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SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS' BRANDING

СОЦІАЛЬНІ МЕРЕЖІ ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ БРЕНДИНГУ ГРОМАДСЬКИХ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙ

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The article examines the role of social media as an effective instrument in branding non-governmental organizations (NGOs), focusing on its influence on brand image, brand awareness, and brand trust. It explores the concept of branding, emphasizing its strategic significance for NGOs as a tool for identity formation. Key factors determining donor engagement and audience interaction are analyzed, highlighting how digital communication strategies contribute to strengthening public perception and loyalty. The practical application of these factors is demonstrated through the Instagram publication analysis of three Ukrainian charitable foundations, illustrating how social media platforms enhance visibility, foster civic engagement, and facilitate sustainable fundraising in the nonprofit sector. Various Instagram post types are analyzed to determine content effectiveness for engagement.

Keywords: branding, brand management, social media, brand image, brand trust, NGO branding.

Стаття присвячена дослідженню ролі соціальних мереж як інструменту брендингу громадських організацій (ГО) та їхнього впливу на формування брендових характеристик, зокрема іміджу, впізнаваності та довіри. Розкрито зміст поняття «брендинг» і визначено його стратегічне значення для ГО як механізму ідентифікації, зміцнення репутації та налагодження довгострокової взаємодії зі стейкхолдерами. Проаналізовано ключові чинники, що визначають залученість донорів і рівень взаємодії аудиторії, підкреслюючи, що цифрові комунікаційні стратегії сприяють посиленню громадської підтримки, формуванню лояльності та підвищенню ефективності діяльності організацій. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена трансформацією комунікаційного середовища та критичною роллю ГО в Україні, де активність громадян у підтримці сектору оборони й участі в суспільних ініціативах є фундаментальною для національної стійкості. У цьому контексті соціальні мережі виступають основним каналом комунікації та ключовим інструментом для залучення пожертв, поширення інформації та забезпечення прозорості. Встановлено, що для ефективного використання соціальних медіа ГО повинні узгодити свої стратегії з загальними цілями організації. Керівництво повинно виділити достатні технічні ресурси, час персоналу та стратегічні рекомендації для забезпечення сталого залучення. Початкові зусилля повинні бути спрямовані на підвищення обізнаності, розвиток відносин із громадою та побудову довіри, що згодом сприятиме зусиллям із залучення коштів. Акцент слід робити на високоякісному контенті, двосторонній комунікації та залученні, заснованому на довірі, а не на ізольованих, короткострокових кампаніях. Практичний аспект дослідження висвітлено на прикладі активності трьох українських благодійних фондів в Інстаграм, що демонструє, як застосування соціальних мереж посилює публічну видимість, сприяє розвитку громадянської участі та забезпечує сталість фандрейзингових процесів у секторі ГО. Різні типи постів в Інстаграм проаналізовані, аби визначити найкращий спосіб підвищення охоплень та залучення підписників.

Ключові слова: брендинг, управління брендом, соціальні мережі, імідж бренду, довіра до бренду, брендинг громадської організації.

Statement of the problem. With the constant rise in the number of social media users and the time spent online, it is no surprise that many brands are actively adopting social networking platforms as a way to build awareness and increase sales. According to Statista, the money spent on social media ads worldwide from 2025 to 2030 is predicted to grow annually by 11.71% [1].

Recent research identifies several factors behind this cultural shift. Demographics are shifting towards most consumers being Gen Z and millennials, who are increasingly active online, traditional marketing channels are generating lower response rates, and internet campaigns cost less than other types [2, p. 179]. Consequently, contemporary branding practices are increasingly centered on the customer, emphasizing personalization and occupying specialized market niches through detailed customer segmentation [2, p. 178].

In the modern digital environment, the use of social media has become a crucial component of strategic brand management for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For this study, NGOs were defined as all types of civic organizations, including non-governmental, non-profit, and charitable. Social media platforms provide an effective means for NGOs to establish and strengthen their brand image, foster community engagement, and cultivate lasting public trust. This is particularly relevant in the Ukrainian context, where citizens' active participation in fundraising for the Armed Forces and in broader civic initiatives is crucial for the nation's survival. Therefore, the integration of social media into NGO branding strategies in Ukraine is both timely and essential, serving as a mechanism for mobilizing public support, enhancing transparency, and raising donor engagement.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent studies on the use of social media and digital technologies for branding and nonprofit development have been conducted by researchers such as H. Albanna, A. Alalwan, M. Al-Emran [6], Y. Bilgin, Ö. Kethüda [5], T. Ostapenko, I. Sozynova, V. Kovpik [4], and others. Statistical data in the field of social media and online communications are systematically collected and analyzed by international analytical platforms, such as Sprout Social and Statista, to help organizations assess audience interaction and optimize content strategies, as well as to form comprehensive forecasts of global social media advertising markets and user behavior patterns. In the field of non-governmental organization research, leading academic institutions and journals, particularly VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, regularly explore issues related to NGO development, governance, branding, and public trust.

Given the crucial nature of donor engagement for Ukrainian NGOs, it is essential to find an applicable framework for building brand image and brand trust.

Setting the task. The purpose of this article is to systematize the theoretical basis and develop practical recommendations for utilizing social networks in NGO branding.

Summary of the main results of the study. Trachuk T. and others define branding as a set of methods used to align a company's offerings with customer needs. In comparison, brand management focuses on maintaining the brand's effectiveness and strengthening its recognition [2, p. 179]. Another definition is suggested by T. Yankovets and K. Medvedieva, which considers branding in its digital dimension. They propose viewing digital branding as the process of creating and promoting a brand through digital technologies, using a system of values and symbols that convey a unified message, build consumer loyalty, and enhance business performance [3, p. 76]. Digital branding enables companies to build strong connections with their target audience by communicating a unique value proposition that emphasizes the brand's distinct features and competitive advantages [4, p. 323].

Researchers consider branded content as the primary component of companies' digital strategies that influences the brand's perception on social media. A brand's content strategy influences customer satisfaction with its products and services, shapes the level of brand recognition, and determines the effectiveness of communication with its audience [2, p. 179]. For charities, social media is regarded as a vital component of marketing strategies, serving as a key tool for fostering communication with donors and volunteers [5, p. 1091].

Bilgin Y. and Kethüda Ö. view social media as a powerful tool for attracting donors, increasing donations, collaborating with like-minded organizations, recruiting volunteers, and showcasing the impact of charitable activities. It also enhances a charity's brand value, which plays a key role in securing donations, as social media provides a fast and cost-effective channel for raising funds during emergencies such as natural disasters or armed conflicts [5].

They outline several dimensions that conclude charity social media marketing. Awareness involves informing followers about issues that require support and drawing the attention of potential donors to those in need. Interaction refers to the exchange of information and ideas between charities and donors through social media. Timeliness emphasizes the regular updating of accounts with current information about organizational activities. Informativeness entails providing accurate and comprehensive details about a charity's work. Customization reflects the extent to which charities engage with donors individually, addressing their specific interests and concerns. Advertising relates to social media advertising designed to attract donors and volunteers [5, p. 1092–1093].

Their study found that, among the dimensions of social media marketing, only awareness has a

direct effect on donation intention. Timeliness, informativeness, and advertising significantly shape the charity's brand image, while brand trust is primarily influenced by informativeness and customization. Overall, SMM impacts donation intention both directly and indirectly through brand image and trust, highlighting the importance of strengthening these factors to enhance donor engagement [5, p. 1098–1099].

Another research focusing on non-profit organizations (NPOs) in Jordan confirms that the use of social media positively influences both awareness and community engagement. It enables NPOs to promote their work, projects, and mission, foster connections and interactions with their communities, build relationships, and receive feedback. Contrary to the study by Bilgin Y. and Kethüda Ö., this one found that in Jordan, many NPOs did not use social media for donations, or it wasn't effective in their context [6].

Managerial implications of that study were that for effective social media use, NPOs should align their strategies with overarching organizational goals. Leadership must allocate sufficient technical resources, staff time, and strategic guidance to ensure sustained engagement. Initial efforts should prioritize raising awareness, cultivating community relationships, and building trust, which subsequently support fundraising efforts. Emphasis should be placed on high-quality content, two-way communication, and trust-based engagement rather than on isolated, short-term campaigns [6].

In the Ukrainian context, fundraising is a crucial activity, primarily conducted through non-governmental, non-profit, or charitable organizations. Social media, as a cost-effective marketing channel and a rapid information disseminator, is the main source of collecting donations and spreading information about the organization's activity.

For this study, three charitable foundations were chosen: Come Back Alive [7], Support AZOV [8], and Tviy Krok [9]. They all work to meet the various needs of the Ukrainian Defense Forces, equipping them with everything from vehicles to grenade launchers. Through third-party data received with ContentStudio [10], the Instagram pages of these charitable foundations were analyzed for the types of content posted and the engagement achieved (Table 1).

The metric any marketer is most interested in is the ER. In the context of this paper, ER shows community engagement, while follower count shows

brand awareness. However, depending on the size and industry of the account, there is a different definition of what constitutes a good ER. Statista reports that in 2023–2024, the average influencer engagement rate on Instagram was 1.85%. For accounts having 1k to 10k followers, the average ER was 2.19%, 10k to 50k followers it was 0.99%, and 50k to 500k followers it was 0.86% [11]. Based on this, Tviy krok severely underperforms, Support AZOV is both way above average, and its niche average, and Come Back Alive is a bit below its niche average.

Various content types also have distinct success rates. According to Sprout Social, the most recent Instagram performance data indicate that Reels generate the highest level of user interaction, achieving an average engagement rate of 1.23%. In comparison, carousel posts receive an average ER of 0.99%, whereas single-image posts tend to attract a comparatively lower average ER of 0.70% [12]. The data of the chosen Instagram accounts painted a different picture (Figure 1).

Reels generate the highest engagement across all accounts. Yet, the numbers of both Come Back Alive and Tviy Krok are half the platform average. Only Support AZOV is showing excellent Reels ER. The same tendency continues for other post types – Come Back Alive and Tviy Krok underperform compared to the platform average with carousels and single-image posts. Moreover, the difference in ER of carousel and single-image posts is not very distinct. Only for Support AZOV, there is a stark difference between Reels ER and Carousel ER, which can be relevant to the content strategy. It is impossible to say if the ER would remain relatively high for single-image posts as it does for carousels, because during the analyzed period, ab3.support did not post any.

Another relevant information is the number of posts per week and in total. As seen from Table 2, tviy.krok posts the most with 67 posts in 4 weeks, and ab3.support posts the least with 11 posts in the same period.

Based on Table 2, the low engagement rate of Tviy Krok Foundation can be attributed to an incredibly high number of posts and audience exhaustion. Nonetheless, the same assumption cannot be made for savelife.in.ua, as their post count is significantly lower than that of tviy.krok.

A content analysis of Instagram feeds was conducted to assess the duration of various fundraising

Table 1
Account metrics for chosen charitable foundations from October 9 to November 9, 2025

Competitors	Followers	Post per week	Engagement rate (ER), %
Savelife.in.ua	203400	7.75	0.5
ab3.support	28900	2.75	5.22
tviy.krok	6200	16.75	0.65

Source: compiled by the author according to data from ContentStudio

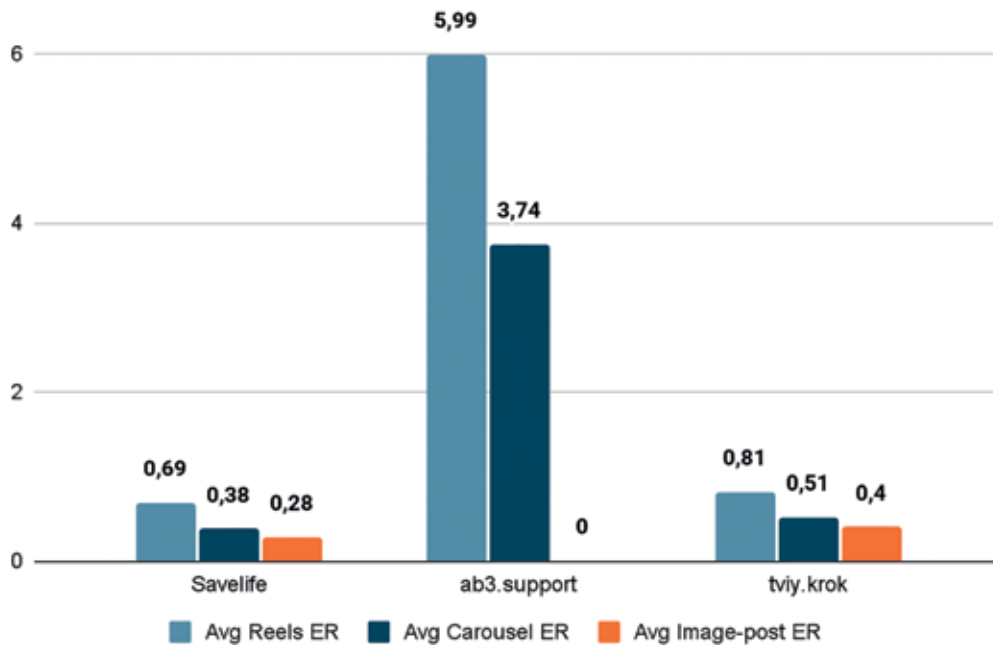


Figure 1. Average engagement rate by post type of chosen Inst. accounts, %

Source: compiled by the author according to data from ContentStudio

Table 2

**Metrics of Instagram content types for chosen charitable foundations
from October 9 to November 9, 2025**

Competitors	Reel post	Carousel posts	Image posts
Savelife	12 (3 per week)	18 (4.5 per week)	1
ab3.support	8 (2 per week)	3 (0.75 per week)	0
tviy.krok	39 (9.75 per week)	8 (2 per week)	20 (5 per week)

Source: compiled by the author according to data from ContentStudio

campaigns, the number of posts published to advertise them, and the partners involved.

For the content analysis, the first fundraising campaign with clear posts about its start and end was chosen. For Come Back Alive, it was "Campaign №13" (Zbir №13), for Support AZOV, it was a campaign with the DOU-community to fund-raise for Dophin Spiders, and for Tviy Krok, a campaign to fund the repair instruments for the 20th Brigade "Lyubart". It is essential to note that all the foundations have several major fundraising campaigns in parallel. Sometimes, separate donation campaigns still contribute to a larger, continuous fundraiser.

Campaign #13, aimed at collecting 100 million UAH, was announced on Instagram on April 28, 2025. From the beginning, the fundraising campaign was supported by Atlas Festival and PrivatBank. The next post, published on July 16, 2025, contains not only a reminder of the ongoing fundraiser but a raffle with a chance to win an apartment. At this point, the campaign had more partners, including Aurora, Royal House, LUN, Uklon, Prom, BMW Ukraine, and the city of Lutsk. Both announcements were made with

high-quality Reels with production and actors. On July 18, 2025, another Reels video with less production was posted (an interview with the foundation's head) to remind followers about the raffle that comes with donating. Last post regarding Campaign #13 was posted on August 4, 2025. It announced that the goal amount was achieved, with the final number of donations being close to 122 million UAH. It was also disclaimed that at that point, the campaign had 21 businesses contributing to it. Thus, the amount of 122 million UAH was achieved in roughly 3 months, and reported on Instagram with 4 posts – 2 entertaining and 2 informational ones.

The campaign to celebrate DOU's 20th anniversary was announced on May 20, 2025, with a carousel post (It is stated that it actually started 2 days before, during the DOU Day). The goal of the campaign was to collect 20 million. The announcement was accompanied by the promise of a chance to win a MacBook, AirPods, or other prizes from the DOU community. The next single-image reminder post about the campaign was posted on July 31, 2025. It was also an announcement about the DOU Day Picnic scheduled for August 30, with tickets to

the event contributing to the fundraising campaign. Another reels post, on August 4, 2025, marked the halfway point in the campaign and depicted the first Dophin Spiders being delivered to the brigade. The next reminder carousel post on August 15, 2025, served a pure entertainment purpose, attracting attention to the campaign. The main graphic element on the visuals was the same, but as it was placed in different environments, it was not very obvious. New Reels, posted on August 26, 2025, showcased a real-life application of Dophin Spiders and reminded about the DOU Day Picnic. The final post was made on September 10, reporting the achievement of the goal and the final amount of 23 million UAH collected. The 23 million UAH were collected in roughly 3 months, and reported on Instagram through 6 mostly informational posts. According to Support AZOV, the campaign was supported by 12 businesses; however, no additional information was provided regarding those businesses.

For Tviy Krok, a campaign to fund the repair instruments for the 20th Brigade "Lyubart" was announced on Instagram on October 27, 2025, with a Reels video post. However, it did not contain the goal amount in the text of the post or in the video. After that, three more Reels videos were posted on October 28, November 3, and November 4, 2025. Two of them contained variations of the same video. On November 4, 2025, a carousel announcing the transfer of tools to the brigade was made. On November 5, 2025, a Reels video was posted depicting the transfer of tools to the brigade and showing their gratitude. To clarify the monetary campaign's goals, the website was used [13]. According to it, the fundraising started on October 22, 2025. Supposedly, the goal was 220,000 UAH. The website also shows the transfer of 220,415 UAH on October 27, 2025. On November 10, 2025, the website indicates that the fundraising campaign is active, with a goal of 220,000 UAH. Based on the information collected and analyzed, as well as an overall content analysis of Tviy Krok's Instagram page, several insights have been gathered. tviy.krok Instagram page has too many similar posts that do not indicate the start and end of separate

campaigns for different brigades. The content is very monotonous and not engaging. The clutter of the page obstructs the transparency of donations, which hurts brand trust. The website that depicts different information from social media only worsens the situation. It is clear that the foundation lacks sufficient resources and/or training to manage the account effectively.

Brand awareness of the charitable organization and follower count influence the number of partners it has during campaigns and the benefits they can offer in return for donations. Consequently, the campaign's goal and the time required to achieve it correlate with these numbers. Come Back Alive collects 10 times the amount of Support AZOV in the same amount of time (arguably, ab3.support took a bit longer than 3 months with their campaign).

Bigger foundations treat fundraising campaigns as advertising ones – they have distinct names, taglines, and partners. However, the example of Support AZOV's content shows that even with less directed video content and the reuse of graphic elements, the content can be effective. It is important to remind the audience regularly about the fundraising campaigns; however, excessive reminders can desensitize followers and decrease community engagement. The factor that most hurts brand trust and loyalty is a lack of transparency in communication. NGOs need to clearly report the beginning and end of the campaigns, avoid double-posting the results, and state the goals of the fundraising.

Conclusions. Brand value plays a key role in donor engagement and securing the financial benefits for the NGO. Brand value encompasses brand image, awareness, and trust, which can be leveraged through social media content. For a social media branding strategy to be effective, it should align with broader organizational objectives.

The study confirms that in the Ukrainian context, brand awareness plays a major role in fundraising capabilities. Another key point is the need for transparency, necessary to facilitate brand trust. The NGOs cannot underreport or overreport their activities and must truthfully state the amount of donations received and spent.

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