



RESEARCH PAPER

Impact of Public Relations on Corporate Communication by Using Facebook and Instagram as Digital Platforms

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ABSTRACT

Corporate communication is one of the best strategy of public relations in this digital era to maintain a harmonious relationship between corporate brands and their consumers via digital platforms. This study investigates how corporate brands (clothing, food, banking, and telecommunication) using Facebook and Instagram as digital platforms for effective public relations and how frequently they are using these digital platforms for uploading their promotional messages. Quantitative content analysis has been applied to collect the data. Overall 24 digital corporate pages (12 from Facebook and 12 from Instagram) have been analyzed. Two way symmetrical model has been used to have a better insight of the topic. It is concluded that digital platforms (Facebook and Instagram) are being used by corporate brands for the purpose of harmonious relationship with their consumers in Pakistan, due to which corporate brands are more concerned to update their official digital pages and show their digital appearance.

KEYWORDS Corporate Brands, Corporate Communication, Public Relations, Digital Platforms, Facebook, Instagram

Introduction

In the current era of intense competition, governments and corporations alike are finding that reputation management through public relations is essential for securing competitive advantage and advancing their own interests (L' Etang, 2008; Taylor, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2013; Moloney, 2006; Edwards, 2016). According to Thomas and Lane (1990), public relations is a management function that aims to build relationships between companies's numerous internal and external publics. The major goals of public relations in today's world are to establish and preserve harmonious relationships with the organization's internal and external stakeholders, including individuals as well as societal, governmental, and commercial institutions in general.

It is impossible to disagreement digital media's popularity and power. Without any doubt, in the previous several decades, digital media has integrated itself into daily life for purposes like connectedness, education, politics, commerce, and branding. Numerous studies have been done on digital platforms, mostly with an emphasis on connectedness and personal activities (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019). Digital media, according to Kent (2010), is "any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback." While digital media provides a means for the general public to stay in contact with businesses, the corporate sector may also benefit from using social media to establish and maintain the reputation of their brands. The question is why the corporate sector uses digital media as a primary communication and PR tool, maintains its reputation through digital media, and uses digital platforms to carry out its advertising and marketing strategies (Periasamy, Freegard, Kumar, & Mittal, 2011).

Digital platforms are seen as a useful strategic instrument for public relations communications by businesses. According to Wright and Hinson (2010), digital platforms are bringing in new patterns for communication between the public and the corporate sector, including employees, consumers, investors, local communities, suppliers, governments, and other stakeholders.

The purpose of this study is to investigate digital platforms like Facebook and Instagram as a novel digital PR tool for creating effective corporate communication process between brands and their consumers. The primary emphasis of this study is to examine corporate brands official pages on Facebook and Instagram with the lens of public relations, and how these new digital PR tools can help to maintain harmonious relationship between corporate brands and their consumers.

Literature Review

Fawkes (2018) demonstrated this subjective study is based on examining extensive literature based on teaching and researching about public relations over decades and extracted fundamental school of thoughts in the field of public relations. These are summed up as advocacy, dialogue, excellence and critical and cultural approaches. Each approach has its own perspective to understand the role of public relations in theory as well as practice, ranging from the aptitude of the practitioners to a critical view of the practice. It denotes that each approach has different towards ethics and the role of public relations in a society. There is a paradigm shift to understand public relations as an applied force. It is observed public relations as a shift from management function into a promotional culture. The role of ethics was examined in different approaches, to follow and obey the ethics are considered the core of any profession's relationship with society. Due to the emergence of consumer culture and free market capitalism, public relations and communication management have expanded in the past half century (Ewen, 1996).

Cheng (2019) studied the role and impact of social networking sites on the practices of public relations particularly to enhance its importance based on presentation, communication and performance. It is revealed from various studies that where SNS are helpful for the PR practitioners to exhibit their ideas and concepts to highlight the image of the company, simultaneously there is a chance to liaison with the public directly, to get instant feedback and create a healthy relationship. Moreover, it is also beneficial for the company profit and decision making. SNS are opening new horizons for both PR practitioners and PR students in their career, studies and profession. It would not be wrong to say that social networking sites are improving the practices of public relations.

Kirat (2007) explored that usage of internet by public relations department in UAE is an important tool to reach their potential publics and to collect information and monitor their online tasks as well as to maintain and build their relations with the news media. Results found that all targeted 24 organizations have homepage, but it was observed that only two thirds of them are posting their publications online, and only one third are using electronic newspapers to monitor their coverage in the media and to gather news, data and information of importance for the various tasks they perform. Only three organizations out of 24 have an online newsroom, and only two have a virtual tour about the organization. No selected organizations' Web site has posted any film or videos. Organizations in the United Arab Emirates still have a lot to do to take advantage fully and rationally of what interactive communication, Internet and online publications are offering for a better performance and more effective public relations.

Permatasari et al., (2021) investigated that the importance and usage of technology is being increased in public relations. So, in this regard, the trends and skills of digital public relations and competencies are needed to investigate and introduce. To investigate the research objectives qualitative descriptive approach was used by interviewing various public relations officers. The results indicated that traditional and digital public relations both work together are needed to the organizations for practicing good public relations. Where having good communication skills, analytical thinking, impressive writing, soft skills and interpersonal communication are the traits of public relations practitioners. It is important for them to keep themselves familiar with digital platforms as well as to known digital content.

Theoretical Framework

“Two-way symmetrical model” is the fourth model as identified by Grunig and Hunt (1984) in explaining organizational behavior and applications of their excellence theory. According to J. Grunig and L. Grunig (2008) the two-way symmetrical model is the first choice of organizations that prefer to practice public relations in an excellent and the most professional way (Peterson, 2004, p. 18). The practitioners that adopt “two-way symmetrical model” try to generate research oriented understanding between their organizations and the publics by involving their publics into a dialogue to resolve controversial issues and to shift organizational practices as per public demands. This model is considered as the most ethical model of public relations because it uses ethical and dialogue based communication which always helps to enhance the efficiency and clout of the organization among public circles (Peterson, 2004, p. 18). The basic objective of the two-way symmetrical model is to negotiate with publics by providing them accurate information, to resolve conflict by providing the publics with suitable solutions and to encourage mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its publics through an open and ethical communication policy. The model which supports this research study is two-way symmetrical model in which content producer conduct research to better understand the audience’s attitudes and behaviors, which in turn informs the message strategy and formulation. Practitioners are negotiators and use communication to ensure that all involved parties’ benefit, not just the organization that employs them.

This model argues that the public relations practitioner should serve as a liaison between the organization and key publics, rather than as a persuader. The term “symmetrical” is used because the model attempts to create a mutually beneficial situation for both producers and consumers. The two-way symmetrical model is deemed the most ethical model, one that professionals should aspire to use in their everyday tactics and strategies. This model is appropriate to support this research containing its postulates which are beneficial for both political actors as well as public. The basic purpose of the corporate brands webpages is not only persuading the public but also to aware them about the latest trends and updates.

Material and Methods

Content analysis is a systematic, quantitative approach to analyzing the content or meaning of communicative messages. Content analysis is a descriptive approach to communication research, and as such is used to describe communicative phenomenon. Quantitative analysis is generally concerned with how often a variable is presented and the amount can be communicated in numbers which allows great precision in reporting the results. While there are many definitions for content analysis, the research approach generally entails a "systematic and replicable" investigation of messages (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998, p. 20). The methodology was first applied in the communication industry,

where it was studied newspaper content (Krippendorff, 2004). Measurable and verifiable data are systematically gathered and evaluated through the process of quantitative data analysis. It has a statistical method for evaluating or deciphering numerical data (Creswell, 2007). The primary goal of a quantitative research analyst is to put a hypothetical scenario into numerical form. Typically, it is done by academics who are proficient in quantitative analysis methods, either by hand or with computer aid (Cowles, 2005)

Unit of Analysis for Content Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was posts of official Facebook and Instagram pages of selected corporate brands i.e. (clothing, food, banking and telecommunication) in Pakistan. In this regard 24 official webpages have been examined.

Universe of the study

The present study examines all the posts uploaded on Facebook and Instagram by the selected corporate brands in Pakistan (clothing brands: Gul Ahmad, Al Karam, and Sapphire; food brands: McDonald's, KFC, and Pizza Hut; banking brands: Meezan, HBL, and UBL; telecommunication brands: Ufone, Jazz, and Telenor) in order to perform an analysis for the selected time period from (January 2023 to June 2023) for the aforementioned purpose.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1
The Posts Uploaded in Facebook and Instagram Webpages of Corporate Brands in Pakistan during January, 2023 to June 2023

Brands Domain	Facebook	Instagram	Total
Clothing Brands	1741	2952	4693
Food Brands	550	651	1201
Banking Brands	439	1283	1722
Telecommunication Brands	594	446	1040
Total	3324	5332	8656

The findings show how frequently corporate brand pages in Pakistan submitted content on Facebook and Instagram between January and June of 2023. The findings show that 8656 posts have been uploaded overall to social networking platforms, such as the Facebook and Instagram webpages of selected corporate brands in Pakistan. 3324 of these cumulative postings have been submitted to Facebook pages. On the other hand, the corporate brands' Instagram pages host 5332 posts.

Table 2.
The Posts Uploaded in Facebook and Instagram Webpages of Individual Corporate Brands in Pakistan during January, 2023 to June 2023

Brand Names	Facebook Videos	Facebook Pictures	Total Posts	Instagram Videos	Instagram Pictures	Total Posts
Gul Ahmad	67	392	459	7	309	316
Al Karam	84	524	608	298	1254	1552
Sapphire	50	624	674	202	882	1084
McDonalds	91	217	308	58	267	325
KFC	91	146	237	75	186	261
Pizza Hut	0	5	5	15	50	65
Meezan Bank	0	0	0	62	577	639
HBL	135	187	322	122	200	322

UBL	34	83	117	77	245	322
Ufone	76	133	209	71	133	210
Jazz	181	103	184	94	45	139
Telenor	36	165	201	14	83	97

The findings indicate that the frequency of posting by clothing brands accumulatively on social networking sites (Facebook and Instagram) is 4693. Whereas there are 1741 posts uploaded on Facebook and 2952 posts on Instagram individually. In the same manner, food brands are uploaded 1201 posts accumulatively while 550 posts on Facebook and 651 posts on Instagram. Selected brands of bank uploaded 1722 posts in total on social networking sites whereas 439 on Facebook and 1283 on Instagram. The telecommunication brands accumulatively uploaded 1040 posts on social networking sites, Facebook (594) and Instagram (446). These posts are uploaded on selected corporate brands in Pakistan during January, 2023 to June, 2023. In comparison with food brands, banking brands and telecommunication brands, clothing brands uploaded significantly more posts in selected social networking sites.

The posts covered audio, video and still photos appeared in social networking sites i.e. Facebook and Instagram. The posts are appeared or uploaded in video and pictorial format on webpages of the Facebook and Instagram by the selected corporate brands. The table is offering the accumulative depiction of the Facebook and Instagram posts. As mentioned in the table clothing brands carries highest number of posts 4693 as compare to posts uploaded by food brands 1201, banking brands 1722 and telecommunication brands 1040 accumulatively. Similarly, Instagram accumulatively posted higher number of posts i.e. (5332) as compare to Facebook posts (3324) in the selected corporate brands during the selected time period.

Discussion

Four corporate brand domains have been selected for this present research study i.e. clothing brands, food brands, banking brands and telecommunication brands in Pakistan. Whereas, there are further three brands have been selected under each domain. Gul Ahmad, AlKaram and Sapphire are selected as clothing brands. Whereas, McDonalds, KFC and Pizza Hut are chosen as food brands and Habib Bank Limited (HBL), United Bank Limited (UBL) and Meezan Bank are selected for banking sector. Similarly, the selected telecommunication brands of this study are Ufone, Jazz and Telenor. Basically it is investigated that how Facebook and Instagram are helping these selected corporate brands to maintain a harmonious relationship between corporate brands and the consumers by examining their frequency of uploading the posts on their official webpages. For this purpose, quantitative content analysis of the corporate brands webpages have been done.

By using quantitative content analysis it is examined that clothing brands have more frequently using Facebook and Instagram for enhancing their public relations. Whereas they have posted much posts on Instagram (2952) as compare to Facebook (1741) as using them as a digital PR tool. Secondly, banking sector have seen more active in posting on their webpages. Similarly, they have posted more posts on Instagram (1283) rather than Facebook (439). Thirdly, food brands have engaged their consumers in Facebook and Instagram while posting their posts for maintaining public relations. They have also seen more active on Instagram (651) as compare to Facebook (550). Lastly, telecommunication brands posts frequency have been observed on their webpages unlikely they have seen more active on Facebook (594) as compare to Instagram (446).

Clothing corporate brands are more actively handling their webpages while uploading posts related to promotions, discounts, offers and events to maintain a

harmonious relationship with their consumers. Accumulative on Facebook and Instagram considering as a digital PR tool, clothing brands uploaded 4693 posts during said time period of January, 2023 to June 2023, which is the highest frequency as compare to other corporate brands like banking 1722 food 1201 and telecommunication 1040 respectively.

In this current study, it is found that the most popular and effective digital platform is Instagram among the corporate brands rather than Facebook. Corporate brands are more inclined towards using Instagram for public relations, promotions and marketing.

Conclusion

Corporate brands are transforming their practices of public relations from conventional ways to modern ways with the help of digital platforms. Public relations as a communication process raises the question of whether the swift adoption of digital tools and communication technology is increasing the efficacy and potency of PR activities (Jeffrey Geibel, 2006). PR and community events are used as tools in public relations campaigns to create a positive perception of a business. Witthaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2009). This research study also explores the usage of digital PR platforms (Facebook and Instagram) in the field of corporate brands (clothing, food, banks and telecommunication) in Pakistan, for effective communication between corporate sector and their consumers. It is concluded that selected corporate brands are welcoming the digital PR platforms (Facebook and Instagram) for maintaining and sustaining their harmonious relationship. Moreover, it is found that clothing brands are more frequently using Facebook and Instagram and actively engaging their customers by posting highest number of promotional messages on these digital PR platforms as compare to banking sector and food brands respectively. The least usage of Facebook and Instagram is noted by telecommunication brands in Pakistan. Whereas Instagram is more famous and frequently used digital platform among the corporate brands for corporate communication rather than Facebook. Only telecommunication brands have uploaded more posts on Facebook as compare to Instagram.

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