

Impact of Social Media on Sustainable Development

Babitha Elsa Oommen

HOD, Mount Zion School of Business Management, Kadamanitta, Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

Abstract: *Instead of throwing a definition in a Shakespearean English curated by web-geniuses to explain social media, let us do it in a fairly fun and an easy way by breaking the two words. The 'Social' part refers to the exchange of information among people. The 'Media' part refers to the medium of communication just like the internet.T.V, radio, newspapers and magazines are examples of the primitive form of media. To pull up a definition now, 'social media' is the series of websites and applications designed to permit people to share content quickly, efficiently and in real-time. With social media, you can share information and ideas in a variety of ways. Different outlets allow you to publish your own ideas in writing, with pictures, or through videos and voice recordings; and you can also hyperlink your audience to interesting articles, pictures, and videos. The information you share can be either private or public. For example, you can email a private message to one person and broadcast a video to a global audience via YouTube. Always consider your communication situation before sharing information. Maybe the most powerful element of social media is their interactive nature. Social media break the traditional barriers of time and distance between people. With video chat technologies like Skype, you can talk to people face-to-face anywhere in the world. On Facebook and mobile devices, you can chat digitally and text with your friends and family. Twitter even allows you to interact with media members, public officials, professional athletes, and celebrities.*

Keywords: Social media, Sustainability, Facebook, Promotion, Technology

1. Introduction

The whole world is facing the problem of depletion of natural resources, global warming and other environmental problems (Höök & Tang, 2013). The level of pollution is increasing in the environment. The United Nations is also talking about sustainable development goals. The pace with which natural resources are depleting it will be harmful for the coming generations. Sustainable development is important for us because it can meet the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Griggs, StaffordSmith, Gaffney, Rockström, & Öhman, 2013). The fear of losing natural resources is taking toll of present generations and they are switching towards sustainable development. The time has come where a stable relationship between human activities and natural world is required, which does not diminish the prospects for future generations to enjoy a quality of life. The usage of social media is not too old. Multinational organizations have started using social media tools for better promotion and marketing of products. In this paper, the authors will research about the usage of social media tools for achieving sustainable development.

2. Objectives

The major objectives of this research paper are mentioned below:

- Social media which helping in achieving sustainable development goal.
- How effective is this social media tool in this purpose of sustainable development.

3. Literature Review

Social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system and they can interact with each other. Through these social networking sites, people can share news, promote products, develop relationship outside the domestic boundaries, establish two-way communication and share connections. Social media tools often called web 2.0 technologies which allow users to interact engage people and media content in a manner that the overall participation increase. Social networking sites are providing much needed online space to the users to connect and interact with people from all over the world. It is hard to imagine life without social media in metro cities all over the world. As per the statistics based on report published in 2015, social media usage has been in more than 240 countries around the world. Approximately 42% of world populations are active users of internet and 29% have active social media content.

Onete, Dina, & Vlad (2013) have argued that social media is providing platform for sustainable business. Social media provide support in different functions of business. It allows customers to gather all information about products and services before purchasing actual product or service. The customers have the option to compare the information about products and services with other vendor. Another attractive feature of the social media is the flow of information among the consumers and manufacturers. Within a fraction of second the information flows from one corner of the world to another corner of the world. The various tools of social media which play an important role in strengthening the relationship between the buyers and sellers is the usage of specialized blogs, discussion forums and other platforms. Previously the organizations were facing many difficulties in fixing up the needs and wants of the customers but now the social media is

actually providing the platform to find out those needs with the help of discussion forums, blogs etc. Social media tools are helping in the better promotion of products. The social media tools help in establishing two way communications with the consumers (Kahle & Valette-Florence, 2012). The striking feature of social media tools is the low cost and ability to take the products and services outside domestic boundaries within no time. Many organizations are following born-global approach because social media tools helped them in taking the business to other foreign countries since the time of inception.

Social media tools have brought a change in the mindset of people about their thinking on the sustainable development issues. The earlier media tools like television, radio, newspaper and journals advocate about sustainable development in one-way communication mode. On the other hand, social media is establishing two-way communication with the help of different skill sets. The most common skill set are mavens, connectors and sales people. Mavens are the idea specialists while connectors are the people specialists. Connectors know a number of people from different sub-culture and niche. Those people connect with each other through social networking sites. There are 17 sustainable development goals discussed and adopted by the United Nations Assembly in September 2015 (Griggs, Stafford-Smith, Gaffney, Rockström, & Öhman, 2013). The social media tools can be used for empowering the people worldwide about sustainable development goals (Kang & Park, 2018). These tools drive the growth of sustainability because they are powerful tools of communications. Social media gives organizations and individuals the ability to correspond with vast number of audiences. These tool also help in developing the trust of people on the companies. The usage of technology in social media tools is eliminating the needs of paper in the organizations. Most of the promotion work and discussions are happening on social media a tool which saves the cost of the company. Social media tools are actually helping in achieving the economies of scale.

4. Effectiveness of Social Media Tools for Sustainability

Since long the companies are trying to achieve the goals of sustainable development but poor communication is stopping their way. The main influence of social media sites are in improved communication standards. Social media tools are boon for the marketers because they are able to communicate their sustainable practices at affordable price which was not possible through traditional media sites.

Zita, Burger, & Scholtz (2014) about the usage of social media for increasing environmental awareness in higher education. The authors have tested the significance of social media in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The sustainable practices can be produced by increasing public awareness, awareness coupled with existing environmental studies and incorporating societal norms and values. The communication is important in all the

three components. Different set of questions have been asked from the respondents. The answers of the questionnaire have suggested that Facebook is most popular used platform to spread awareness about environmental impacts. The other social media platforms used are YouTube and linked-in. The staff participants in the university felt that they were benefited from the campaign through social media networks. The content provided on the social media networks was very beneficial in understanding the importance of environmental practices.

Now-a-days customers are more intelligent. The demand for more transparency and two way communications from their companies. Knag and Park (2018) has discussed about the usage of social media tools for sustainable marketing efforts. Social media tools provide an opportunity to the companies to engage in active dialogues with their customers. Companies can improve their two-way communication by reducing the chances of informal communication. Social media sites provide an opportunity to talk with potential customers in front of current customers. Another means of sustainability which can be added through the usage of social media tools is economies of scale. Social media tools provide a huge platform to the organizations within limited finance. The low cost in the usage of social media tools add to its sustainability. In the last decade, social media plays an important role for the organizations in achieving the goals of sustainability by pushing corporations to new level of transparency, improve connection between customers and company, forced organizations to rethink their role in the society and communities around shared the common purpose.

H&M has strongly utilized social media to raise awareness for brand's sustainability and reduce environmental footprint. The company has started #WorldRecycleWeek on Twitter and encourage customers to recycle unwanted clothes (Sutton, 2018). Though the usage of Twitter also invited criticism and charges of corporate greenwashing but the company was adamant to use it. The usage of social media catered the audiences of different demographics which was difficult to capture otherwise. Toms shoes also used the Twitter to promote environmental sustainability. Toms shoes promotes one day without shoes using the hashtag #withoutshoes on social media to raise awareness about children's health. These social media campaigns are helping in better interconnection with the customers. Another aspect of sustainability is green marketing. Advertising is another aspect of sustainability. Previously the organizations were using the print form of advertising for promotions of their product. The introduction of social media tools has completely changed the advertising of products and services. In recent past, the organizations are talking about integrated communication. Social media and advertising are both parts of integrated marketing communication. Kahle and Valette-Florence (2012) argued about usage of social media as a tool for advertising for board reach, allow for interactivity and offer low cost to the companies as well. Marketing through social media tools decrease the cost and it improves the knowledge of the marketers.

Marketers knowledge improve because they can make separate groups for the consumers looking forwards towards sustainable products, searching for sustainability related feeds and create ads which promote sustainability. The advertising through social media also reduces the chances of print advertisement. The print advertisement uses significant number of papers. Internet and technology can avoid that usage of paper and indirectly avoids deforestation as well (Minton, Lee, Orth, Kim, & Kahle, 2012). Social media channels have the ability to become more credible and source of green marketing because social media channels use electronic word of mouth communication.

Environmental sustainability is still a big concern for the organizations as well as community (Hamid, Ijab, Sulaiman, Anwar, & Norman, 2017). The climate change and global warming is deteriorating the natural environment. In the higher education, students are learning about the concept of environmental sustainability. The institutes' providing the higher education has the responsibility to inculcate the environmental awareness among the students because those students will help in protecting environmental degradation and preserving natural resources in future. Though social media tools are in fashion since last decade but the usage of social media to educate students about environmental sustainability is in nascent stage. There are various practices used at university level such as recycling, reduction of electricity and water consumption, riding a bicycle in campus and usage of technology to reduce paper consumption in the university. It is the universities who can start using technology as a replacement of paper to promote environmental sustainability. Environmental awareness requires action from everybody. The engagement of staff, students and communities is required. Environmental sustainability is not for shorter term, it is for long term aim. The campaigning programs will also help in environmental sustainability. The students in the universities can use social media tools for promotion of campaigning activities and raising awareness. Campaigning requires systematic planning, evaluation and implementation.

5. Conclusion

Based on the overall discussion, it can be concluded that social media tools are helpful in achieving the goals of sustainable development. The previous research done on the usage of social media tools for sustainable development is in nascent stage and the usage of social media tools is also in nascent stage. United Kingdom is arguing about sustainable development goals. The social media tools can play an important role in achieving the goals of sustainability. These tools can connect communities, organizations, customers and students etc. in a single thread working for the sustainable environment. The usage of social media tools can be in the communication, marketing, advertising, promotion and motivating students in higher education towards sustainability. An organization has different functional departments. The social media tools can be used in those functional departments to complete the goals of

sustainability in the organization. The most prominent and famous social media tool is Facebook. It provided the flexibility to form groups, share messages about sustainability. The social media also minimizes the usage of paper in the organizations.

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