ABSTRACT

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 study tries to examine how CSPE's are leveraging the Social Media platforms to communicate and engage with its stakeholders?; 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?; how are CPSE's using social media for CSR communications and branding?; and 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?

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.

The collection of data in content analysis has been done by analysing the social media content and presented in a frequency distribution table as well as in report form and interpreted and reported quantitatively and qualitatively. 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. 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. In-depth interview tool for getting practical perspective and insights on the research topic was administered to Corporate Communications professionals heading Corporate Communications in CSPE's under the study. An Exploratory study and Content Analysis of Stakeholder Communications in the Indian Public Sector through their websites and annual reports was also done to study the reporting practices that the CPSE's adhere to inform their key internal and external stakeholders of social responsibility practices.

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 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. 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 is also quite low and the small number of CSR tweets 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 and no product or services offerings) 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.

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 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.

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 over 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.

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.

Results have important implications, because the main conclusion is that the social media communications need to strategise towards using the full potential of platforms such as Twitter and YouTube to improve dialogue and engagement with their followers. This will lead to greater branding and value creation, good corporate image and generate goodwill with all stakeholder groups and customers leading to better sales and stronger organisational identity as a responsible corporate citizen, which are at the core of the growth and sustainability of organisations in today's VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic and the 'New Normal'.