

## Innovative Social Media Strategies for Social Good: Insights from Select Indian NGOs

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media has transformed the way organizations communicate and engage with their audience. Non-government organizations in particular have turned to social media to expand their reach, mobilize support, and raise awareness for their mission. In India, where NGOs play a crucial role in addressing social and development challenges, social media offers a powerful tool to connect with diverse stakeholders and create meaningful impact. This study presents a case study analysis of two leading NGOs in India- CRY (Child Rights and You) and Smile Foundation. Through a detailed exploration of their Facebook and Instagram pages, the study identifies strategies employed by these NGOs to effectively leverage social media platforms. By providing practical insights, the findings of the study will be beneficial to other non-government organizations looking to enhance their social media strategies for advancing their cause.

### KEYWORDS

social media, non-government organizations, strategies, storytelling, engagement

### 1. Introduction

Today's rapidly evolving digital world has brought about an enormous shift in how people communicate. Through the internet, traditional location and time boundaries are no longer an obstacle to building connections and facilitating real-time interactions. The realms of marketing, public engagement, and communication have all changed substantially with the advent of social media. Social media, also known as Web 2.0, platforms, encourage two-way interactions and collaborations, replacing traditional Web 1.0 technologies that allow only one-way communication (Jussila et al., 2014). Social media platforms allow organizations to exchange information, innovate, and participate in dynamic dialogue more effectively (Saxton & Wang, 2014).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) today recognize the significance of social media in the advancement of their charitable endeavors. They can reach a wide range of stakeholders by using these platforms to share essential information and promote awareness (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Additionally, by facilitating two-way communication and quick feedback from supporters, social media promotes idea-sharing and helps strengthen community bonds (Lovejoy et al., 2012). According to Ramanathan (2016), employing social media to spread awareness is much more affordable than using digital or conventional media. He argues that social media may produce awareness results up to 10 times more cheaply than other forms of advertising.

Beyond just raising awareness, social media has become an indispensable tool for NGOs in a wide range of operational functions. It enhances internal management processes (Waters et al., 2009; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Auger, 2013), promotes programs and events (Auger, 2013), responds to stakeholder concerns (Auger, 2013), and allows NGOs to acknowledge and thank donors and supporters for their contributions. Moreover, social media fosters collaboration among people having common interests (Briones et al., 2011). The interactive nature of these platforms enables organizations to gather valuable insights from stakeholder feedback, helping them make informed decisions and build stronger, more loyal relationships (Waters & Lo, 2012).

NGOs can enhance their public perception and increase their resources by incorporating social media in their PR campaigns. The American Red Cross is one well-known example, as they actively use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to interact with the media, recruit volunteers, and disseminate important information regarding disaster response and preparation (Briones et al., 2011). These initiatives demonstrate the value of social

media in contemporary NGO operations by expanding their reach and strengthening their ties to the local communities.

By using social media effectively and affordably, NGOs can engage a variety of stakeholders, such as volunteers, donors, and the general public. While fundraising and advocacy efforts were once limited to personal networks and small groups, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram now allow organizations to connect with a larger audience, attract new donors and volunteers, and strengthen relationships with existing supporters by sharing their missions and projects (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

As NGOs continue to explore the vast potential of social media, it becomes clear that these platforms are not just tools for communication, but essential components of modern NGO strategy. This paper analyses how NGOs leverage social media to foster growth, raise awareness, and make a lasting impact.

## 2. Literature Review

Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, have become necessary tools for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to engage with stakeholders, enhance communication, and build relationships (Briones et al., 2011; Auger, 2013). By allowing organizations to broadcast messages instantly, social media platforms provide an efficient way to engage with current and prospective donors, volunteers, and community members (Ramanathan, 2016). Due to its real-time information dissemination capabilities, NGOs find social media particularly useful for promoting causes, sharing updates on ongoing projects, and mobilizing support for fundraising and awareness campaigns (Kanter & Fine, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In contrast to traditional methods of communication, which often require significant financial outlays, social media platforms are inexpensive to use. Because of their affordability, they have particular appeal to organizations with low resources or those who lack relevant expertise (Cho et al., 2014; Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2014). While employing fewer resources than traditional media would, NGOs may leverage social media to establish and sustain reciprocal relationships with their supporters, resulting in deeper connections (Waters & Jamal, 2011; Guo & Saxton, 2014).

Social media platforms are simple to use and access. They enable NGOs of all sizes to engage in digital communication and outreach with minimum infrastructure and technical expertise (Guo & Saxton, 2014). This democratization of communication enables smaller organizations, often constrained by limited financial and human resources, to reach stakeholders and promote their causes effectively (Waters & Jamal, 2011).

Additionally, social media has changed the way NGOs raise funds. NGOs can now raise funds more easily and affordably using online platforms than through conventional offline means. Goecks et al.'s (2008) stated that fundraising using digital platforms can help reach a younger, more tech-savvy contributor base at a substantially lower cost. NGOs can also use social media platforms to streamline the fundraising process by using tools like Facebook's "Donate Now" button, which shortens the number of steps required to donate and increases donation rates (Ramanathan, 2016).

When interacting with stakeholders, large NGOs in particular have indicated that they prefer to use social media platforms over traditional websites. According to a study by Lovejoy & Saxton (2012), organizations frequently use social media platforms to engage with stakeholders, thereby promoting community involvement and strengthening relationships. Research has shown that messages that focus on the dissemination of information only may not always lead to the same levels of engagement as those that focus on two-way exchanges (Saxton & Waters, 2014). Despite this, some research, like that done by Waters et al. (2009), indicates that NGOs have not yet fully utilized social media's interactive potential, with many still utilizing sites like Facebook and Twitter largely as one-way modes of communication.

## 3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine the social media strategies employed by Child Rights and You and Smile Foundation, two well-known Indian NGOs to raise awareness, engage with stakeholders, and advance their mission. These NGOs were selected due to their significant presence in the Indian non-profit sector, strong engagement across social media platforms, and successful use of digital tools to engage diverse stakeholders. Both organizations focus on child welfare and have been actively utilizing social media to drive awareness and support for their causes. The research included the observation of their post on their Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn pages over three months. The posts were then analyzed to identify recurring patterns and strategies.

## 4. Study Findings

The social media strategies employed by CRY and Smile Foundation to engage with their stakeholders and expand their reach are outlined below:

Child Rights and You (CRY) is a leading non-government organization that works for the welfare of children and advances their rights in India. It was founded in 1979 and has been addressing critical issues such as education, health, and safety of children since then. CRY has partnered with grassroots-level partner organizations to ensure that every child leads a happy and healthy life.

In the digital age, the NGO has effectively leveraged the power of social media to amplify its reach and engage with a wide audience. With presence across all major platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, CRY exemplifies how non-profits can effectively use social media to create awareness and rally support.

The strategies CRY employs to engage with its stakeholders and further its cause is mentioned below.

*Storytelling-* CRY highlights stories of individuals that illustrate the transformative impact of the programs they have launched. For example, they frequently feature profiles of children who were able to overcome challenges such as illiteracy or poverty with the support they got from CRY's initiatives. The content of the posts is designed to evoke emotional responses from the stakeholders, building emotional resonance and deepening their connection with the mission of the NGO. Such posts also help illustrate the tangible benefits of their work and make their cause relatable.

*Use of visual and multimedia content-* CRY places a strong emphasis on visual content to ensure that their posts are impactful and easy to engage with. Visually appealing content like high-quality images, videos, and infographics are shared by CRY regularly across all platforms to communicate their work. A distinctive feature of their approach is the consistent use of their signature colour yellow across posts. The use of the same colour helps in building their brand identity and creates visual coherence across different campaigns. The videos shared by CRY use vibrant visuals and emphasize the positive impact of their initiatives. Infographics are used by them to break down complex issues related to child rights making the information easier for their audience to understand.

*Collaborations and influencer partnerships-* CRY strategically enters into partnerships with influencers and accomplished professionals to enhance their reach and credibility. By collaborating with successful professionals such as academicians, musicians, magistrates, and entrepreneurs they effectively drive their mission forward. These voices help in raising awareness and inspire action from stakeholders. In addition, CRY partners with corporates to further expand their reach and visibility. Moreover, such associations with reputed companies enhance the NGO's credibility and help build public trust.

*Platform-specific content strategy-* CRY follows a flexible and focused approach to social media by customizing its content, keywords, and hashtags to align with the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the users. This ensures that the message resonates with the specific audience and helps boost engagement.

*Occasion-based engagement-* CRY creates content around a wide range of festivals, national holidays, and global events such as Independence Day, Raksha Bandhan, Earth Day, and more. Posting about these CRY can foster relationships by engaging with timely and relevant themes. This strategy also helps in ensuring that the content remains relevant throughout the year.

*Engaging and interactive content-* CRY actively engages its audience with interactive social media content, fostering a sense of involvement and connection. Hosting live Q&A sessions with child rights advocates, conducting polls to gather feedback on key issues, and initiating discussion around their initiatives are some of the steps taken by CRY to foster active participation and community involvement. CRY also invites its audience to post selfies/ photos around the cause they support, creating a sense of involvement and personal connection with the cause. All these steps help in building a community around their cause, increase the involvement of followers, and deepen connection with stakeholders.

Smile Foundation is a well-known Indian non-government organization that works for the well-being and upliftment of underprivileged children, adolescents, and women. Established in 2002, the NGO works in the areas of education, healthcare, and livelihood. With more than 400 active projects, their initiative spans over 2,000 remote villages and urban slums across 25 states in India. Embracing the civic-driven change model, the NGO works towards sensitizing the community and encourages them to become active partners in driving social progress.

With a strong presence across social media platforms, Smile Foundation has effectively harnessed the power of social media to reach and connect with its diverse audience. The strategic use of social media platforms has helped them mobilize resources and rally support for their initiatives.

The strategies employed by Smile Foundation to maximize its reach and further its cause are mentioned below:

*Authenticity and empathy-focused content-* the content posted across all social media platforms emphasizes authenticity and emotional connection by using real-life images and candid photos. This approach captures genuine emotions and stories from the ground which helps in creating a relatable and compelling narrative. By focusing on real faces and real contexts, Smile Foundation is effectively able to communicate the true impact of their work and build a deeper connection with their supporters.

*Topical Content-* Smile foundations align their posts with significant days like Labour Day and Civil Services Day. By connecting its message, with widely recognized occasions, the NGO takes advantage of the significance and public interest surrounding these events to showcase its work and core values. This approach not only helps the

organization engage in ongoing discussions related to these days but also reinforces the NGOs commitment to issues of labour rights, social justice, and community service.

*Acknowledging donors, volunteers, and corporate partners-* Smile Foundation employs a gratitude-driven content strategy by recognizing the contribution of donors, volunteers, and corporate partners on social media. This public acknowledgment fosters goodwill, strengthens stakeholder relationships, and encourages support. It demonstrates that the organization values the support it receives. Additionally, these posts act as social proof, encouraging others to engage with the NGO's mission.

*Unified campaign communication-* Smile Foundation ensures consistent messaging across all social media platforms by using the same images, adjusted for each platform's specifications. This strategy helps ensure a unified message and boosts the effectiveness of the campaign. Replicating content across platforms helps in enhancing visibility and engagement.

*Geotargeted hashtags-* Smile Foundation uses location-specific hashtags to enhance the discoverability of their content by targeting relevant audiences in specific geographic areas. This approach helps make their posts more visible to individuals interested in local issues and build a more engaged audience. By tailoring hashtags to the geographical context, the NGO amplifies its reach and relevance.

## 5. Conclusion

The social media landscape offers NGOs an opportunity to widen their reach, build relationships with stakeholders, and further their mission. Through an examination of social media posts on the Facebook and Instagram pages of CRY and Smile Foundation, this study highlights the strategies employed by the two NGOs. Both NGOs have effectively leveraged the platforms to build emotional connections with their stakeholders and build connections that help advance their cause. Best practices in the sector are exemplified by CRY's focus on storytelling, use of visual content and influencer partnerships, and Smile Foundation's authenticity-driven content and gratitude-focused philosophy. The study adds valuable insights to existing academic literature in the area of social media, communication strategies and the non-profit sector. Additionally, this study offers practical insights to other NGOs especially those with limited resources as they can learn from these best practices and improve their social media campaigns.

However, the study is limited in scope as it focuses on only two NGOs. This may affect the generalizability of the results. Moreover, the qualitative nature of the study combined with a relatively short data collection period restricts the ability to capture long-term trends. Further studies can address these limitations can address limitations by including a broad range of NGOs across sectors and sizes to assess the strategies employed. Furthermore, a longitudinal study can be conducted to track changes in social media strategies and their impact over time.

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