

# Facebook and CSR: A Content Analysis of Simulated Development on Brand Pages of Facebook

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## Abstract

*Social Media has become a powerful tool for corporate industries to engage with their stakeholders. Communication experts constantly explore the potentials of social media in order to make the best out of these media forms. In order to achieve visibility the communication divisions of the corporate world upload content on a regular basis to make their online presence felt. The nature of content varies from organizational information to stories that concern the community they function within. This study looks at the content uploaded on Facebook in the form of pictures and textual updates looking for an assessment of the process of simulation of social issues using the concepts of signification and simulation given in Baudrillard's concepts of simulation. The ways in which brands take up the responsibility of social discourse production will be deconstructed and analyzed to assess and predict the effect of the content. The study will choose the top five brands of the year 2014 and deconstruct the content for messages with any form of social relevance and then categorize it to first order (signification), second order (reproduction), and third order (simulation). And look at the level of social discourse production the corporate sector takes up as a social responsibility.*

**Keywords :** Facebook, CSR, Brand identities, Baudrillard, Simulation, Reproduction, Signification.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The corporate bodies that are located in a specific space are by default connected to the socio-cultural landscape of the space they are situated in. The online and offline social sphere in turn affects the corporate body either directly or indirectly. When there is this sort of a symbiotic relationship established between the two spaces the people surrounding the corporate body become the stakeholders of the organization. The organization this assumes a certain responsibility to these stakeholders and initiate strategies for the benefit of these stakeholders.

The advanced corporate structures have now realized the importance of CSR and have started to explore the newer paradigms to connecting with the stakeholders. These stakeholders do not necessarily have to be their potential customers or investors; it could be anyone who is in some way affected by the functioning of the organization. There are a wide range of theoretical approaches to CSR. But two dominant paradigms talk about CSR as a profit motivated activity and CSR as a socio development activity.

### A. Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility

Social media has now become one of the most easily accessible tools of communication and is posing a tough competition to the mainstream media forms. Since the structural patterns of ownership and content on social media differ from that of mainstream media, the discourses produced on this media are deviant and demand an alternate framework of reference. Social media gives the sender of the message a more powerful position of communication with the cost effectiveness and multimedia based intertextuality.

Brands and corporate have realized the potential of the social media and now have teams dedicated to managing the online content related to the brands. There are specialized departments that control the flow of information on websites like Face book. YouTube, Word Press etc. Alan Charlesworth in his book digital marketing: a practical approach talks about social media in one of the sections and says "for the likes of YouTube and Face book social networking is the core of a business model whereby they host websites that facilitate social communication and sell advertising on those sites... Organizations and brands (other than the hosting firms) have struggled to find the best way of using them as a channel of communication with the consumers" (Charlesworth, 2014). Thus the brands use Face book and create brand pages on it to constantly update information and interact with the consumers through different posts and comments.

### **B. Branding and Simulated Hyper Reality**

Jean Baudrillard a postmodernist theorist has presented many concepts and theories in order to situate the media and media content into the postmodern social landscape. His idea of the postmodern media is influenced by Marshall McLuhan's - technological determinism, which talks about societies being heavily influenced by media and technologies within those societies. And Roland Barthes' mythologies that take concepts of semiotics and media that talks about the society mechanized by the signs and images presented on all forms of media. Baudrillard in his book 'simulation and simulacra' challenges the events in the postmodern society and presents an alternative approach to understanding media and the media content. He gives the concepts of hyper reality to understand and the media positioning and calls hyper reality as a third order semiotic process called simulation.

The school of semiotics initially contained two orders of signs - first order and second order. First order involves signification, which talks about signs that 'imitate' real things, and thus end up playing the role of referencing tools such as maps, logos etc. Second order involves reproduction which talks about recreation of the real more like a model not just as a tool of reference but more in terms of re-access e.g.: photographs, wax models, statues etc. Baudrillard introduced the third order of signs that were presented to explain the concepts of simulation within the society - the hyper reality. This order the tools become creation of the unreal i.e., the nonexistent which is naturalized over a period of time and forced into the society as a way of life e.g.: consumer behavior, fashion, food habits, summer house property etc.

The big brands today succeed in the competition because they are constantly focused on the interaction with the audiences. Today, it's not just about the process of advertising but also about the alternative secondary marketing strategies used by the brands on all forms of available media. The concepts of branding talks about attaching extraneous factors to the brand and making it more than just what the product has to offer. Thus the brands use multiple strategies to sell their product and use the tools and spaces of communication to sell their ideas. The concepts of CSR when it comes to brands becomes a very crucial aspect of branding, irrespective of the intention of the communicators, CSR as an activity has a direct influence on the brand identity.

This study looks at connecting the concepts of CSR to the idea of semiotic orders by big brands to see how many of the brands take the CSR practice to the level of hyper-reality. The study analyses the content uploaded in different forms (textual, Photographic and video based) by the big brands that fall under the realm of socio cultural discourses. The

study intends to dissect the nature of signification on all the brand pages' posts related to CSR and assess the intentions behind the posts. The creation of a hyper real order of branding will go on to prove that the CSR activities on Face book are all mostly simulation strategies used by the brands in order to create a selling atmosphere. e.g.: brands that sell cars in the name of women empowerment by using taglines such as "made for the women.... now be at par with the men" are clear examples of such phenomena.

There is a huge amount of literature available in the area of CSR and social media. The research work available in the academia on the related fields have dominantly used the quantitative methods of analysis trying to quantify aspects such as the top corporate engaging in the CSR activities, number of developmental activities, Change brought in by the CSR activities, number of campaigns per brand etc. there is limited research conducted using the qualitative analysis methods and this research looks at areas of development and CSR, nature of content uploaded etc.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

### **A. Research Question**

The study intends to discover the simulation practices of the different brands on the social medium Facebook to understand the nature and quality of CSR on their Face book brand pages.

### **B. Theoretical Framework**

The study uses the concepts presented in the 'simulation and simulacra' to categorically assess the order of semiotic constructions of the brands' CSR practices. The simulation concept talks about the three orders of semiotic construction. The first order, which is signification, the second order, which is reproduction, and the third order, which is simulation. The brand's CSR content is categorized in one of these three categories for the purpose of analysis.

### **C. Sample**

The study has used the face book pages of the top five brands as ranked by interbrand ranking list. The study uses all the CSR related posts posted in the year 2014 for each of the brands. The content uploaded was of three different forms text, photographs, and videos.

The samples chosen for analysis - Google, IBM, Microsoft, GE and Toyota.

## **III. ANALYSIS**

The study categorizes the posts based on the nature of the content into one of the three categories of semiotic orders. Any post that uses mere signification in the content with symbols referring to a secondary feature will go into the first order posts using colours, themes, symbols etc. Any post that uses reproduction

and repetition of concepts in the form of campaigns, taglines, formats etc will go into the second order and any post that uses the social issue in order to create a selling mechanism will go into the third order where they combine social problem and present the product as the answer to it. The gathered data will then be analyzed for the content separately based on the orders they are categorized into. The data is quantified on a percentage basis, which help us understand the dominance of the order of signs in the pages.

**Table I: Consolidated Table Showing the Categorization of the Posts Based on the Three Orders For All The Five Brands**

Brand	No of posts	Signification	Reproduction	Simulation
Google	08	02	02	04
IBM	10	01	01	08
Microsoft	18	05	02	11
GE	15	00	08	07
Toyota	10	00	07	03
<b>Total no of posts</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Total percentage</b>		<b>13%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>55%</b>

13% of the CSR posts uploaded on Facebook pages can be categorized under Signification. Different symbols are used to signify the meaning and the importance of the message, this helps in reinstating the message that they care for the society and they are keening using their potential to make the world a better place.

33% of the CSR posts uploaded on Facebook can be categorized under Reproduction. Here, the creators of the content have aimed at reproducing the

issues as it is through words or images and offered a solution for these issues.

The table shows that 55% of the CSR posts that are uploaded on Facebook can be categorized under Simulation. This indicates that these global brands are using CSR as a dominant platform to advertise and build their brand image. Their main focus is to not on giving back to the community but rather building reputation

**IV. CONCLUSION**

The dominant numbers in the third category- Simulation shows us the creation of hyper real environment with the intention of simulating the society is a major characteristic of CSR. The brands simulate the society by using socio-cultural experiences and creating symbols and signs that are then embedded in the form of CSR through their Facebook pages. These patterns make CSR models on Facebook lean more towards profiteering and business strategies.

The hyper real environment created in case of Facebook pages is can be understood as a situation where simulation takes place through CSR activities that pose the brands and the products offered by the brands as social catalyst. The products perform the role of the savior and thus make take up a newer brand identity that escapes the realms of reality and becomes hyper real. So there is no surprise if cars are sold in the name of women empowerment and clothes are sold in the name of equality.

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