CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN A DEVELOPING NATION

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ABSTRACT

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a vital role in the socio-economic development of developing nations. Specifically, NGOs help to bridge the gap between the economically disadvantaged and the advantaged. Undoubtedly, NGOs are the key drivers of societal support and good behaviour promotion in the society. Notwithstanding the value of NGOs, a plethora of studies have cited that NGOs struggle with raising funds to support their ongoing initiatives. Using an exploratory literature review approach, this study proposes the use of content marketing strategies as a tool to attract new donors while maintaining existing sponsors for NGOs in South Africa. Content marketing is a cost-effective marketing tool that can be used to build relationships with NGO stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

The phrase "*content is king*" was popularised by Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, in 1996 (Müller & Christandl, 2019). To date, content plays a central role in marketing (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Müller & Christandl, 2019). Content allows organisations to engage with customers effectively (Müller & Christandl, 2019). According to Holliman and Rowley (2014), content includes dynamic or static content on web pages, such as podcasts, videos, interactive product selectors, and user-generated content. Over the past decades, there has been an increase in the use of content marketing by various organisations (Baker, 2022; du Plessis, 2017; Müller & Christandl, 2019), but the use of content marketing among NGOs has not been fully addressed in the literature. According to Baker (2022), content marketing "*is the process of planning, creating, distributing, sharing, and publishing content via channels such as social media, blogs, websites, podcasts, apps, press releases, print publications, and more. The goal is to reach your target audience and increase brand awareness, sales, engagement, and loyalty.*" In concurrence, Muller and Christandl (2019) asserted that content marketing engages customers at the appropriate buying point, such that it encourages them to convert into a beneficial business outcome. Although this definition

characterises content marketing, it fails to provide clear applicability to NGOs. Yodelpop (2021) provides a suitable content marketing definition for NGOs, stating that it is "*to create and distribute valuable, relevant, and consistent content, in an [endeavour] to attract and retain a clearly defined audience, and ultimately, to drive that audience to take action that advances the organisation's mission.*" Noteworthy, NGOs exist not to make a profit but to add value to society through their activities (Baglioni et al., 2017; Choto et al., 2020). Charitable donations and funding from individuals, groups, and private or public institutions are the main sources of lifeblood for NGOs (Choto et al., 2020). In South Africa, NGOs source their funding from donors, sponsorships from individuals or corporations, investments, the government, fundraising services, and product sales (Wambugu, 2022). Therefore, attracting new funding streams and maintaining existing ones is an important task for NGOs.

The use of content marketing is cost-effective, and it is a modernistic marketing tool for building a relationship with the intended audience (Baker, 2022; du Plessis, 2017; Rose, 2016; Yodelpop, 2021). A content marketing guru, Rose (2016), posited that content marketing could attract potential customers three times better than paid search advertising. However, NGOs are more concerned with establishing and retaining relations with their stakeholders, such as donors and funders (Miragaia et al., 2017). Furthermore, Miragaia et al. (2017) state that stakeholders can be the source or demise of any organisation. In the case of NGOs, without the support of stakeholders through their contributions, it can result in the demise of the organisation. With the death of an NGO, the community being served also suffers a negative impact. Therefore, NGOs need to survive, expand and further cater for the communities' needs (Baglioni et al., 2017; Choto et al., 2020). Previous studies have also cited the challenges that NGOs face, especially in raising funding (Baglioni et al., 2017; Choto et al., 2020; Mitchell & Clark, 2019; Santos et al., 2021; Tahir et al., 2021; Wambugu, 2022). Hence, NGOs resort to various fundraising strategies.

In developing nations like South Africa, the levels of inequalities are rife (Choto et al., 2020) as compared to developed nations. In some studies, South Africa is regarded as the most unequal nation in the world. About half of South Africans live below the poverty datum line, with high levels of unemployment and an ever-increasing cost of living (Breakfast et al., 1994; Francis & Webster, 2019; Nyahodza & Higgs, 2017). Moreover, Baglioni et al. (2017) postulated that the risk of undernourishment is lower in developed countries as compared to developing countries.

For South Africa, the negative impacts of social and economic segregation and discrimination from the apartheid era are still a reference to current social and economic challenges (Choto et al., 2020; Ndinga-Kanga et al., 2020; Nyahodza & Higgs, 2017). Other researchers point to poor governance (Breakfast et al., 1994; Bushe, 2019; Francis & Webster, 2019), highlighting that the widening of the inequalities is a recent phenomenon (Francis & Webster, 2019). Despite the arguments about the causes of the increasing degradation of the socio-economic status of South Africa, NGOs within South Africa have emerged as community development architects (Choto et al., 2020). The role of NGOs is fundamental in South Africa as a developing nation (Wambugu, 2022).

With the above background in mind, the primary objective of this study is to propose content marketing strategies for NGOs in South Africa to assist with attracting new donors and maintaining existing funders, in turn, fortifying their sustainability. In this study, we argue that using content marketing by NGOs will position them in the limelight, which will likely draw the attention of new donors. Also, existing donors will be driven to continue their association with an NGO that is widely known. For the remainder of this paper, (2) the Research Design used in this study is discussed, (3) a topic under the heading "NGOs in South Africa" is addressed, followed by (4) Content Marketing Framework for NGOs, then (5) Discussion and Conclusion, and lastly (6) Avenues for Further Research.

Research Design
In this study, an exploratory study method in the form of a literature review was used. In the search protocol, the main keywords used were "NGO" and "content marketing." Google Scholar and Web of Science were the main data sources used to retrieve peer-reviewed journal articles. After screening the articles, some of the peer-reviewed papers were purposively excluded from this study due to a lack of relevance. Additionally, non-peer-reviewed sources such as reports, books, and professional blogs were also consulted in this study.

Theoretical Overview: NGOs in South Africa
In South Africa, NGOs are regarded as non-profit organisations. NGOs are also associated with community-based organisations (CBO) and faith-based organisations (FBO). The founding documents of an NGO must comply with the provisions of Section 12 (A-O) of the Non-profit Organisations Act, 1997 (Act 71 of 1997) (Republic of South Africa, 1997; South African Government, 2022). Registering the NGO improves its credibility and avails funding opportunities, allows the NGO to open a bank account, and helps the NGO with tax incentives (South African Government, 2022).

According to Choto (2019), NGOs emerged to address the inequalities that were caused by the apartheid era. Their goal was to help to rebuild the socio-economic stability in South Africa. Hence, much of the work carried out by NGOs is to help underprivileged communities, be it healthcare, education, or poverty alleviation. However, the current crisis in South Africa is also attributed to the ineffective management of state resources (Francis & Webster, 2019; Nyahodza & Higgs, 2017). Despite the cause of socio-economic challenges in South Africa, communities still suffer, hence, NGOs help alleviate the plight of these economically disadvantaged people.

Content Marketing Strategy Framework for NGOs
To develop an effective content marketing strategy, an adapted framework for content marketing strategy by Tucker (2013) is used. The original framework had four constructs which are (a) Readers' goals, (b) Your objectives, (c) Content topics and Tone of voice. To get a return on investments, these four main areas need to be defined to create quality and useful content for the intended target audience (Tucker, 2013). However, this model was designed more specifically for the profit-driven organisation. To effectively particularise the framework to NGOs, the researchers

in this study added three new constructs derived from literature, which are (1) choose content channels, (2) distribute the content, and (3) analyse and measure results.

This is shown in the proposed framework for NGO Content Marketing Strategy in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Content Marketing Strategy Framework for NGOs

Stakeholders' Goals

Stakeholders refer to individuals or groups or institutions with a direct or indirect interest in the affairs of the NGO. Significantly, stakeholders can have a positive or negative influence on the success of any organisation (Freeman et al., 2021; Freudenreich, et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2018). In this study, stakeholders refer to the individual or group donors, and government and corporate sponsors (private or public), etc. NGOs should clearly conduct research to understand the goals of each of their stakeholders as this will help to curate content that is appealing to them. The important questions to ask at this stage are:

- Who are our stakeholders?
- What are our stakeholders' needs, goals, and objectives?

NGO's Objectives

It is important for the NGO to also understand its objectives in using a content marketing strategy. In the creation of content for dissemination, the NGO should not deviate from its core objectives. Created content should complement existing organisational objectives (Baker, 2022; Schrage et al., 2019). Usually, the main goal for NGOs is to persuade and attract new donors and sponsors while maintaining existing ones. The key questions to ask at this stage are:

- What are our NGO's objectives?
- What are the main objectives of using the content strategy?
- How does the content strategy align with our NGO's objectives?

Content Topics

The NGO should be clear on what topics and subject matters they should be covering. The content topics should be aligned with the type of stakeholders (Baker, 2022; Tucker, 2013; Yodelpop, 2021) and the NGO's objectives. At this stage, the NGO should understand their stakeholders and what content will be informative and drive them to positive action towards the NGO. Questions to ask at this stage are:

- What are the main topic areas that the NGO should publish on?
- What will be the main subject areas to focus on?

Tone of Voice

The tone of voice can both relate to text, imagery, audio, or video content (Tucker, 2013). The content use should clearly represent the NGO brand. The rule to use in this instance is "fit for purpose" (Baker, 2022). The tone of voice to be used should be approved by the NGO's content marketing manager. The questions to ask here are:

- How will the NGO say what they want to say?
- What style will the NGO adopt?
- How will the NGO maintain a consistent style across all its marketing communications?

Choose Content Channels

After selecting the content topics and tone of voice, it is essential for the NGO to decide the content channels to use to convey the created content for the desired audience. Content channels can be social media pages or NGO websites. The NGO should first research the channels that are often used by their targeted audience. Questions to ask are:

- Which are the best content channels to use that are suitable for our desired audience?
- How often will the content channel be used?

Distribute the Content

The created content needs to be distributed to the intended audience using the chosen content channels (Baker, 2022). The NGO needs to decide when the content will be shared with their stakeholders. A social media or editorial content calendar can be used to set content posting schedules (Baker, 2022). The use of a calendar helps to ensure that everyone within the NGO is informed of when and what content will be shared. Questions to ask here are:

- When should the content be shared?

- Who is responsible for ensuring that the content is shared?

Analyse and Measure Results

Once points 1 to 6 have been decided, it is vital that results are measured and analysed. This helps to determine the effectiveness of the content shared and adjust where necessary (Baker, 2022). Employing measuring tools is an important task to ensure that the desired success is achieved (Jara et al., 2018; Jiang et al., 2013). Various tools can be used for content marketing strategy analytics, such as Google Analytics, HubSpot Marketing Analytics Software, SharedCount, Sprout Social, etc. (Baker, 2022). Questions to ask here are:

- Has the intended audience been reached?
- How can we improve the results we have obtained?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature highlighted the importance of NGOs in developing countries. Notably, NGOs help to solve and manage societal challenges that are often neglected by public actors. Notwithstanding their value to communities, NGOs struggle with raising the funds necessary for them to sustain or expand their operations. In this study, the researcher argues the use of content marketing strategies to lure potential donors and sponsors. Content marketing is an emerging tool that is cost-effective and can yield desired marketing results.

A content marketing strategy framework (Figure 4.1) has been created based on the reviewed literature. The framework describes a step-by-step process that an NGO can take to plan and implement a content marketing strategy. There are individuals or groups or organisations with resources at their disposal to fund non-profit entities, but if the NGO's operation or existence is not known, it is difficult for the NGO to get the support they need. In this case, content marketing is a tool to showcase what the NGO does and as well plead with potential donors and sponsors for support.

- *Theoretical Contributions*: In this study, Tucker's (2013) model has been extended to explain how an NGO can plan and implement a content marketing strategy. New constructs were added to the model which include (a) choosing content channels, (b) distributing the content, and (c) analysing and measuring results. The original model lacked applicability to NGOs and also did not have a clear pathway for determining the usefulness of the content shared.
- *Managerial Implications*: NGO owners and managers can use the proposed framework to market their NGO operations to attract new donors and maintain existing ones. The framework provides a clear step-by-step process that the NGO can follow when deciding on its content marketing strategy.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study was based on an exploratory literature review. Further studies can focus on an empirical study examining the usefulness of content marketing among NGOs. A comparison between developed versus developing nations can be made.

Further studies can also focus on the effectiveness of various content marketing strategies using at least two NGO case studies. By empirically evaluating content marketing strategies, it will help to decide on the best content channels and as well content to be shared with target audiences.

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