

ABSTRACT

In the process of fundraising, NGOs compete for financial resources, sometimes in the middle of an economic recession and a society that often demands accountability. NGOs are now more than ever using public relations to prove their good reputation, which is crucial in accessing donor funding for their operations.

There is a shift from presenting communication as just raw data, figures and charts - to a different touch in telling the message in order to stand out above the din and be 'heard' amongst other NGOs competing for the same resources. This paper analyses how NGOs are incorporating storytelling as a tool for reputation management. These stories, good or bad, true or untrue, told by the NGOs themselves or by stakeholders are constantly in the public domain and influence reputation. Although numerous studies have been done about storytelling and corporations ('for-profit') organisations, there has been limited research linking storytelling for non-governmental ('not-for-profit') organisations.

The literature review assesses the similarities and differences in themes relating to reputation, persuasion, framing and storytelling, and identifies a connection between these themes. The study answers the question: to what extent do NGOs use storytelling for reputation management in order to influence funding? Data collection was done using inductive content analysis of sample NGO annual reports and interviews and questionnaires for donors. The overall study analysed how NGOs communicate to donors through stories, to create and maintain a perception of a good reputation, incorporating framing and persuasion theories.

By combining academic literature and the findings from the research, it was feasible to identify an effective storytelling model that appeals to donors. The paper recommends a three-step storytelling model for NGOs to use to manage their reputation before donors: Eliminate > Connect > Tell.