Sustaining Corporate Identity Through Better Public Relations
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Abstract: Everyday this growing competitive world is throwing big challenges for the organizations to sustain its operations and existence successfully. The issues like innovation, changing economic conditions, increased competition and changing socio-economic structure of states creates a big threat to organizational health and survival. Among all building and sustaining corporate identity is one of the biggest challenges in the path of organizations. Public relation is one such promotion tool that facilitates the organizations to build its distinct corporate identity in the eyes of the people.
This conceptual paper deals with the concept of public relations, corporate identity and its origin in India, public relation professional and their duties and other important public relation practices need to be practiced by the organizations for their success and survival.
Key Words: Public relations, corporate identity

I. Introduction
In this interdependent world it really become important for all most every kind of organizations to keep a long term and trustworthy relations with the community or public groups in order to handle the up-coming challenges and also to maintain the survival and success.
The field of Public relations is all about developing understanding and building good relationships with various public groups including government, media, employees, investors, suppliers, retailers and customers etc. According to various researchers in the area of public relations, it is a systematized effort in order to build the image and reputation of a business in social context.
The worth of public relations in any organization cannot be overlooked. This is largely dependent on the fact that the public relations unit of any organization is crucial factor deciding the success of any organization by developing and fostering its corporate image.
If one start to study and investigate the earlier market conditions in Indian context, then it will not be doubtful to say that it was a seller oriented market and there was not such a stiff competition and strict policies of government but due to dynamic and complex nature business environment and government policy of globalization and liberalization, the competition suddenly increased in domestic market and its creates a threat of successful survival and sustaining competitive strength. But even in such a stiff and challenging competition, the success and organizational growth is possible through better public relations. Many studies have indicated the existence of public relations in every company and institution, irrespective of its requirement.

II. History Of Public Relations In India
In India, the philosophy of public relations was not as popular as in American society. The experts believe that this profession in India was termed as “Cinderella of management”.
This profession in India was organized through the public relations society of India which organized its first conference in 1972, and discussed the conceptual framework and importance of the profession of public relations in achieving the organizational success.
Researchers also believe that the concept of public opinion and public relations was also existing in ancient times when in kingdom system kings and their spies used to visit the public places to identify and understand the public problems living in that particular kingdom system. The stories of panchtantra also represent many best stories revealing the importance of healthy social and public importance.
Specifically in India, the development of public relation function can be divided into two categories-pre-independence and post independence.
In pre-independence era, the philanthropic activities of big business houses like TATA and growth of public sector undertakings, Indian railway public relations efforts in England to attract England tourists to India etc. are some incidents that create a plate form for origin and development of public relation in India.
In post-independence era, the development of parliament system, state legislatures, industrial policy resolution and industrial development regulation Acts etc. became some important contributing factors in emergence of PR profession in India.
In Indian economy the policy of globalization & liberalization and factors like media development and internet revolution also became significant reasons for realizing the importance of public relations in organizational functioning.

Issues on the role public relations plays in building and sustaining corporate image of an organization have being an area of importance in public relations research. Scholars are of the view that a corporate image is powerful; it helps to determine how a person will behave towards a company. How that company is perceived a weak or strong, open or dubious, warm or cold, rigid or flexible. The role of PR therefore is to assist in building and protecting an organization’s image (Bernestin, 1984: 103).

III. Literature Review

Last few decades have witnesses’ tremendous changes in the consumers’ preferences and cultural trends. These changes have made the organization think on new and innovative ways of promotional methods for influencing the customers, because today’s people have become less responsive to the traditional marketing pressures, especially advertising (Duncan, 2002). One of the promotion methods is the concept of Public Relations.

Public Relations as an promotion tool for business organizations facilitates in developing positive relations with the public. Public Relations is the process of “building good relations with the firm’s various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories, and events” (ZainBooks.com, 2011).

One of earliest definition for Public Relations still holds true, that considered public relations as an attempt to seek public support through facilitating information, persuasion and adjustment for an activity, cause, movement or institution (Bernays, 1955).

Anne Gregory (2010) in her study on “Involving Stakeholders in Developing Corporate Brands: the Communication Dimension” found that interactions with stakeholders are crucial and it was quite surprising that relatively few literature on corporate branding recognized the significance of range of stakeholders in developing the corporate brand. Thus, stakeholders contribution was realized and four different practical communication strategies were evolved that can be used to involve stakeholders in corporate brand development depending on the nature of their relationship with the organization.

De Chernatony, L; Harris, F (2000) argued that developing an appealing corporate brand image requires inclusion of both internal and external stakeholders. A model for managing corporate brands was described to reduce the gap between a brand’s identity and its reputation.

P. S. B. Shee; Russell A (2010) analyzed the conceptual development of the corporate image process. Emphasis was laid down to chalk out the difference between corporate image, corporate identity and corporate philosophy. These concepts were combined to make a new image development process in the eyes of public.

Although the concept of public relations was defined by many researchers from various perspectives but it was strongly argued by Wilcox et al (2001) that most of these definitions were redundant as they focus on only few elements of the whole public relations role. What others failed to realize, Wilcox et al (2001) stated that “public relations is a process involving many subtle and far reaching aspects. It includes research and analysis, policy formation, programming, communication, and feedback from numerous publics” (Wilcox et al, 2001, P11).

IV. Understanding Public Relations

“The purpose of public relations practice is to establish a two way communication to resolve conflicts of interest, and to establish understanding based on truth, knowledge and full information.

-Sam Black-a British PR practitioner

“Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.”

-Public Relations News, USA

“Public relations serve a wide variety of institutions in society such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals and educational and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audience or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders and other institutions and society at large.”

-Public Relations Society of America

A. A public relations Professional

A public relations professional is having the most important responsibility of matching the corporate interest and public expectations.

Earlier this job was connected with the profile of smiling, shaking hands and doing out goodies, but now with increased competition this becomes a most challenging job in the corporate world.
According to experts in the area of public relation officer is one who is responsible for keeping the good quality of relations with internal and external stakeholders of an organization including employees communications through internal new sheets, internal publications, building community relations through representations of company at various community functions, supporting the marketing decisions and actions of organization, assisting the financial operations and decisions, updating and managing organizations website for projecting the good image of organization in society with the consultation of top management, building long term investors relations, and also keeping a record of healthy media relations at local and national level through proper and timely press meets and press conferences.

The roles played by the public relations practitioners are very crucial in building the corporate image of their respective organizations in the eyes of public. They actually contribute to the development, sustainability and proper functioning of the organizations. They also contribute in identifying, establishing and extending the influence made by these organizations. Their roles also help in monitoring, controlling and establishing corporate identity as well as corporate image.

B. Scope of Public Relations

The major concern areas of any organization for Healthy public relations are-

- Customer relations
- Dealer relations
- Vendor relations
- Employee public relations
- Investor relations
- Media relations
- Government public relations etc.

1. Customer relations- PR has really an important role in developing the better customer relations through understanding hopes and expectations of customers, developing a consumer relations programme, developing the best products and services and ultimately returning value for their efforts and money paid in buying process.

2. Dealer’s relations- Dealers are people who create a link between the marketing department of a company and its customers. In India, the business relations between the organization and its dealers always have the “conflict of interest”. In this regard, by communicating complete organization information, providing continuous support and by monitoring their attitudes, suggestions and complaints the better relations can be sustained with them for a longer period.

3. Vendor relations- all manufactures always depend on the vendors for supply of material, equipments and other components in order to run their production. Even the big traders like reliance, subhiksha and vishal mega mart running their big retail stores and shopping malls also depend on vendors for supply of merchandise to sale. The public relation program of organization can helps in monitoring, understanding the attitudes, ideas and opinion of vendors in order to create loyalty and pride of association among them.

4. Employee relations- employees are key asset of any organization. Few HR Schemes like collective bargaining, worker’s participation in management, provision of welfare facilities and better career growth perspectives can helps to sustain better employee public relations.

5. Investors’ relations- better investor relations depends on the principle of trust, confidence and understanding. Public relations have the responsibility of fostering the confidence and trust among the investors so that they can hold their investments with organizations with confidence and security. Tools like annual reports, annual general meeting etc. play an important role here.

6. Media relations- better media relations are the demand of this competitive era. For the same the public relations duty is to supply the correct news and information in shape of press release, backgronders, photographs etc.to media with a view to earn publicity and influence public attitudes towards organization. Public relations professional should understand the media needs of information and should supply in timely manner.

7. Government public relations- for keeping the good relations with government official it is really important to understand and listen the government policies and laws and to follow them with full integrity and honesty by paying all taxes on time. Without building strong Government relations the sustainability always becomes a challenging issue for organizations.

V. Understanding Corporate Identity

Building an organization’s corporate image is not so easy task it can’t be achieved in a day it takes time and creative skills of the public relations practitioner of an organization by a public relations practitioner.

According to Dowling (1994), corporate identity is the symbols (such as logos, color scheme) that an organization uses to identify itself to people.
The time has come when professional public relations are supposed to play their proper role towards building and promoting a positive image of needed by the organization. This can be done, if these public relations professionals are allowed to be part of the policy formation at the stage of initiation, analysis and preparation of programs.

According to Dozier and Grunig (1992), “Public relations must be placed high in the organization hierarchy and must be practiced strategically if it is to make the more effective and, thus, to be excellent”. In spite of the significant roles played by the public relations practitioners in building the corporate image of the organization, they are still taken as granted and often neglected by the organization.

VI. Building Corporate Identity Through Better Public Relations: Corporate Examples

It is being observed from the history that in market only those survive who care, consider and creates bundle of values and benefits for associated public groups. The renowned corporate houses including TATA, Reliance industry, Indian Oil Corporation, Infosys, NTPC and Dr Reddy’s are those top donors who create their market image and reputation through excellent CSR practices and incredible public relations practices.

The story of Ratan’s Revolution in itself is one of the best examples of sustaining public relations in Indian context where the Tata “Nano” is being considered as one of live example of India’s engineering, designing and manufacturing skills. Tata’s Nano car, priced at Rs. 1 - 1.50 lakh, is the cheapest four-wheeler in the world, next to the cheapest car the Chinese QQ3, which costs approx. Rs. 2 lakh.

Tata motor’s also said to initiate a financing scheme and designed a new distribution system for semi-urban and rural markets. It is this potential which finally makes the Nano Ratan’s road revolution. This car, when a roll out on Indian roads is most likely to serve as a symbol of good public relations for the house of Tatas.

VII. Discussion

In this present global scenario where the whole world is a single market, organizations have learned the significance of establishing corporate image through effective and continuous public relations between their organization and various stakeholders to facilitate their business in building a strong relationships and establishing a unique identity for their growth and survival. This can be done by expanding their network of customers through proper information dissemination and just advertising and publicity are not enough to influence the people because they have become less responsive to these traditional methods of corporate communications.

Remember “Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing.”  
- John D. Rockefelle

References: