

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The present chapter discusses in detail the conclusion derived as a result of systematic analysis and interpretation carried out in the previous Chapter 4 and both the proceeding rationale and conceptual framework.

An attempt is made to discuss concluding observations on the social media communications for CSR branding in Maharatna CPSEs in the Oil and Gas Sector, with respect to looking at what organizational information is included on social media, use of photos and videos, CSR communications, whether the site generated feedback, and whether there are interactions or discussions between the audience and the companies.

Conclusions derived from the content analysis, in-depth interviews and examination of the contemporary directives for CSR and their implications for the Indian Public Sector as well as CSR reporting on the corporate websites and annual reports are also elucidated. The chapter concludes with a section on recommendations about possibilities for future investigation in the area.

In the backdrop of the social media being used by companies to share their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and projects and present themselves as good corporate citizens, this study attempted to study the content of the communications of the Indian Oil and Gas sector companies that are posted on their social media - Twitter and YouTube – and how it engages with its publics through CSR communications, branding, sharing government schemes and other related information. The CPSE's in the Oil and Gas sector forms the backbone of the Indian Economy and has all Indians as their customers and their products, operations and CSR have a tremendous impact on the lives of the customers and stakeholders.

Major insights out of the Literature Reviewed and Research Gap identified from the literature reviewed are that there are many studies on Brand building through Social Media

communications and CSR communications and branding. However, research in the area of using social media for CSR in the Indian companies, especially the large profit making CPSEs having pan India presence and huge CSR budget (as mandated by CSR Company Act) is greatly missing. Also, there is not much research on studying the Content of the Social Media from point of view of PR, Branding and CSR Communications. With the issuance of the CSR Amendment of January, the implications for CSPSEs and stakeholders as well as examination of the content of CSR thrust areas and CSR reporting on the corporate websites and Annual Report was necessitated to get a holistic understanding of CSR communications for the Public Sector companies.

The research questions that have emerged from above insights included:

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

5.1.1 Objective-wise Conclusion

In this section, objective-wise conclusion derived from analysis and interpretation of data is presented.

Use of social media by CSPEs for brand building and corporate communications and CSR communications and branding.

All the three CSPEs studied have 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 organisations 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 resonate 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. Out of the 553 tweets of IOCL, there are only 3 CSR related tweets. BPCL tweeted 18 CSR tweets out of the 258 tweets and ONGC tweeted 9 CSR tweets out of the 196 tweets, i.e. from all the tweets of the three organisations only less than 3% tweets were CSR communications. As the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are globally accepted developmental goals that underpin CSR efforts, BPCL has woven the SDGs into their CSR communications. BPCL's The Tweets have been aligned with the theme of 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) and shares about CSR activities of the company in the areas of Health – Cancer Care, Covid care – vaccine, Clean Water and Sanitation, Water body restoration, Hunger Alleviation, Education health and water, Education of village children, Blind education, Poverty reduction and promoting organic farming. IOCL and ONGC do not present any SDG underpinning and has posted on varied CSR topics such as Facilitating Girl education and empowerment, Skill Development, Sustainability efforts for water management and ONGC has tweeted on Affordable and Clean Energy, Cancer Care, Covid care infrastructure, CSR commitment, Decent work and economic growth, Empowering and supporting girls through CSR, Health access for Divyangs and Inclusivity and empowerment of disabled. The response generated by the CSR tweets is also quite low with less than 3% of the total engagement. The small number of CSR tweets display lack of strategy or cohesive efforts for CSR communications and focused CSR branding is greatly lacking.

Types of content typically shared, frequency of use of social media and response elicited from social media users.

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 product or services offerings) tweets majorly on social messages and sharing of public information on various government communications and schemes / updates.

The frequency of tweeting is high as far as IOCL is concerned 6 tweets per day making it quite high on the frequency of engagement with audience, whereas the other two companies are averaging 2 to 3 tweets per day. While IOCL repeats the tweets on its products and services to ensure salience for increasing overall reach, engagement, and traffic, BPCL and ONGC have not repeated any of the tweets, also there could be more efforts for creating sustained or common themes in the tweets which have the potential to lead to better engagement.

Interactive aspects of social media utilised by the organisations

Analysis of the engagement 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 & 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.

BPCL's customer connect campaign stands out as a great strategy to keep the audience hooked and engaged through cookery contest as well as video recipes by celebrity chef while ensuring branding for its LPG Bharatgas. Use of trending topics, viral content and hashtags is

also observed which can be used frequently as they resonate with the twitter audience. Being public sector companies, there are frequent posts in spurts during any significant events such as inauguration of new projects or any subject that are tweeted by the government or concerned ministry, a case in point being 23 tweets were posted on one single day related to one event.

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 achieve greater engagement on Twitter.

To capture insights and experiences of Social Media heads in the content creation and management of Social Media channels

Social platforms help the organisations connect with customers, increase awareness about the brand, and boost leads and sales. As the number of people using social media continues to grow and social sales tools evolve, social networks will become increasingly important for customer connect and thereby increase the brand value as well as sell products and services.

There is a need to consciously create content that would interest our wide range of fans and followers, and this is very challenging. While making content, efforts are to ensure that the organisations cater to the various customer segments. To manage social media platforms depending in which ones you are using, 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 organizations 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, create a lot of awareness. The causes need to be believable and need to have some accounting for. Subtlety is the key to any CSR branding on social media and therefore refrain from excessive or exaggerated branding and rely on the engagement itself eliciting positive feedback. Social media tools can be used optimally to project CSR branding. There should be a proper plan in place and standard criteria for how and how much of information about CSR is communicated through social media. Professional expertise is necessary for making the creative input and media plan for CSR branding by the corporates. As a reasonably significant amount of profit is being spent on CSR activities by the CPSEs it must be informed to the masses through social media besides other media.

Organisations have laid down guidelines for 'response and responsiveness'. All posts/comments need not be responded to immediately and individually. Dealing with trolls in social media management is integral part of the social media communications, especially for big brands and organisations. Sometimes trolls are ignored and grievances or customer complaints or feedback are handled by the company on a case-to-case basis and mostly ignored. However, if the comments are right then it is best to deal with them and answer the negativity with clarity. The more you clean the messier it gets and therefore the only way to answer this is share a lot of positivity and truth. Proper and timely communication on social media during crisis helps to spread correct communication reduces damage to the reputation and aids ineffective management of crisis and reputation. Social Media efforts should be to create trust and confidence by sharing facts in real time during a crisis.

When it comes to Brand building, social media is an important tool as it is an interactive platform to convey the vision and mission, CSR, environmental and sustainability commitments, products and services and such thereby highlighting the value that the organisation brings directly or indirectly into the lives of their stakeholders. The challenge of social media is that these pages are open to all. Hence, prompt management and resolution of queries and complaints are essential to effective handling and reduce the negative incidences through 24x7 monitoring.

Also, Oil and Energy sector is majorly a commodity. 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.

The patterns / themes that have emerged from the in-depth interview are: 1) Social Media is gaining immense stronghold in branding and communications worldwide; 2) Content is key to success and content creation is the biggest challenge and opportunity; 3) Handle negative comments sensibly and sensitively – highlight the positive and negative with prudence; 4) Use social media for fast and effective crisis communication; 5) Use of social media for CSR communications enhances brand reputation; and 6) Traditional/classical media and social media are complimentary.

Contemporary directives for CSR and their implications for the CPSEs

India is the first country in the world to make Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandatory, following an amendment to The Company Act, 2013, thus moving from doing good voluntarily to meeting legally mandated CSR. CSR has a key role in attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as many companies are aligning their CSR focus areas according to SDGs to meet their CSR mandate.

The Companies Act, 2013 incorporates a provision of CSR under Section 135 which states that every company with net worth of Rs. 500 crore or more, or turnover of Rs. 1000 or more or a net profit of Rs. 05 crore or more during immediately previous financial year shall establish a CSR Committee of the Board having three or more directors, including atleast one independent director. The companies would need to spend at least 2 per cent of its average net profits of the previous three years on specified CSR activities. (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, n.d.)

The Department of Public Enterprise (DPE) issued guidelines in December 2018 for CPSEs to use their CSR funds in a focused approach towards national priorities. In March 2020, the Government of India declared the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country a “notified disaster” and following the notification, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) clarified that spending of funds for COVID-19 relief would be a permissible activity under CSR. On

22nd January 2021, the MCA finally issued the Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Amendment Rules (“New Rules”) giving effect to the changes introduced in CSR by the Companies Amendment Acts of 2019 and 2020. The Companies (CSR Policy) Amendment Rules, 2021 will require companies to closely plan, review and monitor their CSR initiatives in order to comply with the directives which will play a major role in meeting the nation’s goals towards accomplishing the SDGs.

Reporting of CSR thrust areas and projects / activities on their corporate websites and Annual Reports by the CPSEs

Examination of the websites and annual reports of the three CPSEs shows that all the three companies have social media presence and convey about their CSR activities on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in a bid for CSR branding building and engage with the stakeholders on their CSR activities and projects.

Considering the tremendous impact of digital media on CSR branding and forming of perceptions, 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, with one company even seeking queries, suggestions or feedback are providing a channel for a two-way communication and stakeholder engagement in their CSR. As per the CSR Reporting amendment of Rule 8(3), companies having average CSR commitment of Rs. 10 crore or more in three immediately past financial years need to do impact assessment of their CSR projects through an independent agency. The rule mandates for submission of the impact assessment reports before the Board and incorporated as annexures into their annual report.

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.

5.2 Recommendations

Social Media is used as a crucial communication and branding tool by the CPSEs. The three organisations are using the social media platforms especially twitter for sharing news, achievements, product and customer service branding, and such other themes and topics and have a considerable following.

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, contests and such other means.

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. Organisations can use emotions and storytelling as social media concepts in crafting CSR messages. Emotions and storytelling will promote dialogue, engagement, influence, authenticity, transparency, and mobilization and will lead to audience acceptance, commitment, and participation regarding CSR issues.

Companies need to develop strategies for communicating CSR messages and promote stakeholder commitment and support through social media. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to identify the different innate concepts and supportive features that different social

media has for CSR communication. Thus, more efforts, as stated above, 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.

Social media communicators need to understand that people use social media for different reasons. One is to be informed, however, with massive amounts of information and resources presented online, individuals need valuable content that they can use. If information is relevant and useful for individuals, they will care about it, engage with it and share further.

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 mobilization leading to better branding and goodwill.

It is therefore important for companies to establish CSR communication strategies in order to generate trust in society and improve some of the main intangible assets that allow the sustainability of organizations in an increasingly competitive market. Social networks like Twitter need to be most significant part of the communication and branding mix because of the great potential they have when it comes to transferring the key message to the community at large.

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

5.5 Managerial implications of the study

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.