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### CHANGING FACE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA

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#### **ABSTRACT :**

*Social Media has revolutionized the way we connect with the people all over the world. The fast changing technologies, especially in the field of media, have also brought in the sweeping changes in the field of social media and other areas of the media. The traditional media is under tremendous threat with the*



*increasing popularity of the social media. The life and living and habits of media consumption of millions of people have undergone unimaginable changes. The area of Public Relations has also been witnessing paradigm shift in the way, the public relations professionals function. In this context, this paper tries to discuss and analyze the changes that*

*have taken place in the field of Public Relations with the advent of social media.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Public Relations, Social Media, Communications, PR profession.*

#### **INTRODUCTION :**

Social Media has become all pervasive. The increasing usage of social media has heralded sweeping changes in many fields and the Public Relations profession too has undergone massive changes due to the emergence of social media. The traditional way of public relations heavily depended upon the use of pamphlets, press notes, press kits, handouts etc.,

However, the increasing popularity of social media and its massive use by one and all has massively changed the PR profession. The major changes witnessed by the public relations profession include; the way it reaches its internal and external publics, the type of communication method it uses and the type of social media platform it uses to reach the different sectors of the target people.

The traditional public relations practice has always consumed more time and it used to be laborious process to reach its targeted people. Now the time has become a major factor and there is greater immediacy in reaching the targeted people for the purpose carrying out public relations campaign.

Millions of people living in different geographical locations can also be reached within no time by the public relations professionals by using the social media tools. The impediments like time-limitation, number of people and number of locations have also been majorly overcome by the new social media tools being used by the public relations practitioners.

The major factors like increased broadband, availability of spectrum, entry of private players in the telecommunications field and the affordability of the smart phones have proved to be the game changers in the sudden rise and popularity of the social media.

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It is to be pointed out that India has become one of the major data consumers and in the process has also emerged as the highest data consumer in the world thus social media becoming availability to all. The establishment of cell phone towers in remote locations too has made the internet available to the people living in geographically difficult terrains and other remote areas.

One of the key factors in the increased popularity of the internet is that the cost-effective and cheap and affordable data plans by the telecom players who vie to get the share of customers in a country like India.

This has also led to the monthly affordable and unlimited data plans offered by the major telecom players has resulted in a competitive pricing thus making the internet available to different sections of the people. Earlier, there used to be a digital divide where the communications haves and communication have-nots, but the internet is proving to be a game changer and is creating the level playing field among different sections of the people.

In this backdrop, the public relations practitioners too have jumped onto the bandwagon and have lapped up the developments in the field of social media. It has become easy for them in a way to reach to the targeted audience and at the same time, it is proving to be a major challenge to update with the technology and seamlessly embed those technologies into their professional practice.

### **MAJOR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:**

Though there are scores of social media platforms of different hues, this paper restricts to major social media tools like Facebook, Whatsapp, you tube and Instagram. Having an effective social media presence has become a sort of must for different companies and other corporate bodies that value to connect with the people who are their internal or external publics.

The corporate rely on their branding and image building, here is the major challenge for the public relations professionals to build the desired image for the corporate entities they work for and here lies their success. Image building, branding, rebranding and creation of positive talk around the company and its services are the key to the success and growth of the companies. The profession of public relations takes the major task of creating positive buzz for the services of the company and its products.

In this era of globalization, many of the companies are operating at the multi-national level, and the targeted audiences are stationed at different locations across the globe. The professionals of the public relations need to work in a global environment and work in tune with the needs and cultures of the people all over the world.

The social media platforms like Facebook are immensely popular with the audiences of high end across the world. It has become a sort of must to have Facebook account for the companies to connect with their targeted audience. The public relations professionals and the communication specialists are finding it challenging to reach out to the people all over the globe and with multicultural habits and backgrounds.

Creating and maintaining an attractive and interactive Facebook page for the companies has become a sort of mandatory and this has given an opportunity to the public relations practitioners to reach out the people all over the globe and to get the feedback from the customers and improve accordingly.

Updating the information relevant to their company posted on the Facebook and keeping in touch with the targeted sections of the people is a must for the professionals to keep the interest alive. There is also need to be more interactive where they attend to the grievances of the customers and address their issues in the right earnest. These are the key factors in sustaining the image of the people.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES FOR PR PROFESSIONALS:**

The popularity of social media has also thrown challenges to the companies and especially the public relations professionals, who need to constantly keep update the internal and external publics about their companies and their services tasks and hone their skills to rise up to the new challenges. It becomes a challenge for the public relations professionals when there is an anti-campaign launched by some

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disgruntled or dissatisfied customers or when there is a sustained proxy campaign to malign the image of the company by its detractors or competitors.

The public relations professionals' job involves to promote the company's image and to protect it from malicious and targeted campaigns to tarnish the image effectively, here the social media platforms are potent either way. The effective use of social media tools by the public relations professionals has become a minimum requirement, while fighting the targeted campaigns has become a major challenge to keep the company's image intact.

Image building and image protection are the two major concerns in the social media era for the public relations professionals. The traditional tools of public relations have changed the way they are delivered to the targeted people. The social media presence has also become a critical factor in creating the impression about the company at the global arena. The presence of social media chosen by the corporate entities and other companies should also be in tune with the changing needs and attitudes and consumption patterns of the targeted customers.

Involving different sections of people, valuing the feedback from the stakeholders, custom-made and tailored information aimed at the image building of the company need to be taken care of by the public relations professionals.

The celebrities of different fields like cinema and sports especially are using the Instagram account to reach out to the public and are marketing themselves in a big way by posting the latest and interesting pictures related to them. In a way, some of the popular celebrities are also earning a lot of money by posting their pictures on Instagram platform. The popular social media pays the celebrities based on the number of followers that the celebrities have on the platform. It is not surprising that some of the popular cricketers and cinema stars with huge number of followers on the social media platform are making lot of money by posting their pictures and this has become an interesting way to maintain their public relations in the social media era. Companies too are having the social media presence in all across the social media platforms to reach out to the people as part of the public relations practice and requirement.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

It has become clear that social media has changed the way, the public relations profession functions in the modern world. The social media use has dramatically increased the reach of the companies, corporate and the individuals as part of their public relations needs. The social media has given the opportunity to practice the responsive and interactive public relations where the targeted public also participate in the dialogue and help the company get feedback, which is essential to change their strategies or to be more responsive and have a chance to tune their products or services in accordance with the public requirements and perceptions. The regular press notes, handouts, brochures, etc are being distributed through the social media platforms.

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