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Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Reputation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Kuwait's Oil Sector

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10.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic took the world by surprise and spread at an alarming level. Unlike recent viruses, COVID-19 was found to be very hard to manage. As a result, and due to the severity of COVID-19, global concern put pressure on governments, corporations, and businesses across the world to respond accordingly. Many of the areas concerning governments' response included health, safety, security, and travel and coordination, and the State of Kuwait was amongst the first to start closing up entry and exit points into the country, with daily meetings being scheduled by the Council of Ministers to discuss and implement crisis response measures that would include the shutdown of businesses, shopping malls, and even medical clinics. Discussions about the responsibilities of what

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each governmental authority needed to do to better combat the spread of this disease were also taking place. Because of its vast organizational and operational capabilities, Kuwait's Oil Sector in particular was summoned by the government to attend the Council of Ministers' COVID-19 meetings. As the country's primary economic driver and most organized sector in Kuwait in terms of crisis management, the Oil Sector was invited to aid the government. No country was prepared for a health crisis of this magnitude, and the Kuwaiti government in particular, although resourceful, realized desirability of support from industry. This was where the Oil Sector's expertise and flexibility of procedures came into play.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight how CSR during global crises can be implemented to offer significant support on a country-wide level whilst positively impacting corporate reputation. The chapter will indicate how the oil sector was able to identify and implement CSR projects of high visibility and impact on its reputation, highlight the multiple and complex ways in which material support was given, and reputation enhanced.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. Firstly, a brief overview of the early responses to the pandemic in Kuwait are presented, then an overview of the oil sector, then the three pillars of CSR in a global crisis are presented, with an emphasis on the media work to connect the Kuwait Oil Sector to the positive response to the pandemic, and finally, the chapter discusses CSR best practice in a global crisis based on the three pillars seen in the work of Kuwait's Oil Sector during COVID-19.

10.1.1 How Kuwait Responded to the Pandemic in the Early Months

The official response from the Kuwaiti Government regarding the COVID-19 pandemic started on 24 February 2020, when all National Celebrations and gatherings were cancelled (TIMES 2020). The State of Kuwait commemorates its National and Liberation Days celebrations annually on 25 and 26 February. These celebrations are regarded as Kuwait's main and most prominent festivities throughout the year, which have been carried out regularly since the 1960s (KUNA 2018). Events

normally take place across the country, where companies compete to provide the most elaborate and entertaining festivals as part of their CSR contribution to the inhabitants of the country (Cinemagics 2019). These dates resonate with the people of Kuwait as they recognize Kuwait's independence in 1960, as well as Kuwait's liberation from the Iraqi invasion in 1991 (KUNA 2018)—an event that will forever be engraved in the heart of the Kuwaiti people. Hence contributing showcases corporate citizenship as part of the Kuwaiti society. Families and children wait with great anticipation for these celebrations, and their cancellation for the first time in Kuwait's history left children, in particular, very disappointed (AlQabas 2020b). Suddenly, there was an understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic was a serious social health crisis, which had the power to effectively shut down the country (TIMES 2020). As an unprecedented phenomenon, the impact of the virus on commercial activity was almost completely unheard of. Different business sectors had to deal with a virus that was unpredictable and required a wide range of business decisions to make within the course of a week. These decisions included what needed to be shut down, what will happen to sales, the shift to online business during a forced shutdown, the safety of workers, customers, and so forth. This has led to a call to document the significant shifts in business activity.

The Coronavirus pandemic has created a sense of interconnectivity that has not been experienced during this time and age (Bapuji et al. 2020). Businesses in Kuwait realized that they are part of the societies they operate in, and in turn, societies have also begun to grasp the fact that businesses are an integral part of their everyday lives and a resource that must be called on in a global crisis. In Kuwait, this also means the largest business sector: oil.

10.1.2 The Oil Sector in Kuwait

The Kuwait Oil Sector's mission is to “optimize the value of Kuwait's hydrocarbon resources through exploration, development and production to ensure sustainability” (Kuwait Oil Company 2020f). Whilst the focus is on hydrocarbon resources, the scale and scope of the industry in

Kuwait means that the sector conducts significant CSR activities such as public participation in health events, for example, breast cancer awareness and participation in national day celebrations (Kuwait Oil Company 2020g). These CSR activities are used as part of the sector's strategy to be involved with the community it operates in and effectively maintain a positive reputation for the sector. The Kuwait Oil Sector, in particular, has changed its interaction with society since the outburst of COVID-19. This was evident in its communication efforts which focused on extensive media coverage, social media interaction, and CSR activities and projects that became integral to the Sector's communication. The Oil Sector took a proactive approach to communicate about the safety and precaution measures taken across all of its Companies. A major part of communication was also the development of informative safety awareness campaigns geared towards the general public (Kuwait Oil Company Instagram 2020d), which were launched immediately after the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic reaching Kuwait in an alarming manner (Kuwait Oil Company Instagram 2020d). The sector also took a proactive approach to ensure the correct information was being shared with the public, thus eliminating chances for the spread of rumours (Kuwait Oil Company Instagram 2020d). These messages included all precautionary measures done in the field, all COVID-19 preventative measures being implemented across the Company, as well as a showcase via videos and photos, about how employees are working under very safe conditions.

Oil sectors around the world are easy targets for negative media attention. They are perceived as money-making giants who are damaging the planet (Theodori and Jackson-Smith 2010), despite the fact that this vital sector plays a critical role in sustaining life as we know it. Oil provides the energy that companies and households operate on, fuel for transport, and for essential production of the food we eat, and almost all of our daily necessities, including medicine (EIA 2020). Yet the public and media, in general, find joy in pointing out the negatives of the sector and thus create a difficult task for oil companies to maintain any positive image.

Kuwait's oil sector consists of the mother company, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), which was established in 1980 (KPC 2020). Under

KPC's umbrella are eight different subsidiaries that are concerned with upstream, midstream, and downstream operations. These operations are valued at billions of US dollars and are major contributors to Kuwait's economy. The Kuwait Oil Sector is responsible for securing Kuwait's energy demand, as well as the production and export of oil to international customers—making the State of Kuwait a “reliable supplier of energy to the world” (Kuwait Oil Company 2020i). The sector is not only concerned with the business of oil production, but also responsible for the environment it operates in. The oil sector adheres to international standards for air pollution and has contributed to the environment by developing several natural preserves and oases. Kuwait Oil Company in particular is taking the lead in the Kuwait Environment Remediation Programme, which is the largest and most extensive remediation programme in the world valued at 3 billion US dollars by the United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC) (Kuwait Oil Company 2020h).

The sector also realizes its corporate citizenship by participating in CSR projects that range from the construction and operation of the Ahmadi Hospital to serve residents of the Ahmadi Governorate, to the implementation of several national-level campaigns such as blood donation campaigns, energy conservation, beach cleans, recycling, and so on (Kuwait Oil Company 2020g). All of the above-mentioned contributions were initiated to generate a positive relationship between the sectors with its various stakeholders. These CSR contributions were carried forward during normal times, whilst, during the COVID-19 pandemic, CSR contribution took new directions due to increased restrictions and the urgent needs of the various stakeholders of the sector.

During the pandemic, the decrease in demand for oil hit the sector hard in terms of the spiked reduction of the price of oil, which reached a staggering percentage drop of 49.29% in March 2020 (Mubasher 2020). This led to an alarming level of reduction in the production of oil, which in turn led to more scrutiny from the public regarding what the sector was going to do in terms of impact on the Kuwaiti economy. Despite these challenges, the Kuwaiti Oil Sector aided the Kuwaiti government during their critical time of need, despite short notice and heavy economic impact on operations (Ktv 2020).

10.2 Kuwait Oil Sector CSR in Response to Government Concerns

The Kuwaiti Government Ministry of Health (MOH) was the governmental body at the forefront of combating the disease. With the number of cases rising substantially, the MOH found itself in the dilemma of ensuring cases were diagnosed quickly, confirmed cases were isolated, and availability of medical supplies were not relinquished (AlJarida 2020). Based on analysis of the response to COVID-19 in Kuwait, three main pillars emerged that required the attention and support from other sectors within the country to help organize a crisis response plan that addressed COVID-19 concerns. These pillars included the following:

- (a) Major CSR initiatives
- (b) Medium-level CSR initiatives
- (c) Media coverage

The Kuwait Oil Sector was involved in all three pillars. Given the sector's flexibility of procedures in crisis response (Oil News Agency 2020), the Kuwaiti government chose to assign the oil sector with urgent procurement of medical devices and requirements (Oil News Agency 2020). The entire state of Kuwait follows the Kuwait Chapter-19 procedure for crisis response, which provides more flexibility for the urgent procurement of needs with less monetary restrictions from auditing. The problem with the Kuwait Chapter-19 is that the auditing system occurs prior and post procurement, which hinders the urgent procurement procedure. This section of Chapter-19 is less rigid for the Oil Sector where the sector has more flexibility from auditing prior to procurement. The sector is rather only audited after procurement, making it faster for the MOH to obtain its required resources through the oil sector. This flexibility in crisis response allowed the oil sector to participate heavily in assisting the Kuwaiti government through the launch of several urgent CSR initiatives to help aid the MOH in the best and fastest ways possible. Major CSR projects that were launched included the following:

10.2.1 Pillar 1: Major CSR Initiatives

Quarantine Facilities: Provision of isolated quarantine facilities with the capacity of accommodating 7000 people (MOH 2020; AlQabas 2020a). This included provision of several secluded locations across the sector's locations such as North Kuwait Ritga Field. The facility, which was constructed in a record time of two weeks, contains all of the health amenities and living requirements necessary for returning citizens during their mandatory quarantine period.

Urgent Procurement of Medical Equipment for the Ministry of Health: Kuwait Oil Company's procurement department was put in charge of purchasing medical equipment urgently for Kuwait's Ministry of Health. These included ventilators, hospital beds, personal protective equipment, and so on. The purchasing department was able to secure all needs in a record time of one week, which led to a major positive impact on the sector's reputation with the Ministry of Health. Acting quickly and responsibly led to the establishment of further trust in the Kuwait Oil Sector, which essentially led to commissioning the construction of the Kuwait Field Hospital by the Kuwait Council of Ministers in decision no (522) (AlAnba 2020b) as explained further below.

Construction of the Kuwait Field Hospital: The Kuwait Field Hospital was constructed by Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) in collaboration with Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) in order to reinforce Kuwait's hospitals with additional facilities to house the rising number of positive coronavirus cases. The building includes wards with a capacity for 200 beds, as well as 40 Intensive Care Unit beds and 19 emergency beds (AlAnba 2020a; Kuwait Oil Company Instagram 2020a). The Kuwait Field Hospital's main objective is to free hospitals for general patients being treated for different diseases who stopped going in for treatment due to fear of exposing themselves to the virus. These included regular patients who are sick from a general flu, to patients who are diagnosed with cancer. The hospitals' bed capacities were quickly diminishing as they were being completely occupied with COVID-19 patients, making health staff very scarce as well. Therefore, moving COVID-19 patients to a controlled setting was critical to stop the spread and free hospital capacities to accommodate other patients.

10.2.2 Pillar 2: Medium-Level CSR Projects

Being a proactive participant in the fight against COVID-19 in the State of Kuwait, the Oil Sector helped the Council of Ministers in providing existing resources that could address logistical needs. Participating with existing resources by identifying capabilities provided grounds for immediate response and relief (AlAnba 2020b) and generated quick-wins in terms of positive perception and reputation amongst stakeholders. This is therefore considered one of the most important elements for successful CSR during pandemics by Kuwait Oil Company's higher management. Kuwait Oil Company was able to extend their immediate help by providing the following:

- (a) Providing Kuwait Oil Company's ambulances fleet for the escort of Kuwaiti Nationals returning to the country from Kuwait International Airport to designated quarantine facilities (Kuwait Oil Company Instagram 2020c).
- (b) Provision of Kuwait Oil Company's Southwell Hospital to house critical cases from the MOH's Al-Adan Hospital that was already fully occupied (AlAnba 2020c).
- (c) Providing Medical Staff from Kuwait Oil Company's Ahmadi Hospital to assist in MOH's hospital Emergency Rooms across the country where hospitals were experiencing shortages in medical staff (AlAnba 2020b).
- (d) KOC's Medical Group developed an emergency plan for Ahmadi Hospital, which is home to highly qualified and experienced medical and nursing staff and utilizes the world's latest, state-of-the-art medical equipment. Ahmadi Hospital allocated a complete ward with 31 beds to accommodate any additional patients in the event that Jaber Hospital exceeds its capacity (Kuwait News Agency 2020).

10.2.3 Pillar 3: Media Coverage and Immediate Positive Impact on Reputation

Media content analysis involves the “context of text is analyzed and content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated” (Neuman 1997: cited in Macnamara 2005). Content from the Kuwait media during the pandemic was analysed qualitatively using the researcher’s interpretation of texts (Macnamara 2005). A total of 40 news articles were examined, of which 16 are included. In addition, TV, news, and social media accounts were examined to analyse the impact of oil sector CSR activities on reputation. More than 50 posts were analysed, and a total of 13 were included in here. The articles and social media posts were examined for a period of six months (from February 2020 to September 2020), which was during the period of critical decision-making within the State of Kuwait and its period of consistent lockdowns.

In order to maximize its CSR impact on reputation, Kuwait Oil Company developed targeted media campaigns that would encourage community involvement on a national level. The increased amount of social media use (Suzin Wold et al. 2020) was sought as an opportunity to develop campaigns targeted towards the general public to help encourage a sense of patriotism and establish empathy. Whilst analysing content, the relationship between the media narrative and *Individual Social Responsibility* theory (ISR) emerged as significant. ISR highlights how individuals can have an impact on any social responsibility campaign and suggests that individuals may be drivers of CSR, in which their contribution to social matters adds richness to the CSR initiative being launched (Ebrahim and Buheji 2020). Something as simple as a positive comment directed towards doctors and nurses to encourage and thank them for their efforts may be categorized as ISR, which is what the oil sector has achieved within the campaigns launched throughout the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Several initiatives took place, which could be split into two prominent categories: the first being national communication campaigns (Ktv 2020), and the second, construction projects for needed medical health facilities (AlAnba 2020b). With both categories being highly visible, the

amount of media coverage received for the two projects was evident in all local newspapers and on TV channels and social media. The use of social media, in particular, has allowed initial inferences to be derived in regard to the general public's feedback about these CSR projects from the instantaneous option to view comments. Comments on Instagram and Twitter allow us to have a sense of what people think about these projects and hence develop an initial feel of whether these projects have a positive or negative impact on reputation.

The focus on social media during the pandemic showed great promise for the development of national-level social media campaigns to influence the public's perception about the Oil Sector. As people dedicated more of their time on social media (Suzin Wold et al. 2020), a focus on developing messages for this audience was believed to be critical. Kuwait Oil Company's Information Team, therefore, took on the responsibility to develop campaigns with key messages to influence a positive reputation for the oil sector that would build positive momentum towards media coverage of CSR projects at a later stage.

10.2.4 Stay at Home for Kuwait Campaign

The first campaign launched on 18 March 2020 was the "Stay at Home for Kuwait" Campaign (Kuwait Oil Company Instagram 2020e). This campaign was a message that highlighted staying at home as a patriotic act to help prevent the spread of the virus. The campaign showed great success as it caught on nationally, very quickly. All news outlets posted the same message, including influencers on social media as well as participation from the public, allowing the message to go viral. For the entire month of March, this hashtag was a major trend and constituted the launch of several national campaigns as indicated below.

10.2.5 Together United Campaign

This video campaign was developed with the message of unity and patriotism. The video showcased Kuwait's unity during times of crisis, referencing how people from different backgrounds came together as one to do

what they can, in order to get through the pandemic. This video also focused on the importance of volunteering, which was very much needed during the first couple of weeks when the pandemic started. People started volunteering their time and effort to manage quarantine facilities, grocery shopping management in consumer cooperatives, distribution of food and amenities to people living in completely locked down areas, and so on.

10.2.6 “May God Protect the White Army” Campaign

National campaigns by the Oil Sector in Kuwait were mainly focused on ‘frontliners’—a term that emerged for people working at the forefront of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Kuwait Oil Company initiated a national campaign named “May God Protect the White Army” (white being the uniforms worn by frontliners) on 26 April 2020 (Kuwait Oil Company Instagram [2020b](#)). The ‘White Army’ was a campaign term developed to refer to all medical personnel at the forefront of providing medical care and attention to COVID-19 patients. The campaign included a video that showed how the virus was first reported on in Kuwait, what major impacts it had on our everyday lives, and, in particular, how the virus has impacted the lives of doctors and nurses. The objective of the video was to highlight the fact that although everyone stayed at home to refrain from the dangers of the virus, medical staff were forced to be on duty—forced to face the virus on a daily basis to help people in need. The video showed photos and footage of doctors who were exhausted, working throughout the night and early hours of the morning to secure the safety of Kuwait’s inhabitants. The choice of words for this campaign was critical. The word ‘Army’ was used to make people think of the virus as an enemy of war, in which doctors are ‘fighting’ against to protect us; therefore, creating an element of seriousness accompanied by emotions of empathy and responsibility. The video therefore paid tribute to these soldiers who sacrificed their own safety to help save our lives. The utilization of promotion on social media was found to be a powerful tool to spread messages to the general public and the Kuwait Oil Company used promoted ads, particularly on Instagram, Twitter, social media news

accounts, and influencers. This ensured maximum reach of the required message through social media where the number of reposts and comments exceeded expectations.

In order to fully understand the impact of the national campaigns launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to explain the general negative feedback that the oil sector has previously received, such as issues pertaining to employment, and concerns related to environmental pollution. Even when launching national campaigns, the KOC has always received at least one negative comment pertaining to the above issues such as:

*When are you going to hire us?
KOC burns flares in their facilities, causing air pollution
KOC spills oil into Kuwait Bay.*

No matter what CSR, the oil sector posted these perceptions surface on social media. The result is that CSR communication of any sort created the same negative posts taking attention away from any positive messages. In reference to the White Army Campaign, however, the Company came to a realization, which marked an important turning point. Once the Campaign was launched, comments posted on the released video were positive and completely related to the campaign. There was no evidence of negative feedback. This gave an indication that a campaign during a national pandemic in fact unifies opinions and perception of the general public. In a global crisis, the focus becomes dealing with that crisis, with positive response to those that are seen to contribute, and in this case the Oil industry. The campaign was launched in March 2020 and received 4462 views and comments. Below are some samples of the comments received:

*May God protect them
May God give them strength and protect them
May God give them strength, our heroes. (Source: Kuwait Oil Company
Instagram [2020b](#))*

Negativity towards the company posting content was ‘temporarily silenced’ as the focus was on portraying Kuwait’s doctors and nurses as heroes. Triggering empathy in an audience steered comments away from a negative conversation allowing the company to present itself as a positive, active member of society. Although positive comments were addressed to the doctors and nurses, the usual unrelated negative comments were completely gone, making audiences forget about their negative perceptions momentarily by engaging the public in Individual Social Responsibility (ISR) as described by (Ebrahim and Buheji 2020). ISR means “citizens’ decisions, choices and acts to be supportive for social, economic, social and environmental wellbeing.” This means that citizens themselves make a decision to participate in CSR activities as evident from the comments addressed to doctors and nurses in the campaign above. In short, where an industry that usually attracts negative comments supports communities in a global crisis, individuals focus on that support and do not post the usual negative messages.

10.2.7 Thank You Kuwait Campaign

The humanitarian job of healthcare professionals went beyond their daily responsibilities, with their resources and ability to treat the ever-increasing amount of people diagnosed with COVID-19 being put to the test as expressed by the late HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in his speech to the Kuwaiti people during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Kuwait News Agency 2020).

Learning from the first experience, the sector launched a follow-up campaign to thank medical staff. This voluntary campaign differed from the first campaign as it was conducted without cost, where the campaign required Kuwaiti citizens and residents to develop a message from the heart. The message was in the form of a writing or video to be delivered to medical staff in order to increase health professionals’ morale, highlight their efforts, and reassure them that the Kuwaiti people are forever grateful for their selflessness. The doctors were again praised for their work, and beyond that, they became ‘heroes.’ Whilst contacting employees, celebrities, and even the general public, comments received were

“You are doing something really good and patriotic; this is what we want to see in Kuwait and you are making us proud.” “It would be my honor to participate with you and I hope more and more people appreciate the work you are doing for our beloved Kuwait,” These were some comments received by Kuwait Oil Company employees who were working tirelessly to spread the campaign. During pandemics, when people feel a sense of patriotism, even a company that is usually consistently criticized can facilitate a national conversation of gratitude and support, associating itself with that support and so disarming criticism.

A website ‘ThankyouKuwait.com’ and Instagram account ‘ThankuKuwait’ were created to upload and share all content received from individuals. Content included text messages, photos, and videos from the general public, including Kuwaiti celebrities who expressed their gratitude and support for Kuwait’s medical staff.

The ‘Thankyoukuwait’ website platform hosted thank you messages consisting of posts and videos from the general public that were directed towards Kuwait’s healthcare professionals. The website served as a hub that collects content from social media that included the following hashtags:

#Message_from_the_Heart
#Thankukuwait

In a matter of one week, 310 Instagram posts and 609 posts on the website were uploaded and received. Examples of posts from the Thankyoukuwait.com website and the @thankukuwait Instagram Account are introduced below:

“My sincere and heartfelt thanks to all doctors, nurses, para medical staffs and housekeeping & cleaning workers in all the medical facilities in Kuwait.”

“Thank you from the heart, a word of gratitude does little for our heroes.”

“Thank you for doctors’ efforts and fatigue, thank you Kuwait from our hearts, thank you for staying at home. We will win together.”

“Thank you very much for your hard work for Kuwait and the people.”

A video was developed by Dawood Hussain a famous Kuwaiti Actor and was posted on the Thankukuwait Instagram account.

A video was developed by Bashaar Abdullah, a famous Kuwaiti football player, former captain of Kuwait's national football team, and was posted on the Thankuk Kuwait Instagram account.

Response from medical professionals was outstanding. Some doctors cried when they saw the posts, while others contributed to the campaign by thanking their fellow doctors and nurses for all of their collaborative efforts. The campaign provided doctors and nurses with a sense of community, where they became a unique family that was appreciated by all. The posts below are examples that portray the doctors' reactions to the campaign:

"Happy doctors' day. This portrait is made with the pics of doctors and nurses who passed away in this pandemic. Thanks to all."

"Fatigue and sleepiness hit our emergency response heroes after a long day under the sun and during the first day of the holy month of Ramadan while fasting and working for a continuous 18 hours. A thank you message from your colleague...."

National campaigns during a pandemic which focused on the efforts of others generated a positive impact on reputation by (at least temporarily) silencing negative perceptions and related comments that were visible in most of Kuwait Oil Company's previous posts. By focusing on the creation of empathy towards doctors and nurses and portraying them as heroes, the campaigns launched by Kuwait Oil Company were able to hinder negative comments that were lashed out onto the sector and position themselves as a positive contributor to society, aligned with public interest in dealing with the pandemic and supporting healthcare workers. This was a very different position from the usual attempts to gain support that resulted in the repetition of negative comments. Of course, this in itself does not suggest that negativity towards KOC has permanently receded, only that the organization has managed to align itself with a national sentiment. The correct choice of words for the national media campaigns and the selection of the right causes to support do, however, show how even an organization with reputational problems can bring people together in a crisis. This was evident throughout the entire lockdown period where comments on posts were directly related to the

information being posted and there was a clear decrease in the amount of negative feedback on Kuwait Oil Company's Instagram and Twitter accounts. Significant is the move from being seen as doing good to supporting others that are easily recognized as doing good.

Ensuring coverage of activities was also implemented using a proactive approach and is the link between the deployment of corporate resources and the work to develop corporate reputation. The Oil Sector media departments united to control what was said in the media by providing the media with exclusive access to corporate media platforms, so utilizing social media platforms to post consistent progress of CSR activities as well as developing press releases and distributing them to the media as soon as information was gathered and available. Instead of waiting for the press to express interest in covering the sector's stories, the oil sector turned into a media news provider and was rather 'creating' the news said about the sector, therefore initiating and controlling the news being communicated in Kuwait's local media outlets. Such activity sparked interest from the media to cover positive rather than negative stories. Providing the news actually helped the Oil Sector control the narrative being told during the pandemic by showcasing the reality of its quick actions to help the MOH when in need, which diverted the conversation from negative stories associated with production. Below are some sample excerpts from the Kuwaiti media highlighting the Sector's CSR efforts during the pandemic.

- (a) Al-Anba Local Newspaper—Twitter Account: "Kuwait Oil Company Announces its willingness and readiness to contribute against the spread of the Coronavirus" (AlAnba 2020b).
- (b) Al-Rai Local Newspaper: "Kuwait Oil Company Allocated Entire Wing in its Hospital for the Use of the MOH" (AlRai 2020)
- (c) Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Press Release: "Kuwait Oil Company Allocated Entire Wing in its Hospital for the Use of the MOH" (Kuwait News Agency 2020).
- (d) Al-Anba Local Newspaper: "Kuwait Oil Company Provides MOH with its Southwell hospital as a specialized hospital for COVID-19 cases" (AlAnba 2020c).

- (e) Kuwait's Ministry of Information—Instagram Account: “Kuwait Oil Company Prepares to Provide MOH with Quarantine Facilities in Ritga Field, North Kuwait Area” (MOInformation 2020).
- (f) SNAA NEWS—Local Instagram News Account: “KOC in Collaboration with KIPIC Complete the Construction of the Housing Facilities in the Kuwait Field Hospital in Mishrif Area” (SNAANEWS 2020).
- (g) Al-Qabas Local Newspaper YouTube Channel: “KOC & KIPIC Provide Latest Facilities in Kuwait Field Hospital” (Alqabastube 2020).

The above excerpts show that although the sector received extensive media coverage across traditional and social media, the Oil Sector was the actual supplier of news. Using the proactive approach to media coverage, the sector was able to shift media focus into its positive contributions to society.

10.3 CSR Implementation During Pandemics

There are numerous lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience in terms of CSR implementation and its impact on reputation. CSR implementation is now viewed very differently and the realization of its importance to create or maintain a positive reputation is of great significance. Especially within a sector that is frequently the subject of criticism, creating a positive image during a pandemic can be achieved. Strategies for CSR implementation that focus on improving the reputation by implementing CSR initiatives can be segmented into three pillars that directly focused on stakeholder needs as explained below (Fig. 10.1):

Weekly meetings with stakeholders during the pandemic proved to be beneficial for the successful identification and implementation of CSR projects. While attending meetings with stakeholders, oil sector officials were able to identify three major pillars for CSR initiatives. Major CSR involves a high budget, while medium-level CSR involves using existing resources with the least impact on budget, with the third pillar relating to work with the media, including that related to corporate reputation. Working on CSR projects during a pandemic brought a new

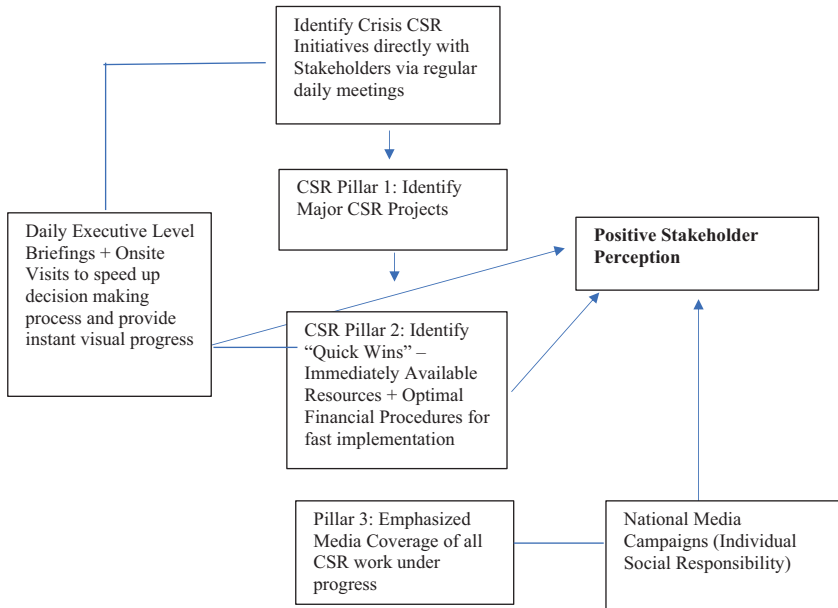


Fig. 10.1 CSR pillars and reputation impact. (Source: Author's own work)

understanding of the term, especially to the Kuwaiti Oil Sector. Companies can now develop stronger CSR programmes by identifying CSR levels as opposed to focusing on a single, highly visual project that would take years to implement and in turn take years to yield or actually see returns on investment in terms of reputation.

Within the overall media strategy 'quick wins'—which are short-term CSR projects that can be done at a low budget and with existing resources. These 'quick wins' allow for immediate returns on investment in terms of reputation and can help start the CSR momentum at the Company. Media coverage and engagement with stakeholders also proved critical to capture the efforts of the work being implemented and obtain a positive influence on reputation. Oil Sector officials did not only attend weekly meetings with the MOH, but rather MOH officials were also invited to the construction site to see first-hand how the construction was progressing. This also allowed for on-the-spot feedback from the CSR receivers, which helped mitigate construction requirements and ensure

implementation is directly according to pressing needs. Given that needs were immediately addressed, this gave a positive influence on reputation as the oil sector is now seen as a hero that came to immediate aid and was heavily committed.

Creating CSR projects and programmes can be very expensive, with the potential to quickly consume a large portion of a Company's budget. Implementing CSR projects during the pandemic allowed for the realization that not all CSR projects need immediate cash contributions. The Kuwaiti Oil Sector has an abundance of existing resources that allowed it to act quickly by providing the MOH with immediate needs using available resources that were only reallocated. These available resources included recently abandoned labour homes/chalets that were remodelled to create quarantine facilities. Also available were running construction contracts that helped the oil sector respond immediately to the MOH's need to build the Kuwait Field Hospital. Kuwait Oil Company's Ahmadi Hospital provided new ventilators to hospitals, in addition to lending the services of doctors and nurses. Moreover, an entire wing was dedicated to the purpose of supporting the MOH during the pandemic (AlAnba 2020c). Time is of the essence during a pandemic. Time for CSR implementation was seen as a critical factor for the success or failure of CSR efforts. Through consistent meetings, swift allocation of resources, practical financial procedures in place and constant monitoring of progress, the Oil Sector was able to successfully complete all required CSR projects on such short notice. Therefore, through identifying existing resources, companies can achieve quick-wins to help gain positive reputation.

The success of CSR projects goes hand in hand with media coverage (Balog-Way and McComas 2020). Without coverage from the media, CSR efforts go to waste. The most important element of CSR implementation, which is missed by many, is extensive media coverage. Media coverage allows for companies to show the severity and intensity of the CSR project at hand. Media can help showcase to the public the different layers of work put in by companies to achieve the end result. It shows regular meetings, time, and effort of different members of staff across organizations, highlights collaborations, and can show the endless days and nights where people are working around the clock to help achieve a project that serves the public. The Kuwaiti Oil Sector was able to achieve

a positive image literally in a matter of two weeks because of continuously publishing the progress of its CSR projects during the pandemic and becoming a media content provider, rather than wait for the media to cover its stories.

10.3.1 CSR After the Pandemic?

The pandemic showed that regular stakeholder meetings allow for companies to understand their stakeholder's most pressing needs. Stakeholders in return have a deeper understanding of the importance of CSR projects and how companies can put everything in their power to come to their aid. During regular progress meetings with the Council of Ministers, the idea was brought to the table to include the Kuwaiti Oil Sector in the implementation of other major governmental projects. The Kuwaiti Government does not perceive the Oil Sector as a source for money but is now more interested in the experience of its qualified personnel. The future aim is to benefit from the experience and knowledge of Oil Sector personnel in project management, especially in terms of the timely execution of state projects of the highest quality and calibre, in which the Oil Sector showcased its best managerial skills. This in itself is a major positive implication on reputation.

Inviting stakeholders to the site during the construction phase proved to be one of the most efficient means to deliver projects based on expectations and actual needs. On-site visits create a sense of reassurance, show how tiresome and engaged management officials are in the project, and provide instant feedback from the CSR receiver in terms of addressing needs or requirements to change aspects of the project as it is being implemented. On-the-spot feedback provided more satisfaction, as well as eliminated needs for changing certain elements of the project, which saves costs as opposed to the need to change things once construction is completed. The greater benefit was a positive impact on reputation where the stakeholder becomes involved in the project and now understands the work and effort that is exerted to address their most pressing needs through immediate action.

10.4 Conclusion

During times of crisis, it is critical to devise a unified action plan of a collaborative nature. In addition to National Communication Campaigns, the focus on three main pillars of CSR can be a useful tool for positive influence on reputation, which are as follows:

- (a) Identify major CSR initiatives to serve massive needs that target a large stakeholder group.
- (b) Identify existing resources that can be utilized for immediate action to generate quick wins to generate positive perception with stakeholders.
- (c) Utilize media coverage extensively to create a positive reputation.

Understanding the immediate needs of stakeholders can only be achieved by actually meeting with them face-to-face, where consistent meetings have been found to be more beneficial to uplifting the Oil Sector's reputation through showing immediate engagement. The key to achieving a positive reputation from CSR implementation during a pandemic is to quickly identify existing resources that can immediately serve CSR purposes. Translating existing resources into quick action leads to a positive perception where stakeholders believe that their needs are being attended to immediate 'quick wins.' It is also important to identify longer-term needs and establish a mechanism to address these needs, such as more lenient financial procedures that can assist in the implementation of CSR initiatives during crises. A sense of unity is essential to establish a strong relationship with stakeholders, leading by example of patriotism and caring about the state as a whole, which established a very positive relationship amongst stakeholders. As a final remark, the amount of CSR projects being implemented during crises, no matter how extensive, will not be of any use to a sector/company without media coverage and promotion. Using media to make people aware of all the hard work and efforts put forth in CSR is what makes a CSR project successful—allowing it to reach its optimal positive impact on reputation. The ultimate takeaway is: there is no point of CSR without exposure.

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