

Chapter 14

The Use of Social Media and Online Petitions to Achieve Collective Change for a Sustainable Future

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ABSTRACT

Scandals of corruption in government and mismanagement in business and government departments has made us rethink of what the world is becoming and what should be done to steer it on the right track. Brilliant policy and law makers have tried to put in place laws and governing statutes that can assist in ethically governing businesses and governments so that they can sustain themselves and maintain a healthy respectful and transparent relationship with all their stakeholders and communities. The failure by certain governments and businesses to adhere to policy, statutes and laws has frustrated good people and their only podium left standing is social media and online petitions. On websites worldwide communities are getting together to discuss and defame businesses and governments that are perpetuating unethical behaviour. This has changed the face of marketing as marketers and the public relations departments are in change of maintain and promoting a company or governments image. The face of marketing has changed as social media has introduced itself into the mix.

INTRODUCTION

Waste and water pollution, depletion of the ozone layer and global warming affects everyone on the planet. Responsible and sustainable business practices are the only way for society to sustain itself. Business and governments have a responsibility to maintain good ethical conduct and maintain good business practice with the stakeholders and communities they do business with. It is no longer about limiting one's carbon foot print or showing solidarity towards democracy within society. Many corporates are

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involved in shocking ethical misconduct yet they hide behind cleverly manipulated public relations and marketing campaigns that portray them as pillars of corporate society.

Corporate Social Responsibility should be the cornerstone of business practice worldwide. In order for a company to be a well-respected or good corporate citizen in the business world it needs to be socially responsible and ethical in its business practice. People in society want assurance by business and government that they will comply with the laws and regulations to maintain and sustain resources and prescribe to a body of conduct that is honest and instils confidence in society. Marketing has changed in this contemporary era. A marketer now has the responsibility to ensure their company or organisation is producing and selling products/ services that are safe, value for money and not harming the community or environment. Communities who fail to be heard by irresponsible businesses and governments are now using social media to champion their cause and be heard. Social media is a powerful tool that has grown in awareness in the business and social communities worldwide. Social media has changed the manner in which businesses and governments interact with their target audiences, distributors, suppliers, employees and communities.

In this age where resources are scarce, businesses and governments need to keep abreast of their ethical and social obligation to their customers and communities in which they reside in. Businesses and governments have an obligation to the public they serve or the services or goods they provide. The main theme in this chapter is to highlight how social media can serve as an excellent way to bring online communities together to name and shame organisations that are socially irresponsible, unethical or unsustainable.

This chapter will explore the following key themes:

1. Background into social advocacy
2. What is social media?
3. Online petitioning
4. Various theorists views on social media
5. Irresponsible behaviour by businesses
6. Cultural jamming a new concept to be taken seriously in marketing
7. A way Forward: The use of social media and online petitions to name and shame irresponsible governments and businesses.
8. Direction for future research

The chapter will start with providing a background into social advocacy and linking it to social media and online petitioning of big businesses who are corrupt and are perpetuating unethical behaviour.

Background into Social Advocacy

Activists are now using social media and on-line petitioning to gather much needed support to change the way big businesses and governments are doing things. They want to make a difference by creating awareness of the unethical practices and corruption perpetuated by big business and governments. Baron (2003) argues that through boycotts, protests, and civil suits, activists can force firms to comply with their demands or make a change to how businesses are conducting themselves. Davis, McAdam, Scott & Zald (2005) adds that neoinstitutional theorists are increasingly treating social movements as motors of institutional change.

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