

USING DIGITAL PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR IMAGE ENHANCEMENT BY PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

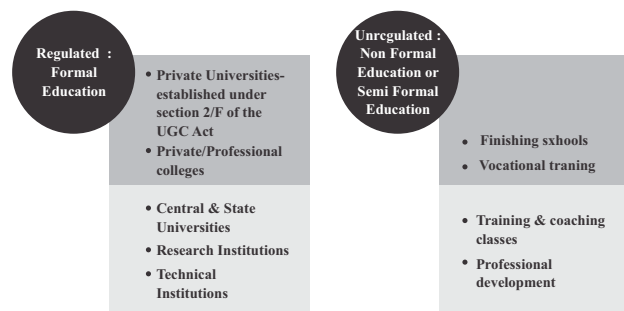
Change is the only constant in today's complex and competitive business scenario. All industries undergo changes. One such industry that has seen mercurial change is the higher education industry in India.

The establishment of private universities under section 2/F of the UGC Act has opened new avenues for higher education in India. These private universities reach out to students to offer wider range of academic courses with focus on quality higher education coupled with sound infrastructure and co-curricular activities and placement assistance. The competition for the intake of students remains intense. Therefore, to reach out to its stakeholders, private universities resort to implementing Digital Public Relations Program. The dearth of improper planning, high revenue cost, lack of trained and expert man power resources makes the traditional public relations usage difficult. And so to sustain goodwill and image and the need to reach out to stake holders effectively in matter of moment, the usage of digital public relations programme by private universities is required. With new dimensions like fast access, mass reach out, instant feedback digital PR programme provides right amount of platform to private universities by focusing, reinforcing, communicating and effective message to right type of client at right time

Keywords: Digital Public Relations, Higher Education in India, Private Universities, Stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the one of the bidding force towards Nation's development. For a change to happen in society 'Education' is the only mechanism, which can break the barriers and stigmas framed by the traditional society. In order to improve one's personality, skills, capability levels, opportunities and choices for rapid improvement; education becomes an important tool. Owing to this reason, education is taken as dominant factor in society to improve the quality of life. Development of education in India is a mixture of numerous successes and multiple gaps, especially the higher education sector, but the pace of development in higher education was unique in comparison with other standards. These critical gaps include poor infrastructure facility, unqualified teaching professionals, poor training to teachers, lack of funding and unavailability of material for training as well as teaching. The higher educational structure in India is operated by government sector and privately managed educational institution largely divided in to two parts:



With more than 850 universities and 40000 higher education institution, India holds an important place in the global education industry.

Despite of remarkable growth of higher education industry in India, there are some critical gaps, there are other factors that influence the most in terms of availability of different types of specialization to offer multipurpose educational environment.

Keeping in mind these gaps and to reach out to students to offer wider range of academic courses with focus on

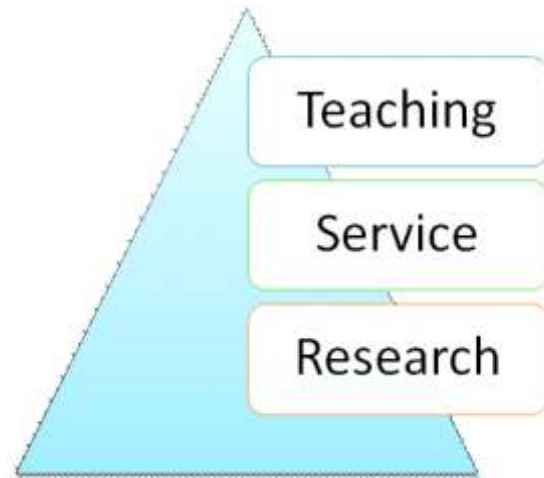
quality higher education coupled with sound infrastructure and co-curricular activities, University Grant Commission [UGC], Apex Body for University education system in India, grants 'Deemed to be University' status Under section 2/F of the UGC Act, to various private higher education institutions across the country to function as a Deemed to be University. Such private universities were non-funded and have the autonomy in deciding the Academic and Administrative procedures. Also, such private universities need to orient the syllabi according to the demands of various types of industry, business and services, bringing necessary changes off and on as per changing technologies.

The competition for the intake of students remains intense. Therefore, to reach out to its stakeholders, private universities resort to planning and executing a PR programme. The dearth of improper planning, high revenue cost, lack of trained and expert man power resources makes the traditional public relations usage difficult. And so to sustain goodwill and image and the need to reach out to stake holders effectively in matter of moment, the usage of digital public relations programme by private universities is required. With new dimensions like fast access, mass reach out, instant feedback digital PR programme provides right amount of platform to private universities by focusing, reinforcing, communicating and effective message to right type of client at right time

By implementing digital public relations programme stakeholder communication becomes direct providing right amount of visibility to this sector. Digital PR programme plays a pivotal role in the achievements of specific objectives at all levels of an organization's work, by focusing, reinforcing and communicating and effective message to right type of client at right time.

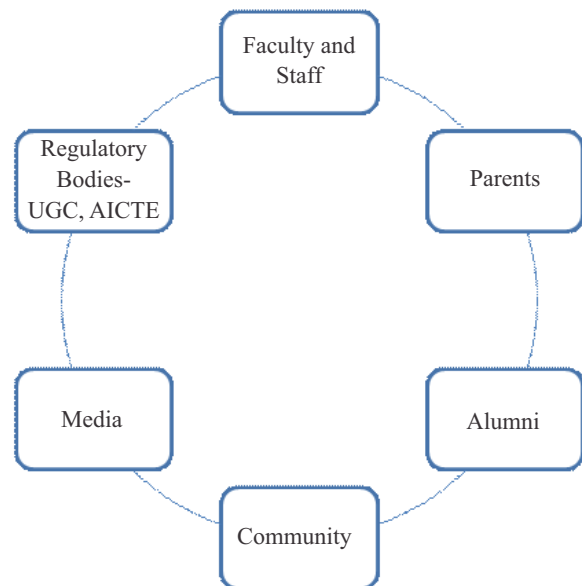
Public relations tools when strategically planned, implemented effectively, coupled with sound communication tactics through a co orientation approach that involves formative research will aid these educational system achieve academic goals. The rationale of the study donates to understand of how public relations' principles impact the functioning of educational system and how its principles and tactics should be viewed as an asset and key tool in positioning these private universities as a "Brand". The three main areas that higher educational institute needs to cater are –

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In order to cater these areas, private universities are going beyond these traditional patterns. Nowadays, the focus is has shifted from conventional teaching to learning based outcomes and hands-on training. Especially with focus on placements and industry oriented approach, it has become imperative for private universities in India to sustain their image to get good numbers of admissions.

Besides the existing students and prospective students, private universities cater to wide range of public



In order to sustain itself in this high competitive scenario, Private Universities need to reach out to its stakeholders on continuous basis. Also, with the digital platforms available to the public, information access is easily available and awareness levels have increased. And therefore the current scenario calls for use of digital public relations for immediate connect, image enhancement and successful operations on daily basis. With more interactive digital platforms like web-sites and other e-resources, the stakeholders especially students and their parents comes to know about course offered, campus life, placement process etc. offered by private universities, which then becomes a basis to finalize the admission seat.

Use of public relations measures by higher education across the globe for image enhancement is not new. Generally, public relation agencies are entrusted with the responsibilities of establishing network and sustaining image. These public relations agencies in return used to adopt traditional PR measures. But with internet revolution and widespread reach, private universities have realized the need to stay connected with its public in order to sustain itself in the market.

However, there are some challenges that private universities must address to. First and foremost, whilst adapting to the digital PR measures for image enhancement, these private universities must meet their own core commitments – Teaching and Research

A sound public relations plan with focus of using digital technologies thus becomes the need of the hour. Social media sites and phone based applications like Facebook, whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pod-cast and Blog pages are a few sources which public relations professional uses nowadays to connect with its public. Stakeholders can directly reach these private universities to seek information they are desirous of.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An investigation into the literature reveals that public relations is not new and its modern day origins in the United States can be traced as far back as 1807 with President Jefferson's address to Congress (Lancaster, 2005). However, in general there has been considerable amount of research for PR in education sectors which would be used as review.

Dean Kurckeberg, (1998) said that PR in a professional environment is an important subset to other disciplinary areas. Also it is been said that public relation strategies needs to take precedence over academics.

Frank Winston Wylie, (1989) proposed the ethics of subjects in terms of two major components namely performing duties with responsibilities with ethics and also in a capable manner. Also based on this the he said that public relation in academics could shape the future of college growth.

Hugh M. Culbertson, (1991) analyzed PR department on various factors like conducting special events, press release, explaining the goal of the organization, etc. based on five point scale.

Matthias Kohring, et.al (2012) investigated the influence of PR managers over educational university in Germany and also it been investigated the influence of media over education to increase the fame of their institution and for progressing with new opportunities within their institution.

Kate Fitch, (2014) investigated PR institutions in Australia and identifies the industrial expectation towards an institution in terms of PR programme. This is been analyzed in terms of college curriculum, industry expectation, academic legitimacy etc.

Jobber, (2001) discusses that unfounded opinions can tarnish the image or operations of the organization. So, one of the functions of public relation is to manage misconceptions.

Clow and Baack, (2007) also argued that the internet could be used as a major tool of public relations to help combat negative word of mouth.

Audu, (2006) indicates that the Internet has many benefits in the academic cycle as it provides around the clock access to global sources of information. Thus internet and website provide a faster, broader reach for public relations practitioners to publish company press releases, background information, introduce new products or services and provide promotional information for an organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The motive of this study is to ascertain the digital PR processes and measures adopted by private universities in India. Due to the experimental nature of the study, a two-step research approach – Survey and Interview was undertaken to answer the research objectives which are as below:

1. To know how private universities in India use digital public Relations program for image enhancement
2. To understand impact and effect of digital public

relations programme on stakeholder implemented by private universities in India

- To identify the importance of public relation programme to improve the image of deemed to be university.

- Sources of Information**

The study is composed of primary and secondary variables. Primary variables are collected through the survey or questionnaire method, secondary variables are collected through literatures, thesis, newspapers, journals and online materials.

- Tools and Techniques of Research**

Combination of Qualitative and Quantitative methods was used for the purpose of the study. The method for research follows:

- Sampling Method**

Random sampling method will be undertaken by surveying around 100 respondents. The respondents were students, faculty, alumni, parents, university board members

- Interview Method**

An interview method was conducted for PR professionals, faculty members, university officials and media professional. Around 3 professionals in each category were interviewed.

FINDING AND ANALYSIS: PART A – RANDOM SAMPLING

From the research study undertaken through random sampling methods following finding came out –

Question 1 - The higher education scenario in India has shown positive change in last few years

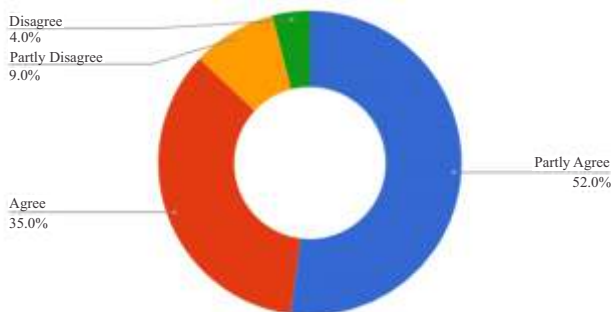


Chart 1 – Perception about positive change in the higher education scene in india

Question – 2 The establishment of Private Universities is the root for these change in India

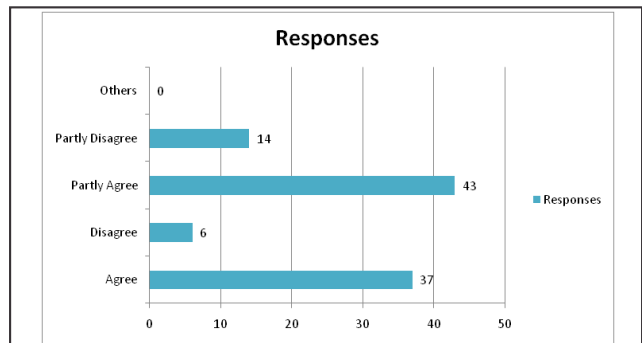


Chart 2 – Private universities a reason for major change in Indian higher educational sector

Question – 3 To enhance image amongst various stakeholders, Private Universities requires a sound digital public relations program

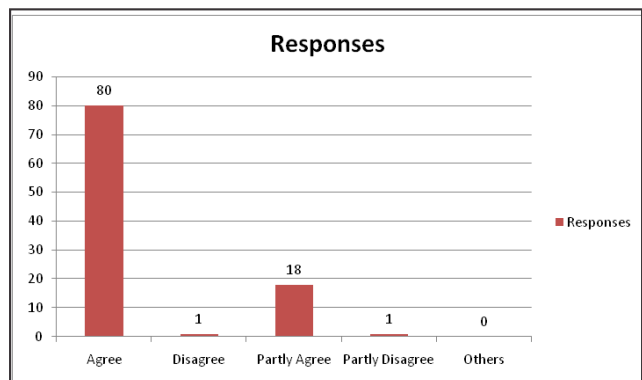


Chart 3 – Requirement of digital PR program for image enhancement

Question – 4 Digital public relations measures provides right amount of platform to private universities by focusing, reinforcing and communicating speedy message to wider audience

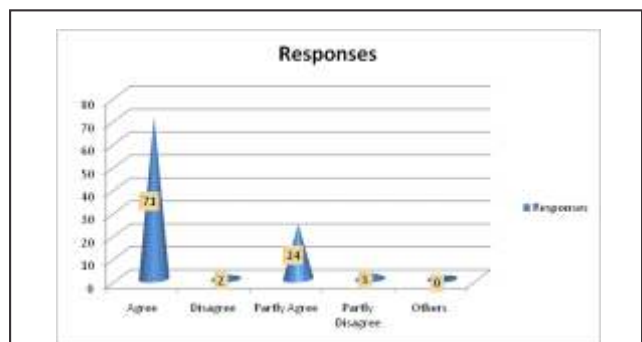
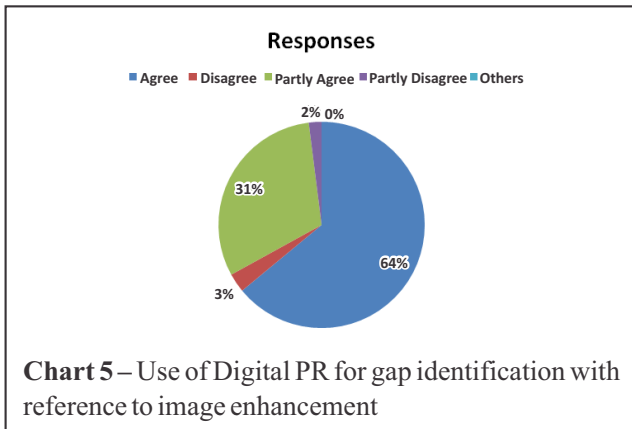
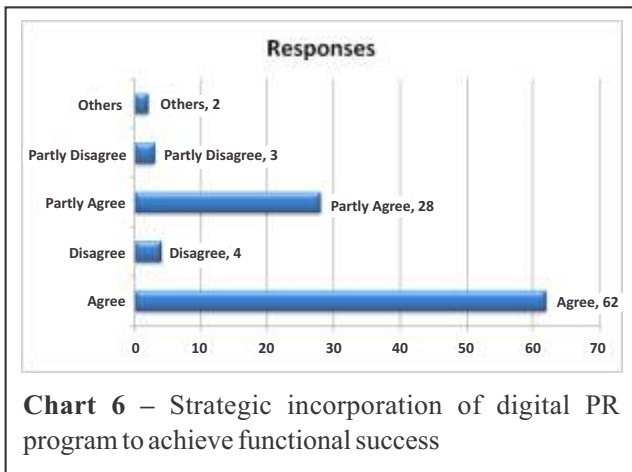


Chart 4 – Speedy Communication for wider outreach through digital PR measure.

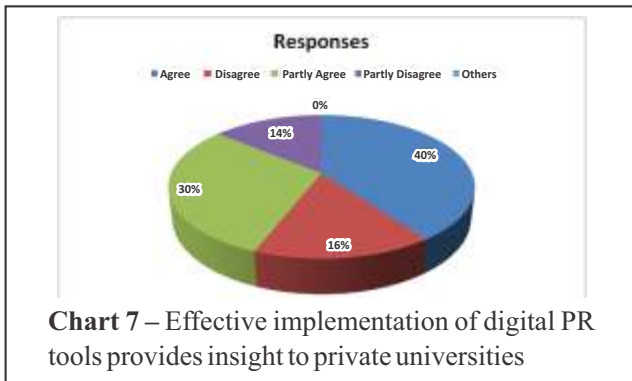
Question –5 Digital public relations measures provides helps private universities, to identify the gap scenario dealing with image enhancement and reputation management



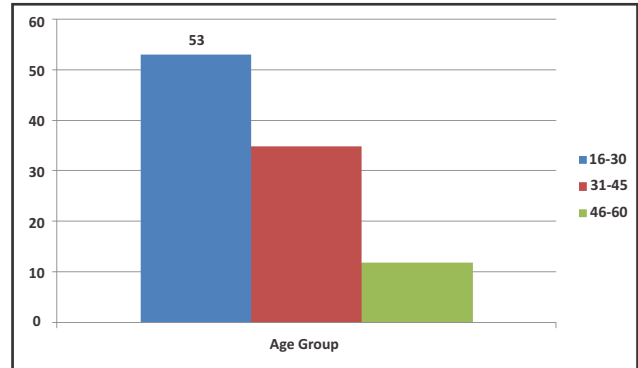
Question – 6 Strategic incorporation of digital Public Relations programme by private universities can help achieve goals, increase goodwill and contribute to the operational success



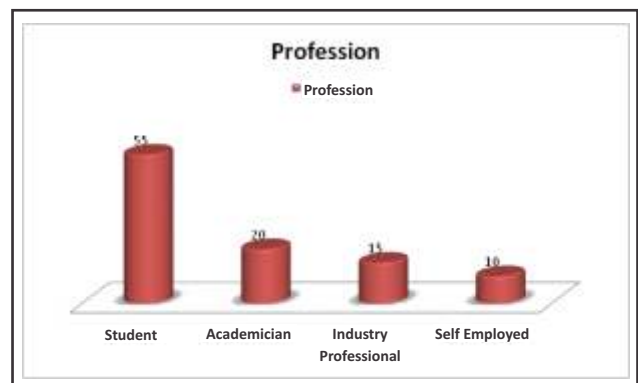
Question – 7 Digital public relations tools, if implemented effectively, is able to address the functional issues face by private universities in India and can provide resources to address them



Summary of the responses: 100 Respondents – Age Group



Summary of the responses: 100 Respondents - Profession



Finding and Analysis: Part B – Interviews – Excerpts

- Since the playing field for Private Universities is very large today, the digital PR programs should be so designed as to highlight the strengths and be accountable for the promises made. Online presence must be used appropriately and with authentic data. – Prof. TriveniMathur, Director, Symbiosis School of Media and Communication
- Use of digital PR program has a lot of scope in the development of image of private university in India. All competitive private institutes use marketing public relations programs but only a few of them do it effectively. Mr. AvinashGawai, Director, Media4U
- Private universities do require a digital PR department to communicate about their ideologies and ideas to the audience but it should not be the primary focus of the university. Ms. KanganKher, Student, Symbiosis Centre for Media & Communication
- Private universities have already mushroomed even in

the most remote parts of India. Through digital PR programs, there is a great scope for private institutions starting to change the face of education in India and reach out to the masses, in the long run. Ms. Shristi Patnaik, Student, Symbiosis Centre for Media & Communication

- With so many similar offerings in the market, a good marketing/PR program is necessary to show differentiation and build a name for an institution – Mr. Prashant Mudholkar, Bureau Chief, Network 18

CONCLUSION

The researcher explored the perception based study to understand the use of digital public relations by private universities in India. Through the study, the researcher concludes that although the higher educational sector in India is growing fast and with private universities offering career oriented course, state of the art infrastructure, placement assistance, still a lot of work is required in order to sustain image. The researcher found that digital public relations programme should be tailor-made and monitored towards the viewpoint of students and parents as primary stakeholder. Such programs are redundant more focused approach can help private universities in India better results in image enhancement.

In search of visibility and image enhancement, the use of digital public relations programme by private universities will result into increased competition but eventually lead to better facilities, quality courses and increased awareness within stakeholders.

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