

CSR COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE 2011

PROCEEDINGS

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CSR COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE 2011

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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CSR COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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EDITORIAL NOTE

CSR and Communication in Theory and Practice

Wim Elving, Urša Golob, Friederike Schultz, Anne-Ellerup Nielsen, Christa Thomsen, and Klement Podnar

With the increasing institutionalization of CSR to corporations, corporate communication on CSR is getting more and more important as well. CSR communication can be defined as a process of anticipating stakeholder expectations, articulation of CSR policy and the managing of different communication tools designed to provide true and transparent information about a company or a brand's integration of its business operations, social and environmental concerns, and interactions with stakeholders (Podnar, 2008). As such for many corporations, CSR communication has become a balancing act between the interests of the organization and its varied stakeholders.

In our connected world, however, NGOs, consumers and other stakeholders are becoming more informed, influential and critical. Despite corporations' true commitment and efforts to reduce their waste, limit their energy use and carbon footprint, many organizations have been accused of "greenwashing". This dilemma of how to communicate CSR is the theme of the first international CSR Communication Conference.

Competitive and working papers as well as abstracts in these proceedings discuss recent academic insights and link academic research to the practice field in order to exchange knowledge on contexts and effects, potentials and challenges of CSR and communication, on best practices and newest developments.

They give a variety of insights on CSR and communication from academia (communication, management, marketing science etc.) and the practice field (corporations, consultancies, associations).

Papers and abstracts discuss trends on CSR from around 30 countries from all continents (Netherlands, USA, China, Brazil, Australia, UK, Germany, France, Japan, Indonesia etc.).

Topics covered in these conference proceedings are:

- External aspects of CSR & Communication: Public Relations, Pressure Group, Media.
- Internal aspects of CSR & Communication: Corporate Identity, Corporate Culture, Leadership and CSR Management.
- CSR & Consumers: Cause Related Marketing and Social Marketing.
- CSR and the Social Media.
- Theoretical perspectives on CSR & Communication: Meta-Analysis, Deconstructivism etc.
- CSR in the crisis context.
- International aspects of CSR & Communication: e.g. Intercultural CSR Communication.

The broad spectrum of different topics, problems, and findings related to CSR and communication presented by authors from all around the world have shown us that CSR communication is an important field and it must indeed be studied in its own right.

Each author is responsible for the content and language of his/her article respectively.

Conference committee wishes to thank the conference keynote speakers Mette Morsing and Andrew Crane for their interesting presentations. We would also like to thank to all presenters, discussants and participants from academia and practice that shared with us new thoughts and ideas.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to all sponsors for their support.

Reference

- Podnar, K. (2008), "Guest Editorial: Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 75-81.

1. CSR COMMUNICATION AND THEORIES

Four Aces: Bringing communication perspectives to Corporate Social Responsibility

Øyvind Ihlen, Steve May, and Jennifer L. Bartlett

Extended abstract

Key words

CSR communication, Epistemology, Dialogue, Transparency, Complexity

This paper is preoccupied with a particular task: that of demonstrating the value that communication studies have for studies and practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Four particular areas are discussed: First of all, communication studies alert us to the fact that publics hold different views of CSR and expect different things of organizations. While this certainly is not a novel point, communication studies help spell out its implications for the management of organizations. As argued by May and Zorn; CSR at its core is "about the simultaneously contested and consensual nature of the relationship between organizations and culture(s)" (May and Zorn, 2003, p. 595). Being informed by communication sociology is helpful in terms of understanding the co-constructive interrelationship between communication and action, and how "truth" is created. In short, truth is inseparable from discourse; it is inseparable from the way we use language and interact (Scott, 2008). This epistemological position can be used for self-reflective purposes for corporations and function as a guard against naïve realism. Not only do different views exist regarding values, what is ethical or not, but one's own position of knowing in general becomes less certain. It invites self-reflection and also attention to communicative choices. In order to handle the complexity and challenges created by public pressure, modernization, rationalization and social change, communicators need to approach their tasks in a reflective manner (Holmström, 2004; van Ruler and Verčič, 2005). This also relates to different meanings of CSR.

Secondly, communication studies can bring to the table considerations about a com-monsense notion like dialogue in a way that can further ability for corporate self-reflection. Dialogue can help catapult new issues to the forefront that otherwise might have been ignored. It can help make sense of issues in both economic and ethical terms, and be valuable for the discussion of how the issues might be integrated in the overall corporate strategy. Ideally, dialogue also opens up for a negotiation process where judgments and assumptions are set in play in an open and visible process (Bohm, 2008). Normative dialogue theory for its part also provides a yardstick for criticism of corporate practice,

Thirdly, as Henriques (2007) has argued, "transparency is part of the moral baseline for business conduct, rather than an optional extra to be adopted when it doesn't adversely affect the bottom line" (p. 4). The paper goes on to discuss how transparency can help organizations come across as trustworthy actors. In addition it is argued that a perspective on the communicative and political function of transparency also furthers discussion of corporate interests and power.

Finally, it is discussed how communication studies can develop and inject a view on complexity in the CSR communication process which can further an understanding that is helpful to meet public pressure. Communication scholarship points to the necessity of reflection and learning in order to avoid over-simplification. A view of complexity is advocated that sees improvisation as a key ability of the practitioner.

Taken together, it is argued that highlighting and honing arguments about the points mentioned above should help communication studies take a more central role in the discussion of CSR than current main stream management research typically relegates it (e.g., Du et al., 2010).

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Revisiting the Social in CSR. A post-structuralist perspective

Oliver Raaz

Abstract

Key words

Post-structuralism, Community, Transparency, Dignity of difference, Normativity

Purpose

Sharing the critique of the conventional academic CSR literature – which promotes an idealistic, identity-centred view on society – this paper aims at investigating post-structuralist social theory (Moebius and Reckwitz, 2008) and highlighting its contribution to a difference-oriented interpretation of CSR.

Design/methodology/approach

Conducting a theoretical analysis, the article is obligated to a qualitative hermeneutic methodology. In a first step, the author will sketch the (intertwined) post-structuralist conceptualization of a) society, b) community and c) communication. Further, it will be pointed out how CSR and transparency can be situated within the theoretic architecture of post-structuralism. Finally, the author will address the issue of normativity: Can – from a poststructuralist perspective – CSR solely be analyzed in the neutral form of a 'discourse element' or may the academic interest itself preserve a normative surplus in dealing with CSR.

Findings

From a post-structuralist point of view, CSR displays nothing more but a special discourse strategy among the multitude of others. Essentially, CSR has to be comprehended as a communication technique designed to implement a special idea of society. Insofar, the communities CSR refers to primarily manifest the status of imagined communities. Emphasizing the 'dignity of difference', post-structuralist conceptions converge in rejecting the common CSR-understanding of a) society as a unified (super-) subject with a consistent sense-structure, as well as that of b) community as a planned, hierarchically controllable, homogeneous social category. Conversely, society – if the term is not suspended anyway – is conceptualized as the pluralistic field of social power constellations and community as a temporary, process-bound coalition of different actors, which cannot be steered but solely cultivated. Consequently, post-structuralist thought interprets c) communication not as a (hierar-chical) transmission of CSR-information but a mode of creating and transforming sense. Paradoxically, post-structuralist theorists also argue normatively, for they insist on the fundamental impossibility of seclusion (which would entail totalitarianism) and demand a permanent pursuit for plurality.

Research limitations/implications

Representing an umbrella term, "Post-structuralism" entails heterogeneity of approaches which cannot be recognized all in detail. This bias will be balanced by a) the use of leading textbooks concerning the topic, b) a clear designation of the post-structuralist authors referred to.

Practical implications

The article suggests practitioners to be aware that 1) their moral ideal of the society represented in CSR-conceptions is inevitably partial (and thus fosters their tolerance as well as their conscience of contingency) and that 2) the communities they aim for are necessarily temporary in character and can only be cultivated but not be controlled.

Originality/value

This paper provides the first encompassing post-structuralist analysis of CSR. In doing so, it is able to offer a sound theoretical and conceptual (society, community, communication) basis for critical CSR-exploration, which has yet been missing. It can be combined with existing approaches that question identity-centred CSR-conceptions as well as striking steering-optimism.

Basic reference

- Moebius, S. and Reckwitz, A. (Eds.) (2008), *Poststrukturalistische Sozialwissenschaften (Post-structural Social Sciences)*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt (Main).

CSR and the need to connect: a theoretical reflection with implications for practice

Noelle Aarts

Abstract

Professional organizations arise and exist insofar as they have a function in their environment. This function determines the identity and boundaries of the organization (this is us, this is what we do, and this is what we are not and what we do not). In addition, organizations are supposed to have a CSR program that guarantees them to act in an ethical sound way and to effectively connect to the environment that is more and more asking organizations to take their responsibility. Such effectively connecting to the environment asks for two-sided communication, given shape by both formal and informal communication within the organization as well as between the organization and important relation groups in the environment (Argyris, 1994; Ford and Ford, 1995; Ford, 1999; Stacey, 2001; Stacey and Griffin, 2005; Baker, 2010). Although this is widely agreed - both among scientists studying issues related to organizational change and practitioners in communication - reality confronts us with a different picture: most communication professionals are mainly focusing on one sided sending of formal messages, resulting in an endless stream of communication means in the form of press releases, newsletters, annual reports, brochures and advertising that is spread out over the world. The lack of real connection by means of two-sided communication in the form of formal and informal discussions, dialogues and conversations may explain why so many efforts to organizational change fail (Boonstra, 2001).

In this conceptual contribution we aim to understand why it is so difficult to interact. We start exploring the issue with the help of theoretical concepts related to self-reference and autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1992; Luhmann, 1990; Morgan, 1998). We will add to our understanding by discussing the emphasis on measurability, researchability and quantifiability, not only in the world of science and governance, but also in the world of communication practitioners. Next the concept of listening as a tool to connect will be explored which helps us to deepen our insight in the construction of stories for 1) making sense and 2) connecting to others. Finally, the results of our journey will be summarized in the conclusion and discussed with regard to their relevance for researchers and practitioners who study the development and implementation of a sound CSR program of organizations.

A Pluralistic framework for studying CSR as a communicative phenomenon

Friederike Schultz and Jean-Pascal Gond

Abstract

Purpose

The debate on CSR influenced research on the interface of business and society in different disciplines for years, but did not lead to a common definition of the concept itself (Margolis and Walsh, 2003; Gond and Matten, 2007). A huge body of literature regards CSR from a functionalist perspective as strategic tool to deal with different stakeholders (Signitzer and Prexl, 2008), and to obtain reputation, financial or competitive benefits (e.g., McWilliams and Siegel, 2001; Orlitzky et al., 2003). Recently, alternative perspectives developed, which point to the widely neglected institutional and cultural determinants of social responsibility (culturalist view), the role of power in the designing of CSR programs (political view) or the processes, by which CSR is socially constructed (constructivist view; see Gond and Matten, 2007). Within the academic discourse on CSR, an increasing interest in the role and theories of communication can be observed. Also in this field the discourse moves from functionalist approaches, which regard CSR as tool to enhance transparency and increase reputation (functional view), to more normative approaches ("communicative framework" by Scherer and Palazzo, 2007) and more constructivist approaches, which describe the communicative construction of CSR and aim at developing a better understanding of CSR as social phenomenon (Mitnick, 2000; Schultz and Wehmeier, 2010). So far, a systematic cartography of the different approaches which take communication and media more into account is missing. Furthermore, especially the constructivist perspective on CSR and Communication is not worked out so far.

Design/methodology/approach

Discourse analysis of academic discourses from the field of communication science, management science, business ethics.

Findings

The paper contributes to overcome the described research gap in two ways: First it maps the territory of communication-related CSR-research by applying the pluralistic framework of CSR (Gond and Matten, 2007). CSR as a communicative phenomenon can thus be regarded as way to enhance transparency (functional view), as a way for corporations to adopt their discourse to dominant value (cultural view), as a way to shape political processes in altering agenda-setting (political view) or finally CSR is performed or constituted through communicative activities both discursively and materially (socio-constructivist view). It hereby takes differences on micro-, meso- and macro-related approaches (individual, organization, society) into account. Based on this cartography it second enhances our understanding of CSR as a communicative and medial phenomenon by developing further the constructivist view on CSR and theorizing CSR as communication and as medium. Finally it presents research agendas and perspectives for future research which help to fill the detected research gaps and to elaborate this media- and communication specific perspective further.

Originality/value

The originality of the paper lays in intersecting different research streams from different disciplines and working out the specific communication scientific contribution to the field of CSR communication.

Transcending the transmission model: A reconstruction of Corporate Social Responsibility communication from a constitutive perspective

Dennis Schoeneborn, Hannah Trittin, and Andreas Georg Scherer

Abstract

Key words

CSR, CSR communication, Organizational communication, External and internal communication, Polyphony, CCO, Social constructivism

Purpose

Extant research on CSR communication has focused primarily on external communication, i.e. what firms communicate to their environment. At the same time, a large part of this literature exhibits a mechanistic understanding of communication that implies the possibility of a package-like transfer of information and meaning from sender to receiver. However, this notion of communication can be criticized for neglecting the constitutive role of communication for organizations. As an alternative, these authors propose a theoretical perspective known as "communication constitutes organizations" (CCO). The CCO view allows for grasping organizations as holistic and polyphonic communicative entities. Hence, what are the implications for CSR communication when we switch from a mechanistic to a constitutive notion of communication?

Design/methodology/approach

This is a conceptual paper. We apply the CCO view to CSR communication.

Findings

Our application of the CCO view yields three main findings: (1) CSR communication represents only one of several communicative practices that collectively constitute the organization and that evolve in competition with one another; (2) CSR communication is not only a function of (large-scale) formal organizations, but as a communicative activity it can itself also form the constitutive basis for the emergence of rudimentary, local, and temporary forms of organizing; (3) According to the CCO view, organizations are constituted and stabilized by various non-human entities (e.g., texts or other artifacts) that "act" on their behalf. Thus, CSR communication would need to take also into account the agency and responsibility of these non-human entities, which in some cases lack concrete individual human creators who could be held accountable for.

Originality/value

Our paper links the literature on CSR communication to broader debates in organizational communication studies. By applying the CCO view, we arrive at a new understanding of CSR communication that allows for comprehending the legitimacy and accountability of organizations as holistic communicative phenomena and helps to transcend a one-sided accentuation of the external side of CSR communication.

Analyzing corporate social responsibility, transparency and authenticity as mythos. A non-dualistic perspective

Friederike Schultz

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Authenticity, Transparency, Mythos, Non-dualism

Purpose

In the discourse on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and especially the functionalist perspective CSR is often regarded as instrument to enhance transparency, openness, and authenticity, and based on that the trustworthiness and reputation of an organizations.

Especially the visions of "realness" are symptomatic for the general structural, value and public change in society, which is partly based on new media technologies and increasing power of protest actors and which leads to an increasing institutionalization of corporate CSR practices.

Such functionalist perspectives were recently criticized by a range of authors, because they build on simple understandings of communication and ontologistic ideas of reality, which neglect the societal conditions and processes of meaning construction between actors (Christensen, 2002; Schultz and Wehmeier, 2010; Schultz, 2010, 2011; Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011). This paper follows the argumentation of these authors, who questioned the opportunities and constraints of CSR, transparency or authenticity from a mainly constructivist perspective, but presents an alternative perspective, which sheds new light on the discourse. It analyzes CSR, transparency and authenticity as mythos.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper first presents the realist and constructivist perspective. In contrast to both perspectives it then analyzes the discourse on CSR, transparency and authenticity from a non-dualistic perspective. This perspective challenges realism and constructivism by arguing that reality is directly integrated in communication and communication therefore mainly performative (Cassirer, 1954; Mitterer, 1992). Based on this perspective, it is argued in the paper that perceptions or constructions of CSR, transparency and authenticity are symbolically and communicatively mediated constructions which are getting real for actors and therefore exist not as ontological, but communicative events in societal discourses and here enfold effects by leading and legitimizing actions. By regarding the concepts as communicative events, it third analyzes its semantics, functions and effects and enfolds the argument, that CSR and related ideas of transparency and authenticity are mythical in character:

Although their "realness" needs to be questioned from an epistemological perspective, they are developed and applied in communications in order to maintaining the autopoiesis of organizations, to securing follow-up communication and elaborating distinctions with partially dysfunctional effects. At the end, alternative strategies for authenticity communication are explored.

Originality/value

The paper applies a non-dualistic perspective to the discourse on CSR, transparency and authenticity.

2. CSR AND SUSTAINABILITY

COMMUNICATION CONCEPTS AND ETHICS

Corporate Social Responsibility Communication: Towards a Phase Model of Strategic Concept Development

Bernd Lorenz Walter

Abstract

Key words

CSR communication, Concept development, Communication strategy, Stakeholder involvement strategy

Purpose

The paper develops a phase model of concept development in integrated corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication by presenting CSR as a mindset in communication processes.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper provides rationales for establishing a new phase model of concept development in CSR communication by adapting existing models of strategic communications. In this context, the main focus is on the need to involve stakeholders in CSR communication processes (Morsing and Schultz, 2006).

Findings

The paper argues that in the sense of CSR communication, stakeholders should be involved in the concept development process from the beginning, with respect to the issues that the corporation and targeted stakeholder groups have in common.

Research limitations/implications

The paper concentrates on selected key aspects of CSR and CSR communication. In particular the aspects reputation, credibility, ethical alignment and stakeholder involvement are considered as prerequisites for understanding the construction of the phase model.

Practical implications

This paper provides practical implications for developing communication concepts in CSR communication in daily business practice.

Originality/value

This paper facilitates a comprehensive understanding of strategic CSR communication as part of CSR reflected in the development processes of communication concepts.

Creating Consumer Confidence in CSR Communications

Guido Berens, Mignon van Halderen, and Wybe Popma

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Consumer attitudes, Communication, Corporate reputation, Advertising, Disclosure

Purpose

This paper examines the role of communication in stimulating consumer attitudes and buying behaviour regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Methodology

Literature review

Findings

“Traditional” corporate marketing tools, like advertising and publicity, seem to be reasonably effective in stimulating consumer attitudes and behaviour. However, their effectiveness also depends on factors like a company’s reputation. The effectiveness of detailed disclosures seems doubtful. Third-party certification labels seem to be effective in principle, although the current proliferation of labels may preclude this. Independent consumer magazines are generally trusted sources for CSR information, but can also lead to information overload.

Practical implications

The results offer suggestions on how to communicate about CSR to consumers.

Originality/value of the paper

This paper provides the first comprehensive overview of the literature on the effectiveness of communication about CSR to consumers.

A Consumption Conundrum: Millennials perceptions of pink ribbons

Amy O'Connor and Alicia E. Phillips

Extended abstract

Purpose

Guided by research that demonstrates the centrality of some social issues, this study suggests NGO-corporate alliance partner choice is influenced by the ability of a social issue to accumulate economic, social, cultural, and political capital. This research evaluates how Millennials, a highly sought-after and pro-cause generation, perceive the number of corporate partnerships communicated by Susan G. Komen for the Cure (SGK), the largest single issue NGO in the US. The research provides empirical data to explore propositions one and four of the Symbiotic Sustainability Model (Shumate and O'Connor, 2010).

Methodology

This study uses focus group methodology. A purposive sample of Millennial students from a mid-sized Midwestern university was used for this study. Five focus group sessions (N = 34) were conducted. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour during which participants discussed their perceptions of the co-branding communication of SGK and its corporate sponsors.

Findings

Preliminary data analysis suggests that Millennials are seeking a deeper commitment from organizational CSR than co-branding efforts may provide. However, focus group participant's comments reveal that they are ethically torn between "doing something" and "doing nothing". Our results indicate that the ubiquitous pink ribbon has resulted in pink fatigue, and the negative perceptions are projected upon the NGO and its cause rather than the corporation. This finding suggests different causes may evoke different reactions from stakeholders. In contrast to the research on green washing which sees the corporation as behaving questionably, with pink washing preliminary data suggests stakeholders view the NGO as having responsibility for overexposure. Further, our participants equate the pink ribbon with SGK even though many other breast cancer NGOs rely on the pink ribbon for co-branding.

Originality/value

This paper makes three contributions to current corporate social responsibility research. First, the majority of research on NGO-corporate partnerships has focused on the benefits of the partnership for the corporation. The current research suggests that NGOs may accumulate capital that places them in a position of relational power within the NGO-corporate alliance network. Second, while previous research suggests that most NGOs have very few corporate partners, some NGOs seem to be more desirable than others. The current research documents how some NGOs become central in the NGO-corporate alliance network. Finally, this study expands our understanding of the ethical conundrums surrounding NGO-corporate alliances and unpacks the trilemma facing NGOs and corporations when they communicate their co-branding CSR activities.

Corporate foundations and CSR communication: Evidence from Romania

Alin Stancu, Georgiana Florentina Grigore, and Ioana Cepoi

Abstract

Key words

Corporate foundations, Stakeholders, CSR, Qualitative research, Romania, Disclosure

Purpose

Many studies show that companies are focusing their attention on those types of stakeholders that can influence them. Thus, organizations are more concerned about shareholders than consumers and employees, and very little attention is made to society and the environment, although CSR entails giving equal importance to everyone. CSR definitions emphasize its voluntary nature, and not on forcing the company through regulations. There is a big difference between the expression of concerns and carry out actions to solve that problem. Since the CSR activities surrounding a state of uncertainty is difficult to assess such actions. While some see social responsibility initiatives as an expression of corporate strategy, of the identity, or market power or on dependence of certain stakeholders, the management challenge becomes more serious in terms of understanding stakeholders need and the way the company can communicate efficiently with them. This article shows the importance of corporate foundations in communicating the company's CSR actions. Studies (Westhues and Einwiller, 2006) showed that the foundations are an important resource in delivering relevant messages to the company's stakeholders. In this way their role in supporting communication is important CSR stakeholder's involvement.

Design/methodology/approach

In order to achieve the objective of our paper we'll conduct an exploratory qualitative research on 2 representatives of the corporate foundations from Romania. The paper analyses the type of stakeholders that the foundations are dealing with, and also their contribution to CSR communication of the company. Besides that, at the beginning of the article a literature review regarding the role of corporate foundations in CSR communication is highlighted and a presentation of corporate foundations sector from Romania is presented.

Findings

Analysing the data we'll find the main categories of stakeholders that the foundations are communicating with. Moreover, another aspect relevant for the article will be to show the relationship between the foundation and the company and the main conflicts that may appear between these two.

Research limitations/implications

The limitation of the study is lack of representatively – we'll conduct an exploratory survey on 2 foundations.

Practical implications

One of the results is that the article will present the role of corporate foundations in communication CSR. Many consumers consider less credible the CSR communication coming from the companies.

Originality/value

Little attention has been put on the role of corporate foundations in international literature, and even less in Romania.

Measuring sustainability: an industry case study of Maersk Line

Mariya Pavlova

Paper

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and PRIME Research launched a national student fellowship award in May 2011. The participants had to submit a paper on a measurement and evaluation topic and the theme was sustainability. My paper was amongst the three finalists and it offers an interesting and different perspective of CSR and measurement:

"He who would learn to fly one day must first learn to walk and run and climb and dance; one cannot fly into flying." (Nietzsche)

This quote perfectly describes the long journey that the public relations industry has started in terms of developing its measurement and evaluation framework. After more than a decade of learning and improving, the public relations industry is ready to embrace these new changes which allow every public relations practitioner to "fly", i.e. to demonstrate their success through their ability to influence change and meet objectives. That quote may also be valid for every public relations professional: one must always upgrade their knowledge and skills to remain competitive and useful for their organisations or clients. In other words, customer satisfaction starts with improved quality. Stakeholders are adding Corporate Social Sustainability to the mix of their expectations for good services. As a result, measuring public relations' impact on businesses has never been of such importance. It is interesting to see how one particular sector has responded to the challenge. For the maritime industry in particular, these new trends of measurement means that their PR has entered new waters. Even though most of the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility have been spreading through businesses in all sectors, some of the conglomerates in container shipping, like Maersk Line, are already far ahead in their proactive approach compared to other industries which is an interesting field to explore.

Back in 1994, the International Public Relations Association predicted the gradual priority of outcomes over outputs, but it took until 2010 to secure the introduction of a new measurement framework, i.e. the Barcelona Principles (International Public Relations Association, 1994a; International Public Relations Association, 1994b). The Barcelona Principles marked both the death of the AVEs and the start of a new era in measuring public relations' impact on businesses. Here we can ask: can we measure everything? Can the Valid Metrics Matrix be applied everywhere? The new toolkit still does not provide all the answers but it is the backbone for showing the real value that public relations can bring to business quality. This paper attempts to argue that definitive research needs to be done to prove to businesses that the new measurement and evaluation guidelines could and should be applied everywhere, even to industries with specific requirements like container shipping.

Measuring sustainability

Most businesses still view quality in terms of customer satisfaction and container shipping is no exception. This is the technical aspect of public relations – whether there are no errors, no mechanical breakdowns or no customer complains (as seen in International Public Relations Association, 1994a). These aspects are doubtlessly very important, especially for high risk industries like the maritime business. What about the managerial aspects of quality? Both service and process require quality. Service delivery is of course of greatest importance, however, process plays a vital role in delivering high quality services. Therefore, some marine companies, like Maersk Line, have realized the essential role of performance in achieving their goals. According to Fraser Seitel, a former vice president for public relations for the Chase Manhattan Bank (as seen in International Public Relations Association, 1994a), the underlying concept in all definitions of public relations is the word performance. In other words, performance becomes a communicative concept which in turns makes public relations the key to managing an excellent reputation. But what does excellent reputation mean? How do we know it is well managed?

The key to understanding corporate reputation has become the measuring of the relationships it is based on, especially with the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility. In recent years, organisations have become concern about it, implementing it into their long – term strategies. This rise of sustainability to the top of management agenda is happening at a time when stakeholders' demands for greater reliability, transparency and lower costs are already exerting pressure

on business operational models. As a result, their demand for proof of ethical behaviour has changed the perception about organisations. Now businesses are seen more as strategic innovation partners rather than mere service/product providers. Subsequently, the levels of communication channels surrounding sustainability has increased and altered the way businesses manage relationships with their various stakeholders. It resulted in the increase of the importance of these relationships. Therefore, building, managing and measuring them is fundamental to an organisation's success. Moreover, for some organisations understanding how to measure has become a part of the sole focus of their strategies: if relationships can be measured then they can be improved, and so could communication effectiveness and overall performance (Paine, 2011).

These sustainability trends have an impact of a wide variety of industries, including maritime business. Recent studies (Haddock - Fraser and Touelle, 2010; Fisk, 2010; Clifton and Amran, 2011) emphasise on the importance of end users in environmental sustainability reporting and point out that, depending on their position in the supply chain, companies that are closer to end users tend to be more proactive because they are more "visible" to this particular stakeholder group. As mentioned above, container shipping industry is less visible to consumers and therefore it is not massively targeted by activist groups. Therefore, it could be argued that most of carriers avoid having to measure their performance and tend to adopt basic Corporate Social Responsibility models rather than proactive, societal ones (Peach, 1987, as seen in Tench and Yeomans, 2009).

Despite being the most environmentally – friendly transport mode for bulk cargo (container shipping is still a modest contributor to global CO₂ emissions - 2.7% in 2007; 3, 3 % in 2009 (International Maritime Organization, 2010; International Maritime Organization, 2009)), the industry is now about to face new social and environmental regulations and stakeholder expectation that have forced changes at all levels of the sector. According to a report on sustainability trends in the container shipping industry (Pruzan - Jorgensen and Farrag, 2010), in the upcoming years market, stakeholder, customer, and regulatory pressures related to sustainability will drive significant changes in the way international container shipping lines operate and do business. Such environmentally motivated regulations have already become the most important cost – driver, as governments and corporations raise their bar of expectations. All of these micro-level changes will be compounded by four wider societal mega-trends: hyper-transparency, regulated carbon and resource constraints, rise of rights and local governance, and socio-economic shifts (Pruzan - Jorgensen and Farrag, 2010).

So, the answer is that the PR function can take a lead, encouraging businesses such as container shipping to join the transparency revolution. Considering that the industry transports about 60 percent of the value of global seaborne trade and represents a heavy social and environmental footprint, these trends will have a far – reaching impact in a variety of other sectors (World Shipping Council, 2011).

Maersk Line seems to realise the importance of these trends to both remain competitive on the market, where big customers are already greening their supply chains (as seen in Leach, 2010), and to adjust to the new economic climate. For example, it produced its first Annual Report in 2009, introduced the CO₂ Dial Program for its customers and has been developing the so called Responsible Procurement Program for its own suppliers (for detailed information see Appendix One Research Report: Being ethical in an unethical industry: a case study of Maersk Line).

"We see our customers putting more and more emphasis on environmental issues and now they started looking at transportation as well. We can choose to do nothing and risk losing out business but we can also respond. But we want also to help this trend grow, we want to drive that demand and create solutions... The decision to communicate much proactively is a great opportunity to take the lead and win by doing so."

*Maersk Line Head of Climate and Sustainability**

Maersk Line manages successfully to combine corporate continuity and sustainable trends. It has already set a solid foundation for measuring performance in order to develop a greener and more transparent company. Even though the carrier is a pioneer in measuring its ethical performance in a rather unethical industry, it still has areas to improve. It could be argued that Maersk Line tends to focus on the technical aspects of public relations, i.e. its carbon and CO₂ footprints or its supplier performance (see 5. Appendix One Research Report: Being ethical in an unethical industry: a case study of Maersk Line). However, the launch of the first global standard for PR measurement – the Barcelona Principles allows a careful analysis and measurement of the managerial impact of quality to sustain a collective reputation management. In other words, the new framework would further improve Maersk Line's evaluation indicators because it would enable the company to measure the results of its efforts in terms of building and sustaining relationships; in terms of improving its communication channels. The complex and changing nature of relationships between an organisation and its public

not only requires measurement and evaluation of the outputs (i.e. the technical aspect of public relations) but also of outcomes to provide competitive insights. It could be argued therefore that the Barcelona Principles and the Valid Metrics Matrix could be a useful platform for measuring Maersk Line's performance: a combination between the carrier's efforts to showcase ethical behaviour by reporting its environmental footprint and its quality of managing relationships in and outside the organisation (see 6. Appendix Two: Valid Metrics Matrix applied on Maersk Line).

**The researched carried out a face-to-face interview with Maersk Line's Head of Climate and Sustainability.*

Ethical values in corporate communication

Stéphane Bernard

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Corporate communication, Reputation, Values, Ethical ideology

Purpose

Most companies nowadays understand that they have to use corporate social responsibility arguments in their communication. However, the impact of these arguments on the firm's reputation is not always easy to establish – and sometimes the exercise can be counter-productive. The literature offers some advice regarding how to communicate, for example Bhattacharya and Sen (2004), Swaen and Vanhamme (2004, 2005) or van de Ven (2008). In this research, the purpose is to examine the role of values in corporate messages on the perception of CSR, but also to observe the effect of other variables like perception of actions and ethical ideology of the receiver.

Design/methodology/approach

A model was drawn from theoretical approaches involving values (Schwartz and Boehnke, 2004) ethical ideology (Forsyth, 1980) and corporate reputation (Davies *et al.*, 2004). Further literature indicates links between CSR, ethics and values, e.g. Steenhaut and van Kenhove (2006). The final model was tested using structural equations on a sample of 276 respondents. A set of 8 corporate messages from different companies were submitted to respondents; perceived values were measured, and also perceived CSR actions, ethical ideology of the respondent and reputation of the firm after exposure to the message.

Findings

The research validates the hypothesis that self-transcendence in corporate messages has a positive impact on reputation in terms of social responsibility, and that it is a key driver. This is consistent with the literature establishing self-transcendence as "ethical values". The results also validate the importance of perceived socially responsible actions. More important, this research confirms the moderating effect of ethical ideology, indicating that different profiles of receivers will react differently to the values expressed in the corporate messages. People with a "strong" ethical ideology will be more severe with corporate messages that express altruistic values when there is no perception of corresponding tangible actions.

Research limitations/implications

This research was carried out in one country only, and could therefore be replicated in order to strengthen the conclusions. Additionally, the scales that were used are fairly complex and may lead to a self-selection bias; it may be possible to simplify them in some cases. Finally, Vitell (2003) suggests some research into the explanatory variables of ethical ideology, which may improve the practical implications of the present study.

Practical implications

Firms can use the results of this research to improve the way they communicate at a corporate level about their CSR activities. Depending on the key stakeholders they target, and their ethical ideology, they can fine-tune their communication mix in order to achieve the right "values vs. actions" balance.

Originality/value

The use of scales that are well established in the literature makes this research easier to replicate across countries for validation and/or comparison. Also, relying on values and ethical ideology in the context of CSR and corporate reputation may seem simple, yet it yields significant and actionable results.

Communicating environmental and ethical performance: a longitudinal analysis of annual reports from 1998 – 2009

Thomas Kilian and Nadine Hennigs

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Ethical/green marketing, Business reports, Ethical disclosure, Environmental disclosure

Purpose

Along with the publics' increased demand for businesses to operate responsibly, more and more companies proactively publish their CSR-related principles and activities. A growing body of research is dedicated to the analysis of patterns in self-reported CSR performances; these studies use annual reports as a proxy for the social or environmental activities of the companies. The research aims are twofold. First, on the basis of content analysis, categories of CSR-related communication are examined. Second, these categories are used in a longitudinal perspective spanning twelve years to compare how motives to pursue CSR and CSR-related activities have changed over time. Design/methodology/approach: This study integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches with a content analysis which forms the basis for longitudinal analysis of annual reports from German Dax-30 companies from 1998-2009.

Findings

On the basis of content analysis categories of CSR-related communication are found that are used in a longitudinal perspective spanning twelve years, to compare how CSR philosophy, motives, and activities have changed over time.

Research limitations/implications

Future research could consider the national culture of the reporting company as a determinant of CSR reporting. Besides, this study did not separate home-market activities from international activities of the companies – given their multinational activities, there might be differences in their CSR commitment in international markets or production sites.

Originality/value

Past research analysing annual reports or CSR reports in various national contexts has relied mainly on simple measures, such as word and page counts of reports, and has mostly failed to provide a category scheme that goes beyond CSR-related activities. Also, prior research has focussed mostly on corporate environmental disclosures and neglected social disclosures. This paper helps to overcome some of these deficiencies by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Consistency of CEO behavior in CSR. Does it matter?

Damla Kartal and Wim Elving

Abstract

Does a CEO of a self –claimed CSR friendly organization to act upon the CSR his or her organization is saying it is executing? Or put it differently: does the CEO of a windmill factory can still drive in his/her sports utility car, or does (s)he needs a hybrid or electrical car, to make the connection with the policy of the organization and its CSR more stronger? Consistency in behavior seems to be important for organizations to keep the gained reputation of the CSR. If an organization states that it want zero CO2 emissions, than the employees and management of this organization need to behave in line with the goals of the organization, and especially should not behave opposite. If they do so, they risk loosing reputation, because of the inconsistency between the communicated CSR story and the actual visible behavior.

In an experiment we used a newspaper story of the CEO of a Dutch firm who trades in his Porsche sports car into a hybrid, environmental friendly car. He did do so, because the company adopted a CSR program with the emphasis on getting in the end to zero CO2 emissions. We created a second newspaper story in which the CEO was interviewed as well, and asked why he remained to drive in his sports car. A total of 124 respondents completed a questionnaire. Despite of our thinking and hypothesis, none of these were supported. Contrary, we did found that inconsistency in behavior resulted in a more positive attitude, higher reputation and higher trust than consistent behavior. In the discussion we will reflect on these results. It might be that inconsistency in behavior is expected of CEO's, or that the respondents could not believe one actually traded in a Porsche for a hybrid form of a car. We will also do suggestions for future research to the consistency in behaviors related to CSR.

3. CSR, COMMUNICATION, VALUES AND IDENTITY

The Challenge of Communicating CSR: Is the Key Found in the Corporate Value Systems?

Line Schmeltz

Extended abstract

Key words

CSR, Values, Corporate identity, Corporate communication, CSR implementation

Introduction

The traditional role of the company in society is being challenged by the increasing number of demands imposed on it by society. It is no longer just a legal entity designed to generate profits and create new jobs, today's company also plays the role of the responsible co-citizen of the community, the socially and environmentally conscious citizen of the world, and the inspiring and interesting workplace dedicated to its employees (Ellis, 2010). It seems reasonable to assume that this changed role of corporations in society, and the values upon which they are based, will lead to a change in the values communicated by corporations, but the question is whether this actually takes place. One of the places where this increasingly higher complexity of roles in society is very obvious is in relation to responsibility. Today, corporations are expected to take responsibility for and engage with the societies and environments in which they operate; in other words it is expected of them to engage in or, at the very least, to take a position on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Purpose

Communicating about CSR is perceived to be extremely difficult (see e.g. IE School of Communication & Global Alliance, 2010; Morsing and Beckmann, 2006; Morsing et al., 2008) especially in the light of the ever more demanding group of active target audiences expecting transparency and openness from corporations (Isaksson and Jørgensen, 2010). The reasons for the problematics behind this, however, are yet to be empirically explored.

This paper posits that CSR cannot be effectively communicated if it is not properly incorporated in the corporate DNA and thus not part of the corporate identity. The paper thus seeks to answer the following question: Do companies embracing a CSR agenda adapt and align their value systems and values communication in reflection of a new commitment and an underlying change in organizational identity?

The approach in this paper is to seek to empirically answer this question by taking a comparative approach to companies' communicated corporate values (the corporate identity) and their CSR values applying a value-theoretical framework (as developed by e.g. Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1999; Schwartz and Bardi, 2001). When a company truly embracing the CSR agenda communicates its identity, it would be reasonable to assume that the values upon which the CSR foundation is built should be reflected in this communication. That is, the new commitment and underlying change in the organizational identity should be reflected and manifest in the company's corporate communication if the engagement is to be considered legitimate by stakeholders. At the same time, the challenging task of communicating CSR engagements and activities is also likely to be easier to overcome if the underlying values guiding both corporate identity and CSR are, if not identical, then at least highly compatible.

Key concepts, theory and models

The concept of values is the pivotal point of this study as it is understood as a constituting element of both corporate identity and CSR (see e.g. Morsing and Thyssen, 2003). Thus the paper draws on theories on corporate communication

(e.g. Christensen, Morsing and Cheney, 2008; Cornelissen, 2011; Melewar, 2008), corporate identity (e.g. Balmer and Greyser, 2002; Balmer, Fukukawa and Gray, 2007; Christensen et al., 2008; Hatch and Schultz, 2008; Van Riel, 2005; Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007) and CSR implementation and integration (e.g. Maon, Lindgreen and Swaen, 2010; Marrewijk and Werre, 2003; Schultz and Wehmeier, 2010) from a value perspective (e.g. Aust, 2004; Dowling, 2004; Pruzan, 2001; Siltaoja, 2006; Williams, 2008). The theoretical framework chosen for the analysis is Rokeach's Value System from 1973 which operates with 36 values divided into 18 instrumental values (moral or competence values) and 18 terminal values (personal or social values).

Research design and method

Sampling. The companies participating in this study were selected through purposive sampling (Neergaard, 2007). They share the characteristics of being members of a CSR network facilitated by The Confederation of Danish Industry and are thus considered by the Confederation as being among the first wave of Danish companies that are truly embracing the concept of CSR and are working with the challenges of CSR in a systematic, strategic and conscious manner. Furthermore, the companies can all be characterized as operating within the business-to-consumer market, they are large-sized companies, and they are all well-established companies founded more than 50 years ago. In terms of ownership, the sample contains both public and private companies, including one holding company.

Units of analysis: manifestations of CI and CSR values. The units of analysis are the corporate website texts on mission, vision and corporate values. These will be compared against data generated through semi-structured interviews (inspired by Bryman and Bell, 2007 and Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) with the companies' CSR managers. Both sets of data will be analyzed through a value theory perspective applying Rokeach's (1973) framework of Value Systems.

Method of analysis. The analysis of both website texts and interview was carried out using a qualitative approach to interpretive content analysis based on semantic units (Baxter, 1991; Krippendorff, 2004). The interpretative qualitative approach was taken through a social constructivist analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) by evaluating and rearticulating small amounts of text in a specific theoretical framework, Rokeach's Value System. By applying this system, the coding categories were already established in the form of the 36 functional and terminal values, hence they are theory driven. Moreover, this approach offers the opportunity, even if it is a qualitative analysis, of comparing the two datasets from each company directly, by elaborating Corporate Value Systems for each company.

Findings and results

Overall, the analysis displays a rather fragmented and inconsistent picture of the companies' articulations of values related to corporate identity (CI) and corporate social responsibility (CSR), respectively, with a minimum of alignment between these two systems. On the contrary, quite often what is represented as a primary CI value is at the same time only a tertiary CSR value (if at all present).

The findings thus suggest that CSR is not very integrated in the Danish companies participating in the study even though they are considered to be among the first wave of seriously CSR-engaged companies. One could then speculate that the reason why many companies find it very difficult to communicate CSR is that CSR is not very well integrated or implemented, and moreover, that the companies are operating with very different and not always completely compatible value systems guiding their communication about corporate identity and corporate social responsibility respectively.

The underlying reasons for this misalignment may be explained by the complexity of a company's role in society today (the corporate citizen), by lack of implementation, by lack of coordination between key players within the organization, by the national socio-political culture in which the companies are embedded, or the line of business that they belong to. Finally, a possible explanation could also be that today's business environment requires corporations to apply CSR as a means (indicated in the use of instrumental values in the CSR data) to reach a specific goal (indicated in the use of terminal values in the corporate identity data).

In conclusion, this paper posits that the two different value systems arising as a consequence of these aspects may explain why companies find it very difficult to communicate about CSR, and that a tighter fit between a company's CI values and CSR values may lessen the complexity of communicating about CSR issues.

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Non – communication of the CSR. The case of state owned enterprises

Zlatko Jančič

Extended abstract

Key words

CSR, Stakeholder theory, Morals, Marketing communication, Private and state owned enterprises

Purpose

The aim of this paper is to consider the question about the morality of conspicuous communication of CSR practices. Though it seems a plausible activity the CSR communications might be misunderstood by various stakeholder groups as an unnecessary bragging. The paper is intending to shed an additional light into this too rarely debated subject.

Methodology/approach

This conceptual paper is based on the comparison between traditions of non-communication of the CSR, namely, Nordic, French and Slovenian. A critical point of view is used when discussing the mainstream corporate practices in the CSR marketing communication.

Findings

The analysis shows that these perspectives bear very little resemblance in their socio-political origins. They, however, converge when looked from the perspective of basic moral principles.

Originality

The paper attempts to balance the view of Danish and French researchers with the perspective from the country from South - Eastern Europe with the long history of state owned enterprises. No similar work has been found dealing with this particular comparison.

A plethora of distinguished authors are nowadays publishing works on stakeholder theory and CSR without much distance to the question of communicating various CSR practices to the wider public (Lantos, 2001; Maignan and Ferrell, 2004; Parvinen *et al.*, 2007). The credo is that this is an important practice to achieve a competitive advantage if of course it isn't merely a cosmetic (Porter and Kramer, 2010).

There are, however, few attempts to explain the reluctant stance towards public disclosure of CSR practices in some countries that differ in their attitudes from the predominant Anglo-American view of the CSR (Bertholin Antal and Sobczak, 2007). Authors explain French historical and cultural reasons, while Morsing and Shultz (2006) emphasize the moral reasons of Denmark in comparison with other Nordic countries. The reluctance of public disclosure of CSR practices was widely present also in Slovenia, especially prior to its independence. When joining the EU and embracing the discontinuous and rather undigested rules of capitalism the things changed. The recession and many corporate scandals of the "nouveau riche" brought on the agenda the memories of the "good old past". At that time compulsory practices of socially interconnected enterprises that were obliged to share their wealth with the broader society without extensive marketing communications about it are nowadays again widely acclaimed. While nostalgia can be a good panacea for times of crisis the reasons for such practices were rather ideological than business related. The paper intends to present some backgrounds for early CSR practices in the state owned enterprises in Slovenia that may contribute to the development of this important field in CSR studies.

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How European managers feel about CSR communication risks and opportunities

Laura Illia, Almudena Gonzalez del Valle Brena, Belen Rodriguez Canovas, Stefania Romenti, and Stelios Zyglidopoulos

Extended Abstract

In the aftermath of the British Petroleum accident in the Gulf of Mexico on 2010, the communication of corporate social activities is suddenly facing its most feared threat: is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) a needed practice for a sustainable reputation, or a huge risk for managers. A key component for engaging in CSR is the actual communication of CSR activities, in order to provide information about the company's special behaviour so as to legitimate the company among their stakeholders. CSR is the process of assessing an organisation's impact on society and evaluating its responsibilities. However, CSR is also an opportunity to generate good and honest news and stories about activities the company and the community around it can be proud of.

Managers responsible for communicating their firm's CSR activities to the general public and their stakeholders often face a challenge. In spite of the necessary transparency on their CSR achievements, the way they actually communicate them may be understood as greenwashing. The more aggressive the communication, the greater the chance they may be accused of justifying their companies' possible wrongs. In other words, CSR and communication managers have to walk a fine line between using a valuable resource and possible loss of reputation. In general, while CSR is associated with positive virtues (e.g. The Body Shop), corporate CSR messages have also proven to attract critical attention (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). Research suggests that the more companies expose their ethical and social ambitions, the more likely they are to attract critical stakeholder attention (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990; Vallentin, 2001).

Greenwashing strictly refers to the unjustified appropriation of an environmental virtue by a company to create a pro-environmental image and give a misleading impression to the public. The corporation seems to establish and implement policies and procedures that are environmentally friendly along the business cycle. In a broader sense, the term may be used to qualify business activities aimed at building reputation as a responsible company, while still engaged in business practices regarded as unacceptable to their various stakeholders, should they know of them. Research shows that the general public has lost trust in what major corporations say about themselves. Therefore, there lays a reasonable risk to expect that, regardless of what the corporation communicates, the various stakeholders will receive the message with suspicion. After all, not every stakeholder is able to directly witness the company's CSR activities. To a great extent they have to rely on what the company says, and usually, what the media say about the same activities.

European managers adopt a lower risk attitude toward CSR communication compared to US managers, for example, as they believe that it is too risky to build corporate image on CSR activities, given that public opinion, media and consumers perceive CSR disclosure as having an opportunistic marketing purpose (Tixier, 2003). Worldwide, 64% of public opinion and consumers believe that companies act socially or are environmental responsible for improving their image (Havas Media, 2009). This is more the case when the company is truly socially committed. This opinion is stronger in countries like Spain (72%) and France (70%) than in the US (58%). Given these differences, the aim with the interviews was to explore whether European managers consider CSR communication to be more of a risk than an opportunity. Communication managers face a real challenge on how to minimise stakeholder scepticism and convey their intrinsic motives in their company's CSR activities. Their perception is that CSR communication more a risk or an opportunity for companies? If it is a risk, how can one minimize it?

To address this question, the authors interviewed sixty-nine Communication or CSR managers of major European corporations about the risks they perceived in the CSR communication process. These interviews were part of a larger project led by the School of Communication (IE University) in Spain, in collaboration with the University of Cambridge in the UK, and IULM Foundation. The project investigated CSR communication practices and differences among the largest 251 European corporations by revenue, located in six countries (Denmark, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the UK) and competing in eleven industries. This paper tries to point out the perception about the issue that these European managers state. The study is quantitative and qualitative, the ultimate aim being to explore what European managers feel about

their communication practices, to explore their opinions on risks and opportunities in communicating CSR.

Main results of your study show that managers do not fear the public opinion or mass media scepticism that CSR communication has an opportunistic marketing purpose. Their point of view is that, in the past, media were attentive only to CSR's worst practices. Today, scandals easily spread, but so do good practices as CSR communication is starting to become known by media and the general public, who seem to have an increasing interest in such issues even when they relate to good news. The managers in the current study shared their opinions about how to avoid risks in communicating CSR. These opinions are summarized in 14 guidelines in the study's conclusion. The variety and type of managers' opinions indicated that CSR communication is a practice still be constantly redefined. According to the managers, both processes—namely, engaging in and communicating CSR—have their complexities and risks. Those who consider engaging in CSR to be difficult believe that CSR is about changing the culture of an organization. Meanwhile, communicating CSR is perceived to be difficult because of the complexity of fitting multiple stakeholders' expectations while providing a concise message that is credible. About 10 recommendations are given on how to manage CSR communication minimizing risks.

Social responsibility as an empty signifier in media discourses

Urška Kolar and Tanja Kamin

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Media discourses, Empty signifier, Individualism, Communitarianism, Lifestyle

Purpose

In the field of CSR there is still a definition crisis and consequently there are various articulations of the CSR core. In this paper we claim, that viewing CSR as an empty signifier (a signifier without the signified) explains, why the inability to reach a consensus on the definition of CSR is inherent in the concept itself, due to its paradoxical combination of discursive elements. We will demonstrate the claim with analysis of mediatization of CSR in Slovene media.

Methodology

We study mediatization of CSR in Slovene media. The sample includes articles containing the term social responsibility in five biggest national daily newspapers and their special editions, published during six months, including time frames when media attention on CSR is elevated (companies publishing their annual reports, CSR award announcement). We used media content analysis, based on Ernesto Laclau's discourse theory.

Findings

Social responsibility functions as an empty signifier in media content. There is inconsistent and contradicting reasoning emerging from writing on social responsibility in the media. Main oppositions are broadly described as individualistic and communitarian. Opposing views appealing to the same signifier contribute to inflation of meanings in CSR and consequently neutralize its ability to pinpoint responsibility to a concrete social actor.

Research limitations/implications

There are multiple social actors to be considered when analyzing discourses of social responsibility. Media content analysis offers viewpoints on multiple social actor positions, which allows us to research interplay between various social actors. This paper also suggests which relations between social actors need further more specific research on CSR discourses and specifies how to carry it out.

Practical implications

Empty signifiers contribute to inflation of frequencies of the concept in media discourses, but diminish its' credibility. Including an empty signifier in the communication strategy consequently enlarges the gap between organizations' desired and perceived identity. When targeting a specific audience the use of an empty signifier results in not actually targeting anyone.

Social implications

Ethical positioning of organizations produces consequences in the identification processes of individuals. When individuals accept individualistic reasoning for social responsibility in which consumer choice is a major factor, discourses of social responsibility are key points in shaping individuals' lifestyle, while accepting communitarian reasoning fosters participation in social movements and advocating social change.

Originality

Applying discourse theory to the CSR field contributes to better understanding of the effects of CSR on individuals in the form of potential identification models in media content, which organizations have to take into consideration when preparing their CSR communication strategies.

4. CSR, MEDIA AND REPUTATION

Corporate Responsibility as a Driver of Reputation or a Constraint Upon it – A Media Analysis

Jana Schmitt

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Corporate reputation, Media society, Media coverage, Frame analysis

Purpose

The contribution asks whether media coverage of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a driver of or a constraint upon corporate reputation. This question is discussed regarding the increasing relevance of the public for economic organisations operating under the conditions of the media society. It is assumed that the public assembled by the (mass) media forms the arena in which reputation is constituted and communicated.

Design/methodology/approach

Due to the fact that media coverage is still the most important arena of public communication it seems to be indispensable to analyse media coverage when regarding effects of CSR on reputation. This paper suggests analysing media coverage by frame analysis, making a proposal how this could be worked out.

Findings

Companies – whether they wish to or not – cannot escape from public communication and public scrutiny in the media society. Therefore both for research and for practice analyzing media coverage is exposed to be a suitable form of research.

Practical implications

Considering the assumption that most people depend on news media for gathering corporate information, it seems to be indispensable for public relations practitioners to understand how media frame Corporate Social Responsibility.

Originality/value

CSR is understood as a symbolic and communicative practice and it is therefore precisely in communicative practices that the institutionalisation of CSR manifests itself. Consequently, the main epistemological interest is how reputation is constituted through social commitment. Research on CSR and corporate reputation coexist hitherto nearly unrelated. The aim of this contribution is to link these loose debates by considering the role of (mass) media for the generation of reputation through CSR.

Communicating CSR to the mass media: The influence of contingency factors in agenda-building processes

Merel Brouwer, Wouter van Atteveldt, and Friederike Schultz

Abstract

Purpose

CSR communication and its effects on consumers is a frequently studied subject in various academic disciplines such as management studies, communication and sociology (e.g. Du *et al.*, 2010; Podnar and Golob, 2007; Webb and Mohr, 1998). However, the effect of CSR communication on mass media is still not analyzed. Only few authors (such as Du *et al.*, 2010, and most notably Morsing, 2003; 2006; 2008) point to the fact that getting positive media coverage from independent, unbiased news sources is something companies should strive for in their CSR communication, as it can greatly enhance a company's CSR associations and reputation. Even so, to date there has been no empirical investigation of the conditions under which CSR communication can lead to positive press coverage.

This paper overcomes this research gap by investigating the transfer of issue salience and issue-attribute salience from CSR press releases to media coverage. Conceiving PR activity as a (Second Level) Agenda Building process gives CSR communication a firm theoretical grounding (McCombs and Ghanem, 2001) and allows us to consider on which issues media coverage is generated as well as how these issues are presented. From a practitioners point of view, second-level agenda-building can offer a valuable means of defining and measuring PR effectiveness.

Design/methodology/approach

A total of 268 press releases of 11 companies were collected from company websites and a total of 435 news articles of 5 Dutch newspapers were collected from the LexisNexis database. Two types of contingency factors were taken into account: company characteristics (e.g. corporate reputation and CSR history, fit, and positioning) and message characteristics (emphasis of CSR fit and commitment and company motives). These contingency factors were derived from CSR (communication) theory and cause-related marketing literature and have proved to have effect on consumers.

In order to trace second level agenda building, we combined an inductive and qualitative content analysis with a deductive automated quantitative analysis. In the qualitative analysis, we determined which issues and issue attributes were mentioned in the press releases. In the quantitative analysis we used keyword-based techniques to trace these issues and attributes in the news coverage following these press releases. Descriptive and inferential statistics were then used to calculate the linkage between the press releases and news articles in terms of issues and issue attributes, and to measure the interaction effects of the contingency factors on this linkage.

Findings

Substantial effects have been found regarding the influence of contingency factors on the transfer of issue salience and issue-attribute salience from CSR press releases to media coverage. Moreover, it turned out that certain issues were more conducive to CSR agenda building than others. These results give a clear insight in how relevant concepts from cause-related marketing literature and CSR communication theory can be of effect, not only on consumers, but on the news media as well.

Originality/value

This paper empirically investigates the effects of CSR communication on press coverage, an understudied subject in CSR literature. It also provides a clear conceptualisation of CSR communication effectiveness in terms of second-level agenda-building.

A limited window and a limited range: corporations' published reputation response strategies on CSR topics in the news media

Craig Carroll and Sun Young Lee

Abstract

Purpose

This study examines how corporations defend their corporate social responsibility (CSR) reputations through a sample of letters to the editors of national and regional newspapers written in response to previously published news and opinion articles. We compare their results to those of a range of stakeholders also writing in about CSR topics.

Design/methodology/approach

Using a systematic sample of every 10th opinion piece featuring a publicly traded company, the study extracts letters to the editor and uses content analysis to examine 433-published letters in nine geographically-distributed U.S. national and regional newspaper over 25 years. We examined authorship (company representatives, think tanks, politicians, NGOs, professionals, labor unions, community groups, unaffiliated citizens, and pro-business voices), a comprehensive view of CSR topics (economic, ethical, legal, and philanthropic responsibilities), the news section of the originating content, and the window of time between the original content and the published response.

Research questions

Two research questions are:

1. How does the window of time between the original content and the published response differ by the type of authorship?
2. How does the news section of the originating content differ by the type of authorship?

Findings

Among 433 letters, 150 letters covered CSR topics. When they were analyzed to answer the research questions, the results showed that all authorships had 10-14 days of the window of time at average. It reveals that corporations were given a similar window of opportunity to respond to reputation threats through the news media, compared to window of time given by their stakeholders. When the news sections of originating content were examined, the news media were less inclined to publish criticism attacking front-page news coverage and letters to the editors by corporations, compared to their stakeholders, but corporations had almost an equal opportunity to criticize other pages including business pages.

Discussion

The study had some practical implications for corporations' strategic communications in CSR.

Originality/value

This study is the first study to examine companies' reputation response strategies published through letters to the editor, a common practice corporations engage in to reach their audiences through public discourse. We examine 25 years of the practice.

Reporting CSR, from rituality to accountability

Paolo D'Anselmi

Abstract

Key words

Reporting, Disclosure, Issue management, Accountability

Purpose

What is it that makes good reading of a CSR report? This is the question that is at the base of this paper. This is in the general realm of the quality of CSR and CSR reporting.

Design/methodology/approach

I have been reading and writing CSR reports for years. Of the ones I read, I wrote critiques. Of the ones I wrote, I listened to critiques of the others. In the end I am asking myself: what are the common denominators of my critiques and I have laid those down.

Findings

I have found that good CSR reporting obeys four values that make a process framework: unknown stakeholder, disclosure, implementation and micro-ethics. In the paper I decline each of them. I also develop a concept of CSR that is for all organizations and not only for private, for profit businesses.

Research limitations/implications

This kind of research is inherently subjective. The only way I see to cope with this is to make every single step and hypothesis explicit and open.

Practical implications

The process framework laid out here is a manual for CSR reporting.

Social implications

The emphasis on new values reveals new stakeholders of a potentially fruitful social conflict: workers subject to competition vs. workers non subject to competition. also the paper reveals the basic nonsense of many proprietary CSR indexes.

Originality/value

This paper focuses on one step that is at the base of many CSR surveys, but is never specified nor disclosed. The openness of method makes this paper falsifiable and therefore scientific.

Building Green Reputational Capital at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol

Loes Knotter

Abstract

Key words

Stakeholder management, CSR communication, Corporate social entrepreneurship, Green reputation management

Purpose

This paper shares reflections on how to use stakeholder management as an instrument to develop more powerful forms of Corporate Social Responsibility.

It provides a case description of the GROUND S, a stakeholder platform initiated by Schiphol Group. The platform resembles key elements of Corporate Social Entrepreneurship.

Design/approach

The paper provides a case description from an informed commentator point of view. On basis of a review of the Schiphol Group Annual Reports 1997-2010, and a number of policy documents and communications, it analyses the Airport strategy, including CSR-policy with a focus on climate and environmental policies. It assesses how CSR-drivers, business environment and strategic objectives of the Airport have shaped the the GROUND S-program.

Findings

Like many other companies, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol has expressed to aim at a 'double return': creating both financial and social/environmental value. the GROUND S has shaped a stakeholder approach based on negotiation around a well identified and defined insight of what is the Airport's interest. This approach implies other parties also pursue their interests. This paper shows that in order to be able to express non-financial value effectively, the platform should include the primary stakeholders' environmental concern. Also contributions to shared concerns on another system level than the Airport's domain should be valued.

Research implications

To understand how CSR resources are applied to the best effect it is important to be able to show CSR impact.

Practical implications

This paper shows an example of how stakeholder management, an essential CSR-communication instrument, is evolving from managing dialogue to value creation.

Originality/values

This paper provides a unique analysis of a stakeholder approach with the objective to co-generate value with other organisations on the Amsterdam Airport Schiphol's climate and environmental objectives.

Collapsed Buffer, Reputation, Instrumental CSR: Toyota's Crisis 2010

Nobuyuki Chikudate

Abstract

Purpose

This study analyzes why and how instrumental CSR communication failed to build a buffer during a corporate crisis by investigating Toyota's recall crisis in 2010.

Approach

The analysis is based on case study databases regarding Toyota, consisting of publicly available resources from the U.S. and Japan.

Findings

Toyota failed in the lead-up to its crisis in 2010. Toyota was suffering from pathologies of collective myopia/hyperopia. These pathologies interacted with malpractices at the cross-point where internal and external communication converges.

Originality/value

This study provides the field of CSR communication with a case for being reflexive about a certain CSR communication approach. It also proposes an analysis of certain pathologies of executives from the standpoint of phenomenology.

CSR communication in banking: How is it perceived by employees and customers?

Elisabeth Houe Thomsen

Extended abstract

This project focuses on how various financial institutions employ CSR communication – and on how this communication is perceived as a way of branding the business. I initially found it curious that the so-called social, civic or sustainable banks seemed to be less explicit in their CSR communication than the larger, conventional banks. I have often wondered why. Which factors might explain this difference? Is it 'green hushing' for fear of being accused of 'green washing' or just not considered necessary?

And how do we determine what might be considered CSR communication? Do we, as stakeholders, need to know words like CSR and sustainability to get a sense of whether a business is acting responsibly?

Purpose

The project aims at finding out how the two types of banks or financial institutions communicate CSR to stakeholders via their websites. (The individual banks will have a say in determining what subpages to focus on – namely those parts that they see as CSR communication.) This communication may – along with other means of communication – be a way of branding the business.

Using discourse analysis – in particular multimodal analysis – and communication analysis, my project will focus on semiotic differences found in terms of type of bank as well as cultural differences – between Denmark and the US – and between stakeholder groups.

The possible variables that the project will compare are differences in perception of CSR on both the part of

- employees vs. customer – their interests may be the same, but in a situation where say social responsibility communication on a website were to attract new employees or customers, these two stakeholder groups might look for different types of information on CSR – the employee may want to know how the bank says that it treats employees, whereas the customer may want to know if she can place her money in green investments,
- conventional vs. civic/sustainable banks – I expect the conventional banks to make explicit that they comply with rules and regulations and the civic/sustainable banks to focus more on cause communication
- and American vs. Danish employees and customers – according to Matten and Moon (2008) American businesses have traditionally been more explicit in their CSR communication than their European counterparts – however, European businesses are becoming increasingly explicit. There may be large cultural differences, but there may also be traits that transcend cultural variation.

Two types of banks will be represented. The two so-called social banks, Merkur <https://www.merkur.dk/> and New Resource Bank <https://www.newresourcebank.com/>, are represented by CEO Lars Pehrson and CEO Vincent Siciliano, respectively. The conventional (and also much larger) banks, Danske Bank <http://www.danskebank.dk/> and Bank of America <https://www.bankofamerica.com/> are represented by Head of Corporate Affairs Anne Melchiorson and CCO Ernesto Anguilla, respectively. Not surprisingly, the smaller banks are represented by their CEO, while the larger banks are represented by high ranking communications employees.

Design

The choice of method and design is not just based on theory but rather on considerations as to how to best explore whether there is a connection between how senders and receivers make sense of CSR communication.

The main aim of this project is to investigate how stakeholders make sense of various types of CSR information. Which rhetorical strategies, types of discourse, words, values, ideologies, effects and outcome do stakeholders associate with CSR as a branding/marketing tool and what effects do they attribute to different (rhetorical) approaches to communicating CSR?

I limit my focus to stakeholder perception using the following research questions:

- Which CSR markers in the discourse, text and social practice of the two types of banks determine stakeholders' perception of communication as CSR communication?
- What exactly do stakeholders recognize as elements of CSR communication?
- Do stakeholders make sense of CSR communication the way various banks intended them to?
- And does CSR communication influence stakeholder action – as to e.g. choice of bank, deciding on investments, etc?

Interviews with main contacts

Initially, I will interview the four representatives mentioned above to find out, what they see as CSR communication. I find it important that the participants have a say in what to analyze – especially as they may disagree with me. Furthermore, it may be relevant to know who determines what information to give on the website. Is it the CEO, the CCO, an internal expert of some kind or maybe even an external expert? (It is often difficult to determine who – in an organization – is responsible for website communication.)

Own analysis of specific parts of the websites

I will make my own analysis of the individual websites. (Knowing that it will be somewhat biased.) Based on this analysis it should be possible to determine what in particular to focus on when interviewing a few employees and customers from each bank.

Qualitative interviews – one-on-one

Employee and customer interviews will be conducted – preferably face-to-face for the sake of reporting on all semiotic aspects. A sample of at least 16 qualitative interviews to be transcribed should be a representative sample:

TABLE 1.

	DK	U.S.
Conventional bank	2 employees 2 customers	2 employees 2 customers
Civic bank	2 employees 2 customers	2 employees 2 customers

Text or content analysis

The website of each bank will be analyzed again based on the findings from the interviews – to find i.a. CSR markers, arguments and narrative structure. In addition, this project will explore persuasive appeals using Aristotle's three argumentative appeals: appeal to source credibility (ethos), appeal to reason (logos), and appeal to the audience's emotions (pathos).

Questionnaire – quantitative approach

Finally, a larger group of employees and customers (from the same banks or possibly just a random sample) will be presented with a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions regarding CSR. The aim of this questionnaire is to test if the markers that my qualitative interviews and text analysis have identified will be recognized and understood as such. I want to use a Lichten scale part of the questionnaire to determine both opinion and importance. (Strongly agree – strongly disagree, very important – not very important.) This questionnaire I want to send online to approx. 240 participants – 30 employees and 30 customers from each bank. (Or a random selection.) Considering the fact that there are two types of banks involved in this project, I will ask the participants about their motivation in relation to choice of bank. And I will ask them about the credibility of a number of conventional and civic/sustainable banks – so as to find out how the stakeholders see the banks in terms of branding and image. My hopes are that about 50% will in fact answer.

Theoretical consideration and theories to be used

"Theories are not meant to be 'master discourses' providing the keys to the kingdom," says Jay Lemke (Norris and Jones, 2005, p. 110). And like Lemke, I expect to use an eclectic approach with different theories – or tools as he calls them – and maybe even slightly adjust them.

In my analysis of websites, I have found that multimodal analysis is a necessary tool as in addition to text, elements such as photos, colors, graphics, page structure and composition influence our perception of website communication. There has to be "lexical cohesion between words and images" – to use Theo van Leeuwen's words (Ibid: 73). A curious

color example could for instance be: Merkur has chosen to use a pink/purple color on all webpages and even on the VISA cards they issue. This color has prompted staff in shops to ask whether it is actually a real VISA card!

Multimodal DA as described by Kress and van Leeuwen offers strata (to use a term known from Halliday's SFL) such a discourse, design, production and distribution – however not hierarchically stratified – to make meaning out of communication.

Where traditional linguistics focuses mainly on text, discourse analysis studies language use beyond the sentence boundary and analyses naturally occurring language use instead of invented examples with the aim of revealing socio-psychological characteristics of a person/persons rather than text structure. And that is precisely what makes DA relevant here. Text, images, color, etc. are interesting in themselves, but it is even more interesting to look into their effect.

I will analyze discourse by interviewing both senders and receivers. The fact that so-cial/civic/sustainable banks have had a tendency to not be quite as inclined to use specific and explicit CSR communication on e.g. websites can be seen as a struggle between discourse types. Conventional banks tend to be more explicit and have a longer history of displaying CSR communication.

In terms of coding, I will use the encoding/decoding model of media discourses developed by Stuart Hall. He sees the meaning of the text as located between its producer and the reader. The producer (encoder) frames (or encodes) meaning in a certain way, and the reader (decoder) decodes it differently according to his/her personal background. When the intended meaning is produced, it is followed by the medium of discourse, but "... at a certain point, however, the broadcasting structures must yield encoded messages in the form of a meaningful discourse" (Hall, 1980, p. 130). Through decoding, a 'new' version of meaning may be consistent with the 'original' one, or be in opposition to it; but most often it will be a result of negotiation.

I believe that DA as well as genre, rhetorical, semiotic and communication analysis will complement each other and offer a valid perspective for research into the perception of CSR in the banking industry.

Interdiscursivity is also at play. Not only may stakeholders be informed of the social responsibility of a given bank. This information also serves – I believe – as a way of branding the bank. As it becomes increasingly important to communicate social responsibility – this communication may also become a way of competing for customers.

By using Multimodal DA, I hope to find valuable information on what makes customers and other stakeholders recognize CSR communication as CSR communication. I do realize that the information that I might find is limited to what people are willing to tell me. So I will not be able to get 'behind' discourse in my search for explanations. Although I do not expect discourse analysis to hold all the answers to these questions, I expect to find valuable information on both stakeholder preferences and various bank communication practices.

I will analyze discourse by interviewing both senders and receivers. The fact that so-cial/civic/sustainable banks have had a tendency to not be quite as inclined to use specific and explicit CSR communication on e.g. websites can be seen as a struggle between discourse types. Conventional banks tend to be more explicit and have a longer history of displaying CSR communication.

Practical implications

It has been quite difficult to establish contact with Bank of America. They seem to be so electronically inclined that personal contact is close to impossible. I ended calling a local branch in New Jersey. They were very friendly and helpful – especially when they realized that the Denmark I was talking about was in fact not just a small town somewhere in one of the states. Bank of America, represented by Ernesto Anguilla, do not want me to interview customers and employees. Nevertheless, they would like to know, what I would want to ask, so I have not given up hope entirely.

Danske Bank, on the other hand, have asked if I would like to use their already existing customer pool/database to get in touch with customers. I make the assumption that these customers may be more interested in contributing to my research – but also that they may be more positively inclined than any random customer that I might interview. I hope to be able to account for these types of source of error.

Findings

Already my initial impression – that so-called social banks – were less explicit CSR communication may not be correct. New Resource Bank does apply traditional CSR communication. This could however be explained by Matten and Moon's findings that European businesses are generally less explicit than Northern American businesses in their CSR communication. This project is still in its initial phase, and my findings are limited to a subjective analysis of the websites of the four banks.

Other than that my findings are limited as I work only part time on my project. My somewhat unstructured findings so far have revealed that these web pages change – not surprisingly. Therefore I have decided to make monthly or quarterly screen dumps to keep track of these changes.

Originality

Karen Becker-Olsen *et al.* have investigated how CSR affects consumer behavior. Many organizations initiate CSR activities believing that this will affect consumers' motivation and perception of the organization, and that consumers will reward the organization for their support of social causes. However, according to Becker-Olsen *et al.* consumers may not blindly accept CSR initiatives as sincere actions. Research actually suggests that if consumers perceive the organization as being insincere they will punish the organization (Becker-Olsen *et al.*, 2005).

With this project, I hope to be able to look into stakeholder perception of CSR communication. A field which to my knowledge has not been intensely investigated. And with your help, I hope to fine tune this project while it is still in its initial phase.

Selling to the Unconvinced: Marketing Challenges for Socially Responsible Companies

Ingrid Davis

Abstract

Purpose

In order to provide the increasing number of companies who are now producing socially responsible products (SRP) with viable marketing concepts, it is essential to answer three research questions:

- To what extent are consumers interested in socially responsible companies and their products?
- What concepts has academia offered for the marketing of SRP?
- Which of the concepts discussed constitute viable grounds for the successful development of SRP-marketing strategies?

Methodology

What is needed to enhance our understanding of the complex social interaction in question is a qualitative inquiry into the research-based evidence available, an inductive analysis designed to discover patterns relevant to designing pertinent marketing strategies.

The approach chosen combines formative and summative evaluations of the existing research literature. It is summative (judgment oriented) in the sense that it discusses and evaluates the outcomes of the consumer research and marketing methodologies presented. These results provide the basis for the formative (developmental) purpose, i.e. the formulation of conditions for successful marketing strategies for SRP.

Findings

My findings show that a majority of consumers favour conventional product features and demonstrate low interest in SRP. Consumer research which states otherwise is revealed to be methodologically flawed.

Many classical marketing approaches are shown to be unsuitable because they fail to take into account this widespread lack of consumer interest and/or focus on consumer features irrelevant to marketing SRP.

Finally, it is shown that developing viable SRP marketing strategies must be based on an interpretive paradigm which takes into account the social complexities of consumption and the actual situation of mainstream consumers. Pivotal points for the concrete development of new marketing strategies will be presented.

Research limitations

In a qualitative analysis 100% objectivity is impossible, therefore constant self-reflexivity and guarding against bias are essential. Formulating clear criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of research and open-mindedness during the whole process of analysis as well as a consistent use of the same set of analytical questions were successful measures to guarantee as objective a qualitative analysis as possible.

Originality/value/practical implications*

The paper makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing academic debate. Rather than offering yet another small scale empirical study, it provides explanations why the results of consumer research as a whole do not paint a correct picture of the motivations for ethical consumption and systematically presents reasons why classical marketing approaches frequently prove unsuitable. The emphasis on finding explanations for a complex social phenomenon rather than producing a set of figures implying simple linear causation through a small empirical study or a quantitative meta-analysis, makes it possible to arrive at clear results which open up many avenues for future research. At the same time, it will also allow practitioners access to this particular debate and provide them with concepts they will find useful in their work.

5. MARKETING, COMMUNICATION AND CONSUMER ASPECTS OF CSR

Manipulating message variables for best practice in advertising corporate social responsibility: Results from an experimental study

Alan Pomering, Lester W Johnson, and Gary Noble

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine best practice for framing of CSR information in a consumer-targeted advertising context. We report on the findings of an experimental study in which two key message variables of CSR advertising, Social Topic Information (STI) and CSR Commitment (CSRCI), are manipulated in order to test the resulting effects on skepticism to the firm's message claims.

Design

The study is a 3 (social topic information: low vs. moderate vs. high) x 3 (CSR commitment: low vs. moderate vs. high), between-subjects experimental design, involving a final sample of 417 participants, representative of the national adult population in a large western market.

Findings

While Social Topic Information was found to provide a degree of contextualisation of a firm's CSR achievement claims CSR Commitment Information was found to have a more significant impact on inhibition of scepticism toward these claims. Research limitations: The results of this study are limited by the testing of just two CSR advertising message variables, though these are argued to be important message variables for communicating CSR achievement, concentration on one product category, the use of an unfamiliar brand and conduct of the study in just one geographic region.

Practical implications

For marketing communications and brand managers, the implications of this study are useful, but represent a departure from the typical rhetoric-based advertising or branding communications approaches that tend to be low on detail that consumers find informative.

Social implications

The more positive marketplace response to socially responsible companies is an important phenomenon for business and market performance. Responsible consumption can alter the direction of product attributes, markets and even economies. Support for more socially responsible businesses will engender enhanced societal business outcomes. Effective communication of CSR is a critical element of this process.

Originality/value

The use of advertising to communicate CSR initiatives is a key tool of corporate identity projection. To date, no research has examined how consumer scepticism to such claims might be inhibited using advertising message variables. This study has implications for theory and practice for the effective communication of pro-social achievements, but also calls for further research in this area.

Skepticism in CSR Advertisements

Francisca Farache

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Advertisements, Substantial information

Purpose

The aim of the present paper is to make a contribution to CSR communication theory by investigating the level of substantial information provided in CSR print advertisements in the UK and Brazil.

Methodology

The paper evaluates CSR advertisements using textual analysis.

Findings

The empirical evidence demonstrates that companies provide a low level of substantial information when advertising CSR.

Originality/value

The paper provides empirical evidence as to the extent that corporations use substantial information in their advertisements.

The role of CSR in preventing consumer switching intentions

Urša Golob and Klement Podnar

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Corporate reputation, Trust, Switching intention, Consumer switching costs

Purpose

The financial services sector is, despite recent scandals, still perceived as an important pillar of modern capitalist economies, performing core financial and economic functions. Thus, there is a need that financial services companies such as banks are perceived as socially responsible by their customers. This plays an important role in maintaining relationships with customers. The purpose of this paper is to explain how relational constructs in banking services (such as CSR, reputation and trust) influence consumer switching intentions by taking into the account transactional, service level switching costs.

Design/methodology/approach

The approach takes the form of survey research. The research was conducted on customers of the biggest Slovenian bank. The hypotheses will be tested on 236 customers. The analysis will be based on descriptive statistics and multi-variate statistics.

Findings

Preliminary results indicate a positive influence of CSR and corporate reputation on trust. The results also show that trust, beside customer transactional switching costs, has a significant influence on consumer switching intentions.

Practical implications

Paper presents empirical evidence of the value of corporate marketing constructs and brings attention to the relational aspects. It signals to the banks why it is important to invest in CSR and reputation initiatives to enhance trust instead of preliminary focusing on transactional aspects of switching costs of their services.

Originality/value

The paper addresses the arguments found in the CSR literature that research on consumer trust as a CSR performance variable still lacks. In addition, industry wide CSR initiatives that involve banks and which seek to engage with CSR systematically within the financial services sector are fairly recent. This is one of the very few papers that provide empirical insights on the influence of 'corporate marketing' variables on consumer retention.

The strategic character of CSR: the role of Communication

Rob van der Rijt, Hans Hoeken, and Tinie Kardol

Extended abstract

Key word

CSR, Communication, Marketing

Introduction

Taking social responsibility is a hot item. According to the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) website Netherlands (www.mvonederland.nl), created by the Department of Economic Affairs, the number of SMEs that engage in social corporate responsibility increases, the government buys more and more sustainably and pension funds focus on CSR when investing. One of the social responsibilities that an organisation can take is the so-called philanthropic responsibility. Other than what the term philanthropic suggests, taking this kind of responsibility can also increase the strategic position of a company. In this article we claim that the use (or the lack of) communication is the determining factor in judging whether philanthropic responsibility is either altruistic, or egocentric by nature.

Defining CSR

In discussing CSR, one often discusses the three dimensions People, Planet and Profit (the triple-P bottom line) in accordance with Elkington's research (1999). These three dimensions show that, besides the creation of Profit, companies also need to take their social responsibility (People) and their ecological (Planet) responsibility. CSR is the search for a balance between these three Ps, in order to offer future generations the same possibilities for development as the current generation.

Caroll (1999) gives another perspective to CSR. He focuses on the type of responsibilities, rather than the different domains of responsibility. Caroll distinguishes economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. Economic responsibility refers to the profit making production and sale of products and services. Legal responsibility refers to acts that are in accordance with the laws, rules and regulations of the (international) community. Ethical responsibility means acting in accordance to currently acceptable norms in society, i.e. the unwritten rules of socially acceptable interaction. These rules are unwritten and legally not binding, but society – of which the organisation is a part – expects companies to follow these rules. It is for example expected in the Netherlands that organisations do not make use of child labour while producing goods and offering services. The fourth responsibility is the so-called philanthropic responsibility. This type of responsibility indicates to what extent an organisation contributes – discretionary and voluntarily – to an improvement of society, without explicitly expecting something in return. Examples are the training of the long term unemployed, so as to improve their employment perspectives and also the donation of money or goods to charities. ABN-AMRO Bank for example, supports the Child Peace Prize and TNT Express supports the World Food Program in order to contribute to peace initiatives and the solving of the world food problem respectively. An organisation's economic continuity does not depend on its taken philanthropic responsibilities. The expenditure on these kinds of initiatives seems even to be detrimental to higher profits. Also, it is not a legal obligation, nor is it ethically expected (yet) for an organisation to support society on its own accord. Yet Caroll notices that these seemingly altruistic initiatives have increasingly strategic motives. In this article we claim that it is the use of communication about these kinds of philanthropic activities that determines whether or not they are altruistic or egocentric by nature.

CSR's strategic nature

Schuyt (2001, p. 15) defines philanthropy as 'The voluntarily made contributions (by means of money, goods and time) to public causes with the prime intention to improve the communal interest'. When an organisation by taking its philanthropic responsibility solely intends to serve the communal interest, we can speak of support of an altruistic nature. According to Schuyt and Hoff (1997) this is the case for donations; the donor does not expect any explicit compensation for its gifts.

However, Caroll (1999) indicates that taken philanthropic responsibilities are – more often than before – of a strategic

nature. This conviction is shared by managers who made judgements about the financial support of charities by enterprises (Saiia *et al.*, 2003). Research by Moir and Taffler (2004) into 60 British enterprises and their motivation to donate to arts-affiliated activities, shows that each enterprise primarily mentions advantages for their own organisation, such as an improvement of their reputation.

Donating to a cause that complements the company's own brand values, mission and goals, can improve the company's strategic positioning (Simmons and Becker-Olsen, 2006). Organisations with a good reputation can – on top of that – demand higher prices for their products than their competitors and they have better access to the financial market and a greater appeal for investors (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990, p. 233). So taking philanthropic responsibility can improve a company's strategic position. For example, TNT's contribution to the United Nations' World Food Program has been so widely discussed – orally and on paper – that it contributes to TNT's positive reputation and brand recognition.

When a corporation takes philanthropic responsibility for strategic reasons, in order to meet egocentric company targets, the responsibility loses its altruistic nature. Communication plays an important role in judging where we can place the taken philanthropic responsibility on the continuum from Altruism to Egocentrism.

The role of communication

The clearest example of a philanthropic activity of an altruistic nature is the anonymous donation. As anonymous gifts do not involve any form of communication, the donating organisation does not have the opportunity to influence its stakeholders in order to improve for example its reputation or brand recognition.

Sometimes the donor implicitly expects a favour in return for its donation. It expects for example that its brand or logo is shown on the beneficiary's website, that its brand name is mentioned in speeches or is printed in a brochure or in a programme. As soon as a corporation implicitly expects communication, or uses communication as a way to promote its philanthropic responsibility, it is always used as a way to positively influence its stakeholders' perception of the corporation (Hooghiemstra, 2000, p. 55; Morsing and Schulz, 2006, p. 323).

By using communication about the taken philanthropic responsibility, the strategic motivation becomes operative. When a corporation organises a charity day for its personnel – making them wear colourful, recognisable overalls with the corporation's logo on it – than this day is used as a means to show stakeholders that the company is doing a good deed. Depending on the donor's communication possibilities, the taken philanthropic responsibility of a purely altruistic nature, then changes into support of a more egocentric nature (Schuyt and Hoff, 1997, p. 76).

A donation changes into sponsoring when there is a contract between the sponsor and the beneficiary, stating that in return for the donation the sponsor's (brand) name will be externally communicated. As an example we can use the insurance company AEGON. AEGON, in its role as Ajax's new principal sponsor – wants to appear with its brand name on the Ajax's players' t-shirts. The sponsoring as such does no longer fall within the spheres of philanthropic responsibility, as there is a deliberate contribution – by legal contract – to the donor's strategic position. By doing so, an economic, rather than a philanthropic responsibility has been met. In Elkington's triple-P approach (People – Planet – Profit) sponsoring has also been defined as an activity that falls under the heading 'Profit, that is, under a corporation's economic dimension (Van Tulder and Van der Zwart, 2003, p. 80).

Monitoring communication

In case a corporation uses its own communication instruments, such as adverts, brochures or TV-adverts, to promote philanthropic responsibility, it has control over the form and the content of its messages. The text's layout, word choice and included photo material can therefore be adapted to the corporation's house style, that way strengthening the company's corporate image. A stronger corporate image can ensure that the mission and brand values are more consistently communicated to the stakeholders, so as to improve the corporation's strategic position (Van Riel, 1996). As part of its CSR-policy, the Rabobank founded the Rabobank Foundation. With money, expertise and experience this Foundation supports other cooperative microfinance institutions in developing countries. The bank broadcasted TV-commercials and placed adverts in magazines to inform its target audience about the support of those microfinance institutions. By communicating about its taken philanthropic responsibility, the bank could strengthen its existing position as 'a bank with a difference'.

A corporation can also exercise 'shared' control on its communication, by developing the communication together with the beneficiary stakeholder. By realising the communication about a philanthropic activity together, for example by publishing a joint press release, or by co-writing an article in a journal, it is possible to better adapt the communication to

the preferences of the target audience (Morsing and Schultz, 2006, p. 328). Messages about taken social responsibility are more credible to the general public when they are communicated by an independent source (Van der Rijt *et al.*, 2007). Although in this way a corporation has less control over the content of the communication, it does not necessarily mean that it negatively affects its strategic position. By realising the communication together, this 'shared' control is less strategic in nature than in the case the corporation is the sole decision maker on the communication's content and form.

Instead of 'shared control', an organisation can also choose for 'partial' control. It does so, when it decides to give the medium – by which its message is communicated - control over the way in which the message is delivered. For example, when a corporation sends out a press release, it is dependent on the medium that chooses to distribute the press release for the format of the publication.

In extreme cases, a corporation might not have any control over the communication of a particular donation. In this case the corporation will let the beneficiary take all the decisions related to the communication. As the corporation does not have any control over the communication, it is impossible to decide beforehand whether or not the communication complements the corporation's mission or position. Such a donation is therefore the least strategic by nature.

Conclusion

The amount of communication about a taken philanthropic responsibility and the control over form and content of that communication are criteria by which one can determine what the nature is of that taken responsibility. The less is being communicated about this responsibility, the more altruistic the responsibility is and the more the communal interest is valued over the corporation's own benefits. If, on the other hand, the media is actively involved in communicating a taken philanthropic responsibility and the corporation is the one who decides on the form and content of the communication, this is done with the aim to improve the corporation's brand recognition, reputation or positioning.

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Reconfiguring Corporate Communication as Research Object and Interdisciplinary Field

Eleftheria Lekakis

Abstract

Key words

Corporate culture, Political communication, Global policies, Neoliberalism

Originality/value

A series of arguments have been voiced in relation to the definition of corporate communication as a discipline (Argenti, 1996; Carroll, 1998; Cornelissen, 2011). However, these are not in tune with an overarching understanding of the significance of corporate communications within a political economy, social, and cultural approach. The rising political role of corporations within the global civic society necessitates their examination as such.

Purpose

My purpose here is to evaluate corporate communication as a research object in relation to its different aspects and to argue that it should develop as an interdisciplinary field informed by both the sciences based on a consideration of the social world (political science, sociology, communication, anthropology, economics) as well as the sciences based on a consideration of the economic world (business, management, finance, marketing and organisational studies). In this sense, ethical issues around corporate responsibility are discussed in terms of the political connotations of the scope of the field of corporate communications.

Methodology/approach

This is an agenda-setting paper which examines different aspects of corporate communication such as image and identity, corporate advertising, media relations, financial communications, employee relations, corporate philanthropy, government relations and crisis communications (Argenti, 1996) in relation to the wider social and political transformations such as the development of new media and the centrality of neoliberal capitalism. By examining how different subfields of corporate communication can be furthered through research, I illuminate different types of approaches which could advance our understanding of corporate communication as a research field.

Argument/findings

In this paper, I argue that corporate communication should be developed as an interdisciplinary field and that we need to reapply our research lenses with a different focus on the notions of effect and benefit, as a purely business, managerial, or organisational approach tend to interpret these notions in a functionalist manner and in relation to the corporation, rather than within a broader social and political framework. In particular, certain subfields such as media relations (communications between corporations and the media), or government relations (communications between corporations and governments) can be informed from critical political economy approaches of communication which would look at the institutional relations between corporations and the media or governments beyond an organisational doctrine that stresses the utility or purpose of these communications. Moreover, employee relations (communications between corporations and their employees) are further understood by anthropological or sociological studies of precarious employment in flexible capitalism. The significance of the social sciences is crucial to the development of the field.

Practical and social implications

The paper proposes the reconsideration of the academic field of corporate communication in such a way that it is informed by sciences of both social and economic focus. The social implications of this paper concern the ethical disposition of the corporation as a powerful institutional entity within a global matrix of public or private institutional to institutional, but also institutional to individual relations and communications.

A management-oriented approach towards CSR branding

Carsten Baumgarth and Lars Binckebanck

Abstract

Key words

CSR brand management, Gap analysis, Conceptual framework, Construction industry, Real-estate industry

Purpose

To develop a model of brand management specifically for CSR brands, i.e. brands that integrate CSR elements at the core of their brand values to credibly differentiate themselves from the competition, and to perform a qualitative evaluation of the model's functionality by applying it to five case studies that cover the value chain in the construction and real estate industry in Germany.

Design/methodology/approach

Based on a comprehensive literature review of CSR-related brand effects and brand management approaches, a definition of CSR brand management was derived as well as a set of success factors for CSR brands. The findings have then been used to develop, based on the work of Hatch and Schultz (2008), a proposal for a new model of CSR brand management. In order to verify the model's functionality, five in-depth case studies have been carried out.

Findings

CSR brand management is a systematic process to develop associations in the minds of a company's relevant stakeholders that are differentiating, preference-inducing and ecologically as well as socially oriented. A corresponding and functional model should include five elements: the company's intended positioning, the values shared as part of the company's culture, the actual internal as well as external behaviour of the company, the external stakeholder communication, and potential gaps between these dimensions. From a management point of view, the gap analysis is of particular interest because the success of CSR brands relies on the minimization of four possible types of gaps: the anchoring gap, the experience gap, the implementation gap, and the credibility gap. The case study research undertaken as part of this paper suggests that the model is functional in a descriptive (practical phenomena can be structured), explanatory (causal link between model dimensions and company performance) and technological (support of managers in CSR branding) sense.

Research limitations/implications

The case study approach is qualitative in nature and is not sufficient to come to representative findings. The paper can therefore only provide a conceptual framework and some limited evidence of its relevance.

Practical implications

The paper identifies controllable variable elements of CSR brands that are critical to their effective management and offers insights into the complex internal processes and external environment of real-life cases.

Social implications

Greenwashing is a common problem in today's business and threatens to diminish the overall credibility of the CSR idea. If CSR is to provide social as well as ecological benefits AND competitive advantage, CSR aspects have to be taken to the brand level of companies and from there, they have to be implemented using a holistic management approach.

Originality/value

While there is quite a lot of literature dealing with CSR in general, there is comparatively little knowledge on CSR brands. This paper offers new conceptual insights into the matter, and it is the first to systematically investigate the mechanisms of CSR brands in the German construction and real estate industry.

CSR communication: a new field of study for organizational communication and public relations scholars

Vivian P. B. Smith, Luiz Peres-Neto, and Margarida M. K. Kunsch

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Corporate reputation, Integrated communication, Organizational communication, Public relations, Stakeholder engagement

Corporations already consider CSR communication a key element when addressing social responsibility challenges, predominantly the management of stakeholder relations. In the other hand, communication scholars are recently including CSR issues into their research projects. Could we affirm that there is a new field of study being created?

The purpose of this paper is to present the evolution of CSR theory into communication research and the interfaces proposed by scholars. A bibliometric study was developed by assessing articles from two communication scientific journals, from January 2005 to December 2010. The content analyses focused on constructs organized by Waddock: roots concepts - corporate citizenship (CC), corporate responsibility (CR), corporate social performance (CSP) and stakeholder theory; and other definitions - corporate community relations and corporate reputation. The construct sustainability (containing the terms business sustainability and sustainable development) was also included, since its importance for the environmental communication field. Quantitative analyses were primarily completed, regarding the frequency of constructs. After that, qualitative analyses evaluated the following variables regarding theory perspectives: CSR, organizational communication, public relations, and environmental communication and stakeholder theories.

The findings showed an increasing movement of integrating CSR theory into communication research in the last five years. The mechanistic perspective of communication remains dominant. It means communication serves the company to reach its CSR goals and it is focused on organizational efficacy.

CSR Communication across the globe: A comparison of stakeholders in India and the Netherlands

Brigitte Planken, Catherine Nickerson, and Subrat Sahu

Extended abstract

Key words

CSR, Communication, Emerging economies, CSR platforms, CSR pyramid, Stakeholder engagement

Purpose

To investigate consumer responses to CSR in a developed and emerging economy (the Netherlands and India).

Methodology/approach

Survey of 95 consumers in each country to investigate attitudes to CSR platforms and CSR initiatives and responses to CSR-based marketing strategies (in terms of attitude to the company and purchasing intent).

Findings

Similar attitudes across nationalities to both CSR platforms and CSR initiatives, with greater importance assigned to CSR reflecting legal and ethical (rather than philanthropic) concerns. (Some) CSR-based marketing strategies, reflecting an ethical (people/planet) concern, led to significantly more positive attitudes to the company and higher purchasing intent. Some cross-cultural variation in the extent to which different CSR-based marketing strategies influenced consumer outcomes.

Research limitations/implications

Exploratory study, limited to highly educated consumers. The study provides indications that stakeholder expectations in emerging and developed economies may be more similar than previously suggested. The philanthropic platform conventionally pursued in Indian business may not be the most effective way to engage (all segments of) Indian consumers. Findings suggest it is important that companies monitor stakeholders' CSR attitudes to ensure that CSR policy orientations meet stakeholder expectations.

Originality/value

Innovative approach to investigate responses to CSR policy and communications. CSR research on emerging economies is underrepresented in the literature. The findings suggest areas of further enquiry with implications for global business.

The role of consumer empowerment in CSR online communication. A case study

Carmella Tuccillo, Alfonso Siano, Agostino Vollero, and Silvia Cosimato

Abstract

Key words

CSR, CSR 2.0, Social media, CSR communication, Social responsiveness

Purpose

A new approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been emerging in response to growing socio-economic concerns and to overcoming stakeholders' scepticism to CSR communication. The main objectives of the paper are to illustrate the evolution of CSR by describing its different stages and to identify unused potentials of social media for CSR communication.

Design/methodology/approach

This study draws together the relevant literature on social responsibility in order to analyze the transition from CSR to CSR 2.0. The paper uses a case study approach to point out the new potential of social media for CSR communication. The Monte dei Paschi di Siena (MPS) case study is based on an interview with the CSR manager, and the analysis of MPS most used social media.

Findings

The paper shows opportunities/risks of social media usage and suggests how to ensure organizational legitimacy in CSR context. The MPS case study shows the growing importance of social media for stakeholders involvement in CSR initiatives.

Research limitations/implications

The study is limited by the analysis of a single case study. Furthermore, the use of interactive media in a CSR 2.0 perspective can help organizations to gain an increasing "corporate social responsiveness". This may imply new practices and research challenges concerning CSR 2.0 communication.

Originality/value

This paper offers a new perspective on CSR communication in the context of social media using new communication tools in order to encourage stakeholder engagement in CSR initiatives.

6. STRATEGIC ISSUES OF CSR AND COMMUNICATION

What is and how to measure CSR communication? An international and intercultural perspective

Stefan Jarolimek

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Communication, Journalism, Russia, Germany, USA

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to investigate basic needs of definition and methodology from CSR communication. The aim is to describe a framework of analysis for CSR communication in different countries.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper outlines CSR communications as latent construct in organizational communications as well as in journalism. It proposes an approach of multi-case-study for systematic analysis. As a first case example, the paper evaluates CSR communications from and about Deutsche Bank in different cultures: USA, Russia and Germany. CSR-reports, political and business newspapers were analyzed following the outlined concept.

Findings

CSR communication is rare in journalism. The proposed approach is expedient to find CSR communication but also extremely time-consuming.

Originality/value

The paper outlines criteria for an analytical CSR definition and takes a look at mostly neglected CSR communications in journalism.

The Scope and the limit for development of corporate social responsibility in the Baltic States as a strategy of corporate communication

Kaja Tampere

Abstract

Purpose

The systematic examination of the current state of the CSR development from the perspective of corporate communication and consumers will give benefit the overall understanding of what is the role and value of CSR in Baltic States. The study aims to define the current point of the CSR development with its characteristics, qualities, perspectives and tendencies. This would further enhance the understanding of future perspectives – scopes and limitations – for the CSR development in Baltic States.

Design/methodology/approach

The empirical study uses a survey questionnaire as a research instrument. The survey took place during February – March 2010. The sample of the study is opinion elite in Baltic States.

Findings

A study will give an insight into the present and future tendencies of the development of CSR. It will also give a perspective for corporate communication practitioners about CSR and how it works in post-communist society as a strategy for organizational communication and reputation building.

Practical and social implications

“All business in a democratic country begins with the public’s permission and exists by public approval,” wrote one of the first public relations experts Arthur W. Page from AT&T back in the beginning in the beginning of last century. Present research gives a practical and social implication because it studies the opinion and attitude of opinion elite who can be and who quite often are important opinion leaders in the society, also potential stakeholders and customers of any company. Knowledge about attitude of opinion leaders can help organizations to build up their business strategy and also their strategy for corporate communication.

Originality/value

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a comparatively new term in Baltic States business vocabulary. The value of the present study is the customer approach. The study examines stakeholders’ attitudes in Baltic States towards CSR activities of companies. Thus the study gives a valuable insight to all who would like to do business in the Baltic States, and more practically for managers and communication practitioners into the minds and attitudes of their possible target audience. The aim of this paper is to consider the question about the morality of conspicuous communication of CSR practices. Though it seems a plausible activity the CSR communications might be misunderstood by various stakeholder groups as an unnecessary bragging. The paper is intending to shed an additional light into this too rarely debated subject.

Public Relations Strategies in the Implementation of CSR Programs in Petrochemical- Mining MNCs in Indonesia

Rizaldi Parani

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Strategic planning, Community development, Social capital

This paper intends to discuss strategies used by public relations practitioners in petrochemical and mining MNCs in Indonesia in their social empowerment programs. The basis for the selection of the topic is the tenuous relations between these corporations and communities living around their operations areas, which have the potential for prolonged conflict. The study uses a qualitative approach using a case study as a method. The study focuses on the implementation of the strategic planning in community empowerment of two major petrochemical and mining MNC operating in Indonesia, namely Freeport Indonesia and Total Exploration and Production Indonesia. Data collection is done by using in-depth interview with representatives from two corporations and also some newspaper articles.

Result of this study show that the community empowerment programs developed tend to focus on the interest of corporation, particularly Freeport Indonesia, and have not given adequate attention to the empowerment of the Mimika people. This seems to allow potential conflict as the works nature of Mimika people are still rely on their environment. On the other hand, Total Exploration and Production Indonesia has developed more comprehensive strategy as they have built strong and close relationship with local authorities before they conduct the program.

Community empowerment programs are important not only for the relations between the corporation and the society, but also for regional development. Thus, PR practioners need to develop appropriate approaches based in consultation, collaboration and negotiation with the community. At the end, the relationship between corporations and community must be based on trustworthiness in order to make the program sustainable and durable.

This study is limited by its qualitative methodology, which does not allow making generalizations, especially with the different characteristic of the society, culture and region where the community empowerment programs are implemented. As a result CSR programs, particularly community empowerment programs cannot be directly transplanted to another region having different characteristics.

Role of Human Relations in CSR: Evidence from the Lebanese Context

Ali El Dirani

Abstract

Purpose

Drawing on qualitative data collected from four organizations from the Lebanese context, the main purpose of this paper is to highlight the role that the HR department can assume in CSR and how it contributes to the success of CSR definition and implementation. This paper aims also to critically reflect on HR's contribution into CSR and the strategic outcome benefits of this contribution in addition to defining the factors hampering the role of HR in CSR. Concluding remarks and necessity for future research into this topic will be presented at the end of the paper.

Design/methodology/approach

The nature of this investigation is qualitative adopting the case study methodology to offer the researcher an opportunity to focus attention on topics relevant to the enquiry and objectives of the research. The case study method offers the researcher an excellent opportunity to learn how to apply interpretive research. Also, integrating empirical findings and data with theoretical context makes the case study theoretical propositions offered in the final report on findings more relevant and valid when tangled with empirical evidences.

Findings

Cross case analysis examining the convergence and divergence in relation to the role of HR in CSR across four organizations from the Lebanese context unveiled interesting insights. An investigation into the domains within which the organizations from the Lebanese sample understand, implement and evaluate their CSR initiatives and activities suggests that CSR is solely understood and practiced within the philanthropic domains of CSR. In relation to the role of HR in CSR, the findings revealed variety where in some organizations it is assuming strategic and change agent role with long-term focus compared to Ad hoc administrative transactional role with short-term focus in other organizations. The findings also highlighted the factors affecting HR's role in CSR. The findings unveiled that none of the organizations evaluate the outcome benefits of the role of HR in CSR.

Originality/value

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is rapidly evolving concept and it is no longer limited to the organizations' fulfillment of their legal and economic responsibilities, but also going beyond compliance and investing more into human capital and the relations with stakeholders. Parallel to the development in the field of CSR, HR is already involved in communicating ideas, implementing policies and managing changes across the organization. The crucial commonalities clearly overlap between CSR and HR whereby the role of HR is increasingly linked and necessary in taking greater responsibility and initiative regarding CSR policies, practices and activities. The topic concerning the role of HR in CSR as tackled in this paper is timely and novel since the debate on the CSR-HR affiliations and how to institute CSR and translate CSR values into organizational actions and process is recently emerging. Thus, it is timely and useful to reflect upon HR's expanding leadership role in CSR strategy and implementation.

A review of CSR communication research: management and marketing approaches

Anne-Ellerup Nielsen and Christa Thomsen

Abstract

Purpose

This review maps the rapidly growing body of research in the CSR communication field. It critically evaluates the research from a corporate communication perspective.

Design/methodology/approach

Following an introduction on the emergence and foundations of CSR communication, the review is structured in three main parts, based on the approaches outlined in the field. First, the paper examines the concept of CSR communication. Second, the paper reviews the concepts of strategic and operative CSR communication, which have been adopted widely within the CSR communication literature and relates these concepts to the concepts of management and marketing communication, including CSR management and marketing communication in specific contexts. It attends to the call for CSR communication research to develop and substantiate outcomes that may better explain or inform CSR communication strategies and practices. The paper concludes with a summation of the current state of the field and some recommendations on how to take CSR communication research a step forward.

Findings

First, a typology of a number of possible domains for CSR communication research is developed, based on the way the different studies conceptualize the communication. Second, the review maps the various concepts of communication that informs the CSR communication field (e.g. identification, credibility and consistency) and outlines avenues for future research. Third, a number of categories of outcomes are found within existing empirical studies (licence to operate, commitment, competitiveness, etc.), and an agenda for building upon this evidence is advanced.

Originality/value

The paper contributes with a review of the literature within the field of CSR communication which is original in that until date, there exists no review within this field focusing on management and marketing approaches to strategic and operative CSR communication.

The Pseudo-Panopticon: The Illusion Created by CSR-Related Transparency and the Internet

Timothy Coombs and Sherry Holladay

Abstract

Key words

CSR, CSR reporting, Panopticon, Transparency

Purpose

The paper examines how the concept of transparency is being used to sell people on a modern panopticon for insuring responsible corporate behaviour. With transparency, corporations create the impression that they are revealing their inner working to the world. Moreover, people believe that the online world lays corporate actions open to their inspection, even if a corporation seeks to conceal them. People believe that if a corporation is irresponsible, that act will be known and punished. In a sense the Internet is the structure of the panopticon because it is what allows people to “see” inside the corporation. We will explore why people believe transparency is a way to insure responsible social behaviour from corporations as well as the potentially negative effects of this pseudo-panopticon. The paper looks behind the discourse of CSR-related transparency to reveal it as a pseudo-panopticon that breeds dangers in society.

Design/approach/methodology

This conceptual paper explores the meaning of transparency in relation to CSR. The meaning of transparency in the realm of CSR serves as a core concern. The paper explores how the concepts can operate in concert to construct the pseudo-panopticon.

Findings

The pseudo-panopticon allows corporations to claim they are transparent in their CSR communication and for constituents to accept that claim. Transparency becomes equated with disclosing large quantities of CSR-related information. Constituents believe the Internet allows them to see every move a corporation makes. Surely any “washing” or irresponsible behaviour will be exposed for all to see. In reality, the Internet is not a panopticon. First, there are still corporate activities that are hidden from view. Second, exposing erroneous or misleading CSR information on the Internet does not mean others will see it or be moved by it. The reality is that a minority of activist constituents bear the burden of insuring true transparency by questioning what a corporation does or does not disclose. The activists sift through the CSR disclosures to verify accuracy and completeness. Can we trust the information? Is it really the information we need to evaluate the CSR efforts? The paper ends by considering the challenges the pseudo-panopticon creates for the senders and receivers of CSR messages.

Social implications

Transparency is a process and fails if activists cannot make other constituents aware of and care about any CSR shortcomings. Transparency as a process requires the motivation to take action in order to insure accountability for the CSR information corporations provide. The challenge is to find ways to make transparency as a process work in a world where apathy and self-deception, in part facilitated by the pseudo-panopticon, work against the process.

Originality/value

We build on the existing idea that transparency is a process by developing its social implications for CSR communication. The result is a novel approach to CSR and transparency that contributes to other critical voices concerned about the value and effects of CSR communication.

Responsible Communication: From Communications Management to Responsibility Management

Gabriele Faber-Wiener

Extended abstract

Key words

Responsible communication, Responsible management, New definition of CSR communication, Discourse based communication

Purpose

To widen the definition, scope and consequently the importance that CSR Communication has in the academic and practical field of CSR. This has consequences for all actors and stakeholders in the field of CSR as well as for the Communications and PR industry where CSR is being considered a major market for the future.

Design/methodology/approach

- Analysis of existing patterns of CSR Communication in the literature as well as in practice
- Interviews with Communication and CSR experts (active and witnessing experts)
- Description of a new, comprehensive approach to CSR (Responsible Management) and
- Construction of a new position for CSR Communication (Responsible Communication)
- Development of criteria for responsible communication

This will also be the issue of my Master Thesis for Steinbeis University as well as part of a new handbook on CSR that will be published in Germany and Austria at the end of the year.

Findings

The definition and scope of CSR communication is presently very narrow. It is in most cases limited to three areas: (external) communication of CSR policies and strategies with a very strong and US-dominated focus on Corporate Social Philanthropy and Corporate Citizenship, some aspects of Stakeholder Management and some special communication tools such as CSR-Reporting.¹

This does not only lead to a very one-sided understanding of CSR in the public – it also reflects the position that CSR Communication has in the CSR discussion, both academically and practically: It is rather weak and superficial.² Presently CSR Communication mostly comes at the end of the CSR process and has – except for some part in Stakeholder Management – no substantial role or power.

Some companies even hesitate to communicate, out of negative experiences or fear of attracting negative responses. This relates to the fact that CSR communication is in most cases still based on one-way communication, with a strong focus on information instead of two-way symmetric communication or even discourse-based communication.³

This originates not just from a narrow view of communication that has forgotten the basics of PR and its ethical principles but it comes also from a very narrow view of CSR which is being perceived mostly as Corporate Citizenship (or even Corporate Social Philanthropy) instead of CSR in the meaning of Corporate Social Rectitude⁴ or – as it is called recently – Responsible Management.

Responsible Management is Management based on Ethics and Discourse and includes not just all areas of business but starts with ethical reflections of business decisions.

This wider scope of defining CSR should be reflected in a new definition of CSR Communication:

From CSR Communication to Responsible Communication on all levels of business

Responsible Communication is based on three pillars:⁵

1. Value-based communication style as a core of the company

This includes the active use of management instruments based on dialectics, semiotics, logic as well as the active implementation and use of ethics management instruments.

2. Communication as central function and integrated part of a CSR process:

This includes six parallel and interlinked processes: the anchorage of the whole CSR process in the company right from the beginning, active and alterocentric-based stakeholder management, systematic issue management, management of a CSR-CI-process as well as reputation and crisis management.

3. External communication of CSR activities and –products

CSR issues are very sensitive, therefore the form of communication for these issues is crucial. Responsible communication considers not just the right tools for the right issue, but considers the ethical correctness of communication means and methods. This includes for example stakeholder involvement also in communications and considers the negative implications of methods such as advertising, social campaigning, activism, cause related marketing or the use of advertorials or VIP testimonials. It focuses on more open and symmetric two-way communication methods as well as on indirect communication through third parties.

Originality/value of this concept

Responsible Communication does not just challenge and widen the present scope and position of CSR Communication which in itself is necessary for a new field in terms of “thinking out of the box”.

It has the potential to lead PR back to its roots: to improve the relationship to its stakeholders and to create value for society⁶ and through that to lead Communications from an Image-driven PR perspective towards being a critical mirror of society.⁷ This is especially important because CSR is being considered a major market for the Communications industry.⁸ If being taken on and carried out seriously, a shift towards Responsible Communication has a high potential not just for the Communications industry, but also for the further development of CSR, since the perspective of informed and ethically correct Communication experts is needed and crucial for the future development of economy and for society as a whole.

Endnotes

1 Even the definition of the CSR Communication Conference limits CSR Communication to mostly one way communication as well as to the management of communication tools instead of challenging the communication style within companies or taking on and demanding a leading role in the CSR process.

2 This does not mean that Communication experts or departments have a weak position in CSR processes, it means that CSR Communication as such has an ill-defined and weak role.

3 Morsing, M., Schultz, M.: „Corporate social responsibility communication: stakeholder information, response and involvement strategies“, 2006, in: Business Ethics: A European Review

4 Corporate Social Rectitude (CSR3) goes back to Frederick from the 1990s and describes the inclusion of ethical aspects in decision making

5 Presently primary focus on Pillar 3 (External Communication)

6 Grunig, J. E. + Hunt, T. “Managing Public Relations“, 1984, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

7 „Public Relations and CSR have similar objectives: both disciplines are seeking to enhance the quality of the relationship of organization among key stakeholder groups: Both disciplines recognize that to do so makes good business sense“ Clark, C.E.: “Differences between Public Relations and Social Responsibility. An Analysis“, 2000, Public Relations Review“

8 Next to internal Communications CSR is the corporate communication discipline with the strongest growth.

Zerfass et al.: “European Communication Monitor 2008, Trends in Communication Management and PR – Results and Implications“. 2008, Euprere / University of Leipzig.

Making sense of CSR implementation among CSR managers: Exploring local strategies

Poul Erik Flyvholm, Jørgensen, Bo Laursen, Anne Ellerup Nielsen, Irene Pollach, Line Schmeltz, and Leila Trapp

Extended abstract

Purpose

The paper investigates sensemaking processes of CSR managers. The exploratory research question focuses on the local implementation of CSR: How does CSR sensemaking among CSR managers work and is it possible to distinguish specific local strategies? In the project, the companies' CSR efforts are mapped in a number of dimensions related to corporate culture, strategy, structure, and stakeholders. CSR managers' reflections on the processes involved are collected and analyzed. On the basis of this, several challenges involved in managing and communicating CSR programs are identified and discussed in relation to the above-mentioned dimensions.

Design/methodology/approach

Interviews were conducted with CSR managers of 16 large industrial companies in Denmark which have practiced CSR for several years and are considered as frontrunners in the area of CSR. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in English. They lasted approximately one hour each and were taped, transcribed and analyzed using NVivo. As suggested in the literature, we took the steps of reading the texts, ordering, coding and grouping to form categories (Chia, 1996; Silverman, 2004). Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1979, 1995, 2003) and research (Basu and Palazzo, 2008; Nijhof and Jeurissen, 2006; van der Heijden *et al.*, 2010) was used as a theoretical perspective. Ambiguity and uncertainty were seen as two central types of sensemaking occasions (Weick, 1995).

Findings

In line with previous studies (van der Heijden *et al.*, 2010) and according to our interview persons, our study shows that a particular reason or set of reasons formed the starting point for the companies in our study to take up an issue or to become interested in CSR. These triggers varied from expectations or criticism by, in particular, a public authority or an NGO about a company's activities to the assessment of future market opportunities or a personal conviction of the CEO. More interestingly, our study shows that an increased focus on non-financial reporting formed the starting point for companies to become interested in formalizing CSR and appointing CSR managers. Since 2009, the new Danish law on corporate social reporting has made it obligatory for the largest Danish companies to take a position on CSR in their annual report.

Most of the CSR managers experienced uncertainty as to their role as CSR managers. They were also uncertain about determining the issues within the general CSR concept that could relate to their organizations. As one of them said: "The agenda changes all the time". All of the participating CSR managers described situations of ambiguity. When starting to transfer the information they had gathered about the general concept to the context of their own organization, the participants were confused about the many different expectations and possibilities in managing CSR. Furthermore, they struggled with organizational limitations, e.g. CSR-units of only four people which are not always strategically and/or globally anchored.

Originality/value

Until now, research has mainly focused on the individual stages or steps of the CSR implementation process and on exploring process elements and strategies (Maon *et al.*, 2009). Less focus has been put on the complex interaction between central elements and strategies of this process. Focusing on CSR managers' experiences with managing and communicating CSR programs – in a qualitative approach, our study contributes with knowledge about the complex interaction between central elements and strategies of such programs, the focus being on the interaction between corporate culture, strategy, structure and stakeholders.

More than business? CSR between leadership approach, communication strategy and management fashion

Lars Rademacher

Abstract

Purpose

Corporate responsibility has grown important as a key concept of management practice to secure and ensure future business. Because of that it is also widely accepted as a relevant and necessary ingredient of corporate brand building and corporate reputation. But up to date there is an alternative tradition that interprets CSR as a mere mid to short term communication strategy designed only to legitimise business activities. The paper aims to find out about the current state of discussion in business and management theory and offers a range of options to perceive the phenomenon of CSR that last from a leadership concept or basic value proposition for daily business via strategic brand value options, long term brand building to short term communication strategies or indicators of current management fashion.

Design/methodology/approach

To find out about the predominant perception of CSR the paper focuses on the diffusion of management concepts along a management fashion cycle that starts with universities and runs via business schools and internal executive training units to consulting firms. Within this cycle the executive trainers are responsible for what might be called a "diffusion boost". If they are convinced of an issue's growing relevance a state of representative diffusion is reached. The paper focuses on executive trainers as the key facilitator and promoter of new business concepts. The method is of course restricted by the assumption that management trainers as a mediator both reflect and influence management theory and management practice.

Findings

The idea is to present a typology in form of a matrix that shows how broad or narrow CSR concepts are in relation to their perceived relevance for leadership concepts, communication strategy and long term, mid term and short term perspectives of business strategy. The paper offers different types of support of strong and weak "CSR believers" and offers a typology of "CSR schools" in executive training. The research design matches findings of an online survey of the most important executive training units in Germany and Switzerland with 10 to 15 interviews of executive trainers from Germany and Switzerland to deepen the insight in sources and diffusion routes.

Originality/value

CSR can be described as a movement of heterogenic ideas and concepts. By the approach offered in this paper it is possible to describe the status quo of different CSR perspectives and wide or narrow conceptualizations and their impact on management trainers and management training.

The Common Welfare Balance Sheet: A Suitable Reporting Tool for CSR?

Gisela Heindl

Abstract

Key words

Common welfare balance sheet, Ecological performance, Financial performance, Societal performance

Purpose

The paper will consider the question of whether and to what degree the common welfare balance sheet is an appropriate tool for communicating corporate social responsibility. It forms part of a wider concept known as common welfare economy and has only recently been elaborated by Austrian entrepreneurs to provide a well balanced framework for companies wishing to report corporate social responsibility programmes to stakeholders. Though being relatively new it is already applied by a considerable number of Austrian companies in 2011 for measuring organisational, ecological and societal performance.

Originality

Similarly to Elkington's triple bottom line approach, the common welfare balance sheet captures an expanded spectrum of economic, ecological and social values. The three pillars – profit, planet, people – have been enhanced by reversing the polarity of motives and objectives. In the long run, financial accounts which traditionally are considered the core performance indicator will decrease in importance and be ranked second place. On a microeconomic level organisational success will primarily be measured by ecological sustainability and societal performance. This will be achieved by shifting the focus from a shareholder value oriented competitive environment to one where stakeholder solidarity and cooperation dominate. On a macroeconomic level the legal framework will foster incentives for cooperation to ensure that the common welfare balance sheet works properly. However, the original moment derives from that process of shifting a company's *raison d'être* from profit maximisation (financial performance) to common welfare (ecological sustainability and societal performance) by emphasising cooperation and stakeholder solidarity.

Methodology

The approach to the topic will be a two-folded one. First, a more theoretic part will briefly outline major scientific models of reporting ecological and societal performance in addition to financial performance. Second, the empirical part will show data obtained from Austrian companies that already report according to the standards set forth in the common welfare balance sheet.

Findings

The key issue will be whether the common welfare balance sheet constitutes an appropriate tool for reporting CSR in an economic environment where an organisation's success is mainly ruled by financial performance. However, the question to be answered will not only be whether the common welfare balance sheet ensures that companies report major impacts on environment and society properly but whether acting socially beneficial and ecologically sustainable will show positive impact on the company's financial performance, too.

Production of a CSR Report as a way of improving CSR strategy

Carolien van Wersch

Abstract

Purpose: improving CSR communication and strategy

The purpose of the session is to demonstrate that annual reports not only are an indispensable part of CSR communication, but are also a key method for improving CSR strategy. Additionally, we will show an easy to use format to develop a report on GRI C level or higher, developed and tested by a consulting firm with ample experience in CSR reporting.

Approach: 'to know me is to love me'

If CSR is about a company's license to operate, stakeholder engagement clearly qualifies as a key element in CSR. Without properly informing its stakeholders, no organization will be able to conquer the hearts and minds of its clients, neighbors, suppliers or employees. A CSR report is an important means of communication with stakeholders, but producing it is often considered as quite a burden. A usable format for such a report could add to a company's license to operate.

Findings: do it right the first time

Our experience had led to these findings:

- Companies find it difficult to identify stakeholders and involve them in selecting CSR issues for the annual report. But when they manage to do it, the added value is enormous.
- The GRI framework is often perceived as an inflexible and obligatory list of items to be reported on. This hinders the selection of key issues for the report. But self-confident companies forget the framework, make their own selections, and end up with GRI-proof reports.
- Once the issues are selected, the quest for relevant data often takes more time than expected. Also data is less accurate and specific as expected. But when the data flow on sustainability finally works, it is an asset for several years to come.
- Converting the data to text for the annual report requires insight in the way society will understand the information presented. It is difficult to get rid of specific words, expressions or jargon. But when a company succeeds in finding a vivid style to show the societal relevance of their activities, the CSR report contributes to the company's brand perception
- When the report is presented, digitally or as a booklet, everybody is glad and proud that the job is done. And subsequently forgets about the annual report until next year, when the entire cycle starts all over again. But when done properly, the production of a CSR report strongly helps improving the CSR policy of the company. It will make it a lot less effort to come up with a second report.

Value: flexible and scalable

The value of the format lies in its flexibility and scalability. It can be used by both small and inexperienced organizations as well as by larger companies with a solid state of references in the field of CSR. Both types of companies will find that, along the way, they will be encouraged to rethink their CSR strategy. This not only leads to a CSR Report, but also to improvements in CSR performance.

The Discourse of Corporate Social Responsibility: What are Public Relations Agencies Selling?

Tam, Lai Shan (Lisa)

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Public relations agencies, Textual analysis, Selling

Purpose

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the presentation of information used to promote CSR communication services on the web sites of public relations agencies and investigate the similarities and differences shared by the agency discourse and other discourses.

Design/methodology/approach

Based on the "PR Firms Ranking" on the O'Dwyer's PR Firms Database, the dedicated pages for CSR and other related phrases on the web sites of the top fifty agencies were studied using textual analysis.

Findings

Most agencies adopt performance-driven and stakeholder-driven approaches to explain the need for their services. In addition to traditional media campaigns and programs, they offer expertise in CSR management and green communication as well as promotion in new media platforms. They tend to be exploiting stakeholder relations as one-way persuasion rather than two-way symmetrical communication. The findings show a consistency with the management discourse on CSR; yet, it is not in line with the academia's call for stakeholder involvement as two-way symmetrical communication.

Research limitations/implications

Not every agency has a dedicated page on CSR on its web site, so only twenty-two firms were included in the sample. More future research is needed to look into the processes of CSR communication mediated by public relations agencies rather than those enacted by corporations alone.

Originality/value

This study adds value to understanding the communication aspect of CSR being packaged as a consultancy service being mobilized through representations by public relations agencies. The results could be used to evaluate how different labels are used by different discourse communities as a rhetorical strategy to CSR communication.

7. CSR COMMUNICATION AND CREDIBILITY

How Organizational Communications Affect Consumers' Perceptions of Corporate Greenwashing

Gerdien de Vriesa, Bart W. Terwelb, Naomi Ellemersb, and Dancker D. L. Daamenb

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Environmental technology, Greenwashing, Organizational communication, Skepticism, Suspicion

This paper presents three studies to examine effects of organizational communications on consumers' perceptions of corporate greenwashing. The results show that consumers tend to perceive an oil and gas company that invests in carbon capture and storage technology (CCS) as engaging in greenwashing, but also that expressing an economic motive for this investment reduces such perceptions whereas explicitly communicating an environmental motive does not. Furthermore, suspicion of strategic organizational behavior mediates the effect of communicated motive on perceived corporate greenwashing. Finally, the effects occur primarily among those who are not by nature very skeptical toward organizational communications in general.

Labels on food, what do consumers think

Vivijan Steenhuis and Wim Elving

Extended abstract

Many products have certificates or labels that should convince customers that this brand and or product outperforms other products within the same branch. In the Netherlands there is a specific label frequently used on a wide variety of grocery products, like vegetables and fruit, potatoes, pasta, bread, rice and wheat products.

The label was introduced by the food industry itself, although not many consumers are aware of the origin of the label. In this research we did test what the influence of the label is on the consumers attitudes towards products that use this label. We also tested the influence of the label on the level of skepticism of consumers to labels in general and this label specific.

Within marketing communication many attempts are being made to load a product or a brand with sustainability. Many organizations try to get a label or a certificate, although many of those labels have an unclear background or are not transparent enough to justify the use of the label. On the other hand, these labels give consumers the idea that the choice for a product with a label is a more sustainable or better choice than an equivalent product without a label.

Method

We constructed an online questionnaire and send this as a link within an email to approximately 140 persons. In the end we had a response of 104 (response rate = 86%; 46% male; mean age 32 years). Respondents were asked to state what they know of the specific label, how often they choose a product specific with that label and the amount of skepticism they experience when they are confronted with that specific label. In the end we revealed what exactly was the origin of the label and asked some questions as evaluation.

Results

Before we revealed the actual origin of the label, only a minority of a third of the respondents indicated that they were skeptic about the label. Knowledge of the specific label varied from 35% correct on the knowledge questions to 86,5%. The level of skepticism after we revealed the real origin of the label rose significantly.

Discussion

Within marketing a wide variety of labels are used to position the specific product or brand above the same products or brands within the same category. The 'I choose conscious' label used in Dutch groceries is broadly used and maybe misleading, given the number of incorrect answers on the knowledge questions we had in our research. The level of skepticism raises after we revealed the true information, that the label is invented by industry itself, controlled by itself etcetera. In an age of skepticism, organizations should be very careful in adopting these labels, certainly when there are no official independent bodies who control these labels and the products.

More than Ordering Information: Constructing the CSR Experience through an Online Interface

Tom Bowers

Abstract

Key words

CSR communication, Internet, Corporate identity

Purpose

This study identifies the prevailing design conventions of initial CSR interfaces and introduces alternative design practices to illustrate the rhetorical potential inherent in interfaces.

Design/methodology/approach

The initial CSR interfaces of the top 25 world's leading companies as determined by 2011 Fortune Global 2000 list and the top 25 corporations identified by the 2010 Lundquist CSR online awards survey were analyzed. The method of analysis draws from the concept of remediation and research asserting that interfaces are shaped by previous and existing cultural forms. The method moves beyond a traditional content analysis and usability study and instead looks to rhetoric and the ability of various cultural forms to organize and give meaning to online data.

Findings

The initial CSR interface is designed to emphasize usability and neglects the communicative possibilities alternative organizational forms afford. Companies do not adequately convey a CSR identity on the initial CSR interface nor perhaps see the opportunity that such an online identity can hold with respect to branding and competitive advantage.

Originality/value

The paper proposes a new approach to the design of CSR interfaces so that the interfaces play a central role in conveying a company's CSR identity. Moreover, the approach proposed in this paper situates the design of CSR interfaces and online CSR communication as not extraneous to but rather embedded within efforts to develop and articulate a clear and strategic view of a company's CSR practices and philosophy.

Do You Notice? Research on the implicit brand association transfer within an endorsed brand strategy

Gert-Jan de Bruijn and Wim Elving

Abstract

Consumers find it increasingly more important to know what company is behind the brand. Transparency of the portfolio has become increasingly important. In this study we have tested the influence of an endorsement brand strategy on the implicit brand evaluation of consumers. With the help of the Implicit Associative Test (IAT) we have tested whether a brand association transfer was visible. Until now there is, to our knowledge, no research published in which unconscious brand evaluation's of an individual within an endorsement strategy. We used an experiment for this purpose, in which we tested three different brand strategies, no endorsement, a weak endorsement and a strong endorsement. We did choose for the brands of the Body Shop and L'Oreal for this experiment, because L'Oreal is the corporate brand behind the Body Shop (The Body Shop was acquainted in 2008 by L'Oreal). The Body Shop has a strong tradition on CSR, whereas L'Oreal is accused several times of using animals for testing, and therefore has a weaker link with CSR.

From the experiment it shows that a strong endorsed brand strategy a shift from the Body Shop towards L'Oreal. This means that a strong endorsed brand strategy has an effect on the unconscious brand preference of an individual. This happened as well for the brand association with Corporate Social Responsibility, respondents judged L'Oreal as a stronger CSR brand after seeing the commercial with a strong endorsement.

The results of this experiment show the preferences of consumers knowing what the corporate brand is and knowing what the company behind the brand exists of. The results of this experiment also show that it can be beneficiary for organizations to acquire a CSR friendly competitor to create a more CSR friendly attitude among consumers.

How on Earth? An action based approach to remain a sustainable pearl

Robert Hexspoor and Eleonor Hintzen

Abstract

Key words

Engagement, Awareness, Internal communication

Purpose

Essent is known as the leading producer of sustainable energy in the Netherlands. This sustainable proposition was put under stress after the acquisition of Essent by RWE, the large German based energy provider in 2009. Unlike Essent, RWE had a bad reputation in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility. According to some critics the acquisition of Essent with e.g. its wind energy parks, had to be seen as RWE's green investment. Essent would be the sustainable pearl of the RWE Group.

This integration within RWE obviously had its business benefits. The morale of the Essent employees however was a big concern for the management. The overall feeling amongst employees was that after years at the frontier of CSR it was a step back in their CSR strategy to be part of RWE. On the other hand there were positive developments regarding the CSR ambitions of Essent. The overall CSR ambition remained. In 2050, Essent wants to be 100% CO2 neutral in everything they do. For the near future, Essent aims to be the most inspiring and leading energy company regarding CSR.

Approach

Essent was dedicated to maintain their leading CSR position. Under the title 'How on Earth', Essent, in collaboration with our communication agency, developed a strategy focused on encouraging and inspiring employees to engage in the CSR strategy by committing themselves to sustainable actions.

The core message was sound for every employee: 'A sustainable society starts with you' - How on Earth can you make a difference? Essent challenges its employees to reflect on their own actions and how they affect the environment.

To build awareness employees were confronted by provocative questions and answers. The combination of an 'unusual' How on Earth request, a creative image and an inspiring response ensured that this campaign was very well received. In a series of appealing 'My How on Earth minutes' (60 second movies) Essent ambassadors told their colleagues what CSR meant to them. The films showed that CSR can be 'big' and 'small', and often is something everyone is doing already.

Next to creating awareness on the 'How on Earth' program, Essent provided employees with inspiration and tools to turn CSR ambitions into action. We have done that by inspiring people with good, but yet very simple examples of CSR and by facilitating them to do something themselves. Examples include:

- CO2 dietary pointer in the corporate restaurants
- Interactive lunch sessions
- Promote carpooling by raffling off a special series of rides with the CEO
- Organizing the Sustainability Day.

Findings and value

The employee satisfaction survey showed that the majority of the Essent staff is aware of the campaign and understands what CSR means for Essent. We are proud of the fact that 'How on Earth' is well known and the participation of employees in CSR related activities has increased significantly. An important side effect is that Essent gains external credibility again after the RWE takeover.

Essent offers practical ways to responsibly deal with work, travel and other things in life. How on Earth is about setting sustainable goals for yourself, and making sure you achieve them.

Corporate Communication and CSR; comparing Italian and Dutch energy companies on anti-greenwashing strategies

Agostinho Vollero, Alfonso Siano, Maria Palazzo, and Wim Elving

Abstract

Key words

Greenwashing, Corporate communication, CSR, Stakeholder involvement, Intercultural differences

Purpose

In this paper we analyze the contribution of corporate communications (CC) to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through an approach based on stakeholder involvement strategies. In this respect, we present two different perspectives focussed on companies that try to avoid identity washing techniques.

Design/methodology/approach

Starting from the literature review on CSR and greenwashing practices, we made a comparison between two energy companies in Italian and Dutch contexts. However, many emphasize responsibilities and responsiveness that companies involved in CSR have to face when implementing their CC plan and actions too (Signitzer and Prexl, 2008).

Findings

The two energy companies show not only the development of progressive interest towards the use of tools that help firms to avoid greenwashing but also the necessity to integrate such initiatives in corporate communication strategies addressed to sustainability. Moreover, the findings from Enel and Eneco analysis suggest that two different ways are implemented to reach this goal: Enel focuses on "community relations" and "stakeholder involvement", while Eneco on "sustainability pervasiveness" and "humourism".

Practical implications

Both energy companies seem to understand that if greenwashing is found out, it can have negative consequences, such as cynicism among stakeholders, reduced credibility and trust in all corporate communications.

Originality/value

The paper pinpoints the fact that companies could reach the objectives of integrating CSR activities in their corporate communication strategies. Moreover, it contends that avoiding greenwashing practices and striving towards social involvement/better mutual understanding of stakeholder expectations of communication strategy and vice versa, are crucial elements.

8. CSR COMMUNICATION AND THE NEW MEDIA

Enrolling carefully – CSR communication in Twitter

Michael Etter

Extended abstract

Key words

CSR, Communication strategy, Social media, Twitter, Management perception, Pharmaceutical industry

Purpose

Social media provide access to stakeholders, which could not have been reached in the same intensity before, and enable a more dialogical and personalized interaction about CSR issues (Fieseler *et al.*, 2010). The purpose of this study is to analyze how an international pharmaceutical company, leading in CSR, uses Twitter to communicate CSR and interact with different stakeholders. Thereby we explore management perceptions of the use of social media for CSR communication.

Design and methodology

We base our research-paper on a single case in-depth-study analyzing the communication strategy of a recently launched corporate CSR-twitter-account. In a first step four different communication strategies for Twitter are developed, based on communication theories (e.g. Wright, 2001; Grunig, 1992; Morsing and Beckmann, 2006; Grunig and Hunt, 1984), and therein the strategy of the company classified through content analysis. In a second step, through interviews with responsible communication and CSR managers, a deeper understanding of the management's reasoning of the developed strategy is gained.

Findings

Content analysis of the disseminated tweets shows that the company follows a rather reactive communication strategy with low interaction, low information disclosure and impersonal tone. The interviews with the responsible managers reveal a very cautious strategic approach. Internal guidelines, external regulations, uncertainty of outcomes, skepticism and unfamiliarity with social media prevent transparent and dialogical communication. The cautious strategy stays in contrast with the management's wish to establish the visibility of the company's leadership in CSR and the aimed relevance of social media for the integrated corporate communication.

Research limitations

With a single case study the representative value of the results is limited. However, the results give valuable insights into an applied Twitter strategy as well as the challenges and concerns management members face by implementing CSR communication in social media.

Practical implications

Companies can use different communication strategies to disseminate CSR information and interact with stakeholders in Twitter or social media in general. However, to implement a successful strategy with the aim of high visibility, fruitful interaction and response, structural and personal management resistance has to be addressed in order to finally lower stakeholder skepticism and raise awareness - the main challenges of CSR-communication (Du *et al.*, 2010; Morsing *et al.*, 2008).

Originality

To date, only little research has been done about CSR communication in social media. No study so far has been published on CSR communication in Twitter, and only one on management perceptions of social media for CSR communication

(Morsing and Castello, 2011). Here the research paper presents highly relevant and new findings.

Furthermore, studies on CSR communication find that many companies are not particularly interested in a direct and public discussion with stakeholders over social media (Stieglitz and Latteman, 2007). With this study we reveal the rationales for the cautious approach by exploring management perceptions of social media for CSR communication.

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CSR Communication in Social Media and Stakeholder Involvement and Dialogue: Lessons from a Corporate Social Media Campaign on Climate Issues

Mette Morsing and Rikke Augustinus Eriksen

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Corporate communication, Social media, Stakeholder involvement, Energy sector, The double-edge of CSR communication

This article investigates how CSR communication in social media influences, and is influenced by, stakeholder dialogue and interaction. From an organizational perspective, social media is argued to offer favorable opportunities for interactive stakeholder relationships and strengthened involvement and dialogue. Social media accordingly appears to be potentially instrumental, in corporations' engagements in CSR through strengthened stakeholder relationships. The pioneering case of energy company Vattenfall A/S and their 2008 pan-European social media campaign 'The Climate Manifesto' however challenges the assumption that stakeholder interaction and dialogue is advanced in social media. An analysis of the campaign, stakeholder reactions, and corporate counteractions, all systematically identified in online and social media covering the campaign duration, shows that constructive dialogue and interaction was absent, and Vattenfall became accused of green-washing, resulting in a communication crisis.

Negative reactions from stakeholders consisted of prejudiced and non-negotiable argumentation indicating that one-way communication exceeds two-way communication. Moreover, the analysis shows that social media imposes new managerial challenges since communication processes are scaled up and bring on autonomous and legitimate sources of information, providing stakeholders with more power in terms of co-production of 'the truth', and more complex routes to corporate legitimacy compared to offline communication.

Consequently, the article suggests that managers face an escalating risk of the double-edge of CSR communication when incorporating social media into their strategies for two reasons: firstly, increased managerial loss of control of CSR messages, and secondly, increased organizational pressure for stakeholder interactivity and dialogue, which is sensitive and potentially counterproductive in social media.

Promoting Corporate Philanthropic Efforts through Social Media

Hen Ping Lee and Sherry J. Holladay

Extended abstract

Key words

CSR, Corporate philanthropy, Social media

Purpose

This research examines how a sample of Fortune 500 companies use social media to report their corporate social responsibility efforts, specifically their philanthropic activities. Social media continues to grow as both companies and stakeholders increase their reliance on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Companies use social media for a variety of reasons including the promotion of corporate social responsibility. Corporate philanthropy, one facet of CSR, involves “a direct contribution by a corporation to a charity or cause” (Kotler and Lee, 2005, p. 144). Philanthropy can be reported relatively easily because it is more tangible and quantifiable than other CSR efforts such as environmental or human rights protection. Thus, social media seem ideally suited to communicating philanthropic activities. This research asks, “How are social media used to communicate philanthropic efforts?”

Design/methodology/approach

A pilot study was conducted as a prelude to the complete study and examined how a sample of 20 Fortune 500 companies communicate their philanthropic efforts through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The data were collected from January 1st to April 1st 2011. Official websites of the top 20 companies were accessed to determine if they provided social media links through their official homepage, the “about us” tab at their website, or through the use of a search engine (e.g., Google, Yahoo, Bing). Uses of the three social media tools to promote philanthropic efforts were recorded. Corporate philanthropy efforts were categorized using Kotler and Lee’s (2005) typology: providing cash donations, offering grants, awarding scholarships, donating products, donating services, providing technical expertise, allowing the use of facilities and distribution channels, and offering the use of equipment.

Findings

Results show that 16 of the 20 companies (80%) provide links to one or more of these social media. The four companies that do not offer social media links are business-to-business companies that are not dependent on the general public for business opportunities. Social media were used to communicate 80 philanthropic activities. Twitter (55%, n = 44) was used most frequently, followed by Facebook (37.5%, n = 30) and YouTube (7.5%, n = 6). Providing cash donations was the most frequently reported philanthropic effort (60%, n = 48), followed by offering grants (16.3%, n = 13), donating products (10%, n = 8), and awarding scholarships (7.5%, n = 6).

Research limitations/implications

This pilot study affirms the value of the research approach and provides the foundation for a larger study of uses of social media to communicate CSR-related information. Preliminary results indicate Twitter is the preferred social media tool. YouTube, a highly visual medium, seems to be underutilized. The pilot study demonstrates that companies can use social media to convey information about philanthropic activities.

Originality/value

The paper offers a method that can be used to gain insight into the CSR activities reported via social media.

Reference

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Social Media: the Wild West of Corporate Communications

Ralph Tench and Brian Jones

Extended abstract

Key words

Social media, Corporate irresponsibility

Purpose

At a conceptual level this paper argues that social media represents a rupture in the communication of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Old communication certainties have given way to new insecurities and a general feeling of uncertainty about how and what to communicate with regards to CSR. Where once there was one message today in the world of social media there are many. Making sense of this new world of instant, mobile communication presents a number of challenges for communicating CSR. The central argument that this paper posits is that traditional media of old presented a clear, ordered world of communication management for organisations to extol their CSR credentials. In contrast to this, new Web 2.0 social media is increasingly being used by activists and hactivists to challenge corporate communication CSR messages and does so by highlighting instances and examples of Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI) (Jones *et al.*, 2009).

Design/methodology/approach

The paper reports on research data from the European Communication Monitor 2010 and 2011 (<http://www.communicationmonitor.eu/>) and draws on work already published in this area (Zerfass *et al.*, 2010, 2011) to illustrate the unruly unregulated Web 2.0 social media communication landscape in Europe.

Findings

In late modernity (Giddens, 1990) communication comes in many guises. Social media is one guise and it has re-shaped as well as transformed the nature of communications and the relationship between organisations and their stakeholders. Organisations of all types and sizes increasingly have to re-think and re-fashion their communication strategies, tools and messages. Whilst rationalization may have been the best expression of modernity (Weber, 1976, 1978), chaos and disorder serve to characterise and exemplify late modernity. In few places is this more apparent than in the fused sphere of social media and corporate communications. The "iron cage" and formal rationality of corporate communications of old has given way to messiness, disorder, confusion and chaos. Set against the principles, practices, attitudes and behaviours of some organisations it is little wonder that the ethics, moralities and values of CSR are increasingly called into question. The spectre of Corporate Social Irresponsibility (Jones *et al.* *op cit*) hangs like agitated layers of air haunting organisations and those that represent and communicate their interests.

Originality/value

User created content serves to demarcate and differentiate Web 2.0 social media from Web 1 or www (OECD, 2007). It presents a number of challenges to the governance, rules, procedures and regulations of traditional corporate communications. Communicating CSR in the Wild West of social media requires diplomatic and political nous, as well as awareness and knowledge of the dangers and pitfalls of CSI. The data reported on in this paper illustrates well the above points and sets out scenarios for future development of corporate communication of CSR through, and with social media.

Mediating Corporate and Audience CSR communication in Twitter: the strategic role of CSR experts

Marcin Szewczyk and Elanor Colleoni

Extended abstract

Key words

CSR, Strategic communication, Network analysis, Communication theory, Social media, Twitter

Purpose

In the last few years, companies have started to communicate their corporate social responsibility efforts in digital media, and in particular in Social Media. Firms are increasingly engaging in digital dialogue with stakeholders and they are actively participating in the construction of an online CSR community. We define the community as composed from three elements: corporations, audience and experts. Corporations are represented by CSR accounts. We label audience as people who follow one corporate account and we assume that they have a specific interest. On the contrary, we call the CSR-experts users, who follow more than one company, showing a general interest in CSR. The purpose of this paper is to explore the communication practices and the modality of creation of social ties between companies and stakeholders by investigating the network structure of the CSR community in Twitter. We first analyze the social networks of several CSR corporate accounts in order to investigate if companies share the audience or they develop their own publics by assessing the connection strength of the CSR network. According to the corporate communication theory of third part endorsement (Morsing et al., 2008), in order to be effective and to avoid the stakeholders' skepticism, corporate communication should flow from companies to experts and from experts to stakeholders i.e. two steps communication flow (Lazarsfeld and Katz, 1955). Therefore we hypothesize that the experts will have a central position in the CSR network and we investigate their role as community connectors across companies and between companies and their audiences.

Design/methodology/approach

Using the entire Twitter social graph from 2009, we select the companies from the 100 Best Corporate Citizens 2009 list who have a Twitter account dedicated to corporate social responsibility. We then detect the social graphs of each CSR account (i.e. the list of followers and following) and we identify a CSR community consisting of 16000 users. We use network analysis to study the network properties of the CSR community and to test our theoretical hypotheses.

Findings

Using network centrality measures, we found evidence of several independent corporate-based networks rather than a unique well-connected corporate social responsibility network. From the corporate perspective, this finding suggests that companies don't share a common public, but they tend to develop their own audiences. The same result holds for the specific audiences, which tend to create separated networks, suggesting an interest in a specific company rather than general corporate social responsibility. Finally, we found that the experts have created their own well-connected community while holding a strategic position inside and across company networks.

Originality

In view of the small body of quantitative research on corporate communication in social media, particularly regarding the study of the CSR community in Twitter, our findings empirically test the validity of corporate communication theory in new context. These results may also provide a good starting point to catch the dynamics of CSR-community evolution.

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Institutionalization of CSR in social media context: MPS case study

Carmella Tuccillo, Alfonso Siano, Agostino Vollero, and Silvia Cosimato

Abstract

Key words

CSR, CSR 2.0, Social media, CSR communication, Social responsiveness

Purpose

A new approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been emerging in response to growing socio-economic concerns and to overcoming stakeholders' scepticism to CSR communication. The main objectives of the paper are to illustrate the evolution of CSR by describing its different stages and to identify unused potentials of social media for CSR communication.

Design/methodology/approach

This study draws together the relevant literature on social responsibility in order to analyze the transition from CSR to CSR 2.0. The paper uses a case study approach to point out the new potential of social media for CSR communication. The Monte dei Paschi di Siena (MPS) case study is based on an interview with the CSR manager, and the analysis of MPS most used social media.

Findings

The paper shows opportunities/risks of social media usage and suggests how to ensure organizational legitimacy in CSR context. The MPS case study shows the growing importance of social media for stakeholders involvement in CSR initiatives.

Research limitations/implications

The study is limited by the analysis of a single case study. Furthermore, the use of interactive media in a CSR 2.0 perspective can help organizations to gain an increasing "corporate social responsiveness". This may imply new practices and research challenges concerning CSR 2.0 communication.

Originality/value

This paper offers a new perspective on CSR communication in the context of social media using new communication tools in order to encourage stakeholder engagement in CSR initiatives.

Acting as responsible citizens: A presentation of CSR initiatives on corporate websites in the Netherlands

Sophie van Gorsel and Piet Verhoeven

Abstract

Taking social responsibility has been an important topic within organizations for decades. The relationship between an organization and the society in which it operates is often referred to as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is getting more attention and is often seen as the tool to legitimize an organization in the eyes of society.

The way an organization determines its policy regarding CSR and chooses how and what to communicate to their public on a corporate web site, can be referred to as a chosen 'frame'.

Purpose

To conduct a content analysis regarding the design of CSR information for the first time with the use of framing theory. The results enable international comparisons of CSR frames on corporate websites.

Methodology

The list of the 50 most valuable Dutch brands in 2009 were used as unit of analyses. The organizations operate in different businesses and therefore give a diverse representation of CSR in the Netherlands. A content analyses was used to analyze the web sites under study. The web sites were analyzed by two types of questions; content questions regarding CSR information presentation and questions about the appearances and use of CSR framing on corporate web sites.

Findings

CSR plays a role for many organizations in the Netherland. Nearly two-thirds of the organizations give information regarding CSR on the homepage of their corporate web site. The organizations which describe their social responsibilities on their corporate web site vary greatly in the amount of CSR information. Looking at the content of CSR information, the organizations show several similarities. Organizations focus on multiple stakeholders and inform their publics about the same issues; they take responsibility for their employees and involvement in 'people' and 'planet'. Organizations focus their communication on CSR especially in the responsibility frame. The economic and legal frame are rarely cited in CSR information on corporate web sites.

Mobile CSR projects linking consumers with corporations: Carrotmob, GoodGuide and ColaLife

Constance Kampf

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Smartphones, Consumer activism, Knowledge resources, Identity

Purpose

This paper is intended first to demonstrate current uses of smartphone technology related to consumer organizing to engage with business about CSR in both social and point of purchase activities. Second, it discusses how this technology calls for an expansion of our understanding of how to interact with stakeholders from communication to engaging with knowledge resources made available through their innovative uses of smartphone technology.

Design/methodology/approach

This paper examines three cases of consumer initiated sustainability on-the-go using mobile technology and new media: the Good Guide, CarrotMob and ColaLife. Cases are analyzed through a lens which combines Gee's (D)iscourse and (d)iscourse with Burke's processes of terministic screens and entitlement. These concepts are used to examine the connection between resources for building knowledge and identity with the context of these cases.

Findings

Some features of mobile technology used by the projects include 1).the camera used as a bar code scanner, 2).social media and connection software which allows users to become involved in CSR online and 3).multimodality. These features are used by individuals reaching out to corporations in their efforts to have a voice in the shape for corporate social responsibility.

Research limitations/implications

Together, these cases suggest that mobile devices have the potential for supporting the emergence of new voices in CSR, especially voices from consumer/community members directed at businesses.

Practical implications

For business, developing a heightened awareness of mobile technology and the ability to leverage outside voices for developing CSR strategy can lead to a more effective CSR strategy on the operational level. In addition, these technology – enabled community members and consumers offer resources for corporations to engage in shared visions of CSR.

Social implications

Corporations working together with technology empowered citizens to co – shape and co – define CSR focuses community resources on positive strategies for defining CSR in a mutually beneficial way.

Originality/value

This paper extends the view of stakeholders in CSR to include uninvited technology empowered community members actively engaging corporations in conversations about CSR and the knowledge resources they make available to corporations. It also extends earlier work on technology and CSR to include Smart Phones.

9. CSR COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEES

Downsizing as a communication challenge: comparing CSR and corporate branding

Rita Järventie-Thesleff

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Corporate branding, Discursive legitimation, Strategy as discourse

Purpose

This paper aims to analyze the communication of restructuring and downsizing decisions in an industrial transnational company. The purpose of the paper is to shed light on the distinct discursive practices involved in legitimizing controversial organizational undertakings within the strategic discourse of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and that of corporate branding.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper is based on the last year of a longitudinal case study of a corporate brand building process in a transnational company. The paper builds on the nascent literature on strategy-as-discourse and discursive legitimation.

Findings

The analysis describes the divergent discursive practices relied on in CSR and in corporate brand related communication. Based on the analysis, the restructuring was portrayed as the 'right thing to do' in the CSR communication. The tone of voice was constructive and forward looking, introducing a clearly defined code of conduct to the remaining employees. This approach is called the practice of Imposing shared responsibility. On the other hand, the closure of capacity and reduction of personnel seemed to present a contradiction to the self-assured nature of the corporate brand leading to a significant reduction of corporate brand related communication. This approach is called the practice of Averting irritation.

Originality/value

This research illuminates the internal legitimation challenges that an organization faces when communicating restructuring and downsizing decisions and highlights the distinct nature of CSR and corporate branding as strategic tools for obtaining legitimacy from internal stakeholders.

Employees as instruments in CSR communication

Taija Townsend and Pia Lappalainen

Abstract

Key words

CSR, Global responsibility, University education, Communication studies, Development cooperation

Purpose

The increasing awareness of social and global responsibilities is altering regulations and requirements imposed on business operations. The expanded spectrum of societal values and, more specifically, demands for CSR practices underscore the need for a broader business mindset: one which appreciates the impact of the provided services and products in global, economic, environmental and societal contexts and which can be adopted by employees working at all organizational levels. These intensifying calls for sustainable business development are also creating pressure for the revision of university education, necessitating the incorporation of social responsibility topics as part of the overall curriculum and urging faculty members to address global-scale themes, such as ecological degradation, human equality and workplace diversity, in their lectures and syllabi.

Approach and methodology

This paper introduces the Development Cooperation Project, a pedagogical experiment realized at Aalto University (Helsinki, Finland) in 2010, which aimed at raising student awareness of their global and social responsibilities. The paper also presents the results of a pilot survey carried out in connection with the project where we examined students' and business operators' attitudes towards CSR communication. The survey reveals that both students and business operators consider CSR communication to be a significant organizational priority, but that both sides need to increase their awareness and understanding of the necessity and impact of CSR policy-making and implementation.

Practical implications

The Development Cooperation Project is the first part of larger research and pedagogical project in which we investigate CSR communication on the employee level. The project focuses on employee competence development and, in particular, it attempts to show that when properly and adequately educated, individual employees can function as critical instruments of CSR image build-up. Our tenet is that, as a means of raising employee awareness and knowledge of CSR, curriculum revision can assist in turning individual employee mindsets and conducts into a principal organizational resource of CSR communication.

'Sharing is caring': CSR purposes explaining the relationship of information flow with affective commitment

Claartje ter Hoeven and Joost Verhoeven

Abstract

As affective commitment is a crucial factor for organizational effectiveness, organizations are increasingly seeking to strengthen this form of emotional dedication (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, interventions to enhance commitment, like improved Human Resources (HR) practices (Kooij *et al.*, 2010), supervisor communication (Van Vuuren *et al.*, 2007), and career possibilities (Weng *et al.*, 2010), are studied extensively. Recently, a study of Grant *et al.* (2008), demonstrates that affective commitment will not only increase from receiving support, but also from giving support.

However, it remains unclear whether such an effect of giving within the organization can be extended to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in a broader sense (i.e., CSR initiatives aimed at employees, at costumers, at the government, and at society at large; Turker, 2009). Therefore, we will study the mediating role of these four forms of CSR in the information flow – affective commitment relationship.

Using data of 301 employees from a Dutch health-care insurance company, we tested and found a positive association between information flow and affective commitment, with a mediating effect for CSR aimed at employees and aimed at their costumers. CSR projects aimed at the government and aimed at society at large did not mediate the relationship between information flow and affective commitment.

Thus, although the positive effect of giving support on commitment reaches further than giving support to colleagues, it does not extend beyond giving support to the most direct stakeholders. This finding can be explained by the social identity theory, which proposes that people privilege in-group members, as opposed to out-group members (Meyers, 2008). Therefore, if CSR is used to improve affective commitment of employees, giving support to organizational members and costumers is recommended.

