



Impact of Social Media Technologies on Public Relation Practices in Higher Education Institutes across India – A Live Study

KEYWORDS

Academicians, Higher education, Public relation, Social media

Dr. Shreya Virani

Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies, Pune- 411 014

Dr. Smriti Pathak

Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies, Pune- 411 014

ABSTRACT

Education sector in India, especially the higher education, includes under-graduate, post-graduate colleges, B-schools etc, is vast and has high potential for PR practitioners. Public relation is essential for successful functioning of any educational institute. Public Relations use social media technologies for changing the ways in which educational practitioners reach out and engage their communities. Social media technologies help to diffuse sociology and information with technology.

Social media technologies are the fastest medium to disseminate information at lightning speed. The information flow is transparent and free. Emphasis is now being given to content creation and reach and acknowledgement of this content. The process of transfer of information involves PR practitioners play an important role in elaborating the image of education institutes, not only to people reading, but also how they share this information for others to participate. According to few researchers it is similar to as many-to-many model where many broadcast many messages (information / communication) to many.

This media can be suited for socializing and sharing opinions in the form of blog posts or comments or spoken podcasts or videos etc. These opinions are direct and open which is different from other media options. It also helps like-minded people to form groups, discuss and blend in their own. These factors have resulted in growth of social media technologies and transformed the way internet is used for PR practitioners. For example most of the Education Institutes have their websites to showcase their strengths and work. This information helps people in many ways. It is no longer a one-way communication channel and instead, it is driven by the activities of users on website or associated websites via internet. There are several recently published books that explore how social media technologies are altering the mode of communication between organizations and external - internal stakeholders. Therefore it is essential for organizations to tap into this effective use of social media through public relation practitioners.

Effective Public Relations Measures will allow communication between education institutes and people in general for dissemination of information and knowledge. Social media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, wikis, Flickr, and YouTube have more than a billion users which focus on more than friendly conversation and individual expression. These technologies facilitate remarkably spread out population in immediate participation alongwith platform for effective collaborations. These one liner or even thoughts, opinions of people help connecting and changing the institute image.

In order for any higher education institute to grow and to catch up with the ever expanding technological world of social media applications, it has to improve and focus on its PR practices using social media. Social media platforms/ technologies is the key for any educational institute to reach the audience through effective display of strength or showcase of strength (highlights).

The proposed study focuses on the various ways in which social media websites are being used as public relations tools by the education sector and how the development and maintenance of such social media websites is crucial for the success of these institutes. Unfortunately, there are few academic articles about social media effecting public relations in the educational sector scholarly literature. Hence the proposed study is aimed at studying the sources of social media being accessed by education sector and its impact on their public relation practices.

The proposed study would invite the participation of academicians from the higher education institutes across India. The population to be targeted is the Indian higher academic fraternity. A well tested and structured instrument was prepared to measure the influence of social media on public relation practices. The questionnaire was prepared by taking various constructs from the previous studies. The questionnaire was tested for its validity. The survey was administered to higher education academicians through the online platform. Descriptive statistics shall be used to describe the data. Simple statistical techniques are used to study the influence of social media on public relation practices for education institutes.

Introduction:

According to Newson & Carrel (2001) public relations is an art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which serve both organizations and the public interest.

Present public relation practitioners are facing difficulties and challenges as information speed and globalization altering the pace and landscape of the profession. The present business environment characterized by globalization requires organizations to understand the intercultural and international aspects of public relations while operating in a global market. The internationalization of public relations is both an opportunity and a challenge for professionals (Taylor, 2001, p.629).

Over the last decade, and particularly in the last few years, social media technologies has transformed our thinking about our relationships, our connections with and affinity to others, and the influence and persuasive power of online communities on how one think, organize, and act politically. Since the inception of the Internet and integration of email technology into one's personal and work lives, his ways of communicating begun to

change. However, it was not until the creation of social media interfaces like Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter and other similar applications that has seen such a massive harnessing of the potential of the now-pervasive online connectivity in everyday lives. Social media technology links people together in ways that resemble traditional feelings of connection, belonging, loosely defined memberships, exchange of feelings and ideas, and the reporting of experiences and actions. Indeed, Social media technologies have suddenly lowered the costs of collaborating, sharing, and producing, thus providing revolutionary new forms of interaction and problem-solving (Shirky, 2010). One can now create, maintain, and access both well-defined and amorphously defined communities online, while also using the social media technology as a tool for a smooth transition between online and face-to-face contact via friendships, planned activities, and other more formal organizational affiliations. Social media technology has become a growing phenomenon with many and varied definitions in public and academic use. It generally refers to media used to enable social interaction.

The public relations task of higher education is to reach each individual citizen and convince him/ her of the significance and

importance of education to him in terms of his /her own self-interest and thus persuade him to protect and to pay for education. The ultimate goal is development of public support and recognition that education is the responsibility of all the people and that it may be enabled to discharge its mission in the preservation and upholding of democratic society. A collective, coordinated, and sustained program to win and hold public support is a basic requisite to the solution of most of our educational problems, where public opinion reigns supreme. Given adequate public support, education can meet the challenge of the times today. Public relations efforts be soundly conceived, be in the best interests of all education, and be competently directed. (Scott M. Cutlip, 1950)

Statement of the Problem

Due to the increase in use of social media among people around the world, there has been an increase in its use as tactics for many public relations practitioners as well. This new form of communication is growing at such a rapid pace, hence there is a need to analyze the impact of social media and other new media sources on the overall public relation in higher educational institutions. The purpose of this study is to discover how public relation practitioners in higher education institutions across India are using social media and also to analyze the impact and implications this new media have on the public relations profession; and how public relations professionals value these new media as a means to communicate with the public.

Literature Review:

As a discipline, PR dates back to the beginning of 20th century and is strongly linked to the growth of the media (print, TV, radio, online) when it begins to influence actions, behavior and policy. (Butterick, 2011)

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR, 2012), Public relations is about reputation- the result of what one does, what one says and what others say about him/her. It is planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an education institution and its public

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of internet based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content. Web-based technologies that support the social architecture of a community and enhance the effectiveness and value of personal interactions continue to emerge. Bruns (2008) projected that ,World Wide Web would radically transforming , shifting from an information repository to a more social environment where users are not only passive receivers or active harvesters of information, but also creators of content. Web-based technologies now encompass the socializing features of virtual spaces that have emerged as zones for information sharing, collaboration, and community formation and extension (Suter, Alexander, & Kaplan, 2005).

As Hill and White (2000) identified, World Wide Web becoming a significant communications tool for businesses, organizations and education institutions. They proposed, Web sites would be used to keep stakeholders up-to-date, provide information to the media, gather information about publics, and strengthen the corporate identity, and a host of other public relations functions. They found that media, corporations, institutions, and publics – may be linked by the structural opportunities that websites provide. They further stated internet being reasonably low cost source of public relations should emerge as superior to other tools in the near future.

Social media has a tremendous impact on the practice of public relations (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Integrating social media into an organization's overall communication plan is vital to its success (Parnell and Parmley, 2009). Universities raising their profiles realized they needed fresh communications leadership,

with many senior level placements from corporate and media sections. Academic institutions are becoming more watchful and strategic in how they manage their communications. (Parnell and Parmley, 2009).

Public relations in the digital age requires understanding how your key constituents are gathering and sharing information and then influencing them at key points (Key, 2005). He noted that for public relations to flourish in the digital realm practitioners needed to break out of traditional thinking and embrace new strategies and approaches (Key, 2005).

Public relations practitioners have realized the importance of emerging means of communication. A majority of respondents in a recent study published by the Institute for Public Relations believe the emergence of blogs and social media have changed the way their organizations (or their client organizations) communicate (Wright and Hinson, 2009).

From the above literature review it is evident that, it facilitates understanding on public relation, social media and the role of internet in enhancing public relations; whereas no literature has found about the impact of social and other new media sources on public relation practices in higher education institutions which further resulted into framing the objectives of the study and undertaking the same.

Objectives of the study:

The study was undertaken in order to fulfill following objectives:

1. To know the various technologies of social media adopted by higher education institutes.
2. To study the influence of social media technologies in enhancing public relation practices in higher education institutes
3. To study the various reasons for using these social media technologies in enhancing PR practices
4. To find the measures adopted by PR practitioners for enhancing PR practices in higher education institutes through social media technologies.

Research Methodology

Population: The study is targeted for the Indian higher academic fraternity to be used by education institutes in measuring PR practices through Social Media.

Sample: Participation of academicians from education institutes across India and the respondents were 300 approximately.

Data Collection: The study includes both primary and secondary data collection techniques. For Primary data collection, a well-tested and structured instrument (Questionnaire) was prepared to measure the influence of social media on public relation practices. The questionnaire was prepared by taking various constructs from the previous studies. The questionnaire was tested for its validity and was administered to higher education academicians through the online platform.

Statistical Techniques: The primary data collected through questionnaire was fed in SPSS for further processing. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data Frequency was used in order to analyse the data which also helped to draw meaningful interpretations.

Duration of the study: Survey conducted for the period Jan. 2016 –June 2016 (six months).

Secondary data was collected from references mentioned in the paper (Mostly used for literature review).

Hypothesis of the Study:
This study has three hypothesis

Null Hypothesis 01: There is no significant influence of social media in enhancing public relation practices in higher education institutes

Null Hypothesis 02: There is no significant influence of the reasons for using social media in enhancing PR practices

Null Hypothesis 03: There is no significant influence of social media on the measures adopted by PR practitioners in higher education institutes.

Hypothesis Testing (Data Analysis): For Hypothesis testing data was fed into SPSS and analysis is done using reports and statistical inferences drawn from SPSS.

H₀₁: There is no significant influence of social media in enhancing public relation practices in higher education institutes

H_{a1}: There is significant influence of social media in enhancing public relation practices in higher education institutes

Table 1 Social media is used to enhance Public Relations (PR)

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Facebook	119	40.2
	Others	177	59.8
	Total	296	100.0

Source: SPSS

Interpretation: From the above table it is evident that Facebook is the most favored choice of social media as compared to other social media like LinkedIn (f=100), Twitter (f=52) and blogs (f=25).

Table 2 Reasons for using PR

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Supplements the use of traditional media	119	40.2
	Reaching out maximum people	176	59.5
	Any other	1	.3
	Total	296	100.0

Source: SPSS

Interpretation: From the above table it is evident that social media helps in reaching out to the maximum population which is the primary objective of PR practices.

H₀₂: There is no significant influence of the reasons for using social media in enhancing PR practices

H_{a2}: There is significant influence of the reasons for using social media in enhancing PR practices

Table 3

		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Social Media enhanced the PR practices in your Institute	Between Groups	8.112	4.056	7.273	.001
	Within Groups	163.398	.558		
	Total	171.510			
Social media (including Blogs) influence the traditional mainstream media	Between Groups	3.519	1.760	3.710	.026
	Within Groups	138.967	.474		
	Total	142.486			

Social media have made communication more effective	Between Groups	6.550	3.275	5.204	.006
	Within Groups	184.366	.629		
	Total	190.916			

		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Social media are more accurate than the traditional media	Between Groups	86.638	43.319	33.195	.000
	Within Groups	382.358	1.305		
	Total	468.997			
Social media are more credible than traditional media	Between Groups	6.151	3.075	20.474	.000
	Within Groups	44.012	.150		
	Total	50.162			
Social media offer education institutes a low cost way to develop PR	Between Groups	8.183	4.091	26.259	.000
	Within Groups	45.652	.156		
	Total	53.834			
Social media are more trusted information source	Between Groups	21.116	10.558	14.331	.000
	Within Groups	215.854	.737		
	Total	236.970			
Social media (including blogs) has changed the way your Institute Communicates	Between Groups	.188	.094	.375	.688
	Within Groups	73.350	.250		
	Total	73.537			

		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The emergence of social media (including blogs) has changed the way your Institute Handles external communication	Between Groups	2.166	1.083	5.978	.003
	Within Groups	53.074	.181		
	Total	55.240			
the emergence of social media (including blogs) has changed the way your Institute: Handles internal communication	Between Groups	3.645	1.823	1.336	.264
	Within Groups	399.639	1.364		
	Total	403.284			

Interpretation: From the above table, it is evident that social media (including blogs) has changed the way the Institute Communicates (Sig 0.688) and the emergence of social media (including blogs) has changed the way the Institute handles internal communication (Sig 0.264).

H₀₃: There is no significant influence of social media on the measures adopted by PR practitioners in higher education institutes.

H_{a3}: There is significant influence of social media on the

measures adopted by PR practitioners in higher education institutes.

Table : 4

		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F
PR practitioners should measure the amount of communication that is being disseminated about their institutes through blogs and other social media	Between Groups	2.588	2.588	10.984
	Within Groups	69.273	.236	
	Total	71.861		
PR practitioners should analyse content of what's being communicated about their institutes in blogs and other social media	Between Groups	19.687	19.687	34.013
	Within Groups	170.174	.579	
	Total	189.861		
PR practitioners should measure impact social media on the formation, change and reinforcement of attitudes, opinions and behaviors	Between Groups	2.132	2.132	13.480
	Within Groups	46.503	.158	
	Total	48.635		

Interpretation: From the above table, it is evident that majority of the respondents agree that PR practitioners should analyze the content of what's being communicated about their institutes in blogs and other social media

Findings & Implications of the Study:

Based on the analysis and the interpretation of the data collected through empirical study following major findings can be enumerated:

1. After studying in-depth literature review we observed and noted the various technologies of social media adopted by higher education institutes in India. Also the present study revolves around these social media technologies. Among all the major Social Media technologies such as Facebook, LinkedIn Twitter, blogs etc, Facebook is the most preferred choice of social media as compared to the others. Further it is evident that social media helps in reaching out to the maximum population hence H_{01} (*There is no significant influence of social media in enhancing public relation practices in higher education*) gets rejected and the alternate hypothesis can be accepted.

2. From the responses gathered it is evident that social media (including blogs) has changed the way the Institute Communicates and also it has transformed the way the Institute handles internal communication hence we can reject H_{02} (*There is no significant influence of the reasons for using social media in enhancing PR practices*) and accept alternate hypothesis.

3. Majority of respondents (as gathered from the frequency) agree that PR practitioners should analyze the content of what the education institutes communicate. This also shows that delivering of information is strength and this should be measured using effective PR measures. Thus we reject H_{03} (*There is no significant influence of social media on the measures adopted by PR practitioners in higher education institutes*) and accept the alternate hypothesis.

Implications for theory and practice

The present research undertaken will provide deeper insight into the role of PR practices and Social Media in revamping higher education across India. The research findings will help educational institutes to frame effective PR practices which will

strengthen internal and external communication.

Limitations of the Study

The respondents were invited to participate and give their responses despite that we could not receive response as expected. So the analysis is based on responses actually received. The sample was spread across India which proved to be the major limitation of the study.

References:

- Bruns, A. (2008). Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to prod usage. New York, NY: Lang
- Bruns, A. (2008). Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to prod usage. New York, NY: Lang
- Effective Public Relations for Higher Education Author(s): Scott M. Cutlip Source: Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Winter, 1950), pp. 646-658 Published by: American Association of University Professors Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40220768> Accessed: 24-03-2015 06:10 UTC
- Gillin, P., 2009. Secrets of social media marketing: how to use online conversations and customer communities to turbo-charge your business. Fresno, CA: Quill Driver Books
- Hill, L.N. & White, C (2000). Public Relations Practitioners' Perception of the World Wide Web as a Communications Tool. Public Relations Review, Spring 2000 v26 i1 p31.
- Moore, F. H. & Kalupa, F. B. (2007). Public Relations: Principles, Cases and Problems, Delhi, India: Surjeet publications, Kolhapur Road, Kamla
- Newson, D. & Carrell, B. (2001). Public Relations Writing: Form and Style, 6th Edition, U.S.A. Wadsworth: Thompson learning Inc.
- O'Reilly, T., 2005. What is web 2.0. [online] Available at: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-2.0.html> [Accessed 12 May 2011].
- Parnell, L., & Parmley, J. (2009). Tools of engagement: Universities reaching to the private sector for new perspective and best practices. Public Relations Tactics, 16(10), 16.
- Shirky, C. (2010). Cognitive surplus. New York: Penguin Press
- Solis, B., 2007. The definition of social media. [online] Available at: <http://www.webprnews.com/blogtalk/2007/06/29/the-definition-of-social-media>. [Accessed 3 April 2011].
- Stockholm Accords. (2010). A call to action for public relations and communication in a global society. The World Public Relations Forum, Stockholm, Sweden, June 15 2010.
- Suter, V., Alexander, B. & Kaplan, P. (2005). Social software and the future of conferences right now. EDUCAUSE Review, January/February 2005, 47-59.
- Taylor, M. (2001). International public relations: Opportunities and challenges for the next century. In R. Heath, & G. M. Vasquez (Eds.), Handbook of Public Relations (pp. 629-637). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wright & Hinson, 2006 & 2007 "Examining the Increasing Impact of Social Media on Public Relations Practice" Institute for Public Relations".