

MEDIA AND
MARGINALISATION:
THE PERIPHERY VOICES

EDITED BY

V. RATNAMALA
SAYAN DEY

Emerging Corporate Communication Strategies among Corporate Firms for Ensuring Women Friendly Workspace During COVID

K.S.Ragini

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility concept in corporate communication studies is a crucial and effective communication strategy to establish connection with the society, especially when the society needs it the most. Corporate firms and companies are viewing CSR concept not only as a strategy to enhance their reputation or promotion but also to cement better relationships with the society, making them socially accountable. Apart from providing financial assistance, the firms are trying to explore more effective communication strategies as part of CSR and trying to extend their community relations activities in order to establish their image among the public and to build a unique reputation among others.

Corporate firms with social responsibility initiatives can win the hearts of public, maintain a seamless relationship with the society and contribute to the developmental needs of the society. A firm involved in community relations can understand the needs and necessities of the society better and offer solutions to the problems of people. A business with social responsibility is the need of the hour prioritizing social, economic and environmental benefits. An employer with social responsibility adds to the value of an organization, morale and work ethics. A well planned, organized and structured corporate social responsibility team can contribute to the overall growth of an organization along with the development of society.

CSR concept has been widely discussed, practiced nowadays and has become a key component in the business strategy of organizations especially among IT firms. To be a part of society makes one socially accountable and responsible. CSR has thus become the central aspect of business and marketing communication strategy. Corporate citizenship enhances the corporate image and the corporate citizenship concept has to be reframed and revised in the post covid world for effective results and active involvement of firms in societal affairs. It invites customer

satisfaction and more engaged employees that would result in better performance of firm as well as its employees. CSR in an organization allows conglomeration and partnerships with other firms, organizations, NGOs and government departments which provide a wider perspective to it and its wider application.

Gender and development is one of the key areas exercised and executed by corporate firms in their CSR communication strategies with at most interest. Women empowerment is viewed a very crucial concept to be attained at all spheres, especially in workspaces. Women have to be treated par with men and mental health of employees is important for the successful functioning of an organization.

Methodology

The study employs qualitative methods. Interviews with Corporate managers, HR managers and with the women employees of the firm were conducted to address the objectives of the study. Content analysis of Wipro corporate website was done to analyze the CSR reports during the year 2020-21, 2021-22 to assess their CSR efforts employed to promote working women during the pandemic. Interviews were conducted with corporate managers, HR managers and Public Relations officers of Wipro, a leading corporate firm regarding the CSR initiatives employed by the company during the last two years especially during pandemic promoting women employees' mental health in life, both in family and workspace. The study analyses the CSR activities carried out by the firm to fight mental stress during pandemic situation among women employees, tries to analyze the emotional health of working women during lockdown period, the challenges faced by them and other social responsibility measures implemented by the firm in this regard. 15 corporate communication professionals were interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with the working 100 women employees in the firm. Content analysis method was also used to analyze and identify the gender friendly measures adopted by firm during the years 2020 - 21 and 2021- 22. Secondary data available on Wipro's website was also taken; an analysis of CSR reports published by the firm during the last two years was analyzed to find out the intensity of CSR communication, especially to analyze women friendly communication initiatives and strategies during the pandemic.

Analysis and Findings

Corporate social responsibility or corporate citizenship, an emerging field in the management research is viewed by corporate firms with utmost

preference and importance. Wipro is a leading IT firm in India with a strong CSR policy and approach which has offered them a unique space among others. Corporate communication team at Wipro manages the communication effectively and constantly engages its employees in community relations campaigns and programmes. Interviews and analysis of annual CSR reports of Wipro reveals that the firm actively involves in social activities with strong CSR policy making them socially accountable.

During pandemic, the firm has taken special efforts to elaborate and revise the policies of CSR considering the crisis situation to be addressed. The Board committee revised the CSR plan to battle the Covid situation and was approved. Taking in to consideration the challenging times, it framed programs and policies to offer a helping hand to those struggling during pandemic situation. Social, political, economical, psychological condition of people during pandemic was researched and studied in depth and framed their CSR policies to offer solutions to the affected ones.

Corporate Social Responsibility team and its functions at Wipro

- i. The team conducts meetings quarterly in a year and assesses its activities.
- ii. The CSR board considers all the recommendations and proposals put forward by the members and take decisions regarding its implementation after consulting the management section of the firm.

Corporate Website and CSR Communication

Corporate website plays a crucial role in communicating CSR programs and initiatives. The corporate website has the following unique features, resulting in better CSR communication and well executed CSR projects. Need based experts group review CSR policies and make further revisions to meet the needs of the society. Features of CSR website includes:

- Fully functioning CSR website.
- CSR interactive features.
- Addresses community issues, issues related to environment, gender, educational concerns etc.
- Presentational features highlighting CSR activities.
- They provide feedback mechanisms and interaction space to public on their websites encouraging public participation.

- They make use of social media as an effective communication tool to reach people and to publicize their CSR efforts as social media is a great resource for CSR communication.

Confinement to home alone has increased the psychological distress among people, especially women which has led them to emotional stress. Women are facing extra burden due to harassments escalating behind closed doors. Incidences and reports of violence against women in households have also increased at an alarming rate says UN. The lockdown as a preventive measure against the Covid 19 pandemic has brought about a potentially far reaching, long term impact on people all around the world especially on women. The impact of lock down has adversely affected women and children who have become the worst sufferers during this period. Job insecurities and financial stress has further made the situation more painful that has resulted in the increase of stress among people. Social distancing, quarantine process and economic uncertainties have further fuelled anxiety among masses.

Mandatory stay at home rules has severely affected people, especially women and children. Both the employed women and domestic engineers are experiencing a similar situation during the lockdown days. Confinement to home alone has increased the psychological distress among people, especially women which has led them to emotional stress. Employed women are facing extra burden due to change in job nature that has changed to work from home Schedule plus the work they do for their family.

The study revealed that most of them faced emotional stress during lockdown days as they were restricted themselves or forced to be at home. Family issues were on rise, physical tortures; mental tortures were also reported by women in some households leading to domestic violence. Some of them expressed their anxiety as they do not know how to handle their children who were psychologically upset as they were denied entry to playgrounds or social places where they once gathered to share themselves.

Domains of Engagement

As part of their CSR activities, Wipro engages in a various sectors including health, education, gender initiatives, women empowerment, sanitation, environment, counseling, rural development projects, other societal development initiatives, gender development, business sustainability, primary health care, special policies for differently abled children, disaster management, rehabilitation projects etc. The firm also

operates community development projects in co operation with government sector, NGOs and other social organizations. The company revised their CSR plan recently to meet the needs of society during pandemic. More inclusive developmental projects, rehabilitation schemes and effective crisis communication plans were framed to address the covid pandemic challenges.

Corporate Social Responsibility has a significant role in corporate communication sector especially during pandemic, as business, service organizations and global markets are strongly battling with the highly challenging time to establish themselves. CSR is a self-regulating business that offers public and its stakeholders a space to interact and participate at large for creating a scenario of being socially responsible and accountable.

Gender Initiatives

Lockdown has further put an additional pressure on working women as they have to work from home and do the additional responsibilities at home which has further caused mental agonies and psychological discomfort among them. Taking this in to consideration, Wipro has put forward employee friendly measures for work including work time reduction for women having children below two years. Interviews reveal that they have further initiated counseling sessions for women employees who face work load stress thus helping them in stress management. The employees also availed counseling sessions from supporting teams at Wipro on family matters including domestic violence cases which were on the rise during the lockdown period. Classes on gender rights and laws were imparted to its employees contributing to gender awareness and personality development that really benefitted its employees prioritizing gender equality.

Counseling Sessions

Respondents were of the opinion that sessions on psychological enhancement for employees, especially women employees, their children, sessions on gender equality, addressing domestic violence cases, stress management, awareness classes on homeVs work balance techniques, engaging and handling children at home during lockdown, work from home issues, sessions on encouraging vocational skills among children were conducted by the firm that helped them to gain and maintain psychological balance during stressful period.

Health care services

During pandemic, the firm could establish a unique position among other IT firms with its inclusive corporate social responsibility schemes.

Wipro tried their maximum to reach its employees through various rehabilitation measures that helped many people and communities to overcome crisis. The firm arranged covid quarantine facilities, medicines, and health information campaigns. diagnostics of Corona cases, treatment to covid positive patients, assistance to health workers, health insurance schemes to employees, corona testing services, provided medical products, supplying hygiene kits, provided emergency health care equipments to government, mass testing campaigns, hand washing campaigns, sanitizing public places, distribution of surgical masks, sanitizers, surgical masks etc thus providing livelihood initiatives to its employees and people in this challenging times.

Online workshops and Training sessions

Wipro offered workshops and training sessions, medical camps on health care initiatives and encouraged its employees to participate actively in community health care projects and programs thus contributing to community development.

Revision of Policies

Wipro revised its policies to ensure work/life balance among employees, especially considering the stress of women employees and offered them flexible work shifts to ease stress balancing their personal and professional commitments, provided child care facilities, family friendly policies and childcare vouchers with a view of empowering women at work. Work from home policy was offered for all women employees.

Panel Discussions and Mentor Programs

The firm initiated and conducted special panel discussions and online mentorship programs regularly to make women voice their opinions, provided platforms to openly discuss the hardships they face at work during pandemic.

Evaluating Female Perception

Wipro provided several communication platforms and chances to help women speak up about their issues, encouraged their feedback and suggestions to evaluate their gender friendly policies at organization from the eyes of women employees.

Discussion and Conclusion

Effective CSR policy and proper implementation of CSR projects and schemes offer firms a unique reputation and branding strategy. Moreover it takes the firm to hearts of millions and also offers solutions to diversified problems and challenges existing in society. Though covid pandemic

affected the corporate world immensely, the corporate industry tried their maximum to fight the crisis, retain business and to withstand the challenges of the pandemic. The findings of the study reveal that during pandemic, the firm tried its best to reach its employees, especially women employees executing more gender friendly measures offering solutions to their problems during the stressful period. CSR provided them a path to reach millions during crisis. Every organization has to review and restructure its CSR policies and strategies to meet the needs of the time especially during crisis situations. CSR Communication and other philanthropic activities by organizations have a crucial role to play during pandemic period. Dedicated and responsible CSR team is the need of the hour to establish and maintain a responsible and accountable etiquette among organizations.

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This edited collection of articles will dive deeply into the dimensions of marginalisation, providing a scholarly platform for engaging and re-engaging with the realities of marginalisation, the periphery voices. These contributions highlight the need of using diverse methodologies and disciplinary lenses to a complicated and serious social issue.

Dr.V.Ratnamala is a Professor in the Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram, India. She was the recipient of 'Young Scholar Award' from CPR South in 2014. She was a Visiting Fellow at Institute for Comparative Modernities, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York during February - May 2020.

Dr.Sayan Dey is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Mass Communication, Mizoram University. He received his doctoral degree in the domain of New Media and Hybrid Culture. His research areas include Print Media, New Media and Digital Culture, Media and Gender among others.

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