Social Media as a strategic tool for Corporate Communication
Los Medios Sociales como una herramienta estratégica para la Comunicación Corporativa

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Abstract

Companies around the globe are embracing and adapting social media for many different intentions: customer service, marketing, internal communications, public relations or corporate social responsibility, etc. It is now a reality that social media is channging the way stakeholders and companies communicate daily, providing opportunities for collaboration, participation, interactivity, and engagement. Therefore, social media is conceived today in the corporate world as a strategic communication partner, driving new and unique possibilities for organizations to engage stakeholders in conversations. We are witnesses of a new digital era where consumers are becoming active users rather than passive individuals, changing dramatically how society operates. But these useful technological tools are employed widely and precisely by corporations in order to facilitate and improve communications? This research aims to discover the usage of different social media platforms by Puerto Rican companies. A content analysis was performed to the Facebook and Twitter official profiles of the top 400 locally owned Puerto Rican companies of 2009. The principal objective was to find if social media sites were mainly used as a strategic tool for corporate communication that can enhance stakeholder participation and engagement. Results showed that Puerto Rican companies are not employing social media platforms for improving communications with different stakeholders, failing to take advantage of the enormous possibilities that social media has for communication.

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Resumen

Compañías alrededor del mundo están utilizando los medios sociales para diferentes propósitos: servicio al cliente, mercadeo, comunicaciones internas, relaciones públicas o responsabilidad social corporativa, etc. Hoy en día es una realidad que los medios sociales están cambiando la manera en que se comunican las compañías con los distintos públicos de interés, trayendo consigo oportunidades para la colaboración, el intercambio de ideas, la participación y el compromiso. En la actualidad los medios sociales son concebidos en el mundo corporativo como un socio estratégico comunicativo, brindando oportunidades nuevas y únicas para el fomento de un diálogo efectivo con diferentes públicos. Somos testigos de una nueva era digital donde los consumidores se están convirtiendo en usuarios activos en vez de permanecer como individuos pasivos, cambiando así dramáticamente cómo la sociedad opera. Pero, ¿son los medios sociales utilizados ampliamente por las empresas con el fin de facilitar y mejorar las comunicaciones? Esta investigación pretende descubrir el uso que las empresas puertorriqueñas le dan a las distintas plataformas de medios sociales. Un análisis de contenido fue realizado a las páginas oficiales de Facebook y Twitter de las 400 mejores empresas locales de Puerto Rico del año 2009. El objetivo principal fue descubrir si los medios sociales son utilizados principalmente como una herramienta estratégica para la comunicación corporativa, fomentando así la participación de distintos públicos en conversaciones. Los resultados encontrados indican que las compañías puertorriqueñas no utilizan los medios sociales para el fomento de la comunicación con sus distintos públicos de interés, fallando en tomar ventaja de los enormes beneficios que los medios sociales ofrecen para la comunicación.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the Internet and new technologies are playing a powerful role in informing, educating, and connecting people around the world. Through social media platforms (such as blogs, wikis, social network sites, video sharing sites, etc) companies can spread news and messages quickly and inexpensively compared to traditional media. More than using social media for disseminating information, the power of social media relies in its principles of collaboration, sharing, participation, and empowerment, among others. Social media has changed how enterprises communicate with stakeholders; therefore it is important that companies learn how to take advantage of this new media, especially for communication purposes. Social network sites seem to provide tremendous opportunities for organizations to engage stakeholders in a dialogic communication (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Thanks to the development of social media channels, people can learn about a product or service through reviews, blogs or groups, and decide whether or not to use that product or service. Then, organizations are no longer the ones in power at the moment of controlling information about their products in the social media world. It is important to understand that there are still companies who need to work on strategies for embracing social media for communication (McCorkindale, 2010).

Social media platforms have changed how people communicate because it allows citizenship participation. The internet and new technologies as suggested by Kent, Taylor, and White (2003) could facilitate more balanced relations between organizations and stakeholders by increasing citizenship participation in the community life.

This investigation has the purpose to find out how Puerto Rican companies use social media, specifically if it is used as a strategic tool for enhancing corporate communication and promoting openness and interactivity with stakeholders. With the significant advantages that social media has for increasing stakeholder participation and engagement (Sweetser, 2010; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), Puerto Rican companies should fully employ and embrace this technology in order to gain organizational success. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the usage of social media by Puerto Rican industries with the purpose of understanding how truly companies are committed to create online scenarios for

communication with stakeholders. The objectives of this investigation are operationalized in the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What is the purpose of using Facebook and Twitter for Puerto Rican companies?

RQ2: What social media site is mostly used by Puerto Rican companies?

RQ3: What types of messages are presented in Facebook and Twitter by the analyzed companies?

RQ4: How frequently do companies sent post and tweets?

RQ5: Are Facebook and Twitter used for corporate communication purposes, promoting openness and conversations with stakeholders?

A content analysis was performed to the official Facebook and Twitter profiles of the top 400 locally owned Puerto Rican companies of 2009. Presently, Facebook and Twitter are highly used among people. Facebook is a social network site where users can create a personal profile, add friends, and post messages on wall's friends and other pages within Facebook, among other features. Facebook has more than 800 million of active users with 50% of them accessing it any given day[3]. On the other hand, Twitter is a micro blogging and social networking service where users can send and read messages in 140 characters or less called tweets. As September 2011, Twitter had 100 million active users[4], with more than a half of them logging in to Twitter daily. An average of 140 million tweets are sent per day according to the Huffington Post (2011).

Communicating corporate messages and issues through social media is important and necessary in order to improve and promote conversations between companies and stakeholders (Briones et al, 2011). Through social media, stakeholders, companies, society, or anybody can have a "voice" and be part of this new digital society; because these platforms have changed the way organizations and people communicate.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB. 2.0

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[3] http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics
[4] http://blog.twitter.com/2011/09/one-hundred-million-voices.html

Emergent media has appeared during the 21st century placing tremendous opportunities for companies in order to communicate better with publics. The cutting edge of this new media is well known as social media, part of the Web 2.0 revolution. The term Web 2.0 was coined in 1999 by IT consultant Darcy DiNucci and later popularized in 2004 by O'Reilly (Visser, 2010). Web 2.0 are web applications that facilitate collaboration and exchange of information. Web 2.0 can be defined as "the effects of extensive collaboration and user-participation on the marketplace and corporate world" (Visser, 2010: 14). Web 2.0 is a powerful tool that can help companies to improve their collaborative knowledge to impact customer relations and corporate culture (Hearn et al, 2008).

With the emergence of Web 2.0 platforms, the way we communicate through internet has changed, and social media for communication has become a central tool for organizations (Kim et al, 2010). Social media can include internet applications such as YouTube, Flickr, Wikipedia, social bookmarking (del.icio.us, Digg), blogs or micro blogs (Twitter), and social networking sites as for example, MySpace and Facebook (Hearn et al, 2008).

boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social network sites as web-based services that allow people to create a public or semi-public profile, and have a list of other users that share a connection. For these authors, the first social network site (using their definition of social network site) appeared in 1997 with SixDegrees, a tool helping people to connect with others that let users send messages. After that, a myriad of social network sites have appeared, being today the most popular, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube[5].

According to a study performed by Burson-Marsteller Communications Group (2010), social media permits new levels in the conversations that was never possible to achieve before. This study analyzed the presence of social media in the Global Fortune 100 companies finding that 79% of the global companies and 86% of the US companies[6] have at least one social platform (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or corporate blogs). This study was conducted for Latin American and Caribbean companies[7] as well. Results showed that 49% of the Latin American and Caribbean organizations have one or more social media presence (Facebook,

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[5] Alexa Traffic Rank, the top sites on the web: http://www.alexa.com Accesed on March, 2011
[6] Data was collected between November 2009 and January 2010.
[7] Data was collected between June and August 2010 from 160 Latin American and Caribbean companies. This study can be accessed at http://www.slideshare.net/BursonMarstellerLATAM/estudio-de-presencia-corporativa-en-redes-sociales-en-latinoamrica-2010

Twitter, YouTube, or corporate blogs). For Puerto Rico, they found that 5% of the enterprises have at least one social media site, and 5% were using Facebook and Twitter.

Presently with the advent of Web 2.0 platforms, companies no longer have the absolute power to control corporate information; therefore stakeholders are claiming more transparency, open communication, and engagement through social media platforms.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMMUNICATION

Social media has impacted the practice of communication and public relations since the beginning of blogs (Wright & Hinson, 2010). Recently, social media has been also an interesting topic for researching different approaches in the public relations field (Briones et al, 2011; Schultz, et al, 2011; Avery et al, 2010; Sweetser, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2010; Hearn et al, 2008).

Although 84% of the public relations practitioners think that social media is a low-cost tool to improve relationships with publics (Wright & Hinson, 2009), social network sites are not being employed in its fully dialogic potential by corporations (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Wright and Hinson (2010) have asked a particular question (for 4 years now) to public relations practitioners in order to know how these emergent technologies have impacted the communications field. The last study (2010) concluded that 83% of the respondents believe that social media have changed how corporations communicate in contrast to previous years (73% in 2009, 61% in 2008, 58% in 2007).

The advancement of new technologies had brought new opportunities for the corporate communication field, because companies not only can publish information, but measure also the effectiveness of the communication process (Argenti, 2006).

Social media platforms create opportunities for organizations to have real conversations with internal and external publics. For stakeholders, social media also brings opportunities because it is easier for them to be watchdogs and track companies with unethical communication behaviors (Sweetser, 2010). For that reason, companies cannot run away and disappear from social media channels; they need to be more present than ever to

promote conversations with stakeholders. "The value of social media is that users are highly engaged and wanted to be heard" (Burston-Marsteller, 2010: 2).

Up-to-date there are no studies analyzing the use and importance of social media sites as a corporate communication tool by Puerto Rican companies. Similar investigations examined the employment of social media by Fortune companies. McCorkindale (2010) studied Facebook member and fan pages of Fortune 50 companies of 2009 in order to determine how companies disseminate information, provide relationship maintenance, and maintain levels of engagement. Using a content analysis methodology, a total of 55 pages were coded. Results shown that while corporations are posting news and mission statements, the majority of the companies are not using Facebook in its fully extent.

Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) examined how Fortune companies are using Twitter to facilitate dialogic communication with stakeholders. Using a content analysis methodology as well, 93 Twitter company profiles and 930 individual tweets were considered for the use of dialogic features within Twitter. They concluded that 61% of the organizations were classified as dialogical and 39% non-dialogic, and both types of companies did not differ in the results at the moment of providing information. Dialogic type-companies obtained higher results that non dialogic at the moment of employing the dialogic features of conservation of visitors (encouragement of visitors to stay on the site), and generation of return visits (incentive to users to return to the site).

As research in social media, corporate communication, and public relations continues to grow, corporations around the world will understand the powerful role that social media has for internal and external communications.

4. METHODOLOGY

People who can understand the rapidly and changing digital world can communicate more effectively than those who cannot (Wright & Hinson, 2010). Therefore, not only people, but

also companies need to adapt to this digital world in order to succeed in communicating with stakeholders.

Puerto Rican companies are not an exception, they require to understand how social media is changing the way we communicate. Social media is here to stay, this media is not static, as the society and technology evolves, it will also adapt to the circumstances and new environments of this digital era.

The commonwealth of Puerto Rico (unincorporated territory of the United States) has approximately 3,725,789[8] habitants, and almost 40% of its population (1,443,920[9]) is using Facebook. According to Burson-Marsteller in its Latin America study[10] (2010), 5% of Puerto Rican companies are using Facebook and Twitter. There is a wide use of social media platforms, especially Facebook by Puerto Rican citizens. Therefore there is a great opportunity for Puerto Rican companies to have a major presence in social media platforms for initiating conversations with customers in order to know what they have to say about the company.

A quantitative content analysis of Facebook and Twitter official pages (available for public view) was performed to the top 400 locally owned companies of 2009. These enterprises appeared on a special report by the Puerto Rican magazine "Caribbean Business" on November, 2010[11]. Using Krippendorff's methodology (2004), the content analysis was carried out between January 1 and January 31, 2011 to determine how Puerto Rican companies are using social media for corporate communication purposes. Krippendorff (2004: 18) defines content analysis as a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use".

The units of analysis were the Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of each company and its respective posts and tweets. In order to find the company's Facebook and Twitter profiles, a search was performed within Google, Facebook, Twitter, and the corporate webpages or press room sections. Inside of each company website, links and icons of Facebook and

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[8] 2010 US Census Data: http://2010.census.gov/2010census/data/index.php
[9] Facebook users in Puerto Rico, data from January 2011: http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/
[10] This study can be accessed at http://www.slideshare.net/BursonMarstellerLATAM/estudio-de-presencia-corporativa-en-redes-sociales-en-latinoamrica-2010
[11] http://www.caribbeanbusinesspr.com/magman/Top400_10/index.html

Twitter were sought. Evidence was looked on Facebook pages within the wall[12] (company and users' posts), discussion and poll applications (for Facebook), photos, videos, and company info. On the other hand, all tweets (messages) and retweets (forwarded messages) were analyzed from each company's Twitter account.

News, general and promotional messages, events, trivia/contests, annual reports, presence of Corporate Social Responsibility and philanthropy initiatives within the posts and tweets were analyzed. Promoting discussions with their fans or followers in these social media sites were also evaluated.

Only companies with active profiles were taken into account for analysis (companies with inactive profiles are those who have not posted messages on Facebook and Twitter for two months or more at the time of the analysis). The analysis was carried out during January 2011, every daily post and tweet in that month was examined to determine the average of posts/tweets/retweets of each company and the presence of companies' feedback (level of interactivity).

5. RESULTS

Facebook was the social media platform most used by the Puerto Rican companies. Results showed that only 43 companies had a presence in Facebook and 19 in Twitter from the top 400 companies' list. Out of the 43 Facebook official pages, 22 were active profiles, and 21 were inactive (it means they have not posted for two months or more at the time of the analysis). Furthermore, out of the 19 Twitter accounts, 8 were active and 11 inactive. These results indicate little representation on the social media world by the top 400 list of locally owned Puerto Rican companies, and a lack of commitment in maintaining and updating an active corporate profile on Facebook and Twitter.

Puerto Rican companies were mainly using Facebook and Twitter for releasing general and promotional messages (about products and services), as presented in Table 1. For example, in the retail industry, the Facebook pages were used to inform about products or events and to release shoppers before reaching to the stores. As shown in Table 1 Puerto Rican

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[12] "The wall is the center of your profile for adding new things like photos, videos, notes, and other application content". On the other hand, a wall post is a is "a blurb that can be posted by anyone visiting the site" (McCorkindale, 2010)

companies were displaying primarily promotional and general messages and, followed by news and events

Table 1. Type of messages presented on Facebook and Twitter

Type of messages	Facebook (%)	Twitter (%)
Annual Report /Achievements	0	5
Promotional Messages	42	32
General Messages	42	32
News	21	26
Events	16	11
Trivia/Contests	5	5
Philanthropy/Charity	0	0
Corporate Social Responsibility	0	0

Annual reports or achievements were not communicated; neither information nor messages related to charity/philanthropy and corporate social responsibility were encountered. It seems that these important subjects for enhancing corporate communication were not relevant to disclose as promotional messages. Primarily social media was employed for marketing purposes and not for promoting corporate communications.

It was also found that only 35% of the total messages addressed during the month were for promoting discussions in Facebook and 11% in Twitter, as shown in Table 2. Usually the companies asked only short-answer questions for promoting discussions, failing in encouraging stakeholders to participate more. Common Facebook applications that promote two-way communication such as discussions, reviews (companies did not used reviews), or polls were not displayed and employed by the Puerto Rican organizations, as appeared in Table 2.

Table 2. Promoting communications on Facebook and Twitter

Promoting communications	Facebook	Twitter

	(%)	(%)
Presence of discussion (communications tools)	16	NA
Presence of polls (information tools)	7	NA
Promoting discussions	35	11

All companies that have an active Facebook page and Twitter account posted at least once, with an average of 20 Facebook posts and 37 tweets on January 2011. During the month, companies posted on Facebook an average of 10 out of the 31 days, and sent tweets 12 out of the 31 days as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Key findings

Average of Facebook posts during January 2011	20 posts
Average of Tweets during January 2011	37 tweets
Average of days posting messages on Facebook	10 out of 31 days
Average of days sending tweets	12 out of 31 days

Only two companies (from media industry) sent retweets (forward messages). This practice was not common between the Puerto Rican industries, usually "retweet" means that companies are listening to other industries or users in order to have truthful relationships within Twitterland.

Feedback was quite poor; one can think that opening a Facebook or Twitter account is just enough. That can take 5 or 10 minutes, but having a productive and interactive platform requires a long-term engagement and constant monitoring. Puerto Rican companies were more concerned in broadcasting information than having real conversations with their followers or fans. Only one company provided some sort of feedback on Twitter (5 times during the month), and four enterprises on Facebook (2 times utmost in the month). These results pointed a lack of participation by stakeholders. This leads to another major problem presented, and was the absence of promoting meaningful discussions in the social media platforms. There were no real conversations where companies and stakeholders can dialogue in order to improve the companies' services and commitments.

Puerto Rican organizations with major presence in social media were universities, retail, and media industry, as seen in Table 4. Media and retail were the lead industries in sending posts and tweets. Media, particularly newspapers were posting and tweeting daily. It was expected that the media industry was widely using social media.

Table 4. Social media presence

Organization	Facebook Presence (%)	Twitter Presence (%)
Universities	8	2
Retail	6	1
Auto dealers	4	1
Media	3	2
Health	2	0
Others	4	1

On the other hand, the average users in the Facebook official pages were approximately 16501 and 5148 for Twitter. Half of the companies displayed photos in their Facebook profiles (51%), and only 23% presented videos. It is interesting to note that only 21% of the organizations had information in the Facebook pages about the company such as the mission, vision or objectives.

Overall, results showed that the few Puerto Rican companies that have a presence in social media used it mostly for marketing purposes. Sadly, social media was not employed as a strategic tool for corporate communication failing to promote openness with stakeholders about different and relevant corporate topics and issues.

6. DISCUSSION

Results showed that Puerto Rican companies are doing efforts in informing about their products and services especially through Facebook. The aim of using social media channels for the few Puerto Rican companies with a presence in social media was basically for marketing intentions. On the other hand, Twitter was poorly used by the Puerto Rican organizations and it was not employed in its full capacity in order to facilitate conversations.

There were more superficial topics than in-depth topics in the Facebook posts and tweets. Social media was not employed for communicating important company's messages, such as corporate news, annual reports, corporate social responsibility, and philanthropy initiatives, among others. Moreover, social media platforms were not neither used to provide feedback nor to promote conversations with stakeholders. For example, some universities' Facebook walls were more used by students to post about selling books, rather than by universities posting messages in order to communicate with students, alumni, and others about institutional issues. Universities could create a tab on Facebook for letting students post things for sale, avoiding saturation of these messages within the wall.

Additionally, companies were not tweeting or posting on Facebook daily. When hosting social media sites, it is important to tweet or post at least once a day; companies should understand that creating a presence in social media sites requires time, hard work, and attention for maintaining the social presence (Sweetser, 2010).

Little feedback was presented by the enterprises (in both Facebook and Twitter accounts). Puerto Rican companies were not encouraging citizens to participate in a two-way conversation. Consumers, for example, are a powerful stakeholder group for creating real dialogues through social media sites. "In particular, the power of consumer word-of-mouth has been greatly magnified given the popularity and vast reach of Internet communication media such as blogs, chat rooms, and social media sites" (Du et al, 2010: 14).

The function of Facebook and Twitter is generally misunderstood in the Puerto Rican business. It looks that only spreading information and answering general questions was enough. Social media platforms are created for collaboration, participation, learning, sharing, and it is conceived as a two-way communication process. Then, if a company decides to open a Facebook or Twitter account, it is expected (following the meaning of social media and web 2.0 platforms) that the organization should actively engage and contribute to the conversations. For Puerto Rican companies, Facebook and Twitter are viewed as another media channel, rule by one-way asymmetrical communication. This vision is woefully inadequate because through social media, companies can have conversations and exchange ideas and opinions with a variety of publics, including, customers, fans, employees, potential employees, suppliers, journalists, academia, etc.

Facebook and Twitter are places to build relationships with stakeholders and have personal and meaningful dialogues with them (Sweetser, 2010).

Half of the companies who have a presence on Facebook and Twitter presented inactive accounts. It means that they were not posting tweets two months ago from the time of the analysis. Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Luce (2009) concluded that "organizations create a profile and then abandon it, they will create only minimal exposure for the organization, and it could turn off potential supporters if they witness inactivity on the site" (105). Therefore, having an inactive Facebook or Twitter account seems as a larger disadvantage than having no presence in social media sites at all, it is like a double edge sword. "By avoiding the place where the conversation is happening, the company is missing the opportunity to be heard and understood" (Burson-Marsteller, 2010: 2).

On the other hand, who is in charge of these Facebook and Twitter accounts? the marketing department? or the public relations department?, there was no "human voice" in these discussions. These conversations should be interactive, have a human approach, and embrace more openness. Sweetser (2010) suggests that one way of having positive impacts on the relationships between organizations and publics, is to communicate in a human voice and taking advantage of most multimedia available. The few replies to posts did not show who is representing the company. In a social networking environment, allowing who is tweeting on behalf of the company is important because is no longer some faceless department but an actual person (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Findings suggest that public relations or communications practitioners should be in charge of the social media sites. Public relations practitioners possess "know-how" in handling and employing social media tools for a two-way symmetrical model of public relations practice (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). They should not only monitor the Facebook and Twitter sphere for mentions of the organizations, but also they ought to check blogs, groups, or other social media presence. Having a presence in the social media world requires planning, preparation, training, and monitoring. It is more than just opening a Facebook account and leave it to the hands of interns or secretaries. "Companies must monitor their own social media presence to ensure a consistent brand message and to measure the impact of their social media engagement" (Burson-Masteller, 2010: 2).

As social media sites become widely used by Puerto Rican companies, organizations should understand the foundations of social media and why it is important to update online strategies and build relationships with publics in a daily basis.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Companies use social media for different purposes in order to achieve corporate goals or objectives. But thanks to the underlying interactivity of social media, it is a tremendous resource for enhancing corporate communication and stakeholder engagement. Very few Puerto Rican companies had a presence in social media platforms. Results showed that the improved communication platforms that social media provides were not employed to reach different stakeholders. Social media has not been conceived yet as a strategic tool for corporate communication in Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican companies failed to create and promote effective communication processes that can lead to fruitful discussions and relationships with different publics.

There is a large difference in having a Facebook or Twitter account and having a well-planned- managed social media presence. Presently, this is the case of Puerto Rican companies; they are more concern just holding a Facebook or Twitter account that counting with excellent managerial people behind it. This study suggests that Puerto Rican companies need to count with social media professionals that can promote engagement in every step of the online activity.

Although there are some limitations in this research, these restrictions present avenues for future investigations. Future research could analyze the same sample for a longer period of time and include other social media sites for in-depth analysis. Further studies also could center in how stakeholders evaluate the performance of Puerto Rican companies in the social media world.

In the late 1990's when companies decided to created corporate websites, it was expected that they would be open for communicating with stakeholders, but they only centered in "pushing mundane advertising messages" (Lee, et al, 2006). More than 10 years have passed and now with the presence of social media in our lives, Puerto Rican companies are not promoting openness through this emergent media. Organizations should embrace

correctly social media if they want to remain competitive in the market. Social media is here to stay and let stakeholders have a voice and become active citizens and prosumers.

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