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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TOOL FOR GRANT PROJECTS: THE EXPERIENCE OF RETREAT CAMP

The article is devoted to the analysis and overview of the experience of using social media as a key tool in the communication strategy of grant projects, using the case of the Retreat Camp project for internally displaced educators. The aim of the study is to identify and systematize the communication tools used in the project's implementation, to assess the effectiveness of information dissemination and audience engagement, and to determine the role of social networks in achieving the strategic objectives of a grant project.

The relevance of the topic is defined by the significant role of knowledge and information in the development of modern society and the need to ensure transparency, accessibility, and effectiveness of project activities. It has been established that social media platforms have become an effective channel for information dissemination, transforming users from passive consumers into active creators and distributors of content. In particular, the importance of the integrated use of websites and social networks is emphasized, as it ensures broader audience reach and increases the effectiveness of communication activities.

The article applies the case study method to examine the practical experience of project communication support; the statistical method to evaluate quantitative indicators of audience reach and interaction (views, reactions, shares); the observation method to track the dynamics of social media profile development; and content analysis to study the content and formats of social media posts.

The structure and content of the Retreat Camp project's communication campaign are examined. This campaign included organizing a summer camp for 39 internally displaced educators, producing and disseminating video materials, and presenting results through social media and partner organizations' websites. The use of the main social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, and Twitter – is analyzed, highlighting the advantages and limitations of each for civil society organizations' communication activities. Particular attention is given to the role of YouTube as a long-term tool for information dissemination and trust-building, as well as the potential of Twitter for developing partnerships and establishing trust among English-speaking audiences.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in combining the practical experience of implementing a grant project with both quantitative and qualitative analysis of social media communication tools. This approach allows, for the first time, to systematize effective strategies for audience engagement and multimedia integration for NGOs working with internally displaced persons. The study demonstrates a new approach to assessing the effectiveness of communication strategies within grant projects, including the practical involvement of the authors in project implementation, which strengthens the validity of the conclusions and recommendations.

The findings may serve as a basis for designing effective communication strategies in future grant projects, ensuring engagement of diverse audience groups, integrating multimedia content, and fostering long-term support for socially significant initiatives. The article contributes to expanding the scientific understanding of the practical aspects of social media use in the civil society sector and provides recommendations for optimizing communication processes within grant programs.

Key words: *communication support, grant project, social media, public organisation, communication strategy.*

Костянтин Пальшков, Тетяна Далявська, Оксана Чуб. СОЦІАЛЬНІ МЕДІА ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ КОМУНІКАЦІЙНОЇ СТРАТЕГІЇ ГРАНТОВИХ ПРОЄКТІВ: ДОСВІД RETREAT CAMP

Стаття присвячена аналізу та узагальненню досвіду використання соціальних медіа як ключового інструменту комунікаційної стратегії грантових проєктів на прикладі проєкту Retreat Camp для внутрішньо переміщених освітян. Метою дослідження є виявлення та систематизація комунікаційних інструментів, що застосовувалися в рамках реалізації проєкту, оцінка ефективності поширення інформації та залучення аудиторії, а також визначення ролі соціальних мереж у досягненні стратегічних цілей грантового проєкту.

Визначено актуальність теми через значну роль знань та інформації для розвитку сучасного суспільства й потребу в забезпеченні прозорості, доступності, результативності проєктної діяльності. Встановлено, що соціальні медіа-платформи стали ефективним каналом поширення інформації, який змінює роль користувачів із пасивних споживачів на активних творців і розповсюджувачів контенту. Зокрема, підкреслено важливість інтегрованого використання вебсайтів і соціальних мереж для забезпечення ширшого охоплення аудиторії та підвищення ефективності комунікаційних заходів.

У статті застосовано метод case study для дослідження практичного досвіду комунікаційного супроводу проєкту, статистичний метод для оцінки кількісних показників охоплення та взаємодії аудиторії (кількість переглядів, реакцій, поширень), метод спостереження для відстеження динаміки розвитку профілів у соціальних мережах і метод контент-аналізу для дослідження змісту та форматів дописів.

Розглянуто структуру та зміст комунікаційної кампанії проєкту Retreat Camp, яка включала організацію літнього табору для 39 внутрішньо переміщених освітян, створення та поширення відеоматеріалів, презентацію результатів через соціальні медіа та сайти партнерських організацій. Проаналізовано використання основних соціальних мереж: Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube та Twitter, визначено переваги та обмеження кожної платформи для комунікаційної діяльності громадських організацій. Окремо акцентовано на ролі YouTube як довготривалого інструменту поширення інформації та інструменту підвищення довіри до організації, а також на потенціалі Twitter для розвитку партнерств та формування довіри серед англомовної аудиторії.

Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у поєднанні практичного досвіду реалізації грантового проєкту з кількісним та якісним аналізом комунікаційних інструментів соціальних мереж, що дозволяє вперше систематизувати ефективні стратегії залучення цільової аудиторії та інтеграції мультимедійного контенту для громадських організацій, що працюють із внутрішньо переміщеними особами. Дослідження демонструє новий підхід до оцінки ефективності комунікаційних стратегій у межах грантових проєктів, включаючи практичну участь авторів у реалізації, що підвищує обґрунтованість висновків та рекомендацій.

Отримані висновки можуть слугувати основою для розробки ефективних комунікаційних стратегій у майбутніх грантових проєктах, забезпечення залучення різних груп аудиторії, інтеграції мультимедійного контенту та формування довготривалої підтримки для соціально важливих ініціатив. Стаття сприяє розширенню наукового розуміння практичних аспектів застосування соціальних медіа у громадському секторі та надає рекомендації щодо оптимізації комунікаційних процесів у межах грантових програм.

Ключові слова: *комунікаційний супровід, грантовий проєкт, соціальні медіа, громадська організація, комунікаційна стратегія.*

Problem statement. Today, when knowledge acquires a decisive role in the development of society, effective communication of project outcomes becomes an integral part of the process. Ensuring visibility and understanding of project content is critical to maximising their impact. The authors of the publication 'The Role of Dissemination as a Fundamental Part of a Research Project: Lessons Learned from the SOPHIE Project' argue that effective dissemination and communication of research results are crucial to ensuring that research is taken into account and has an impact (social, political or economic). Such communication draws the attention of governments and stakeholders to research results and conclusions, increasing their visibility, understanding and implementation. According to researchers, it also bridges the gap between scientists and the public and fosters research transparency [11]. These statements are equally valid for other types of projects besides research, where gaining audience attention is necessary.

In today's world, social media is a key tool for NGOs to communicate. Social media platforms have become an effective channel for both communication and information dissemination. This has changed the role of users from passive consumers to active creators and distributors [15]. Social networks allow for the rapid dissemination of information, engagement of target audiences, ensuring transparency of activities, and shaping positive perceptions and trust in the organisation. At the same time, there is a lack of empirical research based on the analysis of specific grant projects and demonstrating the effectiveness of social media in achieving set goals. This is particularly relevant when the authors of the study – as in this article – are also in the practice: all three are members of the Communications team at the NGO Progressive and Strong and were directly involved in the implementation of the project.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. A considerable number of publications are devoted to research in the field of strategic digital communications in organisations. In particu-

lar, some of them are devoted to: managing the implementation and use of social media in organizations [4; 5]; the professionalisation of strategic digital communications management [5]; analyzing strategic roles related to social media management [12]; mechanisms of social media influence on the reputation of organisations and audience engagement [3; 6; 14]; various models of social media transformation, such as those based on user segmentation [9]; the analysis of institutional communication through three dimensions (posting, interactivity, content) [2]; the role of AI tools in measuring effectiveness of digital communication in social media [8]; the fundamental role of disseminating project results to ensure their impact [11]; the systematisation of general trends in digital marketing and the role of social media in organisations' communication strategies [1; 15], etc.

The purpose of this article is to analyze and summarize the communication support of the *Retreat Camp* grant project, with a focus on the use of social media. The research objectives are as follows: to outline the communication tools applied in the course of project implementation; to analyze statistical indicators of audience reach and engagement; to determine the role of social networks in achieving the goals of the grant project; and to outline prospects for improving communication strategies in future projects.

Research Methodology. To study the experience of communication support for the grant project on social media, the case study method was applied. The statistical method was used to examine quantitative indicators of reach and interaction with social media posts (number of views, reactions, shares, etc.). The observation method was employed to track the dynamics of the project's social media profiles and audience response. Content analysis was used to study the content and formats of social media posts related to the implementation of the grant project.

Presentation of the Main Research Material. Before discussing the core findings, it is important to provide key information about the grant project whose communication experience is the focus of this publication. The *Retreat Camp* project involved organizing a camp (held on August 14–17, 2023) that included psychological support and professional development for 39 internally displaced educators. The project also included the production of five video episodes highlighting the needs and challenges of internally displaced educators and ways to address them. These videos were presented and disseminated through social media, the communication channels of the NGO Progressive and Strong, as well as the information resources of displaced universities. The *Retreat Camp* project was implemented with the financial support of the German Marshall Fund of the United States [10].

For a more in-depth understanding of the analytical data presented later, it should be noted that the *Retreat Camp* project was implemented between June 15, 2023, and January 15, 2024. From the very beginning, the project required the engagement of a broad audience of potential participants. The majority of the communication campaign promoting *Retreat Camp* was centered around the main event – the Summer Camp for internally displaced educators.

This article focuses on the dissemination of information about the grant project through social media, the website of the NGO Progressive and Strong, and the websites of displaced higher education institutions. It should be emphasized that the integrated use of websites and social media can ensure broader audience reach and facilitate more effective dissemination of project information. This is achieved through redirects (i.e., enabling transitions from the website to social media and vice versa), preparing publications tailored to the format and specifics of different platforms, engaging diverse audience groups, and integrating multimedia content.

The main media resource of the NGO Progressive and Strong is its website. It is worth reiterating that the media play a central role in the activities of non-governmental organizations worldwide, as they provide a means for NGOs to interact with target audiences, engage stakeholders, address policymakers, ensure civil society participation, and open new opportunities for outreach [7].

There were no plans to develop a separate website for the *Retreat Camp* project. Similarly, no new social media profiles were created for this project. Information about the project was disseminated through the existing official profiles of the NGO Progressive and Strong on Facebook (8,600 readers), Instagram (800+ subscribers), Twitter (up to 100 followers), Telegram (2,000 subscribers) and YouTube (1,600 users). From the start to the implementation of the *Retreat Camp* project, the number of subscribers remained virtually unchanged.

During the implementation of the *Retreat Camp* project, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram and YouTube were used, taking into account the advantages of each social network. In particular, Facebook is the most popular social network in Ukraine and allows reaching different age and social groups (see Table 1).

The ability to create profiles in the form of pages and groups, as well as events, makes Facebook a convenient and effective platform for building a community around a project, uniting like-minded individuals, and organizing activities. Facebook enables the publication of long text posts and the sharing of photo and video albums. The use of Telegram allows information to be delivered directly to subscribers without algorithmic interference, ensuring that it reaches the target audience. Telegram channels are particularly convenient for quick news, updates, and announcements. Instagram is focused on visual content and makes it possible to communicate project results by appealing to the emotions of the audience. The platform is especially popular among young people. Through Instagram, it is possible to establish contacts with other organizations operating in the same field or geographic region, and potentially even to identify future partners. Demonstrating broad professional connections also enhances credibility with potential supporters [16].

YouTube allows for the publication of longer video materials – such as documentaries about projects and interviews with participants – which represents a comparative advantage over other social networks. High-quality video content on YouTube strengthens trust in the organization and increases its visibility, particularly through the projects it implements. YouTube's value also lies in its role as a search engine: videos can be discovered through keywords long after publication, thereby raising awareness of a project even after its completion. Furthermore, researcher Eva Wieners notes that YouTube is currently used by a relatively limited number of civil society organizations [16]. This is due to the fact that developing a well-designed channel can serve as an effective tool for organizational positioning, communication with beneficiaries and volunteers, and enhancing engagement by visualizing joint activities. At the same time, the relatively low representation of organizations on this platform is explained by its high resource demands: content creation for YouTube requires not only event recording on mobile devices but also a complex process of production and post-production.

Twitter was used primarily to inform English-speaking subscribers and supporters of the NGO Progressive and Strong. This platform serves as an effective tool for developing partnerships, as it allows organizations to support one another by sharing posts and tweets, thereby fostering trust and creating a solid foundation for collaboration.

Considering the characteristics of the above mentioned social networks, and with the aim of meeting the diverse informational needs of the audience, the communication of the Retreat Camp project was used a variety of content formats (including text posts, photos, videos, and articles), which is regarded as one of the key aspects of institutional communication in social media [2].

Table 1

Advantages and limitations of major social networks in the communication activities of civil society organisations

№	Social Media	Advantages	Disadvantages
1.	Facebook	wide age range of audience; various promotion formats (posts, videos, stories, events, groups); long text posts (max. number of characters: 63,206); live broadcasts; creation of photo albums	the algorithms of the main feed change quite often
2	Telegram	long text posts (max. 4,906 characters, with images - 1,024); live broadcasts; without algorithmic interference	no option to create events; no option to create albums
3.	Instagram	long text posts (max. 2,200 characters) various promotion formats (posts, video reels, stories); live broadcasts	the algorithms of the main feed change quite often. no option to create events. no option to create albums
4.	YouTube	live broadcasts; long-form video content; short video format shorts; ability to create playlists	no option to create events; no option to create albums; no option to create long texts
5.	Twitter (X)	text posts (max. 280 characters, or 25,000 characters for Premium users)	no option to create events; no option to create albums

The use of the NGO's existing official social media profiles for the initial coverage of the Retreat Camp project allowed for significant audience reach from the very first announcement of the main event. As of July 25, 2024, the overall audience reach amounted to 2,095 accounts on Instagram (8 posts), 61 views on Twitter (1 post), 15,858 accounts on Facebook (9 posts), over 11,000 views on Telegram (10 posts), and 128 views on YouTube (1 video). The authors are unable to provide data on the number of views recorded as of August 14, 2023 – the official start date of the Retreat Camp – when audience engagement would have had peak relevance. At the same time, it seems relevant to note that views generated after the event lose immediate relevance but still retain informational value.

In addition to event-related announcements, posts indirectly connected to the main activity of the grant also helped attract attention to the *Retreat Camp* project. For example, a post dated July 25, 2023, about supporting internally displaced educators reached 928 views on Telegram (as of August 25, 2024), 1,450 accounts on Facebook, and 150 accounts on Instagram. Another example was a Telegram poll on the challenges faced by displaced educators, which gathered 1,100 views.

Six posts were published directly during the camp itself. Their reach amounted to 11,052 accounts on Facebook, 1,108 on Instagram, and 5,229 views on Telegram. Such systematic communication fosters audience engagement by creating a sense of real-time presence, sparking greater interest in the event, and enhancing attention to the NGO's future activities. This also increases the transparency of the organization's work, which in turn can strengthen trust among donors, partners, the wider public, and the organization's own members. After the event, the posts and videos created during its implementation also serve as material for reports, presentations, and future grant applications, showcasing project achievements and outcomes.

As noted in the previously mentioned publication *"The Role of Dissemination as a Fundamental Part of a Research Project: Lessons Learned from the SOPHIE Project"*, effective research communication is an intensive process that requires both human and financial resources. For this reason, it is important to include a professional communication specialist (such as a science communicator or journalist) in the project team. Their role is not only to develop a strategy but also to perform day-to-day tasks. Dissemination of results goes far beyond sending press releases; it is a daily, creative interaction with the audience that requires constant innovation and the use of diverse tools to achieve the intended goals [11].

The presence of a dedicated communication team within the NGO Progressive and Strong enabled the dissemination of project information to be carried out by professionals whose daily responsibilities focus on such work, thereby relieving other team members tasked with different duties. This allowed for the planning and production of several video formats. Videos included event announcements and messages from educators, as such formats typically generate the highest reach in social media according to current algorithms. Two original videos were produced in English for the NGO's English-speaking audience on Twitter (one of them was also posted on Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram). As of July 25, 2024, both Twitter posts with these videos had a combined total of 381 views.

During the event, 12 video interviews were recorded with displaced educators, in which they shared personal storytelling, experiences, and advice. These videos were uploaded to YouTube (around 1,000 views as of July 25, 2024) and Telegram (around 16,000 views), with some also published on Facebook (around 9,000 views). The video interviews were created with the traditional advantages of this format in mind – namely, the visual interaction between the interviewee and the media user, the ability to convey emotions and utilize nonverbal communication, the opportunity to showcase locations, and the overall accessibility for audiences.

In addition to posts published on the official profiles of the NGO Progressive and Strong, information about the activities of the *Retreat Camp* project was also disseminated through posts created by camp participants, who shared their impressions. According to the authors, this can be explained by several factors. In particular, the high level of personal involvement in camp activities, which included psychological support and professional development, encouraged participants to share their experiences.

Following the camp in August, three posts were published in October to remind audiences of the summer event. Their reach amounted to 1,696 accounts on Facebook, 1,108 on Instagram, and over 3,000 views on Telegram. This suggests that interest in the event remained high even after a considerable period of time.

Advertising is an excellent tool for NGOs to expand their influence and increase the number of followers on social media at a reasonable cost. Today, it is nearly impossible to gain

significant numbers of subscribers on certain platforms without advertising. In fact, about one-third of communication specialists in NGOs consider social media advertising one of the most effective digital marketing and fundraising tools. It is therefore unsurprising that 53% of surveyed NGOs purchase social media advertising, as noted by Sofia Oliveira in her article [13].

A wider reach for social media posts can indeed be achieved through targeted, i.e., paid advertising; however, this mechanism was not employed in the case of Retreat Camp. The key aim was to investigate the real level of audience interest in the project theme through organic promotion.

Several limitations of the study should be noted. The authors relied only on publicly available data and did not use paid AI-based services that provide access to deeper analytics. It should also be emphasized that evaluating the effectiveness of digital communication in social media using AI-based tools must today be conducted systematically. Such an approach allows for continuous monitoring of key indicators (reach, engagement, content performance) to improve the efficiency of communication and marketing activities [8]. The focus on a single project may limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study reflects the current state of social media algorithms, which may change rapidly. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results, as they introduce a degree of selectivity into the data and restrict broader generalization.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. The study confirmed that the use of an integrated communication strategy through Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, and Twitter not only enhances awareness of a grant project but also fosters engagement and trust. Publishing diverse content formats (texts, photos, videos, interviews) ensured the involvement of different target groups. At the same time, the absence of paid advertising and reliance solely on publicly available statistics limited the scope of analysis. A promising direction for further research is the development of standardized methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of NGO communication strategies in social media and the comparison of results across different grant projects.

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