

“COMMUNICATING CSR THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT- A CASE STUDY OF BHARTI AIRTEL WEBSITE”

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out whether the CSR activities done by companies are helpful in sustainable development goals. As CSR communication and reporting to the stakeholders are done by companies only via limited media vehicles, the involvement of people, society and stakeholders of the companies is the limited and not much for achieving sustainable development goals. Because, CSR and sustainable development focuses upon three key areas- Health, Education & Environment or in other terms- People, Planet and Profit, and if number of stakeholders of the companies are limited for these goals, it means the corporate companies are not doing responsible business and do not follow business ethics and shy away doing involve more numbers of people or stakeholders and thus try to escape for spending more profit on corporate social responsibility activities to achieve the sustainable development goals.

But how these companies are reporting these CSR activities to their stakeholders and consumers is the matter of investigation and this topic of research study will analyse the activities of CSR done by the Corporation Bharti Airtel based and incorporated in Delhi NCR area and analyse as its engagement of CSR communication with case study method.

Companies communicating their CSR activities hesitate to use all mainstream media as it is notion that CSR activities are charity work and doing so would term as advertising and publicity.

Method- Case study is used to find out how digital media and companies' websites are used to report CSR activities.

Key Words: - *Sustainable Development, Stakeholders, CSR activities, CSR communication, Ethical Business, Digital Media, Website of Companies.*

INTRODUCTION OF TOPIC: -

Corporate Social Responsibility is the tool for any corporate company or corporations for their functions and actions for doing the responsible business while creating a positive impact on the consumers or society members or stakeholders of the company through its activities on social needs like health, education and environment related necessities and helping the government for these social issues by spending their profit share.

Thus, CSR can be defined as the commitment of Corporate Companies by doing responsible business for contribution to the society, economic development and improving the quality of lives of their workforce-employees, their families and the whole society at the large. In fact, in this process, companies directly contribute into efforts of the Government for the sustainable development of the society and the nation at large. First time, the term- Corporate Social Responsibility was coined in 1953 in the publication of “Bowen’s Social Responsibility of Businessmen”. The World’s Business Council for Sustainability Development (WBCSD)

defined CSR as “the continuous commitment by the business organizations for behaving ethically and contributing to the economic development while improving the quality of life or their workforce as well as their families, local communities and the society at large.”

CSR is also considered as “Comprehensive set of policies, practices and programs that are integrated into business operations, supply chains and decision making in the entire organization. The Companies Act, 2013, clause 135, envisages that all companies having an annual turnover of Rs.1000 crore or more or net worth of Rs.500 crore or more; or net profit of Rs.5 crore or more must implement CSR policy. This act makes it compulsory to spend 2% of their average net profit in the previous three years on various CSR activities mentioned in CSR regulations act, 2014, like Health, Education and Environment issues pertaining to society and country’s sustainable development process.

In the context of India, CSR policy and its implementation has become inevitable as the corporate companies are now realising that it is necessary not only for their business growth but also for building trust among their stakeholders and sustainable relationships with them and in this process, the CSR contributes into sustainable development of the society and the country at large.

Core Areas of CSR Initiatives taken by Business or Companies-

Today, CSR initiatives are not for charity or donations, it is wrong notion, now it is integral part of corporate strategies that enable to enhance the brand image of the company. It is emerged as valuable strategy for any company to survive in the competitive business environment.

There are several new factors are responsible for promoting CSR like, globalization, advancement in communication, sustainable development, governance, leadership, competitive advantage and ethical culture.

Indian corporate companies are involved in many CSR activities like Health issues- Hunger, Malnutrition, healthcare and sanitation ; Day care centres for children for underprivileged sections and specially abled children; Education for underprivileged sections for the society, granting of scholarships, financial assistance for education, Gender equality and empowerment of women, care for senior citizens, environmental protection and sustainability, protection of national heritage , arts and culture, philanthropies, rural development, adopting villages, and in natural calamity and disaster helping the government.

Communicating or Reporting CSR activities: -

The stakeholders or society members only can be associated or connected to corporate companies and its CSR activities when the companies will communicate through various media and only then the goals of sustainable development could become much easier. The key of CSR is “To Give Back” to the society, to take care of underprivileged ones by spending out of their profit from responsible and ethical business.

Although, corporate companies in India now have started to report or communicate about their CSR engagements via various media of communication but maximum companies are using one major media, digital media and their websites of companies. They do shy away from using all media like Newspapers, News magazines, T.V. channels, Radio, Films. The main reason behind this is the notion that corporate social responsibility activity belongs to charity or donations, it is not for publicity and communicating openly through various media would term it as publicity. And here the chain of sustainable development process gets broken as the notion behind this prevent to use CSR as a tool for branding and profit, so no more profit share are spent by the companies for CSR activities and thus, efforts for sustainable developments goals get hampered.

Objectives of the Study: -

The main objective of this study is to find out whether corporate companies in India report or communicate their CSR activities to their stakeholders or consumers on digital media. The following are the key objectives behind this study-

1. To find out how the corporate companies in India report their CSR activities on digital media platforms;

2. To find out, whether companies use all digital media platforms like News portal, News websites or only their official websites;
3. To find out, what kinds of CSR activities are reported in detail on the digital media platforms;

This must be clear that the old perspective on CSR emphasized on Corporate Philanthropy which means charity for Social, Cultural and Religious purposes, while Modern Perspective emphasized on long term interest of stakeholders and sustainable development.

The objective of this paper is also to find out that why and how CSR communication is a necessary tool for an Organization, Government, in order to achieve the sustainable development goals and also for good governance in the society and the country by connecting the stakeholders and consumers to the company.

Method of the Study: -

Corporate companies in India have started to report their CSR engagements very recently. To achieve the aims of this study, the case study method is adopted here. Almost all corporate companies perceive the same notion for CSR activities, so it was found suitable the case study of one corporate company to fulfil the objectives of the study. Bharti Airtel company has been selected as a sample for the study and its region of the sample is Delhi NCR. The Data of this study will be primary as the company has given all data related to its CSR activities on their company websites.

For the entire study, primary data from the company website and secondary data in the literature reviews have been taken into consideration.

The data related to CSR activities available on the website of the company, Bharti Airtel, have been analysed for deriving the conclusions of the study. Bharti Airtel, company has made available its all CSR related policy data, program data on its official website. Generally, the companies are supposed to provide the links of all other data of their CSR engagements communicated on other digital platforms on their websites. What is the case of Bharti-Airtel in this regard would be analysed in data analysis further-?

Data Analysis: -

This study has chosen 'Bharti Airtel' corporate company in the field of telecommunication as the sample of the universe and the website of this company as the digital media communication has been chosen for the data analysis.

Our study has found that 'Bharti Airtel' based its corporate office in Gurugram, India, has dedicated several pages for CSR & Sustainability on the company's official website. The company states on its website that it believes strongly in the power of communication and it can help society to become sustainable and move towards inclusive growth.

Although, Bharti Airtel has been communicating its various CSR activities like Half Marathon- Run for Health, Education, Health through various other media vehicles like Newspaper advertisements, Television ad, FM Radio ad, yet they are only occasionally. The company implements its corporate social responsibilities programs round the year through its various arms- organization – NGOs. The company's flagship NGO- Bharti Foundation, is fully involved in running "Satya Bharti Schools" for underprivileged children in remote and rural areas all over the country. Bharti Foundation website describes all its CSR activities in education field for the society. It is mentioned on this website that Bharti Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Bharti Enterprises. It reflects that the company has the notion of CSR mainly as charity and donations and it terms their CSR activities on education as philanthropic actions.

Clearly, the Bharti Airtel, do not believe in using CSR activities as their strategic tool and for using in their brand enhancement.

This website reveals all educational programs, locations and funding, annual reports, program sheets for elementary education, higher education, technical education program, awards given to achievers in education field.

It shows that the company uses digital media to announce and to report its various CSR activities to its stakeholders and communicate to them well. But the company website is only a small part of huge Digital media platform.

The CSR activities of Bharti Airtel are not found much on other public digital media platforms like news website in the form of news, social media uses etc., and it raises the questions on the approach of communication the company adopts.

What fears or inhibitions prevent the company to communicate with pro-active approach about its CSR programs on all media platforms are the subject of scrutiny and investigation.

The company has posted the details about their CSR policy well on its website. It says that the company has embedded “the Sustainability in their Corporate strategy” in year 2011 and made “the social inclusion” as the cornerstone of the company’s sustainability plan. In the plan and policy, the company has described well how they focus upon “Stakeholders’ Engagement” and work upon the expectations of stakeholders. They have mentioned about their all CSR engagements related to education, rural development, environment, green fuel, solar energy, alternate energy, financial inclusion for the society, safe work environment, health services etc., but what about real CSR activities programs took place and how they created impact on the society can only be communicated to all stakeholders when the company will use various media platforms simultaneously.

The company has mentioned on its website, the goals of sustainability- Good Health & Wellbeing, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent work and Economic Growth, Industry Innovation & Infrastructure, Responsible Consumption & Production and Climate action.

But the company has not mentioned here what kinds of CSR activities on the above areas they have implemented and how they have put those programs and their financial expenditures for the public scrutiny by reporting or communicating in various other digital media platforms or other media.

It clearly shows that the company do shy away from using public digital media platform for reporting or communicating all these engagements of CSR and it shows the inhibitive approach or Re-active approach and it creates the doubts on the real intentions of CSR funding and expenditures.

Although, Bharti Airtel on its website has revealed in its Sustainability Report, 2018 that the company has the expenditure of Rs. 528 Million for the social welfare and education sector out of its total Rs.538986 Million revenue generated in this year, which is just 1 percent of total net profit for its CSR engagement funding. While, Indian Parliament Act. 2013 enunciate for minimum 2 percent of its total net profit must be spent on CSR activities.

The company website mentions also its performances regarding various CSR activities in its highlights, over 2 million people’s lives got impacted through its flagship NGO- Bharti Foundation till date including over 242,000 children in FY 2017-18 which is more than 180% increase from FY 2015-16.

The company has benefited over 4 million farmers through building agricultural awareness by our IKSL program, but there are no programs videos linked on the websites for real communication to the stakeholders.

The company has mentioned that in the sustainable development goals, it has made the efforts to reduce 83% CO2 emissions per Terabyte in network infrastructure in the past two years which is acceptable.

The company has recycled about 5,300 tons of E-waste and refurbished over 840,000 DTH units in the past two years respectively. They made the effort to reduce 23.6 million of diesel in the network infrastructure and used solar energy plants in network infrastructure. They have made the effort to save trees and paperless work like 96% paperless work for prepaid wireless activation through Aadhar card made possible.

Bharti Airtel has made available all CSR engagements programs on its website be it Education for all or Delhi Half Marathon, or E waste management or Health camps or Environment awareness camps on its website, but what are the details of each programs like how much they spent when these programs held when they will be holding all details are not given on the company website.

While giving all minute details of CSR engagements programs on the company website is not possible, reporting or communicating CSR activities through all kinds of media will make possible for the company to reach all stakeholders and the society at large.

The company website has also given all CSR program held details on its CSR website page like its “A Caring Touch” (ACT) program implemented many such initiatives for societal change in the various regions of the country- Helping the Disadvantaged people in M.P. State, Chhindwara district, where the company has granted scholarships to almost 200 students; Caring for the Elderly program on the outskirts of Jodhpur, Anubandh village, and helped senior citizens deserted by their families; Supporting the Community program under which the company has partnered with other NGOs like Action for Autism, CRY, HelpAge India, National Association for Blind, Save Life Foundation, SOS Children Villages of India, and the Banyan among others and did charity and donations work for these organizations.

The company has given all such data on its website and on its CSR page, but again it will be communicated to just only those stakeholders who are already associated or going to be associated for business reason with Bharti Airtel. But what about general stakeholders, general consumers or the society at large who could be future stakeholders and the company can enhance their image and do growth in business?

There are no data available for how the Bharti Airtel has communicated by using various communication vehicles; how many programs and initiatives got media coverage and what are the impact of these CSR initiatives on the consumers and stakeholders; how many media companies have approached to Bharti Airtel for investigation for interviews regarding its CSR engagements, these data are unavailable.

Discussion & Conclusion: -

This study has focused upon the CSR reporting and communication done by Bharti Airtel company in the last two financial years. The annual reports of the company posted on its official websites under name of CSR page and Sustainability report page only give the idea about how Bharti Airtel has made the policy and programs regarding CSR engagements and initiatives taken for sustainable development goals.

The above data analysis reflects that Bharti Airtel has not any policy (posted on its website) regarding the using various media platforms to communicate its CSR activities to its consumers, stakeholders and to the society and the government at large.

The above data analysis shows that the company has posted its notion of CSR and Sustainability as Charity, Philanthropies and donations but not the notion of Corporate Strategy, Ethical business strategy and Giving back to the society. Further this is proved when the data were analysed about the budget on CSR activities in one financial year, 2018, it was surprisingly meagre amount of fund, just 1.0 percent of total net profit of the company in one financial year.

Why so less fund for CSR engagement? Why the CSR regulations and act. for minimum two percent expenditure has been violated? These are the questions could be asked on media platforms and companies in India just post their CSR activities on their company websites that is just small part of digital media and have reach to very few numbers of audience or consumers or stakeholders.

In this way, these are the roadblocks in the goals of sustainable development in India. No doubt, Bharti Airtel has taken many CSR initiatives and implemented many programs related to Education for underprivileged, clean energy, environment protection, health awareness programs for the societal change as its official website shows. But, it is not enough it is now more than 20 years when the CSR initiatives had been taken by many corporate companies like Tata group of companies, Birla group, even before the laws came into existence in 2013. It is now almost six years past; the corporate companies still are far behind in implementing CSR regulations fully.

This research study has proved that the Sample company- Bharti Airtel, even did not spend minimum 2% of its total turnover on the CSR engagements. The objective of this research study- to find out why corporate companies do shy away from communicating their CSR activities in various media to their stakeholders

conclude that the companies do hesitate for the public scrutiny and questions from media for their expenditure on CSR programs and details of the CSR engagements among public and to its stakeholders.

The study also gives the conclusion that corporate companies do not have honest intentions while taking on CSR and Sustainability programs in their business policy.

Recommendations: -

This case study derives some suggestions for the corporate companies and the governments in order to achieve the goals of sustainable development-

First, the Government (ministry of Corporate affairs), corporations, and experts and educationists in CSR field should come on common platform where the notion of CSR as a just charity or philanthropy could be replaced by CSR as “Business strategic tool”, as tool for sustainable development goals and the tool for brand enhancement of corporations in India.

Second, the Government must come up with more stringent laws and regulations to make sure the corporate companies spend the minimum 2% of their net profit on corporate social responsibility activities and for sustainability programs to achieve goals of sustainable development in India.

Third, Corporate leaders and expertise must think over the concept of linkage of CSR and Sustainability programs with brand image of the company and must think the CSR expenditure as the investment for further creating more stakeholders in favour of the company.

Fourth, Corporate companies must emphasize upon the CSR communication by using various media channels and platforms and adopt pro-active approach of communication for reaching to all stakeholders and create ethical business environment in order to achieve sustainable development goals.

Limitations of the Study: -

As the research topic suggest, our study was limited to one aspect of CSR, i.e. digital media communication for CSR activities. For the study, case study method was adopted and there are some limitations in case study method for the research. Only one sample in our research delimit the scope of our study and the results may vary for different segments of corporate companies. But, generally, as far as CSR communication is concerned, our literature reviews suggest that corporate companies do adopt negative and re-active approach and inhibit while reporting and communicating their all details of CSR activities.

This research study can be further investigated using “triangular method” and using two research methods to come arrive on more clear conclusions.

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