

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY

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Abstract: *Today, social media platforms are widely used by individuals, organizations and companies who want to promote themselves and interact with different audiences. Based on a quantitative content analysis procedure, this research aimed to discover how effectively the NGOs from Braşov county, active in the social services field, use social media platforms to attract community engagement. A total score of effective use was calculated for each NGO. Our findings suggest that nonprofit organizations have low levels of effective social media use.*

Key words: *social media, proactive engagement, reactive engagement*

1. Introduction

Social media is a set of technologies that give users the opportunity to create personal profiles, disseminate information and populate a virtual space ensuring interconnection and forming social networks. The above mentioned opportunities arose due to the developing of a new generation of web pages in the online environment, emphasizing the components of social life (Obar & Wildman, 2015). Additionally, social media platforms offer the opportunity to interact within virtual locations, through which social collaboration can contribute to accomplishing activities in traditional environments. This opportunity is used more often by NGOs that want to convey their mission to a more significant number of people (Armstrong & Butcher, 2017).

The use of social media platforms can conform to the principles of community development (Murungi, 2018) by providing simple and inexpensive means of communication and information sharing. Social media helps organizations attract their audience without spending too many resources by overcoming space and time limitations and informing many people about the activities carried out (Demir & Görkemli, 2021). Through social media platforms, NGOs can create an „online social capital” (Deng, Fang, Monod & Qi, 2018, p. 6), more precisely, networks of stakeholders to support them in achieving their goals (Deng, Fang, Monod & Qi, 2018), namely: ensuring the good of the community.

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Several authors mentioned that using social media platforms in communities has various advantages: creating campaigns, promoting awareness for vulnerable groups (Audenhove et al., 2019), and mobilizing community members to solve their community problems (Ukomadu, 2019). However, the mere presence of social media networks does not necessarily lead to the effects mentioned above, but the way people or organizations use these networks. The information regarding the activity of organizations on social media revealed that NGOs have an increased emphasis on informing the public (Chaudri & Janssen, 2018), lacking two-way communication (Gao, 2016), and interacting less with users by offering only a few replies to their comments (Demir & Görkemli, 2021).

Thus, a similar direction was launched through this research to investigate how NGOs use social media platforms in their willingness to attract stakeholders for the good of their communities.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Social media platforms for NGOs

Organizations use social media to build communities, mobilize resources, improve their legitimacy, attract volunteers and provide updated information on how to respond to natural disasters (Gao, 2016). Through social media, NGOs can facilitate interaction between communities and contribute to creating strong societies. These aspects are essential for developing countries that have gone through conflicts and now want to achieve increased democracy (Armstrong & Butcher, 2017).

Social media networks can attract social capital, which is defined as the aggregation of resources that are linked to the possession of a durable network of relationships, mutual knowledge or recognition (Deng, et al., 2018). In other words, social media helps organizations in the online environment to implement strategies adapted to followers' preferences and context: what they post, what they share, and to whom they share, to increase visibility and the number of followers. Online social capital is more advantageous due to the large number of people who can be contacted, but also the vast opportunities that can derive from these contacts (Deng et al., 2018).

NGOs should use social media platforms in a way that allows them to enjoy the advantages offered by them. Although no valid general prescription must apply to all NGOs that use social media, the recommendations mentioned in this article can be a first step that individuals interested in attracting community involvement can use.

2.2. Effective use of social media platforms

In order to attract stakeholders, NGOs must *effectively use* social media platforms. *Effective use* is defined as planning objectives directed towards an aspired effect (Burches, E., & Burches, M., 2020). On social media platforms, interacting with users and engaging them is recommended to use these platforms effectively (Nimet, Gokhan, A., & Gokhan, S. et al., 2021) also understanding how these platforms work and what

motivates an individual to use them (Burton-Jones and Grange, 2013). According to Burton and Grange (2013), the definition of *effective use* differs depending on the vast perspectives held by various stakeholders.

From Clyne's (2019) view, organizations' activity on social media should not be limited to just posting and sharing but should involve users by asking them about their opinions, distributing surveys, contests and prizes. Thus, a central element of using social media effectively is to attract engagement (Shell, 2020).

Through the virtual perspective of social media platforms, *engagement* can be defined as any form of interaction achieved through these platforms in terms of likes, shares, comments, follows, clicks, mentions and hashtags. In their interaction with people, NGOs can adopt two types of *engagement*: *reactive*, which involves the direct response offered to messages, comments or mentions, and *proactive* engagement, by starting conversations with people who can mention the organization's name (McLachlan, 2020).

On the one hand, *proactive engagement* implies asking users to like the content that was posted on social media (Clyne, 2019), formulating posts that include words such as: „like“, „share“, „comment“, „tell us“, „now“, „take“ (Mcharty, 2015; Quesenberry, 2019), giving thanks in their posts to the most engaged fans by posting a list of these fans once a week and posting quizzes, asking users to upload their content and testing their knowledge (McLachlan, 2020). On the other hand, *reactive engagement* means that NGOs offer replies rapidly to the comments posted by users and their replies are formulated in a friendly manner (McLachlan, 2020) Also, in their responses, NGOs mention users' names, and page administrators sign the given answers with their names (Macharty, 2015).

Nevertheless, there are other equally essential recommendations to be considered by the NGOs on social media platforms, such as:

1. Posting content with engagement potential on Facebook: images, videos, descriptions, hashtags, links (Clyne, 2019; Macharty, 2015), and for Instagram: geolocation, employees and follower content and newsjacking (Clyne, 2019; McLachlan, 2020).
2. Posting various content: images with people, infographics, anecdotes, calls to action, motivational quotes, carousel posts, educative posts “how to” (Shell, 2020).
3. Using Facebook tools: Virtual Reality videos, instant articles, and lives with a fundraising link attached (Clyne, 2019).
4. Using Instagram tools: Instagram TV, boomerangs, hyper-lapse, Instagram lives (Clyne, 2019).
5. Creating Instagram stories with music, filters and stickers (Clyne, 2019; McLachlan, 2020).
5. Creating communities: recruiting volunteers, employees, and mentors and creating groups or channels where people can share resources and information (Shell, 2020).
6. Informing by promoting awareness through advocacy and education: informing about NGO projects, initiatives, campaigns, activities, projects and community problems (Shell, 2020).
7. Posting online events, calls to action marches, protests, tagging their partners and sharing the NGO impact (Shell, 2020).

By investigating how NGOs use social media platforms, we can determine what they can improve or change in their posts to use these platforms more effectively and implicitly to attract the support and engagement they need.

3. Study Objective

This study aims to identify the effective use degree of social media platforms by NGOs, which are providers of social services in the Municipality of Braşov.

4. Research Method and Data Collection

Quantitative content analysis was applied to the social media platforms of non-governmental organizations in the Municipality of Braşov, which are providers of social services. As a first step, a list of NGOs in the Municipality of Braşov was found in the data base provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity. NGOs active on social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) were selected and the analyzed material was the posts on their social media pages: text, images, videos. The material was sampled taking into account a time interval of 32 days (period between March 9 - April 9, 2022).

The research concept „effective use of social media” was operationalized using a list of recommendations found in the literature, which provides information on how to post on each social media platform effectively (Clyne, 2019; Macharty, 2015; McLachlan, 2020; Shell, 2020).

Based on those recommendations, the data analysis scheme was developed. In order to see to what extent social media platforms are used effectively, for each recommendation two values were assigned: 0 = „The NGO does not have this type of recommendation in social media posts” and 1 = „The NGO has this recommendation on its social media platform”. Thus, we were able to calculate a score per dimension and also for each NGO. The data analysis scheme included 11 dimensions in the case of the Facebook platform and 12 dimensions in the case of the Instagram platform. (Table 1)

5. Results

Looking at the scores (Table 1) it can be stated that Braşov organizations focus more on posting diverse content on Facebook, and some of their posts contain elements with engagement potential. These organizations are more willing to respond to comments received (reactive engagement) but do not emphasize two-way communication through their interactive posts (proactive engagement). In the case of the „calls to action” dimension, NGOs did not get any points, which might be explained by the fact that they are providers of social services and do not operate in the field of activism to organize marches or protests. NGOs scarcely tag partners such as financiers, companies and other NGOs in their posts. Also, the potential offered by the Facebook platform through the presence of Facebook tools and the possibility to recruit human resources are used very little by the NGOs.

Table 1

Effective use of Facebook platforms by the social services NGOs from Braşov

Effective use of Facebook concept's dimensions	Scores obtained by the NGOs	Maximum possible per dimension
Facebook tools	3	64
Proactive engagement	6	144
Reactive engagement	14	22
Diversity of posts	66	96
Promoting awareness through education and advocacy	33	102
Building communities	4	80
Sharing the NGO's impact	28	64
Online events on Facebook	1	48
Posts with engagement potential	69	128
Calls to action	0	80
Tagging partners	12	64

It can be stated that the values obtained by NGOs (Table 1) on these dimensions are closer to the minimum scores than to the maximum possible ones, which indicates a low degree of effective use of social media platforms.

Diversity of post dimension: Out of 16 NGOs active on Facebook, most have posted images (N=15) and calls to involvement on their pages (N=11), 5 of them have posted infographics and only 2 of them have educational posts and motivational quotes.

Promoting awareness through education and advocacy: Most NGOs inform about their activities (N=12) and the community problems on their Facebook pages (N=11). Fewer NGOs present their initiatives (N=2) and projects (N=3) and only one NGO has exposed its mission.

Posts with engagement potential on Facebook: All the organizations analysed posted images on their Facebook pages (N=16), 11 posted videos, and 6 included links in their posts. Among those NGOs who post hashtags (N=12), 8 of them use between 3 and more than 5 hashtags, and only 3 NGOs use between 1 and 3 hashtags.

Similar to Facebook, on Instagram, NGOs are only focused on presenting themselves on this platform to a greater extent than interacting with people, having lower scores on proactive engagement and reactive engagement (Table 2). Those deficient scores are also because an even smaller number of NGOs are active on Instagram than on Facebook.

On three dimensions, namely: "Instagram tools", "Online events" and "Calls to action" the 8 NGOs analysed have scored 0 points. Though, the higher scores were found in case of the "diversity of posts" dimension, "posts with engagement potential" and "promoting awareness through education and advocacy" indicating another similarity found on the Facebook platform too (Table 2).

Table 2

Effective use of Instagram platforms by the social services NGOs from Braşov

Effective use of Facebook concept dimensions	Scores obtained by the NGOs	Maximum possible per dimension
Instagram video tools	0	32
Proactive engagement	1	48
Reactive engagement	1	16
Instagram stories	4	40
Diversity of posts	18	56
Promoting awareness through education and advocacy	11	56
Building communities	3	30
Sharing the NGO's impact	7	32
Online events on Instagram	0	48
Posts with engagement potential	18	56
Calls to action	0	40
Tagging partners	5	32

6. Discussion

The study results showed us that NGOs from Braşov Municipality registered low scores of effective social media use on both platforms: Facebook and Instagram. In the reactive engagement dimension, organizations respond on Facebook to a lesser extent to received comments and do not try to attract their users through types of posts with an increased character of interactivity (proactive engagement). No type of engagement can be found on Instagram, although the platform provides NGOs with free video tools, which are not used.

The exposed data show many elements of proactive engagement on Facebook that were not addressed by organizations at all. Here we can remember: creating a list with the fan of the month, posts written by organizations containing keywords such as: "post", "comment", "send", "tell us", "new", "now", etc., encouraging users to ask them questions and post content, posting contests or testing users' knowledge.

NGO activity on Instagram is lower than on Facebook, indicating a tendency for these organizations to focus their posted content on a single audience. Also, some organizations synchronize their content posted on Facebook and Instagram, treating the features of the two platforms interchangeably.

7. Conclusion

This study showed that the NGOs from Braşov Municipality, active in the social services field, used social media platforms to a lesser extent for interacting with their communities, with a low score of social media effective use. There are several recommendations that these NGOs can adopt in the future: using the interactive video tools available on the Instagram platform: live, boomerang, hyper-lapse and Instagram TV and Facebook tools.

Involvement and reactivity are recommended on both platforms: Facebook and Instagram, by starting a dialogue with users, using interactive posts as a helpful method. As a consequence, users may be more interested in organizations' social media pages.

Organizations should focus their activity on more than just one platform. Also, synchronizing the same post on multiple platforms is not indicated. It may not attract much user interest because audiences can be different on each social media platform.

External factors such as time limits, low budget and unskilled personnel in social media marketing, may have an important impact on the given results. Thus, starting from the results obtained from the research, we created a guide with basic elements regarding ways to improve the activity of NGOs on the 2 platforms (Facebook and Instagram). This guide was sent to all NGOs in Brasov Municipality, and their feedback was positive.

8. Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

A limitation of this research is that the analysis carried out on the organization's posts focused on a predetermined time frame, and is not representative of the entire activity of NGOs on social media platforms. However, the research results have given us the possibility to create a series of social media effective use recommendations that can be useful to NGOs in the future.

Further research that will focus on the same theme should insist on the trends captured in the posts of non-governmental organizations and compare the perception of the social media activity of NGOs, seen from the perspective of the staff employed in these organizations, with the data collected by the researchers through content analysis.

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