SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) BRANDING IN SELECT INDIAN CENTRAL PUBLIC SECTOR ENTERPRISES (CPSEs): A STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH SCHOLAR
CINY MATHEW PHILIP

**RESEARCH GUIDE
PROF. NITI CHOPRA**

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

FACULTY OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

THE MAHARAJA SAYAJIRAO UNIVERSITY OF BARODA

VADODARA – 390002, GUJARAT, INDIA

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION: BACKDROP AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

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BRIEF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In today's society the future of any company critically depends on how it is viewed by its stakeholders. Reputation or brand management is an important strategic objective in the corporate world. Corporate Communications function pertains to building, maintaining and protecting the company's reputation. Today more than anything else, companies need to strive to compete in the intangibles which includes brand image, value systems, commitment to environmental sustainability and people matters. Corporate Communications is the enabling force to achieve these objectives.

Social media has transformed the field of corporate communications and the way it is practiced and its effects. Companies use social media to share their company's news, messages and achievements instantly with all their stakeholders. In other words, social media is used as an important tool for strategic corporate communication.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is becoming as an important factor for influencing a company's image, reputation and stakeholder relations. Social media has now changed conversations from being face to face to now talking with people through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and other media thus transcending the requirement of being connected in a physical real way.

India is the first country in the world to make Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandatory, following an amendment to The Company Act, 2013 brought into force with effect from the 1st April 2014. Businesses are mandated to invest their profits in areas such as education, health, poverty mitigation, gender equality, sustainability and many such other areas, thus moving from the traditional spirit of volunteerism to legally mandated CSR. The Oil and Gas sector forms the backbone of the Indian Economy and has all Indians as their customers and their products and operations have a tremendous impact on the lives of the customers and stakeholders. This study attempts to examine the content which the Indian Oil

and Gas sector companies are posting on social media, how it engages with its publics, sharing of corporate social responsibility activities, government schemes and such other information on its pages.

Literature review was taken up to explore and derive important learnings from the literature and to critically review it in an attempt to present the research gap and thereby a justification for carrying out the present study. The major insights out of the Literature Reviewed / Research Gap identified are: 1) There are many studies on: Brand building through Social Media communications and CSR communications / branding, 2) Research in the area of using social media for CSR in the Indian companies, especially the large profit making Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) having pan India presence and huge CSR budget (as mandated by CSR Company Act) is greatly missing. 3) Not much research on studying the Content of the social media from point of view of Public Relations, Branding and CSR Communications and 4) Need to study the implications for CSPSEs and stakeholders as well as examine the content of CSR thrust areas and CSR reporting on the corporate websites and Annual Report in the context of the CSR Amendment of January 2021.

The research questions that have emerged from this are:

1. How CSPE's are leveraging the Social Media platforms to communicate and engage with its stakeholders?
2. What content is shared by the CPSE's on their social media platforms and what engagement or interactivity is generated by the social media content?
3. How are CPSE's using social media for CSR communications and branding?
4. How are CPSE's reporting their CSR projects on their corporate websites and annual report as part of the Provision for CSR in Indian Companies Act 2013?

Based on Lasswell's "5W" model of communication, which focuses on "Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) Which Channel (with) What Effect", wherein the communication process is divided into five parts including communicator, information, media, audience and effect, the objective of the research is to add to the body of literature by studying the use of Social Media and Corporate Communications for CSR branding in Indian Oil and Gas sector.

The research objectives are:

1. To examine use of social media by CSPEs for brand building and CSR branding using popular social media channels by these organisations.

2. To identify the types of content typically shared, frequency of use of social media and response elicited from social media users.

3. To examine the interactive aspects of social media tools utilised by the organisations.

4. To capture insights and experiences of social media heads in the content creation and management of social media channels.

5. To examine the contemporary directives and their implications for the Indian Public Sector.

6. To examine the reporting of CSR thrust areas and projects / activities on their corporate websites and Annual Reports by the CPSEs.

Research Approach/Research Design used in the Study

Qualitative Research Method

The research is a Qualitative Case Study Research using case study approach and categorised as an exploratory and descriptive type. Content analysis is used for finding themes and patterns in the content, understanding the strategy or intention of the organisation, identifying broad topics and themes in the communication and analysing the response elicited by the content from the audience.

For this study, the content analysis is both quantitative (focused on counting and measuring) and qualitative (focused on interpreting and understanding) for which categorization and coding of words, themes and concepts within the data is done and then results are analyzed. The content analysis is used for finding correlations and patterns in the content communication, understanding the strategy or intention of the organization, identifying broad topics and themes in the communication and analyzing the response elicited by the content from the audience.

This research studied the social media communications for CSR branding in three Maharatna CPSEs in the Oil and Gas Sector which are also amongst the top 10 Fortune 500 companies in India.

Data collection was done through Non-Probability–Purposive sampling technique for selecting tweets and videos of the three organisations. The content analysis tool was used for studying the social media content and CSR content / reporting on corporate website, annual report and CSR / sustainability reports and In-depth Interviews.

The tools were administered to Social Media channels - Twitter and YouTube - and the in-depth tool was administered to senior Corporate Communications professional/s heading Corporate Communications in companies under the study as well as key experts in the area of the study to get key insights and experiences in communicating on social media platforms.

The content analysis tool is administered to social media channels – Twitter and YouTube – with the units of data collection being Tweets and Videos of the three organisations for the sample period of three months include Qualitative and Quantitative (classified and enumerative) analysis such as the types of content shared by companies on key social media channels, the use of interactive features of the social media sites, and the response to content by audience members. For the data collected, there were both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The number of posts, comments, likes, shares, replies and sentiment analysis are be in tabular form whereas overall social media-wise analysis are be in report form.

In-depth interview tool for getting practical perspective and insights on the research topic was administered to 10 Corporate Communications professionals heading Corporate Communications in the CSPE's / experts.

Further, data was collected from the website of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to study the CSR directives and amendments. The website and annual report of the three CPSEs were examined to study the reporting of their CSR activities. The nature of data is both Qualitative and Quantitative.

KEY FINDINGS

Content Analysis of Twitter and YouTube communication

Major findings and conclusions were derived from analysis and interpretation of data. All the three CSPEs studied have a social media presence on multiple social media platforms namely Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn. All the three have created Twitter handles in July 2014 and have been posting videos on their YouTube channels since 2011 with IOCL being a later entry in 2014. It is observed that all the three companies are using Twitter as a major communication and engagement channel to reach out and build a stronger brand presence, attract potential customers, share government information and schemes as well as post social and emotional messages that resonates with their audiences which include all stakeholder groups and people from all walks of life from across the length and breadth of the country as well as the global audience given their growing presence on the global energy landscape. On YouTube, the organisations are posting videos on a not so regular or frequent basis and there is much scope for making optimum utilization of this highly engaging and impactful communication channel by creating and curating relevant audio-visual content to meeting branding and engagement objectives through professional and focused management of the channel.

The three companies are not sharing much CSR content over Twitter and YouTube. There is much scope for making a direct connect with people and getting their goodwill by sharing the impact of the companies' CSR. The response generated by the CSR tweets and videos is also quite low and the small number of CSR tweets or videos display lack of strategy or cohesive efforts for CSR communications and focused CSR branding is greatly lacking.

The downstream CPSEs (that sell products and services) are posting content majorly aimed at branding (corporate, products, services among others), news, customer connect and government information and social messages, whereas the upstream oil and gas company (only exploration and production of crude) tweets majorly on social messages and sharing of public information on various government communications and schemes / updates.

Analysis of the engagement (implied feedback) from the fans / community in form of likes, comments and shares showed that the Reply response was the least for all categories of tweets whereas maximum response for the tweets was through Likes, implying that conversations and interactivity is at a basic level only. Even though a mix of images, videos, website links on various news, branding, festive greetings, events and campaigns social messages is maintained, it is seen that the responses are not very much, it is more of a one-way communication. These findings are revealing in terms of the lack of dialogue with the twitter audience, thereby losing out to connecting and interacting with their followers.

In-depth Interviews

In order to gain insights into the experience, insights and perspectives of the social media managers in using the Social Media channels and their suggestions for further leveraging the benefits of the powerful social media tools for effective Corporate Communications and to examine issues and limitations, if any, of using social media for brand building and CSR communications and branding, in-depth interview tool for getting practical perspective and insights on the research topic was administered to 10 senior Corporate Communications professionals heading Corporate Communications in oil and gas sector and experts in the field of social media branding.

Form the insights and experiences of social media heads in the content creation and management of Social Media channels, it is felt that there is a need to consciously create content that would interest our wide range of fans and followers, and this is very challenging. To manage social media platforms depending on which ones are being used, the baseline is 'engaging content', periodicity, and keeping up with trends. Social media must be handled by professionals having thorough knowledge of it. There must be innovation and creativity in presenting the message so as to catch user attention. Following trends of each media is also important. Social media is used for organisations to build a strong emotional pitch and to build a strong call to action, a strong likability and most importantly trust. Content is the key challenge. It is imperative to share success or impact stories instead of just sharing numbers or the narratives of programmes undertaken by the company for positively impacting the mind of the consumer.

While communicating about CSR there is a need to build credibility. Subtlety is the key to any CSR branding on social media and therefore refrain from OTT branding and rely on the engagement itself eliciting positive feedback. Social media tools can be used optimally to project CSR branding. Professional expertise is necessary for making the creative input and media plan for CSR branding by the corporates.

Oil and Gas sector is majorly a commodity sector. Building a brand for commodity has its own challenges. The key challenges in managing social media pages for branding and CSR communications is of creating relevant content on regular basis and avoiding people's trolling. Corporates need to go beyond the mandatory communications to truly engaging with them through two-way communications on their websites or by harnessing the social media that has enormous potential to engage with the stakeholders to do meaningful CSR and also build a good corporate image through responsible and effective CSR communications.

Analysis of CSR reporting on the corporate websites and Annual Report as well as the content of CSR thrust areas

The energy majors have been already communicating their CSR on the Corporate Website, Annual Report, Publications and social media as per mandatory guidelines as well as for CSR branding. With the Amendment to CSR Act and the increasing public and media scrutiny on the business operations, stringent environmental norms and stakeholder activism amongst others, will require these companies as well other business organizations to take their CSR communications to the next level. They need to go beyond the mandatory communications to truly engaging with them through two-way communications on their websites or by harnessing the Social Media that has enormous potential to engage with the stakeholders to do meaningful CSR and also build a good corporate image through responsible and effective CSR communications.

Social media communications for CSR branding is an area that can be examined to understand how these companies are engaging with their audience. The contemporary directives for CSR with a mandatory schedule have raised the stakes for large corporations and Indian Companies have never been more answerable for their social responsibility as they are now.

CONCLUSIONS

From the content analysis of the Twitter handles, it is observed that sharing of company related news, events and happenings or achievements are not enough to elicit responses and engagement of the masses. They need to tweet content that engages with their varied audiences by strategically posting conceptualised and curated content tailor made for the customers. Many a times, tweets are not an extension of the traditional press release. However, aligning with the nuances of the social media platforms, there need to be efforts to ignite and sustain conversations through topics and impactful content in which both parties are interested to participate. Customised content that matters to the public at large and appropriate to the social media platform is the key to achieved greater engagement on Twitter.

The YouTube content analysis puts forth that sharing of videos uploaded without any well-conceptualized titles and description, lack of specially curated video content and not leveraging the company's CSR impact will not elicit engagement of the masses. The CPSEs need to post video content that engages with the audiences and serve conceptualised and curated content tailor made for the customers even while ensuring that more CSR or community development related videos that concern the masses are tweeted in order to engage with them to accrue positive vibes. Branded content that appeals to the public's emotional and intellectual needs and on issues that matter to the public at large is key to achieve greater viewership on YouTube.

From the In-depth Interviews the emerging patterns / themes are that Social Media is gaining immense stronghold in branding and communications worldwide. Content is key to success and content creation is the biggest challenge and opportunity. It is important to handle negative comments sensibly and sensitively – highlight the positive and negative with prudence. There is much scope to use social media for fast and effective crisis communication, as well as for CSR communications enhances brand reputation. Traditional/classical media and social media are complimentary and organisations need to strategise a prudent mix to achieve impactful communications and branding.

The analysis of CSR reporting on the Corporate Websites and Annual Report shows that the energy majors are showcasing their CSR vision and mission, activities and projects on their website in details including location of projects and expenditure incurred project-wise and

year-wise, as part of mandatory disclosure in their Annual Reports. These companies also showcase their CSR through PDF brochures, films, photographs and such other communication material to create a positive image in the minds of the stakeholders.

The changes in Rule 9 - Display of CSR Activities on website require the Board to disclose the composition of the CSR Committee, CSR Policy and Projects on their website for public access. This provision is similar to the earlier Rule 9 under CSR Policy Rules 2014.With the Amendment to CSR Act and the increasing public and media scrutiny on the business operations, stringent environmental norms and stakeholder activism amongst others, will require these companies, as well other business organizations, to take their CSR communications to the next level. They need to go beyond the mandatory communications to truly engaging with them through two-way communications on their websites or by harnessing the social media that has enormous potential to engage with the stakeholders to do meaningful CSR and also build a good corporate image through responsible and effective CSR communications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that more efforts are needed to engage the audience in a conversation which will lead to greater interactivity and mobilization for strengthening the branding and engagement and interactivity levels on the social media platforms. In order to reach the next step, which would be two-way communication, there could be more posts that would elicit a response such as questions seeking opinions, testing knowledge, debatable subjects, breaking news, innovative ideas, human interest stories, quiz or survey questions and contests.

Merely sharing information about CSR is not enough, but should encourage dialogue and engagement for an effective CSR communication process using social media channels. The ultimate goal of dialogue and engagement is to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders. CSR tweets that encourage stakeholders to participate in conversations will enable creation of fruitful discussions that could lead to relationship building with stakeholders in the long term.

Conceptualisation and designing the CSR messages is the key to effectiveness. CSR messages impact audiences not because of chance, but because content has certain elements that affects them and therefore are more likely to be talked about and shared. The need is to craft CSR communication messages that are 'positively engaging' and effective for social transmission, opinion formation, and mobilisation leading to better branding and goodwill.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS / SUGGESTIONS

This exploratory case study is expected to contribute to address the research gaps identified from the Researcher's Literature Review and contribute to better understanding into content creation for social media from the point of view of Corporate Communications.

The findings of this study are expected to facilitate further professionalism in the fast-evolving area of Corporate Communications and Social Media communications. This study is also expected to provide valuable insights into the social media communications of CPSEs for their CSR programmes and strengthen their brand image as a responsible corporate citizen.

Social media is always evolving. The social media managers of the corporates need to keep an eye on the latest trends to stay ahead of the curve. The corporates need to use the latest innovative trends and anticipating the ones to come such as dealing with spread of misinformation, greater investment in social media advertising, influencer marketing, growing demand for video content, authentic and engaging content and the ushering of the new Internet, the Metaverse and its experiential, integrating virtual and augmented reality which is creating exciting new opportunities for investors and an entirely new dimension for brands to interact and engage with their audiences.

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