

Understanding the Stickiness of Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting as a Post Globalization Digital Marketing Strategy: A Study of Multinational Automobile Companies in India

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Abstract

Digital Marketing Initiatives of Firms are considered as one of the most influential marketing strategies of corporates to maximize the benefits of their businesses. One of the marketing approaches of businesses to find sophisticated ways of linking social and business values at individual and stakeholder level is through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting on websites. There is a “mad” race to promote CSR in order to enhance corporate visibility towards societal welfare. The objective of this paper is to evaluate whether there are elements of stickiness in CSR reporting as published in the websites of multinational automobile companies in India. Basically, Stickiness refers to a site's ability to retain users and drive them further into a site⁵. This paper takes into consideration four elements of stickiness as conceived by Gillespie, Krishna, Oliver, Olsen, and Thiel¹⁵. Comprising four broad components, they suggest that stickiness drivers in a website are content, customization, real-time interaction, and site promotion. The methodology adopted in this paper is thematic analysis of the CSR reporting of major (according to Forbes ranking) multinational automobile companies in India. The findings from this paper would suggest: firstly, whether all the four elements as proposed by Gillespie, Krishna, Oliver, Olsen and Thiel are prevalent in websites of these companies; secondly, the parameters that are more prominent among the automobile companies; thirdly other parameters (if at all) to be taken into consideration in order to enhance the stickiness of CSR Reporting.

Keywords: Automobile Companies, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Digital Marketing, Stickiness, Websites

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility has become a very popular phrase in the context of globalization. Some critics call it a fancy word, other call it a part of guilt economy. Still others feel, there must be something good about it. Decades of scholarly research has proved that Corporate Social Responsibility is not just a buzz word. There are serious academic outcome and some serious implications to the corporate world if it can be in sync with the academic rigor. In fact, the interest in Corporate Social Responsibility as a concept has gained prominence

primarily due to the effect of globalization where alien companies made an effort to become citizens of the host country. ‘Moreover, while governments have traditionally assumed sole responsibility for the improvement of the living conditions of the population, society's needs have exceeded the capabilities of governments to fulfill them. In this context, the spotlight is increasingly turning to focus on the role of business in society and progressive companies are seeking to differentiate themselves through engagements in CSR⁶⁵. The government has also mandated Corporate Social Responsibility as part of Companies Bill 2013 and has asked the companies to

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spend 2 % of their average net of last three year's profits. Hence, according to Aiyar², corporate must aim for social goals, not just profits.

However, the question that every corporate organization would ask is, how would we benefit out of Corporate Social Responsibility? One of the ways in which corporate organizations can derive mileage is through promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility activities through their website. This process would ensure that the stakeholders of the companies would have a better perception about the company as they would feel that the companies are not only profit driven but also society oriented. One of the known strategies that corporate organizations can implement is the stickiness factor where certain elements of the website would lead the stakeholders get glued to the website and trust to invest in the company. According to the theory set by Gillespie et al¹⁵, the stickiness parameters would enable the viewer of the website to stay on the website for a longer period of time and hence develop trust about the company. The stickiness parameters as devised by them includes, content, customization, real-time interaction, and site promotion. Using these parameters, the company would not only gain the trust of the stakeholders but also get business by gluing eye-balls to their website. However, it remains to be seen whether the multinational companies are actually following the stickiness factors to allure their stakeholders and consumers to remain in the website for a longer period of time.

2. Literature Review

'Corporate Social Responsibility involves the idea of business being proactive in its relationship with a range of social actors and doing more than just trying to avoid breaking moral rules¹⁷'. Corporate Social Responsibility in very simple terms is the responsibility that firms have towards society. However, the number of debates that triggered since its inception proves Corporate Social Responsibility is not that simple concept at all. In fact, the word 'social' in Corporate Social Responsibility is itself subjected to debate regarding the scope of society. Edward Freeman and Archie Carroll⁷ have said that 'society' includes specific groups of people who are immediately involved in firm's activities. This notion of society is backed by stakeholder theory¹² that suggests companies have responsibility to those stakeholders who form immediate part of company's responsibilities^{11,68} defined society in terms of a whole community or nation where people share their common values and traditions.

The term Corporate Social Responsibility gained prominence from 1950 and has shown that whenever there has been a lack of social responsibility by the firms there have been movements affecting production¹. It is also observed that this concept had shifted its meanings across time from stockholder benefit to shareholder benefit and from the questions of 'why' to 'what' to 'how' corporate can maximize value for the firm and society⁴.

An attempt to conceptualize Corporate Social Responsibility started with Bowen⁶ who defined social responsibility 'refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society'. Theodor Levitt⁶⁶ who opined, 'Corporate welfare makes good sense if it makes good economic sense- and not infrequently it does. But if something does not make economic sense, sentiment or idealism ought not to let it in the door'. McGuire⁶⁸ stated 'the idea of social responsibility supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations, but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations'. Although the word 'obligation' was not well defined, McGuire had talked elsewhere about 'corporation must take an interest in politics, in the welfare of the community, in education, in the happiness of its employees, and in fact in the whole social world about it. Therefore, business must act justly as a proper citizen should'. Walton⁷¹, a scholar in Business and society, defines corporate social responsibility as 'in short, the new concept of social responsibility recognizes the intimacy of the relationships between the corporation and the society and realizes that such relationships must be kept in mind by top managers as the corporation and the related groups pursue their respective goals'.

Milton Friedman¹³ stated, "There is one and only one responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competitions, without deceptions and fraud'. Contrary to his statement, Morrell Heald¹⁶ was of the opinion that the Corporate Social Responsibility would actually deal with subjects such as 'philanthropy, employee improvements (working conditions, industrial relations, and personnel policies), customer relations and stockholder relations'. Supporting Heald, Keith Davis⁸ opined that Corporate Social Responsibility encompasses 'consideration of issues beyond the narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements of the firm'. Summarizing the debate,

Carroll⁷ defined Corporate Social Responsibility as ‘the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time’.

Carroll⁹ developed a model for Corporate Social Responsibility and it became the base of almost every research in Corporate Social Responsibility. The model consisted of four major responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. The model has been successful in capturing different dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility through the formation of a pyramid. Carroll’s model is important in the sense that it is an amalgamation or summation of different models, definitions and the observations of CED. Various authors like Aupperle K. E.³, Donna Woods⁷², David Vogel⁷⁰ have supported Carroll’s model. According to Wood and Jones⁷², ‘Carroll’s four domains have enjoyed wide popularity among social issues in management scholars’.

However, very few papers have been found regarding the stickiness factor and its results for the corporate. According to Gillespie et al¹⁵, ‘Stickiness is “the sum of all the website qualities that induces visitors to remain at the site rather than move on to another site” (whatis.com). In other words, site stickiness is the ability to encourage customers to stay longer, navigate more deeply into a site, and return more often.’ Novak, Hoffman, and Yung⁶⁹ were of the opinion that there are 2 kinds of usage which consumers do in websites, one is task-oriented and the other is experiential usage. They found out that experiential usage has a positive correlation with the time used in websites rather than task oriented usage. Supporting Novak et al., Holland and Baker¹⁷ were of the opinion that, personalization and communities building were important elements of stickiness which actually impacted brand loyalty in a positive way. In a paper, based on website affecting rural tourism, Beldona¹⁰ were of the opinion ‘The parameters measured the websites’ effectiveness in the three areas of content, interactivity, and promotional value. The study found that rural tourism websites were largely driven by vertical contents, demonstrated poor interactivity, and had only marginal promotional value in them’. Taking into consideration all the reviews, it seems that there is a knowledge gap to understand if the automobile industries are using the parameters of stickiness to propagate their Corporate Social Responsibility activities.

So the broader research question is,

Does the reporting of Corporate Social Responsibility activities promoted by companies in their websites actually adhere to the theoretical concept of stickiness?

3. Methodology

The methodology taken for this research is qualitative and the method adapted to answer the research question is content analysis. The technique of content analysis adopted in this paper is conventional content analysis. This paper takes into account the parameters involved in the concept of stickiness (content, customization, real-time interaction and site promotion) and, through the lenses of these parameters understand whether companies are doing enough in their promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility activities through their websites. The content analysis will be deductive in nature trying to understand whether the parameters satisfy the elements on the website or not. This methodology would also enable researchers to understand whether any new parameters will be incorporated in the theory of stickiness.

4. Data Collection Process

The participating sector that this paper would take into account is the automobile sector and include both Indian and multinational automobile companies operating in India. The reason for choosing this sector is because of its open market and a substantial influence of globalization since 2005. For restricting the scope of this paper, the analysis would take into account four Indian companies (Tata, Mahindra, Maruti and Bajaj) and four multinational companies, Hyundai based out of South Korea, Ford based out of USA, Honda based out of Japan and Audi based out of Germany. The reason for taking these companies is to have participation from three major continents USA, Europe and Asia that are majorly into the automobile business. The content would be gathered from the website reporting of Corporate Social Responsibility activities of these companies and the themes would be generated from the data. The reason for taking the text of content from the website reporting of these companies comes from the inferences of managers interviewed in previous researches who suggest that promoting Corporate Social Responsibility activities through the website would be beneficial to their company image as a wider population of stakeholders and investors would come to know about the benevolent activities that they are doing for society. Hence, this paper would concentrate on the website reporting of Corporate Social Responsibility activities for Indian and foreign automobile companies in India and undertake a deductive process of thematic extraction and analysis.

5. Findings and Analysis

The analysis of this paper is derived from the content analysis done of the websites for 4 Indian and 4 foreign automobile companies. The process was deductive in nature. Hence, the approach adapted for doing the content analysis was conventional content analysis. Below are the parameter-wise findings of all the multinational automobile companies:

5.1 Customization

From collaborative engineering perspective, mass customization can be viewed as collaborative efforts between customers and manufacturers, who have different sets of priorities and need to jointly search for solutions that best match customers' individual specific needs with manufacturers' customization capabilities Chen¹⁴ in a simpler language meaning 'production of personalized or custom-tailored goods or services to meet consumers' diverse and changing needs at near mass production prices. Enabled by technologies such as computerization, internet, product modularization, and lean production, it portends the ultimate stage in market segmentation where every customer can have exactly what he or she wants'.

5.2 Indian Origin

5.2.1 Tata Motors

The home page requires one to click the 'about us' link so as to view the various pages like the sustainability approach and reports, safety and health, environmental and quality policies and corporate governance, with only the page of sustainability approach and reports depicting explicitly, the commitment of TATA to CSR²³.

5.2.2 Mahindra

Two of the five running pictures on the home page display Mahindra's contribution to pollution free cars and its contribution to villages using solar energy. Apart from that, the other CSR activities come up after clicking on the 'who we are' and 'how we help' sections²².

5.2.3 Bajaj

CSR initiatives, simply mentioned in the 'Corporate' section.

5.2.4 Maruti Suzuki

No CSR activities displayed.

5.3 Foreign Origin

5.3.1 Hyundai

No CSR activities displayed.

5.3.2 Audi

Corporate Responsibility report mentioned upon clicking on the link to the Audi Corporate Website with one picture out of three depicting future sustainability.

5.3.3 Ford

Photos and highlights of Ford being a 'green brand' come up after going to corporate our company sustainability.

5.3.4 Honda

CSR initiatives in the form of content and signs mentioned after going to the Honda Global link from the home page.

6. Real-Time Interaction

In a Research article titled 'Customer Participation in creating Brand site loyalty', Holland and Baker¹⁷ were of the opinion that, 'customer participation in the e-business model fundamentally changes the way brands are developed. That is....producers no longer create an image for a brand and pass it on to the consumer; instead, the producer and consumer are interactively creating the e-business brand'. So it can be inferred that, customer interaction has to be in place when it comes to dealing with the majorly vital and significant issue like CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) through the Websites.

6.1 Indian Origin

6.1.1 Tata Motors

As per Figure 1, the webpage of Tata Motors CSR above, it proves to be a very good example of Real-Time

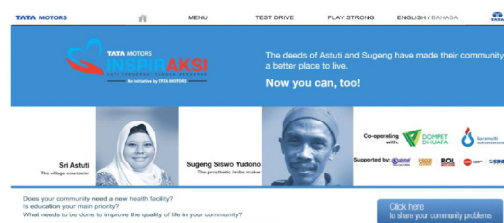


Figure 1. Webpage of TATA Motors CSR activity.

Interaction with any common man who cares about his/her community. They have a link which says 'Click here to share your community problems'. Many people come up to help their people taking the small step of sharing this on the website.

6.1.2 Mahindra

Its CSR webpage is dedicated to explaining all about their **responsibility towards sustainability**. It mainly focuses on:

- Education.
- Environment.
- Health.
- Culture.
- Sports.
- Foundations.
- Gateway House.
- Employee Social Options.

But, there was no Real-time interaction or any space offered to the customers or the visitors of the website to put their viewpoints or enquire anything.

6.1.3 Bajaj

Like Mahindra, Bajaj has also dedicated a full-fledged page to its responsibilities towards the society. There is no live interaction with the people really, but they have shared the mail-id of the CSR division of the company for any queries related.

To know more about our CSR initiatives or participate, mail us at – csr@bajajauto.co.in

6.1.4 Maruti

R C Bhargava, Chairman, Maruti Suzuki India Limited, was critical in understanding the practical implications of Corporate Social Responsibility activities that corporate organizations perform. In a recent article published in *The Economic Times*, Mr. Bhargava reveals his skepticism about the term responsibility in business. *"I had been unable to understand what exactly companies are supposed to do as their CSR. Is it philanthropy and charity? Is it social and humanitarian work or protecting the environment? Is it undertaking public service tasks which normally government should be doing?"*

There is no separate webpage on the website dedicated to the CSR. There is just a page displaying the **Sustainability Report** of the company over the past years.

6.2 Foreign Origin

6.2.1 Hyundai

Hyundai reflects on its Worldwide CSR projects. There is again no real-time interaction offered to the visitors of the website¹⁹.

There is a link that highlights the places on a map wherever Hyundai has carried out its CSR activities across the world. 'Click to view the CSR activities around the world/continent specific'

6.2.2 Audi

Just like Bajaj, Audi just gives an e-mail id to address the CR head of the company:

Dr. Peter F. Tropschuh
Head of Corporate Responsibility
E-mail: cr@audi.de

6.2.3 Ford

There is no other mention of the kind of CSR Ford does other than Environment- driven. Also, there are no evidences of any live interaction with the visitors of the website.

6.2.4 Honda

It displays its Environmental short film series: 'Paint by Numbers'.

Anyone could Post comments, give their details.

Also, they run various **blogs** under different categories:

Education, Diversity, Community, Environment, What we believe

There is also a link provided beside every blog to Tweet.

As the Research article 'Customer Participation in creating Brand site loyalty' by the authors Holland and Baker¹⁷ suggests that to enhance the Stickiness to any website, tools required are:

- Inviting user feedback in response to columnists.
- Using extensive hypertext cross-references to other parts of the site.

Automobile Companies like TATA and HONDA abide by it and offer an interactive user-friendly platform to their website visitors.

7. Content and Site Promotion

7.1 Indian Origin

7.1.1 Tata Motors

7.1.1.1 Content

- Extensive and Meticulous
- Easily Navigable and put on the “Home” page under one of main tabs (About Us).
- Integral Part of the website and their many recent initiatives.
- Authentic and detailed.
- Engaging.
- Business Reports, Social Responsibility Report, Global Reporting initiative reports.
- Association with ‘Global Compact’ and Communication In Progress reports published about the same.

7.1.1.2 Site Promotion (Figure 2)

- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, BuzzFeed and LinkedIn Pages).
- Traditional Media (Press releases about Tata motors where the link is provided for their various YouTube or any other social media pages).
- Online Affiliates (Tata AIG Insurance, BatteryBhai.com and many others).
- Subject of many case studies/blogs being published Online - Google Ad-Words.

7.1.2 Mahindra (Figure 3)

7.1.2.1 Content

- Limited, Cliched and Perfunctory.
- Not easily navigable.



Figure 2. TATA Motors site promotion

- Sustainability Reports (Link wasn't accessible) and Employee Social Options (Esops).
- Blog (Comparatively a lot better and more detailed content).

7.1.2.2 Site Promotion (Figure 3A)

- Google AdWords.
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and BuzzFeed).
- Online Affiliates (Mahindra Finance, Zapak and Snapdeal).
- Traditional Media (Press releases about Tata motors where the link is provided for their various YouTube or any other social media pages).

7.1.3 Bajaj Auto

7.1.3.1 Content (Figure 4)

- Carefully crafted, detailed and well categorized.
- Easily navigable.
- No sustainability reports but instead a link provided for ‘A Coffee Table Book-Beyond Profits’²⁰.

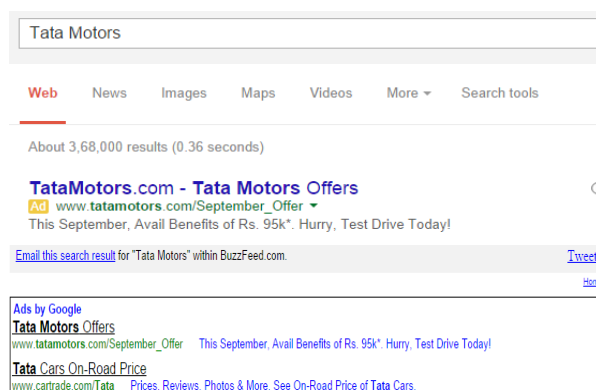


Figure 3. TATA Motors Google ads.

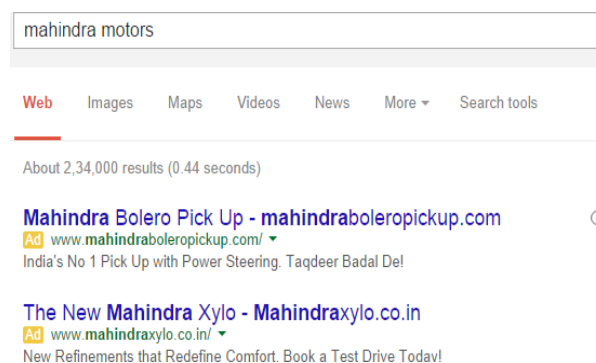


Figure 3A. Mahindra Google ads.

7.1.3.2 Site Promotion

- Online Affiliates (Bajaj Auto Finance and Bajaj Allianz).
- E-tailers (Snapdeal and Infibeam).
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

7.1.4 Maruti Suzuki

7.1.4.1 Content (Figure 5)

- Easily navigable but very limited and bland.
- Information and statistics provided for issues like Community and Skill development and road safety with no access to any external links or further details.
- Sustainability Reports (Not Updated).



Figure 4. Webpage of Bajaj CSR activity²¹.

ROAD SAFETY

Maruti Suzuki runs a nationwide road safety programme. The programme was initiated in 2000 with the establishment of the first Institute of Driving and Traffic Research in New Delhi. Maruti Suzuki has developed two models for imparting driving skills: the Institute of Driving and Traffic Research (IDTR) and the Maruti Driving School (MDS).

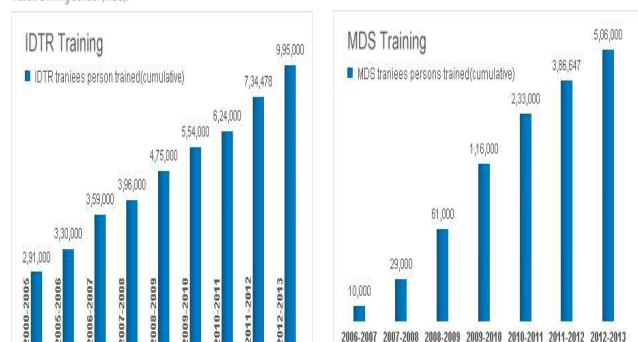


Figure 5. Statistics of Maruti Suzuki employee training.

7.1.4.2 Site Promotion (Figure 6)

- Google Ads.
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube).
- Traditional Media (Press releases).
- Online Affiliates (MTV, Swiftclub, ICICI and MarutiInsurance).

7.2 Foreign Origin

7.2.1 Hyundai

7.2.1.1 Content (Figure 7)

- A Separate CSR website (Hard to find the link through the main website).
- Beautifully designed and updated CSR website with rich and engaging content
- Its separate sitemap.
- Product development and promotion along the same lines.
- Sustainability Reports and Social contribution white paper.

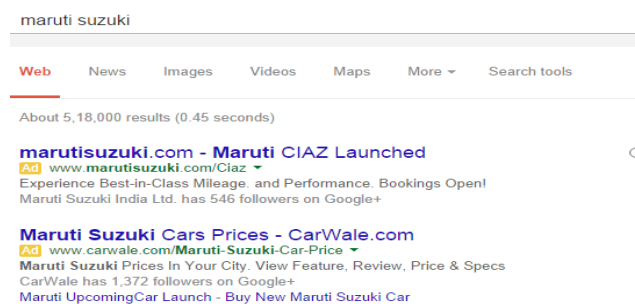


Figure 6. Maruti Suzuki Google ads.



Figure 7. Webpage of Hyundai CSR activity¹⁸.

7.2.1.2 Site Promotion (Figure 8): Google AdWords

- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn).
- Traditional Media (Press releases).

7.2.2 Audi

7.2.2.1 Content (Figure 8 A)

- Easily navigable and reasonably detailed.
- Outdated information and reports.
- No Sustainability Reports.

7.2.2.3 Site Promotion (Figure 9)

- Google Ads.
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube).
- Traditional Media (Print and OOH).

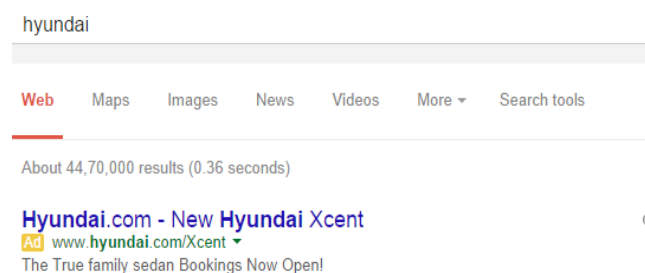


Figure 8. Hyundai Google ads.

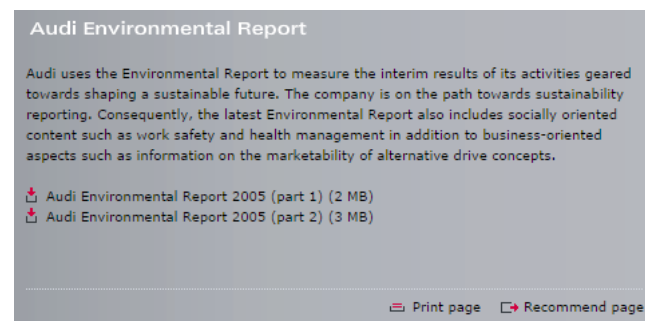


Figure 8A. Audi environmental report.

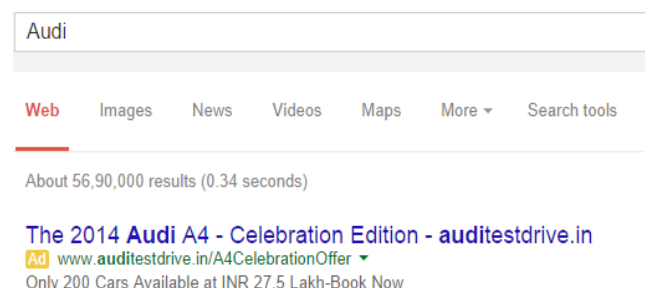


Figure 9. AUDI Google ads.

7.2.3 Ford

7.2.3.1 Content (Figure 10)

- Absolutely no content whatsoever except an outdated AnnualSustainability Report of 2006.

7.2.3.2 Site Promotion (Figure 11)

- Newsletters (Free Sign-Up required).
- Google AdWords.
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube. LinkedIn).
- Traditional Media (Print and OOH).

7.2.4 Honda

7.2.4.1 Content

- Just some outdated content on one page under 'Environment'.
- Dull and unengaging.

7.2.4.2 Site Promotion (Figure 12)

- Google AdWords.
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube).
- Traditional Media.

Thus the following points emerged from the findings:

Firstly, there seems to be limited content as far as the reporting of Corporate Social Responsibility in



Figure 10. Ford sustainability report.



Figure 11. Ford's twitter and Google ad presence.

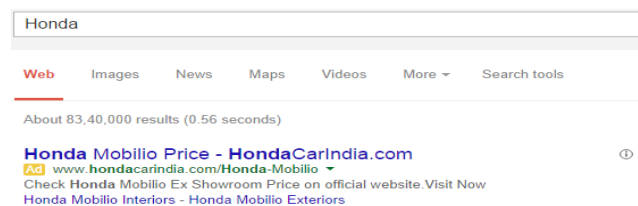


Figure 12. Honda Google ads.

the websites is concerned for both Indian and foreign multinational companies are concerned. Hence there is a requirement for more content in the website. Secondly, as far as customization is concerned, the websites of the foreign companies seem to be much more customized than the Indian companies. Thirdly, in case of real time interaction, the websites of the foreign companies seem to be more interactive than the Indian companies. Finally, site promotions seem to be extremely limited for both the Indian and foreign origin companies. Hence, it can be concluded that companies need to concentrate more on content and site promotion for enhancing the stickiness of their websites as far as the propagation of Corporate Social Responsibility is concerned.

8. Reliability and Validity of the Research

Inter-coder reliability was done in order to understand whether the codes analysed by one researcher was legitimate for the researcher. It was found that inter coder reliability was maintained and the second researcher came up with similar codes as the first researcher. Regarding the validity of this research, validity was measured on four parameters:

8.1 Credibility

Peer de-briefing was conducted as a method of understanding whether the research is credible or not. It was found that the research hold credible for the other researcher as well.

8.2 Transferability

By superimposing the themes of one website on another, it was found that transferability holds good for this research.

8.3 Dependability

The paper has a coherent flow in the methodology of data collection and is logical as far as a deductive process was concerned. Hence the dependability of this research was maintained.

8.4 Conformability

In discussion with another researcher, it was found that the results were logical and holds true in the context of the study. Hence, conformability was maintained.

Thus it was found, that apart from this research being reliable, it is also valid on all four parameters of validity. Hence, it can be inferred that the research holds true for all practical implications in the context of this study.

9. Conclusion

The findings and analysis of the study suggests that there still remains a lot of elements to be included in order to increase the stickiness of the websites in regard to the reporting of Corporate Social Responsibility activities were concerned. While the websites of the foreign companies showed much more stickiness than the Indian companies, both the types of companies lacked in content and in promotion of their sites with Corporate Social Responsibility activities. The inter-linkage between these two parameters seem logical as with more content on Corporate Social Responsibility activities, companies will be more inclined to promote the contents as well. Thus, from the theoretical standpoint of stickiness, the websites seem inadequate to glue the stakeholders and create more loyal consumers of their brands. Hence, it is recommended for brands to increase the stickiness of their websites so that stakeholders get glued to their brands and make more investment in the company.

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