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ಭಾರತದ ಸ್ವಾತಂತ್ರ್ಯ ಸಂಗ್ರಾಮದಲ್ಲಿ ಬುಡಕಟ್ಟು ಸಮುದಾಯಗಳ ಹೋರಾಟದ ಕಥನ

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Institutional Social Responsibility as a Public Relation tool: Perspectives of Higher Educational Institutions

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***Abstract:** The phenomenon of globalization has brought a groundbreaking change in almost all sectors of the economy. Be it manufacturing, agriculture, or the various segments of the service industry. Welfare areas like healthcare and education are no exception to this. Globalization-led privatization has not only created a competitive environment but also put undue pressure on educational institutions to vie for the attention of the stakeholders. Institutions are attempting to establish a cordial relationship with the stakeholders such as students, parents, communities, and alumni, by planning and implementing various social responsibility practices. So to create mutual understanding between the institution and its stakeholders, institutions are compelled to practice public relations using its social responsibility activities as a tool. So, the present study focuses on institutional perceptions of social responsibility as a PR tool. A qualitative methodology has been deployed to elicit data. The study found out that Institutional social responsibility and Public relations are the innate activity of any educational institution. It is understood that even though they are not aware of public relations as a strategic term, they are always striving for good public rapport.*

Key words: Institutional social responsibility, ISR, CSR, Public relations, Higher educational institutions, Educational institutions, PR tool.

Introduction

Public relation is an art and strategic technique in developing mutual understanding between an institution or organization and its target public. Public relations can emphasize the visibility of the institution and it also helps in brand building of the organization. In the modern world, every field is complex and competitive. At this juncture, public relation is a vital tool in proving their visibility and survival.

So practicing public relations helps the educational institution in many ways. Wilcox and Cameron (2009) in their study stressed the role of public relations in educational institutions as follows; “A college or university must maintain a good relationship with its public. Public Relations contribute to a varied range of activities and help universities to develop and sustain a cordial relation with their public. Public relations play a vital role with organizing, creative and coordination function”.

Even the observation of Rex F.Harlow (1976) on public relations can be extended to educational institutions. Rex F.Harlow (1976) in his discussion on public relations said; “Public relations manager handles communications of the organization to achieve or enhance understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics. Its key function includes management of problems and issues, helping management in dealing with the public, helps them keep informed on responsive to public opinion and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.”

So the public relations goals, principles adopted in the corporate world are very necessary for the modern education sector. The educational system nowadays encountered tremendous challenges on financial, branding, and management fronts. In this regard, public relations can earn confidence, support, and credibility for the organization (Scott M Cutlip, Allen H. Center, 1971). Since higher education institutions started to adopt a business-like manner, they also need to be managed in the same manner. Therefore implementing CSR strategies in socially responsible practices in a higher education institutions should be given prominence to garner competitive advantage and a positive reputation.

One area which can tremendously help in maintaining a balanced and harmonious

relationship with the stakeholders in an educational institution is practicing social responsibility activities and communicating them to the public. So keeping social responsibility activities as a public relations tool is a requirement in winning the hearts of the public. Unfortunately, studies show that Indian educational institutions have not considered social responsibility work as a strategy to help them to maintain harmonious relations with the public for long-term benefit.

Literature on Social Responsibility as a Public relation tool

Social responsibility practice by the institution is one of the tools of public relations to build trust and reputation among stakeholders. This practice proves that organizations are responsible towards the people with whom it comes into contact. The following studies highlight the relationship between CSR practice and public relations and how it can help plan a competitive strategy for the organization. However, there are no studies on social responsibility as public relations tool in the educational institution. So to trace the literature on the research topic the studies on CSR have been taken into consideration.

Jacque L'Etang (1994), in his research paper, examined the relatedness between corporate social responsibility and public relations from an ethical point of view. The researcher had taken up the question of current assumptions on linkage with social responsibility. The core idea of the paper was that one cannot separate the public relations and corporate social responsibility activities, but rather these two must be evaluated in a single forum. These two activities are interconnected with each other in such a way that corporate social responsibility becomes a tool for public relations. The empirical study was conducted in the UK in 1989 to analyze the existing practice. So it observed that the organization implement such actions when they are compelled to do so by lobbies from external pressure groups. This kind of practice always raises ethical questions. The researcher argues that the organizations need to find a moral justification for their socially responsible activities and it must be incorporated in their public relations practice so that it can be ensured that the social responsibility practice lives up to the claims made by the PR department. So this paper explores the responsibility of public relations for social responsibility which extends beyond publicity strategy.

Assumpcio Huertas, Paul Caprootti (2007), in their research paper analyzed corporate

social responsibility as a public relation tool in Tarragona, a local community in Spain. The study analyzed the activities of CSR from the perspective of public relations that have been carried out by all types of organizations, companies, and institutions in a local area. The qualitative study is based on interviews with directors of the communication departments of the analyzed organization. The study found out that the corporate social responsibility activities of the company contribute a lot to the positive PR activities of the company.

Daniela Galandrova (2006) in his research work, Public relations, and corporate social responsibility focused on public relation methods and discussed the concept in qualitative analysis. For this, the case study method was adopted where the activities of selected firms in the Czech Republic were analyzed. In the concluding remarks, the author has noted that corporate social responsibility is a way to positive public relations. CSR practice is an excellent chance to prosper from a positive response in media.

The above studies on social responsibility as a tool of public relations underline that the goodwill practice of the company and public relations go hand in hand. Public confidence and trust in any organization depend on how these ventures stand far from their business bottom line approach. CSR as public relations tool includes the existing practice of social responsibility, how this practice is communicated to its stakeholders, and how the stakeholders are engaged and involved in these kinds of practice.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out the institutions knowledge on ISR as a tool of Public Relation
2. To find out institutional efforts to maintain the public relation and stakeholders' participation in ISR activities.
3. To understand the ISR as an image enhancer.

Methodology

Present research adopted qualitative methodology incorporating a semi-structured interview Schedule. 22 Institutions of higher education in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka state are selected for the study. Heads of the institutions, NAAC Coordinators, or in charge of the

Publicity Department of the college were approached. The institutions were selected based on a stratified random sampling method.

A semi-structured questionnaire on Institutional Social Responsibility as a tool of public relations was incorporated. The respondents were interviewed in person or through virtual meeting platforms.

Discussion

Social responsibility as an ethical business practice initiated in the corporate sector, now being extended to other sectors also. The educational institution is one among them. So, like other institution and organizations, the educational institutions also can't neglect the people it comes into contact with. Since educational institutions have a substantial amount of communities' manpower, infrastructure, and financial resource they should be expected to solve the social and environmental problems and respond to the changing condition of society. And also to keep a harmonious relationship with them so that they can make a mark in their minds. This part of the discussion deals with the educational institutions understanding of social responsibility as a public relations tool. The answers received from the respondents reveal that in the process of gaining a good image they are striving for communicating what they practice. So it is understood that even though they are not aware of public relations as a strategic term, they are always striving for good public rapport. The following analysis will through light on institutions' understanding of public relations and the relationship between ISR and Public Relations.

ISR and Favourable Public opinion: For the question, do you think that an institution that wishes to capture favourable public opinion has to show that it is socially responsible?, the researcher received different answers. Most of the institutions answered that being responsible itself creates good public rapport and 'action always speaks more than words. A response from respondent number 17(October 15, 2020), noted that' by conducting various ISR activities the institution create a good impact on public'.

Response from respondent number 7 (October 07, 2020) noted that the very act of being socially responsible and committed to the well-being of the community in itself communicates

the good deeds of the Institution and exerts a considerable positive influence on public opinion which enhances people's perception, image, and credibility towards the institution. Hence, higher education institutions must continue to remain socially engaged as it will certainly capture favourable public opinion and not otherwise. So according to respondent 7, being socially responsible itself creates good public relations.

The same answer is expressed in different words by respondent 20 (October 06, 2020), respondent 1 (April 03, 2020), and 21 (April 03, 2020) According to them;

'ISR should become inherent in the mission and vision of an organization, and also hold a strong place in building the image of the institution. Institutions should be aware that promoting their ISR only benefits them if they are already acting on their plan. Otherwise, falsely claiming to bring social change to those in need could lead to bad publicity.

ISR as a good public relations tool: The responses received from the institutions confirm that ISR activities always elicit good public opinion. Most institutions practice social responsibility activity and expect mutual benefit. However considering ISR for strategic communications, it is only confined to the privately-owned colleges and aided colleges. Most of the privately-owned colleges agreed that they practice ISR activity mainly to gain public support and to get good credits in the evaluation process. Even aided institutions agreed that practicing ISR activity today is mainly to answer the questions of accreditation needs. But when we look at the answers from government colleges most of them are even not aware that good rapport with the community is a necessity of the time. Most of them answered that NSS, NCC, and Rover's rangers practice are the mandatory units in the college and all the activities are arranged in that units. And while conducting activities under these units they take the help of community members. But recently due to NAAC requirements, at least for the sake of the evaluation process there are dialogues with Alumni, Parents, and Community Members. However, the respondents who understood the importance of public relations have seen ISR as a forum to strengthen the bonding between various stakeholders.

Respondent number 16 (October 07, 2020), 8 (September 29, 2020) and 11 (October 24, 2020) noted that 'No doubt, ISR enhances the public visibility of the Institution, but it is just a means

to strengthen the good relationship with the public and not an end in itself. Respondent number 3(October 06, 2020) noted that ‘we practice and we publish’. Because we expect mutual benefit. Publicity gives us a good image. And as today’s society is flooded with so many messages, we need to tell them we are active’.

Involvement of stakeholders: As the involvement of the stakeholders is one of the principles of public relations the respondent institutions noted that for each ISR activity students are the central figures, they are involved in every process, but other stakeholders like parents, community members, and alumni’s are involved or allowed to involve as and when required. During NSS camps and community extension activities, community members are largely involved. At the same time whenever the community arranges programs on cleanliness, awareness program, etc, the institution is extending its resources and manpower to the community members. So most of the respondents revealed that there is partial involvement from the stakeholders other than the students.

Respondents 3 (October 06, 2020) noted that, while organizing a program we take the help of NGOs. Or while NGOs organize, we become partners in their projects. So according to this respondent, stakeholders’ involvement in the institution's effort is necessary. Respondent 21(April 03, 2020) noted that, the Parent-Teacher Association and Alumni association are the two body’s always approached and invited to participate in institutional activities. Sometimes these organizations voluntarily take up initiatives and institutions extend their helping hand. So the above responses indicate that the public relations process is initiated by the institutions by encouraging voluntary participation of its community members and parents in its ISR activities. They include the following ways:

- Monetary contribution by the parents through their wards in supporting such initiatives.
- Helping hand by the PTA Association in supporting the ISR initiatives.
- Voluntary contribution by the Alumni Association in the ISR initiatives especially in NSS activities.
- Help by the community members in community engagement activity by the institution.

Most of the respondents expressed uniform answers regarding students' involvement in

institutional efforts of community engagement. The following points sum up the responses received from the institutions;

- Students being the core of the educational system, we make every effort to involve our students in undertaking a wide range of extension activities and community outreach programs.
- ISR activities and initiatives are discharged with the active participation and voluntary involvement of the students through various forums and associations.

As per responses expressed by the respondents, it is observed that even though they are not aware of the concept of public relations the relationship with the stakeholders is maintained extensively.

ISR activity and enhanced Image: The evaluation of ISR activity is rarely done phenomenon in any educational institution. Even though institutions agree that practice, communication of ISR, and involvement of stakeholders improves the institution's image in the eyes of the public, no institution has any proper mechanism to measure it. And as it is very difficult to measure the good opinion of the people quantitatively, all the institutions responded that they didn't measure the improvements in any qualitative manner. But whenever people express a good opinion on the event or institution it indicates that the image of the institution is enhanced.

As expressed by respondent number 3, 'We don't have any measurement mechanism here. Therefore, I don't think any ISR practice, in my institution, has ever improved the image of the institution. In some years the NSS projects enhanced the image. But there is no consistency in it. Had it become a part of a strong, well-entrenched, institutional policy, ISR practice would have become an image booster'.

The respondent number 7, noted that 'Even though we didn't measure the result of ISR activity, the Practicing and communicating ISR initiatives to our stakeholders has certainly contributed in improving the image of the institution in many ways. The trust that our stakeholders place on us, the support and cooperation extended by them, increased level of their participation have certainly widened the networks.

Respondent number 2 (September 21, 2020) noted that we don't have any measurement mechanism, and institutions' image can be enhanced for multiple reasons, and it is difficult to say that it is only ISR activity is a contributing factor. But on a general note, we can say that it has contributed a lot to improving the institution's relations with the stakeholders.

Findings and Conclusion

- Although institutions are not practicing public relations by using Institutional responsibility as a tool, they are always striving for good public rapport. And they are not aware of public relations as a strategic term.
- Being socially responsible in every act of the institution will attract the public attention. So there is no need to practice public relations exclusively. Involving stakeholders in institutional activity will encourage good relations.
- Most of the institutions consider NSS camps and community extension activities as a technique to involve stakeholders.
- In ISR activity students are the centre, they are involved in every process, but other stakeholders like parents, community members, and alumni are involved or allowed to involve as and when required.
- The evaluation of ISR activity is rarely done in any educational institution.
- Even though institutions agree that practice, communication of ISR, and involvement of stakeholders improve the institutions' image in the eyes of the public but no institution has put in place a proper mechanism to measure it.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is found out that Institutional social responsibility and Public relations are the innate activity of any educational institution. However, given the demands of the globalized environment, it is very important to provide more stress to these activities. The hard reality of privatization, competition, and the challenges of self-financing, educational institutions, needs favourable image in the public domain to survive and flourish. Among the sample institutions selected for this study, ISR activities and public relations are given more priority in the private and aided institutions. It is a neglected area in government colleges. So,

this research suggests that the ISR activities must be used as a Public Relations tool even among government colleges. Because, in terms of facilities and infrastructure government colleges are on par with reputed private institutions if not better. This is the area where an institution can discharge its responsibility towards the community and at the same time it can get the benefit of boosted image and enhanced relationship with its stakeholders. Another area of concern is that the institutions do not have any mechanism to measure the image of the institution. Measuring such activities qualitatively and quantitatively will give a clear picture of success and failure. So the institutions must adopt a proper measurement mechanism. Also, proper policy guidelines on institutional social responsibility at each institutional level are need of the hour.

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