeida & Casais, 2022; Hartemo, 2016). Email marketing is a versatile tool as it can be used for branding, to stimulate sales, or growing the relationship with consumers (Bathia, 2021; Kingsnorth, 2022). Email was one of the first communication tools to be used broadly in the early phase of e-commerce (Goic et al., 2021). Over time, email marketing has progressed from untargeted text-form messages to a visually polished and highly target-oriented form of communication (Garland et al., 2016). Furthermore, email marketing allows to transmit relevant information to the recipients while evaluating the messages' impact and learning what is relevant to the consumers by analyzing and interpreting tracking data, which is generated (Almeida & Casais, 2022; Goic et al., 2021). Compared to other digital channels such as display advertising or retargeting ads, email marketing allows more control for the sender regarding the timing of the distribution as well as the displayed content (Goic et al., 2021).

To develop a measurement of email marketing success, we first define the constituents of email marketing success. In economic terms, success means profit, sales, return on sales, cash flow, growth, or profitability (Bruhn & Meffert, 2012; Krummenerl, 2005; Reichenbach, 2020; Urselmann, 1998; Wirtz et al., 2003). Non-economic goals include such things as market share and customer satisfaction (Evanschitzky, 2003). To conceptualize email marketing success, we consider two approaches that are widely used in the management and nonprofit literature (Fritsch, 2007; Fritz, 1992; Reichenbach, 2020; Urselmann, 1998).

The *goal approach* is based on the assumption that organizations pursue explicit or implicit goals whose degree of achievement represents success; success is thus the degree of achievement goals the organization sets for itself (Cameron, 1980; Fritsch, 2007; Wirtz et al., 2003). The advantages include the high operationalization potential and the possibility of referring not only to the organizational level as a whole but also to sub-levels (Fritsch, 2007; Krummenerl, 2005; Wirtz et al., 2003). A problem with the goal approach is that organizations that achieve the wrong goals, or whose goals are set too low, are, de facto, not successful (Cameron, 1980). In addition, goals can change over time, and not all organizations practice goal setting, so it is not always possible to determine whether goals have been achieved (Reichenbach, 2020).

According to the *multiple constituency approach*, success is defined by the degree to which the interests of external and internal stakeholders are met (Staehle, 2014). Since NPOs have to satisfy the interests of various stakeholders, the approach is particularly suitable for NPO-related issues (Fritsch, 2007; McFarlan , 1999; Moss Kanter & Summers, 1994; Reichenbach, 2020). Especially if there is no dominant exchange relationship with an actual trade-off of a product or service, as in the case of a corporate sales performance, the needs of the relevant stakeholders, e.g. donors, have to be considered equally (Urselmann, 1998). The goal approach has been criticized for insufficiently considering the interests of stakeholders, and the multiple constituency approach does consider the stakeholders, but leaves unanswered the question of their potentially conflicting objectives (Fritsch, 2007; Reichenbach, 2020).

We combine the two approaches explained above for a more holistic measurement of email marketing success. Email marketing – like other sub-disciplines of digital fundraising – requires the setting of goals. However, each NPO will weigh the importance of each email marketing goal differently. Following the goals approach, we understand success to mean the degree to which established goals have been reached, and we investigate the topic by querying goal achievement. Following the multiple constituency approach, we take into account the necessity of including the individual weighting of goals for each organization, and we investigate it by querying the importance of each goal. The inclusion of a multiple constituency understanding of success compensates for the weakness of the sole focus on the focal organization in the goal approach and enables a realistic understanding of success as a flexible and organization-individual bundle of goals with monetary and non-monetary objectives.

To operationalize email marketing success, we developed a specification to measure the indicators of success. Regarding the type of goals, a focus on purely economic goal variables does not seem reasonable. An NPO that is just starting with email marketing as part of their digital fundraising may have low turnover from it, but still be successful in more indirect ways. Nonetheless, economic goals are important in fundraising and must be included. As a marketing approach, fundraising is not only about raising money, but also about developing a relationship between the organization and the supporters (Burnett, 1995; Haibach, 2019). In general, non-economic goals can be a means to an end for economic goals (Meffert, 1994). Thus, there is a need for a multi-dimensional goal construct for email marketing success that combines economic and non-economic goal metrics.

Regarding the origin of the data, internal sources must be used, as no secondary data exists that could serve as a basis for investigating the email marketing success of NPOs in the German-speaking region. Only subjective indicators come into question, since there are no generally applicable objective indicators for email marketing success, and the difficulty of comparing existing key figures must be assumed.[1] Consequently, email marketing success cannot be measured with objective indicators. We, therefore, use the subjective judgments of NPO employees. Objective indicators generally have greater validity, but even with objective data, interview partners may, intentionally or not, make false statements, which cannot be detected without another competent interviewee (Fritsch, 2007; Helm, 1998). Nevertheless, various studies have shown that subjective judgments provide valid information (Baumgarth & Evanschitzky, 2009; Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1987).

We measure email marketing success with a success index. In principle, it would also be possible to measure success by considering several objective variables in isolation, or by a global measurement that combined them all. However, the danger of an

[1] It can be assumed that NPOs define key figures differently. For example, some include personnel expenses in the calculation of the Return On Investment, while others limit the calculation only to the direct costs of a measure. In addition, the need for different temporal references makes comparability difficult. For example, profit is usually calculated over an accounting period of one year, but there are factual interdependencies over a period of time that require a cross-period view of profit (Schröder, 1994). If a NPO makes investments in its email marketing, the profit and thus the profitability of email marketing will be low in the corresponding calculation period. It can be assumed that such an investment will have a positive effect on cost efficiency over several calculation periods.

arbitrary selection of objectives and the unrealistic premise that all organizations pursue identical goals with the same weighting are reasons against an isolated consideration (Böing, 2001; Krummenerl, 2005; Schröder, 1994). The lack of comparability of the results due to the absence of a consistent measurement rule, the lack of transparency because the indicators used by the respondents to measure success are not disclosed, and the high demand on the respondents to aggregate the respective levels of importance of various goals and achievements independently, among other things, oppose a global measurement (Böing, 2001; Fritsch, 2007; Krummenerl, 2005). Using a success index, as we do, makes it possible to consider several variables in an integrated manner. The importance and achievement of the individual goals are multiplicatively linked to degrees of goal achievement; these are added up to form a weighted index value. The resulting success index is high if important goals are achieved to a high degree (Fritz, 1992; Urselmann, 1998). A success index assumes a bundle of objectives with different weightings, as well as the multidimensionality of success, and is, thus, a realistic and differentiated way of measuring success (Fritz, 1992; Krummenerl, 2005; Reichenbach, 2020). Condensing the goal dimensions allows the comparability of the investigated organizationsobjects of investigation (Böing, 2001). Following the constructed success measures of other success factor studies (Fritz, 1992; Urselmann, 1998), the success index EMMSk is calculated by the following formula:

$$EMMS_k = \sum_{i=1}^{m} I_{jk} \bullet A_{jk}$$

$EMMS_k$	email marketing success index for NPO k
Ijk	importance of goal j for NPO k
Ajk	achievement of goal j by NPO k
m	number of goals in this study: 10

With regard to the different layers of success in fundraising, which are explained in the previous section, email marketing success can be divided into three dimensions. *Initiation success* consists of non-economic and pre-economic goals. Its goals include the initiation of donations as well as relationships with donors and potential donors. The goals that address the relationship with supporters, are united under the dimension of *retention success*. Generally, email marketing plays a crucial role regarding the maintenance and growth of relationships (Kingsnorth, 2022). The dimension of *economic success* includes the direct monetary objectives in email marketing. An advantage of email marketing for fundraising and for acquiring new donors is that it is less expensive than other acquisition measures (Table 1).

2.3 Success factors in email marketing of NPOs

We derive nine success factors based on an extensive literature review: quality of planning and controlling, general donor / relationship orientation, individualized donor / relationship orientation, trust building, conversion focus, communication

Table 1 List of email marketing goal dimensions and goals

Goal dimension	Goal
Initiation Success	Image improvement
	Winning prospects (subscribers to the organization's marketing emails) in existing target groups
	Winning prospects (subscribers to the organization's marketing emails) in new target groups
Retention Success	Conversion to repeat donors
	Conversion to regular donors
	Improvement of donor satisfaction
Economic Success	Winning new donors
	Revenue growth of email marketing generated donations
	Profitability and cost efficiency of email marketing
	Increase the number of subscribers

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instruments / lead generation, quality of content realization, and quality of technical realization. We discuss each below.

Fundraising, by definition, is "the systematic analysis, planning, implementation, and control" of activities to raise resources for public benefit organizations (Urselmann, 2018, p. 1). Planning and controlling has proven as an important success factor in previous studies (Reichenbach, 2020; Urselmann, 1998).

Fundraising is relationship building. This ties in closely with donor-centricity. The need for donor-centricity, i.e. aligning fundraising with the needs of donors, is echoed in numerous definitions of fundraising (Gahrmann, 2012; Haibach, 2019; Urselmann, 2018). Targeting the motivations and needs of donors increases not only their satisfaction, but also the effectiveness and efficiency of fundraising (Buss, 2020). Consequently, it can be assumed that email marketing success can be increased through appropriate orientation for donors. We distinguish between two types of donor and relationship orientation: general and individualized. Those measures, that are comparatively easy to implement and do not require comprehensive data sets or marketing automation, are part of general donor / relationship orientation. Meanwhile, online fundraising via email marketing offers numerous possibilities for individualized, need-oriented relationship building. Email marketing can be aligned with the needs of recipients so that each message meets their interests (Bathia, 2021). Therein lies the strength of this digital fundraising instrument, because email marketing can unfold its full potential if it is wisely adapted to the target groups (Prescher, 2020). Customization has become important in marketing (Almeida & Casais, 2022). The donors to an organization and the recipients of an organization's marketing emails are not homogeneous target groups. Each has different subject affinities, their giving dispositions differ, and the relationship between NPO and recipients is at different stages. It stands to reason that different audiences should be targeted differently within email marketing. Organizations can improve their performance by tailoring marketing information to the individual characteristics and inclinations of customers as part of relationship management (Lewis et al., 2013).

An important prerequisite for successful fundraising is a trusting relationship. The reduction of information asymmetries can establish trust. The more trust can be established and the more the risks associated with transactions can be reduced, the more successfully transactions can be conducted (Mitchell, 1999). The provider part needs to reduce the high information assymetries and uncertainty of trust goods, e.g. donations. In addition, legal requirements have to be met for email marketing in the European Union (Heukrodt-Bauer, 2021). It can be assumed that failure to meet the legal requirements will lead to a loss of trust.

Marketing emails can pursue various conversion goals, that is, converting recipients into first-time, repeat, or permanent donors. For online fundraising as a whole, conversion orientation has been shown to have a significant positive impact on success (Reichenbach, 2020). Goic et al. (2021) found that repetition of emails is an additional soure of revenue.

One goal of email marketing is to increase subscribers (Kreutzer, 2018). Naturally, NPOs want to reach as many people as possible who are interested in their work and, ideally, willing to support it monetarily (Reichenbach, 2020). Accordingly, lead generation needs to be pursued: Potential email recipients must be made aware of the possibility of receiving an e-newsletter and/or other email communication, and the email addresses of the willing must be acquired. As email advertising is a permission-based marketing tool (Garland et al., 2016), the consent of the recipients must be formally obtained.

The content of email marketing must be relevant to the recipients. If it is not, "empowered consumers" can and will seek relevant information elsewhere, and opt out of email marketing (Hartemo, 2016, p. 222). Emails are to be found useful by the recipients and not focus on the needs of the NPO (Sargeant & Shattuk, 2017). Furthermore, non-relevant content negatively affects brand perception and marketing effectiveness (Kingsnorth, 2022). Haq (2009) demonstrates that the degree of entertainment and the information content are both highly significantly positively correlated with the advertising value that users attribute to email marketing as well as with the attitude that users have toward email marketing. The subject line is imperative for suggesting interesting content (Kingsnorth, 2022). An eyetracking experiment showed, that especially the beginning of the subject line is absolutely important, as recipients focus their gaze on the first three words (Hudák et al., 2017). Sahni et al. (2018) found that adding the respondent's first name to the subject line can increase the opening rate by 20%. Almeida and Casais (2022) found that two name personalization, where the first and last name of the recipients are integrated in the subject line, generates the highest opening rates. Another study moreover finds that the use of a question mark enhances the opening rate (Conceição & Gama, 2019). The average time spent reading a brand email is about 10 s (Litmus, 2021). This calls for a clear layout with headings and subheadings, so that the reader can easily scan the content. Images and videos are helpful for an appealing visual presentation of the content. Visuals should be representative of the brand (Kingsnorth, 2022). A study shows that image-heavy emails receive higher click-through rates than more text-heavy versions (Lewis et al., 2013). Chittenden and Rettie (2003) also find that emails with many images receive better click-through rates than emails with few images. Yet, newer findings suggest that less designed emails might be better in some cases. An experiment with two email versions revealed, that the pure text email received a by 28.8% better response rate than the version with images (NextAfter LLC & Salesforce.org LLC, 2021).

In addition to the quality of their content, email marketers need to pay attention to the technical side of its implementation. Mobile internet usage is at 87% in Germany, 91% in Austria and 98% in Switzerland (Eurostat, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial that emails display correctly on mobile devices. Dedicated email marketing tools allow for these and other technical requirements to be met.

Email marketing as a part of digital fundraising is not a stand-alone discipline that should be carried out separately from other fundraising and public relations measures. Rather, email marketing should be part of an overarching communications strategy and integrated into a mix of different fundraising measures (Prescher, 2020). We also assume that other organizational conditions such as resources and personnel are relevant for success. Table 2 gives an overview of the nine success factors and their respective indicators.

Table 2 Overview of success factor constructs and indicators

Quality of Planning and Controlling	Conversion Focus
• Detailed written strategic planning	• Links to optimized landing pages
• Detailed written operational planning	• Urgency of the appeals for donations
• Written qualitative & quantifiable goals for email marketing	• Calls to action
• Analyses	• Donation button
• Evidence-based planning	• Reminder & re-reminder in the event of non-opening of email
• Operative controlling: timely controlling of the individual email marketing measures using key figures	Communication Instruments
• Strategic controlling: Controlling achievement of email marketing goal achievement as a whole	• Signup button in header/footer of the website (home page)
General Donor / Relationship Orientation	• Signup form on content pages
• Personalized salutation in newsletter/emailing	• Popup window website
• Automated thank you email	• Checkmark donation form
• Offer dialogue & feedback channels in emails and/or on an corresponding landing page	• Social media (posts & lead ads)
• Promotion of repeat donations	• Google (Grants) Ads
Individualized Donor / Relationship Orientation	• Collaborations
• High-quality data (enabling automation/individualization)	• Notice in print products
• Integrated data management	• Signup at events
• Management of donor journey via email marketing: including systematic upgrading efforts, etc.	• Employees
• Exploring donor preferences: data enrichment e.g., via survey, profile enrichment form	• Download product in exchange for email address
• Technical analysis of user preferences, e.g. via Google Search Console / Google Analytics, link tagging	Quality of Content Realization
• Testing, e.g. A/B tests	• Relevance of content for recipients

Table 2 (continued)

Trust Building	• Relevant / activating subject line
• Sender of email with name and picture	• Storytelling
• Meaningful sender email address	• Reporting of successes
• Double opt-in	• Clear design/usability
• Unsubscribe option in every email	• Visual editing
• Imprint and privacy policy	Quality of Technical Realization
	• Professional email marketing software tools
	• Whitelist server
	• Precise display on different devices (responsive design)
	• Bounce management
	Organizational Framework
	• Integration of email marketing with other online fundraising measures
	• Clear responsibilities
	• Short decision-making paths
	• Personnel resources
	• Financial resources
	• Technical resources
	• Qualification of employees

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3 Methodology

3.1 Choice of the methodological approach

The confirmatory procedure of structural equation modeling is used to test whether the relationships derived from theory are consistent with the empirical data obtained (Backhaus et al., 2015). In this study, the nine hypothesized success factors are the latent exogenous constructs, which are measured by a total of 54 indicators. Email marketing success is the final endogenous variable. The hypotheses read as follows:

H1: The higher the quality of planning and controlling of email marketing, the greater the email marketing success.
H2: The more distinct the general donor / relationship orientation, the greater the email marketing success.
H3: The more distinct the individualized donor / relationship orientation, the greater the email marketing success.
H4: The more distinct the use of trust building measures, the greater the email marketing success.
H5: The stronger the conversion focus of email marketing, the greater the email marketing success.

H6: The greater the use of communication tools / lead generation instruments, the greater the email marketing success.
H7: The higher the quality of content realization, the greater the email marketing success.
H8: The higher the quality of technical realization, the greater the email marketing success.
H9: The more conducive the organizational framework, the greater the email marketing success.

In general, formative measurement models are preferred in success factor research, especially if practical recommendations for action are to be given (Albers & Hildebrandt, 2006). In formative measurement models, the values of the manifest variables cause the shaping of the corresponding latent variables; accordingly, a change of an indicator leads to a change in the assigned latent variable (Fassott & Eggert, 2005). Thus, formative indicators are not interchangeable measurements of the latent variables, and by deleting individual formative indicators, significant elements of a construct would be lost (Bollen & Lennox, 1991). Since this is a success factor study and the indicators cause the shaping of the success factor constructs, the measurement models in the present study are to be operationalized formatively.

The two-step variance analytic approach to estimating structural equation models is based on least squares estimation; in the first step, the case-related estimates for the latent variables are obtained from the empirical measurement data, and these estimates are used in the second step to derive the parameters of the structural model (Hair et al., 2021). The steps are repeated numerous times to obtain the most accurate prediction of the actual observed values as well as to maximize the variance of the endogenous variables in the structural model and the empirical indicators in the measurement model (Hair et al., 2021). It is not only the formative measurement models that require a variance analysis rather than a covariance analysis: Research with decision-relevant management-oriented research questions – where the change in or prediction of a target variable should be explained well, and/or recommendations for action for practice should be derived – calls for the use of variance-based PLS methods (Hair et al., 2021).

3.2 Research design

We conducted four expert interviews to verify the presumed success factors, validate the content, and complete the constructs of the measurement models. Two experts were staff members responsible for email marketing in NPOs and two were consultants for nonprofit email marketing. Based on the interviews, the measurement models were adapted.

We collected data for the main study through an online questionnaire using seven-point Likert scales. With all scales, respondents ranked the statements in relation to their NPO. The importance of email marketing goals was measured from 1 (no importance at all) to 7 (very high importance). The achievement of email marketing goals was measured from 1 (not achieved at all) to 7 (fully achieved). And the success factors were measured from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (applies completely).

Data from 153 fundraising and marketing professionals in German, Austrian, and Swiss NPOs that engage in online fundraising via email marketing are included. Data collection happened in late 2021. As no statistical drawing model can be applied due to incomplete statistical data on NPOs in the German-speaking region, the study participants are an arbitrary selection.[2] The survey received 525 responses, of which 279 were complete. As the survey was also open to NPOs, which do not conduct online fundraising or email marketing, it included different courses. For our analysis of the success factors in the email marketing of NPOs, only responses with complete answers to all relevant questions on success and success factors in email marketing were used. We received 161 complete responses to these questions, of which eight duplicates were removed.

4 Results

4.1 Model evaluation

Email marketing success is operationalized via the $EMMS_k$ index. As this is a single-item construct, no quality testing is required (Hair et al., 2021). Within the success index, there is a bivariate correlation between goal importance and goal achievement for all goals, which averages 0.421. Thus, the independence of importance and achievement required by the multiplicity premise is not fulfilled. This would be unrealistic anyway, since goals with high importance are usually pursued with a higher intensity and therefore have a higher degree of goal achievement (Fritz, 1992). The correlation between the individual degrees of goal achievement is also in the medium range, averaging 0.475. This non-fulfillment of the additivity premise can be accepted, since the degrees of achievement of the goals cannot be considered independently of each other due to the multiple interdependencies between the goals (Fritsch, 2007). The fulfillment of the linearity, compensation, and plausibility premises can be considered fulfilled independently of the empirical data. The lowest index value achieved in the sample is 21, and the highest value achieved is 455. The average value for $EMMS_k$ is 199.2 (median: 202), with a standard deviation of 84.6. The majority of the NPOs studied report only low to medium email marketing success. Consequently, there is a lot of potential for improvement.

For the measurement models of the success factors, we ensured content validity through expert interviews before the quantitative survey. To test convergence validity, we examined the correlation of the formative constructs with their respective global items, which we integrated into the questionnaire and which reflectively capture the content essence of the constructs. In such a two-construct model, the path coefficient calculated with the PLS algorithm from the construct to the global item should be at least 0.7, and the coefficient of determination R^2 should be at least 0.5 (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001; Hair et al., 2021a). The significance level of the path

[2] The call for participation in the online survey was distributed via email and social networks, with the support of the online fundraising agencies Altruja GmbH and RaiseNow AG as well as the German, Austrian and Swiss fundraising associations. To ensure qualified answers, all calls for participation included the information that, if the NPO uses email marketing, an employee who is responsible for this are in the NPO should answer the survey.

coefficient calculated by the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples should be 0.05, with an expected t-value of at least 1.96. To test the indicators of each construct for multicollinearity, i.e., their independence from each other, we used the variance inflation factor (VIF). Here, a conservative threshold value, a maximum of 5 is applied. In the last step of the quality assessment of the formative constructs, the relevance and significance of the indicators are tested. The external weights, which are determined by bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples, are used to determine the relevance. A weight of at least 0.1 at a 5% significance level with a two-tailed t-test is aimed for. If the weight is lower, an outer loading test is performed. We followed the procedure described by Giere et al.(2006) andHair et al. (2021) to choose whether or not to delete an indicator. In principle, the utmost caution should be exercised when deleting, as this can lead to a deterioration in content validity as significant elements of the construct are lost (Bollen & Lennox, 1991; Hair et al., 2021a). The model evaluation of the measurement models resulted in the necessary deletion of ten indicators. In addition, we once combined two indicators into a new indicator, and once combined four indicators into a new indicator, using their mean values. Due to a lack of convergence validity or variance clarification, two constructs are dissolved, and we add their retained indicators to other constructs. Hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 4 have to be rejected. After completion of the quality testing, the model consists of seven success factor constructs with a total of 42 formative indicators (Table 3).

4.2 Analysis of success factors

4.2.1 Disaggregate and aggregate analyses

First, we test the hypotheses on the success factors in email marketing of NPOs in a disaggregate analysis, where the relationship between an individual construct and the final endogenous success variable is considered. To assess the significance of the

Table 3 Overview of potential success factors and number of indicators for pre- and post-model evaluation

Construct	Number of indicators	
	Pre-model evaluation	Post-model evaluation
Quality of planning and controlling	7	6
General donor / Relationship orientation	4	-
Individualized donor / Relationship orientation	7	10
Trust building	5	-
Conversion focus	5	3
Communication instruments / Lead generation	11	9
Quality of content realization	6	8
Quality of technical realization	4	1
Organizational framework	7	5

The Authors

path coefficients, the bootstrapping procedure with 5000 subsamples is used. The path coefficients of all seven remaining constructs have a positive sign and are significant on at least a 5% level. Consequently, in disaggregate analysis, all success factors can be confirmed, so hypotheses 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are verified. Each success factor has a direct effect on email marketing success. Individualized Donor / Relationship Orientation has the highest path coefficient (ß=0.562) and thus the strongest direct effect on email marketing success. The construct explains 31.6% of the variance in success at the sub-model level. The explained variance of the constructs in the disaggregate analysis is 150%. An explained variance of over 100% proves that the success factors are not independent of each other, but that there are correlations of effect between them (Fritsch, 2007).

In the aggregate analysis, we consider the structural model. The examination of the inner VIF values on the latent level does not indicate harmful multicollinearity, as all values are <3. The corrected coefficient of determination R^2_{corr} indicates an explained variance of 38.7%. The value is thus just above the guideline value of 0.33 for an average explained variance (Chin, 1998). The effect sizes f^2, which give information about the strength of the substantial effect of a latent exogenous variable on the latent endogenous variable, are all positive, but very low. This result could be attributed to the correlations of effect shown by the disaggregate analysis. Predictive power shows how well the model fits the empirical data and whether the results also fit data that were not used in model estimation (Hair et al., 2021). Both the positive value of Q^2 of the Stoner-Geisser criterion calculated using the blindfolding procedure, and the RMSE value of 74.64 calculated using the $PLS_{predict}$ procedure, which is below the LM benchmark of 88.91, attest to the model's predictive relevance. According to Lohmöller (1989), a path coefficient value of ≥ 0.1 is taken as the threshold for a significant relationship. Four of the seven path coefficients exceed this value. Three of them reach a p-value of below 0.05 in a two-tailed test, while one construct reaches only $p=0.065$ in a one-tailed test, which is assumed to be sufficient. Therefore, hypotheses 3, 6, 7, and 9 can be confirmed. The other three path coefficients are <0.1. The three success factors in question cannot be shown to influence success in the aggregate analysis. Consequently, hypotheses 1, 5, and 8 need to be rejected. However, in the disaggregate analysis, they do have a direct effect on email marketing success, so they should not be neglected. In addition, the factors in question could influence other constructs that affect success through indirect effect relationships that are not captured in the present model, which assumes a simple effect structure. Furthermore, these factors may not be relevant for all NPOs, but only for certain ones (e.g., only for small or large organizations) (Table 4).

4.2.2 Importance-performance map analysis

The success factors and indicators that emerged as particularly meaningful in the aggregate analysis are not necessarily the most relevant levers for improving success in practice. To identify the measures that are particularly relevant for increasing email marketing success, the performance values must be considered in addition to the total effects. With the help of an importance-performance map analysis (IPMA), which compares the performance of a construct and total effect of the construct on

Table 4 Summary of results from disaggregate and aggregate analysis

Success factor	Disaggregate analysis			Aggregate analysis				
	Path coefficient	Explained variance	Hypothesis	VIF	f²	Path coefficient	p value**	Hypothesis
Quality of planning and controlling	0.521	0.271	Confirmed	2.787	0.002	0.085	0.539 (0.267)	Not confirmed
General donor / Relationship orientation			Not confirmed					Not confirmed
Individualized donor / Relationship orientation	0.562	0.316	Confirmed	2.536	0.05	0.273	0.002 (0.001)	Confirmed
Trust building			Not confirmed					Not confirmed
Conversion focus	0.36	0.13	Confirmed	1.624	0.002	0.086	0.572 (0.282)	Not confirmed
Communication instruments / Lead generation	0.496	0.246	Confirmed	1.6	0.041	0.078	0.012 (0.006)	Confirmed
Quality of content realization	0.501	0.251	Confirmed	2.082	0.023	0.083	0.043 (0.021)	Confirmed
Quality of technical realization	0.234	0.055	Confirmed	1.408	0.000	0.074	0.817 (0.410)	Not confirmed
Organizational framework	0.480	0.232	Confirmed	2.030	0.016	0.090	0.127 (0.065)	Confirmed
				R^2_{corr}	0.387			
				Q^2	0.265			

The Authors

** two-tailed test (one-tailed test)

* $p \leq 0.05$ with two-tailed test

the endogenous latent variables, fields of action can be identified in an importance-performance matrix, and recommendations for action can be prioritized (Höck et al., 2010; Reichenbach, 2020). First, the performance values collected on the seven-point Likert scales must be rescaled to a value range from 0 to 100, which makes it possible to interpret the performance in percentage (Hair et al., 2018; Höck et al., 2010).[3] Everything else remaining constant (ceteris paribus), increasing the performance of a construct by 1% point would increase the performance of the target construct by the value of the (unstandardized) total effect of the influencing construct (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). The higher the total effect of a construct/indicator, the greater the leverage for performance improvement.

An IPMA can be performed at both the construct and indicator levels (Streukens et al., 2017). An indicator-level analysis allows for a more specific identification of areas for improvement. Thus, especially in success factor studies, the indicator level should be considered, since the formative indicators are the specific measures that influence success (Reichenbach, 2020). In the importance-performance matrix, performance (rescaled values of latent variables) is shown on the y-axis, and importance (unstandardized total effects) is shown on the x-axis (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). The importance-performance matrix can be used as a basis for management decisions regarding priority setting and strategy development (Martensen & Gronholdt, 2003). The further to the right a construct/indicator is located in the matrix, the higher is its total effect and thus its importance for the target variable. The importance-performance matrix can be divided into four quadrants, which can be used to determine which areas should be prioritized (Ahrholdt, 2010; Hair et al., 2018; Martensen & Gronholdt, 2003; Martilla & James, 1977). In the *Low Priority* quadrant, performance and importance are both below average, so that the corresponding action areas are not to be prioritized, since an increase in performance would not lead to a substantially increased value of the target construct due to the low total effect. For constructs in the *Possible Overkill* quadrant, with above-average performance but low total effects, maintenance of the measures may be pursued but should not be prioritized. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to transfer resources in these action areas to other areas that have higher importance. The *Keep Up the Good Work* quadrant is where the strengths of the investigated organizations lie. The constructs located here are levers for success and should be maintained in all cases. The *Concentrate Here* quadrant contains the constructs with the greatest potential for improvement. These constructs have high importance but below-average performance scores. Improving performance in this area will result in a greater increase in email marketing success due to the high total effects. Firstly, improvements in this area are the most effective. Secondly, it is generally easier and more cost-effective to implement improvements here than in areas where performance is already high. Consequently, the expansion of measures in this quadrant should be prioritized. The

[3] The formular for the rescaling is as following; where x_i represents the i-th observation of an exogenous variable; Minscale and Maxscale are the minimal/maximal variable values, here 1 to 7 (Höck et al., 2010; Reichenbach, 2020):

$$x_i^{rescaled} = \frac{x_i - Minscale[x]}{Maxsclae[x] - Minscale[x]} \cdot 100$$

delineation of the quadrants results from the mean values of the total effects and performance indices.

A modification of the importance-performance matrix was presented by Slack (1994): The different areas of the importance-performance matrix are not divided into four quadrants, but into four less rigid zones: *Improve*, *Excess?*, *Appropriate*, and *Urgent Action*. We integrate both the original and the modification into Figs. 1 and 2.

Our IPMA indicates significant total effects for four constructs. The three constructs for which no significant effect on success could be demonstrated in the aggregate analysis also have no significant total effects in the IPMA and are left out of the interpretation.

Figure 1 shows the importance-performance matrix at the construct level. The mean lines drawn as auxiliary lines in the coordinate system refer only to the values of the indicators with significant total effects. The performance values of the individual constructs range from 26.56 to 49.36%, with an average of 38.82%. Overall, email marketing cannot be considered professionalized with these performance values. For professionalized email marketing, an expansion or improvement of various areas is necessary. The constructs *Organizational Framework* and *Quality of Content Realization* are in the upper left quadrant with above-average performance values, but below-average total effects. However, performance is above average only in relation to the performance mean; it is below 50% for both constructs. An interpretation, according to the quadrants of Martilla and James (1977), raises the question of whether an allocation of resources to other measures would be appropriate. The inclusion of the zones according to Slack (1994) allows a more differentiated interpretation: With a total effect of 7.59 and

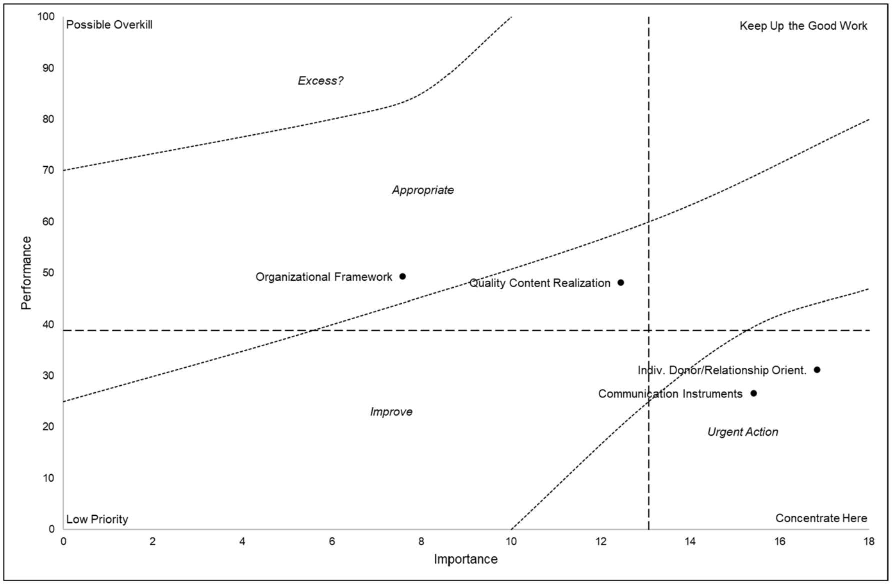

Fig. 1 Importance-performance matrix on construct level. Source: The Authors

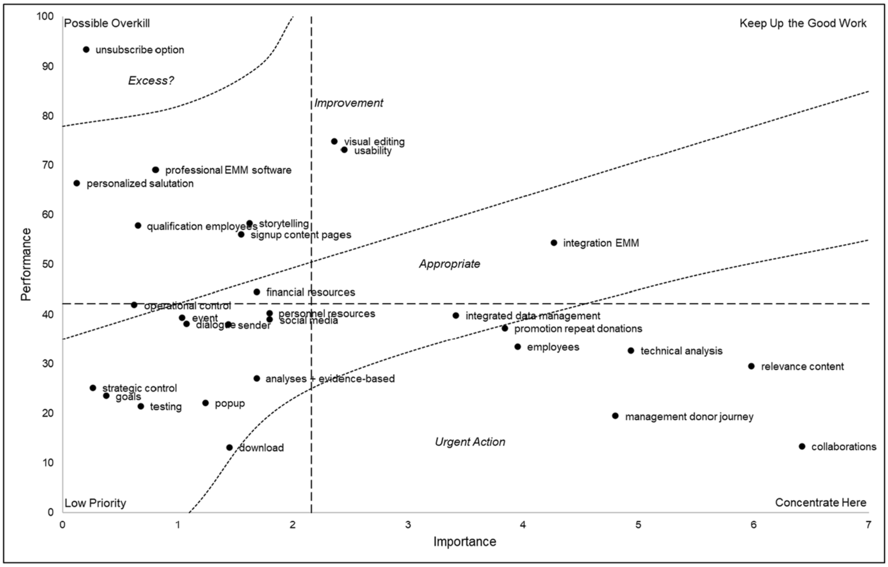

Fig. 2 Importance-performance matrix on indicator level. Source: The Authors

a performance of 49.36, the construct *Organizational Framework* is located in the *Appropriate* zone, far from *Excess*. Accordingly, it cannot be assumed that a disproportionate number of resources is being used. Rather, the results indicate, that the aim should be to maintain performance. Although the total effect (12.44) of the construct is just below average, NPOs should strive to improve their *Quality of Content Realization* performance (48.19), but not with the highest priority, due to the positioning in the *Possible Overkill* quadrant and the *Improve* zone. In contrast to the *Organizational Framework* measures, it is easier to improve the performance of this success factor: The content of the emails can – at least in part – be controlled by the responsible employees themselves, and adjustments do not generally require additional resources. The IPMA on the indicator level will show that the relevance of content is one of the most important levers, which NPOs should emphasize to increase email marketing success.

The success factor *Communication Instruments / Lead Generation* has the second highest importance value (15.42) and the lowest performance value (26.56). With an improvement in performance of just 1% point, NPOs can increase email marketing success by an effective 15.42 points. As with *Quality of Content Realization*, performance improvement should be comparatively easy to achieve, as the expansion of many communication activities does not require a large investment. NPOs should prioritize performance improvement to avoid jeopardizing success. NPOs should expand communication measures to promote their email marketing and increase its success. An IPMA on the indicator level will show which particular communication instruments NPOs should focus on.

The construct *Individualized Donor / Relationship Orientation* has the strongest total effect (16.84) on email marketing success. With a value of 31.18, the performance of the NPOs surveyed is below average and there is a lot of room for improvement. Improving the performance of this construct is the most effective way to enhance email marketing success. Therefore, improvement here should be highly prioritized – first, to ensure success, and next, to increase it.

The IPMA at indicator level allows the derivation of specific recommendations for action regarding the individual measures. The analysis shows 13 negative total effects, all of which are not significant. Table 5 shows the total effect and performance values for the indicators with significant total effects. In the importance-performance matrix (see Fig. 2), only the indicators with significant total effects are reproduced.

Table 5 Comparison between the total effect and the performance values of indicators

	Total effect	Performance
Collaborations	6.42	13.40
Relevance content for recipients	5.98	29.52
Technical analysis of user preferences	4.94	32.68
Management donor journey	4.80	19.50
Integration email marketing	4.26	54.47
Employees	3.95	33.44
Promotion repeat donations	3.84	37.26
Integrated data management	3.42	39.87
Clear design/usability	2.44	73.20
Visual editing	2.36	74.95
Social media	1.80	39.00
Personnel resources	1.80	40.31
Financial resources	1.69	44.55
Analyses + evidence-based planning	1.68	27.07
Storytelling	1.62	58.39
Signup form on content pages	1.55	56.10
Download for email	1.45	13.18
Sender name + picture	1.44	38.02
Popup	1.24	22.11
Dialogue channels	1.08	38.13
Signup at events	1.04	39.43
Professional email marketing software	0.81	69.15
Testing	0.68	21.46
Qualification employees	0.66	57.84
Operational control	0.62	41.94
Written goals	0.38	23.53
Strategic control	0.26	25.16
Unsubscribe option	0.21	93.46
Personalized salutation	0.12	66.45
Mean value	2.16	42.19

The Authors

Only three of the 29 indicators with significant total effects are in the *Keep Up the Good Work* quadrant. Both the interpretation by quadrants and the interpretation by zones, according to which these three indicators are in the *Appropriate* zone, suggest that these measures should be maintained or even expanded. There are seven indicators in the *Possible Overkill* quadrant. Five of these measures are in the *Appropriate* zone, so maintaining them seems advisable. The eleven indicators in the Low Priority quadrant are mostly in the *Improve* zone. Consequently, these measures with below-average performance scores should be improved, but not with the highest priority. Rather, a cost-benefit consideration of improvement efforts seems reasonable.

We place the focus of our interpretation on the indicators, which our analysis has shown to be in the *Concentrate Here* quadrant and the *Urgent Action* zone, as this is where the most important recommendations for action can be derived. The measures located here have the greatest and most effective potential for improvement due to their low performance values contrasting with their high total effects. NPOs should prioritize the expansion of these measures to enhance success. Regarding *Individualized Donor / Relationship Orientation* – which, in the construct-based IPMA, appeared to need strong improvement with a high total effect – *integrated data management* should be improved, *promotion of repeat donations* should be intensified, *technical analysis of user preferences* should be expanded, and, especially, *management of donor journey via email marketing* should be strengthened. Although it is generally assumed that performance improvements in the *Concentrate Here* quadrant can be implemented easily and cost-effectively, improvements in *integrated data management* and *management of donor journey* are likely to pose greater challenges for NPOs. This is because improvements in data management generally require the introduction and/or consolidation or connection of different software systems and can develop into larger IT projects. However, it is not only email marketing that benefits from appropriately powerful and linked data management. If data from different systems flows together or is even centrally controlled via one system, this can result in improvements in various fundraising areas. An improvement in this indicator is needed for an increase in email marketing success – but the investment can be expected to be beneficial beyond email marketing. *Integrated data management* should also be prioritized because the availability of well-maintained data is also a prerequisite for other measures, especially within *Donor / Relationship Orientation*, e.g., *management of donor journey*.

Improvements in *management of donor journey* are unlikely to be easy to implement, since the use of marketing automation is required – at least if it has not been previously used. The initial implementation of automation requires systematic and comprehensive preparations. Though the initial effort is complex, the maintenance of existing automation is less so. An initial investment can therefore create a foundation for a subsequent, less complex realization. Cross-channel donor journeys, which include more channels than email marketing, are likely to have a positive impact on overall donor retention and lifetime value, and thus contribute to an overall improvement in online fundraising success. Also, as the IPMA shows, improving *management of donor journey* will arguably improve email marketing success.

Promotion of repeat donations, on the other hand, can be implemented easily and cost-effectively, e.g., by increasing the introduction of permanent donation/sponsorship programs and using permanent donation buttons or call-to-actions in emails. A 5% improvement in performance would increase email marketing success by a great 19.2 points. Thus, NPOs can improve email marketing success without much effort by increasing the performance of *promotion of repeat donations*.

Expanding *technical analysis of user preferences* also does not require much money. With a professional email marketing tool, several key performance indicators are collected by default, and NPOs just need to analyze them. Because of the tracking opportunities, email marketing is a measurable tool and the data can be used to make improvements (Bathia, 2021). Tracking options from Google are also easy to integrate, provided that the necessary expertise is available. There is also great potential here, as this indicator has the greatest total effect within the *Individualized Donor / Relationship Orientation* construct. An improvement of 1% point in performance would increase email marketing success by almost 5 points.

Two communication tools prove to be particularly relevant to success and in need of improvement: *lead generation by employees* and *collaborations*. Improvements in the first indicator can be implemented easily and inexpensively, such as by having as many employees as possible integrate a registration link for email marketing in their email signature. *Collaborations* have the highest total effect of all indicators, and, at the same time, the lowest performance. Collaborations can be implemented in the form of sweepstakes in which the opt-in to email marketing is a prerequisite for participation, or as co-registration, where the registration for email marketing of a collaboration partner also includes registration for email communication of an NPO. However, a negative effect could be assumed here, as such forms of collaboration tend to produce poor-quality leads because there is no primary interest in the NPO and its work. On the other hand, collaboration can consist of advertising the email marketing communication in partners' newsletters and other publications. In the questionnaire, this form of collaboration was mentioned as an example,[4] which presumably led to the fact that the answers refer in particular to this type of collaboration. Thus, being mentioned in the newsletters of cooperation partners has an enormous influence on success. These collaborations for email marketing are probably not a measure that can be implemented very quickly in most cases. Rather, they require more extensive preliminary considerations and a strategic orientation. Nevertheless, this result indicates that NPOs would be well advised to try this form of lead generation.

Furthermore, the indicator *relevance of content for recipients* is in the area of urgent need for action. This indicator has the second-highest total effect. An increase in performance of 1% would increase email marketing success by 5.94 points. The high total effect shows that aligning the content of email marketing with the needs or interests of the recipients, i.e., a high level of relevance of the content, is of outstanding importance for email marketing success. This is an area in which the NPOs surveyed need to catch up, as the performance value of 29.52% is below

[4] The phrasing of the question in the questionnaire: "We have numerous collaborations to promote our email marketing and generate email addresses (e.g. mentions in newsletters from companies)."

average. Relevant content can be identified through analyses and/or systematic surveys, among other things. Corresponding insights can be generated from key figures such as click rates and open rates, which are output in professional email marketing tools, or from A/B tests. Email marketing subscribers don't all consider the same content to be relevant. Thus, ideally, aiming for content relevance means individualizing content. For example, previous donations can be used to base the content on topics for which a person has donated, or by displaying sample donation amounts based on previous donation amounts. Kingsnorth (2022) preditcs dynamic content to become one of the main trends in email marketing over the next few years. Surveys and profile update forms can be used to generate insights into recipients' content preferences, and email marketing can be aligned to these preferences. Content relevance is closely linked to other measures, as the needed analyses and individualizations require high-quality data as well as a tool that provides the relevant key figures. Consequently, it is not easy to improve content relevance. Rather, resources and upstream measures are necessary. However, the importance-performance matrix shows that efforts in this indicator are important and expedient in terms of increasing email marketing success.

5 Discussion

We empirically determined the crucial success factors in email marketing by NPOs and identified those measures that are particularly influential for success. Our research goes beyond previous research approaches, which examine partial aspects of email marketing and email marketing effectiveness. It is essential for theory and practice to examine email marketing on the level of campaigns. Examples for research on email marketing campaign effectiveness are the works of Lorente Páramo et al. (2021) proposing a model to evaluate the effectiveness of email marketing campaigns or Goic et al. (2021) examining the effectiveness of triggered email marketing campaigns. Also, email elements have been studied, such as the research on the composition of the subject line by Almeida and Casais (2022), Conceição and Gama (2019), Hudák et al. (2017), and Sahni et al. (2018) or insights of Chittenden and Rettie (2003), and Lewis et al. (2013) on the design of marketing emails. Yet, existing research is lacking a comprehensive approach to email marketing, which exceeds the campaign level and examines email marketing as a whole, including its' management, especially in the context of nonprofit marketing. To the authors knowledge, this is the first study to give an empirically validated holistic outline of the success factors in nonprofit email marketing. Our research brings in a broader perspective as it goes beyond looking at factors for the effective execution of email marketing campaigns but evaluates success factors with regard to managing email marketing as a whole, proving the factors of *Individual Donor / Relationship Orientation*, *Communication Instruments / Lead Generation*, *Quality of Content Realization*, *and Organizational Framework* to be relevant for email marketing success in aggregate analysis. Furthermore, our study provides the break-down of these success factors to identify the most relevant measures for improving nonprofit email marketing success in different aspects of email marketing management.

The study reveals that few NPOs are very successful in their email marketing. We identified areas in which NPOs have deficits and measures where they have room for improvement. The most important levers for the improvement of email marketing success, for which NPOs should prioritize a performance increase, are *integrated data management, promotion of repeat donations, lead generation through employees, technical analysis of user preferences, management of donor journey, relevance of content*, and *collaborations*. We have formulated concrete recommendations for action, which are derived from our IPMA. NPOs can use these to make improvements in their online fundraising via email marketing and enhance success. Thus, our novelty findings and derived recommendations enable NPOs to align their email marketing in a scientifically sound manner. Knowing the most effective levers to increase email marketing success is valuable in NPO practice, as human and financial resources are often limited and therefore it is important to not exhaust resources on measures with little effect on success. Based on our IPMAs importance-performance matrix, NPOs can prioritize the measures to be improved regarding their email marketing.

6 Conclusion and implications

The study empirically determined critical success factors in NPOs' email marketing through disaggregate and aggregate analysis of our proposed structural equation model. Our research poses a valuable contribution to previous knowledge on nonprofit email marketing. It fills the theoretical gap of a comprehensive overview of the success factors in the email marketing of NPOs and provides constructive recommendations for nonprofit email marketing practice.

This detailed study broadens the knowledge of NPOs' digital fundraising, more specifically one digital marketing instrument, namely email marketing. The research provides theoretical insights through complementing the current literature on nonprofit email marketing as part of digital fundraising. Our study responds to the gap of existing knowledge, as it is the first study to pursue an in-depth examination of the success factors in email marketing by NPOs in the German-speaking region. It exceeds the campaign level examination of nonprofit email marketing, as it is present in previous research. Consequently, our research can enrich references regarding NPO email marketing as a whole but especially in respect of the drivers of success.

Our study can become a basis for future research regarding nonprofit email marketing and digital fundraising. The model for the measurement of success and success factors can be applied in future studies.

For NPO email marketing professionals, the managerial implications of our research are to benefit an understanding of the factors to make nonprofit email marketing as a part of online fundraising more successful.

Generally, we find a great need for improvement, and, at the same time, high potential, particularly with recipient-centric measures, that is, measures that enable email marketing to be geared to recipients. This finding is in line with previous findings on online fundraising, according to which measures for donor orientation – such as researching donor and communication preferences, offering segment-specific online donation products, and data mining – have below-average usage values (Reichenbach, 2020). The *Individualized Donor / Relationship Orientation* construct has the strongest total effect on email marketing success, but a below-average NPO performance score. Six[5] of the nineteen measures with below-average performance scores – just under one-third of the indicators – relate to email marketing's recipient orientation or data-driven approach. Our results substantiate the existing knowledge that email marketing must be tailored to the recipients, and the content must be relevant to them. To ensure this, a data-driven approach is necessary: Data must be collected, linked to existing data, evaluated, and used to target recipients. The availability of data is a major opportunity of online fundraising via email marketing. After all, every email sent with a specific email marketing tool delivers data that gives some information about the relevance of the content and/or the preferences of the recipients. Email marketing offers numerous opportunities to get to know prospects and donors as well as their wishes – without having to ask them, but by cleverly evaluating the available data. However, our research shows that currently, too little data is generated and too little is done with the available data. More data-driven decisions and a more data-based way of working would be desirable.

7 Limitations and future research

The sample consists of a heterogeneous group of NPOs from the German-speaking region. A more differentiated view of the NPOs in the form of a multiple-group analysis (e.g., division into large and small NPOs) would presumably lead to a greater gain in knowledge, as some success factors may prove to be relevant only to certain groups. In addition, a corresponding group-based analysis would presumably allow more specific recommendations for action to be derived from the data. However, the present sample is too small to conduct a multiple-group analysis; even a division into two groups would not meet the minimum sample size requirements.

The study cannot claim to cover all potential success factors. In general, the digital world continues to develop rapidly, so the success factors will also change with these developments. It can be expected that new success factors will emerge as new technical possibilities arise. Thus, the validity of the success factors we have identified is situational, and repeated examinations of the success factors in email marketing of NPOs in the future would be useful.

Finally, the study can be a starting point for subsequent studies. Firstly, given the continuous digital developments, our research offers a framework for future examinations of nonprofit email marketing. Secondly, the generated knowledge for the German-speaking regions could be used as a base for research of success

[5] Testing, analysis and evidence-based planning, relevance of content for recipients, technical analysis of user preferences, management of donor journey, integrated data management.

factors in NPOs' email marketing with a more international focus. Thirdly, our developed success concept as well as the structural equation model could serve as a framework for the study of other digital marketing instruments, which NPOs use as part of their online fundraising.

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Declarations

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The main quantitative study was conducted in cooperation with Altruja GmbH, which has since merged with RaiseNow AG. The cooperation served to simplify access to respondents and to higher willingness to participate. The study was designed by the authors alone. None of the participants, neither the authors nor the cooperation partners, received any payment or other financial benefits. Part of the general descriptive results benchmark as well as the descriptive results on online fundraising in general were published in the summer of 2022 as part of the "RaiseNow Spender:innen Studie 2022". This does not involve any of the results published in this paper.

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