

Rethinking The NGO Website From The Knowledge Management Perspective

Kajal Sharma

PG Student, CSIT, Sanmati Engineering College, Washim

Sachin Vyawahare

Assistant Professor ,CSE, Sanmati Engineering College, Washim

Social Communication and Information Science Dept.,Lviv Polytechnic National University
Lviv, Ukraine

Abstract— This abstract examines the potential of redesigning NGO websites through the perspective of knowledge management to enhance their effectiveness and reach. In the digital age, NGOs must transition from static online presences to dynamic knowledge hubs that facilitate the creation, sharing, and utilization of information. This study proposes a framework for NGO websites that integrates knowledge management principles, promoting efficient information flow, collaboration, and continuous learning. By implementing interactive features, comprehensive data repositories, and collaborative tools, NGOs can improve stakeholder engagement, support informed decision-making, and amplify their mission. This approach transforms NGO websites into essential platforms for knowledge exchange, thereby enhancing their operational impact and strategic outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital landscape, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face the challenge of maximizing their impact and operational efficiency through effective online presence. Traditional NGO websites often serve as static repositories of information, offering limited interaction and engagement opportunities for stakeholders. However, the integration of knowledge management principles can transform these websites into dynamic platforms that facilitate the creation, sharing, and utilization of valuable knowledge.

Knowledge management, defined as the systematic process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge, provides a strategic framework for enhancing the functionality and relevance of NGO websites. By rethinking NGO websites from this perspective, organizations can foster a more interactive and collaborative environment. This shift not only supports internal processes such as decision-making and strategic planning but also extends the reach and impact of the NGO by engaging a broader audience and facilitating knowledge exchange.

This paper aims to explore the potential of redesigning NGO websites with a focus on knowledge management. It proposes a comprehensive framework that leverages interactive features, robust data repositories, and collaborative tools to create a seamless flow of information. Such a transformation is crucial for NGOs to remain adaptive and responsive to the evolving needs of their stakeholders, ultimately enhancing their mission-driven objectives and societal contributions.

Top of Form

NGO sector is in particular characterized by general deficit of resources, even for essential activities, and a high staff turnover rate due to a large number of volunteers [1, 11, 13]. Therefore, it is not surprising that NGOs often lack the critical processes, skills and tools needed for effective knowledge management often resulting in “corporate amnesia” and “reinventing the wheel”. On the other hand, NGOs are knowledge- intensive organizations and have a number of important qualities useful for knowledge management processes implementation [10-13].

During the last ten years social software and particularly online social services such as blogs, forums, wikis etc. (being a part of the next generation of WWW –the Web 2.0 [19]) have significantly influenced knowledge management research and practice. These means are considered a “new hope” in this field as they aim at facilitating organizational knowledge work in a more “lightweight” and user-friendly way [8, 20, 21].

For different organizations implementation of *social knowledge environments* (SKEs) – comprehensive arrangements of information and communication technology that “*foster awareness of others’ activities, encourage contributions of user generated content, and support networking for knowledge processes that seek to increase the performance of knowledge work*” is promising [8]. SKEs can not only give NGOs a highly usable tool for managing knowledge, but also expand the organization’s boundaries to include external users from appropriate target groups in order to obtain a continuous stream of ideas and feedback [23].

SKEs can be organized within diverse online platforms. However, since 92% of global NGOs worldwide had a website in 2016 [22], it obviously remains important element of organizations’ informational image [27]. The question is how websites can be used for SKE implementation in NGOs.

NGOS FROM THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE
Due to diversity being civil society’s signature characteristic, analyzing the NGO phenomenon is surprisingly challenging [17]. However there is a number

of recognized approaches to the study of NGOs offering helpful definitions. According to [3, 14], entities generally known as “nonprofit”, “voluntary”, “independent”, “civil society” or “third sector” organizations share common features. Such entities are:

organizations – they have some organizational reality, i.e. certain degree of organizational structure, persistence of goals and activities, *which puts them in need to manage their knowledge* [5, 6];

private – they are institutionally separated from state not being a part of the government apparatus, *which makes them more bureaucracy-free and flexible to implement new means and tools*;

not-for-profit and non-profit-distributing – they are not primarily guided by commercial goals, *which makes interorganizational competition much less critical for them and allows to cooperate with other entities and individuals to a bigger extent, particularly in sharing and borrowing valuable ideas and knowledge*;

self-governing – they are enjoying a meaningful degree of autonomy, *which enables them to implement innovative tools and processes, e.g. information-, communication- and knowledge-oriented, without seeking approval from outside*;

voluntary – membership in such organizations is non-compulsory, *meaning that individuals become members on their own will, experiencing personal motivation to join organization's activities and support its mission in different ways, including different forms of cyber-volunteering* [15] *such as participation in information management and knowledge work*.

Given the above, nonprofit sector offers a fertile soil for growing SKEs. Let us study the important features of NGOs that affect their perspectives in knowledge management and should be considered during appropriate means and tools development and implementation.

Volunteers are more willing to share their knowledge

Knowledge sharing is the act of making knowledge available to others, and is critical for leveraging it in organizations. However, even under favorable circumstances, knowledge sharing is a complex process and is only possible when people are able and willing to do it [5].

In this work we consider NGO as a *voluntary association of a group of individuals bound together to pursue shared missions and goals* [29]. NGOs are mission-driven aiming to maximize “social value” for society in contrast to for-profit organizations concentrated on maximizing their earnings [11].

The same applies to organizations' members. Professionals tend to guard their knowledge, because they consider their personal value to the company as a derivative of it. Sharing knowledge can lead to their reduced competitiveness as company's employees, worse career prospects etc. [31]

Although NGO members, like members of any other organization type, also tend to claim emotional ownership of knowledge as it may be linked to status or reputation [5], sharing knowledge in the volunteer role is not directly connected with loss of income or other professional degradation. On the other hand, doing so can promote the fulfilling of the NGO's mission they support as loyal members.

NGOs are semi-permeable organizations able to serve their missions by practicing interorganizational knowledge sharing and crowd knowledge involvement

Semi-permeable organizations refer to entities practicing activities spanning or crossing organizational boundaries e.g. cooperating, crowdsourcing, applying flexible

employment schemes, participating in cross-organizational projects [8]. This is largely true for NGOs:

large number of volunteers in NGOs provides for high staff turnover rate [1, 11, 13] and moreover: volunteers often participate in many organizations at once;

in for-profit organizations, knowledge sharing is a source of concerns [30] and although NGOs also have to protect confidential information and obviously don't want to post some data into public domain, knowledge sharing will not lead to weakening their competitiveness as in for-profit sector and, which is more important, can serve their mission by teaching new followers.

Being semi-permeable, NGOs can benefit not only from cross-organizational knowledge exchange, but also from crowd knowledge – the one created and deployed by large, often organization independent user bases [8]. NGOs can use existing environments for this purpose e.g. wikis, question-answer forums, or develop their own systems tailored for their specific needs and controlled to a greater extent.

NGOs can benefit from using social media and know how to leverage it particularly by involving volunteers to online promoting and knowledge sharing

Web 2.0 services provide good opportunities for NGOs to increase their community presence, impact, effectiveness, and efficiency [16]. Moreover, civil society has proved its ability to effectively use social media in many other cases worldwide [1, 22, 26]. Recently *cyber-volunteering* behavior (voluntary work conducted remotely) through social media has become popular among NGO members [15, 16]. Five key activities in cyber-volunteering include promoting, training, fundraising, knowledge sharing and problem solving [15].

Public trust in NGOs can be a catalyst of community involvement and knowledge sharing

A number of researches confirm that trust is a critical factor influencing knowledge sharing both in organizations and knowledge communities [5, 18]. As NGOs are consistently trusted far more than public organizations, business and media [1], this opens good prospects to shaping online audiences by sharing

information as well as involving “external” individuals into Web 2.0 style knowledge work in NGOs’ SKEs.

To stay sustainable NGOs have to use the most budget-friendly means in terms of time and money

NGOs are under-resourced in comparison to business and government [1, 11, 13]. The lack of monetary and human resources even for essential activities provides a tight limit or complete absence of them for costly information and knowledge management tools and work.

NGO WEBSITE AS A KEY TO EFFECTIVE SKE

Online communities (OCs) can create value including knowledge thus becoming SKEs. Such value creation presupposes an active OC with engaged participants [15, 25]. Growing active OC, in turn, expects effective community management and sufficient user traffic [28]. Thereby we propose the next stages of SKE development:

1. *gaining audience*;
2. *building community*;
3. *creating knowledge*.

Stage 1: gaining audience

NGO websites are content-oriented and therefore their traffic depends much on regular and high-quality content updates. As NGOs have to *stay on budget*, they can not always afford creating enough official content and they still don’t have user generated content without active OC. However being *semi-permeable* and *mission-driven* they can effectively curate related external content from partners, like-minded and/or similarly aimed organizations and individuals, and painlessly populate official website with it (Fig.1). When properly prepared, curated content may be highly valuable to visitors as it addresses the problem of information overload [32]. Curated content can be mixed with official in existing website sections and/or organized into separate subsite e.g. “calendar or events”, “opportunity portal” depending on its features and purpose.



Fig. 1. UML case diagram of stage 1. Here “Visitor” is a user with limited permissions, unregistered or authorized “on the fly” with a global social media account; “Org. Member” – NGO member with “creative” permissions and access to interior knowledge base; “Administrator” – NGO member fully responsible for the website with all permissions.

Stage 2: building community

Building online community requires giving registered users “creative” permissions to e.g. post in his/her own blog and contribute to SKE with crowd knowledge (Fig. 2). NGOs

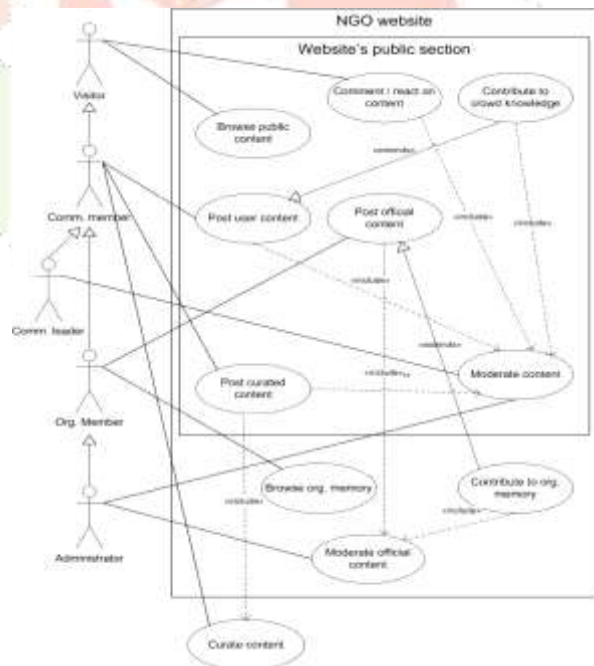
have good prospects for the creation of knowledge-oriented OC around their websites due to *sillsin using social media, public trust* and availability of *active knowledge-intense volunteers*.



Fig. 2. UML case diagram of stage 2. Here “Comm. meber” is a registered user with “creative permissions”, able to contribute to SKE.

Stage 3: create knowledge

Effective knowledge creation within SKE requires advanced community self-management based on reputation



(Fig.3).

Fig. 3. UML case diagram of stage 3. Here “Comm. leader” is a highly trusted user role. “Ordinary” users can be promoted to this role due to recognition of their activity by other community members.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this paper we propose a theoretical framework for creating a SKE on the base of NGO website as well as a UML model for such system behavior. Future research will include both empirical study of existing NGO websites as well as actually development of SKEs according to the proposed approach, their management and observation.

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