

Sustainability Narratives in CEO Letters of Tourism and Hospitality Companies – An Impression Management Perspective

Pande S¹, Singh N², Vishnani S^{3*}

Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India^{1,2,3}

smita.pande@jaipuria.ac.in, nidhi.singh@jaipuria.ac.in, sushma.vishnani@jaipuria.ac.in

ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism has been stressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations Sustainability Development Group. The tourism and hospitality sector affects local communities worldwide. It must, therefore, make sure to strive toward an equitable and sustainable future for the people and the world since this industry can have a long-lasting effect on lives, communities, and economies. While studies have demonstrated the utility of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) letters in diverse Impression Management (IM) facets, such as fostering inclusivity within the organization and its broader societal context, the way these letters can effectively communicate an organization's sustainability endeavours and their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains an underexplored area.

To understand the responsiveness toward SDGs in the Tourism & Hospitality (T&H) sector, the study explores the CEOs' letters to shareholders of airlines, amusement parks/other recreation, hotels and resorts, restaurants, and the travel industry. The study explores the sustainability narratives in CEOs' letters using the qualitative content analysis method. The study sample comprises CEO letters of 26 leading companies extracted from the annual reports of the period FY 2012-13 to 2021-22. These companies are listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), India. The investigation is carried out by analyzing the letters as an impression management strategy, building on theories of social identity and legitimacy. The narrative of each letter was carefully analyzed to unearth the sustainability-related CEO comments used.

The present study used occurrence-based content analysis. Transcripts of letters to T&H company shareholders show that select corporations use a lot of "cues" to boost their reputation as socially conscious businesses. These cues were studied to construct a theoretical understanding of the IM strategy connected to sustainability, developed through the inductive generation of first and second-order codes. The content of the letters was carefully examined, and connections between the CEOs' letters and UN SDGs were found. SDGs 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 11 are the most prevalent. The results reveal that only 37% of letters contained such cues. Amongst the various industries of the sector, airlines (77%) are most actively engaged in IM through letters, while restaurants (20%) are least actively involved in IM through letters. The sustainability narratives of such companies highlighted their initiatives regarding 'support to community', 'education and skill development', 'sustainable management of water and sanitation facilities', 'sustainable energy', 'promoting employability and sustainable economic growth' and "inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements". Such cues have linkages with SDGs 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 11.

Keywords: impression management, sustainability, CEOs letters, letters to shareholders, legitimacy