A GENRE ANALYSIS OF CORPORATE WEBSITES OF OIL AND GAS COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

Due to the constant evolution of technology, especially the internet, companies have switched their preferences to use corporate websites to advertise and provide information about their companies, effectively and efficiently. Corporate website is a very interesting genre to look into yet it is under researched, especially the ones looking into the generic structure, as opposed to the studies of genre analysis on other forms of media (i.e. printed brochures (Henry and Roseberry, 1998; Osman, 2008;), sales promotion letters (Bhatia, 1993; Kathpalia, 1992), job application letters (Bhatia, 1993; Henry and Roseberry, 2001; Upton and Connor, 2001), advertisements (Kathpalia, 1992), book blurbs (Kathpalia, 1997)). Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the generic structural pattern of corporate websites of oil and gas companies. The framework used for this study is based on the work of Askehave & Nielsen (2005) for the generic structure of corporate home pages of computer companies. To conduct this study, data was collected from corporate websites of 20 oil and gas companies worldwide. The results showed that there are thirteen moves in the generic structure of oil and gas companies. This study is expected to make a contribution to genre analysis literature by demonstrating the strategies for PR practitioners to consider in construction of effective corporate websites especially for but not limited to oil and gas companies in the future.

Keywords: Corporate websites, generic structural pattern, moves.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the World Wide Web, as a new communication medium in the early 20th century, has been an extremely powerful trigger that resulted in the introduction of 'cybergenre' or also known as digital genre, which, according to Shepherd & Watters (1998, p.239) is the "new superclass of genre". Cybergenre according to Yates & Orlikowski (1992) refers to genres of "electronic communication in organizations". The features of cybergenre derive from the capabilities afforded by the internet. Personal home pages and corporate home pages are some of the examples of cybergenre (Marco, 2002). The home page is a genre that has emerged spontaneously (Shepherd & Watters, 1998). Personal home page might be considered as the "first truly digital genre" (Dillon & Gushrowski, 2000, p.202) as it has evolved into a standard form. Personal home pages and corporate home pages are more often than not considered as categories belonging to the same home page genre. Nevertheless, the characteristics of personal home page and corporate home page are very much different and thus are considered as separate genres. Corporate home page acts most of the time as a form of advertisements about a company's products/services.

Fairclough (1992) considers corporate home page as "hybrid information-and-publicity". As stated by Mannion & Sullivan (in Marco, 2002), corporate home pages has become an increasingly important genre for companies and above all it has also become a dominant genre on the internet. The knowledge of the generic structure of corporate home page will direct the writers and in this case, the PR practitioners, in the production of this genre and also assist the visitors to better understand, process, and interact with the text. Corporate websites have been an important communication tool for corporations worldwide. Through corporate websites, companies are able to reach out to millions of its clients all over the world. Companies which do not have a corporate website are considered as not serious in its business endeavour (Schwab, 2008). People turn to websites to find out more about a business, see how the company presents itself and the services that companies provide.

MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

Given the importance of corporate websites to companies and the lack of studies on analyzing corporate websites, this study is undertaken as an initiative to identify the generic structure of corporate websites of oil and gas companies around the world to see how generic moves are utilized by the PR practitioners to accomplish the communicative purpose of corporate websites, thus, sending the correct and precise information about the company and their products/services to their clients, potential clients, investors and stakeholders.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Due to the constant evolution of technology, especially the internet, companies have switched their preferences to use corporate websites to advertise and provide information about their companies, effectively and efficiently. Corporate website is a very interesting genre to look into yet it is under researched, especially the ones looking into the generic structure, as opposed to the studies of genre analysis on other forms of media (i.e. printed brochures (Henry and Roseberry, 1998; Osman, 2008;), sales promotion letters (Bhatia, 1993; Kathpalia, 1992), job application letters (Bhatia, 1993; Henry and Roseberry, 2001; Upton and Connor, 2001), advertisements (Kathpalia, 1992), book blurbs (Kathpalia, 1997)).

PR practitioners are generally responsible for the entire content of corporate websites but there are no definitive guidelines provided for them to create corporate websites. Most importantly, PR practitioners lack awareness in terms of knowledge regarding the generic structure of corporate websites of oil and gas companies. There are also instances in which companies employ lay people who have no specific knowledge on the creation of corporate websites and this poses a problem to the respective companies as corporate websites are considered as a window to the companies.

Due to the circumstances mentioned above, this research is undertaken to assist PR practitioners and lay people who have no sufficient knowledge on the generic structure of the corporate websites for them to be able to gain some understanding on the overall construction of the corporate websites of oil and gas companies and assist them in constructing effective corporate websites especially for but not limited to oil and gas companies in the future.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze corporate websites of oil and gas companies using genre-based approach. Corporate websites, in general, is considered as a form of advertisement for the companies as corporate websites will be the first source the general public, clients, potential clients, investors and stakeholders visit if they need to find information or any updates about the companies.

Therefore the analysis on the organization of corporate websites is conducted to examine the way PR practitioners present the information and messages to the general public, clients, potential clients, investors and stakeholders. This study revolves around the investigation of generic structure of corporate websites. The objective that this study attempts to achieve is to examine the generic structural pattern of corporate websites of oil and gas companies.

The next part of the study will discuss previous researches conducted on genre analysis as well as the framework used to analyse the generic structure of oil and gas companies' corporate websites. The methodology section of this study elaborates on the method used in collecting and analysing the data of the present study. The findings from the analysis of data collected and the discussion on the findings obtained will follow. The study concludes with recommendations for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of this study, generic structure of corporate websites of oil and gas companies will be identified using Askehave & Nielsen's (2005) Swalesian Genre Model.

Orlikowski & Yates (1994) in their pioneering work on the concept of genre propose that genres are classified as communicative actions 'characterized by similar substance and form and taken in response to recurrent situations'. Martin (in Askehave & Nielsen, 2005) expresses genre as "how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them". The above definitions given of genre may give a brief understanding on the concept of genre as a whole. However, it was perhaps Swales (1990) who has put forth one of the most extensive definitional discussions of the concept of genre:

> A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience (Swales, 1990, p.58).

Studies on genre have gained momentum since its introduction three decades ago. Studies by Miller (1984), Bazerman (1984), Swales (1990) and Yates & Orlikowski (1992) have all contributed significantly to the understanding of the concept of genre by defining the concept and introducing models appropriate for performing genre analysis. Although previous studies on genre offer great insight into the concept of genre, most of the studies tend to focus on genres transmitted via speech or print.

The last few years have been a witness to the steady rise in genre research which deals with genres transmitted through the internet. Research on electronically-transmitted texts started with the work of Yates & Orlikowski (1992). Their study on transmitted texts focused on the production, reproduction and modification of genre over time e.g. the memo's transfer to the electronic medium; Furuta & Marshall (1996) on genres utilised on the internet to facilitate information; Crowston & Williams (1997) on the reproduction and adaptation of genres on the web; Rousinnov et al. (2001) on the study of people's recognition of genres on the web and Ryan, Field & Olfman (2002) investigated the evolution of US state government home pages. Other studies on genre analysis include of Swedish daily online newspapers (Åkesson, 2003), weblogs (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004), online encyclopedias (Emigh & Herring, 2005), web-based discussion board (Sæbø & Päivärinta, 2005), product reviews on consumer opinion web sites (Pollach, 2006), newsgroup movie reviews (Charoensri, 2007), tourism homepages and web-mediated advertorials (Cheong, 2013), Wikipedia (Tereszkiewicz, 2013) and personal mommy blogging (Morrison, 2015).

FRAMEWORK FOR GENRE ANALYSIS

In their study, Askehave & Nielsen (2005) explore the possibility of extending the functional genre analysis model to account for the genre characteristics of non-linear, multi-modal, web-mediated documents. In this study, genre theoretical concepts such as 'communicative purpose', 'moves' and 'rhetorical structure' are adapted in order to accommodate to the multimodal, non-linear

characteristics of web texts. In their study, they utilized the Swalesian genre-model by keeping the basic premise of the model (i.e. the three level analysis of communication purpose, move structure and rhetorical strategies) as well as adding Finnemann's concept of navigating mode (i.e. hypertextual context) to all levels of analysis, consequently producing a two-dimensional genre model. Schematically the two-dimensional genre model is presented in Figure 1.0.
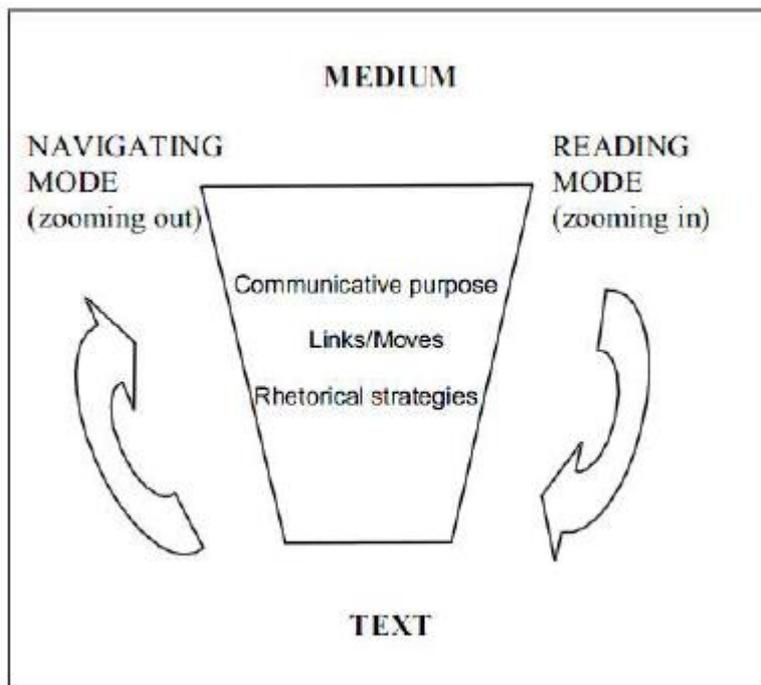

Figure 1.0: The Two-dimensional Genre Model from Askehave & Nielsen
(2005, p.3)

For the purpose of this study, only the Swalesian genre-model will be adopted in this study focusing on the aspect of reading mode of the corporate websites. In their analysis of the move-structures in the reading mode of the generic structure of corporate websites, Askehave & Nielsen (2005) found that there are nine moves that are prototypical to corporate websites. In this present study, this nine- move structure of corporate websites identified by Askehave & Nielsen (2005) will act as a guideline to identify and analyze the generic structure of the corporate websites of oil and gas companies.

METHODOLOGY

The source of data collection for this study was from primary source which is the corporate websites obtained from the internet. The study of genre analysis requires the genre under research to be in a specific category to separate them from any close resemblance to associated genre (Bhatia, 1993). This is imperative to define the genre thoroughly so that it would not be confused with other related genres. In this present study, the category of corporate website is narrowed down to corporate websites of oil and gas companies.

The oil and gas companies that are chosen represent every continent on the globe. According to Resenberg (n.d.), there are no standard definition given to the number of continents but the most common number of the continents is 6 or 7. For this present study, the researcher considered the number of continents as 5 with the exception of Antarctica as there are no oil and gas companies originated from that part of the region. The 5 continents are Asia, Australia and Oceania, Africa, the America, and Europe.

In order to determine the number of firms to be selected for this study, two issues are considered. Firstly, at least each continent will be represented by one company. Secondly, the size of the sample needs to be controlled so that each corporate website can be evaluated in a reasonable amount of time with great quality. Based on the above criteria, a total of 20 oil and gas companies are selected representing each continent of the world and small enough of a sample so that it can be carefully analyzed in the limited amount of time. The oil and gas companies chosen are listed on Table 1.0.

Table 1.0: List of Oil and Gas Companies according to Continent

CONTINENT	NAME OF COMPANY
ASIA	Petroliam Nasional Berhad (PETRONAS), Malaysia
	Perusahaan Minyak dan Gas Bumi Negara (PERTAMINA), Indonesia

AUSTRALIA AND OCEANIA	Saudi Aramco, Saudi Arabia
	Gazprom, Russia
	Australian Worldwide Exploration (AWE), Australia
	Woodside Petroleum, Australia
	Santos, Australia
	New Zealand Oil & Gas Ltd, New Zealand
AFRICA	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Nigeria
	Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, Kuwait
	Sonatrach, Algeria
	Sasol, South Africa
THE AMERICAS (NORTH & SOUTH AMERICA)	ExxonMobil, United States
	ConocoPhillips, United States
	Chevron Corporation, United States
	Petroleo Brasileiro S.A. (Petrobras), Brazil
EUROPE	British Petroleum (BP), United Kingdom
	Roual Dutch Shell (Shell), Netherlands
	Total S.A, France
	ENI S.p.A, Italy

The generic structure of corporate websites is analyzed by employing qualitative approach. This study utilized the analytical framework by Askehave & Nielsen's (2005) based on Swalesian Genre Model. Table 1.1 below consists of the functions/examples of the moves which were used as guideline throughout the identification process of the generic structure of corporate websites.

Table 1.1: List of Moves Extracted from Askehave & Nielsen (2005) Generic Structure of Corporate Websites

NO	MOVES	REALISATIONS/FUNCTIONS
1	Attracting attention	Capturing or attracting the reader when they enter the home page
2	Greeting	Welcoming reader to the home page
3	Identifying sender	Identifying the company and it plays an important role in creating positive image for the company. This move is often realized by a logo
4	Indicating content structure	Providing reader with a clear overview of the content of website. This move is often realized by the *main menu*
5	Detailing (selected) content	Providing detailed information about the topics listed in the main menu in a form of small summaries
6	Establishing credentials	Establishing a trustworthy image of the company
7	Establishing contact	Providing contact information for the reader
8	Establishing a (discourse) community	Establishing communities within the website (this move is realised by a login facility)
9	Promoting an external organization	Promoting other company, product etc. More often than not a banner advertisement is used to realized this move

The generic structure of corporate websites of oil and gas companies were analyzed through several processes. Firstly, each of the 20 corporate websites of the oil and gas companies was visited. Secondly, thorough observation on the corporate home page of the 20 oil and gas companies was made. This observation was made to look for the occurrences of moves *Attracting attention, Identifying sender, Indicating content structure, Detailing (selected) content, Establishing contact, Establishing a (discourse) community, Promoting an external organization* as well as *Greeting* and *Establishing credentials.*

RESULTS
Generic or rhetorical structure refers to the organization of the text as a whole and it consists of a few components or moves that play specific functions to be performed. The combination of all these moves results in achieving the primary role of the text. Through the process of identifying each moves allow the understanding of the intended function that the webmaster wanted to accomplish in the text. The analysis of the generic structure of the corporate websites has resulted in the identification of 14 moves. The generic structures found in corporate websites of oil and gas companies are as follow:

1. Attracting attention (AA)
2. Greeting (GR)
3. Identifying sender (IS)
4. Targeting the market (TM)
5. Creating positive image (PI)
6. Indicating content structure (CS)
7. Detailing (selected) content (DC)
8. Offering information on products and services (IP)
9. Establishing credentials (ES)

10. Establishing contact (EC)
11. Establishing a (discourse) community (ED)
12. Establishing relationship with potential clients/investors (ER)
13. Giving related information about the page (RI)

For the PR practitioners and lay people to be able to use the moves for the purpose of constructing the corporate websites, and for the readers to better comprehend the texts found in corporate websites, the meaning of each moves need to be identified. It is therefore important for each move to be explained in order for it to be meaningful to users. As stated by Berkenkotter & Huckin (as cited in Osman, 2005), moves perform rhetorical functions and by describing the moves the rhetorical functions of the moves are identified. The moves and the description of the moves are shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Description of Moves

MOVES	DESCRIPTION
Attracting attention	Capturing or attracting the reader when they enter the home page
Greeting	Welcoming reader to the home page
Identifying sender	Identifying the company and it plays an important role in creating positive image for the company. This move is often realized by a logo
Targeting the market	Targeting the customers and investors by stating the mission and vision of the company
Creating positive image	Creating and projecting a positive image of the company. This move is often realized by the use of slogan/s
Indicating content structure	Providing reader with a clear overview of the content of website This move is often realized by the *main menu*
Detailing (selected) content	Providing detailed information about the topics listed in the main menu in a form of small summaries
Offering information on products and services	Providing information on the products and services of the company to the visitors, consumers and potential investors
Establishing credentials	Establishing a trustworthy image of the company
Establishing contact	Providing contact information for the reader
Establishing a (discourse) community	Establishing communities within the website (this move is realized by a login facility)

DISCUSSION

The findings in Chapter IV show that there is an additional of five (5) moves found in this study as compared to the Askehave & Nielsen's (2005) previously identified moves. Table 1.3 below shows the comparison between the two generic structures:

Table 1.3: Comparison of Moves on Corporate Websites of Oil and Gas Companies

ASKEHAVE AND NIELSEN'S (2005)	PRESENT STUDY
Attracting attention	Attracting attention
Greeting	Greeting
Identifying sender	Identifying sender
Indicating content structure	Indicating content structure
Detailing (selected) content	Detailing (selected) content
Establishing credentials	Establishing credentials
Establishing contact	Establishing contact
Establishing a (discourse) community	Establishing a (discourse) community
Promoting an external organisation	
	Targeting the market
	Creating positive image
	Offering information on business/ products/ services
	Establishing relationship with potential clients/investors
	Giving related information about the page

The rhetorical moves do not necessarily occur according to the sequence presented above nor are they always present in all corporate websites. Thus, a corporate websites may contain all or several moves mentioned above. Five out of fourteen rhetorical moves identified were not initially included in the study conducted by Askehave & Nielsen (2005). The moves are *creating positive image, targeting the market, offering information on products and services, establishing relationship with potential clients/investors* and *giving related information about the page*.

These additional moves give significant impact to the corporate websites of oil and gas companies and it is especially interesting to know and understand the functions of each of these moves. Askehave & Nielsen's (2005) study on generic structure of corporate websites has taken computer companies as their subject. This could be a reason as to why the five moves identified were not initially part of the generic structure of corporate websites.

Targeting the market is another move that is considered crucial to corporate websites of oil and gas companies. As the name implies, the function of this move is to target existing as well as potential consumers and investors through the use of mission and vision of the companies. The oil and gas companies intend to impress consumers and investors, existing or potential with the companies' bold and aspiring mission and vision statements.

Offering information on products and services is another crucial move incorporated in corporate websites of oil and gas companies. Corporate websites of oil and gas companies, in a way act as an advertising medium to inform readers as well as existing and potential consumers and investors about the company's products and services.

The fourth move that has been identified is *establishing relationship with potential clients/investors*. The functions of many elements on corporate websites are designed to make visitors feel at 'home' thus convincing the visitors that the company will do their best to meet their needs. One of the ways to realize this move is by offering products and services for different types of consumers.

Last but not least is the *giving related information about the page* move which is realized by providing the current date and time as well as the date the last time that the corporate website was updated, proposing things to do with the page or article (i.e. 'Like' it on Facebook, 'Follow' on Twitter, add to favourites or email the page/article to contacts), providing the copyright information, legal notices/disclaimer, terms of use, online privacy statement, site map and glossary.

In the case of corporate websites of oil and gas companies, the move *Promoting an external organization* does not occur at all on the corporate websites of oil and gas companies. This means that none of the oil and gas companies promote an external organization in their corporate websites. This move is included in the original framework for generic structure of corporate websites by Askehave & Nielsen (2005). The reason for this situation could perhaps be attributed to the fact that oil and gas are highly competitive industry and thus there is no logical reason for the company to promote fellow competitors.

CONCLUSION

The study hopes to shed some light onto the generic structure utilised in oil and gas companies' corporate websites and how these generic moves are utilized by the PR practitioners to accomplish the communicative purpose of the corporate websites. This knowledge will serve the public and lay people well in understanding how generic moves are utilized by the PR practitioners to achieve the communicative purpose of corporate websites, thus, sending the correct and precise information about the company and their products/services to their clients, potential clients, investors and stakeholders. The limitation of the study is in terms of the time and duration of the data collected. The data collected for this study only consist of 20 corporate websites of oil and gas companies due to time constraint. There are a total of 158 oil and gas companies around the world and due to time constraint; it is not possible to put each and every one of these companies under a microscope to conduct a study. The data is collected on the same day, on 7th November 2012. The rationale behind this move is due to the momentary nature of websites in general, whereby the features on the corporate websites regularly changed on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Genre analysis is a very interesting subject to study on. As far as genre studies on corporate websites of oil and gas industries is concerned, it is recommended for future studies to conduct a study on the overall linguistic features used throughout the corporate websites of oil and gas companies as opposed to just focusing on the moves which communicate corporate image of the oil and gas companies. Future studies could also incorporate analysis on the visuals used as well as the design of corporate websites of oil and gas companies and whether the designs tally with the image the companies' want to portray to the general public, consumers and the investors.

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