

Brands Telling Digital Stories

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Abstract- The social media is disrupting the PR campaign cycles; it is being displaced by social media campaign tactics which belong to an entirely different ecosystem where the act of sharing social media content generates publicity in lieu of a campaign event. Although marketers may think of social media in terms of brand awareness and reputation management, the effective use of social media in Public Relations campaigns can generate conversion, facilitate brand positioning, and maintain continued brand sustenance. Today, Public relations and digital storytelling are more important than ever. Harnessing the power of storytelling, a company can influence the perception of its brand and products and create emotional connections with customers. The USC Centre for Public Relations in its Global Communications Report 2017, maintains the top three trends identified as: Digital storytelling; Social listening; Social purpose. The 2023 report titled, 'New reputation' explores the evolving nature of corporate reputation. The engagement between the consumers, employees and investors to build reputation is nothing but story telling. A PR team must understand the importance of storytelling. Focus on what your audience cares about, about their problems, and how those challenges can be overcome is important. It would be interesting to study, how award-winning PR campaigns used story-telling on social media. To study the topic, the paper employs collective case-study approach. The methodology would entail to select award winning campaigns of the year and then study the social media campaigns of these brands as case studies. The cases would then be analyzed on various aspects: The storyline; the digital story-telling, audio/video/ interactive websites/games etc.; social listening: social engagements, linear/nonlinear; consumers leading the conversations; investor stories; social purposes; engagements and interactions. The paper is significant as today the

corporates and brands must go beyond pitching products. It is much more important to be authentic, and engage with the audience and the media. PR can witness the good story grow, evolve and inspire new ones to do their job. The outcomes of the study would definitely put light on the digital story telling importance and its role in brand building.

Indexed Terms- Social Media, Digital Storytelling, Corporate Communication/ Public Relations, Social Media/Digital Engagements, Brand Building.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's real-time media environment engaging the average human is more of a science than an art. People are being bombarded 24/7 with mountains of data on hundreds of new mediums and channels. All the marketing and PR activities are happening over these platforms. It is important for organizations to remain relevant in this complex era of conversations. Organisations need to adapt to the trends that change as fast as Facebook profiles. Public relations and digital storytelling are therefore, more important than ever. By harnessing the power of storytelling, a company can influence the perception of its brand and products and create emotional connections with customers. The brand identity of any organization along with its culture does not merely need to be lived but to be told. How a brand tells its story works not only as a great tool to attract external customers but to attract and retain internal customers (employees) as well.

The idea that a story is only meant for a child is now a thing of the past. Today companies across the board, are looking to weave a web of ideas, product lines, services, core competencies, belief and value systems, intellectual footprints, and individual voices into a singular employer branding strategy, creating an impactful and feature-rich narrative via digital

storytelling. This helps cement perception, drive a certain understanding of what an organization stands for, and envision an on-going communication pathway, with customers.

The creative practice known as “Digital Storytelling” (DS) originated in Berkeley, California during the mid-1990s and is now increasingly used across the world. It is a simple, powerful tool that provides people with skills to tell their personal story as a two-minute film. Each completed film is shown in a community setting before being stored on the internet so others can share it. People with little or no knowledge of computers acquire digital literacy and storytelling skills alongside an introduction to basic. Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It has grown rapidly in the past two decades and has proven to be a fertile area of research for policy makers, academics, and creative practitioners. Burgess (2006, p.4) describes it succinctly as “a workshop-based process by which ‘ordinary people’ create their own short autobiographical films that can be streamed on the web or broadcast on television.” Today, businesses are builders of dreams, magicians crafting incredible experiences, offering their customers a whole new world of limitless possibilities.

Every organization is carved out of a basic thought or vision on which its identity rests. However, conveying that thought as is or even just listing out a timeline with all the achievements and the history is not enough to compel a stakeholder. The narrative needs to be punctuated nuances of human behaviour and by characters who are easy to relate or those who can really drive motivation in an identifiable time-space. The thought behind the business and behind branding also needs to be translated across all collaterals within and to all touch-points outside. All of this wouldn't be possible, without an employer branding strategy or 'story.' This is why companies, big or small, are now looking at digital storytelling as an essential element of one's marketing mix. So, there is need to go ahead, tell a story, share an idea, and speak to your people out there, in every which way, across the many channels available to the modern marketer, powered by technology and digital innovation.

“Regarding trends in 2018, we see employer brands being deployed with more tactical efficiency than ever. A strong and coherent employer brand allows for consistent messages on multiple online platforms, and for recruiters to start adapting their interview and sourcing methods to harmonize with the brand. We are also embracing technologies that enable the human tradition of storytelling, so that job seekers can engage in the personal brand building to help distinguish themselves to potential employers,” says Chris Cho, Chief Product Officer at Monster, in conversation with HRTechnologist.

Like in any story, whether it is the Iliad, the Ramayana, Alice in Wonderland or Long Walk to Freedom, success of communication lies in the hold the narrator has on the core ideas and ideals of the narrative. For an organization, the key aspects are values, principles, competencies and behaviors, and product design. Being in tune with these help in having the basic skeleton of the story in place. However, for communication to be truly successful, it needs to open a conversation. Branding thus needs to look at storytelling as not a tool to say something, but a tool to talk to others with. The brand story should thus encourage a response and lead to more sharing by resonating with aspirations, hopes, fears and challenges that the audience faces as well.

- The big question, then is, to explore how does a company perfects the art of 'Digital Storytelling'? What transforms thought into a great story, that truly add value to your employer branding strategy?
- To understand the sense of what the audience wants to consume, the ability to create characters who matter, time & space that is identifiable, and finally analyse the overarching employer branding strategy, that's reinforced across collaterals or channels.
- To draw how key stakeholders can carve out their vision, consolidate ideas, and their basic nuts and bolts. Once the same is crystallised, it's important to gradually flesh out all the moving parts of an employer branding strategy.
- Whether every storylines on digital platform, reiterating the same thought, albeit changing form or shape, as per individual needs?

- In relation to study digital storytelling , here are a few aspects to keep in mind:
- Who is the target audience who would be “listening” to all that the company has to say?
- What are the key aspects of the storyline?
- How to best to articulate the storyline and make the characters relatable?
- Which channels of dissemination would be the most effective?
- Is the architecture of the brand story ready for all digital platforms in a way that the form changes although the thought remains the same?

II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital story telling has captured the attention of all the businesses and are acting as a potent tool in the hands of marketers today. Various writer and professional have expressed on this aspect.

Lambert (2013) opines that storytelling is a means for people to express, comprehend and articulate experiences in the everyday world. He argues that storytelling empowers people and that they can engage with the world around them. He is of the view that Digital Storytelling is the method for a greater facility for representing people through the media that contrasts with broadcast media contexts. Digital storytelling produces “conversational media” (in a chain of stories that generate other stories). It is a technique for breaking down barriers and increasing understanding across generations, ethnicities, and other divides. He sees it as a tool that stands to benefit education and corporate brands.

Thumim (2012) describes the storytelling as the method that sets out the foundation for the writing of a personal story that draws on “family photographs, ‘family archives’, sometimes people’s own drawing or artworks, and sometimes some video as well”. The completed story may take professional turn. through aesthetic inputs.

The ways digital stories are re-defined and re-used goes beyond the initial meaning. Corporations and community-based organizations, institutions and non-governmental organizations are considering digital storytelling as a form of developing their brand (Adi, Crişan & Dinca, 2015). There are several reasons for

which different organizations start looking at digital stories as a form of corporate communication and branding. In our view, the main reason is connected to the way legitimacy is defined in the post-modern world.

The postindustrial society or the new capitalism has abandoned the hierarchical way of management, transforming itself into a network of networks in an antisystem, based on the autonomy of agents, teamwork, flexibility and communication (Hauser & Michon, 2001). In this new form of society, the new way of producing meaning is easily described by using the term “small story”. People still need stories, but in the absence of the grand one, they appeal to substitutes of the grand ideologies, i.e. to replacing the theory with genres like, ethnography, journalism, animated books, documentaries and, especially, the novel” (Rorty, 1998, p.30), a new priest of the “metaphysical culture”, which he considers to be, nonetheless possible rather than post-religious, and equally desirable” (Richard Rorty, 1998, p.29-30). The re-orientation of the neo-capitalist society from Truth to Consensus is interpreted by Rorty as a major turn, “targeted against theory towards narration”. This is why “the novel, the movie, and the TV show have replaced slowly but firmly the sermon and the treaty as the main tools for moral change and progress”. We add to the list the digital stories.

In relation to story telling, in a larger context, “people, organizations and national states legitimate through managing their own image - a euphemistic expression where the true meaning is distorted to managing the social representations. In order to serve this purpose, a whole system of social engineering has been set out, with all the additional technology - the public relations. The science per se does not legitimate anymore, but its results are being used successfully in building efficient communication strategies, servicing the purpose of legitimation”. (Bortun, 2012).

Hypothesis

The contention is that digital storytelling is emerging as the most preferred tool in PR and Marketing . Digital stories do make a difference, compared to other means of online communication, namely the webpage of the company and its Facebook page, for

employer branding. They are very well connecting to the people due to social connect.

III METHODOLOGY

As per the USC Centre for Public Relations in its Global Communications Report 2017 the top three trends identified were: Digital storytelling; Social listening; Social purpose.

To study how three award winning PR campaigns used storey telling on social media and fulfil social listening and social purpose by studying the social media campaigns by the organisations as case studies. The three campaigns are:

- 1 Vicks' 'One in a million #TouchofCare' campaign.
- 2 Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust (#BehtarKal)
- 3 Mahindra Hariyali (#CelebrateDifferently).

The three case studies would be analysed on three aspects:

- (i) Digital Story telling: audio/video/ interactive websites etc.;
- (ii) Social listening : social engagements, linear/non linear - customers leading the conversations;
- (iii) Social Purposes .

IV DATA ANALYSIS

1. Vicks' 'One in a million #TouchofCare' campaign: A tale of a transgender – Vicks Touch Of Care (Created by Publicis Singapore)

i. Digital Story Telling: audio/video/ interactive websites:

Vicks aims to redefine the meaning of family in a contemporary society with #TouchOfCare, a campaign that embraces maternity with a slight variation but the same affection and shows everyone has a right to care and that wherever there is care there is family.

Despite the long format of the film the campaign, dramatically re-creates a non-fictional tale into a successful result, Vicks portrayed the idea of #TouchOfCare through a digital film, oozing of emotions with some refined aesthetics of audio-visuals.

ii. Social Listening : social engagements, linear/non linear - customers leading the conversations:

The story narrated by an orphan Gayatri takes us through her life-journey as the film beautifully captures how Gauri, a transgender woman nurtures Gayatri against her odds by caring for Gayatri as her own child and gracefully carrying the entity of motherhood, despite being the third gender. It takes the idea of family beyond biological linkages. It depicts motherhood in a distinct manner through its content, yet consisting of a surprise element in the film.

The magnificently weaved story-line even captures how the little girl holds a farsighted dream of becoming a lawyer instead of a doctor for her mother, to help her obtain the basic civil rights.

iii. Social Purposes :

This campaign portrays a face of progression through their stance of 'care' being the ultimate idea of a family, beyond discriminatory mindset and support for women empowerment. Being the iconic brand, Vicks maintaining an emotional bond throughout their campaign, has etched their presence in the hearts of their consumer by intensifying the sentiment of touch and care in the digital age.

The brand managed to drive content in a manner that spoke heart to heart to their audience, creating a deeper connection in a consumer-brand relationship. It kept in mind that raw emotions always tend to work with Indian consumers.

Vicks Touch Of Care has scored some whopping digits on social media with 3,024,142 views on YouTube, 1.2 million views on Facebook with 14k reactions and 23k shares along with responses flooded on Twitter too.

2. Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust (#BehtarKal)

(i) Digital Story telling: audio/video/ interactive websites etc.:

An organisation, created for cluster redevelopment of congested Bhendi Bazaar area in South Mumbai, today took out a peace march to sensitise people about the perils of living in dilapidated buildings. The public interest campaign 'Behtar Kal' (better tomorrow) aimed at alerting tenants about the risk of

staying in buildings that are prone to collapse during the monsoons. Scores of people living in the area along with students took part in the march organised by the Saifee Burhani Upliftment Trust (SBUT).

(ii) Social listening : social engagements, linear/non linear - customers leading the conversations:

The marchers appealed to people not to put their lives at risk by living in old and dilapidated buildings. Many such buildings have collapsed during the monsoon in the past, killing a number of people.

(iii) Social Purposes :

Safeguarding the interest of tenants living in dilapidated buildings in Bhendi Bazaar, as it is painful to see some families risking their lives and continuing to reside in buildings declared unfit for living.

According to official estimates, there are over 16,000 old and dilapidated buildings in the city. Of these, nearly 200 are in Bhendi Bazar. State bodies - the BMC and the Mhada - have served eviction notices to the occupants of several of these buildings, but have not met with much success. The SBUT is implementing the multi-crore Bhendi Bazaar cluster redevelopment project.

3. Mahindra Hariyali (#CelebrateDifferently)

(i) Digital Story telling: audio/video/ interactive websites etc.:

The group has planted 16 million trees in the last 12 years, wanted to generate awareness among people about the importance of planting trees in order to increase carbon sink in the country for combating climate change. The campaign leverages the experience and take the biodiversity programme to the much wider and bigger audience because the problem in India is very large

(ii) Social listening : social engagements, linear/non linear - customers leading the conversations: Ahead of the World Environment Day, multinational conglomerate Mahindra Group launched an initiative to motivate citizens to plant trees at a time when India is lagging behind in achieving its third commitment under the Paris Agreement.

(iii) Social Purposes :

Mahindra Hariyali, a tree plantation movement, the campaign 'Celebrate Differently', gives every Indian

a change to plant a tree and celebrate differently on the occasions they have in their life. Under the campaign, the company is looking at individuals who want to plant tree directly and those who cannot plant can share their comment on #RiseAgainstClimateChange. It Stresses on the need to make a sustainable action for climate change.

The country's third commitment under the Paris pact was to create an additional 'carbon sink' of 2.5-3 billion tonnes which translates to 75 billion trees, covering area of Rajasthan. In the last 12 years, the group has been planting trees and enhancing biodiversity in many different ways.

At present, the Group's three biggest companies together have a carbon footprint of 1.8 million tonnes. It is aiming to be a carbon neutral group by 2040.

All the campaigns have successfully stressed on digital storytelling , social listening and social purpose as the main ingredients to make them much appreciated and awarded campaigns. Digital storytelling is definitely emerging as the most preferred tool in PR and Marketing . Digital stories are making a difference and are much preferred by the marketers as compared to other means of online communication.

CONCLUSION

The large corporations do not promote goods and services; they build reputations and the most skilled ones build the legitimacy of the subject they serve. The real name of public relations is marketing of communication in the public sphere. The digital stories are replies to the generalized marketization. Brands have realised the significance of social media and its peculiar demands. Utilising the social channels' storytelling abilities, they are creating an image of a more personal and reachable entity. Through digital stories organisations are building their own identity, their own recognition, their own respectability and credibility. They get self awareness, self-respect and self-trust - meaning exactly those things that the grand stories of legitimation cannot offer any more.

In other words, in line with the new tradition of bottom-up legitimization (Habermas, 1983), more and more organisations are trying to give a meaning to their existence. For them, the online environment is the ideal environment. It is therefore they not only tell a story, they raise an issue; involve social concern; try to connect; arouse emotions; make it interactive; invoke a response; ask for a reaction; and let everyone share the stories since digital platforms have the capacity to replicate fast. By building this community of voices, they resonate with their audience's ambitions, dreams, challenges, and aspirations and project social listening and relate to the social purpose. Digital story telling thus, must inspire a reaction from wonder to awe and finally, an affirmative action to bring change.

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