PROCEEDINGS
7th International CSR Communication Conference
University of Bath School of Management
16 to 19 September 2024

CONFERENCE SUBMISSIONS

Structured Abstract

A structured abstract (between 1,500-2,500 words including references) should present in a concise way the purpose of the paper, main theoretical framework, assumptions and if applicable, research methods and final or preliminary results. Submitted abstracts must not have been previously presented, scheduled for presentation, published, or accepted for publication. In addition, it his under review, must not appear in print before the conference. Submitters must delete all identifying information prior to submission. The author details must be on a separate page.

Acceptance of a submission means that the author will be expected to present the paper at the conference.

Special Session (panel, roundtable)

The objective of Special Sessions is to acquaint educators and researchers with new perspectives, theories, and provocative ideas. In submitting special session proposals, the organizer and listed participants request that, if accepted, they all register and appear at the conference. Session proposals should include a short description of the session theme and its relevance (200-400 words), list of session participants and short abstracts (200-300 words) of their contributions.

Other important information will be available on the conference website and via social media where the conference fees, program, and invited speakers will be announced.

Scholars wishing to participate in the 7th CSRCom are invited to submit either a structured abstract or a proposal for a special session for review by March 15, 2024, via the conference website.

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Editorial Note

Diletta Acuti, Sarah Glozer, Andy Crane, Ursa Golob and Klement Podnar
University of Bath, School of Management and University of Ljubljana

The 7th CSRCOM came to the UK for the first time in 2024 and was held at the University of Bath from 16 to19 September 2024. CSRCOM is a leading international conference that brings together scholars and practitioners interested in the communication of social and environmental responsibilities of business. The conference is unique not only in bringing together various disciplines within management (e.g., marketing, social and environmental accounting, organisation studies), but also in bridging the gap between academia and practice to develop real-world and impactful insights into CSR at the communication interface. Building on the theme of the 6th conference, which explored new challenges for CSR communication in an age of digitalisation and polarisation, this year's conference continued its topical focus by exploring 'CSR communication for a world in crisis'.

The conference, which aimed to address social crises such as climate change, fake news, and social inequality, featured 54 paper presentations, including a special session on 'New Forms of Organising for Irresponsibility and the Erosion of the Public Sphere', as well as dedicated sessions for discussing ECRs' research. We were joined by a total of 108 participants, including 6 guest speakers and 102 delegates delegates attending from all over the world, including the UK, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Turkey, North America, Thailand and India.

We were delighted to have three keynote speakers at the conference: Professor Charles H. Cho (Schulich School of Business, Canada), Professor Jeremy Moon (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark) and Professor Maura Scott (Arizona State, USA). The keynote speakers participated in a welcome panel on the topic of 'The Past, Present, and Future of CSR Communication', and delivered inspiring individual keynote speeches throughout the conference. We were also joined by three practitioners for a plenary practitioner panel on 'CSR communication: the good, the bad and the ugly': Lauren Branston (Institute of Business Ethics), Gail Gallie (Project17; Project Everyone) and Jack Hodgkiss (Hubbub).

The variety of crises that organisations are addressing and raising awareness of through CSR communication is reflected in the diversity of themes discussed at the conference. In an era of increasing social and environmental challenges, organisations are expected to drive meaningful change that responds to both local and global issues. In this context, effective CSR reporting and accountability become essential, providing a transparent and structured way for organisations to demonstrate their commitment to these goals.

The plurality of contemporary crises suggests that the responsibility for addressing them cannot rest with a single entity but should be shared among multiple actors. These include not only traditional business stakeholders - such as suppliers and investors - but also consumers, advocacy groups, local communities, and social movements, which often act as catalysts for broader societal change.

The 7th CSR Communication conference sought to encourage conceptual and empirical research examining the role of CSR communication in documenting, shaping, and negotiating these responsibilities and aspirations. It aimed to explore how CSR communication can contribute to navigating a world in crisis, shedding light on its potential to drive collective action and meaningful impact.

A sincere thank you from the conference team to all keynote speakers and panellists, as well as to all reviewers, presenters, discussants, and participants from both academia and practice for contributing fresh perspectives and ideas. Your involvement has once again enriched the conversation on CSR communication and helped advance the field.

The conference organisers would also like to express their gratitude to the Marketing Trust for supporting the event. We look forward to continuing these important discussions and welcoming you to the next edition of the CSR Communication Conference in 2026!

Transparency Signalling Theory: Concept, Measure and Theoretical Propositions

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This paper centres on the pivotal role of transparency signalling within Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communications, dissecting how positive and negative signals distinctly influence stakeholder trust and scepticism. By meticulously analysing these signals' impact, the study introduces the innovative concepts of rhetorical density and normative ranges as evaluative tools for CSR communications. The research aims to illuminate the intricate dynamics of transparency signalling, offering a comprehensive framework that elucidates its significance in shaping stakeholder perceptions and fostering a transparent corporate environment.

Transparency in CSR: A Multifaceted Construct

Transparency within CSR is a multifaceted construct that influences stakeholder trust and corporate authenticity (Carroll & Einwiller, 2014; Coombs & Holliday, 2013; Rawlings, 2009). It denotes the extent to which an organisation transparently shares essential details about its operations, impacts, and decision-making processes. Transparency signalling in the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication is a nuanced concept that extends beyond the mere provision of information to stakeholders to signalling transparency and accountability (Carroll & Einwiller, 2014).

Transparency signalling is of paramount importance in CSR communication due to its potential to increase stakeholder trust and engagement and reduce CSR scepticism (Carroll & Einwiller, 2014; Cho, Patten, & Roberts, 2014). It serves as a bridge between corporate intentions and stakeholder perceptions, ensuring that efforts towards social responsibility and ethical conduct are not only implemented but also recognized and valued by the broader community (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). The distinction between transparency signalling and transparency itself lies in the proactive nature of signalling, which involves crafting and disseminating messages that are designed to be interpreted as indicators of transparency.

The Concept of Transparency Signalling

Transparency signalling encompasses the strategic ways in which corporations convey their commitment to openness, honesty, and accountability. Unlike transparency, which is often perceived as an objective state or quality of being clear and accessible (Heinberg, Liu & Eisingerich, 2021; Liu et al., 2015), transparency signalling involves the active process of sending cues and messages intended to shape stakeholders' perceptions of a company's transparency (Cho, Roberts & Patten, 2010; Livesey & Kearins,

2002). This distinction is crucial as it highlights the intentional and strategic nature of communication efforts by corporations to be seen as transparent entities (Christensen, Morsing & Thyssen, 2010).

Dissecting Transparency Signals

Transparency signalling bifurcates into positive and negative signals, each carrying distinct implications for stakeholder perceptions.

Positive Transparency Signals: Enhancing Perceptions

Positive transparency signals are designed to bolster stakeholders' views of an organisation's transparency, focusing on communicative aspects that contribute to positive perceptions. To signal their commitment to transparency, organizations should adopt proactive practices that encompass accuracy, by ensuring all disclosed information is accurate, verifiable, and reliable, offering stakeholders a truthful representation of the organization's CSR performance (Carroll & Einwiller, 2014). Accessibility is key, making CSR information readily available and easy to access for all stakeholders through clear language, user-friendly formats, and multiple channels (Du & Vieira, 2012; Laud and Schepers 2009). Accountability involves demonstrating responsibility for CSR actions and outcomes, openly sharing both successes and failures, and illustrating how the organization addresses and learns from challenges (Ihlen, 2011; Parum, 2005). Assurance can be achieved by including third-party verification of CSR reports and information, providing an independent assessment of the organization's disclosures and practices (Einwiller & Carroll, 2020; Ihlen, 2011; Laud and Schepers 2009; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen, 2008; Schlegelmilch & Pollach, 2005). Lastly, acting on stakeholder interests is essential, requiring engagement with stakeholders to understand their concerns and interests, and integrating this feedback into CSR strategies and reporting (Du & Vieira, 2012; Ihlen, 2011; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Waddock & Googins, 2011).

Here are the positive transparency signals:

1. Balance: Ensuring a holistic view that includes both successes and challenges, promoting a comprehensive understanding of CSR initiatives (Ihlen, 2011).

2. Individual Ownership: Clearly attributing statements and actions, highlighting accountability and transparency. (Ihlen, 2011)

3. Guidance: Providing accessible, clearly articulated information to enhance stakeholders' comprehension. (Du & Vieira, 2012)

4. Accuracy: Presenting precise, verifiable data to lend credibility and foster trust (Hart, 2009; Ihlen, 2011; Laud and Schepers, 2009).

5. Concreteness: Using tangible examples to make concepts more relatable and understandable (Hart, 2009).

6. Timeliness: Offering prompt and relevant communication, addressing current issues to keep stakeholders informed. (Laud and Schepers, 2009)

7. Stakeholder Inclusiveness: Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, addressing their perspectives and concerns. (Du & Vieira, 2012; Ihlen, 2011; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Waddock & Googins, 2011).

These elements work collectively to enhance stakeholders' perceptions of transparency, contributing positively to the organisation's transparency narrative.

Negative Transparency Signals: Inducing Scepticism

Conversely, negative transparency signals risk obscuring transparency and inducing scepticism among stakeholders (Carroll & Einwiller, 2014). Certain practices can detrimentally affect perceptions of an organization's transparency and are best avoided (Laud & Schepers, 2009; Waddock & Googins, 2011). Ambiguity, characterized by the use of vague or unclear language, can create confusion and leave room for multiple interpretations of the organization's practices, policies, or performance (Cho, Roberts, & Patten, 2010; Laud & Schepers, 2009). Avoidance, which involves omitting crucial information expected by stakeholders, such as details on environmental impact, labor practices, or governance issues, can also undermine transparency (Cho, Roberts, & Patten, 2010; Schlegelmilch & Pollach, 2005). Lastly, abstraction, marked by overly general statements that lack specific, actionable information about CSR initiatives, outcomes, or challenges, can further obscure an organization's transparency efforts (Carroll & Einwiller, 2014; Hancock, Curry, Goorha, & Woodworth, 2007; Maignan & Ralston, 2002).

Here are the negative transparency signals

1. Ambivalence: Employing vague language, leaving stakeholders uncertain about the organisation's intentions. (Cho, Roberts & Patten, 2010; Dambrin & Robson, 2011)

2. Assortment: Presenting a confusing array of information without a cohesive message, leading to confusion (Craig, Mortensen, & Iyer, 2013; Hancock, Curry, Goorha, & Woodworth, 2007).

3. Attachment: Building relationships in ways that might overshadow factual content, potentially leading to perceived bias. (Laud & Schepers, 2009)

4. Adornment: Utilising embellishment or excessive praise, which can detract from authenticity, suggesting self-promotion over genuine transparency. (Hart, 2001)

These communicative behaviours, when overemphasised, can lead stakeholders to question the organisation's sincerity and integrity in its transparency efforts.

Enhancing CSR Communication through Rhetorical Density

In the nuanced domain of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication, the clarity and impact of transparency signalling are pivotal (Carroll & Einwiller, 2014). This clarity is initially assessed through the lens of rhetorical density, which examines the concentration of specific rhetorical elements within a text. Subsequently, normative ranges provide a comparative framework that situates this rhetorical density within a broader historical and genre-specific context, offering insights into the text's relative transparency.

Rhetorical Density: The Starting Point

Rhetorical density is a critical initial measure in evaluating CSR communication. It quantifies the presence of specific rhetorical elements, such as those constituting positive or negative transparency signals, within a segment of text. A text with high rhetorical density of a rhetorical element is one where there the

element has high concentration of words related to the rhetorical element within a particular word range. Conversely, a text low rhetorical density is one where there is little to no rhetorical elements might indicate a more straightforward or minimalistic emphasis on the rhetorical element. This density, or lack thereof, can contribute to the text's transparency signals, potentially strengthening stakeholder perceptions of corporate transparency.

Normative Ranges: Comparative Contextualisation

The concept of a normative range for transparency signals within corporate communication can be understood through the lens of the normal distribution curve, often depicted as a bell curve. This statistical model is particularly relevant when analysing the rhetorical density of transparency signals and the identification of rhetorical fault lines within corporate disclosures.

In this context, the peak of the bell curve represents the most observed level of rhetorical density in transparency signalling, where most corporate communications tend to cluster. This central point signifies the normative range—a level of rhetorical engagement that aligns with standard practices and stakeholder expectations in the realm of CSR communication.

Rhetorical density provides a measure of how densely packed a given segment of communication is with rhetorical strategies and elements. This measure offers insights into the depth and intensity of the rhetorical effort employed within a text, irrespective of the broader strategic emphasis of the company. Rhetorical density, in this framework, refers to the concentration of transparency signals within a given segment of communication. High rhetorical density, positioned on the tails of the bell curve, indicates a communication rich in transparency signals, potentially enhancing stakeholders' perceptions of corporate openness and accountability. Conversely, low rhetorical density, also at the tails but at the opposite end, suggests sparse use of transparency signals, which might lead to perceptions of inadequate disclosure or opacity.

Rhetorical Fault Lines

Rhetorical fault lines become evident when analysing deviations from this normative range. These fault lines represent the points at which the rhetorical density of transparency signals shifts significantly, either increasing towards higher density or decreasing towards lower density. Such shifts can signal strategic changes in corporate communication, marking transitions between different thematic areas, such as moving from discussing corporate achievements to addressing challenges and setbacks.

Understanding the normative range for transparency signals through the analogy of the normal distribution curve, with its implications for rhetorical density and the identification of rhetorical fault lines, provides a structured approach to analysing corporate communication. It allows for the assessment of how closely a company's transparency efforts align with standard practices and expectations, offering insights into the effectiveness of their CSR communication strategies.

Theoretical Propositions

Drawing from the conceptual differentiation between positive and negative transparency signals, we propose five distinct scenarios, each representing a unique combination of these signals. These scenarios are rank ordered based on their anticipated impact on enhancing stakeholder trust, fostering perceptions of transparency, and minimising Scepticism.

1. High Positive / Low Negative Transparency Signals: This optimal scenario underscores the importance of robustly communicating achievements and strengths (high positive signals) while minimally focusing on challenges or setbacks (low negative signals). We posit that this combination is most conducive to bolstering stakeholder trust and perceptions of transparency.

2. Moderate Positive / Moderate Negative Transparency Signals: Representing a balanced approach, this scenario involves a realistic and honest portrayal of both the organisation's strengths and areas for improvement. Such balanced communication is expected to maintain good levels of trust and transparency perception among stakeholders.

3. High Positive / High Negative Transparency Signals: This scenario entails extensive disclosure of both achievements and challenges. While comprehensive, the high volume of negative signals might counteract the positive effects of the achievements disclosed, leading to mixed stakeholder perceptions.

4. Low Positive / High Negative Transparency Signals: Characterised by limited communication of strengths coupled with an extensive focus on challenges, this scenario is likely to erode stakeholder trust and diminish perceptions of transparency due to the predominance of negative signals.

5. Low Positive / Low Negative Transparency Signals: The minimal communication on both fronts in this scenario risks being perceived as opaque or evasive, resulting in the lowest levels of stakeholder trust and transparency perception.

These propositions provide a theoretical foundation for empirical investigation and offer practical insights for organisations striving to navigate the complexities of transparency signalling within CSR communication. By understanding the implications of different combinations of transparency signals, organisations can tailor their communication strategies to enhance stakeholder engagement and foster a culture of transparency and trust.

At a macro level, the interplay between normative ranges, rhetorical fault lines, and rhetorical density facilitates a comprehensive framework for analysing and comparing communication strategies across companies. This approach reveals not only the content and thematic focus of corporate communications but also the underlying rhetorical structures that define a company's approach to transparency and stakeholder engagement.

Discussion and Conclusions

Positioning corporate communications within a comprehensive analytical framework enhances our grasp of the rhetorical strategies pivotal for effective engagement in business discourse. This approach illuminates current industry trends, uncovers best practices, and underscores the strategic employment of rhetoric to cultivate transparency, trust, and stakeholder engagement.

Looking ahead, the research trajectory for transparency signalling is ripe for expansion beyond the confines of normative ranges. Future investigations could delve into:

1. Digital Transformation and Transparency: Examining how digital platforms and social media are reshaping transparency signalling in CSR, and the implications for stakeholder engagement in an increasingly digital world.

2. Cultural Variations in Transparency: Exploring how cultural differences influence the perception and effectiveness of transparency signalling, and how global organizations can navigate these nuances to foster trust across diverse stakeholder groups.

3. Behavioural Insights in Transparency Signalling: Integrating findings from behavioural economics and psychology to understand how stakeholders interpret transparency signals, and the role of cognitive biases in shaping perceptions of corporate transparency.

4. Longitudinal Studies on Transparency Evolution: Conducting long-term studies to track changes in transparency signalling practices over time, assessing how evolving societal expectations and regulatory landscapes impact corporate communication strategies.

5. Cross-Sector Comparative Analysis: Investigating how transparency signalling varies across different industries and sectors, providing insights into sector-specific challenges and opportunities for enhancing stakeholder trust.

6. Impact of Transparency Signaling on Financial Performance: Analysing the correlation between effective transparency signalling and corporate financial performance, to quantify the tangible benefits of transparency for businesses.

By venturing into these areas, future research can broaden our understanding of transparency signalling, offering nuanced perspectives that guide organizations in refining their CSR communications. This forward-looking agenda aims to equip corporations with the insights needed to navigate the complexities of transparency, ensuring their communication efforts resonate with and meet the evolving expectations of their stakeholders.

In summary, the sophisticated dance between transparency signalling elements and stakeholder perceptions demands a strategic communication approach. By emphasising positive transparency signals and carefully managing negative ones within the appropriate normative ranges, organisations can enhance their transparency narrative, fostering a more transparent, ethical, and engaging corporate environment.

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How CSR improves the persuasiveness of defensive strategies in crisis communications

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Abstract

Scholars have cautioned about the efficacy of a defensive response strategy after a crisis, as stakeholders may perceive it as a non-genuine effort to extricate the company from a negative event. In this context, we propose that information about a company's commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can enhance the persuasiveness of defensive response strategies, making them more effective in mitigating negative stakeholder responses after a crisis. In three studies, we demonstrate how CSR enhances the effectiveness of two types of defensive strategies: claiming victimhood and blame shifting. In Study 1 we show how CSR companies can claim victimhood more effectively than companies that are not engaged in CSR. In Study 2 we show the positive effect of CSR in case of a blame shifting response. Finally, in Study 3, we show the interplay of CSR and company size on the persuasiveness of blame-shifting communication.

Keywords:

Defensive response, claiming victimhood, blame shifting, CSR engagement

Conceptual development

When faced with an unexpected negative event, companies communicate to stakeholders in an attempt to reduce the ensuing negative consequences (Bundy et al., 2017). The literature shows that, in certain circumstances, defensive strategies that refuse responsibility for the crisis can prove effective (Antonetti and Baghi, 2021a, Hersel et al., 2022). Two strategies that can be used to refuse responsibility are claiming victimhood (Coombs, 2007; Kwok et al., 2022) or blame shifting (Park et al., 2018; Antonetti and Baghi, 2021a). Both are suitable to situations where an external factor or agent has caused the crisis, although victimhood requires that the company itself has been damaged by the crisis (Coombs, 2007). While organizations always retain a responsibility to care for the stakeholders affected by a crisis, evidence shows that blame shifting and claims of victimhood might prove persuasive strategies in situations where situational responsibility fall with other actors (Bundy and Pfarrer, 2015; Raithel and Hock, 2021). At the same time research has warned against the effectiveness of such strategies as stakeholders dislike companies who are perceived as trying to pass on responsibility to others (Park et al., 2018) and might consider these strategies as a manipulative response to extricate the company from the crisis (Antonetti and Baghi, 2021a).

In this context, we propose that information about a company's commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can enhance the persuasiveness of defensive response strategies, making them more effective in mitigating negative stakeholder responses after a crisis. CSR improves a company's reputation (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001) because socially responsible firms are perceived as helpful, caring and virtuous (Shea and Hawn, 2019). CSR signals the good intentions of the organization (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009) leading stakeholders to process defensive responses more favorably. The message of care and concern for others implicit in CSR involvement may protect the company from being considered unfair and manipulative (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009).

In three studies, we demonstrate how CSR enhances the effectiveness of two types of defensive strategies: claiming victimhood and blame shifting. In Study 1 we show how companies that are wellknown for their CSR practices can claim victimhood more effectively than companies that are not engaged in CSR. In Study 2 we show that the positive effect of CSR is effective even in case of a blame shifting response strategy. Finally, in Study 3, we show that CSR and company size interact to explain jointly the persuasiveness of blame-shifting communication. We suggest that CSR serves as a more intentional signal of morality than an indication of size and we demonstrate that a large company could benefit from the positive CSR halo in enhancing its perceived ethicality when deciding to use a blame-shifting response.

Study 1: How CSR elicits higher sympathy for a company that claims victimhood

Claims of victimhood attempt to elicit feelings of sympathy for the unjust harm that has befallen an organization (Gray and Wegner, 2009). Sympathy is an emotion that expresses a sense of concern and care for others and triggers a desire to help the perceived victim (Goetz et al., 2010). We hypothesize that stakeholders are more likely to feel greater sympathy for a company that engages in CSR compared to a victim organization that is not able to communicate its CSR engagements. Figure 1 summarizes our hypotheses. To test our predictions, we presented participants with a newspaper article about a grocery retailer affected by a cyberattack. In the CSR condition, the retailer was presented as well known for its investments in corporate social responsibility and its involvement in a number of philanthropic initiatives. In the no CSR condition, the retailer description was focused on its well-known wide assortment of fresh products and its customer service. The article ended with the company response following the cyberattack. In claiming victimhood condition the retailer stressed that it was a victim of the cyberattack. In the condition rejecting responsibility, the retailer stressed that it was not responsible for the incident and in the condition accepting responsibility, the retailer admitted its responsibility.

Figure 1: conceptual model of Study 1

Participants and research design

We conducted a 3 (crisis response: claiming victimhood vs. rejecting responsibility vs. accepting responsibility) X 2 (company CSR engagement: CSR vs. no CSR) between-subjects experiment. We recruited 427 US participants (43% male; mean age 42) on Prolific. After reading the scenarios participants completed measures of sympathy (Batson et al., 1983), intention to spread negative word of mouth (Antonetti and Maklan, 2016) and intentions to purchase in the future (Bolton and Mattila 2015). We also ran a lottery where we offered participants the possibility of winning a £25 voucher from either the retailer mentioned in the study or a competitor with a similar product assortment. Participants could choose up to seven tickets for the lottery and distribute their choice of tickets among the two alternatives. We used the choice of tickets associated with the retailer as a measure of relative support.

Results

We ran a conditional process analysis using PROCESS (model 7; Hayes 2017) with 10,000 resamples for the estimation of bias-corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals. The multicategorical independent variable was coded 0 (accepting responsibility), 1 (rejecting responsibility), and 2 (victimhood claiming) and the moderator was coded 0 (no CSR) and 1 (CSR). Claiming victimhood increases feelings of sympathy when CSR is present (effect = 2.13, CI 1.34 to 2.91). Conversely, when CSR is absent, claiming victimhood does not significantly increase feelings of sympathy (effect = .66, CI -.13 to 1.46). Consequently, and consistent with our hypotheses, when the retailer displays CSR credentials, the mediation of feelings of sympathy is supported, leading to a reduction in negative word of mouth (indirect effect: -.32, CI -.55 to -.14), an increase in purchase intentions (indirect effect: .32, CI .15 to .54) and an increase in the number of tickets chosen (indirect effect: .47, CI .19 to .84). In contrast, when CSR is absent, claiming victimhood does not improve stakeholders' responses (negative word of mouth indirect effect: -.10, CI -.24 to .01; purchase intentions indirect effect: .10 CI, -.02 to .24; choice of tickets indirect effect: .15 CI, -.02 to .34).

Study 2: How CSR engagement enhances the persuasiveness of blame shifting

In situations where the company can be reasonably described as not responsible for wrongdoing (Bundy and Pfarrer, 2015), the persuasiveness of blame shifting communications is due to their ability to protect the perceived ethicality of the company defined as the overall judgment that the company behaves in line with moral and social norms of conduct (Brunk, 2012). Blame shifting suggests that ethical wrongdoing is limited to only one partner (e.g., a supplier or an employee) and is not generalizable across the company. Furthermore, the message proposes a target of blame and, as a consequence, highlights the relative morality of the company (Rothschild et al., 2012). Since CSR improves a company's reputation as well-intentioned and caring (Shea and Hawn, 2019, Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001), we assume that it will increase perceived ethicality of the company and stakeholders' willingness to accept the attempt at blame shifting as a defensive strategy. We expect, therefore, that the CSR involvement enhance the effectiveness of blame shifting so that this defensive crisis response is more persuasive when the company is engaged in CSR. We presented participants with the description of a fictitious sports retailer. In the high CSR condition, the company was presented as well known for investing in charitable initiatives and supporting grassroots sports initiatives in local communities. In the low CSR condition, the company was described as being very aggressive against small and independent stores and showing little concern for its employees (Shea and Hawn, 2019). After that, participants saw a news report describing a case of corruption involving the company. The article presented a senior buyer as the only culprit and ended with the company's response to the accusation. In the accepting responsibility condition, the company accepted responsibility, and expressed regret. In the blame shifting condition, the company accused the senior buyer and refused any responsibility. Figure 2 summarizes our hypotheses.
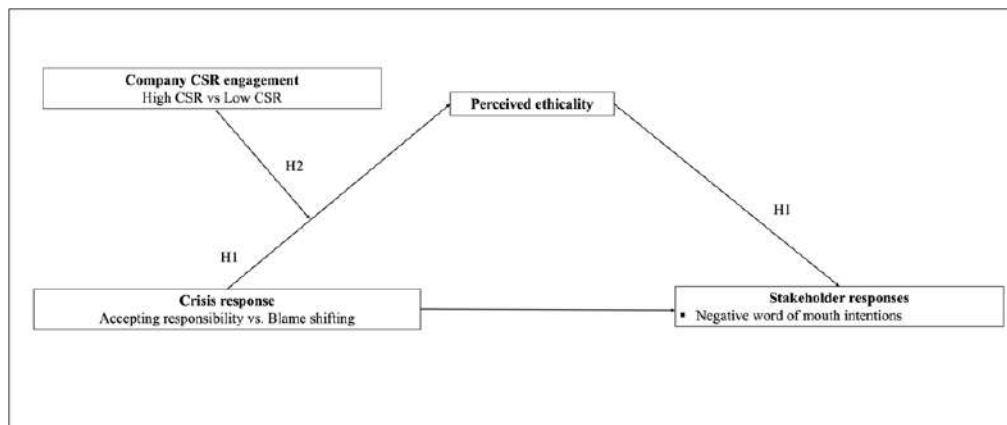
Figure 2: conceptual model of Study 2

Participants and research design

We conducted a 2 (crisis response: accepting responsibility vs. blame shifting) X 2 (Company CSR engagement: low CSR vs high CSR) between-subjects experiment. We recruited 608 U.S. participants (41% male; mean age 43) for participation on Prolific. After reading the scenario, participants answered

questions about perception of company ethicality (Brunk, 2012), intentions to spread negative word of mouth (Antonetti and Maklan, 2016) and provided demographic information.

Results

We conducted a conditional process analysis using PROCESS Model 7 (Hayes, 2018) with the same procedures adopted in Study 1. The independent variable was coded 0 (accepting responsibility) and 1 (blame shifting) and the moderator was coded 0 (low CSR) and 1 (high CSR). Results show that blame shifting increases perceived ethicality when the company has a high engagement in CSR (effect = .50, CI from .19 to .81) while the effect is not significant when the company has a low CSR engagement (effect = -.01, CI from -.30 to .32). Consequently, blame shifting reduces intentions to spread negative word of mouth through the mediation of perceived ethicality when the company is highly involved in CSR (indirect effect = -.32, CI from -.54 to -.10). When the company has low CSR engagement, blame shifting does not reduce negative word of mouth through perceived ethicality (indirect effect = .01, CI from -.19 to .17).

Study 3: The interaction of company size and CSR engagement on the persuasiveness of blame shifting

In Study 3 we investigate how CSR signal and company size have a conjunctive effect on the persuasiveness of blame-shifting crisis response strategy. We assume that since small companies are seen as highly friendly, less powerful and more cooperative (Yang and Aggarwal, 2019), their blameshifting response is less likely to be resisted and more likely to reinforce company perceived ethicality. On the contrary, large companies are less friendly (Yang and Aggarwal, 2019) and this will lead to higher suspicion about their communications (Isaac and Grayson, 2017). In this study we consider the possible interaction between CSR and company size. We evaluate the possibility that a large company might be able to deploy blame shifting effectively provided that they can boast of a CSR engagement. We hypothesize that only one cue is needed to communicate a positive image of the company and that CSR represents a more intentional and costlier signal than an indication of size. Consequently, the positive effect of CSR would allow even a large company to use blame-shifting response effectively. Figure 3 summarized our hypothesis. To test our prediction, we used the same procedures described in Study 1 and 2. The company was a fictitious chocolate brand characterized as a large or small player in the chocolate industry and as engaged or not in socially responsible activities. After reading the description of the company, participants saw a news report describing a

case of child labor in the farms of the brand's supplier. The article ended with the company's response to the accusation (same used in Study 2). After reading the scenario, participants answered the same scales used in Study 2, a purchase intention measure (Boston and Mattila, 2015), and provided demographic information.
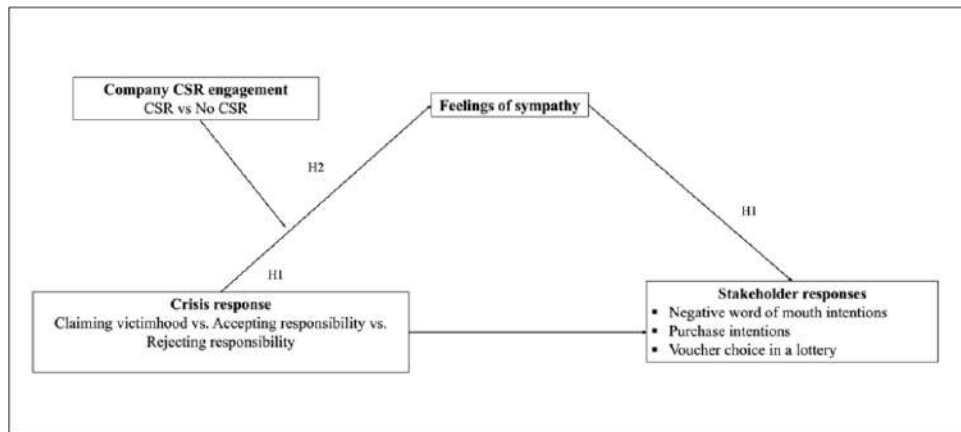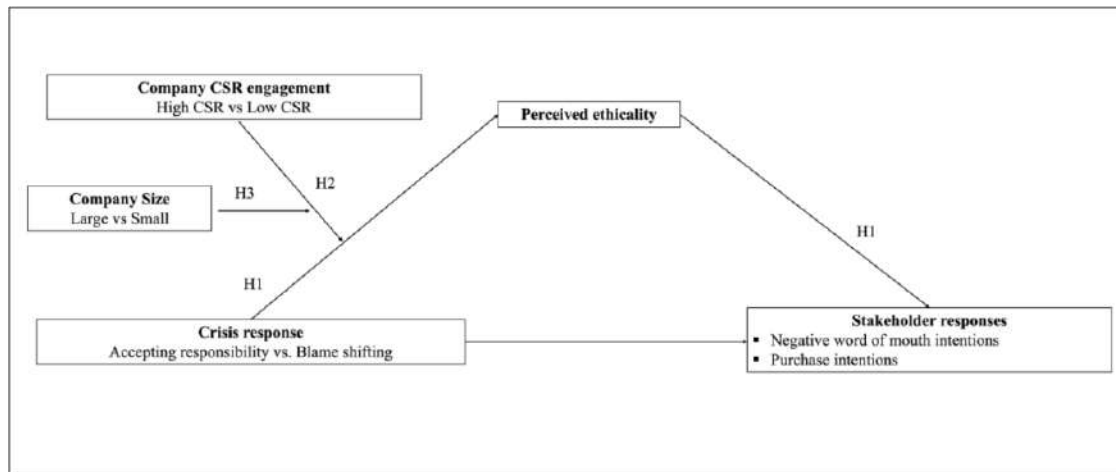
Figure 3: conceptual model of Study 3

Participants and research design

We conducted a 2 (crisis response: accepting responsibility vs. blame shifting) X 2 (company size: large vs. small) X 2 (CSR engagement: No CSR vs. CSR) between-subjects experiment. We recruited 503 U.S. participants (45% male; mean age 44) for participation on Prolific.

Results

We ran conditional process analyses using PROCESS Model 11 (Hayes, 2017) with the same procedures adopted in Studies 2 with company size (0 = large and 1 = small) and CSR engagement (0 = no CSR and 1 = CSR) as moderating variables. Supporting our hypotheses, blame shifting appears to be effective in enhancing perceived ethicality when deployed by a small company with a strong CSR engagement (effect = .83, CI from .22 to 1.143) or by a large company with CSR record (effect = .61, CI from .10 to 1.12). When the company is small without a CSR record, the effect is positive although only marginally significant (95% CI effect = .60, CI from -.01 to 1.21; 90% CI effect = .60, CI from .09 to 1.11). Finally, blame shifting decreases perceived ethicality when deployed by a large company without CSR record (effect = -1.00, CI from -1.48 to .46). Blame shifting has a positive effect on stakeholder responses through the mediation of perceived ethicality when the company is small with a CSR record (negative word of mouth indirect effect = -.41, CI from -.65 to -.16; purchase intentions indirect effect = .37, CI from .14 to .60) or small without a CSR record (negative word of mouth indirect effect = -.30, CI from -.60 to -.01; purchase intentions indirect effect = .27, CI from .02 to .54). When the company is large with a CSR record the effect is positive although only marginally significant (negative word of mouth indirect effect 95% CI effect = -.30, CI from -.61 to .01; 90% CI effect = -.30, CI -.56 to -.03; purchase intention indirect effect 95% CI effect = .27, CI -.01 to .56; 90% CI effect = .27, CI .03 to .52). The only condition in which blame shifting increases negative word of mouth and reduces purchase intentions is the case of a large company without a CSR record (negative word of mouth indirect effect = .48, CI from .23 to .74; purchase intentions indirect effect

= -.44, CI from -.68 to -.20). These results indicate that CSR allows large companies to deploy blame shifting effectively.

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Strategic calibration in CSR communication: The case of fortune 100 companies' public first responses to George Floyd

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The corporate first public response is a critical element in crisis management (Coombs, 1999), and we argue here, in corporate social responsibility (CSR). We define a corporate first public response as the initial statement or action communicated by an organization to the public and its stakeholders in reaction to a significant event, crisis, or issue. Companies' first public responses shape public and stakeholder perceptions and manage reputational dynamics in the aftermath of significant societal events (Coombs, 2010; Veil, Liu, Erickson, & Sellnow, 2005). This initial communication strategy is essential for addressing the informational needs of stakeholders, including employees, customers, and investors, while articulating the organization's stance and strategic direction (Gata, 2015). It emphasizes transparency, timeliness, and accountability, playing a pivotal role in defining corporate identity during periods of scrutiny and in building sustainable relationships based on trust and legitimacy (Coombs, 2010; Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). As such, the examination of the corporate first public response offers valuable insights for scholarly research in CSR and corporate communications, highlighting its impact on stakeholder engagement and the alignment of organizational actions with societal expectations.

The phenomenon of companies globally issuing "first public responses" to the societal upheaval following George Floyd's death marks a pivotal expansion in the realm of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, (Balakrishnan, Copat, De la Parra, & Ramesh; Fletcher & Lovelace, 2024) signifying that such responses are now a broad-based requirement, not just for those directly involved in crises (Purtell & Kang, 2022; Rim, Kim, & Dong, 2019). This shift illuminates the necessity for companies to be keenly aware of the broader corporate dialogue, understanding that their responses are part of a larger tapestry where they must thoughtfully calibrate their messages in alignment with or in distinction from their peers. It highlights the importance of attunement to societal issues and stakeholder expectations, underscoring the evolving nature of CSR where companies must navigate their role within a complex web of public discourse, shaping their strategies to ensure relevance, resonance, and responsibility (Ashby-King, 2023; Coombs, 2018; Kim, 2019).

This paper introduces and elaborates on the concept of the "first public response" as a crucial facet of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication, particularly spotlighting the nuanced process of calibration within this context. The genesis of this exploration lies in the collective corporate reaction to the societal crisis following George Floyd's death, which presented a unique scenario where companies across the spectrum felt compelled to publicly articulate their stance on an issue external to their immediate operational realm. This widespread phenomenon underscores the transition of "first public

responses" from being an occasional necessity for companies directly embroiled in crises, to a more universal aspect of CSR communication that companies must adeptly navigate.

Central to this discussion is the concept of calibration, which we refer to as the strategic adjustment and alignment of a company's response not in isolation, but in consideration of the broader corporate discourse and stakeholder expectations(Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). This calibration is critical to ensuring that the response is not only timely and genuine but also resonates effectively within the larger societal and corporate context, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of CSR communication in addressing complex societal issues.

The absence of a consolidated analysis of corporate first public responses in CSR communication represents a critical lacuna in the field, suggesting an uncharted area ripe for scholarly exploration. This gap highlights the need for research that not only addresses the content and strategies of these responses but also considers their impact on stakeholder relations, societal perceptions, and the broader implications for CSR practices. Such an inquiry would not only enrich the academic discourse on CSR communication but also provide valuable insights for practitioners seeking to navigate the complex interplay between corporate actions, societal expectations, and stakeholder engagement in the face of global challenge.

Literature Review

First Responses

"First response" refers to the immediate actions taken by emergency services or individuals at the scene of an incident or emergency. Scholars and practitioners (e.g., Schottke & American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, 2007) within healthcare, disaster management, and law enforcement contexts widely use the term.

- Emergency Services: This includes the first set of professionals who arrive at an incident scene. Think paramedics, firefighters, and police officers. Their primary goal is to stabilize the situation, provide immediate care, and ensure safety.

- Initial Assessment: Part of the first response is quickly assessing the situation to understand the severity of the situation and the needed resources.

- Immediate Care: Especially in medical emergencies, providing immediate care to stabilize patients is a key component. This could range from CPR to controlling bleeding.

- Coordination and Communication: First responders also coordinate with other necessary services and communicate critical information about the incident to ensure a seamless response.

The concept 'first response' is about swift, organized actions taken right after an incident occurs, aiming to minimize harm and stabilize the situation.

Corporate First Responses in Crisis Communication

The literature on emergency services and organizational crisis management provides a comprehensive overview of first response strategies and their implications. Existing studies have focused on corporate crises, scandals, and reputation management through the lens of individual case studies, often emphasizing the immediate tactical responses to isolated events (Alharbi, 2012: Eweje & Wu, 2010; Frazier & Fellows, 2019; McKenna & Waddell, 2007; Meng & Yang, 2020; Moloney, 2009; Painter & Martins, 2017; Samaroo, 2020; Veil, Liu, Erickson & Sellnow, 2005; Vanek, 2015; Yeltsin, 2015; Young, 1972).

The literature highlights several critical functions of the corporate first response. Table 1 provides our classification. According to Coombs (1999), the first public response to a crisis should be "quick, consistent, open, sympathetic, and informative" (p.114). Others have noted that the first response should set the tone for the company's approach to the crisis, control the flow of information to preempt misinformation, provide reassurance to key stakeholders about the company's initiative-taking stance, manage the potential impact on the company's reputation, and navigate legal implications with transparency and caution (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). Such a response not only addresses the immediate crisis but also establishes a foundation for long-term resolution and trust-building with stakeholders, underscoring the strategic importance of the first public response in maintaining corporate credibility and trustworthiness in times of upheaval.

Corporate First Public Responses in CSR

We note a sizeable gap exists in the exploration of corporate first responses within the context of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. This approach overlooks the broader, systematic examination of first responses across diverse organizations, especially in the context of societal issues that transcend individual corporate boundaries. Corporate first responses are not necessarily public, as we note that many companies choose to address issues privately within their employee base before making any public statements. This distinction is crucial, as internal communications often aim to inform, reassure, and engage employees (Smith & Mounter, 2005), reflecting a company's immediate priorities and values in crisis management (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). These internal responses can include emails, internal memos, town hall meetings, and dedicated discussions on intranet platforms, tailored to the concerns and morale of the workforce (Coombs, 2010).

In contrast, we note that first public responses are directed towards a broader audience, including customers, investors, regulatory bodies, and the public, and are disseminated through external channels like company websites, press releases, and social media (Coombs, 2010; Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). These public communications must navigate a wider array of considerations, including public sentiment, media scrutiny, and potential impacts on brand reputation and stakeholder trust. The differentiation between internal and public responses underscores the multifaceted nature of corporate communication strategies in addressing crises, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of how companies communicate across different audiences and platforms in times of turmoil.

The Case of George Floyd and Racial Equity

In our study, we delve into the examination of corporate first public responses in the wake of George Floyd's death, focusing specifically on the initial two-week period following this pivotal event. This timeframe is critical as it represents the immediate aftermath when public sentiment and societal reactions were most intense, and corporate responses were under significant scrutiny. Numerous studies investigated corporate responses to George Floyd's murder (e.g., Ashby-King, 2023; Balakrishnan, Copat, De la Parra, & Ramesh, 2023; Bonaparte, 2020; Chen, Dechow, & Tan, 2022; Goreansky & Olkkonen, 2022; Purtell & Kang, 2022; Wertley & Baker, 2022; Yancey & Krome, 2021).

The case of George Floyd presents a pivotal opportunity to explore the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) issue of racial equity, a crucial and increasingly recognized dimension of CSR (Fletcher & Lovelace, 2024). This tragic event and its aftermath prompted a widespread reckoning with systemic racism and inequality (Bonaparte, 2020), not just within societal structures but also within corporate practices and policies (Balakrishnan, Copat, De la Parra, & Ramesh, 2023). As companies issued their first public responses, they were also making a statement on their stance towards racial equity, consciously or not (Purtell & Kang, 2022; Morsing & Roepstorff, 2015). This scenario allows for an in-depth analysis of how corporations align their CSR strategies with the imperative for racial justice, examining the authenticity, depth, and impact of their commitments.

By scrutinizing the corporate responses to George Floyd's death, we can assess how companies address racial equity both in their external communications and through their internal actions—ranging from diversity and inclusion initiatives to more equitable hiring practices and beyond. This examination reveals the extent to which companies are willing to engage with complex social issues and integrate them into their CSR frameworks, challenging them to move beyond superficial acknowledgments towards meaningful, systemic change. The responses to this case serve as a litmus test for the genuine integration of racial equity into corporate values and practices, providing insights into the evolving landscape of CSR where issues of social justice and equity become central to corporate identity and stakeholder expectations.

The Means to Critique Racial Discourse

The examination of racial equity in the corporate context, particularly in the aftermath of George Floyd's death, indeed prompts a scholarly pivot towards theories that can dissect and elucidate the complexities of race relations. While Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers profound insights into systemic inequality and the social construction of race, its contentious aspects, and the lack of a clear empirical framework for corporate analysis led us to seek alternative methodologies. In this vein, Stephen Toulmin's framework of argumentation emerges as a valuable tool for analyzing corporate discourse on racial equity.

Toulmin's model allows for a structured examination of corporate communications by breaking down the arguments into their constituent elements: claims, grounds, warrants, backing, qualifiers, and rebuttals. This approach enables a systematic assessment of how companies articulate their stance on racial equity, the evidence they present to support their positions, the underlying assumptions guiding their arguments, and how they address counterarguments or potential criticisms. By applying Toulmin's framework, we

can scrutinize the logical structure and persuasive efficacy of corporate responses to racial equity issues, facilitating comparisons both within and across organizations.

This methodology offers a way to empirically analyze and compare corporate commitments to racial equity, transcending the limitations of CRT in the corporate context. It allows scholars to assess the robustness of corporate arguments regarding racial equity, evaluate the consistency and sincerity of these claims, and gauge the extent to which companies are genuinely engaging with the principles of racial justice and inclusion in their CSR initiatives.

Stephen Toulmin's framework of argumentation offers a structured way to analyze the components of an argument, breaking it down into six key elements:

1. Claim: The statement argued or the conclusion that the speaker or writer wishes the audience to accept.
2. Grounds: The evidence or facts that support the claim.
3. Warrant: The underlying assumption or principle that connects the grounds to the claim, often unstated.
4. Backing: Additional evidence or reasoning that supports the warrant.
5. Qualifier: Words or phrases that limit the claim's scope, indicating the strength of the leap from the grounds to the claim (e.g., "most likely," "sometimes").
6. Rebuttal: Acknowledgment of counterarguments or limitations to the claim, providing responses or exceptions.

Our research questions is:
RQ1: What communication traits characterize companies' first public response to George Floyd's death?

Research study

In this study, we focus on analyzing the public first corporate responses issued by the Fortune 100 companies in the aftermath of George Floyd's death. Our investigation encompasses the platforms used for these communications, including company websites, news media interviews and coverage, and various social media channels such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Additionally, we consider statements released through trade press and other forms of social media.

Applying Toulmin's framework to the study of companies' first public responses to George Floyd's death offers several advantages. It allows for a detailed examination of how companies construct their arguments regarding racial equity and social justice, revealing the underlying logic, assumptions, and evidence they use. By dissecting the argumentative structure, researchers can assess the clarity, strength, and persuasiveness of these corporate communications. The framework helps identify the specific claims companies make about their stance on racial equity, the evidence they provide to support these claims, how they justify the connection between their actions and their stated commitments, and how they address potential counterarguments or skepticism from the public.

Furthermore, Toulmin's model facilitates a comparative analysis across different companies and communication platforms, enabling researchers to uncover patterns in how corporations articulate their commitments to racial equity and respond to societal expectations. This analysis can reveal the extent to

which concrete actions or commitments substantiate these statements and provide insights into the authenticity and depth of corporate engagement with issues of racial justice in the wake of George Floyd's death.

Discussion and conclusions

In our study, we will delve into the empirical findings related to the distribution and configuration of Toulmin's elements within the first public responses of the Fortune 100 companies following George Floyd's death. Our analysis aims to uncover how these corporations construct their arguments in addressing such a pivotal societal issue, shedding light on the strategic frameworks employed in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication. Specifically, we anticipate identifying trends and variances in the use of Toulmin's components—claims, grounds, warrants, backings, qualifiers, and rebuttals—highlighting the nuanced approaches companies take in crafting their narratives.

Furthermore, our study will introduce and discuss the concept of calibration, focusing on how companies adjusted their responses considering their peers' actions, reflecting a collective corporate concern for alignment with broader societal expectations and the corporate sector's collective stance on racial equity and justice. This exploration will enrich our understanding of the strategic modulation of messages and the significance of maintaining coherence within the corporate community's collective voice.

The broader implications of our findings for CSR communication practice, particularly the importance of constructing robust, evidence-backed arguments in corporate first public responses, will be a key focus of our discussion. We will explore how the calibration of corporate messages, in conjunction with the argumentative structure identified through Toulmin's framework, can enhance the credibility and impact of corporate communications.

By examining the interplay between Toulmin's elements and the process of calibration in these corporate communications, our study aims to contribute valuable insights to the discourse on strategic CSR communication. We propose that a carefully considered approach, combining argumentative soundness with strategic alignment to societal and peer dynamics, can significantly strengthen a company's role as a constructive societal participant in addressing critical social justice and equity issues.

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Organizational stigma formation

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Abstract

Despite the increasing research into stigma management, little work has been done on how stigma emerges and reaches the necessary critical mass. We study the online stigmatization of Monte Paschi di Siena (MPS), one of Italy's biggest banks, over 5 years. We coin the term stigma formation and present a model of stigma formation integrated by three discursive mechanisms: borrowing, ascribing, and normalizing. We show how these mechanisms vilify the organization through the strategic use of cultural resources, moral statements, and emotions. We discuss the role played by different emotions in stigma formation. We contribute to stigma studies by identifying the micro-mechanisms of stigma formation and how these relate to the macro processes of stigma, the role of emotions in stigma formation, and the dynamics of stigma formation online.

Introduction

Political scandals, fraud cases, and other controversies can lead to the stigmatization of an organization (Hudson, 2008). In such cases, the organization becomes the target of negative social evaluations, which play a crucial role in explaining both the antecedents and outcomes of stigma (Helms et al., 2019; Roulet, 2020). Stigma emerges when "a critical mass of stakeholder group members accepts a vilifying label" (Devers et al., 2009, p. 162); that is, when social evaluations are supported by many others (Roulet, 2020). Stigmatization happens through labeling (Devers et al., 2009) which, in this context, is a process of cognitive association with cultural resources that are already stigmatized (Zhang, Wang, Toubiana, and Greenwood, 2021). By becoming associated with other stigmatized cultural resources, the target organization gains their properties, which are typically to do with deviant behaviour. Stigma labels and the stereotypes evoked tend to be context specific (Denvers et al., 2009) and are conveyed with the specific intent of socially controlling (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995, 1997) what is publicly said about an organization.

Extant research has examined the stigmatization actions and labeling efforts performed by valuators, evoked in a specific context (e.g., Durand and Verge, 2014; Helms and Patterson, 2014; Tracey and Phillips, 2016; Vergne, 2012; Augustine and Piazza, 2022). It has focused on how labeling is built at individual level; that is, how a stakeholder engages in practices of vilification to transform the social evaluation of the organization (Zhang et al., 2021), including through media attacks (Durand and Verge, 2014; Roulet 2015, 2020). However, there is a lack of understanding of how labeling is constructed and of how through

labeling the necessary critical mass for stigmatization can be reached (Roulet, 2015, 2020; Hudson et al., 2022). We use the term formation of stigma to explain the process and mechanisms valuators purposefully use in the labeling that leads to stigma. Formation relates to the stage where individuals engage in an evaluative mode of information processing and creation (Tost, 2011). We specifically aim at exploring the mechanisms of stigma formation through the following research questions: How is stigma formed? What are the mechanisms involved in the formation of stigma?

To address these questions, we build on research that looks at the micro-foundations of social evaluations (Bitektine and Haack, 2015) and at how social evaluations are formed (Tost, 2011). Since we argue that labels are discursive devices aiming at social control (Ashforth and Humphrey 1997) and "affective tag[s]" (Fiske and Taylor 1991), we analyze them from the perspective of rhetoric (Green, 2004; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Vaara and Tienari, 2008) and emotion. By looking at emotions and rhetoric, we aim to unpack the mechanisms of vilification, and the relations between the micro actions and macro processes that create a critical mass (Felin et al., 2015). Also, we aim to extend extant studies on stigma emergence (Roulet 2015, 2020; Hudson and Okhuysen 2009; Maguire and Hardy, 2009; Creed et al 2014) by providing a communications approach that allows us to show how stigmatizing is contextual, being drawn from a combination of cultural resources, moral arguments, and emotional pathos.

Our context is the Italian bank, Monte Paschi di Siena (MPS), receiving negative social evaluations (Illia et al., 2023; 2022) due to accusations of corruption from 2011 to 2015. In a first step we identified which tweets are creating a critical mass of social evaluations among 2,580,000 tweets posted on the social media platform Twitter about MPS. In a second step, we develop an extensive qualitative analysis of 3,972 tweets selected in the first phase, which we complemented with secondary data to contextualize the tweets and make sense of their communications. From this analysis, we present a model of stigma formation made up of three mechanisms that extend the understanding of vilification of a target object. This allows us to unpack the labeling process by coming to a more nuanced understanding of what labels are used by evaluators and how they are used and manipulated. The mechanisms of stigma formation are: borrowing (i.e., breaking down the meaning of the target object and overturning its moral connotation by borrowing shared cultural resources to create humor), ascribing (i.e., attaching negative meaning to the target organization and creating moral shock by associating it to stigmatized resources), and normalizing (i.e., stabilizing stigma by using the target organization as an unquestionably stigmatized object to vilify another target and create moral resignation). As with any complex social process, mechanisms co-exist and interact. We also argue that emotions play a relevant role in the overall dynamic. In particular, when the emotion of one mechanism becomes dominant, it contributes to raising or mitigating the emotional pathos of the other two mechanisms.

We contribute in three ways to the literature. First, we contribute to the understanding of stigmatization and stigma emergence (Helms et al., 2019; Devers et al., 2009; Roulet, 2020) by using the term stigma formation, which maintains the dimension of social construction while also having connotations of the intentionality of stigmatization. We go beyond the understanding of labeling as ascription and detail the mechanisms of stigma formation, contributing to understanding the micromacro dynamics of stigmatization (Roulet, 2015, 2020; Bitektine and Haack, 2015; Ravasi et al., 2018; Hudson et al 2022)

and how critical mass is achieved. We point at the importance of understanding how cultural references, moral principles, and emotions work together to vilify an organization, and how they need to be understood in context. Second, we contribute to understanding the role emotions play in the vilification process (Toubliana and Zietsma, 2017; Creed et al., 2014;

Zietsma et al 2019). We show that stigma forms strategically via emotions, but we illustrate that latter is not expressed in a linear way, as extant studies suggest, but rather emotions tend to pick in the form of range and then mild (in the form of resignation) during stigma formation. Third, we contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of social media in stigma formation (Illia et al., 2023; Goel et al 2016; Gibbs, Rozaidi, and Eisenberg, 2013). We go beyond claims related to the role of emotions diffusion of information and polarization at the sentiment level, to show the communication dynamics of mobilization online. We also contribute methodologically by demonstrating how AI tools can support the qualitative exploration of organizational phenomena.

References upon request

CSR as in between the legal and the ethical: Mobilising legal frameworks though public discourse

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Assumtption and purpose

Within the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) it is assumed that private actors (corporations) become positioned as a responsible actor in society first and foremost by assuring economic relevance and to do this within legal frameworks established by public actors (governments) (Carroll, 1979; Gillan, Koch, & Starks, 2021; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). The current paper challenges this view by drawing on a literature suggesting that the law is not only a framework where it is central to stay within its boundaries, but where legal boundaries under certain circumstances can be mobilised by private actors (Anastasiadis, 2014; Edelman & Suchman, 1997; Fuller, Edelman, & Matusik, 2000).

A second assumption within the CSR literature is that corporations need to work with sustainable development as corporate social responsibility since many governments do not regulate this field (Moon, 2007). However, actors from various sectors are also understood to invite each other into organisational decisions based on Habermasian discourse ethics and discursive practices for the transformation of economies towards sustainability (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Vaara & Tienar, 2008). The current paper goes beyond how public actors shape private actors in (transnational) governance towards sustainability, as suggested by Überbacher and Scherer (2020), and rather explores how private and public actors interact through the mobilisation of legal boundaries.

A third assumption within the CSR and sustainability literature is that CSR, like sustainable development, can been categorized as rather dynamic (Hopwood et al, 2005; Matten and Moon, 2008), changing with time, place, and users. This includes the perspective that not only can sustainable development be understood in different ways, but sustainability also involves balancing and proportionality in the decision-making process, including what parts of sustainable development should be selected and prioritised, and how environmental and economic values should be balanced. This has elevated language to a crucial instrument in communicating the shifts within markets towards sustainability. In these discourse-based practices, the primary objective has frequently been the pursuit of consensus, compromises, and symmetry within stakeholder relationships, leading to a normative theorising of dialogue (Weder, 2022). This consensus perspective has been problematised in not opening as a place for constructive exchange of disagreement and conflict (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2005; Žižek, 2009). Therefore, this paper will explore how exchange of disagreement and conflict in debates on sustainable development as part of CSR can be constructive and lead to various results.

With this constructive perspective, this paper also challenge a fourth assumption within the CSR literature, which is that of language and communication as merely talk and less practice (Basu & Palazzo, 2008;

Haack, Schoeneborn, & Wickert, 2012). The present paper builds on a more constructive view of language (Caruana & Crane, 2008), investigating material consequences (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009) of sustainable development as part of a CSR discourse.

In this way, this paper contributes to advancing knowledge in CSR communication and how social actors do not replace the field of law and ethics with each other, but rather let these two fields interplay in the construction of environmentally and socially legitimate markets. Furthermore, the current leading literature within this field is mainly based on studies from Anglo-Saxon contexts for market and law. In this paper the focus will be on how European and Nordic law systems interact with global goals of sustainable development in the market sphere, an important but neglected part of the knowledge. A third contribution is made by questioning the rigor of legal and ethical boundaries, suggesting that legal and ethical boundaries are flexible, and that this flexibility of boundaries are used by social actors to achieve results that are in line with their primary agenda for sustainable development.

Theoretical framework, method and data

For the exploration as part of the purpose in this paper, a theoretical framework has been used where a rational economic basis for reasoning, built on instrumental rationality, is compared to an environmental basis for reasoning, supported by value rationality, both inspired by critical theory (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002), a flexible process influenced by the social context. Rationality as argument for decision-making has been found important for legitimation in comparison to authorisation (Suchman, 1995), being of particular importance in the trade-off between economic and environmental values.

Since rationality needs to be defined and argued for, a discursive analysis of text material used for the exploration of public and private interaction for the governance of sustainable development through the mobilisation of legal boundaries. The aim of the discourse analysis is to not only describe but also explain the balance act between the economic and the environmental in relation to the purpose of the Environmental law and code. Moreover, this analysis has as its ambition to make visible how seemingly symbolic interactions in private and public governance of sustainability have substantive effects, letting the texts illustrate the discursive practices and their material outcomes.

The texts collected as data are part of a debate on sustainability in the Swedish building industry. This debate started in 2019 and ended in June 2022. The main issue concerned in this debate was whether a Swedish, global company and private actor, part of one of the world's largest integrated manufacturers of building materials and solutions, should be allowed continue mining limestone at its quarry on the Swedish island of Gotland. Protests had been made by local social movement groups. As a first result of this debate between social movement groups and private actor and global company, a Swedish court had decided that a nearby nature reserve, protected under European law, should not be allowed by quarry operations, since this was considered to damage this nature resource that from now on should only be allowed for drinking-water supplies. The private actor and global company protested against this decision, based on its production of 75 % of the cement used in Sweden, and warned about the risk of cement rationing. A court rejected a long-term extension of quarrying at the site, a decision that was overruled by the Swedish government, giving the cement operation a stay of execution. Later, the company applied for

a new permit to quarry for another four years while preparing an application to secure production at the Slite plant for the coming decades.

To analyse this debate, texts were collected in the form of government bills, Swedish Government Official Reports, court cases, judgments and cases in the Swedish Environmental Court and in the European Court of Justice, reports from social movements as well as the private actor (company) on their web sites, press releases and other press material. With the help of a discursive repertoire, based on discursive strategies and tactics, where rationalities used as arguments in the decision-making process were identified as means for the mobilisation of the legal framework in the public and private interaction for the governance of sustainability.

Preliminary results

The study in this paper is under analysis and some preliminary results exist but will be developed further before this conference takes place. For the conference, tables and figures as well as illustrative examples will be presented. The preliminary findings indicate that public and private actors mobilising the legal framework with the help of discourse, leading to the positioning of the private actor changing with the discursive activities. In the initial stage of the discursive activities, the private actor was positioned as unsustainable with the help of environmental value rationality. This was followed by a second phase in the discursive activities, where the private actor responded to the critique, using arguments of economic rationality as a reason for positioning the corporate activities as sustainable. This led to a third phase where a public actor interacted in the debate, using environmental value rationality for status quo in the legal framework. A fourth phase was then initiated by another public actor, part of the Swedish government, leading to a change in the law, helping to position the private actor as both legal and sustainable, based on a combination of economic and environmental rationality.

These discursive practices and processes made the private actor move from being positioned as sustainable to unsustainable, back to sustainable. Tools used for this were not changes in business practices by the private actor, but rather through the mobilisation of the legal framework through discursive practices.

Conclusions and discussion

Rather than restricting or enabling good life for all, current governance legacies are open to change, and are also mobilised in different contexts. This influences how we understand private actors as responsible or not, in line with sustainability or not, and even legal or not. This is made in a process of constructing legislation as a central feature of markets, not as a limitation or regulation of markets. The outcomes of these processes in terms of the legal boundaries for markets can vary. One outcome is that private actors can be positioned as neutral, unsustainable (or unethical) and ethical within a limited timeframe and in a limited place (like Sweden) where private actors participate in the mobilisation of the legal frameworks. One contribution of this paper is to demonstrate how the interaction of public and private actors mobilise legal frameworks, leading to different positionings of private actors in terms of sustainability. A second contribution is to exhibit but also how discursive tools can lead to highly material consequences. I

demonstrate how the understanding of sustainable development varies with the prioritisation of different economic and social outcomes, and how this influences the legal framework to better fit with prioritised goals towards the understanding of sustainable development. This is central to CSR communication.

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Strategic communication responses to CSR institutionalization: An NGO perspective

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Purpose

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is variously understood as the voluntary actions corporations take to demonstrate their fit in society (e.g., McWilliams & Siegel, 2011) or broadly, "the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society" (European Commission, 2011). Scholars have argued that CSRi is ubiquitous for corporations (see Aguinis & Glavas, 2012, for a review) and through communication, corporations have institutionalized a preferred set of CSR activities, behaviors, and standards within and across institutional fields (e.g., Jamali & Neville, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2017).

However, corporations are not lone actors within the CSR field. To point, NGOsii actively construct the meaning of CSR (Dempsey, 2011) within and across economic fields (e.g., Austin & Seitandi, 2012; Pedersen & Pedersen, 2013). The current study enters the conversation about NGOs as CSR actors by approaching CSR as an institutional field (Jamali & Neville, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2017). Our goal is to foreground an NGO perspective on CSR institutionalization and move beyond conflict-partnership characteristics and orientation to explicate the influence of social context and NGO positions in the field on the strategic communication NGOs employ as actors in the CSR field.

Two interrelated questions guide our analysis: First, how do NGOs define the CSR field? This question is important in light of the well-known assertion that CSR is not a "fixed script" (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010, p. 13); rather it is a contested and dynamic construct in which multi-level actors including NGOs play a role in shaping meanings and influencing outcomes (Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013). Second, guided by CSR understandings, what strategic communication repertoires do NGOs employ in the CSR field?

Theory

The study combines perspectives from institutional theory and strategic communication. Institutional theory argues that institutional fields share a set of rules, norms, and beliefs that serve to distinguish one field from the other (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Norms and beliefs spread across a field through mimetic, coercive, and normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008). Over time, institutionalization occurs as behaviors and ideologies become habituated, accepted, serially reproduced and minimally contested across or within fields (Campbell, 2007; Colyvas & Jonsson, 2011; Hardy, 2011;

Jepperson, 1991). Once a behavior or ideology, such as CSR, becomes institutionalized, it is reified and guides future actions across economic and social industries.

The process of institutionalization involves different actors (Bondy et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2011), however, not all voices are represented equally. Within the CSR literature, researchers have found that large multinational corporations (MNCs) use their expansive resources (Bondy et al., 2012; O'Connor, 2006) and strategic communication activities (O'Connor & Shumate, 2010) to institutionalize a "superior, universal form" (Jamali & Neville, 2011, p. 601) of CSR that is homogenous across economic fields and supports traditional business imperatives (Bondy et al., 2012; Jamali & Neville, 2011; O'Connor et al., 2017). In contrast to MNCs, NGOs have fewer resources at their disposal to institutionalize CSR (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010) as well as a limited role in deciding which practices corporations adopt as part of their CSR portfolio (e.g., Nijhof et al., 2008; Trapp, 2014). Even when MNCs position themselves as part of an ecosystem, they prioritize particular stakeholder groups (e.g., standard-setting organizations) to gain institutional legitimacy (Xu & Woo, 2023). With the exception of large international environmental NGOs, MNC reporting of CSR accords a less prominent role to NGOs (Xu & Woo, 2023).

Further complicating matters is that many NGOs rely on corporations for financial resources (e.g., Arenas et al., 2009) thereby potentially limiting their willingness to advance a definition of CSR that is at odds with corporate conceptualizations. Finally, the heterogeneity across social issues (e.g., Bertels et al., 2014) and NGOs positionality regarding corporate collaboration (Ählström & Sjöström, 2005) may make it more difficult for NGOs to institutionalize CSR.

While NGOs may not be the most powerful actor within the CSR field, they still engage in strategic communication to influence the field of CSR in context. Trends in strategic communication (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2015; O'Connor & Shumate, 2018) suggest that NGOs may be able to challenge the ability of corporations to be the authoritative actor in defining CSR. For example, NGOs may leverage social media to mobilize a broad range of actors to participate in their campaigns thereby creating more urgency and legitimacy for their claims and compelling business to respond (Coombs & Holladay, 2015; Davis et al., 2016).

Method

Guided by the goal to understand NGO approaches to CSR as embedded in a particular social context, and to foreground the NGO rather than the corporate perspective about the field of CSR, we conducted in-depth interviews with 14 international NGO managers in Switzerland. The NGOs that participated in this study represented multiple social issue industries and were equally split between Swiss chapters of an international network and Swiss-headquartered organizations with operations in and beyond Switzerland.

Except one telephonic interview, all interviews were conducted face-to-face in the Swiss cities of Basel, Berne, and Zurich, lasted between 40 and 62 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interview questions were guided by the study's research questions and included topics about NGO perspectives on contemporary CSR developments in Switzerland, NGO presence and experience(s) in the CSR field, how they view their role(s) in the CSR field, communication strategies and specific activities that

constituted engagement with business, facilitators, and attendant challenges, and constraints on NGO efforts. Participants were invited to share perspectives and examples from their experience(s) and ongoing programs as well as to raise other topics not covered in the interview guide.

Major results

Across the diversity of NGOs in our study (including their specific work in Switzerland and NGO position in the field), we find a striking uniformity in how the CSR field is defined/described. NGOs were unanimous about the "high levels of interest" in and "talk" about CSR but defined the CSR field in Switzerland as driven by 'business logics.' All participants elaborated on the market mindset by noting that, from their perspective, corporations engaged in CSR not because they were overly altruistic or moral bound but driven by business benefits. Several participants identified CSR as a risk management endeavor in relation to the market orientation of CSR. Interviewees indicated that this was particularly true for large, international, consumer-facing companies that are more likely to face direct public pressure than companies higher on the value chain.

Against this background of a uniform, market-first, CSR field, NGOs in our study employ an amalgam/array/constellation of strategic response repertoires that aim to influence the CSR field through resistance (by exposing irresponsibility/irresponsible behavior); through reform (working in coalitions shape policy and structural change favorable to advancing CSR); and through (mutually) reinforcing the importance of CSR facilitated via cooperative mechanisms geared at information provision, sharing expertise, or pushing business toward a more strategic and embedded CSR approach. Notably, these strategic response repertoires are all imbued with tension(s) and often necessitate differentiated approaches, for example, an interviewee noted:

On some sectors we are working, against companies directly, when we make critical reports on them. At the same time, we are also working with the trading associations and the Swiss government to elaborate a sector guidance for the commodity trading sector.

Another interviewee explained that working in coalitions allowed them to involve businesses in a way that transcended the extremes of NGOs who "only criticize" business or only "work with business" whereas a third opined "...it's always good to have principles, but when it is about survival, it's a bit more difficult."

We outline the specifics of each strategic response stance and the associated tensions.

Implications

Our study builds on the build on the foundations of early NGO-focused CSR theorizing while adding to it in important ways. First, accompanying the interest in NGOs as political actors (e.g., Dempsey, 2011) in the CSR field is the assertion that NGOs occupy and operate in a "contradictory space" (Sander, 2012, p. 181). Therefore, viewing them as "sacred spaces set apart from market forces" is deemed problematic and delinked from social reality (Dempsey, 2011, p. 148).

Second, NGO strategies and actions need to be understood in context, as "shaped by the particulars of certain periods" (Ählström & Sjöström, 2005, p. 238). As an example, Ählström and Sjöström's (2005) classification of "preservers" as partnership-seeking NGOs whose "strategy is not reliant on autonomy

from corporate influence" (p. 239) may not adequately capture current developments wherein NGO-business partnerships are subject to intense scrutiny, the risk of NGO co-optation, and consequently, the need for accountability mechanisms (e.g., AbouAssi & Trent, 2016; Burchell & Cook, 2013). Conversely, despite being classified as a non-partnership NGO, Greenpeace notes that it "has no permanent friends or foes. If your government or company is willing to change, we will work with you to achieve your aims..." (https://www.greenpeace.org/international/about/values/), illustrating the limitations of static typologies in a rapidly transforming business landscape

Collectively, these arguments reinforce the need to examine NGOs as "constituted within a contingent field of economic, political, and social relations" (Dempsey, 2011, p. 148). Although seminal work has provided a valuable springboard for conversations about NGO role(s) in CSR, the developments noted above necessitate nuanced understandings that are more complex and grounded in actual practice.

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A Shelter for Creating Sustainable Value: Informal Institutions, Formal Institutional Challenges, and Subsidiaries' CSR Performance

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Abstract

Multinational enterprises (MNEs) and their subsidiaries often face challenges in creating sustainable value through conducting corporate social responsibility (CSR) in host countries. This study examines how sister city relationships influence subsidiaries' local CSR performance and how formal institutional challenges affect this relationship. Analyzing data from foreign MNE subsidiaries in China (2010-2019), we find that subsidiaries from sister cities exhibit higher CSR performance. While formal institutional distance doesn't significantly moderate this effect, bilateral political tensions strengthen it. Our findings highlight the role of subnational informal institutions in promoting local CSR performance. This study offers insights into leveraging informal institutions for enhanced CSR performance amid institutional challenges.

Keywords: Subsidiary CSR, subnational informal institution, formal institutional distance, bilateral political tension, sister cities

Extended abstract

Multinational enterprises (MNEs) and their subsidiaries play an essential role in creating sustainable value both for themselves and the host countries in which they operate (Kavadis, et al., 2024; Pisani, et al., 2017; Vishwanathan, et al., 2020). Through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, MNEs have the potential to promote sustainable development and generate shared value (Husted & Allen, 2006; Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010). Previous research has shown that MNEs and their subsidiaries can provide sustainable value in host communities by addressing social and environmental challenges, such as poverty alleviation, education, health, climate change (Ghauri & Yamin, 2009; Kolk, 2016; Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010). However, despite the growing emphasis on CSR in international business context, research has shown that MNEs and their subsidiaries face significant challenges and barriers that hinder from effectively creating sustainable value in host countries and communities.

One of the main challenges is that MNEs and their subsidiaries often prioritize their own motives and financial goals over generating sustainable value for host countries and communities (Fiaschi, Giuliani, & Nieri, 2017; Muller & Kolk, 2010; Surroca, Tribó, & Zahra, 2013). They primarily engage in CSR to mitigate the liability of foreignness and gain legitimacy rather than addressing social and environmental issues in a meaningful and sustainable manner (Husted, Montiel, & Christmann, 2016; Jamali, 2010; Surroca, et al., 2013). Lack of intrinsic motivation and empathy may lead subsidiaries to conduct symbolic CSR practices, fail to effectively create value to host countries, or even engage in corporate irresponsibility (Bondy, Moon,

& Matten, 2012; Crilly, Ni, & Jiang, 2016; Fiaschi, et al., 2017). Another main challenge that may disrupt or discontinue subsidiaries' CSR activities arises from formal institutional challenges. For example, institutional distance and recently increasing geopolitical tensions may pose threats to the operation of subsidiaries in host countries (Campbell, Eden, & Miller, 2012; Ciravegna, Ahlstrom, et al., 2023). Although CSR can be employed as a tool to mitigate legitimacy challenge (Li & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2023), the operational risk may lead subsidiaries to withdraw their efforts in host country markets or disinvest from host countries (Song, 2024).

From an institutional perspective, MNEs and their subsidiaries' local engagement, including CSR activities, are influenced by formal and informal institutions (Kostova & Roth, 2002; Marano & Kostova, 2016). While most IB studies focus on formal institutions' impacts, less attention is given to informal ones (Dau, et al., 2022; Zhang, 2020). Unlike formal institutions emphasizing coercive pressure and compliance (Martínez-Ferrero & García-Sánchez, 2017; Muller & Kolk, 2010; Yang & Rivers, 2009), informal institutions shape social norms through long-term interactions among societal members (Scott, 2013). These informal institutions are crucial in determining collective norms about why and how to conduct CSR (Jamali & Neville, 2011; Marquis, Glynn, & Davis, 2007). The social virtues and collective norms institutionalized over time are more likely to lead individuals to conduct CSR in authentic ways. Therefore, focusing on informal institutions' impact on subsidiaries' CSR can improve our understanding of key factors that contribute to sustainable value creation.

While there is growing interest in formal-informal institutional interactions, most studies examine institutional convergence, where formal and informal institutions align and mutually reinforce each other (Dau, et al., 2022; Gaur, et al., 2022; Holmes, et al., 2013). Less attention is paid to institutional divergence, where formal and informal institutions are misaligned or in conflict (Dau, et al., 2022). This divergence can occur when formal institutional structures misalign with informal norms. Furthermore, although some scholars explore how misaligned informal information weakens the effectiveness of formal institutions (Gaur et al., 2022), there is limited exploration of how formal institutional challenges might disrupt the effectiveness of established informal institutions. Therefore, it needs further exploration on how subsidiaries navigate conflicting institutional settings and how this affects their approach to sustainable value creation in host countries.

This study focuses on a particular informal institution closely related to subsidiaries and local stakeholders: institutionalized compassion within sister city relationships. Established to mitigate war-introduced pain after World War II (Zelinsky, 1991), these relationships cultivate mutual understanding, trust, and joint efforts to overcome difficulties (Cremer, De Bruin, & Dupuis, 2001; Hu, Natarajan, & Delios, 2021). This virtue has been institutionalized as norms encouraging general reciprocity among social actors. While prior studies emphasized economic advantages of these partnerships (Brakman, Garretsen, & Oumer, 2016; Hu, et al., 2021; Zhang, et al., 2020), the impact of humanistic components on subsidiaries' CSR performance hasn't been sufficiently investigated. Moreover, the potential divergence between these informal institutions and formal institutional pressures remains unexplored. Therefore, our study asks: How does institutionalized compassion within sister city relationships influence subsidiaries'

local CSR performance? And to what extent is this effect affected by formal institutions, especially when there is divergence between formal and informal institutions?

With a sample of 88 subsidiaries located in China between 2010 and 2019, we find that subsidiaries located in sister cities of their origin cities in home countries have higher CSR performance than their counterparts, suggesting that compassion within sister cities can engage subsidiaries to create greater value for the host country. We further tested the moderating effects of formal institutional distance and the occurrence of bilateral political tension between subsidiaries' home and host countries. Formal institutional distance and bilateral political tension show divergence from institutionalized compassion because they are likely to create misaligned policies and friction that may intervene in social emotions embedded between sister cities. However, we did not find that formal institutional distance weakens the positive effect of sister cities, and we found that the occurrence of bilateral tension enhances the positive effect of sister cities. This finding is consistent with evidence in the literature on compassion that the buffering qualities of compassion act as a protective shield, reinforcing the organization's ability to overcome adversities, safeguarding against negative impacts, and fostering resilience and solidarity (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004; Madden, et al., 2012).

This study makes three important contributions to IB and CSR research. First, while previous research has emphasized the role of formal institutions in influencing CSR practices, our study demonstrates how informal institutions, specifically sister city relationships rooted in compassion, motivate subsidiaries to engage in creating sustainable value for host communities. Second, it extends our understanding of how disruptions in formal institutions, particularly bilateral political tensions, impact subsidiaries' local CSR performance. The findings reveal that the compassion and social cohesion fostered by sister city relationships can mitigate the adverse effects of political tensions, enabling subsidiaries to maintain or even enhance their CSR efforts during challenging times. Finally, this research highlights the complex interplay between informal institutions at the subnational level and formal institutions at the national level in shaping subsidiaries' local CSR performance. Our study provides a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing subsidiaries' CSR performance in increasingly complex and volatile global business environments.

The responsibility of CSR and strategic sustainability communication for driving socio-ecological transformation

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Purpose of the paper

The diverse crises described in the Call for Papers suggest that responsibility for solving them cannot lie in one hand. Rather, wicked problems of this kind require multiple perspectives and insights to solve them (Balint et al. 2011). We therefore ask which responsibilities - and opportunities - actors in CSR and sustainability communication have in order to make appropriate contributions. We discuss this on the basis of the socio-ecological transformation as a particularly urgent challenge. The success of which ultimately also touches on issues of social justice, peace and many others. In other words: In our conceptual presentation, we ask how the issue of the responsibility of communication can also be presented with a view to its social impact (Strippel et al. 2018, Pleil et al., 2021). To this end, we are to present a normative model of the responsibility of strategic communication in the socio-ecological transformation.

Literature Review & Problem Statement

Academic discussions often refer to the Great Transformation (e.g. Schneidewind, 2018: 23). This is understood as a progressive step in the development of human civilization, in which human dignity and development opportunities are the guiding principles (ibid.) and from whose mindset technological, social, cultural and economic innovations emerge (ibid.: 42). Through the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, the majority of countries have committed to such a transformation, the goal is considered binding under international law (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018), and compliance with the Planetary Boundaries is considered a fundamental right (Ensor & Hoddy, 2021). As early as 2015, 43 CEOs of global companies called for concrete climate measures from politicians at the World Economic Forum (Allen & Craig 2016). If we look into the latest CSR and strategic communication literature regarding ethical aspects, Cappizo & Luisi (2024) argue that justice and equity should be formulated more explicitly for future Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). They defined six strategies based on clarity, conflict, reflectiveness, community empowerment, and collaborative, justice-oriented outcomes.

On the other hand, if we look at the ethical self-image of strategic communication, we see that codices and casuistry are widespread (Paganini 2020), but that these essentially only contain principles (Eggers 2021) or virtue ethics proposals (Funiok 2018). In contrast, there are hardly any ethical approaches to responsibility that include the macro level.

However, most codes for PR and strategic communication more or less explicitly describe a common basis for action. This foundation is formed - at least in Western industrialized countries - from a mixture of basic democratic rights and human rights that are binding upon international law. In the light of the urgency of the climate crisis and the morally and legally binding nature of the international agreements for dealing with it, we argue that these should also be regarded as part of the foundation described.

In our view, this means that strategic communication and therefore also CSR communication have no choice but to align their actions with the planetary boundaries and, more specifically, with the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. We also believe it is important - especially in light of the experience gained from the discussions on dealing with HIV or Covid 19 - to clearly follow the science when it comes to sustainability. The verifiable analyses and recommendations have been put on the table and are therefore no longer a question of political beliefs (IPCC 2023; Marquardt 2023).

These arguments are not unfamiliar to the CSR community. While general strategic communication and sustainability communication (Prexl 2010) typically remain at the meso level or think from an organizational perspective, there are different perspectives in the discussion on CSR: On the one hand, it is about discussing the impact of CSR for the respective company and, for example, connections to image, brand perception and financial performance (e.g. Adewole 2022). On the other hand, there is a discussion on how CSR can improve the connection between companies and their surrounding regions, which has often become very weak as a result of globalization, in order to support their development (e.g. Carrera 2022). A third trend goes even further, discussing how companies can support social change and act as change agents (Aguilera et al. 2004). From a normative perspective, the role of companies as change agents towards sustainable societies could be discussed as a new standard. This is all the more important as, historically, corporate actors are the main reason for today's problems (Allen & Craig 2016).

Conceptual Contribution

Of course, this places particular demands on communication. This is because public communication on sustainability is crucial for mobilizing, building consent and setting priorities (ibid.) - and of course communication informs, it can persuade or point out opportunities for action or behavior change (Gifford & Nilsson 2014;).

The model to be presented on the responsibility of CSR and strategic communication distinguishes between co-responsibility for processes, results and discourse. It also considers the micro, meso and macro levels. The model formulates a normative approach and assumes that professional actors position themselves normatively.

The Responsibilities of CSR and Strategic Sustainability Communication for driving Socio-Ecological Transformation: a normative model

	Process Responsibility	Output Reponsibility	Discourse Responsibility
Macro level	Cooperations and Networks between Organizations	Development of New Narratives (e.g. better living vs. groth)	Moderation / Design of Public Discourses
	Purpose	Enabling stakeholders for sustainable decision-making	
Meso level	Internal Transformational Communication (i.e. value-oriented Change Communication)	Strategy and Coordination of Sustainability-PR and -Marketing	Outside-In-Consulting for strategic development of the organization
	Sustainability Reporting as Catalyser for Sustainable Development in the Organization	Further Development of Corporate Culture	
Micro level	Individal Norms & Values	Orientation through Professional Codes	Professional Norms & Quality
	Self-critique	Qualifications	Mutual Acceptance/Recognition of Discourse Parteners / Ability to Change Perspective
	Involvement (e.g., Corporate Activism)	Critical Thinking	

Fig 1: Normative model of strategic communication's responsibilities for socio-ecological transformation

In our normative model we offer three perspectives on responsibilities: for processes, outputs and discourses. Starting at the very bottom left on the micro level, we assume that strategic communication is shaped and shapes the individual norms and values of organizational members, it (potentially) enhances their abilities for self-critique and supports individual's involvement and motivation to engage for organizational goals and strategies (Weder 2022). In the meso level we suppose that transformational internal communication (Pleil et al. 2021) is acting as a value-based internal change agent towards broadening the knowledge of how to reach the once set sustainability goals in close connection to the materiality analysis and the official sustainability reporting that we interpret as a catalyzer for the organization to align with sustainability goals. We, then, use purpose as a signaling concept for recent developments both in theory and practice: on the one hand purpose seems to have taken up entrepreneurial spirit and expectations especially when it comes to social innovation and acts as a modern code for CSR. One example is the transformation of large companies, like Bosch, into smaller, flexible unites, for those transformational process purpose helps to connect an organization through the different levels from micro to macro. level (Munro 2020). There, we see the main responsibility of Strategic Communication to support the creation of networks and cooperation between and beyond organizations (e.g. industries, sectors) and workflow between and among these organizations.

If we look at the level of practical communication outputs, we assume that on the micro level strategic communicators can be guided and trained along professional codes that impact and inspire their own qualifications paths. These should also include specific training in critical thinking to understand the complex nature of wicked problems and the difficulties that arise for developing appropriate communication strategies. At the core of this stream, we put sustainability PR and marketing in close interplay with the organization's cultural development. But the responsibilities are - in our view - not

limited to the organization itself but stretch across the stakeholder network at least on the first level. Here, Strategic Communication is in the role of a facilitator and enabler to support sustainable decisionmaking in the stakeholder network. To align partner-organizations and the whole industry sector and economic eco-system, we argue that Strategic Communications is also driving the acceptance of new ways to see the interplay of society and business through new narratives.

Finally, if we focus on discourse-related responsibilities we acknowledge that mutual acceptance of discourse partners is crucial to achieving progress in any kind of publicly displayed negotiation. Strategic Communication needs to be aware of the dignity of discourse partners - may they be in favor or against one's own position (Weder 2022).. On the macro level, we argue that strategic communication has responsibility for the way public opinion is formed, but also how discourse in general within a democratic society is shaped and carried out. If we assume that strategic communication has an influence on social transformation, we need to look at the ways in which such transformation occurs. We follow the concept of sustainable citizenship by Munshi and Kurian (2016), which is based on social justice and takes into account issues of power and marginalization. In our view, strategic communication must be aware that it bears responsibility for the quality of public discourse. With a focus on transformative processes, this is not achieved on the basis of the traditional management approach, which prioritizes stakeholders according to their power, but through inclusive thinking - in the sense of cross-sectoral and participatory approaches (Wade et al., 2024, p.3).

Impact and Conclusion

Based on this model, we believe that one of the next steps would be to discuss existing ethical guidelines and codes of the profession. At the same time, the fundamental question can once again be asked with regard to CSR: Can CSR and CSR communication have a positive social impact if the institution behind it does not meet the fundamental normative requirements and, for example, does not respect planetary boundaries through its business model, but is recognizably complicit in overstepping them? We would very much like to discuss these questions with our colleagues at the conference.

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The influence of group heuristics on corporate social responsibility messages designed to reduce illegal consumption

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Introduction

Corporate social responsibility, defined as positive social projects undertaken voluntarily by organisations (Beal, 2013), has been suggested to improve consumer loyalty (Latif, Pérez & Sahibzada, 2020; Iglesias, Markovic, Bagherzadeh & Singh, 2020), increase consumption (Sen & Bhattachary, 2001), and attract ethical consumers (Kang & Namkung, 2018). However, corporate social responsibility has not been tested as a deterrent against illegal consumption, such as piracy and counterfeiting, which is the aim of this study. Illegal consumption is suggested to fund organised crime and cause significant worldwide profit loss and economic damage, requiring expensive protection and policing measures (MPA 2006; IPO, 2023). However, educational messages designed to counteract illegal consumption are reported to be ineffective, and threatening messages are reported to cause psychological reactance and increase illegal consumption intentions (Whitman, Murad & Cox, 2024). This suggests that a different tact is necessary.

Whilst corporate social responsibility has not been tested as an illegal consumption deterrent, contemporary literature indicates that it may dissuade unethical behaviours in other domains. Harjoto (2017) found evidence to suggest that companies with corporate social responsibility programmes had lower incidences of corporate fraud. Bereskin et al. (2016) indicated that companies that donate to charity were more likely to have employees who reported the unethical behaviour of colleagues. Beaudoin, Cianci, Hannah and Tsakumis (2019) found that corporate social responsibility deters company managers from engaging in fraudulent behaviour.

Studies indicate that corporate social responsibility improves consumer loyalty through the adaptive inclination to reciprocate, i.e., a company voluntarily gives to society so consumers feel an obligation to reward them with their custom (Russell & Russell, 2010; Lähdesmäki & Suutari, 2012; Park, Kim & Kwon, 2017). The effect is reported to be strongest if the corporate social responsibility project benefits the ingroup, a group that an individual strongly identifies with, rather than the outgroup, a group that an individual does not identify with or identifies with to a lesser degree (Briscese, Feltovich & Slonim, 2021). Russell and Russell (2010) indicate that projects which benefit locals rather than foreigners positively impact green consumption. Antonetti and Maklan (2016) suggest that consumers object more to corporate wrongdoing which harms the ingroup than if the harm is directed towards the outgroup. This reciprocal ingroup favouritism can be explained by group heuristics.

Group heuristics relates to the expectation that rewards will be reciprocated from members of an ingroup, but not an outgroup. The expectation of reciprocal favours by some but not others defines the boundaries of the ingroup, resulting in ingroup favouritism (Yamagishi, Jin, & Miller, 1998). The effect has been suggested to increase prosocial behaviour towards the ingroup (Murata, Kubo & Hata, 2012), however, whether the effect will similarly decrease anti-social behaviour towards the ingroup is not known. Macintyre et. al. (2023) indicated that priming ingroup bias in the form of national pride can deter tax evasion, though the role of reciprocity as an underlying mechanism was not examined.

In order to test the effect of a brand's corporate social responsibility on illegal consumption, a population of consumers with some brand knowledge and identification must be recruited. Brand identification is a key facet of sports culture (Parry, Jones & Wann, 2014), making a population of sport fans an ideal sample for this study. Measuring individual differences in reciprocal attitudes (trait reciprocity) and team identification, a corporate social responsibility message relating to an individual's specific team's fans ("team message") is compared in a controlled survey experiment to a broader message relating to the broader sports industry ("sport" message). The messages suggest that illegal consumption decreases the investments that the team or sports industry are able to make to support young fans and community projects. Changes in illegal consumption intentions are measured by asking participants if the messages would influence them to change their piracy and counterfeiting behaviours in the future.

At a baseline, a significant proportion (50%) of the sample reported consuming sports illegally. The results of the experiment indicate that the "team" message influenced participants to decrease their counterfeiting intentions, relative to the control group. The message did not influence any change in digital piracy intentions, suggesting that physical illegal consumption may be more believably harmful than non-physical illegal consumption, as has been previously suggested (Yar, 2008). The "sport" message had no overall effect on piracy or counterfeiting intentions, however it significantly interacted with the team identification measure, having a psychological reactance effect and increasing intentions to counterfeit for participants with low team identification.

The results suggest that corporate social responsibility messages pertaining to a specific brand may have a positive influence on reducing illegal consumption of consumers with a strong attachment to the brand. If the message is broadened out beyond the brand, such as the wider industry, it may have a reactance effect, increasing illegal consumption intentions of consumers with low brand identification. This may be notable for trade bodies or umbrella organisations with intentions to run corporate social responsibility projects on behalf of their member brands. The conceptual model can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual model
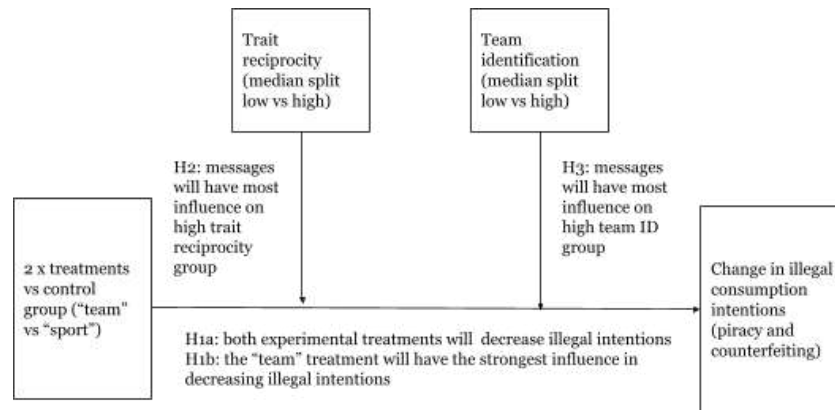
Design

The experiment was conducted using an online survey sample pool (Prolific.co), screening for UK adult participants who had an interest in soccer. The sample size was calculated using Gpower software. To take into account some missing data, invalid manipulation checks and failures in attention checks, 600 individuals were recruited which resulted in a final sample of 591 after failed attention check participant data was eliminated.

Participants answered demographic and consumption questions, and then were randomly assigned to a treatment group ("team", "sport" or control) to read a message and report if it would make them change their illegal piracy (dependent variable 1) and counterfeit consumption (dependent variable 2). After the treatments, participants were asked the questions of the team identification scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) which generated a Crononbach Alpha Score of 0.88, and trait reciprocity (Maximiano, 2012). Social desirability bias, the tendency to hide one's true behaviours in order to preserve one's social impression, has been suggested to threaten the validity of illegal consumption studies (Whitman, Murad & Cox, 2023). Therefore, the impression management scale (Paulhus, 1991), a recommended measure of social desirability bias in illegal consumption research (Kwak, Holtkamp, & Kim, 2019) was included at the end of the survey as a control.

Manipulation Check

Two corporate social responsibility messages suggesting that illegal consumption is damaging to the team or to sport were designed with an AI tool (chat.openai.com) to optimise their persuasiveness. All messages, including the control message included a basic message and call to action, in order to control for experimenter demand effects. At the end of the main survey, participants in the control group (n = 194) rated which of the three messages was the most loyalty inspiring, believable and would inspire themselves or their peers to reduce their illegal consumption.

Results

The dependent variables were based on a 7-point likert scale: significant decrease = 1, no change = 4, significant increase = 7. Figure 1 (piracy) and Figure 2 (counterfeiting) indicate that on average, participants of all groups including the control, intended to reduce their illegal consumption, as all means were lower than 4.

Figure 1: Means plot of treatment groups in response to piracy question
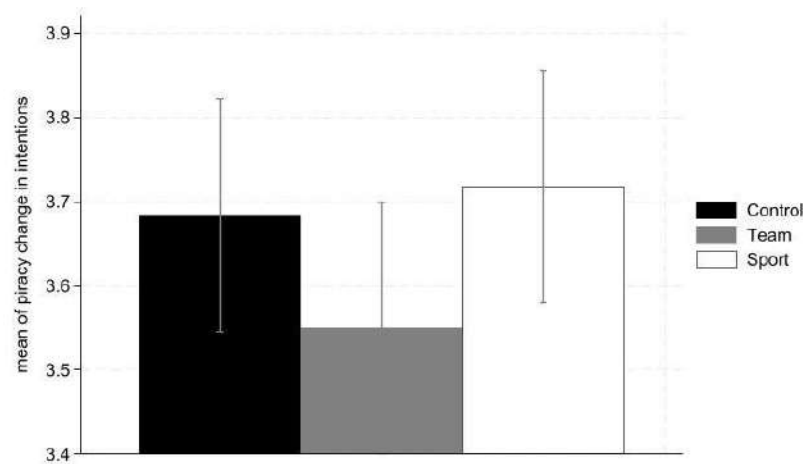
Figure 2: Means plot of treatment groups in response to counterfeiting question
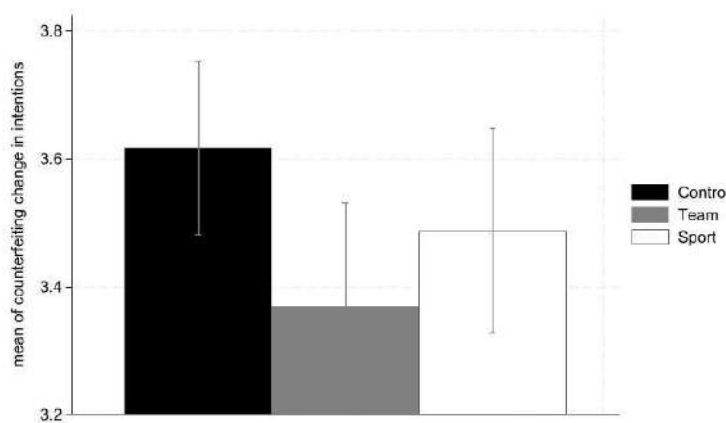
A moderated linear regression was conducted to test the pre-registered hypotheses. Table 1 indicates models 1 - 3 - (change in piracy intentions as a result of the messages) and models 4 - 6 (change in counterfeit intentions as a result of the messages). Models 1 and 4 test hypothesis 1a (the "team" and "sport" corporate social responsibility messages will reduce illegal consumption intentions compared to the control group of no message). The results suggest that the "sport" message was not effective in reducing illegal intentions for piracy (p-value = 0.73) or counterfeiting (p-value = 0.22). The "team" message was not effective in reducing illegal intentions for piracy (p-value = 0.20), but was effective in

reducing illegal intentions for counterfeiting (p-value = 0.02). This suggests that hypothesis 1a was partly supported, in that the "team" (though no "sport") message influenced a significant reduction in illegal intentions to counterfeit.

In order to test hypothesis (1b the "team" message will be more effective than the "sport" message) a regression analysis was conducted (see Table A in the Appendix) to compare the difference between the team and sport treatments. This analysis indicated that there was not a significant difference in the two treatments for either piracy (p-value = 0.11) or counterfeiting (p-value = 0.31), suggesting that 1b could not be supported.

Models 3 (piracy) and 6 (counterfeiting) test hypothesis 2 (the experimental treatments will be more effective in decreasing illegal intentions for high trait reciprocity individuals compared to low trait reciprocity individuals), by including interaction effects with the treatments and a binary measure (median split high vs low) of trait reciprocity. The results indicate that trait reciprocity did not interact with "team" (p-value = 0.84), or "sport" (p-value = 0.14) for piracy change in intentions. Similarly trait reciprocity did not interact with "team" (p-value = 0.46) or "sport" (p-value = 0.93) for counterfeiting change in intentions. This suggests that hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Model 2 (piracy) and 5 (counterfeiting) test hypothesis 3 (the experimental treatments will be more effective in decreasing illegal intentions for high team identification individuals compared to low team identification individuals). The results suggest that team identification did not interact with the "team" treatment for either piracy (p-value = 0.46) or counterfeiting (p-value = 0.48). However, there was a significant interaction between team identification and the "sport" treatment for piracy (p-value = 0.02) and counterfeiting (p-value = 0.02) with a negative coefficient. This suggests that the "sport" message was significantly less effective for low team identification individuals than high team individuals, partially supporting hypothesis 3.

Table 1: Results of a moderated linear regression testing the influence of the treatment groups, team identification and trait reciprocity on piracy and counterfeiting

		Team ID	Rec		Team ID	Rec
Model	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
	Own Piracy	Own Piracy	Own Piracy	Own Counterf	Own Counterf	Own Counterf
Team	-0.134	-0.210	-0.154	-0.247**	-0.325**	-0.129
	(0.103)	(0.141)	(0.178)	(0.107)	(0.158)	(0.196)
Sport	0.0343	0.249**	-0.169	-0.130	0.0897	-0.143
	(0.0992)	(0.119)	(0.169)	(0.107)	(0.139)	(0.182)
High Team ID		-0.00337			0.0551	
		(0.142)			(0.138)	
High Reciprocity			-0.208			0.0762
			(0.149)			(0.150)
Team x High Team ID		0.154			0.152	
		(0.208)			(0.214)	
Sport x High Team ID		-0.477**			-0.487**	
		(0.201)			(0.214)	
Team x High Reciprocity			0.0453			-0.172
			(0.218)			(0.234)
Sport x High Reciprocity			0.309			0.0189
			(0.209)			(0.225)
Constant	3.684***	3.685***	3.821***	3.617***	3.593***	3.567***
	(0.0702)	(0.0927)	(0.122)	(0.0691)	(0.0959)	(0.126)
Observations	591	591	591	591	591	591
Adjusted R-squared	0.002	0.017	0.002	0.005	0.016	0.002
Robust standard errors in parentheses						
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1						

Conclusion

Illegal consumption, such as counterfeiting and piracy, impacts industries and economies, resulting in job losses, increased prices for consumers and loss of tax revenue (euipo.europa.eu; ojp.gov 2014). Research suggests that illegal consumption is increasing (IPO, 2023), and this study indicates that in the case of sports, 50% of fans consume illegal content every month. Unfortunately, traditional messaging, such as those which threaten or educate consumers, are not known to be effective in reducing illegal consumption (Whitman, Murad & Cox 2023). Research suggests that corporate social responsibility increases legal consumption (Russell & Russell, 2010), however no studies have tested whether corporate social responsibility can be used as an illegal consumption deterrent.

This study suggests promising evidence that corporate social responsibility can be used to reduce illegal consumption, so long as the ingroup, i.e. brand that the individual identifies with, is emphasised in the messaging. This has important implications for industries who cultivate brand identity amongst their consumers, as this brand identity can be primed through corporate social responsibility to decrease illegal consumption. This paper indicates that messages which are not specific to a beloved brand, and are delivered by the industry in general, may be ineffective or cause consumers to respond negatively, increasing their illegal consumption intentions. This suggests that corporate social responsibility messages need to be brand specific and targeted carefully towards loyal consumers.

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When consumers challenge Corporate Virtue Signalling on social media – Developing a communication process model

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Background

CSR communication is an integral part of business practice. According to the Governance and Accountability Institute, 90% of companies on the S&P 500 index published CSR reports in 2019—up from 86% in 2018, 75% in 2014, and only 20% in 2011. A credible CSR image can increase revenue by up to 20 % and can account for up to 11 % of the total value of a company (Project ROI 2015). CSR statements have traditionally been published in annual reports, for purposes of meeting accounting regulations and shareholder interest. However, there is now a growing trend for companies to publish their CSR credentials on social media, for purposes of communicating a favourable brand image with the general public. Indeed, 97% of firms in the US consider online reputation management as key to corporate success (Forbes 2018), on the understanding that it can enable the organisation to raise awareness amongst broad target audiences, generate meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, promote desirable brand values and support important social causes.

Yet posting CSR statements on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter does not come without risks. Whilst doing so helps to meet consumers' expectations that brands should be held accountable on CSR issues – for instance, 70% of consumers believe that large brands have a special responsibility to make the world a better place (Aflac 2019) - there is an increasing level of consumer scepticism about the authenticity of CSR statements. In fact, according to Marketing Charts (2020), 53% of consumers believe that organisations engage in CSR activities to further improve their own image, and not necessarily because they genuinely care about particular social causes. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that mainstream media have increasingly reported on social media users who criticise brands for their CSR statements, resulting in social phenomena such as cancel culture, corporate call-outs, anti-brand memes, corporate wokeness and social media firestorms. Thus, at present, CSR-statements on social media present brands with a challenging paradox: Companies must communicate to expectant social media users that they are indeed 'doing good' for society but communicating this via social media is extremely likely to invite criticism of the motives and effectiveness of the company's CSR activity.

Aims/Purpose

Against this backdrop, the main purpose of the present article is to offer an in-depth analysis of what happens when consumers challenge CSR-statements on social media. We propose the term 'Corporate Virtue Signalling' (CVS) to describe the statement of a brand (e.g. McDonalds) on its official social media channels (e.g. its Facebook brandpage) about a particular virtue (e.g. Protecting the environment) that it

claims to support or hold. We use 'corporate virtue' as an umbrella term that encompasses any value, activity or goal that an organisation claims to hold and, in so doing, retains the capacity to make a contribution to the improvement of society/social well-being. As such, we regard CVS as a new type of CSR activity that promotes a specific corporate virtue to a target audience via social media. Unlike the popular press, which tends to present 'corporate virtue signalling' as inherently empty rhetoric that does not reflect authentic corporate values and effective CSR actions, we conceptualise CVS as simply a form of communication that can serve to provide social media users with a true representation of a corporation's virtue(s).

In the marketing literature, studies on CSR in a social media context have largely focused on its impact on corporate financial performance (Stäbler & Fischer, 2020), consumer engagement and attitudes (Korschun & Du, 2013; Lee et al., 2018) and the ways CSR messages should be framed (Wagner et al., 2009). By contrast, research that investigates what happens when consumers challenge CSR statements on social media is scarce (see systematic reviews by Wenzel & Will, 2019; Adhikariparajuli et al., 2021). In particular, studies of who says what, how and when are missing from the extant literature. In other words, there is a need for a conceptualisation of CVS as a process which captures both the content of, and interrelationship between, a CVS statement, initial challenges and criticisms from social media audiences, and subsequent interaction events (hereafter referred to as 'CVS interaction episode'). By way of illustration, we offer the following example from the official Facebook brand community page of McDonald's: https://www.facebook.com/McDonaldsUK/posts/1663276733695444

In this instance, McDonald's posted a news article about the success of its new recycling policies. Subsequently, a consumer criticized the brand's environmental credentials, which led to consumer-to-consumer interactions in support of either the brand's claim or the consumer's criticism. The brand eventually responded by offering more information on its policies which led to further disagreements between consumers and ultimately ended in a seemingly polarized community opinion. This example reflects a typical CVS interaction episode and raises several important questions that have not yet been addressed in the marketing literature. For instance, what kind of virtues do brands typically promote on social media? How do other consumers and the brand itself respond when these statements are challenged? And what ultimate outcomes do these interactions lead to?

Methodology/Design

Using a netnographic analysis of 15 Facebook brand communities over a 2-year period, we analyse the virtues that brands promote in their CVS statements, the ways in which consumers challenge these, the subsequent consumer-to-consumer interactions and brand response, and the outcomes of these interactions. We selected the communities based on richness of data in relation to CVS statements, and level consumer engagement via c2c interactions. The chosen brand communities consisted of football (e.g. AFC Bournemouth), food & drinks (e.g. Costa Coffee, McDonalds), cosmetics (e.g. Dove) and fashion (e.g. Nike) brands. This is a working paper, and data analysis (following Braun & Clark's (2014) Thematic Analysis) is ongoing.

Results/Findings

Our findings first reveal the different categories of CVS statements that companies make on social media; UN Social Development Goals (SDGs), Society & Environmental Governance (SEGs), Criteria and Moral Value Dimensions, and account characteristics (Information vs Emotion-based). Further to this, we identify the primary ways in which consumers communicate counter-accounts (personal vs third-party vs non-account), the types of C2C interactions that then unfold (pro-brand, con-brand, neutral), the response strategies that brands engage in (generic vs virtue-specific), and the ultimate outcome of the communication event (pro-brand consensus, counter-brand consensus, polarization).

A typical unit of analysis contains the following 5 interaction events:

1.A Brand's CVS statement

2.A consumer counter-account

3.Subsequent consumer-to-consumer interactions

Amber Rowan Roberts
Why wait? Why not make it mandatory for all McDonalds to recycle everything that can be recycled? Why not make changes now, instead of gradually over the next 7 years?
Like · Reply · 3 y   6

> **Sharna Marie Alderman**
> Amber Rowan Roberts really believe me many customers just shove any rubbish in our very simple to understand recycling bins as they really don't care.
> We try but the public don't.
> Like · Reply · 3 y

> **Sharna Marie Alderman**
> Amber Rowan Roberts that's great but it takes more than 10% of the customers recycling for it to be worth it.
> Like · Reply · 3 y

4.Brand Response

Author
McDonald's ✓
Hi Amber, this is a global announcement and we're all working hard to improve our packaging and reduce waste. Here in the UK we're already no longer using foam packaging and are pleased that 100% of our fibre-based packaging (paper and card) comes from renewable, recyclable or certified sources.
Like · Reply · 3 y   2

5.   Interaction Outcome

The CVS episode ended without a community consensus and without McDonald's ultimate efforts to build a consensus.

Discussion/Conclusion/Summary

Based on research from Accounting (accounts and counter-accounts) and Digital Marketing (c2c conflicts and brand response strategies) literature, we integrate the findings above to conceptualise CVS as a process of five interrelated interaction events (see Figure 1).
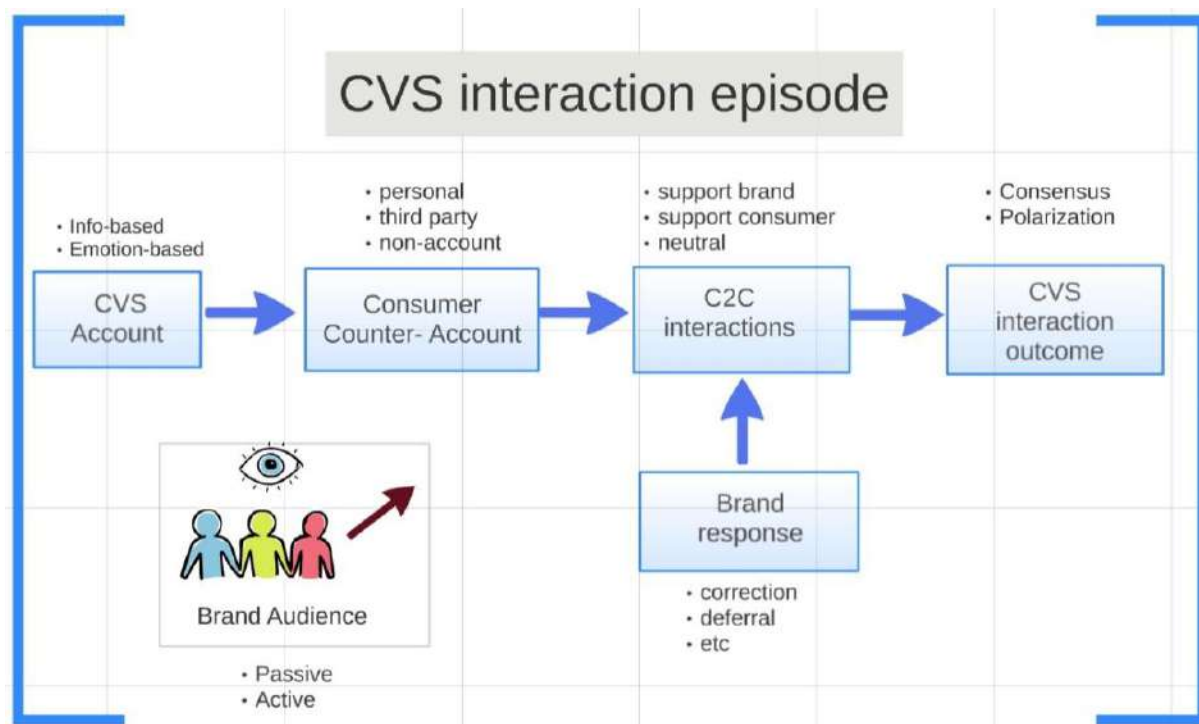
Figure 1 – CVS interaction episode

The conceptual framework developed in this study constitutes an original and valuable theoretical contribution. Unlike prior work that tends to focus on the impact (rather than content) of a particular interaction event in isolation, we offer a holistic picture of the entire communication process, including the content and outcome of each extended interaction event. Our framework uses real-world, observational data from different industries (Fashion, Food, Sports) to define each interaction event, integrate it with extant research, expand knowledge by offering a novel conceptual lens that combines Accounting and Digital Marketing concepts, and highlight gaps for future research.

Furthermore, the analysis of the content of each interaction event depicted in the conceptual framework offers further, more specific advancements of marketing theory. First, we conceptualise corporate virtues as an umbrella term that encapsulates overlapping concepts from theory (social values, moral values, ethics), industry (SEGs) and policy (SDGs). In doing so, we offer an applicable classification system for research and practice. Up to now, research on CSR statements on social media have lacked a unified terminology. Moreover, we embed CVS into the CSR marketing literature by distinguishing it from related concepts (e.g. corporate hypocrisy, moral grandstanding). Second, we substantiate knowledge by proposing personal, third-party, and non-accounts as a means to make sense of c2c interactions that occur in response to CVS. By applying these concepts, we contribute a novel perspective on conceptualising c2c comments on social media, which so far have largely been analysed under a sentiment-based (i.e. is a comment positive or negative) and WOM lens (i.e. consumers personal opinions). Third, we provide evidence of follow-up brand responses when their CVS statement has been challenged. Research on how brands should manage c2c interaction on social media, particularly when consumers

disagree, is an under-developed area of research, as highlighted in recent calls for future research (Dineva & Breitsohl, 2022; Swaminathan 2022). Our findings that brands engage in different types of response strategies (generic vs virtue-specific) when facing challenging statements from consumers in relation to their CVS statement contributes to, and expands, an emerging stream of literature in digital marketing. Fourth, we offer a first insight on the potential outcome of a CVS interaction episode. We identify three possible interaction outcomes (pro brand consensus, counter-brand consensus, polarization), and link these back to prior interaction events.

Implications

Our empirical work and theorisation is of practical value as they offer managers critical insights and a structured framework for reflecting on the opportunities and challenges that arise from CVS as a strategic communications tool. For example, social media content teams need to be aware of the implications of posting about virtues that consumers are likely to challenge, and the dynamics that may develop thereafter. Specifically, our findings imply that CSR and social media managers should work together to develop a clear category of virtues, as well as a communication repertoire that accurately reflects the brand in both CVS statements and subsequent responses to consumers.

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Tackling grand challenges with a stewardship mind: A literature review of stewardship theory

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Introduction

In March 2023 Elon Musk with a group of experts and industry executives called for a sixmonth pause in developing artificial intelligence systems, claiming that "AI systems with human-competitive intelligence can pose profound risks to society and humanity". Meanwhile, Patagonia have for long centered their strategy on the idea that the company plays a role in the society that goes beyond material growth, and states on its website that the company "can prioritize purpose over profit and protect this wonderful planet, our only home". Recently, Larry Fink, the CEO of BlackRock, the largest money-management firm in the world, claimed: "Successful CEOs understand the need to build bonds with the full range of their stakeholders – but especially their employees". These quotes link companies' economic action to environment, society and the overall possibilities of future generations, suggesting a radically different perspective compared to a traditional profit-maximization view. This recalls the overarching idea of stewardship, which represents "an alternate view in which organizational actors see greater long-term utility in other focused prosocial behavior than in self-serving, short-term opportunistic behavior" (Hernandez, 2012, p. 172).

A recent trend in the management literature shifts indeed the attention from the transactional approach of principal-agency theory – postulating humans as self-interested economic actors interested – to placing the "long-term interests of a group ahead of personal goals that serve an individual's self-interest" (Hernandez, 2008 p. 122; see also: Davis et al., 1997; Hernandez, 2012). As a consequence, stewardship theory has become an interesting perspective to rethink how bridging competing strategic goals of employees and companies (Schepers et al., 2012), top executive remuneration (Bruce, Buck & Main, 2005), shareholder-manager relationship (e.g.: Löhde, Campopiano & Calabr , 2021), and as an expression of purpose (George et al., 2021). However, the early reflections on the concept of stewardship date back four decades ago when scholars started to notice that "those in business have a responsibility to address the conduct of corporations, not just the actions of executives and employees on the payroll" (Hatfield, 1982 p. 100).

Consistent to the central core of stewardship theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Hernandez, 2008; 2012), the commitment to an overarching mission or to a vision of some idealized future state represents a moral obligation acting as an internal pressure to behave according to a transcendent set of values (Caldwell, Bischoff & Karri, 2002). In particular, a new rule of conduct may serve as an intrinsic motivation on which the relationship between managers and the company can be founded, namely "the pursuit of a cause" (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003 p. 574; see also Hernandez, 2012). Therefore, a stewardship mind may

cause executives "to feel responsible for ensuring the long-term well-being of their business and communities" (Hernandez, 2012), representing a moral obligation acting as an internal pressure to behave according to a transcendent set of values (Caldwell, Bischoff & Karri, 2002).

The fragmented but compelling body of literature on stewardship, together with how managers seem to put in practice this approach in their daily actions and communications, urges a systematic literature review. In this paper we fill this gap and we aim to seek a common concept of "stewardship mind" across management and business scholarly literature by conducting an extensive literature review based on almost 1,600 published papers. Using topic modeling techniques, we define 10 substantive domains characterized by different combinations of duty to care and psychological currencies. Our analysis (1) provides a comprehensive overview of the literature using stewardship as well as its development over the past four decades, which serves (2) to identify the key concepts of stewardship mind, duty to care and psychological currency, and (3) offers opportunities for future research. In short, we aim to answer to the following questions:

RQ1. What is the general landscape of stewardship theory use in the management and business research and which are the main topics discussed by scholars?

RQ2. What is an overall definition of stewardship mind, as a combination of duty to care for something worth and psychological currency?

Methodology

Following a systematic review procedure (Tranfield et al., 2003), we searched the Scopus database for articles whose titles, abstracts and related keywords contained the term "stewardship" by using the following query: ((TITLE-ABS-KEY ("STEWARDSHIP") AND LANGUAGE (english)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"re")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA,"BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English")). We aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the scientific production in the Business, Management and Accounting field without limiting the scope of our analysis to obtain a comprehensive view of the use and variations of the stewardship concept. The keyword search was conducted in October 2023 using the Scopus database. This search yielded 1,612 papers. We converted the Scopus outcomes in an excel file, resulting in 1,593 papers. We then removed the papers not published in journals outside the ABS List 2021, obtaining 1,175 papers.

We used a probabilistic topic modeling procedure on the abstracts. In line with extant research (e.g. Vaid et al., 2023; Schmitt et al., 2022), we did not include keywords and title associated with published papers in the topic modeling analysis. Our topic modeling methodology closely adheres to preprocessing and topic modeling guidelines based on the Grün & Hornik, 2011 approach and the R "topicmodels" package. First, we removed commonly English "stop" words and a custom dictionary. Then, we performed the LDA algorithm to find the optimal number of topics. Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) is a probabilistic topic modelling procedure that uncovers the hidden or latent structure of both finite and discrete data, such as text documents (see Blei et al., 2003; Wedel & Kannan, 2016).

To select the optimal number of topics, we run several topic modelling from 2 to 20 topics and we used the LDAvis plot to identify overlaps and we read the abstract of the 10 most cited papers in each topics in

order to choose the number of topics that best summarize the concept uses and interpretation. We chose the 10 topics model.

Preliminary results

Figure 1a reports the most relevant words used when discussing stewardship and Figure 1b represents the temporal evolution of the number of papers published per year across the thematic areas. Figure 1b suggests that the thematic areas developed differently, with a rapid increase in the last twenty years.

Figure 1a   Figure 1b

Then, we used a probabilistic topic modeling procedure (LDA approach, Grün & Hornik, 2011) which resulted in 10 topics (see Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of the ten topics

Topic	Duty to care for:	Sub topics		N. of papers
Environment and society	Duty to care for longterm environmental and societal impact of a business.	o o	Tourism: environmental and cultural impact Environmental certifications Health	137
CSR talk	Duty to care for the engagement of stakeholders.	o o	Disclosure and communication of CSR practices/approaches Local community: the embedding of the company in the network of local relationships Board chair's role	80
Leadership and education	Duty to care for leadership behaviors in the local community.	O o o	Leadership Heritage Education	127
Small and family businesses	Duty to care for a longterm sustainability of the company's governance.	O o o	Psychological ownership Innovation Knowledge sharing	152
Agency versus stewardship in corporate governance	Duty to care for longterm organizational outcomes.	o o o	Conflicts with agency theory behaviors Non-profit organization Managing investments	109

Servant Leadership	Duty to care for the longterm well-being and engagement of the working community.	O o	Servant leadership Sense of community and community well-being Psychological antecedents.	131
Disclosure and reporting	Duty to care for the company trustworthiness inside and outside the organization	O o	Trustworthiness in information management activities Financial and non financial reporting	111
Grand challenges	Duty to care for the organizational change	o o o	Environmental Stewardship Governance Data stewardship	83
CEO governance	Duty to care for the relationship between CEO duality and organizational performance	○ ○	CEO governance and performance Ceo duality and performance o Manager's Religion	155
Stewardship attitude / Human purpose and Marketing	Duty to care for brand identity	○ ○ ○	Human purpose o Brand identity Sustainable consumerism Sustainable tourism	90

For each topic we identified some sub-topics and we also included the "duty to care for something worthy" for each topic. As previously mentioned, a stewardship mind is characterized by a combination of duty to care for something worth and psychological currency. Stewards, guided by a stewardship mind, embrace an inherent duty to care of an entrusted possession, that could be a tangible resource, an intangible asset or an inalienable right. As we can see from Table 1, some topics are mostly related to the duty to care for the long-term impact of the organizational outcomes or to specific stakeholders, such as the local community (Topic Leadership and education) or the employees (Topic Servant Leadership).

Since management is a "self-perpetuating" process (in that "executives train subordinates to become future managers; those subordinate, in turn, train their direct reports; and so on", Hernandez, 2012 p. 173) a stewardship mind has the potential to stimulate managers to adopt a long-term perspective and to innovate the company's strategies. Indeed, managers who are "stewards" should inspire the "sense of purpose" of the employees, in particular of the managers involved in those strategic decisions which potentially influence the firm's impact on the entrusted resource. A steward inside an organization has similarities with the Champion of Innovation, defined by Howell and Higgins (1990), as an individual who informally emerges in an organization (Schon, 1963; Tushman and Nadler, 1986) and makes "a decisive contribution to the innovation by actively and enthusiastically promoting its progress through the critical [organizational] stages" (Achilladelis, Jervis, and Robertson, 1971: 14).

In the next months we will delve deeper into the psychological currencies that characterize each topic and we will provide the definition of stewardship mind.

Discussion and conclusion

Organizations are called to reimagine their strategies "with an eye towards global impact" (de Ruyter et al., 2022 p. 13). To redefine a company's strategy, managers should be motivated to answer a personal calling to bring about a sustainable environment and society.

From the academic perspective, understanding this trend requires shifting away from the traditional focus on agency and transaction costs, or from pure economic and opportunistic motivational frameworks. Recently, and following a spur from other disciplines (consistent to the curves graphically represented in Figure 1b), management scholars started recognizing stewardship theory as a promising lens through which understanding why and how organizations are striving to include the interplay between customers/consumers, firms, governmental policies, and society in their strategies, reimagining their role in addressing grand challenges and not only material growth (de Ruyter et al., 2022; George et al., 2021; Hernandez, 2012; 2008). Nevertheless, to date no effort to review the fragmented scholarly literature on stewardship has been done. Moreover, when querying an academic repository (e.g. Scopus), one immediately notices the variety of management sub-disciplines that are using stewardship lenses since the late Seventies and the diverse approaches used. Importantly, "stewardship" (and various expressions including this term) may assume different meanings across sub-fields and a recent ramification of this term is spreading (generating a plethora of narrow concept like "forest stewardship", "health stewardship"). Our in-depth literature review unearthed ten distinct areas within business studies where the stewardship approach has been examined, each characterized by its unique interpretations and mechanisms.

Future research. Our extensive topic modeling and analysis of the most cited articles revealed a striking overrepresentation of conceptual studies relative to case studies and reviews. This observation highlights the pressing need for empirical research to measure stewardship practices, develop comprehensive stewardship scales, and augment the established scales developed by Hensen et al. and de Ruyter et al. in the context of marketing research.

Another influential framework in business and management which have often been studied separately from stewardship theory is stakeholder theory. There is growing interest in exploring the intersection of these theories to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations can manage their relationships with stakeholders in a responsible and ethical way. It would be fascinating to delve into how the stewardship mind intertwines with stakeholders and whether it shapes their perceptions towards the resources that stewards safeguard. Studies in leadership, supply chain management, B2B marketing, and consumer research could unravel the intricate dynamics at play.

Moreover, we advocate for the importance of conducting research to uncover the potential dark side of stewardship. A stewardship mind could be limitative in cases where moral duty strongly opposes the principles of business effectiveness, efficiency, and innovation and this can hinder the survival and development of the company. Moreover, in highly competitive or dynamic environments, where leaders may be compelled to prioritize the well-being of other stakeholders or the principles of stewardship immediate organizational interests over. This is particularly likely in organizations with an ingrained individualistic or competitive culture and when leaders lack strong ethical principles or a sense of responsibility. Further research would be necessary to determine whether these limitations of the

stewardship approach are more pronounced at certain organizational levels or in specific contexts. Furthermore, we posit that a stewardship approach could not be limiting to growth since it isn't about upholding the status quo but rather about embracing a forward-thinking approach to redefine the role of business but empirical studies that validate this intuition are still missing.

Managerial implications. We believe that our literature review may have a great value also for practitioners. In fact, consistent to our opening quotes, a stewardship mind is already present among managers. They show a commitment to a moral obligation that subjugates personal interests to preserve others' long-term welfare. When a stewardship perspective guides managerial action, marketing strategy can be redefined to ensure a company's ability to face contemporary grand challenges, through the duty to take care of stakeholders, society and the environment. A stewardship mind can make managers feel responsible for ensuring the longterm well-being of their businesses and communities.

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Green perceived value in the tourist attractions of Spain from online reviews

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Abstract

Green perceived value allows a comprehensive assessment of the green utility of a product or service, focusing on the environment and sustainable development. This research adopts a mixed approach of big data techniques and statistical tests to analyze the sustainable perspective of tourists in Spain from 207,706 TripAdvisor reviews. A natural language processing (NLP) algorithm is used to classify the sustainable content of comments and

BERTopic modeling is performed to detect the main topics related to sustainable dimensions. Likewise, an orderly logistic regression model (ologit) is constructed with the Stata statistical software, in order to analyze the effect of the sustainable content (economic, environmental, social and cultural) of the reviews on the tourist's rating. The findings show that cultural, and environmental aspects have a positive influence on rating. However, the social and economic dimensions have a negative impact. The research provides useful information to the managers of tourist attractions.

Keywords: Green perceived value, sustainability, tourism, Big Data, UGC.

Introduction

The adoption of sustainable practices in tourism is essential to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural resources, as well as the quality of life of residents. Academics have begun to analyze sustainability from online reviews of tourists or user-generated content (UGC) (Brazyté et al., 2016; D'Acunto et al., 2023), since they can be useful to understand users' perceptions about sustainable actions of tourism enterprises. Likewise, online reviews reflect the degree of user satisfaction, which generates a great impact within the sector, since the level of satisfaction is a key factor for reviews and recommendations (Ekinci et al., 2008). In addition, in the current digital age data is growing exponentially, so it is relevant to apply advanced methods and tools for the analysis of large volumes of information.

This research aims to analyze the sustainable perspective of tourists on the main tourist attractions of Spain through big data techniques applied to the UGC. Specifically, the effect of the sustainable content of online reviews on the rating is analyzed and the main themes and words that tourists express at economic, environmental, social, and cultural level are revealed. The development of this research expands the emerging line of tourism research used by the UGC to analyze specific issues, such as sustainability or social responsibility, privacy, or the use of service robots (Cai et al., 2024). The results are

valuable for the decision-making of companies and managers of tourist attractions, both at management and communication level.

Literature review

The tourist industry stands out for its intangibility and experiential approach. This leads tourists to rely more and more on the UGC and becomes a useful tool to reduce uncertainty (Kim & Kim, 2020). Likewise, the tourism industry generates significant positive and negative impacts on the planet and society. Therefore, sustainability becomes a topic of great relevance within the sector. On the one hand, jobs are created, and people's quality of life is increased. But, on the other hand, it generates a high use of natural resources, a large accumulation of waste and high levels of pollution (Henderson, 2007). Given the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability and the UGC within the tourism sector, online reviews have begun to be used to assess the degree of awareness of tourists regarding CSR and sustainability (D'Acunto et al., 2020). In turn, it reflects the value perceived by tourists with respect to sustainable and responsible business activities.

Green perceived value focuses on the environment and sustainable development (Aditi et al., 2020). It is the comprehensive evaluation of the green utility of a product or service, where the consumer compares the benefits and costs perceived from sustainability (Chen & Chang, 2012). Sometimes consumers relate a sustainable product or service with lower performance, high price, and low quality (Font et al., 2017; Olson, 2013; Ottman et al., 2006; Peng & Chen, 2019). Our research adopts the concept of green perceived value to understand the extent to which tourists perceive and value the sustainable aspects of tourist attractions. We analyze the rating assigned by each tourist and include the four central dimensions of sustainability (economic, environmental, social and cultural), since they promote sustainable tourism development (Agyeiwaah et al., 2017). Previous research on sustainable dimensions in tourism has shown how tourist perceptions are associated with qualification. The research by Väisänen et al. (2023) shows that the most negative perceptions come from the economic dimension and the least negative ones from the cultural dimension. D'Acunto et al. (2020) confirm that online reviews that focus on social issues are associated with negative emotions and lower ratings. Conversely, comments on environmental issues relate to positive emotions and higher ratings.

Therefore, the present study answers two research questions: What is the effect of the sustainable content of online reviews on the ratings of tourist attractions? What topics of sustainable dimensions do users refer to in their online reviews of tourist attractions?

Research methodology

Our research takes a novel approach that integrates data science techniques and statistical testing. The programming language used is Python and the statistical program is Stata. The source of information is TripAdvisor, since it continues to position itself as one of the leading platforms of UGC for its perceived ease of use, credibility and utility (Filieri et al., 2021). First, we collect the data with the web scraping tool Octoparse. The first 2,000 comments
(when available) were downloaded from the 15 main tourist attractions of each Autonomous

Community of Spain. 313,683 reviews were obtained for 255 attractions covering dates from 2007 to 2024. Feedback information includes: 1) attractiveness location; 2) date of comment; 3) travel category (friends, family, couples, business, solo); 4) visitor nationality; 5) rating in a range of one to five; 6) number of contributions or comments that the tourist has written on TripAdvisor. Subsequently, the "Business" category of travel is deleted, since the motivations and needs of this type of travel may differ significantly from those of leisure tourism. The study period is also delimited, including only the years 2012 to 2023, therefore, the final sample of this research consists of 207,706 comments.

Second, a Hugging Face platform Natural Language Processing (NLP) model is applied to rank the sustainable content of comments. A score is obtained for each of the sustainable dimensions (environmental, economic, social, and cultural). Likewise, the category "other" is added to consider the content of the reviews that is not related to sustainable aspects, for example, satisfaction or general topics. Third, the ordered logistic regression model (ologit) is constructed, establishing as a dependent variable the qualification and as independent variables the dimensions of sustainability calculated previously. The control variables included are the length of the profile (number of words), the experience of the reviewer (contribution), the travel category and the nationality of the tourist. The model is then verified to meet the assumptions of parallel lines through the Brant test. In case the model does not comply with the assumption it is necessary to apply generalized ordered logistic regression (gologit) (Williams, 2006). This would indicate that there are differences in the way independent variables are associated with the dependent variable (rating) in their different categories (ranges from 1 to 5).

Finally, BERTopic modeling of machine learning themes is applied to detect topics related to sustainable dimensions. This technique stands out for its ability to capture the semantic context (Grootendorst, 2021). For this, the 500 comments with the highest scores by dimension are selected and the 5 main themes are obtained for each of the social, cultural, economic, and environmental fields.

Results

Estimation of the ologit model was performed with the Stata program. The results of the Brant test indicated the violation of the assumptions of proportionality, so it was necessary to apply the gologit model. We use the module gologit2 written by Williams (2006) with the option of self-adjusting, since it allows relaxing the restriction of parallel lines only in variables where the assumption is violated. It is important to clarify that, the "travel category" is a dummy variable that consists of four different options (friends, solo, family and couples). However, the category "pairs" is excluded from the models ologit and gologit estimated, being assigned the value of zero. Therefore, it becomes the reference point for comparing the results of the other options (friends, solo and family).

Effect of sustainable content of online reviews on rating

Table 1 details the results of the gologit model for the entire sample. The probability of receiving higher ratings for reviews decreased when they contain economic and social content (ECO and SOC), while reviews enriched with environmental (ENV) and cultural aspects (CULT) tend to increase ranking scores, indicating that these aspects positively influence tourist perceptions. In addition, the nature of the trip

plays a fundamental role. People who travel with friends (FRI) or solo travelers (SOLO), unlike couples, tend to give more favorable ratings to tourist attractions. By contrast, domestic users (ORI) show a propensity to be more critical, often ranking tourist attractions less positively compared to international travelers. In addition, revisions that are characterized by a higher number of words (WC) tend to produce lower scores, reflecting the inclination to elaborate on negative experiences that require long explanations. Similarly, expert users (CONT) tend to assign lower ratings, potentially influenced by their higher expectations or specific demands regarding the tourist attraction.

Table 1. Results of the gologit model.

Variable	Pseudo R2	0.0316	
		Coeff.	Odds Ratio
_cons	Cut 1	4.8488***	127.5879
	Cut 2	3.9547***	52.1787
	Cut 3	1.8208***	6.1769
	Cut 4	.3364***	1.3999
ECO	Cut 1	-.1830***	.8327
	Cut 2	-.1900***	.8270
	Cut 3	-.1401***	.8693
	Cut 4	-.1344***	.8743
SOC	Cut 1	-.5192***	.5950
	Cut 2	-.3517***	.7035
	Cut 3	-.1422***	.8675
	Cut 4	-.0117	.9883
ENV	Cut 1	.5014***	1.6511
	Cut 2	.4314***	1.5394
	Cut 3	.3183***	1.3748
	Cut 4	.1438***	1.1547
CULT	Cut 1	.8383***	2.3125
	Cut 2	.7973***	2.2196
	Cut 3	.6295***	1.8767
	Cut 4	.3247***	1.3836
FRI	Cut 1	.0831***	1.0867
	Cut 2	.0831***	1.0867
	Cut 3	.0831***	1.0867
	Cut 4	.0831***	1.0867
SOLO	Cut 1	-.1125	.8936
	Cut 2	-.0107	.9894
	Cut 3	.1146***	1.1214
	Cut 4	.1947***	1.2150

FAM	Cut 1	-.0199	.9803
	Cut 2	-.0199	.9803
	Cut 3	-.0199	.9803
	Cut 4	-.0199	.9803
ORI	Cut 1	-.1705**	.8432
	Cut 2	-.1091**	.8966
	Cut 3	-.0356	.9650
	Cut 4	.0198	1.0200
WC	Cut 1	-.7353***	.4794
	Cut 2	-.6984***	.4974
	Cut 3	-.3941***	.6742
	Cut 4	-.1133***	.8929
CONT	Cut 1	.2238***	1.2508
	Cut 2	.1427***	1.1534
	Cut 3	.0228***	1.0231
	Cut 4	-.0861***	.9175

Main topics of sustainable dimensions

Table 2 shows the results of BERTopic theme modeling. The five main themes are obtained for each sustainable dimension and for each theme the most significant keywords are obtained in order of importance. In the economic dimension the words "price", "entrance" and "expensive" stand out in different tourist attractions such as parks, vineyards, castles, among others. For the social sphere we can observe terms related to people, major cities, and the family. The themes of the environmental dimension include positive adjectives such as beautiful, precious, wonderful. Tourists highlight the natural beauty, beaches, and cathedrals, as well as its excellent state of conservation (words like care, clean, admire, breathe). Within the cultural dimension are words referring to museums, vineyards, monuments, cities. It also reflects the interest and taste of people to learn about culture (words such as know, interesting, exhibition).

Table 2. Main topics by sustainable dimensions.

Dimension	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5
Economic	Pay, entrance, climb, visit, economic, price, nice, expensive, park.	Visit, economic, price, guided, entrance, guide, city, good, bridge.	Economic, price, quality, wine, good, cap, product, market, fast, good.	Visit, castle, visit, entrance, economic, good, price, palace, guided, view.	Cathedral, pay, visit, price, entrance, enter, climb, church, chapel.
Social	Visit, good, social, person, park, guide,	City, street, square, neighborhood,	Cathedral, Roman, wall, neighborhood,	Madrid, Barcelona, neighborhood, city,	Child, adult, age, family, visit, good,

	experience, people, entrance, road.	place, people, life, center, social, restaurant.	period, city, history, building, church, century.	visit, place, life, social, history.	recommended, experience, fun.
Environmental	Atmosphere, environment, night, good, beautiful, nice, site, visit, square, place.	Environment, good, nature, animal, care, visit, show, area.	Nature, park, natural, water, environment, place, enjoy, beautiful, visit.	Beach, water, sand, island, environment, best, spectacular, enjoy, clean.	Cathedral, plaza, atmosphere, beautiful, around, Seville, admire, breathe, spectacular, wonderful.
Cultural	Culture, visit, city, cultural, place, history, guide, know, street.	Visit, cultural, monument, palace, cathedral, history, culture, place, city.	Museum, art, exhibition, work, good, visit, interesting, like, history.	Roman, museum, Madrid, visit, work, best, culture, Barcelona, art, theater.	Wine, winery, tasting, culture, museum, visit, process, world.

Conclusions

The findings of this research present theoretical and practical implications. From the academic field, the literature on tourism, big data and UGC is expanded. We propose a novel methodology where big data techniques are applied to online comments to analyze and extract sustainable perceptions of tourists. In this way, we provide the sustainable perspective of tourists and how it influences the final valuation. Sometimes consumers do not perceive sustainable characteristics as a fundamental part of a product or service (Font & McCabe, 2017; Ottman et al., 2006). Even sustainable attributes may be negatively associated with product or service attributes (lower performance, high price, low quality) (Font et al., 2017; Olson, 2013; Ottman et al., 2006; Peng & Chen, 2019). Therefore, our results provide a greater understanding of the value perceived by the tourist at economic, social, environmental, and cultural level, from the online comments.

Regarding the practical implications, we note that the research provides useful information can help the managers or entities of the tourist attractions to enhance their services or products. A better understanding of the effect of sustainable dimensions on the rating of tourists allows to guide and improve communication strategies, highlighting environmental and cultural aspects. Managers could also identify and analyse the gap between communication on sustainable aspects and the perceived value of end-users. This can lead to improvements and better decisions on social and economic aspects.

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From trend to truth: Unraveling circular fashion claims through the lens of social desirability bias

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the relationship between social desirability bias and engaging in circular fashion business model applications. Initially, Instagram posts sharing circular fashion messages from six global companies were selected and examined using semantic network analysis. The total findings were then analyzed across eight different dimensions. In the subsequent stage of the research, the data derived from the network analysis were used to investigate the perspectives of 44 participants regarding various communication messages associated with circular fashion, employing a semi-structured interview format. The participants' inclination towards social desirability was assessed using the abbreviated version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, supplemented by demographic inquiries. Furthermore, the exploratory inquiry concludes by delineating four distinct thematic elements—clothing performance, emotional brand attachment, greenwashing concerns, and openness to change—drawn from both interview data and a comprehensive review of relevant literature.

Keywords: circular fashion, corporate social responsibility, social desirability bias, semantic network analysis

Extended abstract

The fast fashion model, dominant in the fashion industry has fostered a culture of rapid garment turnover prioritizing affordability and short trend cycles (Gazzola et al., 2020; Moran, Eichelmann, & Buggy, 2021; Türker & Altuntaş, 2014). This phenomenon, illustrated by the 'Zara model,' emphasizes limited production quantities, frequent product renewals, and accessibility, contributing to what is termed the "democratization of fashion" (Crofton & Dopico, 2007; Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2021). However, such linear consumption patterns, characterized by buy-make-discard cycles, maintain unsustainable practices akin to planned obsolescence (Piippo, Niinimäki, & Aakko, 2022). Global clothing consumption is expected to reach 102 million tons annually by 2030. This has dire environmental consequences, including 5 billion tons carbon dioxide emissions and 79 trillion liters water use. These statistics underscore the concentrated environmental impacts in manufacturing countries, further exacerbated by the significant CO_2 emissions from global fashion product transportation, particularly driven by air cargo due to intricate supply chains and short lead times (Peters, Li, & Lenzen, 2021).

In response to escalating environmental and social concerns, the concept of "slow fashion" has emerged, advocating for sustainable design, production, and consumption values (Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2021).

However, despite consumers' preference for environmentally and socially conscious brands, their purchasing behavior often remains unaffected due to perceptions of sustainability as unfashionable and higher prices (Rausch, Baier, & Waning, 2021). Alternatively, the Circular Economy (CE) model offers an integrative approach aligning economic models with environmental and social concerns sustainably (Milios, 2018). Prioritizing reducing, reusing, and recycling in manufacturing and consumption processes, the CE model faces adoption challenges due to consumer cultural norms and awareness gaps (Kirchherr et al., 2018; Jesus & Mendonça, 2018).

The culture surrounding garment production has shifted towards promoting a disposable mindset, particularly evident in the fast fashion sector, where shorter lifespans for items have become normative (Caro & Martínezde-Albéniz, 2015; Piippo, Niinimäki, & Aakko, 2022). Despite intentions to support sustainable fashion brands, consumers often exhibit an "attitude-behavior gap," leading to contradictory purchasing behavior (Jung, Choi, & Oh, 2020). Ethically-minded consumers tend to engage in circular consumption practices, associating such behaviors with experiential well-being and happiness (Domingos, Vale, & Faria, 2022). Consequently, companies are adopting the "green fashion" model, emphasizing environmentally friendly materials and clean production methods, while seeking green certifications or eco-label endorsements (Yan, Han, & Lee, 2017; Bielawska & Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2021).

In the realm of sustainable fashion, customers play a critical role in determining the fate of clothing items, choosing between disposal and recycling options (Weber, Lynes, & Young, 2016). Initiatives aimed at incentivizing consumer participation, such as H&M's offering of discounts for returning old clothes, have proven effective in encouraging recycling efforts. However, despite such efforts, sustainability campaigns in the fashion industry often fall short, with a significant portion of companies' sustainability claims contradicting their actual actions (Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2021; Mizrachi and Tal, 2022). As a result, changing trends and diminishing emotional attachments frequently lead to the premature disposal of fashion products, with certain items attaining a nostalgic status and being labeled as "vintage garments" (Ferraro, Sands, & Brace-Govan, 2016).

Moreover, the rise of the "eco-movement" has seen many consumers expressing a preference for used clothing due to environmental concerns (Ferraro, Sands, & Brace-Govan, 2016). However, the association of shopping at second-hand stores with lower social status in some contexts poses challenges, stemming from concerns about item condition and hygiene (Valor, Ronda, & April, 2022). To counteract this stigma, some vintage stores employ descriptors like "almost new" or "previously loved fashion" (Valor, Ronda, & April, 2022). Concurrently, the fashion industry is witnessing a surge in renting services, offering temporary access to luxury brands at affordable prices while promoting sustainable consumption by extending the lifespan of garments (Jain et al., 2022). Renting provides consumers with psychological fulfillment akin to a treasure hunt, while swapping and upcycling initiatives contribute to fostering a sense of community, shared values, and environmental responsibility.

This study aims to address a significant gap in the existing literature by investigating the influence of consumers' socially desirable dispositions on their participation in sustainable consumption behaviors, particularly in the realm of circular fashion. Specifically, the research seeks to ascertain the attitudes of consumers with both low and high social desirability scores towards circular fashion, providing valuable

insights into the role of social desirability in shaping consumer behavior within the context of sustainable consumption practices. While research examining consumer traits and behaviors concerning collaborative consumption models for various product groups has been conducted (Edbring, Lehner, and Mont, 2016), the impact of consumers' social desirability tendency on these applications, such as recycling, reusing, and upcycling within collaborative consumption models, remains largely unexplored.

A two-phase design is adopted comprising semantic network analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the discourse surrounding circular fashion practices on social media platforms and consumers' perceptions of relevant communication messages. Initially, semantic network analysis was conducted using Pajek software to scrutinize Instagram posts related to circular fashion from six prominent global fashion brands: Zara, H&M, C&A, Levi's, G-Star Raw, and Patagonia.

The brands' selection was based on their diverse positions within the fashion industry and their various approaches to sustainability. Zara, recognized as a pioneer in fast fashion, prioritizes rapid turnover of high-fashion collections and capitalizes on scarcity-driven consumer purchasing behavior (Crofton and Dopico, 2007). Similarly, H&M operates in the fast fashion sector while striving for sustainability through initiatives like the "Conscious Collection" (Zhang, Zhang, and Zhou, 2021). Another key player in fast fashion, C&A, has demonstrated a commitment to sustainability with campaigns like "Wear the Change" (Mandaric, Hunjet, & Vukovic, 2022) but faces scrutiny regarding its working conditions (Portway, 2019). Levi's, an iconic denim brand, has shifted towards sustainability with initiatives such as the Better Cotton Initiative and the "WaterLess" policy (Jolue, 2011), while G-Star Raw has gained attention for its recycling projects and dedication to cleaner production methods (Moorhouse and Moorhouse, 2017). Patagonia emerges as a leader in embracing circular economy principles and advocating for durable, high-quality clothing through campaigns like "Worn Clothing" and "Don't Buy This Jacket" (Dezi et al., 2022; Rattalino, 2018).

Firstly, aforementioned six companies' official global Instagram posts - consisting of visual and text - about the circular economy concept were listed. Other than captions and hashtags which are the words used to signify a specific issue, theme, place etc., and updated by Instagram users (Kostygina, et al., 2021, pp. 2-3), scripts of all 167 posts within the contents were textualized. Relevant Instagram posts of each fashion brand were coded after the data collection step. Two independent coders manually coded, evaluated, and compromised the content. The related content was coded by identifying the sentences expressing the main idea. The descriptive summary of the posts' network is provided in Table 1.

Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 44 participants to grasp perceptions about circular fashion and purchasing attitudes towards the brands. The shared thematic messages of fast fashion brands regarding circular fashion were obtained from network analysis of Instagram posts under six items (see Table 2). Name and logo of these brands were not shared with the participants not to influence their perception. According to their answers, the reasons behind their opinions about the subject were tried to be explored with further questions. To evaluate social desirability bias among participants, the short form of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSDS), developed by Ural and Özbiricikli in 2006, was employed. Participants were categorized into high (above 3.52) and low social desirability tendency groups based on their scores, enabling a nuanced understanding of their biases. Additionally,

Plutchik's wheel of emotions served as a framework for analyzing emotional responses elicited by the communication messages.

58% of the participants with high social desirability score are women while 42% of them are men. The research findings of Nolte, Elsworth and Osborne (2013, p. 2) and Chung and Monroe (2003, p. 298) reveal that demographic data is associated with social desirability bias. These researchers claim that social desirability tendency of women is higher than men. In addition to gender factor, the research of Heerwig and McCabe (2009, p. 674) examining the relationship between social desirability and education level stated that there is a negative correlation between social desirability level and educational attainment. In contrast to this statement, in this study just 17% of the participants with high social desirability score have high school or lower educational degree. 83% of them have bachelor or higher degree meaning that level of education and social desirability has positive correlation.

The interview findings challenge the notion that individuals with lower social status are more likely to engage in circular fashion practices (Çakır and Dedeoğlu, 2020, p.70) due to the social risk associated with the potential loss of social status (Lang, Seo, and Liu, 2019). Despite assumptions, most research participants displaying high social desirability and optimism about circular fashion have relatively high personal incomes. This finding suggests that the relationship between social desirability and engagement with circular fashion is not solely dependent on economic well-being.

Those with lower social desirability scores expressed skepticism towards the fashion industry's transformation, viewing circular fashion models with doubt and suspecting green claims as potential marketing ploys. Conversely, another subset advocated for the industry's shift towards circularity, emphasizing environmental and social sustainability. Skepticism towards brands correlated with perceptions of authenticity and concerns about greenwashing. Participants with lower social desirability scores tended to support the status quo, prioritizing clothing performance in purchasing decisions to mitigate perceived risks associated with alternative brands implementing cyclical models.

55% of participants exhibited high social desirability tendencies, contrasting with 45% displaying low social desirability tendencies, which resulted in varied trends in engaging with cyclical fashion practices. Given the established relationships between personal characteristics and social desirability tendencies in existing literature (Havan and Kohút, 2019, p. 39; Ones, Viswesvaran and Reiss, 1996, p. 665), this study explores these characteristics concerning cyclical fashion attitudes.

Consumers, particularly those with low social desirability bias, prioritize clothing performance attributes such as fabric quality, comfort, durability, and fit. They value brand loyalty and prefer high-quality, long-lasting clothing, with durability significantly influencing their purchasing decisions (Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh, 2020; Caputo, 2017). While environmental benefits are secondary, they appreciate clothing made from ecological materials like organic cotton (Lee and Sargeant, 2011).

In contrast, individuals with high social desirability bias prioritize emotional benefits when selecting brands (Ostrem, 2006). They seek brands that evoke positive emotions and foster emotional loyalty, favoring inclusive brands aligned with social and environmental responsibility values (Havan and Kohút, 2019). This inclination towards altruism may lead them to participate in cyclical fashion practices, reinforcing their emotional connection and brand loyalty (Caputo, 2017; Lee and Sargeant, 2011).

Moreover, greenwashing, characterized by misleading environmental communications from companies, poses challenges for consumers in discerning genuine sustainability efforts from deceptive claims (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020). Participants with low social desirability bias express skepticism towards sustainability claims in circular fashion, viewing them as profit-driven marketing tactics rather than authentic environmental endeavors.

Participants' attitudes toward change in the fashion industry exhibit variability contingent upon their degree of social desirability. Those with lower scores tend to harbor skepticism toward environmentally friendly claims and display reluctance to embrace change. They perceive conventional styles as safer choices and may exhibit hesitancy in adopting recycled or handmade clothing due to their association with unfamiliarity and perceived elevated prices in sustainable apparel (Smith, 2015; Garcia et al., 2019).

Conversely, respondents with higher levels of social desirability exhibit enthusiasm for the transformation of the fashion industry. They underscore the evolving needs and expectations of consumers over time, regarding change as imperative and exhilarating. This observation is in line with the findings of Steenkamp et al. (2010), wherein a positive correlation between individual-focused social desirability tendencies and openness to change was established. This cohort anticipates brands to communicate change and actively supports advocates of industry transformation. They hold the belief that the fashion industry's pivot towards circularity represents a critical stride toward environmental and social sustainability, hence placing their trust in brands that champion change (Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2021).

Respondents with higher social desirability scores show enthusiasm for transforming the fashion industry, viewing change as necessary and support brands advocating for industry transformation. This aligns with Steenkamp et al.'s (2010) research on social desirability bias, indicating a positive association between openness to change and individual-focused social desirability tendencies. They believe the shift towards circularity is crucial for environmental and social sustainability and stress the need for radical industry transformation and emphasize the importance of brands communicating change positively. This group strongly advocates for the fashion industry's transition towards circularity (Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2021).

Table 1.Semantic Network Analysis Metrics of Instagram Posts Network

Instagram Posts Network	
Number of vertices	339
Number of lines with value 1	1471
Number of lines that have different value than 1	932
Total number of lines	2403
Density of the network	0.02097188
Average degree	14.17699115

Table 2. Summary of Semantic Network Analysis Findings of Instagram Posts

Instagram Posts	Number of Repeat	Repeated Dimensions
We believe in buying better and wearing longer.	6	Input degree, output degree, input closeness, output closeness, betweenness, articulation point
Fashion industry needs to change.	5	Input degree, output degree, input closeness, output closeness, betweenness
It is responsibility.	5	Input degree, output degree, input closeness, output closeness, betweenness
We move towards circularity.	5	Input degree, output degree, input closeness, output closeness, betweenness
Collection is produced with organic cotton.	5	Input degree, output degree, input closeness, output closeness, betweenness
We produce garments that are built to last.	5	Input degree, output degree, input closeness, output closeness, betweenness
Sustainability is essential.	4	Input degree, output degree, output closeness, betweenness
It is an innovation.	4	Input degree, input closeness, betweenness, articulation point

This study contributes a novel perspective to the understanding of fashion brand communication by investigating the influence of social desirability tendencies on consumer engagement with circular fashion. By exploring this relationship, it enriches the comprehension of consumer behavior within the fashion industry. Moreover, the research intends to offer original insights into social media communication strategies for fashion brands by presenting a comprehensive overview of the research design process, encompassing data collection to analysis. This provides valuable guidance on how fashion brands can effectively leverage social media platforms to communicate their circular fashion initiatives.

The insights derived from the interviews offer managerial takeaways for fashion brands seeking to implement circular economy practices. Firstly, brands need to prioritize environmental performance and quality attributes to establish green value, ensuring that final products meet high-quality standards alongside sustainable materials and production processes. Secondly, transparency in the production process is emphasized as essential to prevent greenwashing, requiring brands to furnish clear and accurate information about their sustainability efforts to enable informed consumer decision-making. Lastly, fostering a stronger emotional connection with consumers is deemed crucial for cultivating brand loyalty, achievable through effective communication of brand values, sustainability initiatives, and commitment to ethical practices via social media platforms.

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Greenhushing: does it really pay to disclose sustainable cues on online delivery platforms?

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Abstract

This project investigates the impact of revealing product sustainable cues in post-purchase versus pre-purchase phase on online delivery platforms. Our research reveals that post-purchase disclosure enhances satisfaction and prompts positive reviews, challenging perceptions of sustainable products as expensive which often negatively influences choice during the pre-purchase phase.

Introduction

In today's marketplace, consumers are increasingly faced with choices between organic products and their more traditional counterparts. According to Statista (2024), in 2022, sales of organic food amounted to about 134.76 billion U.S. dollars, up from nearly 18 billion dollars in 2000. Extant literature has widely analyzed what motivates consumers to choose an organic or green product, such as the color of the packaging (Sokolova, Krishna, and Döring 2023), the presence of eco-labels (Neumayr and Moosauer 2021) or the green frames used to communicate the product (Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala 2014). Moreover, recent literature has also demonstrated the green consumption effect suggesting that using a green (vs. conventional) product enhances the enjoyment of the accompanying consumption experience (Tezer and Bodur, 2020).

However, despite the growing demand for sustainable options, challenges persist, particularly concerning consumers' perceptions of organic products' costliness and performance. It is acknowledged that some consumers may be reluctant to purchase organic products because they are usually perceived as more costly than traditional ones (Dale, 2008; Haws, Winterich, Naylor 2014; Mintel 2010). Moreover, research suggests that consumers attach lower performance to green products since they think that companies have diverted resources to make the product greener (Mai et al. 2019; Newman, Gorlin and Dhar 2014; Usrey et al. 2020). Additionally, a recent literature review posits that sustainability claims may inadvertently trigger negative consequences on consumer behavior (Acuti, Pizzetti, and Dolnicar 2022). This conventional wisdom has been also confirmed by some interviews we have conducted with online food delivery platforms managers who declared: "if I add an organic label to the product, consumers do not choose it because it is perceived as a more expensive product" (Interview conducted with a local delivery platform manager in December 2023). These managers expressed reluctance to disclose sustainable attributes of products on delivery platforms due to the prevalent perception among consumers that such products are more expensive, potentially deterring purchases.

The present study aims to explore the impact of disclosing product sustainability cues postpurchase versus pre-purchase on online delivery platforms. Contrary to conventional wisdom, our research reveals

that post-purchase disclosure not only enhances consumer satisfaction but also prompts positive reviews, challenging the prevailing notion that sustainable products are invariably expensive and less desirable. This finding underscores the significance of timing in communicating sustainability attributes, as delayed disclosure allows consumers to form unbiased perceptions without undue influence on their initial purchasing decisions

Theoretical framework

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication literature has widely analyzed the importance of communicating CSR in order to increase brand loyalty, intention to purchase, legitimacy and reputation (e.g. Crane and Glozer, 2016). At the same time literature has emphasized the risks associated to CSR communication suggesting the presence of a Catch 22 of communication (Morsing, Schultz, and Nielsen, 2008), leading some companies to "greenhushing", namely situations where companies employ CSR practices but deliberately withholds information about them (Ginder et al., 2021). Literature has mostly analyzed greenhushing from a company perspective suggesting that companies prefer not to disclose their CSR efforts as a strategy to minimize public exposure in order to shield themselves from contestation or to reduce communication costs, especially when considering small and medium companies (Wickert et al., 2016). For instance, Carlos and Lewis (2018) found that some companies adopt a strategic silence by hindering sustainability certifications when they perceived a threat to their legitimacy or reputation. Font et al. (2017) found that small rural tourism businesses in the Peak District National Park (UK) prioritized customer experience and landscape appeal over sustainability practices, communicating less than one third of their sustainability efforts to visitors. This approach aimed to prevent tourists from feeling guilty about visiting these unspoiled areas.

However, to the best of our knowledge, no research has investigated how consumers react to greenhushing and in particular how they react when they discover to have bought an organic product without knowing it before. How does it affect their expectations? Does it lead to a higher level of satisfaction? Does it lead to a higher intention to leave a review or to spread word of mouth about the product they have chosen? Our study aims to answer to these questions by exploring consumer responses to greenhushing, specifically examining their reactions upon discovering post-purchase that a product is organic. By elucidating the impact of delayed disclosure on consumer expectations, satisfaction levels, and propensity to leave reviews, we offer novel insights into the dynamics of sustainable consumption behavior.

We hypothesize that revealing the green nature of a food product only after the purchase will have a positive effect translated by higher satisfaction and a higher intention to leave a review. This effect is explained by the higher expectations created by revealing the green nature of the product in the post-purchase stage. Instead of hiding the green characteristics of its products, companies can reveal these features only after consumers' decision to complete the purchase. We believe that this strategy will protect companies from negative spillovers of green claims (i.e., higher price perception and lower performance) and will not interfere in the consumer decision making process when making a purchase.

Methodology

In our study, we randomly assigned 100 US Prolific participants (Mage= 38.45, 49% females) to two experimental conditions. Participants were shown an assortment of four apples with different colors, types, and prices emulating a real online delivery platform that sells groceries (see Figure 1).
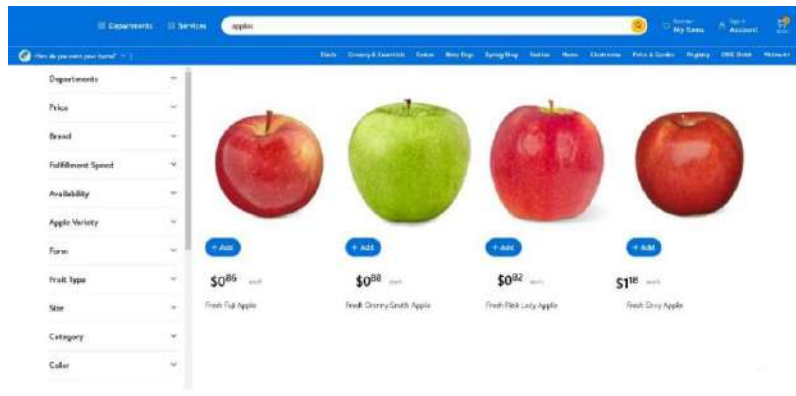
Figure 1: Assortment of apples on the delivery platform

We instructed respondents to choose the most preferred apple from the assortment (i.e., the apple that they would choose in a real purchase setting). After that, participants were either shown a standard thank you message by the platform for their choice – control condition - (i.e., Thank you for ordering from us! Your order is confirmed, and we're getting it ready to ship. We hope to see you again.) or a message that revealed the organic characteristic of the apple they have chosen – treatment condition (i.e., Thank you for ordering from us! Your order is confirmed, and we're getting it ready to ship. We're excited to let you know that the product you've chosen is an organic product. We hope to see you again.). All participants in the treatment condition saw this message regardless of their choice. We will control in our analysis for the choice of apple. Subsequently, respondents rated the apple they have chosen in terms of expectations (please rate the apple you have chosen) on a 7-point scale (1 = much worse than expected, 7 = much better than expected) (Diehl and Poynor 2010), their satisfaction (my feelings toward the apple I have chosen can best be characterized as) on a 7-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied, 7 = satisfied) (Taylor and Baker 1994), and their likelihood and motivation to leave a review (please indicate how likely / motivated you would be to post a star rating and a text review at the review forum?) on a two item (α = .94) 7-point scale (1 = Not very likely / motivated, 7 = very likely / motivated) (Bond, He, and Wen 2019). Finally, participants reported their age and gender.

Preliminary Results

Findings show that participants reported higher expectations (M control = 4.8, SD = .990; M treatment = 5.48, SD = .995; t(98) = 3.43, p < .001) and satisfaction (M control = 5.64, SD = 1.16; M treatment = 6.08, SD = .944; t(98) = 2.08, p = .020) in the treatment condition compared to the control condition. Next, we tested for mediation: condition (0 = control, 1 = treatment) was a significant predictor of expectations (b

=.68, SE = .19, t(98) = 3.43, p < .001), which, in turn, was a significant predictor of both satisfaction (b =.60, SE = .09, t(98) = 6.66, p < .001) and intention to write a review (b =.52, SE = .18, t(98) = 2.99, p = .004). Our estimation of the indirect effect using 10,000 bootstrap replications produced a significant indirect effect of our treatment on satisfaction (a × b =.41, SE = .13, 95% CI .17 to .68) and intention to write a review (a × b =.36, SE = .17, 95% CI .07 to .71) via expectations.

Importantly, this indirect effect remained significant when we controlled for apple choice.
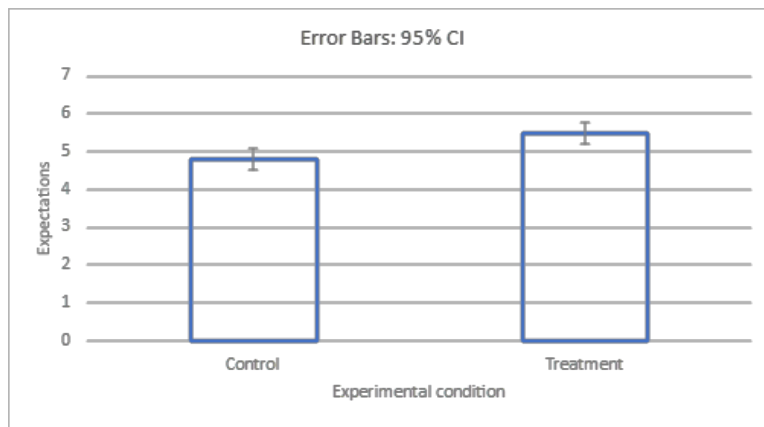
Figure 2: Difference in expectations across conditions
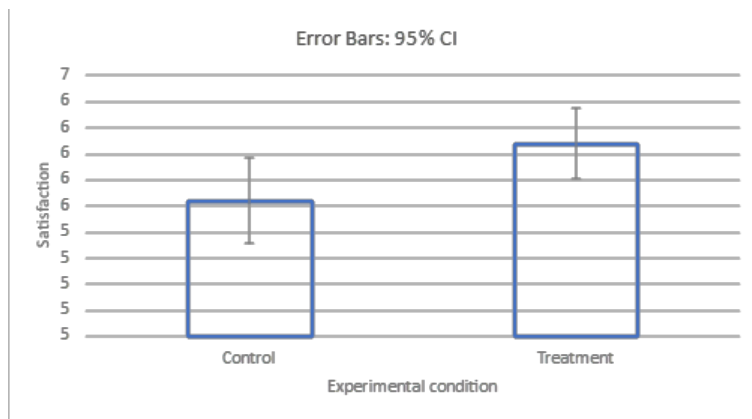
Figure 3: Difference in satisfaction across conditions

Conclusion

Although consumer demand for sustainable options is certainly on the rise, there is room to further encourage and support sustainable consumer behaviors, trying to overcome apprehensions regarding costliness and performance which continue to impede widespread sustainable adoption. Our study sheds light on the impact of post-purchase revelation of a product's organic nature, demonstrating that such disclosure significantly elevates consumers' expectations, satisfaction levels, and intention to leave a review. This finding suggests a promising strategy for companies to enhance consumer perceptions

without influencing their initial purchasing decisions, thereby potentially mitigating negative associations often linked with green product cues.

Moreover, our research underscores the importance of timing in communicating sustainability attributes, suggesting that postponing disclosure until after the purchase decision mitigates negative associations often linked with green product cues. This approach not only safeguards companies from potential backlash associated with perceived high prices but also empowers consumers to make informed choices without undue bias.

The preliminary results of our study pave the way for future research avenue. First, we will introduce additional mediators and moderators in the experimental design in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the processing mechanism between the condition presented in the scenarios and the dependent variables. Second, we are planning to conduct some field experiments in a real online delivery platform setting in order to rely on actual behavioral data, offering maximum realism (Moorman et al., 2019; Morales et al., 2017). Third, we are planning to analyze the phenomena also in an offline environment to understand whether effects will persist also in the offline realm or not.

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The challenge of waste separation: Gamifying communication

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Abstract

Local authorities face significant challenges in encouraging residents to separate waste. Particular attention is needed with regards to converting non-recyclers, who are sceptical or apathetic, to recyclers. We propose that gamified communication is an appropriate solution. Gamification involves the incorporation of game design elements into communication tools, including social media. Gamified messages are subtle and unintrusive, which decreases scepticism because they make sustainability issues easier to understand and enables audiences to visualise the effects of their actions. Whilst gamified CSR communication may have a boomerang effect, it has been found to be effective within the context of waste management. This paper proposes three phases of study to understand how to improve waste separation through gamified communication.

Keywords: gamification, gamified communication, social media, waste management, recycling

Rediscovering connection: Investigating brain synchronicity among consumers in artistic performances

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This study explores the mechanisms of brain synchronicity among multiple consumers during an artistic performance, highlighting how this phenomenon can offer insights into human interconnectedness. Drawing on social cognitive neuroscience, the study adopts ethnography and neuroscientific methods, aiming to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of synchronicity and its potential to foster prosocial behaviour (Michael, McEllin, and Felber, 2020). Emphasising the role of self-organisation in natural systems, by the means of neuroscience techniques, the study suggests that interpersonal coordination during artistic performances is incisive in creating a deep interconnection and bond between individuals.

Purpose of the paper

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issues of social isolation and loneliness had already emerged as significant public health and policy considerations, primarily because of their profound effects on longevity, as well as mental and physical well-being. (Fried et al., 2020). This study investigates the phenomenon of consumer brain synchronicity as one of the ways to open oneself to the outside world, rediscovering a deep connection with other individuals. When we discuss brain synchrony, we refer to coordinated neural activity or neural coupling between brain regions among people (Basso et al., 2021). An increasing body of research in social cognitive neuroscience indicates that phase synchronisation, a phenomenon whereby the peaks and troughs of the brain waves of several individuals occur simultaneously or similarly, emerges among brains during significant social interaction (Redcay and Schilbach, 2019). From a biological perspective, this resonates with the principle of self-organisation, according to which systems of varying complexity, ranging from molecules, crystals, cells, tissues, organisms, to societies of organisms, are arranged by 'morphic fields' (Piirto, 2011). This 'holistic view', arising since the 1930s, was later also supported by the revolutionary discoveries of quantum physics with regard to atoms and subatomic particles (Capra, 2014). Particularly in the field of quantum mechanics, the concept of synchronicity is embodied in the phenomenon of entanglement, a holistic property of compound quantum systems, in which, due to the superposition principle, the measurement of an observable of one system also simultaneously determines the value of the same observable of the others.

Within this context of vision, this study aims to analyse the mechanisms of synchronicity established during an artistic performance, in particular an avant-garde music festival, carried out by a plurality of consumers. When human beings listen to music, they are driven to move in tune or get in tune with the rhythm, and this rhythmic entertainment leads to positive affective states (Basso et al., 2021). Hence

music, and therefore dance, will be the protagonists of the performance. From a neurocentric point of view, dance, involving neurobehavioral processes in seven distinct areas including sensory, motor, cognitive, social, emotional, rhythmic, and creative, drives interpersonal coordination and therefore intra and inter-brain synchrony (Basso et al., 2021). It is therefore the performance of a complex joint task, in which individuals adeptly manoeuvre through intricate interactive situations by leveraging mutual perceptual and cognitive abilities, as well as their shared history with their interactive counterpart (Schmidt, Richardson, 2008). The research thus takes up a great challenge in the field of research inherent to joint action: by bringing research to the event of artistic performance, it studies the topic of synchronicity in the ecological environment outside the laboratory, thus scaling up the size of the analysis group, extending the investigation beyond the dyads.

The artistic performance will be analysed from a qualitative point lens through ethnography, and from a neuroscientific point of view through collaboration with HST -"Human Science and Technologies"- (https://www.hst.unito.it/progetti/cciaa/mindthegluten), a research infrastructure of the University of Turin that is at the forefront in terms of the methodologies and instrumentation adopted. HST is part of the ERC Social sciences and Humanities (SH) sector and is the result of the synergetic integration of research projects in the humanities and social sciences for the digital transformation of companies and markets and research projects in psychology and cognitive and clinical neuroscience. The aim of the investigation is to explore the cognitive, social and emotional characteristics of synchronicity, by confirming that coordination entails a reduction in brain activity in areas linked to cognitive control and an increase in brain activity associated with socio-emotional processes and uncover how such an artistic and entertainment event fosters synchronicity and how it impacts the lives of the participants, testing the phenomenon that synchronisation may be able to promote prosocial thoughts and behaviour. Prosocial behaviour is defined as voluntary actions aimed at aiding or benefiting either an individual or a group of individuals (Van Der Wel et al., 2021). Social coordination processes should be comprehended within the framework of the universal logic governing the stability of natural systems, specifically through dynamic processes of self-organisation. These dynamic processes of interpersonal coordination function automatically, beyond the conscious awareness of the participants, and seem to serve as the foundation for the spontaneous synchrony observed in natural interactions (Van Der Wel et al., 2021).

Main theoretical framework/assumptions

This study is situated within the expanding field of Transformative Service Research (TSR), a domain focused on enhancing consumer well-being by exploring social and cultural issues (Mick et al., 2012; Davis et al., 2016). Guided by Transformative Service Research (TSR), this study adopts a dynamic and interdisciplinary approach, encouraging to deeply reconsider subjects, methodologies, and objectives, with the overarching goal of catalysing significant and positive societal change (Anderson et al., 2013; Corus and Saatcioglu, 2015).

Aligned with the framework of Transformative Service Research, this study constructs a pathway toward enhanced inclusion and social cohesion (Rosenbaum 2015; Rahman 2021), achieved by promoting synchronicity among consumers. This is gained through the active participation of consumers in the

artistic event, promoting transformative results through co-creation processes. (Blocker and Barrios 2015, Bieler et al., 2022). In particular, those attending the artistic event engage in theatrical acts, both as audience members and performers, losing their inhibitions in an orgy of experiences in search of sensations (Goulding et al., 2009). Thus, in this context, in addition to high levels of involvement in activities, a key feature is the resulting community defined by shared experiences, objects and actions (Belk and Costa, 1998), the one that Kozinets calls 'hypercommunity', characterised by an intense but temporary social experience (Kozinets, 2002). The context within which the research is conducted can be attributed to the paradigm of "extraordinary experiences" within the realm of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). This paradigm delineates consumer experience as originating from encounters with atypical occurrences, imbued with heightened emotional resonance (Arnould and Price, 1993). Such experiences are often catalysed by interpersonal engagements, as highlighted by Abrahams (1986). Additionally, pivotal stimuli include the auditory ambiance orchestrated within the setting and the spatial configuration of its design, which collectively dictate the cadence and spatial parameters governing consumer behaviour (DeNora, 2000).

Research methods

The research project investigates how active participation in a music festival, a collective event in which sound, olfactory, tactile, visual and social stimuli are inextricably intertwined, influences the connection between human beings by stimulating synchronicity effects among consumers. The event chosen as the setting for the experimentation is Club to Club, a world-famous festival and flagship of the city of Turin's rich musical and cultural offer. The avant-garde and experimental vision that has guided the festival for the past twenty-two years aligns perfectly with the innovation that HST intends to promote. The study, which will employ different types of methodologies, essentially involves three phases. In the first phase, prior to the event, consumers from past editions of the festival (8-12 subjects) will be interviewed, individually or in groups: through the adoption of qualitative techniques typical of research, an attempt will be made to dissect the concept of synchronicity within the context of the live event, decoding rituals, symbols and meanings attributed to it (Arsel, 2017). At this stage, in addition to traditional qualitative research techniques, additional alternative qualitative methods that could generate new insights to advance consumer research will be employed, in the wake of new methodologies adopted by scholars lately, such as videographic approaches (Rokka, 2018); art-based research (Bettany, 2022); and poetry (Rojas-Gaviria, 2021). Since synchronicity is a difficult-to-measure experience (Canniford, 2012) with an abstract and barely graspable dimension, the aim of using creative methodologies in the investigation is to uncover as much as possible its true meaning, the level of awareness participants have of it, and the ways in which it is perceived.

At the same time, the research will be implemented by analysing the experiences of the C2C community members with respect to past editions. In order to achieve this, netnography will be used, a qualitative research methodology that analyses digital traces (posts, videos, comments, memes, emoji, etc.) that users have shared on social media (e.g. Reddit, Tik Tok, Telegram, Instagram, Youtube, etc.), adapting

techniques derived from ethnography and emphasising the researcher's interpretive expertise, ethical considerations and contextualisation (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024).

In a second phase, carried out during the course of the festival, a neuroscientific data collection will be added to an in situ ethnographic survey, with the detection of psychophysiological correlates. As far as ethnography is concerned, the researchers will carry out a participant observation in the vicinity of the venue, without in any way influencing the course of the performances, and will collect data through fieldnotes and video reportage inside the concert hall. The idea is to document and interpret the social, emotional and behavioural interactions in the setting of such an event, through observation during the concerts, and with pre- and post-interviews aimed at dissecting the experiences of synchronicity and the feelings experienced. As far as the neuroscientific measurements are concerned, a small space will be set up within the event premises, in which a small sample of subjects (between 15 and 20) will be subjected on a voluntary basis to a measurement of electromagnetic brain activity detected through EEG (electroencephalography) in two sessions, one carried out at a time prior to the enjoyment of the performances, and one afterwards. At the same time, other measurements will be taken through the polygraph, which allows parameters such as skin conductance and heart rate to be measured.

The two phases will be followed by the analysis and interpretation of the data, up to the definition of future study/application scenarios.

Brief discussion and contributions

The results of the analysis concerning interpersonal synchronicity manifested during active participation in a music festival have significant potential to shed light on the degree of connection emerging, both qualitatively and neuroscientifically. These findings have a twofold effect: on the one hand, they outline the impacts on participants' existences of this unique and peculiar relationship that spontaneously develops between consumers in a music event context, such as C2C. From this perspective, the results can contribute to understanding the well-being produced in society by similar cultural and entertainment consumer services and so making companies aware of their ethical responsibility to foster such connections among consumers.

On the other hand, the analysis of the innate configurations of synchronicity may shed light on its nature, integrating theories concerning the self-organisation of living systems and so, by exploring the cognitive, social, emotional and physical characteristics of synchronicity, established during an artistic performance, the purpose is to conceptualise the theoretical construct of "synchronicity" in consumer research.

The main constraint of the research lies in the inability to employ neuroimaging tools during the event itself, but only shortly before and shortly after the lived experience. This is due to technical and instrumental limitations related to the impossibility of using electroencephalography (EEG) on moving subjects. However, this opens the door to future investigations that can overcome this obstacle and further explore the deeper meaning of synchronicity.

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V) LEGITIMACY AND REPUTATION

Ambivalence and irresponsibility: Implications for the insurance value of a reputation for corporate social responsibility

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Abstract

By adopting a micro-approach, our research provides direct causal evidence on whether and how a firm's strong prior reputation for corporate social responsibility (CSR) does or does not mitigate the reputation losses associated with a negative event. We focus upon the role of ambivalence in individuals' processing of conflicting information to develop and test competing hypotheses that reflect the effects of ambivalence on individuals' judgments of the severity of a negative event. A social media study of 1.1 million tweets and three laboratory experiments with about 1500 participants jointly suggest that, in the wake of a CSI event, individuals experience stronger ambivalence towards firms with strong prior CSR reputations compared to other firms. Our results further suggest that stronger ambivalence is positively related CSI severity judgment. As a result, a firm with a strong prior CSR reputation tends to suffer greater reputation loss than other firms.

Keywords: Reputation; Corporate social responsibility; Ambivalence

We need values to legitimize – Understanding value compromises in CSR actions and communication

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Abstract

Institutional scholarship marginalises the role of values for organizing. Relatedly, it remains unclear how actors judge organisations on the basis of moral values and the organization's achievement of doing good for society as represented by their corporate social responsibility (CSR). The CSR literature, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with civic values, notably the renunciation of personal interest in favour of the collective, but often overlooks value pluralism.

In order to appear legitimate in today's complex societies, actors are likely to seek reasonable and pragmatic compromises between different moralities. Although the tensions and trade-offs of such "hybrid" solutions are often discussed, for instance in the context of social entrepreneurship or CSR in family firms, the value compromises of CSR actions and communication have not been conceptualized, which is the purpose of this work in progress, drawing on pragmatism and contributing to legitimacy theory and CSR scholarship.

Introduction

Contemporary institutional scholarship marginalises the role of values for organizing. Recently, this neglect has been pointed out as a significant problem because values are of central importance to our societies, waiting to be re-discovered by institutional scholars to increase the moral and practical relevance of this research tradition (Kraatz, Flores, & Chandler, 2020). One of the core themes within this tradition is the notion of legitimacy. Thereby, legitimacy is commonly defined as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995).

Although values are explicitly mentioned in this prevalent definition of legitimacy, they are not at the core of existing legitimacy literature. Instead, the majority of research focuses either on taken-for-grated mental schemas and cognitive scripts or on strategic and somewhat opportunistic legitimization tactics. In the context of legitimacy, the scholarly marginalisation of values seems particularly puzzling. After all people experience values as moral imperatives and use them to judge themselves, each other, and organizations as either legitimate or illegitimate (Kraatz et al., 2020). As a result of the underrepresentation of values in legitimacy theory we know little about the underlying moralities guiding actors in particular situations. Relatedly, it remains unclear how actors judge organisations on the basis of such moralities and the organization's achievement of doing good for society as represented by their CSR actions and

communication.

Pragmatist theory, and the French pragmatist sociology in particular, is centred on values and holds that persons, individually and collectively, strive towards the "common good". There are pluralistic moral orders accommodating values (Selznick, 1992) and actors can draw on any of those moral orders when judging the legitimacy of organizations. Pluralism is also known to contemporary institutional literature through the substantial body of work on institutional logics. However, institutional logics are predominately conceptualized as belief systems that shape the cognition of actors (Friedland & Alford, 1991), neglecting the role of morality and values to judge organizations purposefully.

The CSR literature is mainly concerned with civic values, notably the renunciation of personal interest in favour of the collective, but often overlooks value pluralism. With the exception of some fundamental state provisions practically all CSR actions and communication are characterized by a compromise between civic values and other values deriving for instance from family relationships, market principles and industrial processes. In order to appear legitimate in today's complex societies, actors are likely to seek reasonable, realistic, and pragmatic compromises between different orders of worth. Although the tensions and trade-offs of such "hybrid" solutions are often discussed, for instance in the context of social entrepreneurship or CSR in family firms, the value compromises of CSR actions and communication have not been thoroughly conceptualized, which is the purpose of this work in progress.

Literature background

Pragmatism, Values, and Legitimacy

Early pragmatist writing centres on values to describe individuals' concept of self and society (Dewey, 1925, Mead, 1934). This focus on values was subsequently incorporated in initial institutional scholarship (Selznick, 1992), shaping early conceptualizations of legitimacy.

According to Parsons (1960, p. 175) legitimacy is characterized by "the appraisal of action in terms of shared or common values". Values are often defined as ideal beliefs that reside in individuals, in groups, institutional and societies (Selznick, 1992; Giorgi, Lockwood & Glynn, 2015). Despite their prominent role in foundational writing, values only play a marginal role in current institutional literature (Kraatz et al., 2020; Reinecke, van Bommel, & Spicer, 2017). However, most recently, various scholars have called for a reintegration of values in existing scholarship, not at least because values are a matter of social importance and public interest

(Kraatz et al., 2020).

French Pragmatist Sociology

To reintegrate values into legitimacy theory we draw on Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot's

(2006) orders of worth framework. Core to Boltanski and Thevenot's work is the analysis of how actors legitimize themselves in light of value pluralism, where the criteria for evaluating legitimacy is uncertain and contested (Reinecke et al., 2017). Boltanksi and Thevenot propose multiple values-based ideal type orders of worth: the civic worth where the common good is founded on collective welfare, market worth based on market competition and freedom, the industrial worth based on efficiency and rational

organization of society, domestic worth based on family values and authority, worth of fame based on popularity and reputation, and the inspired worth based on creativity and novelty. The various orders of worth offer moral legitimacy criteria, giving actors "direction to the ordinary sense of that is just" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 74). Actors can draw on any of the orders of worth to legitimize themselves on moral grounds (Richards, Zellweger, & Gond, 2017). The focus on morality is a distinctive feature of the orders of worth framework (Gond & Leca, 2011) as actors need to justify that their actions promote the "common good," meaning that these actions ought to be beneficial for all and not just promoting personal gains (Reinecke et al., 2017).

The pragmatic legitmacy of csr actions and communications

With this paper, we highlight how each economy of worth relates to pragmatic legitimacy. Pragmatist sociology, from which the economies of worth framework derives, stresses critique, problem solving, and action for the common good. We show how pragmatic legitimacy described by Suchman's relates to the economies of worth as actors critique each other based on the moral principles and seek to find compromises for the common good. We argue that the primary scholarly view of pragmatic legitimacy neglects actors' efforts to promote the common good that unites opposing parties and individual interests. Although private arrangements focusing on personal self-interests might be common, a failure to account for the common good in legitimacy analyses obscures the fact that most people wish to act in accordance with values that are deemed appropriate in the specific organizational and institutional context. Understanding value compromises with the civic worth to achieve pragmatic legitimacy The civic order of worth is often associated with the highest moral legitimacy within the CSR literature because of its overarching moral principle, which promotes a renunciation of personal interest in favor of the collective. Against this backdrop we have taken the civic worth as reference point and highlighted pragmatic critique and compromises from each of the other orders of worth, based on alternative moral principles but sharing the wish to act for the common good.

Table 1

		Economies of worth (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006) Pluralistic moral principles guide actors´ justification referencing the common good					
		Civic Worth *The renunciation of personal interest in favour of the collective*	Market Worth *Market competition generates freedom from oppression*	Industrial Worth *The moral value of an effective system of order anchored in scientific observation*	Domestic Worth *The personal responsibility of binding relationships and the respect of tradition and heritage*	Worth of Fame *To be honourable is to be honoured and loved by many*	Inspired Worth *To renounce glory so as to be touched by creativity and grace*
Legitimacy Trichotomy (Suchman, 1995)	Pragmatic Legitimacy						
	Influence Exchange	*Critique of the civic worth Compromise with the civic worth*	Critique that collective interventions in market individualism hinders equitable solutions Acting on increasing market demand for business ethics and corporate citizenship behaviour	Critique of the inefficiency of civic bureaucracy; Cost of civic rules and regulations Showing respect for the rights of workers and the trade unions	Critique of the impersonability and anonymity of collectives, devoid of affection and the values of the family Using good sense in the applications of a rule; Humanizing a regulatory setting	Critique of the lack of public debates, which is seen as being essential for democracy Showing respect for the collective opinion	Critique of the frigid legalistic relations. Lacking of individualism and avant-gardism. Joint interest in calling back into question existing situations and structures

Developed from Boltanksi and Thevenot (2006) and Suchman (1995)

Our conceptualization seeks to raise scholarly recognition that, although civic oriented arguments might be particularly suited to promote a CSR agenda, other views— such as market-, industry- or domestic-based reasoning—are not less moral but might be indispensable in finding CSR solutions that promote the common good.

CSR actions and communication are structured around value compromises. This paper shows how the wider CSR field can be structured into different pragmatic compromises between the civic worth and each of the other orders of worth, described by the French pragmatist sociology.

First, the legitimacy of CSR topics such as worker rights and decarbonisation efforts rests on the compromise between the civic worth and the industrial worth. Despite the differences of the industrial worth, which is based on efficiency, and the civic worth focusing on the collective will, these to orders of worth have been objects of substantial compromise efforts in various societies (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). The figure of the worker, the concept on unionism and the establishment of labour laws are a result of these compromising efforts. The compromise of these two worlds derives from the common belief that work should be save and dignified, workers ought to be equipped with appropriate rights, and that motivated workers ultimately lead to increased productivity (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Moreover, environmental targets deriving from the civic effort to decarbonise and increase biodiversity are likely to be part of a civicindustrial compromise as the drive for efficiency of the industrial worth will lead to effective methods of mobilizing actors in the face of climate change, seeking approval and recognition for their efforts from civic governing bodies.

Second, the CSR discussion around ethical behaviour, moral courage and personal responsibility of decision makers, which is often associated with family-owned enterprises, is based on the legitimacy compromise between the civic worth and the domestic worth. This compromise can be initiated by using the register of personal relations, good manners and polite behaviour (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). In this compromise actors seek to use good sense in applying rules, which rests on their personal etiquette and moral compass.

Third, the growing interest of the wider CSR field in social entrepreneurship and impact investing rests on the perceived legitimacy deriving from a compromise between the civic worth and the market worth. This compromise is based on the belief that market mechanism can free people from oppression and are a powerful mechanism to installing equitable solutions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Acting on increasing market demands for business ethics and corporate citizenship behaviour, market-based solutions to enhance the collective welfare are of great interest globally to address complex civic and environmental challenges, which go beyond the scope of national governments.

Fourth, CSR topics like local sponsorship, high profile philanthropy, sustainability certifications, and CSR marketing and reporting rest on a legitimacy compromise between the civic worth and fame worth. Public relation campaigns which seek to mobilize people for a good cause are a typical example of such a compromise, seeking to shape the public opinion. This compromise also often entails celebrities and high-profile business figures who are willing to put their name at the service for a cause. Moreover, sustainability certifications can be seen as a figure of compromise between the civic worth and the fame worth as through the intermediary of a competent authority (i.e. certification provider), it is officially

certified what is presented as true (i.e. that the company's supply chains are sustainable and fair) (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

Finally social movements, such as the Fridays for future movement of young environmental activists can be regarded as a compromise between the civic worth and the inspired worth. This compromise rests on the joint requirement of calling back into question existing structures and practices, which leads to protest and in the extreme case to revolt. This compromise is based on re-instating justice and making people aware of the power of imagination and group creation (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Figure 1 presents a visual summary of how CSR actions and communication are structured around value compromises.

Figure 1

Orders of Worth Compromise   **CSR Actions and Communication**

Market Worth		*Social Entrepreneurship; Impact Investing*
Industrial Worth		*Worker Rights, Labor Laws, Decarbonization Efforts*
Domestic Worth	Civic Worth	*Ethical Behaviour, Moral Courage, Long-Term Commitment, Personal Responsibility of Decision Makers*
Fame Worth		*Local Sponsorship, High Profile Philanthropy Sustainability Marketing and Reporting Sustainability Certifications*
Inspired Worth		*Social Movements, Activism*

The relationship between explicit and implicit CSR and value compromises. This paper seeks to explain how the legitimacy of value compromises and the related CSR actions and communication is shaped by national business systems. These national business systems are historically characterized by either explicit or implicit forms of CSR. Whereas explicit CSR describes proactive business activities that assume responsibility for the interest of society, implicit CSR describes firms' role within the wider formal and informal institutions for society's interest and concerns (Matten & Moon, 2008). Liberal market economies, notably the United States foster an explicit CSR approach, whereas more coordinated market economies, such as countries in the European Union have traditionally been characterized by

organizations' implicit CSR (Matten & Moon, 2008). Although all order so worth are available for legitimacy purposes in any national business system (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), we argue that some value compromises deriving from a combination of orders of worth are more legitimate in countries with a prominence of extrinsic CSR, whereas other value compromises might be more successful in promoting legitimacy in countries characterized by implicit CSR.

Specifically, we argue the civic-fame compromise as well as the civic-market compromise are particularly prevalent in countries where extrinsic CSR is predominant. This is because in these countries the financial system is dominated by the stock market and by relatively disperse ownership (Matten & Moon, 2008). This increases the need for transparency and public accountability fostering a civic-fame compromise for instance by engaging in extensive environmental marketing and reporting efforts. At the same time, countries in which explicit CSR is prominent typically have a relative capacity of successful business people to give back to society (Dowie, 2001), fostering CSR activities such as high profile philanthropy, which rests on a civic-fame compromise. Moreover, these countries are also characterised by a relative confidence about the moral worth of capitalism (Matten & Moon, 2008) promoting the legitimacy of civic-market compromises, such as impact investing and social enterprises.

Contrarily, countries characterized by implicit CSR tend to have more extensive nationalized insurance systems for health, pensions, worker rights and other social provisions (Matten & Moon, 2008), fostering the legitimacy of a civic-industrial compromise, in which the company respects and cooperates with formal and informal institutions such as trade unions, and governments' social and environmental departments and integrate CSR solutions implicitly in the firm. Moreover, countries with a prevalence of implicit CSR foster a legitimacy strategy based on civic-domestic value compromises. Firms in these countries tend to enact their social responsibility within long-standing networks (Matten & Moon, 2008). Business decision makers and their stakeholders meet frequently and informally, and social responsibility is enacted through the long-term relationship, moral behaviour and personal commitment of decisionmakers rather than through official, public actions and communications.

Finally, we argue that a civic-inspired compromise can derive in both implicit and explicit CSR systems, as activists might challenge the consequences of capitalism, pointing to the limitation of explicit CSR efforts, as well as the state's failing in addressing crucial CSR issues, highlighting the downsides of implicit CSR. Accordingly civic-inspired compromises can lead to social movements and campaigns in both types of systems. Table 2 provides an overview of the relationship between explicit and implicit CSR and value compromises.

Table 2

Implicit CSR	Explicit CSR
Industrial-Civic Compromise	Market-Civic Compromise
Domestic-Civic Compromise	Fame-Civic Compromise
Inspired-Civic Compromise	

Contributions

Next to highlighting our detailed contributions to legitimacy theory and CSR literature the aim of the full paper is to show a thorough roadmap of future lines of research taking into account value compromises in CSR actions and communications.

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Seeking and Building Legitimacy Through Strategic ESG Communication: A Multi-Method Study of the Canadian Oil and Gas (O&G) Industry

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Abstract

This study utilizes a mixed-method approach to scrutinize legitimacy-seeking behaviors through ESG communication in the oil and gas (O&G) industry. By integrating insights from 21 interviews with PR practitioners in the Canadian O&G industry and quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 23 large O&G companies' ESG reports (482 pages), this study offers a triangulated view of the patterns in legitimization strategies in ESG communication and the motivations behind them. Our findings reveal that Canadian O&G companies focus on showcasing results and strategic partnerships, positioning themselves as industry leaders to bolster legitimacy. This approach to ESG communication, emphasizing environmental successes for public approval, indicates a preference for instrumental tactics over tackling core issues. This research contributes to the theoretical development of legitimacy in communication and CSR/ESG literature and offers practical insights into current and prospective practices of O&G companies in the realm of ESG communication.

Keywords: ESG, Legitimacy, Legitimization Strategy, Controversial Industry, Oil and Gas

CSR Liability in a Crisis: An Indian Study

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Abstract

The paper explores CSR liability during a crisis in an Indian company, Oil India Limited (OIL). As a Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) the company was proactive in its CSR initiatives in Assam, India. In 2020, there was a blowout in one of the wells of OIL which caused immense damage and led to reputational loss. Based on past CSR experience with the company, the stakeholders perceived the crisis as an opportunity to escalate their demands, thus, creating a financial and reputational liability for the company. The findings reveal that dependence of a company in the area of operations (Assam), financial health (good), nature of industry (extractive) and the PSE status can convert CSR into a liability during a crisis. The paper suggests the following communication strategies for managing CSR liability: avoidance, counterarguing, source derogation and empowering strategies and affirms that the last of these is the most appropriate.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Crisis, CSR liability, India, PSE

Purpose

The purpose of the paper is to explore the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) during a crisis. The paper is based on a Public Sector Enterprise, Oil India Limited, based in Assam, India. Situated in the extractive industry, the company faced a major crisis in 2020 following a blowout which lasted for 190 days. In those six months the company faced an unprecedented sequence of events which brought about a huge financial loss and tarnished the image of the company. Despite extensive CSR spend, based on stakeholder demands, the company was unable to appease the stakeholders and faced a major reputational loss.

Scholarship on reputation defines reputation as the overall appeal (Fombrun 1996), fame and esteem (Hall 1992), a signal of key characteristics (Fombrun & Shanley 1990), and an image created based on past actions of the company (Weigelt & Camerer 1988). It is an intangible asset with potential of being depleted in a crisis which is "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2015, p. 3).

To protect the image, the reputation of a company in extreme situations as, in crises, communication can be used (Benoit, 1995, Coombs, 2010a). Some levers that can prevent this asset from being depleted are communication with stakeholders, prior positive reputation of the company, brand loyalty (e.g. Ahluwalia et al., 2000) and situational factors as CSR which can mitigate the crisis and restore normalcy between the stakeholders and the organisation.

Researchers are divided in their findings on the effects of CSR in managing company reputation during a crisis. While some scholars posit that CSR initiatives and history tend to a create positive disposition towards the company (e.g., Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009), others argue that CSR can be a liability to the organisation due to poor execution of efforts as in the case of greenwashing (e.g., Lim et al., 2013) or the challenge it poses in the redefinition of organisational practices as irresponsible (Coombs & Holladay, 2015) or perceived lack of synergy between CSR initiatives and organisational mission (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Does CSR then prove to be an asset or a liability in mitigating the crisis and managing reputational capital?

In this paper, we extend the concept of CSR challenge by proposing that good CSR initiatives can prove to be a liability in a crisis situation, for stakeholders use CSR as a handle to make unreasonable demands which alleviates the crisis and causes reputational damage to the company. In such situations, CSR turns into a liability with the company simultaneously attempting to mitigate the crisis and address increased stakeholder demands as part of the corporate responsibility. This often creates a liability for the company for if demands are not acquiesced, the reputation of the company is tarnished through dissenting stakeholder voices. Mostly, such CSR liability leads to additional financial loss to the company.

Through this study, the paper will elucidate the process of how CSR, viewed as an asset to a company can turn into a liability in a crisis situation. Based on the findings, the paper will present a set of recommendations from persuasion literature on how companies can attempt to once again convert the liability to an asset.

Objectives

The objective is to explore the following questions in the paper

1. impact of CSR on crisis situations, that is, does past history of being a CSR compliant organisation act in favour of the company or does it prove to be a liability?

2. what maybe some of the associated challenges that arise due to community development through CSR in a crisis?

Research Method

The paper is case based and the analysis is done through an in-depth study of Oil India Ltd., an Indian public sector oil and gas company in India with its core operations in the state of Assam. During the unfolding of the crisis, several interviews with the company leadership team were taken at the headquarters in Noida, India. Extensive interviews ranging over 40 minutes were conducted with CMD, Director HR& BD responsible also for CSR; and other Directors (Operations; Exploration and Development). Some interviews with the Regional Chief Executive, General Manager - Corporate Communication and CSR from the regional and field offices were also conducted. Other interviewees included diverse community members (members (±15, student union leaders; community organizations; CSR beneficiaries+critics). Additionally, several organisation documents and media articles were also studied to gain an objective insight into the unfolding of the events.

Results

The Case: #Baghjan Burns: Crisis at Oil India Ltd. (Authors, xxxx)

As the second largest national oil and gas company in India, Oil India Limited (OIL) was incorporated on 18th February 1959, as a fully integrated Exploration & Production company in the upstream sector. In 1981, it became a wholly owned Government of India enterprise, under the administrative control of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. Like other Public sector enterprises (PSEs) created by the Indian government post-independence (1947), OIL had played a critical role in the development of the country and had significantly contributed to the GDP (Kansal et al., 2018). The contribution of PSEs to CSR has been viewed as important in "promoting the flagship schemes of the government, which aim at empowering the disadvantaged sections of the society" (CSR Initiatives, 2019, p. 5; Kansal et al., 2018).

OIL had significantly impacted the socio-economic development through its CSR efforts in the state of Assam where its operations were concentrated (90%). Most of the company's CSR efforts were in direct response to the community needs. Though the CSR spend of the company was INR 40 crore1 (USD 5.3 million)2 and based on stakeholder demands, the locals in Assam were not too happy with its CSR efforts and often resorted to violent means and threatened operational disruptions to secure more resources and benefits. The company was forced to acquiesce to the demands for fear of consequences as operational/loss of production, financial, reputational. The stakeholders viewed the company as "a duck that lays golden eggs" and asserted that "If we don't demand anything from OIL, we don't get anything".

In May 2020, a blowout occurred in Well No. 5 in Baghjan, Assam which was both, high volume (80,000 standard cubic metres) and high pressure (over 4,000 pounds per square inch). OIL came under severe scrutiny for its crisis preparedness and had to contend with the voices of multiple stakeholders—the government, media, environmental NGOs, state authorities, local communities and others. For almost six months, OIL mobilised all the resources possible and worked hard to manage the crisis and restore order. OIL's persistent failure to prevent escalation of the crisis made it difficult for the senior leadership team to manage the company's lost reputation and regain the faith and trust of the local communities. Compounding were excessive and escalated demands of stakeholders, based on previous CSR experience, followed by threats of operational disruptions, if not addressed.

Though the leadership team focussed on providing relief to the affected local communities in addition to managing the blowout, the local communities were not satisfied. They viewed the crisis as an opportunity to leverage on the goodwill of the company and extract as much monetary benefits as they could. Despite assurance from the company that relief would be provided at the earliest, the community leaders kept making upward revisions to their demands. They shared incorrect details of the extent of damage and number of affected parties and demanded instant monetary compensation. Slight delay in acceding to the demands angered the youth community which began to blockade roads, disrupting production and the transportation of crude oil and emergency equipment.3 OIL lost 467 metric tons of crude oil production from 59 producing wells. Petroleum and gas production were stalled in 66 oil wells and 13 gas wells due to blockades by students and local people.

The well was abandoned on December 4, 2020. Initial CSR efforts proved to be a liability for the company which spent INR 490 crore (USD 65.3 million) to manage the crisis, and loss of production was to the tune

of 90,000–95,000 cubic metres of gas and 10–15 cubic metres of condensate per day. Despite this spend, the stakeholders were not appeased and reputation was lost.

Findings

1. Research on CSR or corporate-community relations (CCR) emphasises issues linked to corporate involvement in communities in and around operational areas which also grants them a social license to operate (e.g., Blowfield, 2012). Stakeholder knowledge of the company and their dependence mentality (e.g., Frynas, 2005) in which previous CSR projects increased the expectations of the local communities and "social initiatives are seen as gifts" (Frynas, 2005, p. 590) add to the notion of liability. In the case of OIL, previous CSR projects were based on the needs of the communities that had increased the expectations of the local communities. However, not all of them could be agreed upon which often reflected in dissent within the local communities. Crisis then proved to be an opportune time for them to press forth their demands vociferously under threat of blockage and operational disruptions.

2. Excessive demands on the organisation and the compulsion to accede to those demands under threat of operational disruptions created a CSR liability which far exceeded the benefits extended by the company. In the case of OIL, challenges were created as the clamouring stakeholders were from the region where they had their core operations for their "ability to assess and respond effectively to these kinds of issues can have significant ramifications for both their ability to secure the social license to operate and their bottom line" (Muthuri et al., 2012, p. 357).

3. The results of development-oriented CSR are shaped "by the relational effects and agency of the communities that are the targets and objects of these activities" (e.g., Banks et al., 2016, p. 246). Limited presence of the state in such cases coupled with companies agreeing to many of the community demands creates an expectation spiral which if unaddressed can harm the reputation of the company

4. The PSE status of the company, in which, it was caught between the community and the government, made it an easy target for the stakeholders (Authors, xxxx). With 90% of OIL's operations in Assam, the CSR beneficiaries found that blockading the company or disrupting operations was a sure way of ascertaining that their demands were met. The trust in the company and what it had done as part of their CSR efforts had created an ecosystem where "no" to demands was not an option. Crisis then, was viewed as the right time to advance demands, under threat of violence, which could neither be refused or bypassed.

Based on the findings and literature on image restoration (Benoit, 1995) and persuasion (Fransen et al., 2015)2, we propose the following communication responses.

Image restoration strategies	CSR liability responses based on
Silence	Avoidance
Denial	Counterarguing
Attack the accuser	Source derogation
Corrective action	Empowering strategies Attitude bolstering

	Social validation
	Self-assertion

The paper suggests four strategies from the scholarship on persuasion to CSR liability which would help in image restoration. Avoidance – not responding to the accusations or demands made by stakeholders and maintaining a silence which may not be in the best interest of the company under duress. Counterarguing through denial of enhanced demands could have major financial ramifications as there is always the threat to violence. In the present case neither avoidance nor counterarguing would work. A positive attitude, with one-on-one communication, developing a mind-share with the stakeholders was the need of the hour. Attacking the accuser by openly derogating the source would lead to face loss of the accuser. Incorrect statements and numbers of persons affected by the crisis were being made in the case of OIL. However, maintaining peace with the stakeholders was critical, even though the leadership team feared that it could become a precedence for any other similar casualty in future. The best of the image restoration strategy is corrective action which can be taken by empowering strategies as attitude bolstering – referring to the good that the company has done; providing social validation – citing references of people and communities who have benefitted from the CSR efforts; and, self-assertion – taking a proactive stand on measures to be taken in the benefit of the community rather that buckling under pressure. The case of OIL attests that taking corrective action is the best strategy in managing CSR liability.

Implications

CSR liability is an example of a situation where beneficiaries of the CSR effort attempt to create a change in the ecosystem by making explicit demands on the company using crisis as a lever to affect the functioning of the organisation. The paper offers insights into how companies, in the extractive industry, can be exploited by stakeholders during a crisis and what can be done to restore normalcy.

Originality/value

There is limited research into prior CSR as a liability for PSEs during a crisis. This paper provides new insights into understanding stakeholder demands during a crisis and thus, converting CSR into a liability. Concepts from the field of public relations and persuasion have been used to advance techniques of image restoration.

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Navigating the Paradox: Discursive Legitimation of Unsustainable Business Models

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Background and purpose

Companies with business models that are inherently unsustainable (e.g. Bocken & Short, 2021) can reduce their enormous environmental footprint either by de-growing their business or by offering a fundamentally different value proposition, thereby changing their business model entirely. However, given the sustained consumer and investor interest in businesses that are widely recognized as fundamentally unsustainable, neither of the two options is a realistic scenario (cf. Blühdorn, 2011). Fast fashion companies exemplify such an unsustainable business model (Bocken & Short, 2021), which is characterized by globally dispersed supply chains, low-quality garments, quick responses to new fashion trends, low retail prices, and high demand, all of which contribute to resource depletion, environmental pollution, overproduction, and overconsumption (e.g. Pedersen et al., 2018; Luque & Herrero-García, 2019; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Even environmental sustainability initiatives, such as garment take-back or recycling, cannot resolve the unsustainability inherent in the resource consumption during production, the transportation from low-wage countries to final consumers, and the limited durability of the garments (Brydges, 2021). If fast-fashion companies wanted to reduce their environmental footprint substantially, they would have to produce higher-quality garments with more sustainable materials at facilities closer to their customers and consequently sell lower volumes at higher retail prices, which would essentially change their value proposition from fast fashion to more high-end fashion. Thus, fast fashion companies that want to remain in the fast fashion business need to manage growing expectations about the sustainability of their business model, while meeting consumer demands for fashion that is produced and marketed in a way that is profoundly unsustainable.

In order to maintain their license to operate, fast fashion companies need to "talk [sustainability] into being" (Heritage & Clayman, 2010) in their CSR communication, despite their enormous environmental footprint. Sustainability communication, such as reporting, is inherently paradoxical for such companies, as it accentuates the tensions between the positive self-presentations expected in sustainability reports and the fundamental unsustainability of their operations. Previous work on such tensions includes mythmaking in "CEO-speak" of oil companies (Ferns et al., 2019) and the discursive hegemonization strategies of BP as an unsustainable company (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2019). In a similar vein, Wong and

Dhanesh (2017) examined how companies in the luxury segment navigate between being environmentally responsible and maintaining an elite brand positioning.

The purpose of this paper is to critically explore how fast fashion companies construct themselves as sustainable companies while operating as an inherently unsustainable business. We use paradox as a meta-theory (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2023), within which we embed legitimacy and legitimation as our theoretical lenses for a discourse analysis of how fast fashion companies present their business model as desirable and appropriate. This study contributes an understanding of how unsustainable companies attempt to shape the meaning of sustainability and, more broadly, assumptions about what is legitimate. The findings therefore contribute to the broader question of responsibility attribution for 'wicked problems' (Rittel & Webber, 1973), such as unsustainable production and consumption patterns (Little et al., 2019) and climate change (Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). This process merits interest, as the question of how companies respond to wicked problems is likely to shape their path over the next decades.

Theoretical framework

Paradox

Fast fashion brands face a persistent conflict between consumer demand for cheap fashion and societal demands for environmental sustainability (Akrout & Guercini, 2022). We view this conflict from the perspective of organizational paradox (Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Smith, 2014; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2023), which is characterized by persistent oppositions of interrelated elements and therefore a well-suited lens for the complexity of corporate unsustainability (Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015; Carmine & De Marchi, 2023). Core to the paradox perspective is the idea that organizations need to engage with multiple interrelated demands simultaneously. If they address only one pole of the paradox rather than both of them, the contradictions between the interrelated elements will resurface at some point (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Sustainability paradoxes become in particular salient for companies, when they have to deal with a plurality of conflicting stakeholder perspectives, when they engage in change that brings conflicting interest to the surface, when their business is directly affected by the scarcity of natural resources, or when organizational members recognize these paradoxical tensions themselves (Lewis, 2000; Jay et al., 2017). Rising expectations from stakeholders have created the conditions of plurality and change which are core to the ambition of the paradox framework to understand "how actors may manage paradoxes to foster change and understanding" (Lewis, 2000, p. 774). In this study, paradox provides a lens for how unsustainable companies deal with contradictory demands under conditions of plurality, scarcity and continuous change (Lewis, 2000), specifically how they legitimize their unsustainable business models.

Legitimation

Legitimation is the process by which social actors seek to create and manage this sense of legitimacy by drawing on social knowledge as an explanation for the roles they take on and the actions they undertake (e.g. Wiseman, 1980; Suchman, 1995). Legitimacy is society's perception that the behavior of individuals, organizations and institutions is congruent with societal expectations (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975).

Language and communication are therefore fundamental in shaping as well as reflecting society's assumptions about what is legitimate and what is not (Harmon et al., 2015). Discourse scholars have embraced this view of legitimation and highlighted how discursive representations function as ideological choices in labelling certain acts as legitimate or illegitimate (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Van Leeuwen, 2007). Discursive legitimations are used in text and talk explicitly or implicitly to obtain social approval by answering the (often unspoken) questions of why something is done at all and why it is done in a particular way (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Legitimations do not have to be preceded by a specific accusation of illegitimacy. Rather, they can be seen as a form of self-defense for real or potential actions that have been or could be criticized by others. Legitimations are often used by an entire institutional field to anticipate and fend off criticism of the practices adopted by a collection of entities in this field. Legitimations are therefore intended to "create an ideological space within which the institution can operate, enjoying sufficient social acceptance to pursue its activities freely" (Breeze, 2012, p. 4).

Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) and later Van Leeuwen (2007) have conceptualized four broad categories of legitimations. First, authorization draws on traditions, laws and the institutional authority of individuals to legitimize certain practices. Second, rationalization draws on the knowledge and cognitive validity of existing goals as well as uses of institutionalized social action to highlight the utility of current social practices. Third, moral evaluation draws on systems of values that are cherished in society to show how certain practices are consistent with these values. Lastly, mythopoesis draws on narratives in which legitimate practices are rewarded and illegitimate practices are punished. To this typology, Vaara et al. (2006) added normalization, which renders certain practices as natural and taken for granted. These broad categories of legitimation are well recognized and have been applied with minor modifications to legimtiantions in varying contexts, such as company-NGO relationships (Joutsenvirta, 2011) or changes in public sector management (Hyndman et al., 2018). However, these generic categories of legitmation do not account for potential paradoxical tensions across categories, which can occur when companies face contradictory demands.

Methods

We conduct a longitudinal case study of the global fast fashion giant H&M, which is recognized as the pioneer of fast fashion (Muran, 2007) and exemplifies the problems associated with the fast fashion industry today (Segran, 2021), including accusations of greenwashing (Donald, 2022; Stern, 2022). We collected H&M's sustainability reports from the past ten years (2014-2023) to analyze the discursive legitimation of their unsustainable business model. We focused on the introductory sections as well as those sections addressing the company's environmental performance. Rather than departing from Van Leeuwen's (2007) broad categories of legitimation, we conduct our analysis inductively drawing on the 'Gioia methodology' (Gioia et al., 2013). As a first step, we identified statements focusing on what H&M says to legitimize their unsustainable business model. These statements were categorized into 20 first-order codes with the help of NVivo. As a next step, we identified paradoxical tensions among these legitimations. Such tensions occur, as H&M needs to navigate between maintaining a highly unsustainable business model and accommodating societal demands for environmental sustainability. The figure below

shows an extract of a preliminary set of first-order codes, including conforming, leading, policing, empowering, and incentivizing. So far, we have identified three paradoxical tensions among these codes: Isomorphism vs. differentiation: H&M want to be seen like the rest of the industry when it comes to sustainability problems, but also want to gain recognition as an industry leader in sustainability.

Proactivity vs. reactivity: H&M want to lead industry action towards more sustainability, but also need to rely on lawmakers to enforce such actions.

Autonomy vs agency: H&M want to help consumers to change their unsustainable habits, but also recognize the need to steer them towards such actions.

The contribution of this analysis will be an understanding of how H&M defend their unsustainable business model by managing tensions between the demand for fast fashion and the need for more environmental sustainability. This analytical work is still in progress, but will be finished prior to the conference.

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Review on the relationship between CSR and occupational welfare services in Italian SMEs

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Abstract

This paper analyses through a systematic literature review (SLR) the main aspects of occupational welfare (OW) regarding the phenomenon of CSR, which is becoming increasingly present in SMEs. The research aims to identify, through three factors of study: best practices, the relation with the territory and sustainability reporting, how Italian SMEs interpret the relationship between OW and CSR in terms of strengths, weaknesses, and trade-offs. This paper intends to contribute to the construction of an overview of the OW phenomenon and of the SMEs that provide welfare services addressed to employees, identifying the types of paths related to CSR they have chosen and providing useful information for the actors involved in the companies.

Keywords: occupational welfare, CSR, business ethics, SMEs, welfare service

Introduction

One of the most interesting trends in the work Western world, which characterized the last fifty years is the growth of occupational welfare (OW) (Farnsworth, 2012; Halkos et al., 2022; Halkos & Nomikos, 2021) The main reasons behind the growth of the OW are to be attributed on the one hand to the difficulties of public welfare and on the other hand to the prevalence of neo-liberal ideologies (Lindsay et al., 2015). Other reasons are then grafted onto these roots, including greater awareness and sensitivity on issues such as work-life balance, stress management, and the relationship between employee satisfaction and the evident increase in work productivity with the consequent affirmation of successful companies (Aureli et al., 2021; Del Baldo, 2017a). Drawing from this premise, this paper aims to verify the contribution of CSR in changing the landscape of OW in Italian SMEs. In this way, it is possible to note as OW and CSR are of growing importance to governments and service providers keen to meet growing needs and tackle social problems within changing welfare environments. In this vein, the central government has tried to increase firm involvement in local services and encourage the expansion of OW to shift some of the pressure away from the state and onto employers (Farnsworth, 2004, 2022; Greve, 2008).

Theoretical framework

Before defining the relationship between CSR and OW, it is necessary to remember some fundamental theoretical concepts. In this vein, the pyramid Carroll (1991, 2016) defines "Corporate Social Responsibility encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organizations at a given time". Moreover, to study the relationship between CSR and business it is possible to refer to the ISO standards1. According to the ISO 26000 standard, CSR is a concept that businesses are not required to implement: it is neither a form of certification nor a mandatory regulation. The enterprise itself determines the scope and nature of its activities for its stakeholders' benefit (Bruna & Nicolò, 2020; Chakroun et al., 2020). Thanks to the rising necessity for explicit disclosure of CSR internal efforts, some people believe that CSR or sustainable business practice is worthless without external reporting and considerable formalization (Luu, 2020). Furthermore, consultants and service providers built a profitable market of reporting and audit to supply new tools and reports based on financial principles/accounting standards, resulting in a genuine hypocrisy of CSR communication (Looser, 2019). Governments and service providers eager to address social issues and meet expanding requirements in the context of evolving welfare systems in Europe are placing an increasing emphasis on OW and CSR (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). OW is conceptualized using the list of benefits, services, and provisions offered by private enterprises (Brunsdon & May, 2019; Greve, 2008; Pavolini & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2018). Based on this list, it is possible to consider OW a "material topic" for CSR purposes (Domínguez & Prieto, 2022). This indicates that it is significant due to its effects on society and the economy, both positive and negative, as well as the fact that how it is managed affects stakeholders' or interest groups' decision-making (Del Baldo, 2009). The central government has tried to increase firm involvement in local services and encourage the expansion of OW to shift some of the pressure away from the state and onto employers (Farnsworth, 2004).

According to the EU Green Paper (European Commission, 2001), an organization's human resources are its most important stakeholders when it comes to responsible business practices in terms of welfare services. This is because organizations may change a complex and competitive socioeconomic environment like the one, we currently live in. In this perspective, its concrete functioning and its effects are framed within the Italian socio-economic and policy context. The high level of human capital in SMEs and the key role of CSR make it possible to underline how OW goes beyond the more developed standards of service such as pensions and health care (Montero et al., 2009). This concept of work makes it possible to increase the aspect of work-life balance and the offer of services strictly connected to OW (Del Baldo, 2017b).

The literature on welfare indicates that from 2016 to the present, the number of Italian companies providing OW has increased significantly (Bernardoni, 2020; Pesenti & Scansani, 2020). At the same time, the companies that take into consideration to role of CSR increase with a low speed (Colombo et al., 2019). Italian SMEs pay attention to external CSR issues, focusing more frequently on environmental impacts than internal CSR issues related to social and economic factors (Bonomi et al., 2020; Perrini, 2006). Despite this, the attention to internal elements has nevertheless seen an increase compared to the consideration of external stakeholders (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). CSR can more fully develop the

notion of workers as stakeholders – the nature of their participation and commitment to the organization – and their special role in establishing and representing the enterprise (Jackson et al., 2018).

Objectives of the research

The paper aims to verify, through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) what is the contribution of CSR in changing the panorama of the OW of Italian SMEs. This viewpoint places a great emphasis on how its actual operation and effects relate to the socioeconomic backdrop in Italy.

Research methodology

The research approach was based on Petticrew & Roberts (2008) recommendations for the construction of an SLR in the social sciences. Thus, describes the review question, which aided in conducting a thorough literature search. The search outcomes were then filtered based on the applicable inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following that, the technique evaluated the quality of each study and extracted the most relevant data. Finally, the greatest evidence synthesis can be carried out. The process is executed with CADIMA2. To accurately assess effectiveness in social systematic reviews, generalizing effectiveness studies are required. To develop the RQ, the PICOC model (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Walker, 2007) is utilized, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 PICOC model.

Variable	Data
Population	SMEs in Italy
Intervention	Role of the CSR in the welfare field
Comparison	Between the OW and CSR
Outcomes	Level of implementation of OW through the CSR
Context	OW from 2012 to 2023

To ensure a comprehensive literature review, four electronic databases were chosen: Web of Science, Google Scholar, Scopus, and ProQuest. Also, due to the nature of RQ, only studies released between 2012 and 2023 are taken into account. A combination of keywords is considered in the papers; starting from the terms of reference: welfare (e.g., corporate welfare; occupational welfare, social policy), combining them with words related to welfare service (e.g., welfare service company, portal, provider, web-based, intranet, SMEs) and with another set of keywords related to the nation object of study (e.g. Italy and Italian), in addition, a set of keywords for firms (SMEs. company, firm, organization) and finally with the term refer to the CSR (e.g business ethics, corporate social responsibility, common good, ethical behavior, social contract). Only the Italian or English languages are considered in the study.

The initial phase of the keyword search was solely focused on the abstracts. In the second phase, it was required to expand the search to include the entire text because only the abstracts provided a limited

numerical result. This database exploration resulted in an initial number of 175 papers across all four databases. Then, in the first round of selection, there were 114 records excluded by reading their titles. The second round of selection comprised removing duplicate papers and reading abstracts. In total, 31 papers were thoroughly read and analyzed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Flow diagram
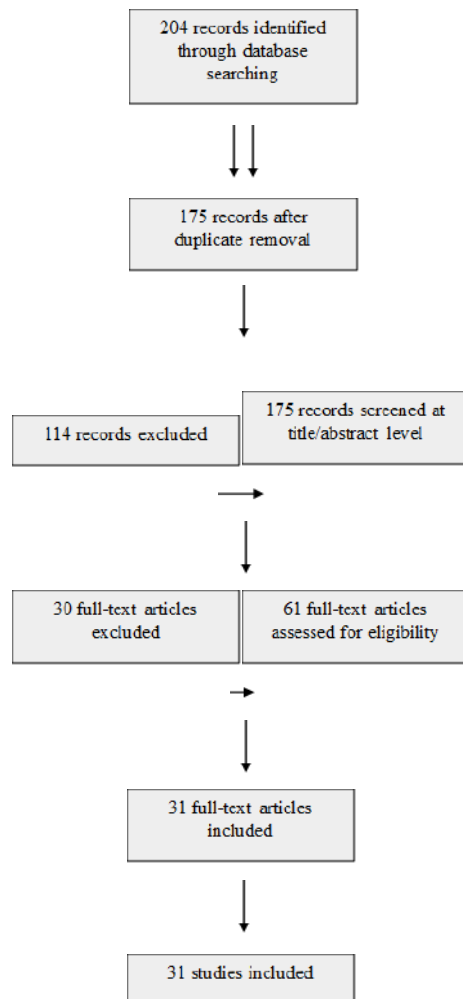
Results

The SLR presents three factors of study: best practices, the relation with the territory and sustainability reporting. The first factor taken into consideration is best practices. It presents some features of improvement of best practices through CSR and the favorable climate in SMEs. In this internal evaluation, small business owners reported that the potential benefits they anticipated from implementing sustainable practices (such as employee motivation, competitive advantage, reputation, and customer satisfaction) had a positive impact on them (Battaglia & Frey, 2014; Cantele & Zardini, 2020; Casalegno et al., 2014; Querci & Gazzola, 2021). Small and large businesses are being impacted by the CSR challenge in increasingly comparable ways. By integrating numerous CSR best practices, which were previously

exclusively common in larger organizations, SMEs are attempting to enhance the value of their core business (Casalegno et al., 2014; Lamberti & Noci, 2012). At the same time, it is helpful to underline how Gasparri (2020a) conducted an engaging discussion about the possibility of a revived OW in Italy. In this vein, Gasparri (2020a) and "Percorsi di Secondo Welfare3" have highlighted a significant role (in the large spread of good practices related to the OW) connected to the CSR phenomenon. While this move started with the intention of fostering cooperative and participatory industrial relations (Leonardi, 2018; Maino & Ferrera, 2014; Maino & Razetti, 2019), as the process progressed, more players emerged, some of whom were functioning as private welfare providers. These players were likely more concerned with taking advantage of a market opportunity than they were with advancing more universal goals like improved working conditions and increased productivity within the company (Maino & Razetti, 2019; Mallone et al., 2019; Massagli, 2019; Massagli et al., 2018). By contrast, there may be certain obstacles to the implementation of CSR notwithstanding the beneficial effects of CSR on SMEs. In this sense, it is feasible to highlight some instances like a lack of funds, a lack of time, a concern about losing ground to competitors, or an attempt at greenwashing (Cantele & Zardini, 2020; Casalegno et al., 2014). Additionally, Maino & Razetti (2019) point out that limiting the increase in OW to large businesses would worsen the differences that already exist between highly protected and less protected workers as well as between businesses, which frequently have different approaches to CSR and social innovation (Ferrera, 2012). In this framework, the advantages of OW and CSR would be limited, and there's a possibility they wouldn't have a positive spillover effect on the greater territorial community.

The second factor taken into consideration, the relation with the territory, offered a detailed overview of the diffusion of CSR and the relationship with OW. It has an element with a strong level of evidence in the SLR of the growth of a good CSR example in the North and Centre of Italy, starting from Piemonte, Emilia Romagna, and Toscana (Battaglia & Frey, 2014; Casalegno et al., 2014; Del Baldo, 2017a; Moscariello & Masiello, 2013). In this area, CSR plays a crucial role in providing welfare services to its employees. Medical care, personal computers, automobiles, mobile phones, meal vouchers, and parking are just a few examples of these benefits (Casalegno et al., 2014). Also, CSR provides a chance for engagement with all parties involved in businesses operating in the area (Battaglia & Frey, 2014; Del Baldo, 2017a; Lamberti & Noci, 2012). Simultaneously, a functional extension of bilateralism can be observed, about the two unified domains of the OW: health care and complementary pensions (Gasparri, 2020b; Treu, 2023). Once more in the north, many institutions have indicated the action of bilateralism concerning family support and conciliation programs (Gasparri, 2020b). Instead, the SLR emphasizes with the paper of Silvestri & Veltri (2017) a slow growth of CSR and the South of Italy. It is possible to note that this is a growth in CSR, but this alone does not prove that CSR is common in southern Italy. At the same time, in the southern regions, there is a significantly lower presence and demand for OW. One of the factors that determines the relationship between business and territory is the variation in the social services provided by the government to enterprises (Gasparri, 2020b; Treu, 2023). Finally, the third element of the second factor is the CFR (Corporate Family Responsibility). At the regional and municipal levels in Italy (Toscana, Veneto, and Piemonte), the General Directorate for Social Welfare and Family Policy has been a leader in various CFR practices (Casalegno et al., 2014; Del Baldo, 2017a; Tomaselli, 2019). Concerning OW, the origins of

the CFR role may be traced to Italy in the early 1900s. In this sense, the success of the "city of factories" was founded on the common ground of mutual interest rather than restrictive paternalism, which gave rise to "compliance" and collaboration between all parties involved in the production who benefited from it in different ways (Gasparri, 2020a; Varini, 2016).

The third factor taken into consideration - sustainability reporting - presents a focus on the role of detail reporting for the diffusion of CSR. The ethical CSR behavior of employees and Italian SMEs type of sustainability reporting currently present more disclosures regarding some fundamental aspects such as lenders, human capital, corporate governance and environmental issues (Coluccia et al., 2017; Furlotti & Mazza, 2022; Simoni et al., 2020). Italian businesses are devoting more resources to CSR programs, as well as to properly evaluate and incorporate ethics into their corporate strategies and corporate governance (Coluccia et al., 2017; Furlotti & Mazza, 2022). The emergence of benefit corporation regulation is another aspect of sustainability reporting that has a positive connection with CSR. In 2016, Italy became the first country in Europe to adopt benefit corporation legislation after the US (Nigri et al., 2020; Nigri & Del Baldo, 2018; Riolfo, 2020). Finally, the characteristics of the board of directors' composition regarding CSR is the last element. Three SLR papers (Calabrese et al., 2018; Simoni et al., 2020; Vacca et al., 2020) have demonstrated the beneficial effects of gender diversity and female leadership on boards of directors for the promotion of innovative OW service.

Conceptual contribution

The analysis carried out of the 31 papers focused on three factors (best practices, relation with the territory and sustainability reporting) affirm that there is an important contribution of CSR in the development of welfare services in Italian SMEs. The paper intends to provide a detailed collection of existing studies on CSR and OW to have a clear connection between the two phenomena. This paper also aims to be a starting point for future studies on internal CSR and its approach towards OW in other European countries.

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Cracking the code for sustainability – the role of non-financial reporting for SME organizational change for sustainability

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Abstract

Recently, European jurisdictions have introduced reporting requirements aimed at promoting transparency and incentivizing sustainability initiatives. However, the impact of these requirements, particularly on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), is subject to debate. SMEs encounter challenges in implementing systematic sustainability management and struggle to adhere to reporting requirements from bigger companies in their value chain. This study delves into the influence of reporting standards on sustainability management and organizational change within SMEs through a qualitative multiple-case study. By addressing these gaps in understanding, the research seeks to contribute to the discourse surrounding sustainable business practices and change mechanisms of SMEs.

Keywords: SME, organizational change for sustainability, sustainability reporting, case study

The Role of Time in Improving the Action-Orientation of Business and Human Rights Communications: Emerging Disclosure Practices for Human Rights Due Diligence in MNCs

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Introduction

Business and human rights (BHR) communications are increasing in prominence within international firms' corporate social responsibility (CSR) and non-financial reporting (McPhail, 2016). Global supply chains are now importantly recognised as significant sources of harm and firms are called upon to be more accountable for the impacts of their operations (Wettstein et al., 2019) and in their nonfinancial disclosures specifically (Parsa et al., 2018). Regardless of the complexity of the logistical arrangements with third-parties and contractors, these multi-national corporation (MNCs) are under the purview of ever more and ever stricter regulation (Baboukardos et al., 2020) as well as mounting societal pressures (Amengual & Mota, 2020).

It appears, however, that the increase in overall expectations on firm conduct, is not always sufficient to drive impact. Scholars find that firms continue to contribute to human rights infringements, despite communicating with their external announcements (Maher et al., 2022), policies (Olsen et al., 2022a) and reporting activities (Parsa et al., 2018), that they protect human rights for their workers and other stakeholders. Implementing meaningful activities in human rights is not necessarily easy, and the amount of time a firm is found to engage in human rights communications, such as human rights policies is found to be a key factor in generating impact (Olsen et al., 2022a). We are thus interested in examining the role of emerging BHR reporting practices to close this gap over time. In particular we seek to examine, how key firm disclosures are constructed, how they develop over time and what they reveal about the seriousness with which firms are engaging with the agenda.

Human rights due diligence (HRDD) is a key concept within UN guidance on BHR1 that is a crucial link to human rights protections (UNGPs, 2011). Unlike other aspects of the protect, respect, remedy framework (Ruggie, 2008) which are perhaps not always so usefully defined (Wettstein, 2021), the concept of HRDD infers some particular properties where the firm must investigate the scope for harm in their operations, it must respond and then communicate in an ongoing way (Rogerson et al., 2024). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2018), sets out some important features of HRDD; it involves proactivity in the identification and evaluation of risks to human rights in operations, either existing or possible; it implies the integration of learning into firm policies and processes, and the tracking of the effectiveness thereof; and, it requires the communication to stakeholders of what was found and the actions undertaken. Communicating about the firm's action is thus an essential ingredient in HRDD.

The importance of this communication aspect of HRDD has not been overlooked; it is becoming a mandatory feature of a forthcoming European Commission Directive (EC, 2023). As the prevailing regulatory pressures mount, firm responses are expected to proceed in such a way that reporting practices become institutionalized (Campbell, 2007; Shabana et al., 2016). We are thus interested in how this key concept of HRDD emerges within firm's non-financial disclosures and how this evolves with time. We will explore how this 'organizational talk' represents the kind of organizational action required by HRDD. Building on earlier work of Rogerson et al. (2024) who find that some firms are more action-oriented in their disclosures than others, we will seek to establish the intensity and consistency with action, of firms' emerging emphasis on HRDD in disclosures. And we ask, how is understanding developing, within these firms, of what is necessary for HRDD, with respect to the properties HRDD implies for firms' actions?

Our conceptual (and planned empirical) work seeks to unpack this puzzle, to explore the conditions under which disclosure, as organizational talk, develops in tandem with an action-orientation on HRDD or when a firm perpetuates a talk-orientation without communicating a corresponding understanding of the actions required by HRDD. A key feature of our work is in focussing on the role of time in progressing accountability through firm communications, and how time features in closing talk action gaps. We ask, what ways do talk-oriented initial disclosures prepare firms for more actionorientation later? Is the development of an emphasis on talk about HRDD a necessary precursor for an action-orientation to develop? What are the explanatory pathways for bringing about an actionorientation where firms understand what's necessary for HRDD?

This structured abstract proceeds to consider how reporting practices emerge in CSR and BHR, and then, to help frame our work, we draw on CSR communications and organised hypocrisy literatures that explore the concept of temporality in resolving talk action inconsistency. Next we explain our methods and data, before concluding with a summary of how we intend to advance this preliminary work and develop our plans to complete a configurational analysis to unpack key combinational aspects of the dynamics and complexity of talk action interactions in BHR communications.

Time and the emergence of reporting practices

Scholars have considered the diffusion of reporting practices before. Shabana et al.'s (2017) institutional perspective on CSR reporting predicts the early adopters' use of communications as primarily about legitimacy management; motivated by coercive pressures which stimulate a defensive response to reporting. Over time, the benefits of reporting become clearer, providing opportunities for firm's to achieve new goals, until eventually there is a critical mass of reporters, and the practices become mainstreamed (Shabana et al., 2017).

While Ioannou and Serafeim (2017) also find that firms respond to regulatory mandates on reporting, even when practices are normalised, BHR reporting can be inconsistent with impacts in practice (Islam et al., 2021). These kinds of disclosures are thus noted to be of no assurance of good behaviour in practice (Moneva et al., 2006), where critiques of their effectiveness as accountability tools have been well

established (Gray & Milne, 2015; She & Michelon, 2019), raising questions of the quality and character of the communications used by MNCs.

Work to benchmark reporting practices on HRDD in 2019 has thus been developed by Rogerson et al., (2024). They examine the talk and action-orientation exhibited within the top 100 European firm's non-financial reports and find three predominate responses; dismissal (talk and action are ignored), concealment (involves a symbolic talk-orientation), and compliance (involves more substance, where action-orientation is appropriately featured). We are thus intrigued to learn about how the positions firms adopted might shift with time, since 2019. Does the passage of time enable firms to do better and move to more compliance in their reporting practices on HRDD, or are dismissal and concealment strategies a persistent phenomenon of HRDD? To frame this exploration, we draw on organized hypocrisy and CSR communications literatures to consider the influence of time and organizational talk on the development of an action-orientation in reporting.

Time and organized hypocrisy

Cho et al. (2015) explore organized hypocrisy within sustainability reporting at extractives firms and find evidence of communications-based facades, in other words disconnects between firms talk and actions. In such circumstances talk might offset or diminish the firm's motivation to become more action-oriented, and a persistence of talk and action misalignment might establish (Brunsson, 1993). Here reporting is a device that maintains the status quo.

It is also possible that the inconsistency between talk and action could resolve, since talk might be positively connected to firm learning (Cho et al., 2015) and thus eventual action and alignment (Haack et al., 2012). If a façade successfully shields the firm from attention, it can provide 'cover' for what might be embarrassing or reputation-harming mistakes, and thus it incentivises innovation and experiment (Cho et al., 2015). This perspective is developed further by Haack et al. (2021) whose 'bait and switch' model suggests that if communicating on CSR is incentivised but not scrutinised, firms may be encouraged to embark on CSR implementation, first with promises, and then later with action when a circumstance of surveillance or audit arises at a future point in time (Haack et al., 2021). Scholars have long-noted the scope for time to bring talk action inconsistency into line (Haack et al, 2012; Christensen et al., 2012), and in these instances, talk is a precursor to action, and inconsistencies between talk and action are a necessary starting point. It is an enticing concept, that encourages aspirational firm aims (Christensen et al., 2012). Scholars further argue that talk IS a kind of action, and supports reflexive engagement with the agenda over time (Christensen et al., 2020).

What is surprising is that we are yet to understand how time gives rise to each of these alternatives. Olsen et al.'s (2022b) work in extractives industries, find that firms' talk and action alignment on human rights abuses is prompted only rarely, and when an external trigger threatens their legitimacy, such as NGO involvement with potential for reputation-damaging exposure. A clear critique of such firms arises, given failures to generate the impact promises, and substantively address harms caused (Maher et al., 2021). It appears, empirically, that firms do not always seek consistency and instead we see examples of those that continue to benefit from what is an empty kind of talk, and thus devoid of the implied aspiration.

Time in these scenarios may not have been sufficient to prompt learning, but instead complements defensive strategies. Reporting is then part of ever more convincing and protective facades, where firms avoid the necessary actions.

It is thus this gap in understanding, about the role of time to bring about action-orientation, that we seek to fill with our research. Our study plans to delve empirically into these two logical possibilities (where talk-orientation either precedes or pre-empts action-orientation in practice), by examining the situation where action-orientation arises (or does not arise) in one time-frame, with respect to a previous outcome of talk-orientation in an earlier time-frame. We also build into our model a set of the other explanatory factors (industry and firm-level, Olsen et al, 2022b) that influence the situation, presenting a configurational approach to identify the variety of pathways that might explain how action-orientation is arrived at in practice. We seek to examine the interaction between talk and action-orientation of HRDD disclosure of MNCs, under the purview of impending EC reporting regulations to understand the role of time in bringing about accountability outcomes through communications.

Methods & Data

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a research method based on the mathematics of set theory (Ragin, 1987). It's a method originally designed for working with qualitative cases and involves a systematic approach to cross-case comparison (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). It aims to identify the combinations of conditions, or configurations, that lead to a particular outcome (Ragin, 2008). Configurational perspectives are well-suited to the study of complex phenomenon; unlike predominant approaches in management research that emphasise individual explanatory factors, QCA supports the discovery of sets of explanatory factors, both through their combinational impact and the interconnections between a variety factors (Furnari et al, 2021).

Despite its surging popularity in the Academy (Fiss et al., 2014; Misangyi et al., 2017) timesensitivity in QCA is only recently gaining attention (e.g. Furnari, 2018) with options only just becoming established for working in steps and for capturing change and duration related intervals, to manage the temporal elements of research design (Niessen, 2023). Originally conceived of as a static approach (Ragin, 2008) there is huge potential for QCA to unpack temporal dynamics. We thus seek to support establishing methodological best practice in the implementation of a longitudinal QCA design, through our study.

Our sample is constructed from the disclosures of the largest 100 European firms2 from 2019 to 2023 inclusive, representing 4 years' worth of subsequent reporting for each firm from a base-point in 2019. This results in a dataset of approximately 90 firms persisting in the same corporate form across this time interval. For each of these firms, for each year, we will collect the annual report, as well as all published sustainability reports and human rights policies. QCA is particularly well-suited to medium-sized samples (Ragin, 1987), such as the 90 cases we seek to examine.

QCA conditions

QCA proceeds with the identification and then operationalisation of the theoretical determinants of the phenomenon. These are the explanatory factors, or causal conditions, and the outcome condition of

interest, arrived at by the researchers in iterative processes involving topic expertise, close work with theory, and knowledge of the data (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).

We thus set out the proposed key conditions below, with some indications of how we might proceed with calibration (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012), likely using fuzzy sets34 in all instances, and proceeding with a multi-level two-step approach of distal and proximal factors (Schneider, 2019).

Table 1: Preliminary model of likely QCA conditions

	Conditions	Condition definition and calibration considerations
Outcome condition	Talk is action-oriented (talk action consistency)	Defined as the presence of both organizational talk and action-oriented disclosure on HRDD. The measure for this outcome[4] is based on an established HRDD framework.
Explanatory factors	Country-level regulation (hard-law score)	Strength of the regulation in the home country
	Industry-level pressures (soft-law score)	Presence and strength of industry-level expectations and guidance
	Industry-level opacity	Firm's degree of 'cover' from scrutiny
	Firm visibility	Relative size/significance of the firm with respect to peer firms
	Previous talk action consistency	Presence of talk action consistency or inconsistency in the year prior
	Wider firm talk on BHR	Emphasis on human rights in the firm's broader communications
	Firm governance	Presence of the firm's membership to global governance and industry-level commitments
	Firm structural complexity	Relative complexity of the firm's supply chain arrangements.

Conclusion

Our contributions relate to building understanding in the important agenda of BHR reporting for MNC supply chains, where humans and their rights are at evident risk, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. LeBaron et al., 2021). Secondly, we contribute to theory in terms of advancing understanding of the role of time in improving the seriousness, and action-orientation of disclosures, and finally in terms of bringing time into QCA analyses and establishing options for configurational research that gets into both the complexity and dynamics of phenomena.

We expect to complete the secondary data collection and analysis by the end of 2024. We hope to present at conferences, beginning with the CSR Comms 2024 conference in Bath, should our proposal be accepted.

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Climate ESP: A Comprehensive External Environment Analysis Framework Post-PESTLE

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Introduction

The dynamic nature of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) demands innovative approaches to understanding and engaging with the complex external environment that influences corporate actions and strategies. This paper introduces Climate ESP, a novel framework designed to enrich traditional models like PESTLE with a deeper, more nuanced view of the external factors critical to CSR. By integrating ten key dimensions, Climate ESP provides a comprehensive tool for corporations to align their CSR initiatives with the evolving societal expectations and global challenges, promising a transformative impact on CSR communication and strategic alignment.

This paper unfolds in several key sections, each designed to illuminate the facets and potential of Climate ESP within CSR communication. Initially, we examine the limitations of traditional strategic frameworks like PESTLE in capturing the extensive array of external influences that shape corporate strategies, particularly within CSR contexts. We then introduce the genesis of Climate ESP, elaborating on its design to offer a more holistic view of the external environment's impact on CSR initiatives.

The core of our discussion revolves around the ten dimensions of Climate ESP—each pivotal in crafting comprehensive CSR strategies. These include the influences of culture, arts, sports, and entertainment (C); the legal landscape (L); informational and educational dynamics (I); the media environment (E); assets, resources, and capabilities (A), technological advances (T), environment (E), economic (E), social (S), and political (P) environments that form the platform of situational analyses for effective CSR communication.

Furthermore, the paper explores the dual themes of readiness and foresight encapsulated in Climate ESP, emphasizing their critical roles in preparing organizations for both current challenges and future opportunities. Finally, we address the challenges and practical considerations in implementing Climate ESP, offering insights into navigating the complexities of integrating this framework into existing CSR strategies and communication efforts.

Situation Analyses and CSR Communication

A Situation Analysis is a strategic management tool used to assess an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, along with its external opportunities and threats. It involves a comprehensive

examination of the company's operational environment, including competitors, market trends, regulatory landscapes, and customer dynamics, to inform decision-making and strategic planning (Buchko, 1994; Duncan, 1972; Miles & Snow, 1978; Milliken, 1987).

Situation analyses in CSR communication also identify emerging trends and potential risks, facilitating proactive management of CSR narratives. They enable organizations to build trust and credibility by addressing relevant issues and demonstrating responsiveness to the changing societal and environmental landscape (Groza, Pronschinske & Walker, 2011; Sharma & Vredenburg, 1998; Torugsa, O'Donohue & Hecker, 2013).

Situation analysis for situational awareness in CSR communication, especially in crisis contexts, helps organizations understand the evolving landscape and stakeholder sentiments (Groza, Pronschinske & Walker, 2011). This awareness enables timely, empathetic, and relevant responses, ensuring CSR efforts address immediate concerns and contribute positively to crisis resolution and community support (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005).

Situation analyses aid in corporate disclosures and transparency by providing detailed insights into operational strengths and weaknesses, enabling clear communication of CSR efforts (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). They also facilitate risk mitigation by identifying potential external threats, allowing for proactive strategies. Moreover, understanding the external environment enhances stakeholder engagement by aligning CSR initiatives with their expectations and values, fostering trust and collaboration.

The Limitations of PESTLE

Traditional strategic frameworks like PESTLE have provided valuable insights into the external factors influencing corporate strategy, particularly in the realm of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Bismark, Kofi, Frank, & Eric, 2018). However, these frameworks often fall short of addressing the full spectrum of external influences, particularly those beyond the conventional domains of Political, Economic, Sociocultural, Technological, Legal, and Environmental factors.

The omission of broader cultural dynamics, including arts, sports, and entertainment, can lead to CSR strategies that fail to resonate with current societal trends and values. This gap may result in missed opportunities for meaningful engagement with stakeholders and the public. Additionally, the ever-evolving informational and educational landscape, crucial for shaping public narratives and understanding of CSR initiatives, is often underrepresented. This oversight can hinder the effective dissemination of CSR messages and the fostering of informed stakeholder communities.

Furthermore, the rapid advancement and impact of technology on societal norms and expectations pose both challenges and opportunities for CSR strategies, which may not be fully explored within traditional frameworks. The environmental dimension, while included, requires a deeper integration to reflect the growing emphasis on sustainability and the urgent need to address global environmental challenges.

These limitations highlight the need for a more comprehensive and adaptable approach that incorporates a wider range of external factors. (Buchko, 1994; Downey, Hellriegel & Slocum, 1975) Such an approach

would enable organizations to develop more resilient, responsive, and impactful CSR strategies, aligning with the complex and interconnected nature of today's global business environment.

The Genesis of CLIMATE ESP

In response to the identified limitations of traditional strategic frameworks like PESTLE, Climate ESP is introduced as an innovative approach tailored to provide a more holistic view of the external environment's impact on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Designed to encompass a broader array of external factors, Climate ESP enriches the analytical landscape by integrating key dimensions such as Culture, Arts, Sports, and Entertainment, alongside Informational and Educational environments, Media dynamics, and the critical aspects of Assets, Resources, and Capabilities. This comprehensive framework not only addresses the previously overlooked areas but also brings to the forefront the necessity of adapting to rapid changes in the media environment and the increasing importance of robust strategies to counter misinformation and disinformation. Climate ESP aims to equip organizations with the insights and tools needed to navigate the complex external factors influencing CSR, ensuring that their strategies are both resilient and aligned with evolving societal expectations and values Components of Climate ESP:

The Climate ESP framework encompasses ten dimensions, each pivotal to shaping a comprehensive CSR strategy. Here's a breakdown of their relevance:

- *Culture, Arts, Sports, and Entertainment*: This dimension acknowledges the profound impact of societal trends and cultural dynamics on CSR agendas. For instance, Nike's endorsement of Colin Kaepernick showcased how sports and entertainment could amplify social justice issues, aligning brand identity with contemporary societal values and stakeholder expectations. (Bonaparte, 2020)
- *Legal Environment:* Navigating the complex landscape of global and local regulations is crucial for CSR compliance and strategy formulation. Legal frameworks dictate the boundaries within which CSR activities operate, from environmental regulations to labor laws, influencing how companies engage with their CSR commitments (Halkos & Nomikos, 2021).
- *Informational and Educational Environment:* The role of knowledge dissemination and education in CSR is twofold; it shapes the narratives companies create around their CSR initiatives and informs the public about these efforts. In the age of information, educating stakeholders about sustainability practices and CSR initiatives is vital for building trust and engagement (Sobczak, Debucquet, & Havard, 2006).
- *Media Environment:* Media plays a critical role in framing CSR issues and shaping public perception. The way CSR activities are reported and discussed in the media can significantly impact a company's reputation and stakeholder relationships. The evolution of digital platforms has further diversified the media landscape, offering new opportunities and challenges for CSR communication (Saxton, Gomez, Ngoh, et al., 2019; Vashchenko, 2017).
- *Assets, Resources, and Capabilities Environment:* Leveraging organizational assets, resources, and capabilities is essential for sustainable CSR practices. This includes everything from utilizing

financial resources and physical assets to harnessing human capital and intellectual property in a way that aligns with CSR objectives and enhances corporate sustainability (Donnelly & Wickham, 2021).

- *Technological Environment:* Technological advancements present both opportunities and challenges for CSR. On the one hand, technology can drive innovations in sustainable practices; on the other, it can raise ethical concerns, such as data privacy issues. Navigating this dimension requires a keen understanding of technological trends and their implications for CSR (Atanasov, Chipriyanova & Krasteva-Hristova, 2023).
- *Environmental:* Environmental stewardship is at the heart of CSR. This dimension emphasizes the importance of sustainable practices, resource conservation, and reducing the environmental footprint. Companies are increasingly held accountable for their environmental impact, making this a critical area of focus in CSR strategies (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011).
- *Economic Environment:* The economic backdrop influences CSR priorities and feasibility. Economic conditions can affect the resources available for CSR initiatives and shape stakeholder expectations regarding corporate contributions to economic development and sustainability (Tang, Bouges, & Karim, 2018; Vashchenko, 2017).
- *Social Environment:* Societal shifts significantly impact CSR agendas. Changing social norms, cultural values, and community needs can dictate the direction of CSR efforts, requiring companies to be adaptable and responsive to remain relevant and effective in their CSR endeavors (Coombs & Holladay, 2018; Vashchenko, 2017).
- *Political Environment:* The political climate and policies can greatly influence CSR strategies. Political stability, governance structures, and public policies related to sustainability and corporate governance can either enable or constrain CSR activities, making political engagement and awareness crucial for strategic CSR planning (Campbell, 2007; Vashchenko, 2017).

Climate ESP as Readiness and Foresight

Climate ESP not only serves as a comprehensive framework encompassing ten critical dimensions of the external environment but also encapsulates two fundamental aspects organizations need to navigate this landscape effectively: readiness and foresight. "Climate" signifies the immediate conditions—akin to understanding the weather for the day—and emphasizes the need for organizations to be prepared and adaptable to current external factors. This readiness ensures that companies can respond to immediate challenges and opportunities with agility and informed decision-making.

On the other hand, "ESP" (Extra Sensory Perception) extends the metaphor to represent the intuitive foresight organizations must develop to anticipate future trends, disruptions, and opportunities. This foresight involves looking beyond the immediate horizon to understand potential future shifts in societal values, technological advancements, environmental concerns, and other critical areas, enabling proactive rather than reactive strategies. In this paper, ESP is metaphorically revisited to cover four distinct dimensions:

1. *symbolizing* the foresight into market trends and consumer behaviors,

2. *telekinesis* representing the impact of corporate decisions on the physical and digital world,
3. *telepathy* reflecting direct and intuitive communication within and outside the organization, and
4. *precognition* foreseeing potential future challenges and opportunities in the business landscape.

Together, Climate ESP encourages a dual focus: maintaining readiness for the present "climate" of external factors while developing the "ESP" needed to foresee and strategically prepare for what lies ahead. This balanced approach allows organizations to navigate the complexities of the external environment with confidence, ensuring that their CSR initiatives are both relevant and impactful in the face of continuous change.

Climate ESP as a CSR Communication Tool

Climate ESP can refine CSR communication strategies by ensuring alignment with external environmental factors, guiding policy formulation with insights into ethical, legal, and societal expectations. It can inform tactical approaches by leveraging media and technology trends for targeted messaging. Supportive actions might include stakeholder engagement initiatives informed by ESP dimensions. For execution, Climate ESP can facilitate adaptive and responsive communication practices, ensuring CSR efforts are effectively conveyed and resonate with diverse audiences.

Climate ESP enriches CSR communication by integrating insights from ten dimensions, ensuring strategies are culturally resonant and ethically grounded, policies comply with global regulations, and tactics leverage current informational and educational trends. Supportive actions incorporate media dynamics and technological advancements for impactful messaging, while execution is bolstered by emphasizing environmental stewardship and economic sustainability. Social responsiveness and political awareness guide the adaptive execution of CSR initiatives, making communication strategies comprehensive and effective in engaging a diverse range of stakeholders.

Challenges and Considerations

Implementing the Climate ESP framework may present challenges, such as managing the vast amount of data from its ten dimensions, adapting to rapidly changing external environments, and ensuring the framework aligns with a company's existing strategic processes. Other challenges include integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives, addressing the complexities of global operations, and the need for continuous updating to keep pace with societal and technological changes. These factors necessitate a flexible, learning-oriented approach to implementing Climate ESP in CSR communications.

Navigating between oversimplification and overwhelming complexity is crucial when implementing the Climate ESP framework. To avoid "paralysis by analysis," companies can prioritize actionable insights, focus on key dimensions most relevant to their CSR objectives, and integrate adaptive learning processes. Simplifying data interpretation and fostering cross-departmental collaboration can also mitigate confusion, ensuring the complexity of Climate ESP translates into strategic value without overwhelming stakeholders or internal processes. This balanced approach allows for informed decision-making and effective communication without succumbing to data overload or oversimplification.

Solutions

Navigating the implementation of the Climate ESP framework within organizations involves fostering adaptive leadership and a culture of continuous learning. Leaders should encourage flexibility and experimentation, promoting adaptability and ongoing education. Adopting a phased approach, prioritizing impactful dimensions, and encouraging cross-functional collaboration can deepen strategic insights. Incorporating regular training, forming strategic partnerships, and applying agile methodologies ensure responsiveness to changes. Engaging experts across various domains leverages diverse skills, optimizing strategic execution and enhancing CSR communication.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Climate ESP holds the potential to revolutionize CSR strategy and communication by offering a holistic view of external factors, ensuring initiatives are ethically sound, legally compliant, and strategically forward-thinking. This comprehensive approach enables organizations to engage more effectively with stakeholders, aligning CSR efforts with broader corporate goals and societal expectations, thereby enhancing transparency, trust, and sustainability in corporate practices.

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Rethinking responsible management communication from an actor-network theory lens, a case study of solar taxiing project in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

The actor-network theory (ANT) is mobilised along with insights from corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication and responsible management (RM) literatures to conduct an ethnographic case study of a responsible project called solar taxiing, which is emerging in Sub-Saharan Africa. A six-month ethnography was conducted studying the project and 75 interviews were conducted. The study's result redefines the concept of RM communication and refine its area of inquiry. The study shows that RM communication is performative, processual, emergent, and heterogenous, constituting seven key components. The study found that both humans and nonhumans (particularly, technological artefacts) are stakeholders, and they all play equal and active role in co-creating perception, reality and meaning through RM communication. Lastly, the study found that organisations emerge out of RM communication, and not always the case that RM communication emerges from existing organisations.

Keywords: CSR communication; responsible management communication; actor-network theory; stakeholders

Introduction

CSR communication studies generally focus on reporting how corporate actions fulfil the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations of society (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). CSR communication has been conceptualized as the sharing of information from a corporate entity or its representatives to stakeholders (Amaladoss & Manohar, 2013). The notion of CSR has developed into many branches and has opened new areas of inquiry such as responsible management (Podnar, 2008). As the attention of researchers expand to focus on individual managers, the concept of responsible management emerged, referring to the harmonious incorporation of ethics, sustainability, and responsibility (ESR) into management practices (Carroll, 2020). Insights are drawn from CSR literature to theorise RM. CSR literature and RM literature have one thing in common – both argue that corporate and managerial actions should harmoniously fulfil stakeholder needs. Just as the concept of CSR communication developed out of CSR studies as an independent area of inquiry, so is RM communication emerging out of RM literature as an independent area of inquiry. The focus of this paper is to contribute to the definition of the RM communication concept and to refine it as an area of inquiry.

CSR communication and RM communication overlap. For instance, the United Nations Principle of Responsible Management (UN PRME) allude to CSR communication in its 6th principle (dialogue) to develop the concept of RM education. RM scholars such as Willness et al. (2020) also suggest that RM literature could be advanced with insights from CSR research. Both concepts share the same purpose: to shape stakeholders' reactions, protect threat to self-interest, and fulfil the need of belongingness (Willness et al., 2020).

Concerning CSR communication body of knowledge, there is an extensive volume of literature addressing issues such as approaches to CSR communication (Golob et al., 2013; Laasch et al., 2018; Morsing & Schultz, 2006), epistemologies of CSR communication

(Bartlett et al., 2007; Christensen & Cheney, 2011; Cooren, 2004; Schoeneborn & Trittin,

2013; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010), CSR communication themes (Dobers & Springett, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009; Ziek, 2009) and CSR communication frameworks (Dobers & Springett, 2010; Du et al., 2010). On the contrary, very few studies have been conducted on RM communication, and the concept has been used fuzzily in mainstream RM literature.

A research inquiry remaining unaddressed, even by CSR and CSR communication literature is how responsible communications exist when corporations are not yet incorporated. RM scholars investigating the role communication plays in RM face the same challenge. Moreover, it has not been defined what constitute RM communication and how it emerges. Therefore, it is unclear how one can fish out, among the numerous communicative practices, which practices can be uniquely identified as RM communication. This study is conducted to fill this gap. This paper draws insights from RM studies, CSR communication studies, and ANT to propose a new theoretical framework of RM communication.

Theoretical framework

This study mobilises ANT to explain the constitutive and processual nature of RM communication. The ANT originated from the works of Latour (1996), Law (1992) and Callon (1986). It extends the basic concept of semiotics to material semiotics (Bueger, 2013). ANT prescribe that an actor can only do things in relation to others. It follows that the attributes and nature of an actor cannot be studied in isolation but must be analysed in terms of its relation with other things (actors). Actor-networks are therefore complex and need unpacking to fully appreciate the dynamics buried within. The theory proposes the principle of symmetry and translation. These principles provide a unique perspective with which the concept of RM communication is redefined.

The solar taxiing project

An individual who grew up in a deprived rural community in Sub-Saharan Africa with no electricity embarked on a journey to obtain a sustainable source of electricity for his grandmother. This quest influenced him to pursue BSc. electrical engineering, exposing him to renewable energy sources. At university, he gathered other ambitious students into a community of 'critical thinkers' to innovate and provide solutions to societal problems. The students formed an organisation called Creativity Group. Within the organisation, they invented things and gained recognitions and awards. The members of the

group graduated and wanted jobs to get sustainable income. They built a business model out of their group and formed a firm called Kumasi Hive which focused on innovation and prototyping. The group members brought their ideas into Kumasi Hive and developed them for commercial purposes.

They envisioned building solar-powered vehicles for clean transport services in Sub-Saharan Africa. They received seed funding from Mastercard Foundation in 2018 to perfect their prototypes. They piloted the prototypes, and it was successful. They received business support and funding from Persistent to scale up. They formed a company out of the project and registered it as Solar Taxi Ltd. Solar Taxi Ltd produces, assemble, and sell electric vehicles (EVs) and electric bikes (e-bikes), and render e-ride hailing and e-courier services.

This is the narrative of the solar taxiing project. The case of solar taxiing project is used for this research because it is the first large scale project of such nature spearheading responsible practices nationwide and influencing national policies and enrolling a vast host of stakeholders. It provides rich volume of data showing how responsible innovation technologies in spatial interactive form and humans interrelate and co-shape the formulation of the solar taxiing RM communication practices.

Objectives of the research
The research (1) redefines the concept of RM communication, and (2) develop a process and constitutive model of RM communication.

The purpose of this research
The research helps advance RM studies by uncovering the processual and constitutive nature of RM communication and by demonstrating how RM communication is not a mere knowledge and information transfer but is a constitutive RM practice. This study is useful to RM and CSR communication studies because it helps to understand, make sense of, and grasp the complexities underlying RM practice in general, calling RM researchers to reexamine RM communication in multiple perspectives and in tandem with RM practices. Lastly, the study helps establish that RM communication practices are emergent and contextual and co-created by both humans and nonhumans.

Research method
Using ethnography method, the research gathered empirical data onsite through direct observation, recording, note taking, photographing, interviews, and document analysis. The ethnographic study spanned a period of six (6) months. 75 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. The fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, social media posts, and document evidence were uploaded to Nvivo 12 qualitative data analysis software and analysed using both thematic and content analysis in three phases.
Phase 1: conducted an inductive thematic template analysis.
Phase 2: conducted an integrative analysis across all themes of events.
Phase 3: corroborated and polished the previous coding to prepare for framework development.

Results

The result shows that in the emergence of RM communication, technological artefacts gradually assume identities. The assumption of identities is largely influenced by the context and social interactions the technological artefacts are engaged in. In the social interactions on the solar taxiing project, EVs, e-bikes and their accessories such as batteries and charging units contribute to how people see the initiative and the reality of the project. This shows that the technological artefacts have the potential of co-shaping how people see and interpret reality. Contrary to the traditional conduit view of CSR communication, RM communication is participatory, involving humans and non-humans in the co-creation of perception, reality and meaning. The study shows that the EVs and charging stations are not mere neutral intermediaries which people are using to promote clean transportation in Sub-Saharan Africa. They play constitutive role by facilitating how people perceive reality, and co-shape how people (e.g., users) react to the environment and behave. Therefore, the use of the EVs and accessories is an active engagement of communication and interaction between humans and technology, towards developing the transport sector without polluting.

The EVs and charging stations in the solar taxiing project are designed with some interactive technical features that give them the potential to guide human behaviour and help humans to make ethical decisions. The signalling of energy consumption and carbon emission are communications initiated by the EVs in RM communication. The EV prescribes the range the charged battery can cover, and this property has an embedded script of prescribing to its users that they must plan their journeys before they set off. In the use of EV for responsible practices, there is a constant communication between the technical artefacts (the EV) and the human users, and this communication constitutes RM communication.

The narrative of the solar taxiing gives rich empirical data that demonstrates the performativity of RM communication. As the CEO narrates how the solar taxiing idea came into reality, he identifies that he comes from a rural community which did not have electricity when he was growing up. He uttered the words: "let's come together and do something"

These words resulted in the formation of "Creativity Group" The term "come together" was an imperative and performative speech that directly brought to reality the Creativity Group.

These individuals were talking with one another, but there was no group until the speech "come together" was uttered. Only then was Creativity Group born to hold them all together.

Moreover, the expression "do something" is also a performative speech as it directly translated to innovation and material reality of their ideas which until then were only spoken not performed. As he expressed, "...We went ahead to do amazing stuff over the years." The aspirational talks given were performative and that resulted in the performance of innovative practices and development of innovative technologies. It also illustrates how RM communication emerge and subsequently result in the emergence of a responsible organisation. It is not always the case that RM or CSR communication comes from an existing firm. In some instances, firms come out of RM communication.

Discussion of findings

Redefining RM communication – the constituent perspective

Drawing insights from Meyer et al. (2018)'s work and the thematic analysis of the field data, the study empirically constructs RM communication as a complex process involving: (1) human and nonhuman actors "who" (2) disseminate their ideologies and interests in their (3) routine social interactions using (4) texts, rhetoric, discourses, language, speech acts, and visuals, signals, sensing, signalling, scripting, and inscription to (5) interact with others to (6) create, transfer and transform meaning and knowledge, which eventually (7) contribute to the creation, sustenance or change of a full-fledged RM practice. The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

The communication process begins with the initiator, which in this framework refers to the focal actors (i.e., stakeholders – both humans and non-humans) that sense the RM problem (i.e., matter of concern) and generate ideas, interest and concepts and attempt to send them across. The initiator is personified and could be (1)humans doing the talking directly or (2)nonhumans doing the talking through nonverbal language or (3)nonhumans doing the talking through human stakeholders (Bencherki, 2016). There are various communications that are interwoven in daily social phenomena, yet it is essential to put the RM communication into perspective (Cooren, 2000) to clearly identify its function. The ideologies and interests associated with the actors determine that a particular set of communicative practices are RM communication.
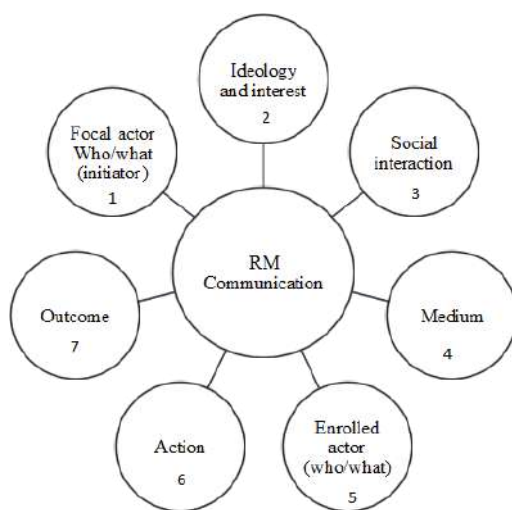
Figure 1: Constitutive framework of RM communication (source: author).

Redefining RM communication – the process perspective

RM communication comprises stakeholders who have individual interests matching the RM ideologies of ethics, sustainability, and responsibility. The stakeholders engage in social interaction to align their interests and ideologies and the varying interests are harmonized and inscribed into mediated communicative objects as scripts that allow actions supporting responsible practices and forbid actions that support irresponsible practices. As shown in figure 2, this process is iterative and occur synchronously. Hence, there are dotted arrows pointing backwards to indicate that the process is fluid.

For instance, the mediated communicative objects may influence new stakeholders to enrol and may also influence existing stakeholders to exit. Moreover, the mediated communicative object may influence some stakeholders to modify their interests and behaviour. Hence, RM communication is not a linear progressive process, but rather an iterative, continuous, fluid arrangement towards flux and stability of RM practices. It is essential for the mediated communication object to be understood as flexible and that they are not static. The scripts embedded in them get modified as the communication process ensues. For instance, the exit of a stakeholder from the communication process or the enrolment of a new stakeholder into the communication process could alter the social interaction and the inscription and scripting, which subsequently modifies the mediated communicative objects' scripts.

The RM communication process must result in a desirable outcome consistent with RM practicing.
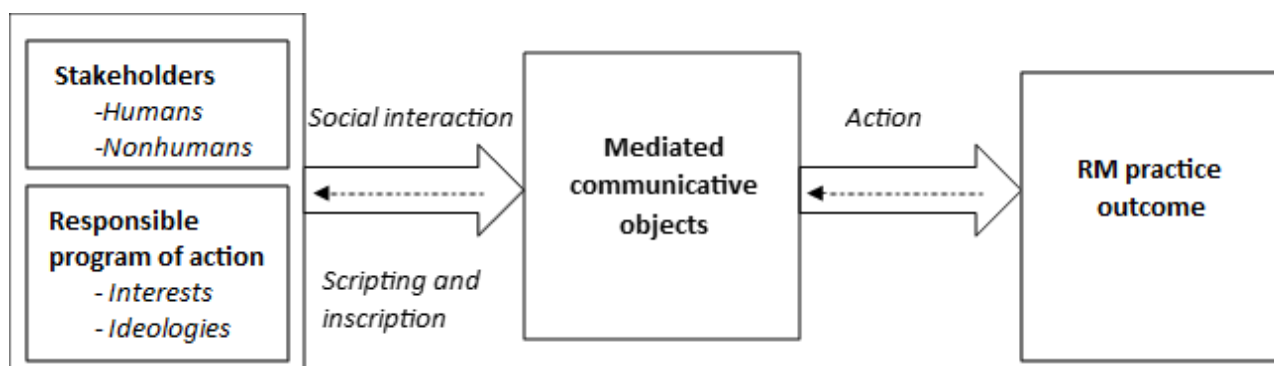
Figure 2: RM Communication process model (source: Author)

Conclusion and implications

This study presents new theoretical perspectives to RM communication by developing framework of RM communication and redefining RM communication. This paper examines the process, dynamics and mechanisms underlying the emergence of RM communication by mobilising the conceptual thinking of mediation, inscription, scripts, co-creation, and actornetwork to explain the constitutive, performative, and emergent nature of RM communication practices.

The study contributes to existing RM literature by cementing the conceptualisation of RM communication as a performative phenomenon that materializes in the formation of RM practice. This study has conceptualized RM communication from an ANT lens to demonstrate the symmetric relationship between humans and nonhumans.

This study tackles the challenge of fragmentation by building a connection between the RM communication area of inquiry and the RM practice area of enquiry and distinguishing it from CSR communication.

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Engaging stakeholders in technology development aiming to solve social problems: how can this advance corporate social responsibility (CSR). The case of a social partnership for digital health.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to empirically explore how to engage stakeholders in technology development aiming to solve social problems within health and to discuss how this can advance corporate social responsibility. The study focuses on social problems within health that technology development for Decentralized Clinical Trials is assumed to be able to solve.

Data consists of observations and interviews with stakeholders of a social partnership with the main aim to validate the design of the case study app and web portal and to identify potentially important amendments to the design. All the collected data has undergone a thematic analysis.

The analysis points to multiple concerns that need to be integrated in the overall partnership strategy in order for the final solution to contribute to solving social/corporate social responsibility problems, e.g. patient empowerment in light of scarce resources in the healthcare sector.

Keywords: stakeholder engagement, technology development, social partnerships, digital health

Contextualizing media CSR: A cross-country comparative analysis of media CSR initiatives in times of crisis

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Abstract

This study compares the media's corporate social responsibility (CSR) responses to the war in Ukraine across seven countries with diverse socio-political contexts: Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine. The comparative study sheds light on the contextual nature of CSR, aiming to identify and understand the country-specific differences (as well as similarities) in media's CSR behaviour in responding to the humanitarian crisis. The study uses the typology of Ingenhoff and Koelling (2012) who categorise media's responsibility into editorial, employee, environmental, and societal domains. Empirical data (N = 161) consists of "micro-cases" (CSR actions) collected from various online sources including media companies' websites, press releases, media coverage, and annual reports. As for overall results, the CSR actions of media organisations fell overwhelmingly in the "responsibility for society" category in all countries. Interestingly, the proportions of categories vary between the countries, likely reflecting the sociopolitical differences across countries.

Keywords: media CSR, Ingenhoff and Koelling typology, media grassroots initiatives, war in Ukraine, comparative study

Organisational re-engagement work after stakeholder engagement failure

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Introduction

Stakeholder engagement often fails. Failure of stakeholder engagement creates cynical distance, adherence to clandestine practices and slack compromises (Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Laine & Vaara, 2007), perpetuating organizational denial and weak commitment (Winkler, Etter, Castello, 2020; Costas & Kärreman, 2013; Humphreys & Brown, 2008; Iivonen & Moisander, 2015). Yet, organizations still enter into engagement strategies driven by the belief that doing so will contribute to making decision-making fora more inclusive, effective and fair (Scherer and Palazzo, 2007; Mena & Palazzo, 2012). The literature on stakeholder engagement failure has mainly focused on understanding why it fails by, for instance, problematizing aspiration talks (Christensen, 2016; Christensen et al. 2013), the cynical responses and lack of identification in employees provoked by contradicting daily business experiences and strategic ambiguity (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Costas & Kärreman, 2013; Humphreys & Brown, 2008; Iivonen & Moisander, 2015; Scandelius & Cohen, 2016). Despite the increasing interest in the failures of engagements, what is lacking is the understanding of how, despite the initial failures, organizations re-organize to re-engage with stakeholders. Accordingly, the present article asks, *how organisations can re-engage stakeholders after a stakeholder engagement failure?*

To answer this research question, we look at the case of the UNFCCC Conferences Of Parties (COPs) and in particular, COP26 held in Glasgow (UK) in 2021. We focus on how after a specific event of failure of engagement, the organisation promoted organizational reflexivity and the change of engagement strategies.

The contribution of this study to the literature on stakeholder engagement is twofold. First, we situate the concept of the 'paradox of inclusion" in the stakeholder engagement literature. By that, we emphasize the importance of looking at the failure of inclusion as a fundamental governance issue impacting the development of multistakeholder governance institutions and mechanisms (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Korula et al 2019). We claim the paradox of inclusion arises when organizations become aware of the existence of a clash between their aspirational vision of inclusion and its current barriers hindering it. The paradox of inclusion emerges at the intersection of three key elements: the articulation of the illusion of inclusion (through aspirational talks, material enablers and symbolic signalling), the barriers to it (material, institutional), stakeholder expectations of inclusion, and their experience of it. As already investigated in the stakeholder engagement and aspirational discourse literature (Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Castelló et al., 2013; Cooren, 2020; Winkler et al., 2021), the paradox of inclusion acknowledges the inherent tension of

engagement. It signals different levels of tensions beyond discursive ones (Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Castelló et al., 2013; Cooren, 2020; Winkler et al., 2021) that can help organizations in their reflexivity processes. The paradox of inclusion also explicitizes the importance of the emotional experience and how this (in-site experience) becomes crucial for disengagement. Drawing on Islam et al., (2019) who believe that "discrepancies between institutional orders and the realm of action become visible" (2019:25) when institutional norms become embodied through concrete practices, we argue that negative emotions act as triggers of tension visibility, making inclusion tensions visible within the organisation when the three elements mentioned above intersect. Additionally, we highlight how the emergence of inclusion tensions made the organisation aware of their internal struggle to match a new vision (engagement and inclusion for all stakeholders) with an old structure (political engagement through representation).

Second, we theorise what we call 'Re-engagement work' which is the organisational process of re-engagement taking place in the aftermath of stakeholder engagement failures, when organisations, aware of stakeholders' frustration, try to re-engage. We argue that in this process in-site experience and out-site reflexivity are necessary to help significant change, in this case, the re-articulation of the vision of the organization. While previous studies are mainly concerned with how to establish engagement and maintain it (Noland and Phillips 2010; Ferraro & Beunza, 2018; Winkler et al., 2021; Beunza et al., 2022; Kujala et al., 2022; Cho, Noh, Roggio, & Luna-Reyes 2023), we show how organisations can conduct re-engagement work that is not only focused on the maintenance of the engagement but also in a deeper process of self-reflexivity.

Methods

Our data set (Table 1) consists of 7 days of ethnographic observations, 42 semi-structured interviews, and secondary data, such as archival data, and online and social media data. Data gathering lasted three years (2021-2023).

Table n. 1

Data Structure: summary of data sources, type of data and use in the analysis.

Data source		Type of Data	Use in the analysis
Ethnography		7 days of Ethnographic observation were divided as follows: - 5,6 and 7 November 2021 outside the Green Zone (gathering pictures, videos and for November 7 ethnographical account) - 8,9,10,11 both inside the Green Zone and outside (gathering ethnographical account) -pictures, videos, and leaflets were gathered as part of the ethnography	-Development of the case's historical account (timing of events, the explosion of anger and frustration in the civil society because of exclusion-related issues) and contextual account: understanding of the space, the two zones and their functioning, mapping key actors and their main activities -Collecting contacts of the people the author met in person to do interviews

Semi-structured interviews		-42 interviews (1785,95 minutes transcribed)
		-2 rounds of data collection
		  • 1st round from 8 November 2021 to 17 May 2022
		  • 2nd round from 5 July 2022 to May 2023
		-Interviewees clustered in groups according to the badge system:
		  • Pink/Party badge: country delegates
		  • Yellow/Observer badge: NGO members (including faith groups); activists (including indigenous people); academics; entrepreneurs operating within the field of Climate Change
		  • Experts working for the UN
		  • Civil society members
			-Development of the historical account and contextual account
			-Detailed understanding of the cause and the strategic intent of each stakeholder
			-Detailed understanding of the creation of the aspirational discourse of ideal inclusion
			-Detailed understanding of participants' interaction with the discourses and symbols, and the emotions elicited by them
			-Understanding the main line of argument related to inclusion/exclusion
			-Understanding emotional dynamics and engagement dynamics
			-Understanding how participants cope with the emotions elicited by inclusion discourses and symbols and the outcome of this process (engagement or disengagement)
			-Understanding what COP26 organizers are doing to manage or reduce negative emotions and re-engage stakeholders

Archival data	Documents and websites	19 documents from the UNFCCC and COP26 organizers, including: -UNFCCC 1992 Convention, -COP26 timetable, -COP26 negotiation process explained, -COP26 user manual for observer organizations, -COP26 admission process explained, -COP26 Presidency Event program, -COP26 maps of the venue -Letters to parties -COP26 Explained -UNFCCC Handbook, 2006	-understanding the strategic operation of the creation of discourse of inclusion -understanding of COP26 official version and framing of COP26 "as the most inclusive COP ever" -Detailed understanding of the regulatory framework for Climate Change at the supranational level -A deeper understanding of the negotiation process -Detailed understanding of the relationship between actors. -Characterization of UNFCCC and COP26 President Alok Sharma narrative: building momentum around the conference and promising stakeholders' inclusion

		- Cop26 - How To Get Involved Opportunities Within Uk Government Managed Spaces At Cop26 Glasgow 2021
		
		-100 official websites pages, e.g.:
		  - ukcop26.org
		  - gov.uk
		  - unfccc.int
			-Understanding the main line of argument related to inclusion/exclusion
			-triangulation to identify patterns and themes, regularities and discrepancies
			-Understanding emotional dynamics and engagement dynamics

	Press articles and blogs	-80 articles from online press, blogs and other organizations (The Guardian, The Washington Post, CNN, The Independent, Metro, The Times, Save The Children, Humanrightspulse, Kings College, UNESCO News, etc.)	-Construction of the case's historical account and contextual account -Understanding the main line of argument related to inclusion/exclusion -Understanding emotional dynamics and engagement dynamics
	Social media	-100 Twitter posts - 4 LinkedIn posts	-showing examples of Institutional narrative creation -helping justify the choice of the case study illustrating inclusion concerns among participants to COP26 -Understanding emotional dynamics and engagement dynamics

Videos		60 Youtube videos from YouTube COP26 and UNFCCC official Channel; Other 15 YouTube videos shot in COP by media and news agencies	-Construction of the case's historical account and contextual account - Understanding the strategic process of creation of the aspirational discourse of ideal inclusion -understanding of COP26 official version and framing of COP26 "as the most inclusive COP ever" -Characterization of UNFCCC and COP26 President Alok Sharma narrative: building momentum around the conference and promising stakeholders' inclusion -Understanding the main line of argument related to inclusion/exclusion -Expression of emotions -Understanding emotional dynamics and engagement dynamics

		- "Putting younger generations in charge of the switch to sustainable energy & transportation" +
		  • video shot by one of the authors related to the same event "Putting younger generations in charge of the switch to sustainable energy & transportation"
		  • video shoot in the Green Zone for the University of Surrey Instagram profile
		  • videos shoot at People's Summit (a parallel forum organised by the civil society)
			- Showing that COP26 organizers engaged in the operation of content curation. All evidence of the activist action has been removed from it.
			
			-Reflect on the researcher's role in the field
			
			-Comparing the official forum with unofficial ones and characterizing them both as well as the emotional and engagement dynamics

As for the analysis, we relied on an inductive theory generation approach in recursive steps (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) Our data structure comprises 63 first-order concepts, 24 second-order concepts and 11 third-order themes.

Findings

Inclusion in COPS has been identified by UNFCCC as one of the "challenges" to stakeholder engagement (Background note, 2022). Despite COP having increased inclusion over time, COP is still perceived as lacking inclusion and representation of marginalized voices (Expert 2, interview, 10/05/2023). This poses a challenge for the organization, subject to continual scrutiny from the public and media, making evident the tension between its vision of including more people and still, due to logistical constraints and legal barriers the fact of being perceived as exclusive. We describe how this tension is constituted in the context of COP26, illustrating its two opposing propositions that we conceptualize as the *Creation of an aspirational vision of inclusion* and the *Material barriers to inclusion*. We then explain how the intersection of these two leads to the emergence of inclusion tensions that create emotions shaping COP26 participants' engagement. We conceptualise this as the "paradox of inclusion", and the tensions it generates as "inclusion tensions". Finally, we develop a second model to show how the institution tries to re-engage stakeholders after engagement failures through the design of insite mechanisms and their transformation into out-site mechanisms mediated through a strategic review process.

The creation of the aspirational vision of inclusion

Prior to and during the first days of COP26, the organizers created their aspirational vision of inclusion to establish the possibility of engagement by promoting an *aspirational discourse on inclusion by proclaiming the strategic importance of inclusion in COPS; enabling the illusion of inclusion through material elements (such as badges and open spaces)* and *creating and announcing partnerships* in what we call symbolic inclusion signalling.

An example of aspirational discourse was the releasing of official messages or speeches of prominent figures belonging to COP26, such as President Alok Sharma, promising inclusion and emphasizing its importance ("Alok Sharma, Letter To all Parties to the UNFCCC", 15 July 21). The UN's aspiration of inclusion is also created through a symbolic repertoire made of material elements which include, for instance, an *inclusive badge* that allows delegates and members of the civil society to enter different zones where activities are organized. There was also symbolic signalling in the public announcement of partnerships with different actors such as civil society groups and corporate actors.

Emotional anticipation. The creation of aspiration of inclusion promoted by the aspirational talk, the material enablers and the symbolic signalling generated expectations and emotional anticipation of future inclusion in participants' minds. For some of them, going to COP26 was a dream come true: *'I was very excited. It was kind of something I've always wanted to do really, a bit like having a dream come true for me' (Davon, interview, 07/12/21).* Interviewees identified the institutional aspirational discourse

promising inclusion spread by COP organizers before the summit as the very source of their expectations of inclusion. As Abigail (interview, 14/12/2021) recalled: '*I expected to be able to kind of flow throughout the entire venue, and easily manoeuvre the spaces and be able to get into almost anywhere. And that, because that's what I essentially was told that I'd be entitled to.*'

Barriers to inclusion

Although the UN was articulating the aspirational vision of inclusion to transition to the implementation phase of the agreements, some elements led to the emergence of a *paradox of inclusion* that prevented real inclusion. We call these contradictory elements *barriers to inclusion*. They prevent access and opportunities for voicing, hinder participants' identification with the institution and its purpose, prevent physical inclusion in the space, and limit possibilities of dissent. Barriers range from technical problems, unsatisfactory venue design choices, limited logistics and the corporate look of the zones, to more structural obstacles that originate from the constitutive elements of the UNFCCC itself. This generated a contradiction between what participants were told they could do, as anticipated by the aspirational discourse of inclusion, the material enablers and the symbolic signalling, and their real possibilities of inclusion and engagement, as regulated by the Convention.

Emotional disconnection. What initially created enthusiasm and built emotional anticipation of future inclusion generated negative emotions in stakeholders leading to their emotional disconnection from the summit. In Christian, and Nando's words respectively (interview, 7/6/2022; 20/11/2021) we can find this idea of unmet expectations and the consequent frustration and disappointment arising from it:

> "*One of the brandings I'm sure you've heard about COP was that it was going to be the most inclusive COP ever. They were gonna apply people in. But when we got there, as soon as you step into the Blue Zone, you are defined by the badge that you wear*" (Christian, interview, 7/6/2022)
>
> "[I felt] *a lot of frustration, feeling like insignificant in the decision making of the organization. Feeling like left out. But also sometimes feeling guilt*" (Nando, interview, 20/11/2021).

In many instances, all this emotional turmoil resulted in stakeholders wondering why the UNFCCC accredited them and then prevented them from being able to have an impact and participate. Others left the conference, thus disengaging from it. Laura (interview, 08/11/2021) talked of "*claiming the streets*" as a much freer space, while Barbara (Barbara, interview, 15/07/2021 stated, "*Why should I be mentally exhausted on something [knowing] that even though I continue sitting down, there's not impact that I'm going to make. So I'd rather go out*". To sum up, the institutional vision of inclusion and its symbols could not be realized because of legal and structural barriers. These led to negative emotions that resulted in the emotional disconnection and disengagement of some participants from the negotiation process, thereby configuring what we named *stakeholder engagement failure.*

Re-engagement work in response to engagement failure

Aware of the engagement failure, threatening the legitimacy of the organisation and the possibility to fulfil its mission, the UNFCCC started a process of re-engagement, aimed at countering stakeholder emotional disconnection and fostering renewed engagement with the organisation. To do so, the organisation engaged in what we named *re-engagement* work consisting first of some in-site actions that helped the reduction of the sense of frustration, second, a strategic review process to reflect on the in-site problems, and third, out-site reflexivity that reflects a long-term plan developed into several mechanisms in an attempt to re-articulate the organisational vision and promote new and future engagement.

In-site mechanisms

We define in-site mechanisms put in place by the UNFCCC during the two weeks of COP to address and overcome pressing challenges of inclusion. Facing concerns over the degree of openness and access, and a wave of frustration reported by the media, the organisation started to implement quick and focused interventions, aimed at mitigating inclusion obstacles. The UNFCCC on November 2, 2021, started a re-articulation of the discourse to include the acknowledgement of frustration.

Acknowledgement of frustration. The UNFCCC recognized the presence of tangible and intangible obstacles in the negotiation space, which prevented participants' inclusion.

Invitational inclusion. The UNFCCC also started an invitational inclusion, welcoming the involvement and access of stakeholders in COP, and actively introducing more contesting voices in the official narrative. They invited more activists, including celebrity activists, to speak in COP Blue Zone and Green Zone and to appear in official press releases, YouTube videos and shorts (YouTube video, 09/11/2021; 11/11/2021; 11/11/2021).

Material dismantling of the barriers of inclusion. They also dismantled some of the material barriers to inclusion. In line with the idea of including more people, on November 8th 2021 the UN granted physical access by opening the Green Zone to the public: everyone from civil society could enter without a ticket (COP26 WEBSITE).

Strategic review process

In-site adjustments only mitigated partially the problems related to stakeholder inclusion in COP. On November 13, 2021, Patricia Espinosa, at that time Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, launched the "*Review Process*" co-created with constituencies to "*review what happened here in Glasgow to ensure greater inclusivity moving forward*". (UNFCCC, 13/11/2021). The review process was presented as crucial as a pivotal element that would institutionalize some of the in-site actions and provide new ground to develop other mechanisms within the UNFCCC with a longer impact. The recognition of the failure and the re-articulation of the discourse, this time towards a need to create a long-term strategy became central to their discourse. This was done by recognizing that the initial in-site short-term actions were insufficient to re-engage stakeholders and they were not dramatically altering the nature of the COP's inclusivity (Expert 2, interview, 10/05/2023). Therefore, they embarked on this review process as a conscious effort

to bridge the gap between immediate readjustments and the need for transformative, long-term mechanisms to overcome structural challenges.

Out-site reflexivity

We define the out-site reflexivity mechanisms put in place by the organisation that reflect a long-term plan in the attempt to re-articulate the new organisational vision and promote renewed and future engagement. Out-site reflexivity mechanisms prompted the organisational *commitment to self-reflection, commitment to distance reduction, the commitment to a nonhegemonic cultural approach, and the final re-articulation of the mission*.

Commitment to self-reflection. The first step to regaining participants' trust is being self-critical, admitting the existence of structural problems within COP26, and COPs in general. Consequently, the UNFCCC acknowledges organizational shortcomings in the initial vision, openly addressing weaknesses and uncertainties surrounding the organizational vision. This admission reflected a commitment to self-reflection and improvement, signalling an openness to the prospect of revision.

Commitment to distance reduction. A second fundamental element of the re-articulation of the strategy of inclusion was the aim of putting the individuals at the centre of the inclusion process and reducing the distance between stakeholders and the organization in several ways.

Commitment to a non-hegemonic cultural approach. Moreover, the UNFCCC fosters a nonhegemonic cultural approach by acknowledging and leveraging other knowledge systems and uniting diverse stakeholder groups for a common goal, showing the UNFCCC's openness to other perspectives.

Facilitating the re-articulation of the vision. The commitment to self-reflection, distance reduction and diverse knowledge systems helped the organisation's commitment to identify the problems and demonstrate a caring disposition towards stakeholders. However, these mechanisms were not sufficient to remove obstacles to inclusion. As a result, the organization engaged in what we name the *facilitating the re-articulation of its vision* of inclusion enhancing stakeholders' democratic participation and re-imagining more open engagement spaces than the current COPs. This deliberate progression underscores UNFCCC's commitment to moving beyond mere recognition and actively seeking to address the identified issues.

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CSR Communication and Persuasion Models/Theories: a scoping search and review of literature

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Abstract

Despite the basic assumption that CSR communication goal is to shape, reinforce or change audience's attitudes towards responsible organisations and the socio-economic-natural environment, the corpus of studies that has specifically focused on the application of theories of persuasion (message effects models, attitude-behaviour approaches, cognitive processing theories, consistency theories) has rarely been systematically reviewed. This scoping exercise will help to preliminarily assess the potential size and range of the available research literature in this field. Therefore, we utilize the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology – as outlined by Rethlefsen et al. (2021) – to present our exploration of two multidisciplinary databases/platform (Scopus and Ebsco), through an exhaustive search with inclusion and exclusion criteria. Our research will focus on quantity and quality of literature, by study design and other key features (e.g., theory, characteristics, context, results), to map the current state of knowledge and identify priorities for future investigation and research.

Keywords: persuasion; CSR communication; PRISMA

Introduction

The main purpose of this work is to provide for the first time a scoping overview of how persuasion theories and models have been utilised in CSR communication research/practice, as a set of exploratory, explanatory or even predictive tools to shape, create and reinforce attitudes, intentions and behaviours of various audiences (in this case, we would like to focus on the organisational/mass domains, rather than on the inter-individual/group levels). Therefore, this study will fill this gap by outlining an original overview and synthesis of how persuasion theories and concepts have been 'appropriated' and applied in CSR communication, so that scholars will be able to explore further specific aspects and research avenues.

If we assume, among other options, an inclusive working definition of *persuasion* such as the one proposed by Miller (1980) – i.e., "any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another, or others" – we understand that, at time where CSR communication is one with societal global challenges and the ability to create tangible impact and behavioral changes in terms of shared agency, collective responsibility and collective intentionality (Arrigoni, 2019), an understanding of how organizations' "supply of CSR" could meet stakeholders' "demands" by aligning both perspectives (Kuokkanen & Sun, 2020) would considerably benefit from a structured systematic synthesis of how CSR communication *persuasiveness* has been and could be achieved.

Main theoretical framework/assumptions

The theories identified and discussed in this paper are part of a wider categorisation based on an often-used typology (for example, by Capella et al., 2006): the four theoretical families/clusters selected are *message effect* theories, *attitude-behaviour* approaches, *cognitive processing* models, *consistency* theories. A very concise presentation of the theoretical families/clusters follows here.

Message effects models are, broadly speaking, based on the identification of the format and the contents that produce the desired *effect* in terms of cognitive, attitudinal, and emotional outcomes. More specifically, following the seminal work of Janis and Feshbach (1953), the stream of research focused on the use of *fear* to promote behavioural changes has developed *both* a specific attention to models based on "subjective expected utility" (after the work by Rogers 1975, 1983) *and* a nucleus of interest based on "parallel response models" (as proposed by Leventhal 1971 and Witte 1992, 1994). The former lead to the idea that message efficacy/protection motivation is higher when a *threat* is both harmful and severe, a *risk* is tangible, the *behaviour/solution* advocated is effective/achievable and no *barriers* to engage in it are perceived; the latter assumes that an appraisal of *threat susceptibility* and *severity* can be followed by an *efficacy appraisal* in term of self- and response efficacy – with high levels of threat *and* efficacy predicted to lead to self-protective action (and, therefore, to the fear appeal being persuasive).

Attitude-behaviour approaches generally attempt to predict a behaviour from attitudes, while at the same time recognising that the attitude-behaviour correlation must be complemented by other variables in order to improve the predictive power of such models. A very significant example in this field is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), which posited that behavioural intentions are composed by the *attitude(s)* towards the proposed behaviour (split into *evaluation of the belief* hold about the behaviour and the *strength* of such beliefs) and *subjective norms* (consisting of *normative beliefs* – i.e., believed expectations of others - and *motivation to comply* with them). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) adds *perceived behavioural control* (influenced by *control beliefs* and *perceived power*) as a third variable contributing to behavioural intention. The Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) included *actual control* as a factor both feeding back into perceived control and directly influencing behaviour.

Cognitive processing models tend to focus on what *processes* lead to certain aspects of messages to influence people's attitudes or, in other words, on how/what pre-existing attitudes/cognitions may lead to a certain message to be processed in one way or another. In this respect, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) – as proposed by Petty, Cacioppo and Goldman (1981) – suggests that a message is processed "centrally" when the receiver is motivated and able to evaluate the quality of the arguments proposed, engaging in a systematic appraisal of its content, while, when the motivation and the competence is at a lower level, cognitive shortcuts and "peripheral" processing occurs. The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) suggests that systematic processing and heuristic processing occur jointly or in parallel (see Chaiken 1980)

Consistency theories are based on the principle that inconsistent cognitions (thoughts, opinions, attitudes, behaviours...) are uncomfortable to hold, and therefore people are motivated to move from that state:

Cognitive Dissonance Theory, initially proposed by Festinger (1957), identifies *magnitude of dissonance* as one of the key motivators to reduce it, for example by changing, adding and re-framing cognitive and behavioural elements. Having identified the eight relevant theories models for this research – Extended Parallel

Process Model (EPPM) and Protection Motivation Theory (LET) as part of *message effects* models; Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and

Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) as examples of *attitude-behaviour* approaches; Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) representing *cognitive processing* models; Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT) as the main instance of *consistency theories* – in the next session the main objectives and other methodological aspects of the study will be outlined.

Methodology/Objectives

We chose to follow the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-

Analyses (PRISMA) methodology (Rethlefsen et al., 2021) or documenting and reporting our systematic literature since it facilitates the full reproducibility of the process.

Explanation and Exploration. A systematic literature research will be performed on
SCOPUS; EBSCO (containing Academic Search Complete, Business Source Premiere,
ERIC, GreenFILE, MLA Directory of Periodicals, MLA International Bibliography,
MEDLINE, APA PsycInfo, APA PsycArticle, SocINDEX); Science Direct; JSTOR; Sage; Wiley; Taylor & Francis; Emerald; Gale; ProQuest (publicly Available Content Database). As far as SCOPUS is concerned, reference lists of included articles will be also manually screened to identify additional studies.

Search Strategies. Original searches to be run on the databases between March and May 2024:

1.   (TITLE (csr OR "social* responsib*" OR "corporate social" OR sustainab* OR sdg*

        OR "ethic* business*" OR "business* ethic*" OR "responsib* manag*" OR esg)
        AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("protection motivation" OR "extended parallel" OR "eppm"))
2.   (TITLE (csr OR "social* responsib*" OR "corporate social" OR sustainab* OR sdg*

        OR "ethic* business*" OR "business* ethic*" OR "responsib* manag*" OR esg)
        AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("planned behaviour" OR "reasoned action"))
3.   (TITLE (csr OR "social* responsib*" OR "corporate social" OR sustainab* OR sdg*

        OR "ethic* business*" OR "business* ethic*" OR "responsib* manag*" OR esg)
        AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (elm OR "elaboration likelihood model" OR hsm OR
        "heuristic-systematic"))
4.   (TITLE (csr OR "social* responsib*" OR "corporate social" OR sustainab* OR sdg*

        OR "ethic* business*" OR "business* ethic*" OR "responsib* manag*" OR esg) AND TITLE-ABS-
        KEY ("cognitive* dissonan*))

Limits and restrictions. Language: English; Study type: full academic paper/peer reviewed journal articles; Exclusion criteria: a) duplicates; b) not on topic based on title; c) not on topic based on abstract; d) publications from Universities' and Faculties' Journals, Bulletins and Repositories will not be selected. Inclusion criteria: a specific focus on CSR/Sustainability communication aspects.

Total records. As of March 15, 2024, a total of 765 records were identified on Scopus only, before screening by language, format/study type, title and abstract taking place.

Deduplication. Manual, and with the support of Mendeley Reference Manager software.

While using a systematic review protocol, we will try to combine aspects of a critical review with a quite comprehensive search process, as seen above in relation to how the search strategy has been designed. Addressing the underlying question broadly, this paper – both in the version presented at Bath Conference and in the subsequent version that will be submitted to journal(s) – will try and collate 'best evidence synthesis' identifying the defining attributes of the field that can be used to develop a synthesis model (Sutton et al., 2019) mapping out and categorizing existent literature on persuasion and CSR communication.

Preliminary results

   1) Message Effects / Fear appeals – EPPM / PMT (2015-2023, 34 results)
The preliminary pilot exploration of literature on Scopus has revealed 34 studies, many of which relate to waste management behaviours, crop residue management practices and germane topics, etc. Nonetheless, examples of article that would eventually be incorporated in the systematic overview include Xie & Wang's (2022) study – revealing the moderating role of threat intensity on the relationships between CSR appeal and consumers' responses in COVID-19 advertising – or Perrault et al. (2018) article – exploring college students' sustainability attitude and behavioral motivations by testing EPPM. Overall, it seems the existence of a specific CSR communication research stream based on the use of these persuasion models/theory has still to be established and confirmed during the next few steps of the present study.

   2) Cognitive processing models - ELM, HSM, Unimodel (1992-2023, 75 results) The preliminary pilot exploration of literature on Scopus has revealed 75 studies, many of which relate to sustainability stewardship and broadly speaking investigate – for instance – the effects of cause involvement, ability to process CSR-related messages on persuasiveness. Examples of studies that will be included and integrated more in detail are: Bögel (2015) using the ELM to verify whether stakeholders with high vs low CSR involvement differ in their processing of CSR communication, and Pérez (2019) specifically analysing how message authenticity influences the persuasiveness of CSR communication. The chance

to identify and synthesize the research in this area is much more evident at the moment, if compared to the previous section.

3) <u>Attitude-Behaviour Models - TRA, TPB, RAM</u> (1994-2023, 605 results)

The preliminary pilot exploration of literature on Scopus has revealed 605 studies, many of which relate to purchasing and consumption behaviour, rather than on CSR communication *per se*. One exception is Darus et. al. (2014) study on factors that impede the growth of the voluntary adoption of independent corporate social responsibilities assurance practices among manufacturing companies in Malaysia (using TRA as basic framework). Given the nature (and the conceptual positioning) of the attitude-behaviour models, it is not certain whether a specific sub-set of literature outputs relating to its role on CSR comms would emerge.

4) <u>Cognitive Dissonance Theory – CDT (2007-2024, 51 results)</u>

The preliminary pilot exploration of literature on Scopus has revealed 51 studies, many of which relate to a wide range of specific topics that would not fall into the CSR communication domain – e.g., education for sustainable development, health professional contribution to sustainability, sustainable mobility, etc. Nonetheless, examples of article that would eventually be covered in the systematic overview include Adams & Whelan's work addressing how "sources of dissonance significant enough to result in managerial concern for change" can be created (2009, p. 118). A more recent example (Zhang & Zhang, 2023) has "extended the theoretical discussion of *cognitive dissonance* to a trendy strategic communication context". Overall, an eventual final synthesis leading to how CSR authenticity can be better communicated in a way to create more "consistent" behavioral patterns can be expected at this stage.

Contribution

The aim of this work is not to collate insights from literature covering all theories and models relevant to CSR communication, but to select the most significant tenets of the most important of them and explore a potentially heterogeneous topic by identifying the resulting contrasting and complementary features, for example looking at how historically "particular research traditions have unfolded overtime and shaped the kind of questions being asked and the methods used to answer them" (Wong et al., 2013, p. 2). This would be operationalized using a method like the TCCM (Theory-Context-Characteristics-Methodology) framework as developed by Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019). Hopefully, this will provide for a first time a reasonably structured aggregate summary of the strength and overall direction of how CSR communication and persuasion research is evolving and whether an overall picture about what is (and is not) known in the field can be derived and shared within our scientific community (as it could likely be the case for sections 2 and 4 above).

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The Impact of Branding on Sustainable Consumption and the Circular Economy: Proposing a Brand Equity Model for Charitable Non-profit Organizations

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Abstract

As society transitions from perceiving sustainable living as a trend to acknowledging it as a necessity, the significance of charitable non-profit organizations in promoting environmental sustainability becomes more pronounced. This study explores how these organizations, through the repurposing of donated goods, can contribute to the circular economy and encourage sustainable consumption via elevated brand equity. It introduces a stakeholder-based brand equity model, emphasizing the crucial roles of donor and customer loyalty in the growth of these institutions. By highlighting trust as a cornerstone of donor loyalty, the research employs a three-stage mixed-methods approach to address four key questions, integrating surveys and interviews. Ultimately, it underscores brand equity as a strategic asset for propelling the circular economy and sustainable consumption, suggesting that the practices of charitable non-profits could establish a precedent for responsible consumption across society.

Keywords: brand equity, sustainability, circular economy, trust, non-profit branding

Introduction

The rise of sustainable consumption mirrors a growing societal awareness, notably embodied by the circular economy model that underscores waste reduction through recycling, reuse, and upcycling initiatives like thrift stores, repair cafés, and remanufacturing facilities (Kirchherr et al., 2017). This model, long championed by charitable non-profit organizations, presents an effective approach to generating social impact by sustainably managing surplus goods. These organizations collect donatable items, which are then sold, recycled, or upcycled, with the proceeds supporting individuals facing adversity.

Charitable non-profits rely on two critical stakeholder groups: donors, who provide surplus items, and customers, who purchase these items. A favorable brand perception among these stakeholders is crucial for these organizations, as it can significantly boost donations and sales. This, in turn, enhances the capacity for repurposing surplus materials, reducing reliance on natural resources, and promoting sustainable living practices. Moreover, the resulting increase in revenue facilitates the expansion of their operations, thereby extending their social impact and reaching a broader segment of those in need.

This research introduces a brand equity model tailored for the charitable non-profit sector, with a particular emphasis on France's Emmaus Solidarity Center. It posits that increasing brand awareness and

equity can enlighten the public about the importance of reusing, recycling, and upcycling, thereby emphasizing the significant role of charitable non-profits in the circular economy and their broader social and cultural missions. The study aims to elucidate the extensive contributions of these organizations to both the circular economy and society at large, highlighting their potential for making future impacts. The research addresses four key questions:

1.   How do donors' perceptions of trust affect the brand equity of charitable non-profit organizations?

2.   Which aspects of donor perceptions have a greater impact on the brand equity of charitable non-profit organizations?

3.   Which aspects of customer perceptions have a greater impact on the brand equity of charitable non-profit organizations?

4.   How do donor and customer loyalty sustain and strengthen the ability of charitable non-profits to contribute to their impact on the circular economy and sustainable consumption? What are the measurable impacts of these contributions?

To our knowledge, the study is the first to develop a brand equity model for non-profit charitable organizations that bridges relationships between sustainable consumption and the circular economy. The research findings will help identify brand equity dimensions and provide actionable strategies for brand managers in relevant fields. The study offers a unique perspective, thus opening a new research avenue at a crucial time when ecology, sustainable development, and the circular economy are of utmost importance.

The Emmaus Movement

The Emmaus Movement was founded in Paris by the French priest, MP, and activist Abbé Pierre to address growing housing problems in the 1950s. The movement's primary objective was to foster societal solidarity and provide help to those in need. The organization is grounded in the core principles of self-sufficiency, solidarity, and unconditional welcome. The impact of Emmaus on French society was profound and efficient, leading to international collaborations and the foundation of Emmaus International in 1971 (Emmaus International, 2023). Today, the Emmaus movement has expanded to 250 branches in France and has a presence in 41 countries (Emmaus France, 2023).

Emmaus' self-sufficiency system is a simple and effective mechanism: people bring their unused and surplus items to Emmaus' collection centers and donate them without expecting anything in return. New and goodcondition items are reserved to be displayed in the store for sale, while those not in good condition are categorized (e.g., paper, wood, plastic) and transported to respective recycling centers. Within the scope of upcycling activities, worn-out historical furniture, traditional costumes, and defective bicycles are refurbished, repurposed, and given a second life. Alongside Emmaus, British Oxfam and American Goodwill Industries similarly advocate for circular economy principles and sustainable development in the nonprofit philanthropic sector.

**Brand equity and the role of trust in the charitable non-profit sector**

The charity branding literature has primarily focused on constructing brand image and linking it with reputation (Hou et al., 2009; Abreu, 2006). Names and logos are critical identifying elements that help people focus on the functional aspects of a charity (Roberts-Wray, 1994). The strong relationship between brand awareness and the ability to raise funds and sustain operations is evident (NfpSynergy, 2010; Tapp et al., 1999). Ewing and Napoli (2005) adapt and refine Keller's (2000) brand report card to the nonprofit context, proposing a multidimensional scale for assessing nonprofit brand orientation. Their scale requires full coordination of branding activities and defining dimensions of interaction, orchestration, and impact to maximize brand awareness and performance. Boenigk and Becker (2016) develop a stakeholder-based measurement index for non-profit brand equity, suggesting that the significance of non-profit brand equity depends on building trust, commitment, and awareness among stakeholders. From a more holistic perspective, brand equity is critical in attracting support, building and maintaining trust, sustaining donations, and consequently, increasing the organization's social impact (Bilgin and Kethuda, 2022; Sargeant et al., 2006; Bennett, 2005). The relationship between public trust and donation intention is influenced by factors such as transparency, accountability, effectiveness, integrity, and benevolence (Becker, 2021).

This perception of trust holds importance for regulators, donors, the media, and the general public, who approach the charity sector with a more ethically-focused perspective (Sargeant and Lee, 2004). Notably, the renowned Edelman Trust Barometer underscores the consistent public trust in NGOs over time, suggesting that NGOs possess the potential to expand upon their existing public trust, positioning themselves as reliable sources of information and action (Edelman, 2022).

Conceptual framework

The current study suggests a stakeholder-based brand equity framework centered on the loyalty of donors and customers of charitable non-profit organizations, where recycling-based responsible consumption and a philanthropic culture converge within the non-profit sector. Building on existing literature, the research contends that the sustained success of Emmaus and similar entities depends on the enduring loyalty of both donors and customers. Drawing on Keller's (1998) seminal Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) theory, the suggested model integrates conventional brand equity dimensions tailored to the clientele of charitable non-profit entities (see Figure 1). Keller's (1998) brand resonance model posits that positive brand perceptions among customers culminate in behavioral loyalty. The research model departs from the norm by incorporating trust and donation intention as pivotal elements for donors. The study argues that trust in the organization (i.e., the brand) is a bridge that should connect the brand meaning to the brand response. Improving brand performance and brand image perceptions results in strengthening trust, driving positive brand judgments and favorable brand feelings, thereby increasing donation intention. We should also note that we expect the emotional side of the brand resonance model to be stronger than the cognitive side for donors (Duman et al., 2018). Donors leaving their personal belongings to these institutions to benefit others require establishing a certain emotional bond towards the institution.

As a result, the study proposes a stakeholder-based brand equity model that aims to validate established brand equity dimensions while highlighting the important roles of trust and donation intention for donors. Research establishing a link between donor and customer loyalty underscores the interchangeable roles of donors and customers. Bridging brand equity to sustainable consumption and the circular economy, the study recognizes non-profit charities as truly sustainable institutions.
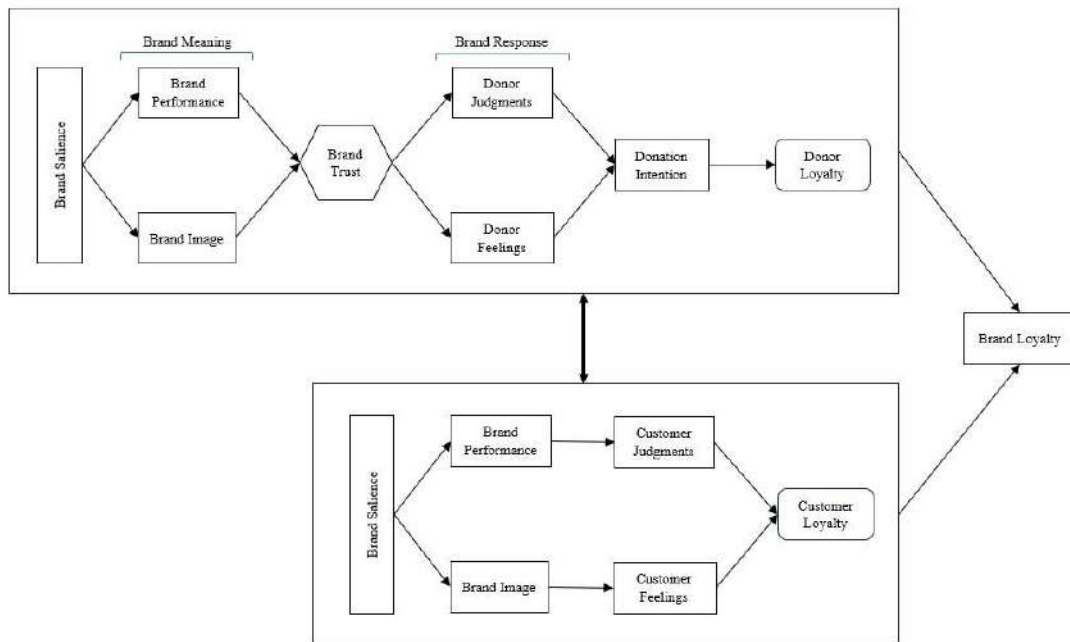
Methodology

This investigation adopts a tripartite mixed-methods approach to delve into the posed research questions. Initially, quantitative surveys are deployed to both donors and customers of the Emmaus Solidarity Center in France, aiming to gather data on their perceptions related to the study's focal points. Subsequently, to gain deeper insights into the organizational strategies and their perceived effects on sustainable consumption, semi-structured interviews with the management team of Emmaus are planned.

For data collection, the methodology involves administering paper-based, self-administered questionnaires at the Emmaus Solidarity Center. These questionnaires begin with preliminary screening questions, progress through sections designed to evaluate the brand perceptions of donors and customers in line with the theoretical framework and conclude with demographic questions and an open section for suggestions to refine the study further.

In the data analysis stage, a comprehensive five-step analytical procedure is planned. This includes employing descriptive statistics to summarize the data, factor analysis to identify underlying variables,

regression analysis to explore relationships between variables, cluster analysis to segment the survey population, and Structural Equation Modeling to construct and test the theoretical model.

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews with the management will elucidate the influence of branding strategies on fostering donor and customer loyalty and their subsequent impact on promoting the circular economy and sustainable consumption practices.

Discussion

This research delineates a comprehensive brand equity model tailored to the charitable non-profit sector, scrutinizing how these burgeoning entities contribute to the circular economy and a culture of sustainable consumption from the perspectives of donors and customers. It posits brand equity as a pivotal strategic asset, enhancing the sector's role in advancing sustainable consumption and the circular economy. The investigation enriches existing brand equity frameworks by offering an innovative view on the role of brand equity outside commercial realms, highlighting its significance for social and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, it explores how brand equity-driven financial stability and operational innovations can amplify the environmental impact of charitable non-profit organizations. As these institutions' brand equity scales up, public favor and consequently, donations and thrift store patronage are anticipated to rise. This increase is expected to expand the institutions' reach and foster widespread adoption of responsible consumption practices among the populace. Such shifts in individual behaviors, especially among younger generations, could catalyze a broader societal behavioral transformation. With the circular economy emerging as a viable alternative to the traditional linear economic model, the practices of charitable non-profits might inspire businesses and institutions, thereby cementing the foundation for a responsible consumption ethos within society.

The findings aim to guide charitable non-profit administrators in forging donor and customer engagement strategies and pioneering operations that align with the circular economy's tenets. For policymakers, the study advocates for incentives that bolster donations and encourage sustainable consumption behaviors. The thrift stores operated by these organizations not only provide consumers with economically viable options and access to unique collectibles but also play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage.

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Curbing confrontation? The tactical repertoires of corporate activism

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Abstract

Companies are increasingly engaged in socio-political issues through corporate activism (CA)— activity where companies take public stances in controversial debates that extend beyond their core business. To make their stances, companies borrow from well-known activist tactics, and thereby choose from repertoires of confrontational and non-confrontational tactics, as activism is a versatile political activity. To investigate what kind of tactics CA currently entails, this systematic literature review analyses 105 articles against a framework of activist tactics from social movement literature. Our preliminary results show that the current understanding of CA implies a narrow view on activism, focused on non-confrontational tactics. This "curbing" of confrontation raises interesting questions for the research field of CA, especially as companies' activism is criticized both for its inauthenticity and whether it actually addresses the most difficult societal issues. Our results contribute to understanding the possibilities and limits of companies' political roles when they engage in activism.

Keywords: Corporate activism, social movement, tactics

Introduction

Driven by the erosion of traditional institutions (Dodd, 2018) and the rising pressure from external and internal stakeholders (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Flight & Coker, 2022), companies are becoming increasingly engaged in socio-political issues through a phenomenon called corporate activism (CA). CA is a company-initiated form of activism where companies take public stances in complex and highly controversial socio-political debates that sometimes extend beyond their core business (Eilert & Nappier-Cherup, 2020). Due to its public and vocal nature, corporate activism is a highly communicative phenomenon. Recent examples of company stances have related to, for example, systemic racism (Hoffmann et al., 2020) and LGBTQ+ issues (Chatterji & Toffel, 2019). While the issues addressed in CA are typically controversial and divisive, it has been shown that CA can lead to backlash or extreme reactions that antagonize stakeholders (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022; Olkkonen & Morsing, 2023), which can challenge some of the traditional wisdom of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication.

In this study, we focus namely on the concept of corporate activism, as opposed to other related concepts such as brand activism and CEO activism. While these concepts overlap with CA, for example, in their

interest in public stance-taking, their highly communicative nature and risk of receiving intense reactions (Cammarota et al., 2023; Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020;

Gulbrandsen et al., 2022), our focus is on companies' public and political activities expressed in CA, and the consequent role of business in society. Essentially, CA not only responds to political pressures, but takes it a step further by proactively putting that pressure back on political actors to influence change (Gulbrandsen et al., 2022). These activities are taken with communicative means such as campaigning or posting statements, and they strive to influence companies' stakeholders, the general public, and policymakers on the path to social change (Eilert & Cherup, 2020; Olkkonen & Jääskeläinen, 2019).

Essentially, in CA activism is not an external force to companies and their CSR endeavors (e.g., Doh & Guay, 2006), but a form of practicing CSR by taking part in socio-political debates. In practice, companies borrow from well-known activist tactics when they make their public stances (Eilert & Nappier-Cherup, 2020; Gulbrandsen et al., 2022; Muller, 2022; Lechterman et al., 2023). However, as explained by social movement literature, activism is a versatile form of political action that can take many forms and include many nuances. Hence, we argue for a need to draw directly from social movement literature to understand what kind of activism we are talking about when we talk about corporate activism, which activist tactics companies currently use (or don't use), and what kind of tactical repertoires activism may offer them in the future.

Theoretical framework/Assumptions

This study utilizes the existing framework of activist tactics in the social movement literature to understand where the CA tactics fall within the wider social movement spectrum. We rely especially on Taylor and van Dyke's (2004) notion of 'tactical repertoires' in social movements, understood as dynamic interactions that link a movement's participants, as well as its opponents and authorities in their course of action to challenge or resist change within groups, organizations or societies at large. Their framework offers various tactics, ranging from non-confrontational to confrontational ones (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004). Non-confrontational tactics refer to tactics that aim to raise awareness, such as boycotts, petitions, or lobbying, whereas confrontational tactics are more disruptive and can include even illegal activities. Below is a summary table of the kinds of social movement tactics and the classification:

Social Movement Tactical Repertoires

Non-confrontational	Confrontational
boycotts, dramaturgy, lawsuits, leafleting, letter-writing campaigns, lobbying, petitions, and press conferences	Sit-ins, demonstrations, vigils, marches, strikes, motorcades, symbolic actions, boycotts of classes, blockades, and other illegal actions such as bombings
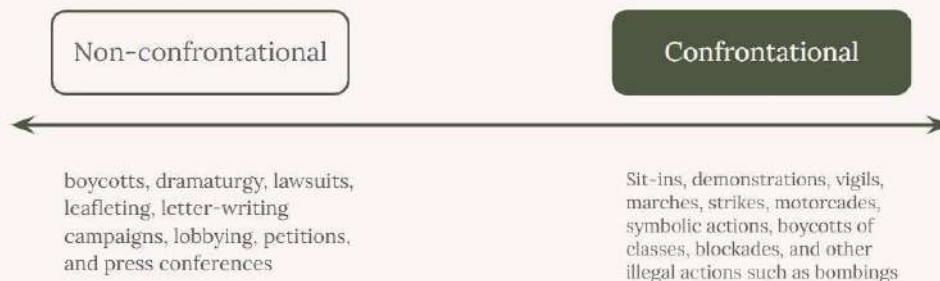
(Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004)

In this study, we conduct a systematic literature review to examine the tactical repertoires of CA against this framework of activist tactics from the social movement literature.

Research methods

The literature for this systematic literature review was gathered from two databases: SCOPUS and Web of Science, and the data collection for the review itself consisted of two main phases in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which activist tactics are currently recognized in the literature of corporate activism?

RQ2: What kind of activism is corporate activism?

The first phase focused on literature specifically on CA, and the second phase was an expanded literature search based on the related terms closely discussed in the first phase's articles.

Phase 1

As CA is an emerging concept and field of research, preliminary search with the keyword "corporate activism" in the title, abstract and keywords was carried out on SCOPUS to see the results that are returned. No time limit to the year of publication was set. The results showed records that involved an unrelated concept: "anti-corporate activism", as well as book chapters and articles in other languages. Therefore, the search term was adjusted to:

Title, abstract, keywords: "Corporate activism" AND NOT "anti-corporate"

Limit to: English, Articles Results:

n=32

The abstract of each record was examined and screened based on the criteria of the article directly looking at the concept of CA and the full articles were available for downloading.

The same procedure was carried out on Web of Science, and the first phase's output was 23 articles.

Phase 2

In phase 2, the articles from phase 1 were analyzed based on their introduction and theory sections to identify the related concepts that describe the same phenomenon. The concepts were listed below, and an expanded search was carried out on SCOPUS and Web of Science. The same screening criteria were applied to this phase 2 search.

Search terms		
Corporate	social	activism
	social-political	advocacy
	socio-political	
	sociopolitical	
	political	

The query string for this phase was as below:

> "corporate social activism" OR "corporate social-political activism" OR "Corporate socio-political activism" OR "corporate sociopolitical activism" OR "corporate political activism"
>
> OR
>
> "corporate social advocacy" OR "corporate social-political advocacy" OR "Corporate socio-political advocacy" OR "corporate sociopolitical advocacy" OR "corporate political advocacy"

After leaving out duplicates and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria (excluding articles on CEO activism and ones that focused on organizations that are not corporations or businesses) for screening, the remaining result was 82 articles. This made the total number of articles that would be used as a sample for this systematic literature review 105.

> *Analysis of CA tactics*

The CA tactics from each article (on-going process) were compiled and categorized according to the social movement literature's categorization. This process has revealed that mostly nonconfrontational tactics are used in CA.

Preliminary findings

Our preliminary results show how companies choose to borrow certain activist tactics from social movements but seem to avoid using others. The tactics of CA currently encompass mostly financial or technical support, or advocacy through their communications (e.g. public company statements, social media posts, advertising, PR, etc.), which are defined as non-confrontational in social movement research, while more confrontational tactics such as taking part in public debates, discussions or protesting, etc., and corporate boycotting (Eilert & Nappier Cherup, 2020) are much less used by companies when engaging in CA. Out of the 23 articles on CA that were currently thoroughly analyzed, 18 entailed non-confrontational tactics, whereas 5

mentioned confrontational tactics. As such, the view on activism in the existing literature of CA seems to be quite narrow and focused on non-confrontation.

Implications

Our preliminary results show that we are talking about a specific type of activism when it comes to corporate activism as a communicative phenomenon. According to our analysis, companies curb confrontation when they choose tactics for their CA and limit their tactics to nonconfrontational forms that can raise awareness about socio-political topics but do not aim to disrupt. These findings can raise interesting questions for the research field of CA, as companies' activism has been criticized both for its lack of authenticity and whether it actually addresses the most difficult societal issues (Branicki et al., 2021). Furthermore, the results also suggest that the current tactics used in corporate activism align quite closely with the reform perspective in the field of sustainable development (Hopwood et al., 2005). This implies that although the companies wish to push for positive change, they are still confined to existing systems– advocating for incremental improvements rather than deeper systematic change (Hopwood et al., 2005).

Understanding the nature of the current tactical repertoires of CA may lay the groundwork for future research to scrutinize how the current tendency in CA impacts and shapes public discourse around socio-political issues and how the public responds (and perhaps even how the more

"peripheral" voices are speaking up in response). Moreover, as a lot of the CA activity mentioned in the literature take place on social media, understanding how companies' activist tactics play out on social media (along with their affordances and hindrances) is also key for future research. Shedding light on this could potentially explain how CA could harness more transformative power for a more deeply sustainable development and world.

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Navigating the tightrope: the balance between objectivity and social responsibility in news media

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Abstract

Purpose: To explore and challenge the prevalent notion that news media supposedly should not and do not take an active stance on social responsibility due to professional standards and traditions of being objective.

Design/methodology/approach: Empirical study based on a mapping of news media house's official communication about their CSR engagement, analyzed via qualitative content analysis, thereby connecting the fields of CSR and journalistic objectivity.

Results: The results will generate new knowledge on the perception if CSR in news media houses.

Implications: By both challenging existing professional norms and theoretically developing the notion of journalistic objectivity as playing a part in news media's work with social responsibility, we present a path forward for news media to take social responsibility.

Keywords: News media social responsibility, democratic debate, polarization, journalistic objectivity, activism.

A configurational analysis of business attacks to human rights and environmental defenders

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Framing of the research

Evidence of killings or other abuses against human rights or environmental defenders (hereinafter "defenders") is on the rise (Scheidel et al., 2020). Extant statistics have documented thousands such abuses across the world, which generally manifest in the form of violations of defenders' physical integrity (e.g., torture, disappearance or abduction, rape or sexual abuse), or as non-physical attacks, including e.g., judicial harassment, violation of freedom of movement, freedom of expression and freedom of association, strategic lawsuits against public participations (known as SLAPPs).

While defenders are often considered marginal actors for strategic decision-making, their attacks relate to research on nonmarket strategies focusing on ways to manage stakeholders to avoid social conflicts with communities, which is needed because conflicts cause disruptions and delays that increase operational costs (Oh et al., 2020), lower market value of operations (Henisz et al., 2014), cause reputational damages (McDonnell & King, 2013) and, for international firms, they may even bring investors to withdraw projects (Bruijn et al., 2024). Earlier research in this camp has examined multiple ways in which conflicts can be reduced, for instance, via binding companies with communities through community benefits agreements (Dorobantu & Odziemkowska, 2017), or through collaborating with nonmarket stakeholders to reduce contention (Odziemkowska & McDonnell, 2023).

CEOs are key influential actors in reducing conflicts (Briscoe et al., 2014): despite being seldom directly involved in the specific disputes, they feature as "the face of the firm" for which they are "uniquely positioned to manage activist pressure and other stakeholder evaluations" (Neville, 2022, p. 45). The literature on CEOs responses to social activism is limited. To the best of our knowledge, scholars have mostly examined CEOs public statements in response to activists' pressures (Neville, 2022) and the consequences of social influence tactics on stakeholders' evaluations of the firm (Gomulya & Mishina, 2017), while more recently this literature has evolved into examining forms of CEO activism, where CEOs publicly take a stance on salient political, environmental or social debates (Wowak et al., 2022). While all these studies reflect the strategic importance of CEOs' reaction to activism, in most cases the CEOs response merely consists in an "act of communication"(Hambrick & Wowak, 2021, p. 34), a verbal response or a statement to pacify contentious opinions. This literature has instead overlooked non-verbal corporate responses to activists, such as attempts to silence them off through intimidation or violent attacks.

Purpose of the paper

Our study fills this gap by examining the conditions underlying the emergence of (more or less) violent ways to silence defenders. We ground our study on a combination of upper-echelon (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) and social movement (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977) theories and adopt a configurational theorizing approach, which exploits CEO heterogeneity along three observable dimensions - their age, whether they are founder CEOs and their post-graduate training in business studies – to predict the principal modalities through which defenders can be silenced-off in the case of a conflict. Inspired by classifications used in the specialized literature on human rights and environmental defenders (Olsen, 2023), we distinguish between two principal modalities to silence-off defenders, namely attacks to their physical integrity (including killings, abductions, beatings and torture, and forced displacement); and non-physical attacks (including legal actions, unfair trial, violation of freedom of movement and of association). An essential difference between physical and non-physical attacks, is that the former may carry higher penalties for firms and CEOs, which interferes with the latter interest in ensuring a profitable outcome and in avoiding reputational harm. Killings and threats to individuals' physical integrity constitute violations of hyper-norms or core human rights that are "fundamental to human existence" (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994, p. 265) and for this reason they are likely to mobilize strong negative sentiments among stakeholders and be a source of psychological discomfort for managers and CEOs. Involvement in such abuses can lead to reputational harm for companies, which in turn has repercussions on shareholder prices (Chatterji & Toffel, 2010), and investors' trust (Hersel, 2022). In contrast, non-physical attacks are less susceptible to these reactions as they involve modalities that are more easily acceptable by a wide variety of stakeholders.

To enrich theoretical understanding of attacks against defenders, we also focus on their characteristics, namely the domain (i.e., whether their goal is the protection of the environment or human and worker rights), the organization (i.e., whether they act as individual defenders or they are backed up by an organization) and visibility of their activism (i.e., whether they are social media active) which we consider because they are among the most prominent elements observable by CEOs and corporate leaders facing defenders' activism (Nah et al., 2013; Scheidel et al., 2023). As explained later, these characteristics are likely to elicit reactions for CEOs, who need to strike a balance between meeting economic goals (e.g., avoiding disruptions in corporate operations) and their social license to operate locally (Idemudia, 2009). In addition, we suggest that the institutional quality of the country of the abuses acts as a boundary condition to the outcome.

Methodology

In our analysis we draw on an original dataset built based on the available knowledge about attacks to defenders occurred between 2015 and 2020. We developed this dataset via manual coding of information retrieved through Business and Human Rights Resource Center (BHRRC), which in 2015 has introduced a specific program to track attacks against defenders. To complement and double check the available information, we consulted additional sources (e.g., Frontline Defenders, Amnesty International, protectdefenders.eu). Our final database includes only cases in which a defender is clearly attacked by representatives of a company or a government operating in collusion with that company (directly or through a third-party actors). For each abuse, we reported: (a) a brief

description of the abusive event; (b) the year when it occurred; (c) the country where it occurred; (d) the name of the defender; (e) whether the defender belongs to an organization (NGO, association, etc.) or operates individually; (f) the type of the abuse; (g) the name of the company(ies) involved in the abuse. We employed two independent coders to ensure a consistent coding process and recruited an independent human rights law expert to advise and cross-validate our coded information on the type of violation.

Our outcome variable Physical integrity abuse is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 if the defender is victim of a physical integrity abuse, the value 0 otherwise.

In line with the theoretical framework, we measure Defender environmental domain with a variable that takes the value 1 if the defender activism is on environmental issues, the value 0 when the activism concerns human/worker rights; Organized defender to distinguish whether the defender's activity is carried out as a member of an organization (1), or the defender acts as individual (0); and we proxied the social media activism of a defender (Defender social media activism) considering whether (s)he has a Twitter/X account (1) or not (0). We measure CEO age as the age of the CEO at the time of the attack against the defender; Founder CEO accounts for whether the CEO is also the founder of the company (1) or not (0). CEO post-grad business education takes the value 1 if the CEO completed an MBA or a PhD in business studies and the value 0 otherwise. We measure the degree of institutional quality of the country where the attack against the defender has occurred (Country institutional quality) using the Freedom House Civil Liberties Score.

We analyzed our data using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Following established practice in QCA studies, the first step requires to separate membership in the condition (1) from non-membership in the condition (0) and identify meaningful grouping of cases (i.e., calibration) (Ragin 2008). Since five conditions are coded either as absent (0) or present (1), they do not need to be calibrated. The other two conditions (i.e.,

Country institutional quality and CEO age) need to be calibrated. We used a three-level scale where a score of 0 represents full non-membership of a set, a score of 1 represents complete membership of a set, whilst a score of 0.5 represents the point of "maximum ambiguity" (Ragin, 2008). To calibrate Country institutional quality, we combined the methodology used by Freedom House and the distribution of the variable. We set the full membership score at 2 since Freedom House defined as "free" countries (corresponding to the highest level of institutional quality) with a score of 1 or 2; the full non-membership score was set at 5 (value at the 75th percentile of the variable distribution) while the cross-over point at 3 (value at the 50th percentile of the variable distribution).

The variable CEO age was calibrated based on a quartile split of the sample: CEO that are in the top 75th percentile (i.e., 62 years) represent full members, the 50th percentile value (i.e., 58 years) is considered the cross-over point, and those in the bottom 25th percentile are full non-members (calibrated as 0).

As second step, we conducted necessity analyses to establish whether the presence or absence of any single causal condition was necessary for our outcome. We used the standard criteria in the literature, that is, high levels of coverage and a consistency value of at least 0.9 (Greckhamer et al., 2018). We found no causal condition meeting the criteria, suggesting that none of the causal conditions or their negations are necessary for our outcome to occur.

The third step of QCA consists in the construction of the truth table which is the list of all logically possible combinations of causal conditions. Since we were considering seven causal conditions, the truth table produced 27 combinations. We deleted the combinations of causal conditions not associated with any observations in the dataset. We followed standard practice and also excluded configurations associated with our outcome that consisted of single cases (Greckhamer et al., 2018). We specified a threshold for the consistency measuring the degree to which a combination of causal conditions is reliably associated with the outcome variable (Ragin, 2008) of 0.95.

Results

The QCA analysis reveals that the occurrence of a defender's physical integrity abuse can be the outcome of four unique configurations of factors, shown in Table 1. We follow the notation applied by Fiss (2011) and subsequent research, where ▪ represents the presence of a condition, represents its absence, and a blank space indicates a "don't care" situation, meaning that a given condition can be either present or absent. Table 1 reports also consistency and coverage scores for each configuration and for the overall solution for the outcome.

Configuration 1: This is the case of a physical integrity abuse against an individual environmental defender with no social media activity protesting in a country with weak institutional quality. These are ideal conditions for companies to attack defenders as these individuals are in the most vulnerable conditions: they operate in a risky domain (i.e., environmental conflicts); they are not supported by an organization, which we interpret as a condition where they lack assurances and protection against the abuses; furthermore, they lack social media visibility, which lessens the chances that the attack is broadcasted to wider audiences, damaging the reputation of the company and the CEO. In addition, although in this case we had no a priori expectation, the defender's activism is in a country that has limited capacity to ensure their protection from attacks. These conditions can be ideal to enhance the chances of impunity of companies and to limit the losses tied to reputational or litigation costs. Interestingly, in this configuration the CEO is young, consistent with our expectations but, unlike our predictions, the condition of being a founder is not relevant, while, in this configuration, the CEO does not have a post-graduate training in business studies, which means that this additional condition was not needed to reach the equifinal output.

Configuration 2. This is the case of a physical integrity abuse against an environmental defender. In this case the defender works with an organization and has social media visibility through Twitter/X. The defender's activism is in a country with weak institutions. As compared to Configuration 1, the common condition is that the country where the activism takes place is unlikely to protect the defender from attacks, although here the defender has some additional guarantees, such as the backup of an organization and his/her presence on social media – aspects that do not appear to act as deterrents for corporate actors. In this case companies are led by a young CEO, who is not the founder of the company and has a post-graduate education in business studies.

Configuration 3. This is the case of a physical integrity abuse against a defender of human/workers' rights. The defender is part of an organization, which in our baseline prediction should act as a deterrent for physical integrity abuses, but has no social media visibility in Twitter/X. In this configuration, the defender activism is in a country with poor institutional quality. Some conditions – the defender's lack of social media visibility and the poor institutional environment – create a

relatively favorable context for physical integrity attacks to occur. Here we observe a young, non-founder CEO holding a post-graduate degree in business studies.

Configuration 4. This is the case of a physical integrity abuse against a labor defender, who is part of a labor organization. The CEO of the company involved is old, he/she does not hold a post-graduate education in business studies, and he/she is not a founder CEO. The defender is not active on social media and the protesting activity is carried out in a country with a relatively strong institutional quality.

Tab. 1: Configurations of physical integrity abuses

	Configuration 1	Configuration 2	Configuration 3	Configuration 4
Defender environmental domain	•	•	⊗	⊗
Organized defender	⊗	•	•	•
Defender social media activism	⊗	•	⊗	⊗
CEO age	⊗	⊗	⊗	•
CEO founder		⊗	⊗	⊗
CEO post-grad business education	⊗	•	•	⊗
Country institutional quality	⊗	⊗	⊗	•
Raw coverage	0.09	0.01	0.01	0.03
Unique coverage	0.09	0.01	0.01	0.03
Consistency	0.96	1	0.96	0.99
Solution coverage: 0.13				
Solution consistency: 0.97				

Contributions

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. It extends nonmarket strategies research by examining stakeholder management under extreme conditions where the silencing-off of activists is the preferred choice to address conflicts in the short run. We exploit a novel database to examine the configurations that are more likely to elicit violent attacks to defenders to continue operations. In so doing, we open a new area of inquiry on firm-community conflicts, focusing on the victims of attacks rather than on corporate strategies to handle conflicts peacefully and collaboratively (Olsen, 2023). Second, we contribute to the literature on CEO interactions with activists (Neville, 2022; Pless et al., 2022). While extant research focused on verbal reactions to

activists (Li et al., 2023), and on how such responses affect corporate reputation (McDonnell & King, 2013)or performance (Carberry et al., 2019) we provide a profiling of CEOs who can end up involved in (more or less) violent silencing-off modalities of defenders' activism, conditional on other characteristics. In this way our study responds to calls by management scholars asking for more research examining the impact of business activities on society (Margolis & Walsh, 2003) and, moreover, by exploring how heterogeneous corporate actors like CEOs influence the silencing-off modalities differently, we challenge the conception of corporate actors as "bad actors" by default held in allied disciplines by environmental justice researchers (Scheidel et al., 2023), hopefully opening up opportunities for interdisciplinary research.

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Dispersed public debates after brand activism: Responses to Oatly's controversial 'Milk Myths' campaign

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Abstract

In this article, we examine a public framing contest in the Nordics, perpetuated by a campaign by Oatly, a well-known activist brand that advocates for sustainable alternatives for dairy production and consumption. Theoretically, we approach brand activism as a form of corporate political activity (CPA) that seeks to drive societal change. Our versatile dataset consists of 47 news articles and 4,040 social media posts about the public debate that followed the campaign. The results reveal that the campaign invoked very different perspectives, not only on the campaign, its claims and legitimacy, but further on what matters and who is assigned responsibility. The study extends research on brand activism by explaining brand activism as a form of CPA where lobbying is, firstly, done very publicly in the media space, and secondly, aiming to mobilize consumers to drive a societal change that would also benefit the company.

Keywords: Brand activism; Corporate political activity; Framing

Introduction

Companies that engage in brand activism often initiate public debates by taking a stand on controversial issues that are known to divide people and opinions (Bhagwat et al. 2020; Olkkonen & Morsing 2023). Companies can thus seek to gain visibility for their ideas and ethical stands arguing that their goals are in alignment with some ideas of the common good (Murray & Nyberg 2021). Murray and Nyberg (2021, p. 1632) call this strategy frame alignment: making one's "social construction of reality appear congruent with the interests of the target audience for mobilization". In this way, brand activism can be considered as a form of corporate political activity (CPA) whereby companies aim to influence the political environment surrounding them (Katic & Hillman, 2023; Nyberg & Murray, 2020; Yates, 2023). However, as shown in this article, these attempts can also prompt societal debate and a framing contest between actors who have different interests and draw on different ideas about what matters, what a given situation is about, and who can take action, seeking to steer public opinion in their favor (cf. Murray & Nyberg 2021).

In this article, we examine a public framing contest in the Nordics, perpetuated by a campaign by Oatly, a well-known activist brand that advocates for sustainable alternatives to dairy production and consumption (Koch, 2020; Ledin & Machin, 2019; Levitt, 2017). As shown in this study, in 2020 it "managed to raise tons of noise and debate" in Finland with its Milk Myths campaign (Oatly n.d.), in which the company publicly busted 20 milk-related claims. The campaign was executed via newspapers, outdoor advertising, campaign website dedicated for the campaign (maitomyytit.fi), video ads on social media, and a printed booklet sent out to around 250,000 households with

children in the age group of 6-12. In the campaign, each presented myth was busted with arguments against it motivated by various research papers, reports by governmental bodies and research that Oatly had ordered from an independent third party, highlighting the benefits of plant-based options such as oat milk, as a healthier and more environmentally friendly option. Simultaneously, Oatly seemingly attacked the Finnish dairy industry and the way it has been allowed to advertise cow milk to Finns over the years. The campaign led to an official notice from the Chamber of Commerce for advertising against good practice and using children's gullibility to Oatly's benefit (Chambers of Commerce, 2021) and was largely debated in the public arena and in the media.

As shown in this article, the campaign invoked very different perspectives, not only on the campaign, its claims and legitimacy, but further, on what matters, who is assigned responsibility, and how we should organize our societies. We examine the public framing contest that followed the campaign, in which Oatly attempted to leverage media coverage (Murray & Nyberg, 2021) as well as social media and the attention economy to impact regulatory decisions in their favor.

In this way, Oatly engaged in the politics of sustainability (Levy et al., 2016) but also actively initiated a public debate about the role of milk in Finnish breakfast tables, school cafeterias, and in the local economy within the broader conversations about what is considered fair and right. The debate that followed the Milk Myths campaign focused partly on the claims about climate and health impacts of milk consumption made in Oatly's campaign materials but partly also on the overall role of business in society - whether it is acceptable or not for companies to engage in this type of debate. These events led us to ask: How are the frames of brand activism challenged in public after the stance?

Brand Activism as Corporate Political Activity (CPA)

Brand activism has been defined as companies' public stances on debated or partisan sociopolitical issues, for example, in support of social, environmental, or political change (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Burbano, 2021; Gulbrandsen, Just, & Uldam, 2022; Jungblut & Johnen, 2021; Rivaroli, Spadoni & Bregoli, 2022; Sibai, Mimoun & Boukis, 2021). Brand activism can increase brand visibility but also function as a form of 'outside' corporate political activity, in which corporations use media to influence political decision-makers and shape public policy (cf. Murray & Nyberg, 2021). Whereas activists have long used media and communication strategies to advance various causes (Bennett, 2017), activist brands such as Oatly (Koch, 2020) may use media in a similar related way to gather support for a cause, with the important difference that they are powerful actors themselves. Corporations that engage in activism may have easier access to media, but the sincerity of their activism can also be examined critically (e.g., Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Brand activism can trigger public debates in which companies, activists, politicians and individuals alike seek to get their preferred agenda and message visible in newspapers and on social media conversations. Due to the partisan nature of brand activism (Moorman, 2020), campaigns often evoke strong emotions in consumers (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) and other stakeholders, igniting fierce public debates about the legitimacy of the brands' viewpoints. It's natural for a brand's stance on these societal causes to have the potential to trigger critical, negative, or even aggressive

reactions from consumers, partners, and employees who do not align with the firm's actions (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022).

These debates occur in newspapers and other journalistic content but simultaneously in social media and digital platforms. Here, different social groups take part in public framing contests, in which they compete to get their frames, that is to say a certain understanding of a phenomenon, across in the public sphere (Ihlen & Nitz, 2008; Murray & Nyberg, 2021). Framing is a way to assign responsibility - establishing a dominant field frame successfully attributes the responsibility to a certain target actor after the contestation (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015). Kaplan (2008) as well as Murray and Nyberg (2020, 2021) have shown how actors engage in framing to mobilize action in their favor, for example by (re)aligning frames in ways that resonate with the audience. Two such ways have been shown to include drawing on claims of truth ("truth-claims") and normative claims of what is considered fair and right ("rightnessclaims") (Nyberg & Murray, 2020, p. 591).

Method and Data

To examine how different social groups engage in framing contests in a brand activism induced controversy, we set out to examine frames in the public dispute over the ethics of milk consumption building on the pragmatic sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). The framework provides a toolkit to examine plural and competing normative approaches to controversial and complex issues. The typology has been applied in past research that has examined the moral multiplexity in organizational settings (Cloutier et al., 2017; Demers &

Gond, 2020; Dey & Lehner, 2016; Lehtimäki et al., 2011; Gond et al., 2016; Patriotta et al., 2011; Shin et al., 2022; Wright & Nyberg, 2022). Extending this research, we set out to identify the different and co-existing frames that different actors bring up in their ethical deliberation.

The initial data set consists of newspaper articles (N=47) and social media posts (N=4040). In the social media data, we limited our focus to posts published between 25 October 2020 - May 2021. Using claims as a unit of analysis (Frig & Sorsa, 2020; Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016), we first extracted claims from the collection of newspaper articles. Claims are understood as acts made in public and can be a statement in a newspaper or on social media (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016). Further, we removed duplicate posts (retweets) as well as posts that were unclear or difficult to understand, from the data set. In total, 324 claims were discovered in the journalistic material and 1549 on social media. The posts were made on the social media platform X (Then Twitter).

In practice, for each claim in the research material, we assigned codes to the following: content, justification, and position: if the claim was objecting, supporting or neutral to Oatly's campaign. In the analysis of claims presented in newspaper articles, we also assigned codes for the speaker and addressee (Frig & Sorsa, 2020; Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016).

Our study shows how the campaign engaged with several different understandings of the common good and sparked intense debate about broader topics such as the ethics of milk and dairy consumption in society, as shown next.

Preliminary Findings

The data reveals that according to Oatly, the company aimed to spark a discussion about milk, milk myths, and its impact on the climate. However, the debate that followed concentrated not only on

(1) the role of milk in the sustainability transition - as intended - but moreover on (2) the perceived responsibility of Oatly and (3) healthy and ethical food more generally. In addition, the heated societal debate, labeled as "the milk war", became a topic in itself.

The role of milk in the sustainability transition
The Milk Myths campaign sparked discussion on the role of milk in Finnish society, schools, and daycares, drawing primarily on the domestic, market, and civic value regimes (Thévenot et al., 2000). Many agreed with Oatly's argument that the dairy industry's strong presence in institutions and official nutritional guidelines does not reflect modern requirements. This view is perpetuated by the dairy industry's prominent advertising targeted to children and by the European Union subsidies that favor the industry.

Still a very relevant wake-up call, even though it was initiated by Oatly. I hadn't heard of the school milk subsidy before, but I think it's a ridiculous subsidy that distorts the market (and the nation) and mainly benefits Valio. (Tweet)

Since the Milk Myths campaign explicitly purported to bust myths and, in this way, reveal the truth and break taboos, the campaign indeed caused a closer examination of the offered truth-claims (Nyberg & Murray, 2020). For example, the biggest local newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (Jokinen & Malmberg, 29 October 2020) did a fact-check on the offered claims – whose facts were also questioned. For example, an "online magazine for green thinkers", then offered a "fact-check on the fact-check" (Verde, 19 November 2020). The campaign thus prompted debates over truth-claims as well as over rightness-claims, as the dairy industry's dominance in society was deemed unfair and unsustainable.

The perceived responsibility of the activist brand
While the arguments presented in Oatly's Milk myths campaign did spark debate and deliberation, most of the debate focused on the perceived responsibility of Oatly: combining civic and market orders of worth. Namely, instead of discussing the arguments in the campaign, citizen-consumers often criticized the activist brand for its connections to Blackstone Group, a global investment group that is linked to deforestation in the Amazon and known to support the Trump administration in the United States. Oatly responded to the criticism by publishing a statement, in which it justifies accepting the investment arguing that they need funding to continue to grow in the most sustainable way possible:

Our idea was that if we could convince them that investing in a sustainable company like Oatly would be profitable (and in the long run even very profitable), other private equity firms would also wake up and start directing their USD 4 trillion of capital into green investments. (Oatly, 2020)

Thus, Oatly was criticized due to its part-owners, but also for irresponsible marketing: in particular, the campaign was heavily criticized for provoking confrontation with the dairy industry, as well as

for advertising to children. Oatly rejected these claims and also called attention to the prominent milk advertising to young kids:

What's interesting is that if our efforts to reach parents are considered unethical, how should we deal with the type of advertising that the dairy industry has invested in for decades, targeting children in schools?" says Linda Nordgren from Oatly Communications. (Vaittinen, 5 May 2021)

Here, truth-claims are concerned with consumers exposing the responsibility of Oatly's business. This frame is loaded with normative claims of rightness, with consumers blaming the brand for irresponsible behavior and Oatly defending its strategy to enable a sustainability transition globally.

Healthy and ethical food
Oatly's campaign further sparked societal debate for and against plant-based diets, drawing on value regimes within and beyond the 'orders of worth' conceptual framework. Namely, the data includes numerous debates on dietary choices based on values such as health benefits, climate impact, animal rights, and domesticity. As Oatly states its aim is to "slow down or even stop climate change" (Perttula, 29 October 2020) and emphasizes that "the carbon footprint of Finnish milk is 327% higher than that of our oat drink", the campaign caused debate on the climate impact of different diets as a reaction to the bold claims.
However, it also prompted a fierce debate and brought up opposing viewpoints on healthy diets, as consumers defended and objected to different arguments concerning the health benefits of milk consumption. For example, the ingredients in oat milk were closely inspected and advocates of dairy consumption often associated cow milk with concepts like "realness" and "naturalness".

This debate is characterized by the polarized public discourse on social media, where "alternative facts" struggle to gain visibility. Accordingly, these diverse truth-claims support different viewpoints on what is considered fair and right, and how Oatly's arguments resonate with local traditions and values.

Implications
Our analysis shows that the initial framings made by the company at the start of brand activism are challenged in public after the stance is made. These framing contests touch upon broader topics than the focus of the activist brand campaign and revolve also around the company's societal role and its legitimacy. Theoretically, we contribute to brand activism literature by explaining brand activism as a form of CPA where lobbying is, firstly, done very publicly in the media space, and secondly, aiming to mobilize consumers to drive a societal change that would also benefit the company. Furthermore, the study offers insight on how activist campaigns disperse to multiple simultaneous debates and call for follow-ups from the company on many fronts. Our results can thus also offer guidance when companies are launching their activist campaigns and help to prepare for the debate(s) that follows the stance-taking phase.

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Extending a Formative Perspective on Sustainability Communication: Introducing Trans- and Counterformative Speech Acts

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Abstract

Short Abstract: In this conceptual piece, we propose an extension of a formative perspective on sustainability communication by introducing trans- and counterformative speech acts. Different to established types of speech acts such as commissives, directives, or declaratives, trans- and counterformative speech acts achieve their formative potential not from mutual constitution and enforcement of the semantic and pragmatic dimension of an utterance, but from an exploitation of contradictions between these dimensions. We posit that a better understanding of trans- and counterformative speech acts is crucial given the pressing need for socio-ecological change. We illustrate our argument with examples from the field of heterodox economy, protest, education, and arts for sustainability.

Keywords: CCO, formative approach, speech act theory, sustainability communication, sustainable communication

Due to the pressing need for socio-ecological change, research on sustainability communication has argued that the scope of analysis must extend beyond the communication of, about, and for sustainability. To not get stuck in one of these dimensions – in either studying strategic, rather functionalist communication of sustainability or ESG (e.g., promotion, reporting), public discourse about sustainability (e.g., media coverage, public debate), or researching participatory communication for social change (e.g., social movements, corporate activism) – scholars increasingly advocate to focus on forms, dynamics and, thus, the character and dimensions of "sustainable communication". Sustainable communication is approached as communication that can transform the pragmatic conditions and future presuppositions in which it operates (Weder & Erikson, 2023). Scholars who consider communication as constitutive for organization(s) (CCO) have addressed a related issue in their plea for a "formative" perspective on communication in the neighboring domain of CSR research (Schoeneborn et al., 2020). This scholarship draws on speech act theory and pragmatism to critique a merely representational view of communication and the prevailing distinction and divergence between talk and action in the context of CSR. Based on that, these scholars argue that communication should be considered performative, i.e., a form of action in its own right (Christensen et al., 2013). Looking at corporates and the ways they articulate their responsibility towards the society, the CCO-scholarship thus goes beyond studying the relationship between responsible action and communication, and vice versa (i.e. "walk the talk; talk the walk").

Much more, it is interested in phenomena where responsible communication and action are simultaneous, mutually constitutive, and enforcing (i.e., "t(walk)ing", see Schoeneborn et al., 2020). In this respect, formative reasoning in CSR research provides a valuable reference point to reflect on how sustainability communication can become sustainable: Firstly, formative reasoning highlights the genuine ability of communication to "talk into existence" (Hoffmann, 2018, 668) issues of relevance for social responsibility and sustainability. In that, secondly, formative reasoning places particular attention on how communication can give voice to issues of concern previously unheard and thus to mobilize corporate action towards what "a situation calls for" (Cooren, 2020, 176). Thirdly, a formative perspective offers an interesting take on the temporal capacity of communication by highlighting how aspirations of social responsibility and sustainability can shape corresponding action by raising scrutiny to live up to them (Christensen et al., 2013, 2021).

Established Speech Acts in Formative Scholarship

So far, formative CSR scholarship, in its concrete application of speech act theory, has predominantly focused on three well established types, each of which treats communication as performative in the strict sense of talk as action – therewith emphasizing the simultaneous and self-enforcing co-constitution of the semantic meaning and pragmatic conditions of an utterance (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1975): (a) declaratives, in case of which communication sets a new social fact (e.g., by formal declaration and authorization of a particular issue of concern to CSR), (b) directives, in case of which communication mobilizes action into a particular direction (e.g., by promoting and deciding on behalf of what taking social responsibility in a concrete situation calls for), and (c) commissives, in case of which communication promises and commits to future action (e.g., by articulating an aspiration of future social responsibility). The focus on these three established speech acts is understandable given that formative CSR scholarship predominantly has in mind the pragmatic conditions of corporate communication contexts. These contexts privilege speech acts with an emphasis (a) on how authority depends on gaining voice and speaking on behalf of a corporate entity (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011); (b) on how communication can mobilize collective action (Kuhn, 2008), particularly in the echelons of management and leadership communication (Tourish, 2013); and (c) on a prevailing temporal ideal of incremental progress towards communicated goals (Savage et al., 2018).

If we turn to the field of sustainability communication and its evolutionary appropriation in the corporate sphere (Golob et al., 2023; Weder, 2023b), we must acknowledge a steady approximation to similar pragmatic conditions in the now dominant framing of sustainability as innovation-driven, progress-friendly, and business-compatible concept (Weder, 2021). We contend that this can be overcome by broadening the perspective towards how sustainability is debated outside the "capitalocene" (Haraway, 2015) and thus beyond the sphere of orthodox corporate and business communication. A related argument in formative CSR research is Christensen's plea for CSR as societal "metacommunication" (2022). A look at public sustainability metacommunication reveals extensive concerns regarding the appropriateness and achievability of sustainability goals within the established business logic, which manifests in corresponding calls for radical revision of this baseline logic (i.e., Angerer & Gramlich, 2020; Frank, 2017). Furthermore, established authoritative speech acts such as declaratives, directives, and commissives, especially when uttered by corporate

representatives, usually provoke immediate hypocrisy and incapacity blaming against self-declared change agents for a sustainable future (Kraemer & Winkler, 2023).

Communicating this future by perpetuating the "smooth talk" of sustainability communication (Pyla, 2012), ultimately, presents the biggest point of controversy, as declarations, commitments, and aspirations of steady progress towards sustainability clash with demands for radical change given the urgency of the situation (Stephens, 2018).

Taking these points of critique seriously raises the question of whether a perspective on sustainability communication in the strict sense of performative speech acts fully captures what makes communication sustainable when broadening the focus towards its societal metacommunication (Christensen, 2022). Hence, in our conceptual contribution at hand, we propose to extend formative reasoning towards speech acts that transcend the established spectrum of declaratives, directives, and commissives and their focus on authoritative, mobilizing, and progressive talk as action – thereby holding on to the idea of a simultaneous, mutually enforcing co-constitution of semantic meaning and pragmatic context. Alternatively, we seek to explore and learn from the formative potential of sustainability communication outside the orthodox business sphere, which much stronger rests on deauthorization, irritation, and "diffraction" (Haraway, 2000) of the prevalent pragmatic context for the sake of sustainability.

Introducing Transformative and Counterformative Speech Acts

To do so, we draw on Epstein's concept of paradoxical speech acts (Epstein, 2015). Epstein considers speech acts paradoxical in case talk neither simply represents the pragmatic context (constatives), nor acts it out (performatives). Rather, paradoxical speech acts stand for types of talk that exploit contradictions between the semantic meaning and the given pragmatic context and, in doing so, seek to alter the latter. In that, paradoxical speech acts present demanding, risky, and future-open forms of communication, as their formative potential does not lie in authorizing and mobilizing action within given pragmatic conditions, but in unsettling these conditions to create space for new.

Epstein distinguishes two types of paradoxical speech acts: Transformatives and counterformatives. Transformative speech acts represent utterances that make it impossible to accept established pragmatic conditions any longer, because the uttered meaning fundamentally changes the mutual perceptions and expectations of all constituents involved. Epstein mentions confessions and revelations (e.g., disclosures of intimate feelings, kinship, or status), discoveries and peripeties (e.g., dramatic turning points such as the recognition of a vocation, fate, or conversion) or semantic paradoxes (e.g., the liar's paradox) as examples. Transformatives carry the risk of a complete dissolution of established relationships and pragmatic conditions. Yet they also hold the formative potential to fundamentally reshape these relationships and conditions.

Counterformative speech acts, in turn, represent "reversed performatives" as they stand for speech acts that "do not perform the actions they describe, but demonstrate their mutual incompatibility, impossibility, or falsity" (Epstein, 2015, 138). Again, their utterance is risky, as counterformatives directly contradict the established pragmatic context and risk immediate de-legitimation. Yet, they also hold the formative potential of gradually "transforming the unknown into the known, the distant into the near, the false into the true, etc." (Epstein, 2015, 139). Epstein mentions examples

of fundamental counterformative utterances (in which uttered meaning runs counter basic pragmatics – to the very possibility of uttering them, e.g., "I am dead"). Yet, the author also reflects on semantically more sophisticated forms, such as provocative, logical, and ironical (self-)refutation (e.g., "we learn from history that we don't learn from history"); semantic animation and personification (e.g., giving voice to the organic, material or spiritual world); and the construction and deconstruction of infinitions (e.g., indefinable concepts central to belief systems and intellectual paradigms as all further concepts derive from them).

Therefore, transformative speech acts gain their formative potential through redefining the pragmatic conditions in which they are conveyed, while counterformative speech acts gain formative potential through deconstructing given pragmatic conditions. In that, transformative speech acts reflect what Weder (2023a) has described as "cultivation of sustainability", while counterformative speech acts reflect her idea of "sustainability by problematization" (Weder, 2022). While the former has an emphasis on communication that successively re-assembles established relational perceptions and expectations for the sake of sustainability, the latter focusses on how communication cracks existing patterns, contradicts and queers established, pre-defined and normalized representations and belief systems on sustainability. Table 1 provides an overview of main features of trans- and counterformative speech acts compared to the so far prevalent focus on directives, declaratives, and commissives as performative speech acts as explained above.

Table 1: Sustainability Communication as Per-, Trans- and Counterformative Speech Act

Type of Speech Act	Performative	Transformative	Counterformative
Examples	Directives, declaratives, commissives	Confessions, revelations, peripety, semantic paradoxes	Contradictions, (self)-refutations, animation, infinition
Talk-Action-Relation	Mutually constitutive and enforcing	Contradictory, yet constitutive (paradox)	Contradictory, yet constitutive (paradox)
Formativity for sustainability	Normalization through authorization, mobilization and progression for the sake of sustainability	Cultivation through risky, future-open reshaping of relational perceptions and expectations for the sake of sustainability	Problematization through risky, future-open, speculative deconstruction of established belief systems for the sake of sustainability

Examples of Sustainable Trans- and Counterformative Speech Acts

In our presentation, we will illustrate the explanatory value of trans- and counterformatives by giving first examples of sustainable communication in the fields of heterodox economy, activism, (higher) education, and arts.

For the field of heterodox business communication, we will focus on the circular economy approach as an example for transformative communication, and de-growth approach as an example for counterformative communication. Both approaches fundamentally contradict the orthodox, highly institutionalized narrative of growth-compatible, innovation driven "sustainable development" in business communication (Sachs, 1999). However, they differ in the way how they challenge the dominant growth imperative. On the one hand, circular economy communication has an emphasis on transformative peripety and conversion of given pragmatic conditions by replacing the ideal of

linear production and innovation (and waste as its consequence) with the idea of circular reuse and sharing instead. This implies a fundamental revision of the relationship between producer and consumer, and it cultivates shared responsibility for sustainability ("it takes two to tango", Shah & Yang, 2023). On the other hand, post-growth communication finds representation in more confrontative, counterformative types of speech acts. These speech acts problematize the defensive walls of the "harmony" and "balance-driven" sustainability narrative maintained by both linear innovation-focused and circular transformative sustainability communication (Weder, 2021; Frank, 2017). This is achieved by refuting the growth imperative and confronting it with its "unthinkable" opposite – the idea of deliberate de-growth and return to past, lower standards of living.

For the field of activism, we will focus on the labels of the two most established social movements – the "for future" label as example for a transformative speech act, and the "extinction rebellion" label (and its offspring "last generation" in Austria, Germany, and Italy) as counterformative example (Buzogány & Scherhaufer, 2022). The self-designation for future (as an addition to a formal date, task, or profession) echoes a transformative confession and vocation. It signals an unequivocal re-prioritization of formal duties for the sake of sustainability. This not only changes the relational perception by formal peers (e.g., schoolmates, colleagues, stakeholders), but it also hopes for animating them to follow the example and become "agents" (Weder & Milstein, 2021) or "natives of social change" (Oliveira, 2022). The self-designation extinction or last generation, in turn, represents an example of counter-formative self-refutation. Here, the "unthinkable" is problematized as an identity marker and therewith brought into the collective consciousness: that this young generation may present the end point of human history, which contradicts to the dominant premise of steady human evolution and progress.

For the field of (higher) education, we will discuss "education for sustainability" as an example of transformative communication, and "un-learning" for sustainability as example of counterformative communication. Both approaches share the conviction that teaching and learning about sustainability and the SDGs must extend beyond designated school subjects, higher education programs, and degrees. Much more, it requires new theories, new methodologies, new pedagogies (Weder, 2022) – debated under the umbrella of education for sustainability (Leal Filho, 2023). Education for sustainability implies a revision of established relational premises and expectations in education settings and the cultivation of new learning spaces. Concretely, this is achieved by confession and conversion – from an authoritative to a conversational voice, from intellect to emotion, and from teacher-centric to transformationfocused didactics, where transformation of individual behavior is not only initiated and stimulated but also actually happens in the created learning spaces (Lozano et al., 2019; Pisters et al., 2020). Un-learning approaches, in turn, rely on counterformative argumentation. They stress the contradictory argument that the only chance to learn for sustainability is un-learning what we know about sustainability first. Concretely, this contradictory request manifests in fundamental contestations of established categories, binaries and abused master narratives like "sustainable development" by deconstructing the groundless infinition of core concepts, on which progress-oriented sustainability approaches rest (Weder & Samanta, 2021).

Our final examples come from the field of arts. In this context, approaches like sustainable art, eco art, environmental art, or "artivism" (Giannachi, 2023) have become increasingly popular in recent years. The two approaches in focus – eco-cultural jamming (Weder & Milstein, 2021) and ecopoetics (Knickerpocker, 2012) representing trans- and counterformatives, respectively – strive for art that goes beyond mere representation of ecological issues and disasters. Rather, these approaches seek to crack established cultural reception patterns for the sake of sustainability. To do so, eco-art and eco-cultural jams aim to creating confusion by public revelation of the unpleasant and repressed negative ecological impact of the current lifestyle of global northern elites and therewith strive for cultivating new behavioral patterns (Weder & Milstein, 2021). Ecopoetics, in turn, focus on counterformative speech acts by fundamental problematization of established ways in which we reflect on how humanity is connected to the material world. This is achieved by semantic (re)animation and personification of ecological phenomena, life cycles, and the planet as such (Haraway, 2015, 2016; Puchner, 2022), which fundamentally challenges the prevalent anthropocentric perspective and facilitates entirely new socio-ecological priorities.

With these examples of trans- and counterformative speech acts, we hope to initiate a debate on new narratives and "string figures" (Haraway, 2020) of sustainability well needed in a "world in crisis", as addressed in this year's CfP of the CSRCOM.

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International Women's Day Incorporated: How communications co-opt & neutralise radical movements

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Introduction

International Women's Day, celebrated each March 8th around the world, can be considered a successful revival of a feminist tradition. For some, it is a reminder of the inequality that still exists, the inequity that still requires fighting. For others, the day is about celebrating women: their successes and power. Increasingly, the day is recognised in the corporate world through panel discussions, keynote speeches by women leaders, and a yearly theme. In 2024, the United Nation's theme was 'Invest in Women'. Yet in organisations around the world, and social media timelines, the theme shared was 'Inspire Inclusion'. A purple-coloured, clearly branded website entitled 'International Women's Day', shares a theme each year; it is the predominant organisation that businesses, schools and other organisations turn to each year. But who governs this organisation? Who runs this website, and who chooses the themes is unclear. How has this organisation become so legitimate that it's theme and messaging eclipses other, more official bodies'? In this paper we argue that 'IWDInc's' specific forms of 'femvertising' (Sterbenk et al., 2022), from visual branding to thematic hashtags, encapsulate 'gender-washing' (Walters, 2022). The co-optation and dominance of this 'IWD Inc' organisation of International Women's Day is symbolic of neoliberal feminism.

Neoliberal Feminism

Feminist scholars have in recent years lamented what has been termed the 'neoliberalisation of feminism' (Prugl, 2015), evident in the deradicalisation of feminist messages for more 'moderate' feminisms (Lewis et al., 2019), the adoption of a narrative of individual success over collective struggle (Fraser, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014), and a privileging of white, middle-class women's needs over others (Phipps, 2020). At the macro-economic level, funding for equity-related programmes and policy work has been diverted from self-described feminist non-governmental organisations to private business, who run CSR-related programmes on gender equality, with varying success (Prugl, 2015). 'Transnational business feminism' (Roberts, 2015) further involves a proliferation of consultancies operating in this space, who work as intermediaries for between smaller NGOs, large corporations and international donor organisations. Emerging work suggests that in some contexts, such as India, this configuration of powerful actors works to reassert nationalistic and traditional gender roles, under the guide of women's entrepreneurship (Guha Majumdar et al., 2024).

In more optimistic tones Grosser & McCarthy (2019) acknowledge the challenges of creeping neoliberalism, but still see potential in feminism and feminists working in corporate spaces, particularly with regard to accessing political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing struggles for gender equity. One example of apparent success is the revival of International Women's Day globally as a day of campaigns and advocacy. Yet amongst the celebrations of the

very-real successes there have been in women's equality, the ongoing structural causes of inequity are often lost amongst the calls for 'empowerment', 'choice' and 'inspiration': symptoms of neoliberal feminism (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

The History of International Women's Day

The history of International Women's Day was already suffused with myths even before the advent of website-enabled cooptation. For many years the feminist tale has been thus: in 1857, women garment workers in New York City hit the streets to protest against poverty wages, 12 hour working days and grievous conditions. They were brutally beaten, arrested and some even trampled in the crowds. The story goes that fifty years later, in memory of these brave workers, International Women's Day was founded to honour their memory and to be a reminder for the radical work needed to fight for women's equity and equality the world over. It's a great story, but unfortunately not a true one. Kaplan (1985) explains how the actual roots of IWD are entwined in socialist history, and this narrative was ignored in favour of a 'more universal' tale of women's struggle, invented in 1955. The original Woman's Day (singular) was closely aligned with socialism: held in 1909 in the United States, and 1911 in Europe, and closely associated with the communist campaigner Clara Zetkin (Kaplan, 1985). Rallies were centred on women's economic empowerment and the importance of political freedom. During World War 1 hundreds of demonstrations across Europe protested against both war and the harsh conditions it was creating. In 1917 the IWD protest sparked the February revolution in Russia (Goldberg Ruthchild, 2012). In Spain, in 1938 IWD became a mass protest against rising fascism.

Kaplan (1985) history clearly shows how class struggle ran alongside women's fight for recognition for equality, at times these demands clashed as many saw women's suffrage as a separate, secondary fight to working men's revolution. Nonetheless, IWD was born from deeply political roots, encompassing women's fight for political, social and economic equity and equality. It wasn't until the 1960s that International Women's Day (plural) became more aligned with feminism per se. Furthermore, many nations have since adopted 8th March and International Women's Day as a national holiday, with gifts of flowers being commonplace. In 1975, the United Nations adopted IWD, in their inaugural 'Year of the Women'. Today:

The holiday's early links to feminism and suffrage, to socialism and communism, indeed any political connection, have often been clouded in a haze of candy and flowers. But the first decades of International Women's Day celebration were far from sweet, and marked by war, revolution, civil war, and counter-revolution.

In some countries, the radical roots of IWD is still apparent: in South America clashes between women protesting for reproductive rights and police have been frequent, but overall feminist demands have been successful. In Spain, on IWD in 2019 and 2020, huge numbers of women and men campaigned against gender-based violence (Topping, 2023). Yet these interpretations of, and manifestations of IWD are very different from the pink-infused, 'power-woman' marketing adopted by business. IWD offers both a humourous and depressing lens on the phenomenon of 'femvertising' (Sterbenk et al., 2022). Infamous examples include Brewdog's pink-coloured beer, free for women on 8th March, apparently meant to highlight the gender pay gap. This from a business that has since been revealed to cultivate a working culture toxic for the women working

there. McDonalds turned their iconic logo upside down to celebrate IWD: another employer that has been exposed for ignoring the sexual harassment occurring in its restaurants. In other forms of what could be considered corporate hypocrisy around women's equity, each year organisations publicly celebrate women whilst largely continuing to ignore the structural conditions that perpetrate inequity: the gender pay gap, everyday misogyny, and 'organisational housekeeping' that most often falls to women. Ironically, it is often women who are asked to organise IWD events, or speak at them, unpaid.

It is this paper's contention that corporate co-option of IWD, particularly through a mysterious website-based organisation, symbolises how more radical forms of feminism become co-opted.

Case Study: International Women's Day Inc.

On their website, IWD (hereafter IWDInc to differentiate it from the day itself) states "Support for IWD should never be a battle between groups or organizations declaring what action is best or right" (IWD, 2024). This line appears to head off criticism, such as appears here, that IWD has been taken over by any one organisation. Yet, that is exactly what has appeared to have happened. Our intention with this paper is to collect empirical data in the form of documentary data and interviews, which explore:

▪ The ownership and membership of IWDInc. Who works here? Are they employees of other organisations?

▪ The relationship between IWDInc and other organisations who organise around International Women's Day e.g The United Nations.

▪ The relationship between IWDInc and their stated partners on the website.

▪ The legitimacy of IWDInc to set 'the' theme for the annual celebration. Are organisations aware of the contention over this theme?

▪ What has made this theme, and IWDInc's declaration of the theme, so successful to the point that it is accepted? Are there particular choices of marketing communication that may have added to this success?

Through analysis of website data and online interviews our aim is to explore the mechanisms by which IWDInc has at best, adopted International Women's Day as a piece of advocacy, and at worst (and is our contention), has co-opted it as a form of gender-washing and corporate branding. We intend to have collected the first round of data by the time of the CSRCOM conference.

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The Impact of CSA Backtracking on Hypocrisy and Legitimacy Judgment

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Purpose

Over recent years, organisations have increasingly engaged in socio-political discussions by exhibiting their stance and position regarding controversial issues, which can be seen as a form of CSR communication (Pasirayi et al., 2022; Podnar & Golob, 2024). These highly public engagements by organisations are referred to as Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) (Dodd & Supa, 2014) and are typically communicated by the organisation through official statements and other forms of visible communication, such as social media posts (Rim et al., 2020; Parcha & Westerman, 2020). CSA, which shows considerable conceptual overlap with its neighbouring concept of CSR, is frequently employed by organisations to align with the values of stakeholders, including employees (Burbano, 2021), customers (Hydock et al., 2020), and investors (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Organisations, such as Victoria's Secret, Target, and Budweiser, have engaged in CSA through various means, including launching clothing lines for minorities, running campaigns representing minorities, or rebranding their identity towards inclusivity.

In recent years, however, we have also observed how organisations have backtracked from their previous socio-political stance, namely by retreating from or reversing their original stance (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). While initial research and anecdotal evidence suggests that backtracking can lead to substantial backlash from stakeholders (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020), such as in the case of Budweiser, which has stopped supporting transgender rights, other examples suggest that the damage for organisations from backtracking is neglectable, such as in the case of Victoria's Secret that has stopped embracing body diversity. In view of this contradictory evidence, this research aims to investigate the impact of CSA backtracking on stakeholder judgments, particularly judgments of organisational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) and hypocrisy (Wagner, Korschun, & Troebs, 2020). Thus, with our research project, we aim at investigating the nuanced ways in which individuals who are either in support, in opposition, or neutral regarding a specific stance perceive and respond to organisational backtracking from CSA.

Our project aims at contributing to our understanding to a subform of CSR communication (Podnar & Golob, 2024) and non-market strategy, which are used to enhance organisational legitimacy (Mellahi et al., 2016; Nalick et al., 2016). We focus on organisational legitimacy as an outcome which has shown to be important for organisations' survival within a given social group (Suchman, 1995; Díez-Martín, Blanco-González, & Prado-Román, 2021; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). However, socio-political issues are polarising issues that cause divisions of viewpoints within society and debates among stakeholders (Nalick et al., 2016). Thus, in contrast to traditional CSR, CSA invokes polarised reactions. Indeed, issues such as gun control, racism, immigration, reproductive rights, same-sex

marriage, legalising marijuana, and transgender rights are highly polarising in nature and lack societal consensus (Haack, Schilke, & Zucker, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Not surprisingly, CSA can lead to backlash and negative reactions by some stakeholders that might lead organisations to backtrack. Organisations make substantial efforts to avoid backlash, which can lead to boycotts and brand hate (Costa & Azevedo, 2024), due to a perception that organizations are morally corrupt (Ng, 2020). The phenomenon of CSA backtracking, however, is little understood (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020).

Accordingly, the aim of this research project is to explore the intricate relationship between organisational CSA backtracking, the framing of such stances, and the degree to which stakeholders are involved in a particular socio-political issue. Furthermore, we will focus on the role of the cost from the socio-political stance on these relationships. Our research questions are:

1.How does CSA backtracking impact stakeholders' legitimacy judgments, and what is the mediating role of hypocrisy perceptions?

2.How do the cost of the initial stance, the ego-involvement, and the framing of the backtracking influence this relationship?

By analysing how individuals respond to and interpret shifts in socio-political stances, the study aims to offer insights into the key factors influencing hypocrisy perception and organisational legitimacy judgments.

Theoretical Background

Two fundamental theoretical perspectives—Attribution Theory and Social Judgment Theory (SJT)—form the basis of this study. The attribution theory revolves around individuals' perceptions and attributing causes to behaviours and actions (Kelley, 1967), either by external attribution (referred to as situational attribution) or internal attribution (referred to as dispositional attribution) (Kelly, 1967, 1973). In the communication context, audiences attribute causality to one of three entities: the communicator, the external reality that the communication attempts to represent, or the context in which the communication takes place (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The attitudes of individuals are more likely to be negative if they perceive the crisis is internal and can be controlled; however, if the crisis is external and beyond control, individuals would be less negative about the situation (Weiner, 2012). Hence, when individuals perceive that an organisation's backtracking is due to external pressure, they tend to be more understanding.

The second theory that will be used is SJT, which helps to explain how people react to messages based on their existing attitudes and beliefs (Sherif & Holland, 1961). When a message falls within an individual's latitude of acceptance, they agree with it because it aligns with their existing attitudes and beliefs. On the other hand, when a message falls outside an individual's latitude of rejection, it means they disagree with it because it conflicts with their existing attitudes and beliefs. Furthermore, when a message falls within an individual's latitude of noncommitment, it means they do not really have a strong opinion either way (Ledgerwood & Chaiken, 2007; Sung & Lee, 2015). Also, the theory suggests that how much a person is invested in a certain topic, or how important

that topic is to their life and values (egoinvolvement), can influence their perspective on the topic. Essentially, the more a topic matters to an individual, the more likely they are to have a strong opinion about the topic; therefore, the individual will have a higher ego-involvement (Sherif & Holland, 1961).

By combining the two theories, we will develop a framework to hypothesise how individuals perceive the backtracking of an organisation and how it will affect their hypocrisy perceptions and, consequently, legitimacy judgments.

Methods

A mixed method approach will be used for this research, based on qualitative interviews and quantitative online experiments. Firstly, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to gain in-depth insights into the perception of individuals' reactions to backtracking with focus on their hypocrisy judgments and impact on legitimacy judgments. The interviews will offer a detailed understanding of the evaluating factors individuals employ to evaluate organisational backtracking. Through an abductive approach, we will analyse the interviews in drawing on prior literature on legitimacy, hypocrisy, and CSA to form a better understanding of how individuals make sense and judge backtracking from socio-political stances, providing insight into how situations are shaped based on personal views (Riessman, 2008). Based on the interviews and theories, we will then develop our hypotheses.

In the next step, we will test these hypotheses with experiments. This will be done using an online experiment deployed through Prolific. The inclusion criteria for the sample of study encompass all participants who fall within the age range of 18 to 59 years, ensuring a broad representation of perspectives across the adult population.

Established measurement items for the prior identified variables will be used and modified to the context of the study. The items related to the perception of moral and cognitive legitimacy will be borrowed from Bitektine et al. (2020). Furthermore, constructs representing moral hypocrisy and hypocritical attribution will be derived from research by Wagner and colleagues (2020). The ego-involvement items will be based on the McDermott & Lachlan (2020) scale, and we will be using Mayer et al. (2019) economic language to assess. Finally, Simon et al. (2000) items represent the study's perceived cost of the CSA stance.

The participants of the study will be presented with scenarios from X (formerly known as Twitter), showing a post where an organisation declares its socio-political stance by creating an initiative. Afterwards, the subjects will be shown a traditional news account post announcing that the fictitious organisation backtracked from their initiative. The post by the news account will be manipulated for two variables: the cost of the stance, which will be categorised as high or low, and the framing of the message, which will be either instrumental or non-instrumental. By employing this experimental design, we will be able to isolate and observe the interaction between these variables on the subject's perception.

Conclusion

This study aims to investigate whether the organisation's perceived legitimacy is impacted when it announces that it backtracks from a communicated CSA initiative that was initially implemented to

enhance its legitimacy. This is especially significant in light of the growing issues, such as social inequality. Podnar & Golob (2024) stress that organisations must prioritise effective communication when addressing challenges posed by activism and organisations' taken stances. The authors contend that it is crucial for cultivating connections with a wide range of stakeholders and navigating the complexities of activism in the business world (Podnar & Golob, 2024). This research will contribute to our understanding of CSR communication by highlighting the balance organisations must navigate between maintaining their legitimacy and adapting to evolving environments, offering valuable insights on how to frame CSA engagements and what factors might increase or mitigate the negative effects of backtracking. In doing so, this research explores the dynamics of CSR communication against the backdrop of significant global challenges, including those outlined by the UN's SDGs. By delving into the roles of stakeholder involvement, perceived costs of organisations' stance, and organisational strategies in framing CSA, we uncover a complex interplay that deepens our understanding for stakeholder perceptions of organisations' activism. This exploration helps in understanding how these factors influence the effectiveness of CSA strategies, shedding light on nuanced approaches to CSR communication overall.

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Visualising a social dialogue about a thing we might call 'sustainability'

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Problem

The word 'sustainability' is everywhere, it seems. Within the mainstream usage patterns of organisations (e.g. ESG reporting or government policy), the term is most often scientific and environmentally focused – phases such as net-zero, carbon neutrality and scope 1/2/3 emissions dominate. Yet, this standardised discourse masks a different communications environment, one where people living their lives away from the bubble of professionalised sustainability expertise and reporting (i.e. most people) talk about this thing we might call 'sustainability' using related but very different terminologies and language patterns. To date, however, sustainability communication research hasn't dwelled on these more expansive, everyday dialogues regularly.

Background

As planet earth falls further toward numerous climate tipping points, communication concerning the climate crisis and sustainability is no longer a 'niche media topic'. For example, researchers at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford found that, on average, "55% of the public access news and information about climate change on a weekly basis" (Waqas Ejaz, Mukherjee & Fletcher, 2023). In the corporate world, stakeholder communication most regularly responds by allocating a (legally/financially framed) sense of responsibility or by defining related commitments and targets across social, environmental, and economic dimensions. In addition to reporting mandates (e.g. The EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)), these modes of communication weave in the complexities of gaining a social license to operate (Hurst & Johnston, 2021) while creating opportunities to move towards concrete enactments of organisational responsibilities (Christensen et al., 2013). Somewhat ubiquitously, such communication responds to an influential but rather conceptual definition of sustainability/sustainable development concerned with fostering socio-ecological-economic justice for present and future generations (see Brundtland 1987).

In considering such modes of communication, Weder and Erikson (2023) describe communication of CSR and sustainability, which, they contend, is the form of communication addressed most often by sustainability communications research. This framing has been adapted by literature analyses in corporate communication, PR, advertising, and marketing communication (Golob et al., 2023). In this same field, corporate reporting is the most common resource for empirical analysis, which, consequently, focuses on (corporate focused) sustainability issues, strategies, practices, and projects. As a default stance, sustainability is addressed as a predetermined and somewhat fixed concept intractable from related organisational agendas and legacies.

While these communication of CSR contexts are significant, they form only a section of sustainability communication patterns. The linguistic dynamics influencing humanity's movement toward any possible future expand beyond sustainability/ESG reports and corporate webpages and advertising. It is in these broader contexts, Weder and Erikson (2023) have argued, that communication about sustainability takes place.

In dining rooms rather than meeting rooms, in family WhatsApp channels rather than marketing communication channels, a rich social and cultural process is unfolding constantly. People shape and reshape their relationships with this thing we might call 'sustainability' through contestation – conversational debate, reassurances, pronouncements, promises, and such like. While such forms of dialogue might draw upon public and corporate discourse – when people implicitly or explicitly invoke or contest communication of sustainability terminology, concepts, and agendas – they have the capacity to stretch well beyond it. For instance, Lock, Wonneberger and Steenbeek (2024) highlight how divergent conversations materialise across media outlets, corporate communications, and online consumer reviews.

Beyond Lock, Wonneberger and Steenbeck's article, communication about sustainability and thus the issue of how sustainability is negotiated socially is gaining more attention in academic research and communication practice. In the area of sustainability consumption and related behavioural influences, for example, challenges arise when sustainability is interpreted or enacted as a limited, somewhat unchallenged concept – the word itself informing but potentially hindering communication about sustainability (i.e. Vringer et al., 2017; Skitka et al., 2021). Most often, however, research exploring the meaning of sustainability or related linguistic associations employs specific representations of sustainability (Golob et al., 2024), which drastically reduces the analytical field. This narrowing might, for example, happen when a particular search term is used to identify instances of online conversation (e.g. customer reviews mentioning 'sustainability'). To capture a more definitive perspective regarding communication about sustainability, any research design must strive to break free of the epistemological shackles that maintain communication of sustainability as a definitive field of activity.

Despite the obvious requirement to do so, detaching research methods from the limitations of sustainability terminology is a tricky task. How can we understand what sustainability means to people or understand how these variable interpretations might influence people's behaviours without asking people about the 's word' or by looking for such terminology in existing patterns of data? This conundrum demands new theories and new methodologies (Weder, 2022).

Methodology / Study design

This paper offers an analytical perspective regarding communication about sustainability that eschews the limiting potentiality of sustainability as a bounded linguistic concept. Moreover, we demonstrate how socially negotiated semiotic sensibilities can combine with advanced (computer aided) analytics to produce novel ways of interpreting human dialogue. While the specific arguments and data contained within this paper remain unpublished, the work relates to a larger programme of work examining people's relationships with sustainability funded by Accenture (a large consultancy firm), published under the title Our Human Moment.

The ambitions of this paper are a) to develop an articulation of people's varying relationships with sustainability (brought to life as archetypal positionalities conceptualised as Life-centric Archetypes); b) to develop a qualitatively thematic and quantitively measured depiction of how people describe aspirational sustainable behaviours; and c) to visually demonstrate how archetypal positionality serves to influence these descriptions.

The methodology can be conceptualised as three sequential phases of social contestation. During the first phase, a team of professional (i.e. financially incentivised) researchers (including this paper's authors) designed a 20-minute, thirty-five question online survey with a general population sampling criterion. Across the survey, the team set out to explore the notion of sustainability as both an explicit term and a concept related to but stretching beyond the term. Through numerous instances of social contestation – mostly online meetings and live-document editing and commentary – the research team designed a phrase that aims to capture the essence of sustainability without falling prey to its cultural and conceptual baggage. The chosen phrase – to live in a way that considers the impact on people and the planet today and in the future – was used for most of the survey. The word 'sustainability' did not appear until question twenty-eight. The phrase 'sustainable living' is used to denote data stemming from questions that utilised the longer, implicit conceptualisation of sustainability. The topics of inquiry covered by the survey most relevant to this paper are a) sustainable living (including questions relating to behavioural goals, motivations, and barriers), and b) worldviews (including questions relating to people's sense of agency and responsibility, and their dispositions and outlooks).

During the second phase, 8000 respondents representing eleven countries (Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore, South Africa, UK, and US) completed the survey. This paper draws upon data relating to multiple questions, but one is more integral than most:

27.   Please list three things that you would like to do, but are not yet doing, to live in a way that considers the impact on people and the planet today and in the future. [OPEN ENDED, 3 RESPONSES]

Viewing people's answers to this question as evidence of social contestation encourages us to consider the idea that everyone answering the survey will most likely have known or assumed that their answers would be read, seen, and analysed – to some extent, at least. In this light, we might view the individual responses as varying attempts to describe what living sustainably might mean. In an open-ended question format, the potential for reflective and productive writing/response is particularly pronounced. Responses are constructed as a response to the (incentivised) invitation to complete the survey and, as such, as a relationship between the respondent and any entity they might imagine or know to have instigated the invitation and determined question formats. In other words, each respondent is writing or not writing words for the benefit of themselves but also the people/party behind the survey.

During the third research phase, the research team analysed the survey data to produce a series of outputs designed to address project ambitions outlined earlier. First, we produced an articulation of people's varying relationships with sustainability – a series of six archetypal positionalities termed Life-centric Archetypes. The key methods utilised include data modelling (inc. binomial regression analysis) and cluster analysis, utilising sixty-four input variables from the survey design and an

algorithm enabled technique to group (or cluster) respondents according to similarities and dissimilarities of response. This component of the process is addressed in depth in Cracking the code: Life-centric Archetypes for mainstreaming sustainability (Accenture, 2024). Although complex statistical and computer-aided techniques were employed during this process, this paper views this method as another iteration of social contestation. From the exact analytical processes employed through to the naming and descriptions accompanying each archetype, the outputs are evidence of a multi-stage, multi-language creative process.

The second output from this third phase, relates to the ambition to develop a qualitatively thematic and quantitively measured depiction of how people describe aspirational sustainable behaviours. We, as a research team, engaged in another experimental process aided by technology; debating and establishing the relationships between the words and phrases that emanated from the open-ended question mentioned earlier. Most specifically, we used a form of advanced modelling analysis to help us detect the most influential keywords, main language topics, and relationships between these topics. These dynamics were brought to life initially as a data visualisation of every response to the question – a topic modelling approach that produced a network map representation of the text. In this visualisation, the main linguistic topics form interconnected clusters that are linked by strings/relations of text. It becomes possible to see the main topics of conversation and the extent to which they are loosely or closely interlinked with each other. Importantly, this process was digitally/computer enabled but also guided by human decision-making (e.g. in the testing and recalibrating of digitally assumed topic identification). Again, the paper argues that this stage of the multi-phase methodology produced yet another socially contested and constructed representation of this thing we might call 'sustainability'.

The third and final output from this third phase are a series of more granular visualisations of the same data, responding to the ambition to visually demonstrate how people's varying relationships with sustainable living (i.e. archetypal positionality) serve to influence their linguistic behavioural descriptions and aspirations. To produce a series of topic network maps, one for each archetype, we employed computer-aided techniques again, ascribing each respondent to an archetype. Finally, we used a codification and visualisation process to generate six visualisations.

Findings

The six Life-centric Archetypes are named Detached Fatalism, Uncertain Scepticism, Determined Pragmatism, Disheartened Altruism, Self-interested Idealism, and Diligent Optimism. This paper will bring the six Life-centric Archetypes into dialogue with archetype specific datasets that relate to the open-ended question. For the purposes of this abstract, a comparison will be made between two archetypal positions: Detached Fatalism and Diligent Optimism.

Detached Fatalism

As a positionality, Detached Fatalism relates to the belief people can't change the course of events, no matter which choices they make. Detached Fatalism is also a position relatively disconnected from the concept of living sustainably. Relatedly, there is statistically little desire for living in ways that benefit other people and the planet.

We can visualise how respondents aligned with this archetype answered the open-ended question – Please list three things that you would like to do, but are not yet doing, to live in a way that considers the impact on people and the planet today and in the future – with this image:
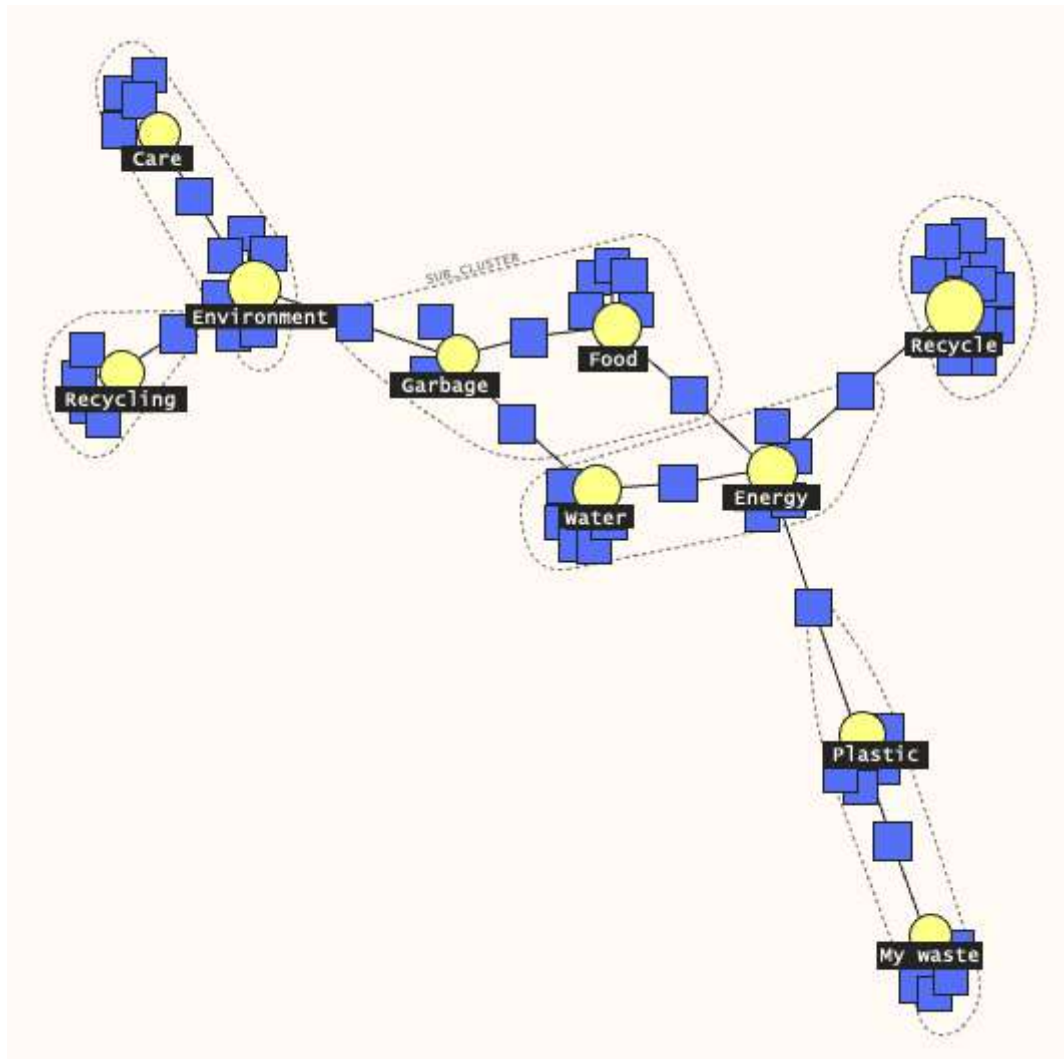
Diligent Optimism

In contrast to Detached Fatalism, the Diligent Optimism positionality relates to the belief that people can change the world for the better. As a positioning, Diligent Optimism is strongly associated with living sustainably and aligned respondents acknowledge a sense of responsibility to build a more sustainable future.

We can visualise how respondents aligned with archetype answered the same open-ended question with this image:
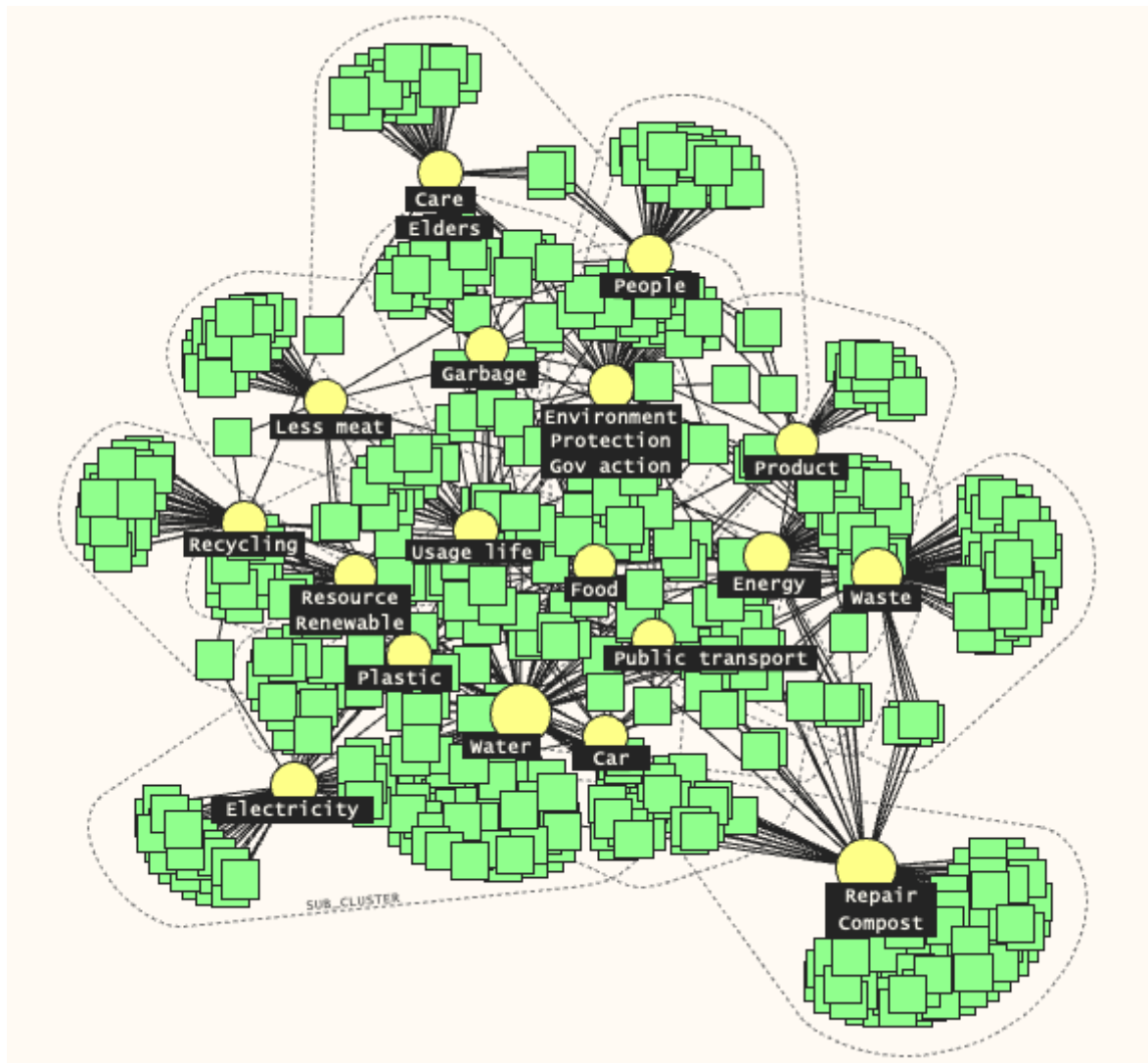
Visualising social positionalities

In addition to the variable language topics, a comparison of the two images reveals variances in quantity of language and complexities of relationship between linguistic topics. Detached Fatalism, as a positionality, is somewhat simplistic in its linguistic depictions – topics are spread apart, linked by relatively few interwoven words and concepts. In contrast, Diligent Optimism, as a positionality, showcases much richer, more divergent and concept laden representations. We glimpse a field of sociality that is more systemic and multi-dimensional, where the people responding to the survey were going to greater lengths to both explain and justify their intended and preferential actions. Respondents perhaps wanted us, the survey reviewers, to understand the lengths they wish to go to live in a way that considers the impact on people and the planet today and in the future.

In showcasing these two network-map visualisations, this paper demonstrates how the complexity of people's linguistic interpretations of, and preferences for 'sustainable action' correlate with their archetypal positionality. The terminology people use and the density of the interrelationships between this terminology is evidence of varying engagements with sustainable living. The images act as social representations of these same engagements.

Implications & Outlook

In the very act of creating visualisations of individual and collective responses to the survey, the research team behind this paper were able to create computer-aided representations of sustainability discourse through contestation – producing a unique perspective of communication about sustainability. Observing the duality of this process – the creative interpretation of thousands of 'original' creative responses to a survey – the authors argue that the linguistic terrain of sustainability must similarly be understood as a shape-shifting act of social contestation and cultural production – a mode of grappling with the existential human condition and its present circumstances.

Seen in this way, the paper presents representations of our continual becoming, which find form not as an outcome of predicted or predicable structures of thought and language but as the outcome of i) a contested survey design process, ii) the creativity of survey respondents, and iii) a socially constructed textual analysis and visualisation effort. In this light, these network-map images illustrate something particular about how people comprehend the human experience (i.e. hopes for people and the planet today and in the future) and the variances and similarities between modes of existence.

By interrogating the language that people employ when not beholden to sustainability as a tightly defined concept, we may well become better placed to counter the post-climate-change era with productive dialogue and conversation. As any organisational effort to communicate with others is 'linguistically loaded' – holding the ability to not only alter people's perspectives and behaviours, but to also shape what is said or not said in the future – such respect for people's differences will remain essential during such an effort.

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Unlocking the Spiral of Silence to Combat Hate Speech in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (AI): A Deliberative Experiment

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Abstract

This study explores the use of AI, specifically the Large Language Model GPT, to counter hate speech by generating and promoting positive posts. The research aims to determine if AI can effectively boost counterarguments against hate speech, potentially reducing its prevalence. The study addresses the contentious debate on combating hate speech through censorship or free speech, proposing a novel approach that leverages AI while preserving open dialogue. By testing hypotheses in a deliberative experiment based on the Spiral of Silence theory, the research seeks to provide insights into responsible business and communication management by platforms in the digital age. The findings could revolutionize the approach to combating hate speech and offer solutions to the challenges associated with AI over-censorship in detecting or censoring hate speech.

Introduction

Hate speech encompasses insults, threats, negative stereotypes, and misinformation (Rieger et al., 2021). It targets individuals or groups based on arbitrary traits, stigmatizes them, and legitimizes hostility towards them (Parekh, 2012). Lately the issue of hate speech has received heightened attention, especially regarding the role of platform organizations managing harmful forms of discourse (Reuters, 2022). However, the debate on combating hate speech through censorship or free speech is contentious (Strossen, 2018). While some scholars propose content moderation and censorship as methods to tackle hate speech, others advocate for the power of free speech and education of users.

In this study, we address the issue of hate speech through the lens of AI, particularly the sophisticated Large Language Model (LLM) GPT. Rather than using the AI for mere detection and censorship of hate speech, our approach focuses on generating and promoting positive posts using AI. With this rationale in mind, our study poses the question: Can an LLM effectively boost counterarguments against hate speech, ultimately leading to a reduction in its prevalence?

If our findings prove promising, they could revolutionize the approach to combating hate speech by leveraging AIs while preserving open dialogue. This is particularly important as previous studies have highlighted the technical challenges of over-censorship associated with AI when they are used to detect or censor hate speech (Alkhamissi & Diab, 2022; Mehta & Passi, 2022; Meske & Bunde, 2023; Thiago et al., 2021). This clearly brings important implications of the social implications of AI,

creating insights in and around responsible business and the management of communication by platforms in a digital age.

Using the Spiral of Silence theory (Neumann & Petersen, 2004; Neumann, 1979) – which suggests that individuals participating in public deliberation self-censor when they perceive the majority opinion differs from their own opinion – this study develops hypotheses tested through a 1-single factorial deliberative experiment. In these experiments participants are asked to play the role of either 'supporters', 'neutral' users or 'hate' users on the basis of which they interact in groups of eight in a fictitious context inspired by the sporting world, where celebrity athletes often experience intense hate speech (Litchfield et al., 2016; Yaneva & Stoyanova, 2021). Deliberation will last 30 minutes, with one group including humans without stimuli (Control), one group including humans with stimuli (Condition 1) and one group including AI with stimuli (Condition 2). We provide the theoretical backdrop for the paper, outlining literature on hate speech.

Hate Speech

Hate speech is a multidimensional construct (Rieger et al., 2021) including personal insults (i.e., individual attacks based on an individual's characteristics), threats (i.e., statements aimed at intimidating an individual's physical or psychological integrity), negative stereotyping (i.e., dissemination of negative beliefs about an individual or group) and misinformation (i.e., dissemination of false information over a target.). The vilification of the target is based upon rather random characteristics, which are used to attempt ascribe an undesirable quality to the target so to legitimize that it is an object deserving hostility (Pareckh, 2012).

Hate speech is not a new phenomenon, yet acknowledgement of hate speech has increased in the last decade. Scholars concur in pointing out that hate speech has serious consequences on its target (Yong, 2011) also because social media (Chetty, 2018; MacAvaney, 2019) have amplified hate speech since users can post anonymously and quickly coalize as a mass against a target, without fearing penalization (Brown, 2018; Rieger et al., 2021).

Celebrities, which are individuals that receive public attention due to their extraordinary traits (e.g. sports performance, business ability) are often targets of hate speech on social media. This is the case because celebrities are not only receiving attention from traditional media (e.g., tabloids, general news), but are receiving attention also in social media, since they are constantly divulging details of their private lives through their open social profiles (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). While social media have their advantages for building their prominence and narrative as a celebrity, they also have disadvantages, including the loss of control over the content posted and how it is perceived by the public (MacPherson & Kerr, 2021). Hate speech is part of these disadvantages.

Combatting hate speech in the age of AI

The debate on how to combat hate speech is divided (Strossen, 2018). Some scholars suggest combating hate speech with content moderation or censorship (Cohen, 2000; Kalsnes, & Ihlebæk, 2021). Others, instead argue for the power of free speech and for the need to assure platforms need to defend fundamental is free expression (Newman, 2017; Howard, 2019). Events such as the scandal of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica in 2016, well as the assault on the Capitol Hill in 2021, have seen public institutions advocate for censorship as a solution for hate speech. Digital platforms

such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have consequently reconsidered their policies aiming to fight hate speech by censoring accounts of users that publish violent content. The debate is, however, far from being closed, as we could witness in the last months of 2023. The new ownership of Twitter - now X - by Elon Musk once again promoted the benefit of free speech and the establishment of simple a-priori authenticity controls of accounts and users using platforms. Such a-priori controls, however, are not always considered efficient.

Content moderation and censorship of hate speech are today implemented with the help of AIs. Extant studies suggest that algorithms successfully help to combat hate speech as they can automatically detect messages that include insulting and menacing language, thereby censoring it (AlKhamissi & Diab, 2022; Mehta & Passi, 2022; Meske & Bunde, 2023; Thiago et al., 2021). This has been successfully implemented for hate speech in the field of sustainability (Tomašev et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022), business (Chowdhury et al., 2022), education (Chen et al., 2023) and public opinion (Wilson & Van Der Velden). However, AI use for moderation and censorship poses ethical and technical challenges, including the possibility of AIs compromising freedom of expression, for example by wrongly considering a post as violent while it is not (Meske & Bunde, 2023; Thiago et al., 2021).

Spiral of silence & counter-narratives

Given the above limitations of both censorship and freedom of speech as solutions for hate speech we would like to explore a third possible solution that relates to educating users to avoid hate speech, via moderation. This solution also includes the intervention of AIs, but special type of AIs, that are LLMS. Clearly a human being would not have the capacity to moderate a critical mass of hate speech published online, and it would be worth to explore whether an AI text agent can be used to moderate hate speech and combat it, while avoiding censoring and stopping conversation.

Such exploration can draw on the spiral of silence theory (Neumann & Petersen, 2004; Neumann, 1979) and studies on counter-narratives (Cathy et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2023). Spiral of science theory suggests that individuals participating in a public deliberation self-censor themselves when they perceive the majority opinion differs from their own opinion (NoelleNeumann & Petersen, 2004; Clemente & Roulet, 2015). By applying this principle, it is possible to argue that hate speech persists because those who oppose hate speech see a high number of hate posts that they perceive to be the majority, therefore self-censure themselves for fears of social repercussion. It is only when individuals corroborate that many others think like them that they may speak up. This happens because they have co-oriented themselves to others (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973), that is they have realized that their initial assumption of being part of a minority is not accurate, and only construed in their perception.

Objective of the study

By building on spiral of silence theory and studies on counter-narratives we propose that if an LLM can create a narrative that presents a counter-argument to hate speech (Carthy et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2023), other users may be empowered to speak out and provide additional support for these counter-arguments. This could potentially shift the direction of the conversation, which is currently saturated with hate speech, towards a more positive dialogue that upholds the target of such hate

speech. If this happens the LLM will unlock the spiral of silence, enabling positive speech over hate. In concrete this would mean that an LLM may have the following influences: an influence on trajectory of dialogue during deliberation; also, it may improve quality of dialogue (Steenbergen et al., 2003) in a public deliberation (Bächtiger, 2010). Finally, it may lower legitimacy (Jasinenko et al., 2023) of hate speech. We therefore hypothesize the following:

H1: Counter-arguments to hate speech increase when the LLM is present.
H2: Quality of dialogue in deliberation increases when LLM is present.
H3: Legitimacy of hate speech is lower when the LLM is present.
H4: Intensity of hate speech is lower when the LLM is present.

Methods
We will run 2 (human vs AI) X2 (Counterargument vs no counterargument) deliberative experiment with the following conditions. Condition 1: only humans with no stimuli; condition 2: only humans with stimuli to produce counterarguments; condition 3: AI with no stimuli; condition 4: AI with stimuli to produce counterarguments. Scenario, participants, manipulation and procedure will be as follows.

Scenario. The deliberative scenario will propose to participants a context of hate speech against a fictitious sports tennis athlete. Athletes are often the preferred targets of intense hate speech (Litchfield et al., 2016). In sports such as tennis, various forms of hate speech are intertwined with comments on players' profiles (Yaneva & Stoyanova, 2021). Users, sometimes fans themselves, insult, threaten and embarrass athletes when they disagree with their behavior or actions. For example, if a female tennis player shares a moment when she is dating another sports athlete, users may denigrate her in various ways, accusing her of not focusing on her training, career among other things (Kavanagh, Litchfield, & Osborne, 2019). Because of these messages, the mental health of sports athletes is at threat and their sports performance may also be negative impacted, with consequential loss of high-profile sponsors that are fundamental for sports financial support. Hence, hate speech, in the sports industry, has repercussion on the mental health of athletes as well as on economic performance of such athlete -celebrity.

Participants. Each deliberation group will have the same following settings. Deliberation will last 30 minutes. Deliberation will include a total of 8 agents. Of them, 4 will be part of the research team and will post same hate speech type of posts across deliberative group targeting the tennis star with insults, disinformation, menaces and negative stereotypes. The other 4 participants will be the actual participants in the deliberation and will be not given any role.   Of them, three will be inserted from the beginning of the deliberation, whereas one will be inserted only after 10 minutes.

Manipulations. The participant that will be inserted after 10 minutes will be humans in conditions 1 and 2, whereas AI in conditions 3 and 4. In Condition 1 and 3 the human or AI will receive a simple role that explains in general terms their role to support the tennis star, without specifying their objective to produce counter-narratives. Instead in condition 2 and 4, the human or the AI will

receive an elaborated instruction to produce counter-narratives to hate speech, namely insult, menaces, disinformation and negative stereotypes.   These agents will receive same example of counterarguments. In all conditions the humans and the AI will be asked to produce the same amount of post per minute so that the amount of post remains constant and is not manipulated.

Procedure. The deliberation will be carried out via the Microsoft Teams platform where all participants, except one, will be invited to post comments on a fictitious tennis player from time 0. Before Deliberation we will ask the 8 participants that enter in the deliberation to fill a survey in which they reply to questions that may allow us to control for their interest in tennis, their knowledge and experienced with hate speech. Also they will be asked to fill a survey at the end of the deliberation to measure the perception intensity of counter arguments against hate speech (or pro hate speech) with the dimensions indicated theoretically by Carthy et al., (2020), Chung et al., (2023); their perception of the quality of dialogue during deliberation with items theorized by Steenbergen et al., (2003) and Bächtiger et al., 2010; their perception of intensity of hate speech, with a scale inspired by the study by Rieger et al., (2021). Finally, we will analyze the actual deliberation, i.e. dialogues. With the help of a codebook that will take inspiration from items of the survey, we will analyze the presence and intensity of counterarguments, the quality of dialogue and the amount of hate speech. Also, qualitatively, we will analyze the trajectory of dialogue before and after the insertion of the LLM and humans (i.e., 10 minutes after start deliberation).

Expected contribution

If our findings prove promising, they could revolutionize the approach to combating hate speech by leveraging AIs while preserving open dialogue. This is particularly important as previous studies have highlighted the technical challenges of over-censorship associated with AI when they are used to detect or censor hate speech (Alkhamissi & Diab, 2022; Mehta & Passi, 2022; Meske & Bunde, 2023; Thiago et al., 2021). The implications of work will thus be theoretical, in empirically demonstrating how the spiral of silence against online hate speech may be unlocked and practical in raising awareness of the beneficial social impact of AI in moderating hate speech. Our contributions will hopefully create new insights into the responsible management of communications by platform companies at a time when the spotlight is increasing being placed on these companies to provide safer climates for users.

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Understanding the Effectiveness of Multimodal Sustainable Messages on Consumer Social Media Behavior

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Introduction

Sustainability is a key driver in consumption choices (White et al. 2019). While consumers increasingly look for eco-friendly products and brands (Harvard Business Review 2023; Insight First 2022), 82% have been convinced to buy a product or service through a video (Wyzowl 2024) and appreciate it as a way to learn more about eco-friendly products or services and stay updated about social and environmental issues of their interest (Think with Google 2019). Consequently, an increasing number of companies are using social media posts to communicate sustainability (e.g., Fernandez, Hartmann and Apaolaza 2022; Kronrod et al. 2023; Verk et al. 2021), combining both visual, textual and audial cues. For instance, Renault posts short videos to communicate features of its new sustainable concept car, Carrefour posts educational videos on how to save energy during our daily activities, while Patagonia combines on-screen text, images and narrating voices to promote instances of activism.

Consistent with its relevance, a deal of work on sustainable communication has begun to examine how visual cues – such as certification logos (Pancer et al. 2017) or aesthetic stimuli features (Wang et al. 2017) – or verbal cues – such as the assertiveness of the language (Kronrod et al. 2012) and the message framing (Olsen et al. 2014) – affect consumer behavior.

But while it is clear that language and images can affect consumer behavior, less is known about their interplay and the effect of multimodality on social media communication (Packard and Berger 2024; Grewal et al. 2022), particularly in the case of dynamic audiovisual content, such as videos (Stuppy et al. 2023).

Tough, multimodal messages have become ubiquitous. Most studies on sustainable social media communication focus exclusively on text content (e.g., Kronrod et al. 2023, Grappi et al. 2024; Kronrod et al 2012), ignoring that social media platforms such as TikTok are merely based on video sharing. Videos may include simultaneously written text (e.g., caption), narrating voice, background music, and moving images, thus engendering content that vary in the degree of multimodality. Interestingly, mode enriched communication may be perceived as the best venue to convey complex topics or difficult to grasp messages such as those dealing with sustainability (Think with Google 2019). For instance, Apple's video campaign featuring a conversation with Mother Nature to report its environmental commitment follows this trend. But while, for example, Stella McCartney showcases videos of sustainable alternatives to animal leather in videos combining narrating voices and text-overlays, Patagonia uses only narrating voices to promotes his recycled duffels. In presenting Daisy – its recycling robot that disassembles old iPhones – Apple does not use narrating voices, but text-overlays of keywords of the caption. Renault, on the other hand, unveils its news

sustainable concept car through merely a video coming on with the background music and the caption.

Despite the prevalence of multimodal content, which venue is more effective in engaging consumers is still an open question.

In this paper we aim at answering this question. Retrieving 417 TikTok videos of 15 companies (see Table 1), we analyze the effect of multimodal sustainable messages on consumer engagement. We find that a higher multimodality degree in video content decreases the number of shares, suggesting that individuals on TikTok prefer to share simpler videos in terms of multimodal structure – that is, videos consisting of less modes delivering information. In other words, when communicating sustainability, companies should use less modes within the video to facilitate content sharing and diffusion. We also demonstrate that educational videos aimed at increasing knowledge about sustainability issues and behaviors are preferred by consumers on social media, thereby suggesting that CSR communication should go beyond merely promoting products or services with sustainable features.

Literature Review

Although modes such as texts, images, and sounds are all capable of delivering a message, they do so in a different way, as they have different logics, potentials, and constraints (Meyer et al. 2018; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996). As suggested by Packard and Berger (2024), "multiple modes may encourage more heuristic processing, which could limit the extent to which language (and other information) is carefully considered by consumer". For example, images are processed immediately and holistically, based on a principle of spatial and simultaneous organization of cues, while verbal modes (i.e. speech, written text) are encoded in a temporal and sequential manner, and are based on grammar and syntax principles. Consequently, a single mode may not always adequately convey the information of a green claim. For instance, an image alone may not effectively communicate the fact that a shirt is made of recycled materials, thereby requiring text or speech for comprehensive understanding.

While still emerging, prior research within the marketing field started to investigate the interplay between images and written text (e.g., Ceylan et al. 2024a, 2024b; Holiday et al. 2023). Extant research in social media communication suggests that the mere presence of an image in addition to textual information, as well as their semantic congruency and complementarity, increases the engagement with the post (Li and Xie 2020; Villarroel et al. 2019).

While sustainability is a complex phenomenon (Madan et al. 2023), inherently difficult to grasp for consumers (White et al. 2019) and thereby complex to deliver for companies (Schoeneborn et al. 2020), there is scarcity of research on how the interplay between multiples modes may make this communication more effective. Tough, seminal evidence suggests that integrating different modes (e.g., image and text) can foster social change (Barberá-Tomás et al. 2019) and improve the communication of green attributes of the product (Schmuck et al. 2018).

Prior research showed that linguistic features such as the number of hashtags can affect engagement

(Valsesia et al. 2020). Moreover, the presence of audio content, such as sounds (Zhu and MeyersLevy 2005) or narrating voices (Chang et al. 2023) can influence perceptions and evaluations.

Moreover, one could argue that other variables, such as the topic or the sender may affect the results, independently of the modes in which the information is conveyed. Recent research showed that influencers on social media may indeed affect engagement (Gerrath et al. 2024; Knupfer et al. 2023), pro-environmental intentions to purchase (Kapoor et al. 2023; Pittman and Abell 2021), and adoption rates of an eco-friendly product (Zhang et al. 2021). On the other hand, education is the first route to sustainable behavior change (Bergquist et al. 2023; White et al. 2019) and recent research suggests the effectiveness of information sharing on social media to address sustainable issues such as climate crisis (Vlasceanu et al. 2024). However, informative posts are less likely to be perceived as driven by advertising motives with respect to commercial posts (Hughes et al. 2019), thereby reducing persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994). This may affect engagement metrics of content diffusion (e.g., share). Consequently, we include these variables into the model.

Methodology

We selected the European companies from the Fortune 500 list, which met the following criteria: 1) have a TikTok account; 2) the account is verified; 3) shared at least one video post about sustainability on their TikTok account. This resulted in 15 companies and 417 videos from 1st April 2022 to 31st April 2023. Table 1 shows descriptives of the companies that have been selected.

Table 1: Sample of Companies Selected

Company	Country	Industry	Fortune Global 500 – Rank 2022	Following Count Videos account Sample	Follower Count	Liking Count	Total Videos Count	Sustainable Number of Sustainability Videos	Sustainable Videos about (%)	Sustainable Videos able (%)
E.ON	Germany	Energy	112	8	50500	949500	68	66	97.06%	15.8%
Engie	France	Energy	130	34	5201	12800	24	21	87.50%	5%
Volkswagen	Germany	Motor Vehicles & Parts	15	8	100600	289200	101	53	52.48%	12,7%
Iberdrola	Spain	Utilities	304	13	277600	8900000	180	75	41.67%	18%
Renault	France	Motor Vehicles & Parts	237	14	905300	4800000	86	32	37.21%	7.7%
Volvo	Sweden	Motor Vehicles & Parts	323	7	25500	91000	7	2	28.57%	0.5%
Mercedes-Benz Group	Germany	Motor Vehicles & Parts	38	7	2100000	10900000	200	56	28.00%	13.4%

BMW Group	Germany	Motor Vehicles & Parts	59	18	1800000	12800000	162	42	25.93%	10.1%
Credit Agricole	France	Banks: Commer cial and Savings	84	39	60700	484400	138	14	10.14%	3.4%
Allianz	Germany	Insuranc e: Life, Health (Stock)	47	26	15600	167900	176	12	6.82%	2.9%
Orange	France	Telecom municati ons	271	43	426700	2800000	172	11	6.40%	2.6%
Carrefour	France	Food & Drug Stores	119	163	904500	4800000	269	17	6.32%	4.1%
Maersk Group	Denmark	Shippin g	206	37	114500	1200000	88	3	4.55%	0.7%
Telefónica	Spain	Telecom municati ons	300	39	186500	841400	318	10	3.14%	2.4%
SAP	Germany	Comput er Softwar e	433	6	10600	50200	102	3	2.94%	0.7%
Total							2091	417		100%

It is interesting to note that companies that communicate sustainability the most are part of two sectors that also contribute the most to GHG emissions in Europe. On the contrary, those companies whose impact on the environment is more indirect seem to make less effort in terms of sustainable communication over time (see Table 2).

Table 2: Industry overview

Industry	Number of Sustainable Videos	Sustainability Driver Score by Sector – Brand Finance (2023)	Percentage of Sustainable Videos over Sample	Reference Sector – EEA (2022)	Estimated Share (%) of Sectoral Emissions in 2021 in Europe
Motor Vehicles & Parts	185	9,4%	44,4%	Transport	22,73%
Energy and Utilities**	162	9,4%	38,8%	Energy Supply	26,21%
Telecoms	21	8,7%	5%	*	*
Food & Drug Stores	17	12,6%	4,1%	*	*
Banks: Commercial and Savings	14	6,8%	3,4%	*	*
Insurance	12	8%	2,9%	*	*
Shipping	3	–	0,7%	International Shipping	3,75%
Computer Software	3	4,7%	0,7%	*	*
Total	417		100%		

*Not reported as the impact is composite and/or largely indirect
**This aggregates energy companies (i.e., E.ON, Engie) and utility companies (i.e., Iberdrola) as categorized in Fortune 500 list

We asked a research assistant to annotate the main variables of interest. Table 3 shows details about what and how variables have been annotated.

Table 3: Variables of interest

Variable	Definition Type of Variable	Coding Scheme
Multimodality degree	This indicates the number of Multicategorical modes used into a video to share variable information	1. = Image + Caption 1. = Image + Caption + Text-Overlay 2. = Image + Caption + Voice 3. = Image + Caption + Text-Overlay + Voice
Text-overlay	This indicates the presence or Dummy variable absence of text superposed over the video	0 = absent; 1 = present
Narrating Voice	This indicates the presence or Dummy variable absence of any voice (off-screen or on-screen) sharing information over the video.	0 = absent; 1 = present
Background music	This indicates the presence or Dummy variable absence of background sounds which can elicit feelings and moods	0 = absent; 1 = present
Topic: education	This indicates whether the video Dummy variable was educational or not	1 = education; 0 = other
Influencer's presence	This refers to the presence or Dummy variable absence of an influencer within the video	0 = absent; 1= present

Preliminary results

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics related to the variables concerning multimodality degree. The majority of the videos present a text overlay (77.46%). Furthermore, while almost all the video includes background music or environmental sounds (97.60%), less than half of the videos include a narrating voice. Regarding the multimodality degree (i.e., the number of modes used into the video to share information), about 40% of videos include only a caption and text overlay, while almost 37% of videos also include a narrating voice.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

Variable	N (%)
Text-Overlay	
Present	323 (77.46%)
Absent	94 (22.54%)
Narrating Voice	
Present	179 (42,93%)
Absent	238 (57.07%)
Background Music	
Present	407 (97.60%)
Absent	10 (2.40%)
Multimodality Degree	
Images + Caption	68 (16.30%)
Images + Caption + Text-Overlay	168 (40.29%)

		24 (5.76%)
Images + Caption + Narrating Voice		24 (5.76%)
Images + Caption + Text-Overlay + Narrating Voice		157 (37.65%)

Regarding the dependent variable, we decided to focus on share count as it is the most powerful metric of social media engagement (Gavilanes et al., 2018). Given that the dependent variable is a count, and the outcome variable was overdispersed, we run a negative binomial regression. Table 5 reports the results. Models 1-7 provide partial model estimates. In particular, we first calculated the intercept model, taken as a base model for further comparisons (Model 1). Then, we calculated Model 2 by adding the different levels of multimodality, Model 3 includes also the type of content (i.e., whether it is educational or not), Model 4 accounts for the presence of influencers within the video, while Model 5 includes also caption and hashtag wordcount. Model 6 controls for the view count. Model 7 includes all variables as well as time- and brand-fixed effects. The differences between the full model and all the sub-models are significant (P(χ2, df)<1e-03).

Results of the full model suggest that a higher multimodality degree leads to a decrease of the number of shares, suggesting that users on TikTok prefer videos with a lower degree of multimodality. This result suggests that when communicating CSR, companies should use less modes with the video in order to be perceived as worthy to share. It is interesting to note that the variable related to the topic education is positive and significant, suggesting that videos on education are preferred by users. These results suggest that when communicating about CSR, attention should be paid not only on promoting products or services including sustainable features, but also include educational messages on sustainability, that is, brands should use content that informs consumers on how to achieve sustainability goals. For instance, Carrefour posts TikTok videos about the importance of adopting a sustainable behavior by turning off the house lights or sorting waste. Despite not strictly related to the core business of Carrefour, such messages trigger positive reactions in consumers. A high number of hashtags affects negatively the number of shares. Finally, the presence of influencers is not statistically significant, showing no effect on the number of shares.

Table 5: Negative Binomial Regression

			DV: Share Count				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Image+Caption+TextOverlay			.097	.120	.074	-.038	-1.111***	-.612***
			(.237)	(.236)	(.240)	(.241)	(0.169)	(0.168)
Image+Caption+Voice			-1.279***	-.964**	-.986**	-1.262***	-1.942***	-.637**
			(.392)	(.390)	(0.389)	(.397)	(0.279)	(0.248)
Image+Caption+TextOverlay +Voice			-1.043***	-.902***	-.921***	-1.092***	-1.771***	-.699***
			(.240)	(.245)	(.249)	(.251)	(.178)	(.181)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Topic_Education			-.871*** (.247)	-.894*** (.247)	-.891*** (.247)	-.513*** (.177)	.319** (.162)
Influencers' presence				-.136 (.253)	-.293 (.253)	-.330* (.179)	-.225 (.173)
Caption Wordcount					.013* (.008)	.017*** (.005)	.001 (.005)
Hashtags Count					-.074** (.036)	.106*** (.031)	-.093*** (.032)
ln(View Count)						.726*** (.031)	.949*** (.041)
Time FE							Included
Brand FE							Included

Constant 5.422*** 5.702*** 5.704*** 5.753*** 5.951*** -3.468*** -5.111***
 (.084) (.200) (.199) (.210) (.294) (.475) (.794)

Observations 417 417 417 416 416 416 416
Log Likelihood -2,427.430 -2,405.713 -2,400.834 -2,398.543 -2,396.447 -2,181.580 -2,181.580
theta .343*** (0.019) .367*** (.021) .373*** (.021) .375*** (.021) .378*** (.021) 0.784*** (0.048) 0.784*** (0.048)
Akaike Inf. 4,856.859 4,819.427 4,811.668 4,809.085 4,808.894 4,381.161 4,381.161
Crit.

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Conclusion and future research directions

Our preliminary analysis suggests the need to further investigate the influence of multimodal content on consumers' engagement to help companies to define the most optimal content which potentially leads to a change in consumers' online behavior.

First, we will broaden the sample size by including companies from industries that have a high environmental impact (e.g., fashion, cosmetics, food). In particular, we will scrape data thanks to the TikTok Research API.

Second, while companies frequently use redundant information across various modes to improve consumer processing of brand messages in ads (MacInnis et al. 1991), the optimal content redundancy – that is, the extent of contentual overlap between two or more sources of information" (Albers et al. 2023, p. 341) – across multiple modes remains unexplored within marketing field, as do its effects. For example, videos can be made of the joint presence of images, narrating voice and

text-overlay, where the last two can deliver the same (i.e., redundant) information. While there is anecdotal evidence of its frequency in social media posts, to the best of our knowledge, no research focused on the level of ideal contentual overlap across multiple modes. As a consequence, we will consider the level of content redundancy across multiple modes, i.e. how much repetition multiple modes deliver, and how this affect engagement.

Third, we will test whether the results are idiosyncratic for sustainable communication or can be generalized to other contexts.

Fourth, experimental research will be used to capture why a specific multimodal content is more effective in terms of engagement, thus, investigating the psychological processes that shape consumer online and social media behavior. This research will tap into this aspect by measuring mechanisms related to greenwashing perception, focused immersion and curiosity, among others, to establish which process explains best consumer preferences for multimodal content.

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Silent Strategies: An Examination of Under-Communication of Corporate Social Responsibility Activities on Social Media Platforms

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Background

Social media platforms have, in recent years, become primary parts of society's communication infrastructure. This includes corporate communications that increasingly are shared across various social media channels to reach broader audiences, and social media platforms have in many ways transformed relations between civil society and corporations (Castelló et al., 2013; Lundgaard & Etter, 2022). The use of social media platforms for corporate communications is especially seen with CSR communication, where numerous studies have highlighted the importance of using these platforms to interact with consumers and stakeholders (Acuti et al., 2024; Etter et al., 2018; Illia et al., 2017).

However, the social media context is also characterized by a plurality of opinions (Castelló & LopezBerzosa, 2021; Schultz et al., 2013), and communicating on social media presents a range of both opportunities and challenges for corporations. On the one hand, corporations can utilize these platforms to bypass traditional mass media filters with their own self-presentations (Glozer et al., 2019). Social media platforms also enable corporations to constructively engage with consumers, maintain and grow corporate legitimacy, improve reputation, and develop their CSR-initiatives (Castelló et al., 2016; Illia et al., 2022; Lillqvist et al., 2019). Here research has emphasized the importance of a dialogical approach to social media and highlighted the numerous benefits of continuous interaction with consumers and stakeholders (Castelló et al., 2016; Glozer et al., 2019). On the other hand, research has shown that social media platforms also enable activists and NGOs to criticize corporations for misleading self-presentations (Luo et al., 2016; Vestergaard & Uldam, 2022), leading to pressures to renew their legitimacy vis-à-vis wider publics, often through CSR initiatives (Castelló et al., 2013; Etter et al., 2018, 2019; van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021).

Corporate CSR communication is, however, often met with skepticism and scrutiny (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010; Viererbl & Koch, 2022), and communicating about CSR can backfire on the corporation (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Szabo & Webster, 2021). The risks of facing criticism for communicating about CSR initiatives has sparked a fear among communication managers, resulting in a tendency for corporations to refrain from communicating about CSR initiatives online (Uldam et al., Forthcoming). This hesitancy to communicate about CSR is even seen in cases where corporations have improved their sustainable/green activities, but still refrain from communicating about them. This is also known as 'greenhushing' (Font et al., 2017; Thakur et al., 2023), and more recently 'green blushing' (Falchi et al., 2022), which refers to corporations deliberatively withholding information about CSR initiatives from consumers and stakeholders (Font et al., 2017). This practice

of undercommunicating CSR activities is however a challenge, especially for a world in crisis, as Falchi et al. notes (2022 p. 1939) "green blushing should concern environment advocates ... green blushing is not a neutral and inconsequential chose. It can generate substantial detrimental effects and delay environmental progress". This echoes ideas within the CSR literature emphasizing the importance of communicating about CSR activities to both improve and develop these activities (Christensen et al., 2013, 2021), as CSR communication is recognized as central to the enactment of taking responsibility for being sustainable (Font et al., 2017).

However, the reasons and perceptions that leads to corporate under-communication about CSR activities, as well as the antecedents of 'greenhushing' and 'green blushing' remains under explored within the CSR communication literature. In this article, we investigate this tendency to undercommunicate about CSR activities, analyzing interviews with communication managers from multinational companies, combined with an analysis of corporate online CSR communication. In doing so we contribute to a better understanding of the reasons for under-communicating about CSR activities, and we elaborate on the concepts 'greenhushing' and 'green blushing' that are used interchangeably throughout extant literature. Additionally, by investigating these decisions to undercommunicate, we contribute to ongoing debates in the CSR communication field addressing the differences between 'talk' and 'action', including visibility management (Carlos & Lewis, 2018; Zyglidopoulos & Fleming, 2011) and the potential of 'aspirational talk' (Christensen et al., 2013). By analyzing both the interview data and social media data, we also contribute to a better understanding of social media platforms as a primary context for CSR communication, this includes both the nuances of CSR communication within the social media context, and how and to what extent perceptions about the platforms contribute to this hesitancy to communicate.

Theoretical framework

It has been argued that social media platforms provide opportunities to engage more democratically with stakeholders about CSR initiatives (Castelló et al., 2016; Glozer et al., 2019), allow corporations to bypass traditional mass media filters with their own self-presentations, and more broadly engage end-consumers and other stakeholders more efficiently and at a lower cost (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 67). However, social media platforms also enable new modes of mobilization for civil society actors who can contest the legitimacy of corporations in cases of (perceived) misconduct (Lundgaard & Etter, 2022; Luo et al., 2016; Vestergaard & Uldam, 2022). This potentially leads to pressures on corporations to renew their legitimacy vis-à-vis wider publics, typically through CSR initiatives (Castelló et al., 2013; Etter et al., 2019; van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021, Uldam et al., Forthcoming). In this way, digital media can exacerbate the logics that incentivize visibility management, as social media platforms are contexts that afford civil society actors such as activists and NGOs possibilities for contesting corporate misconduct (Castelló et al., 2013; Etter et al., 2018, 2019). Hence, using social media for CSR communication can also easily backfire when hijacked by activists (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Vollero et al., 2020), which can put companies in a defensive position by default.

Furthermore, while communicating about CSR activities can be beneficial and improve engagement with shared content (Viererbl & Koch, 2022), communicating about CSR initiatives can also have negative effects on corporate reputation (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Szabo & Webster, 2021), as

communicating about CSR activities can "trigger stakeholders' scepticism and cynicism" (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010, p. 2; Viererbl & Koch, 2022). This is for example seen within the literature on 'greenwashing', i.e. making claims about responsible or sustainable behavior that doesn't match activities (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013; Szabo & Webster, 2021), where research has shown that even perceived greenwashing can affect corporate reputation (Szabo & Webster, 2021). Hence, while corporations experience growing expectations to communicate about their CSR activities (Uldam et al., Forthcoming), there are also perceived risks associated with communicating about CSR activities, and the result is a growing tendency among communication managers to under-communicate about CSR activities (Falchi et al., 2022; Font et al., 2017, Uldam et al., Forthcoming). Importantly, even in cases where the company has improved their sustainable performance, research has identified a tendency to under-communicate, which is often referred to as 'greenhushing' (Font et al., 2017). The choice to under-communicate about CSR activities has received growing interest in recent years, with recent research also introducing the concept 'green blushing' to describe the process whereby corporations improve their green performance, but then prefer not to communicate about these achievements (Falchi et al., 2022).

However, the concepts 'greenhushing' and more recently 'green blushing' has mainly been studied within the tourism industry (Font et al., 2017), and the terms appear to be used interchangeably throughout the literature. On the one hand, Thakur et al. (2023, p. 309), suggests that 'pure altruism' is a reason for engaging in greenhushing, while Font et al. (2017, p. 1008) describe greenhushing as a more deliberative process, suggesting that "businesses use greenhushing to mitigate a potential disconnection between their perception of customer expectations and their own operational position concerning sustainability issues". In other words, greenhushing is also seen as a "conscious effort to reduce dissonance" (Font et al., 2017, p. 1008), which indicates that greenhushing refers to a more deliberative process, to some extent echoing notions of 'strategic silence' (Carlos & Lewis, 2018), rather than emerging from 'pure altruism'. Similarly, throughout the literature both greenhushing (Ettinger et al., 2021) and green blushing (Falchi et al., 2022; Kutzschbach et al., 2021) are highlighted as the opposite of greenwashing, illustrating a lack of clarity around the concepts and their uses.

This highlights a need to better understand the decisions by companies to under-communicate about CSR-initiatives, especially in cases where they actually improve their green performance. Furthermore, there is a need for clearer definitions of the concepts used to understand the undercommunication of CSR activities. This includes both their antecedents, the motivations for engaging in green hushing and green blushing, as well as we consequences of such engagement. Furthermore, we need to consider how and to what extent these under-communication processes relate to broader debates related to differences in CSR communication between 'words' and 'action' (Christensen et al., 2013; de Bakker, 2016; Fleming et al., 2013; Winkler et al., 2020), including related concepts such as 'strategic silence' (Carlos & Lewis, 2018) and 'aspirational talk' (Christensen et al., 2013).

Methods

This article draws on eleven in-depth interviews with top managers who work with CSR, PR, communication and/or digital media in multinational companies or agencies that advice

multinational companies. The interviewees are head of PR, Sustainability and communication from a wide range of industries, as well as business to consumer and business to business, however all companies have a trajectory of contested communication and/or business practices or agencies that have advised such companies.

The interviews are analyzed through an inductive approach to investigate the reasons and perceptions of communication managers, including their understandings of social media platforms and how these understandings affect the under-communication of CSR initiatives. In analyzing the interviews, we adhere to the methodology described by Gioia, Corley & Hamilton (2013). This research design allows rich contextualization and an appreciation of subjective views, which are central to theorizing the understandings brought up by the interviewees.

In addition to the interviews with the top managers, the interview data is supplemented with an analysis of social media posts from March 2021-March 2023 shared by the companies in our sample. This includes both general informative posts, as well as CSR communications by the companies, from both Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter and LinkedIn. The analysis of the social media data allows for a deeper understanding of the under-communication of CSR activities, as well as how and to what extent the perceptions and opinions expressed in the interviews match with the online communication. In other words, how and to what extent is the fear of communicating articulated by the interviewees enacted in the company's online communication. The analysis of the online communication also allows for deeper and richer understanding of both greenhushing and green blushing as these practices are enacted in online corporation communications.
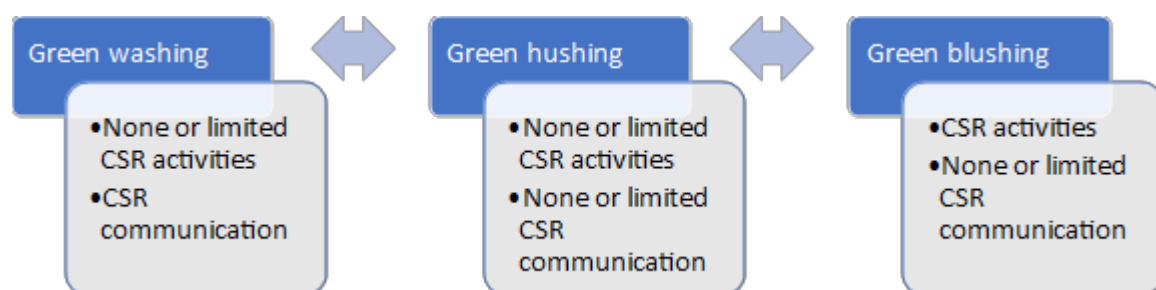
Preliminary findings

In this article, we examine the nature of under-communicating CSR activities on social media to understand the hesitance to communicate and expand on the concepts used to describe this in the literature. We investigate the antecedents of the different concepts used and mirror these observations in our data.

The research is still at an early stage, with social media data collection ongoing. However, early findings indicate that perceptions about the recipients of CSR communication is critical. Stakeholders are, by the communication managers, perceived to be confrontational and antagonistic, as they are seen to use social media platforms to call out corporations for insufficient sustainable development when they communicate about achievements or CSR initiatives, leading to a growing fear of criticism and ultimately hesitance to communicate about CSR. Numerous interviewees ascribe this fear of communicating specifically to social media platforms, which are perceived to cultivate anger and emotional responses, leading to increasing levels of criticism in relation to CSR, and ultimately a hesitancy to communicate about CSR activities.

Furthermore, we highlight key differences in the reasons and perceptions among communication managers to under-communicate. On the one hand, we identify deliberative decisions to withhold information, i.e., a hesitancy to communicate about CSR activities, often leading to limited sustainable development. We refer to this as 'greenhushing', echoing Font et al. (2017). In contrast to the arguments by Thakur et al. (2023), our findings indicate that this is not emerging from true altruism, but rather strategic decisions, thus echoing a form of visibility management as the corporations engage in a form of 'strategic silence' (Carlos & Lewis, 2018). Greenhushing, we argue,

presents a key challenge for a world in crisis, as it ultimately limits sustainable development. On the other hand, we find indications of more altruistic responses, where corporations continue to pursue increasingly sustainable behavior, but decides not to communicate about it, or at least appear hesitant to communicate for different reasons. Green blushing, we argue, while potentially also an issue for future sustainable development is more productive, as it doesn't to the same extent as greenhushing, limit sustainable development. In other words, in contrast to greenhushing we find that the corporations engaging in green blushing continues to develop their CSR activities, despite the lack of communication.

Naturally, these findings, and the model we propose are subject to further analysis and discussion following the review of the online CSR communication, as well as deeper engagement with the interview data. With that said, our preliminary analysis leads us to propose a continuum of CSR communication recognizing the difference between 'talk' and 'action':

Green washing
- None or limited CSR activities
- CSR communication

Green hushing
- None or limited CSR activities
- None or limited CSR communication

Green blushing
- CSR activities
- None or limited CSR communication

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Global Commitment and Local Connectivity: An Exploratory Study of Unilever's CSR/Sustainability Communication in Thailand

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Abstract

In the contemporary world of crisis, organizations should communicate their contributions to sustainability-related issues, especially via digital media to reach worldwide stakeholders. Although scholars and practitioners place increased interest in social media, corporate websites are still essential for formal communication in global and local contexts. The present research aims to examine the digital CSR communication of SDGs through the case study of Unilever's global website and local website for Thailand in 2023, halfway towards the 2030 agenda. Applying concepts of *glocal* ("think global, act local") vs. *lobal* ("think local, act global") CSR communication, qualitative content analysis is conducted. Key findings reveal that Unilever's global website explicitly communicates how Unilever's global sustainable business strategies align with the SDGs, along with glocal and lobal sustainability initiatives. Unilever's Thai website mostly communicates SDGs rather implicitly in corporate sustainability initiatives. This study provides theoretical and practical implications for CSR communication of contributions toward SDGs.

Keywords: CSR communication, Corporate sustainability, Corporate websites, Glocalization, Sustainable Development Goals, Thailand

Introduction and purpose of the paper

Digital corporate communications have been used to facilitate the co-participation, cocreation, and co-production of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Canel, 2023). In the 21st century, many systematic reviews of corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication research articles published up to 2016 revealed that CSR communication has become an emerging area of interest among multiple disciplines in both academic and business sectors, including public relations, corporate communications, management, and organizational studies (e.g., Golob et al., 2013; Crane & Glozer, 2016; Tuan et al., 2019; Verk et al., 2021). Concurrently, with the rise of digital media, a shift in CSR communication from one-way communication to two-way communication with stakeholders has been evident, particularly via interactive features on websites and social media (Capriotti, 2017; Crane & Glozer, 2016; ElAlfy et al., 2020). The 17 SDGs require companies to integrate social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainability into corporate philosophy, corporate value, and corporate communications (Goto, et al., 2018). Specifically, SDG#17: "Partnerships for the Goals" emphasizes the significance of collaborations with partnerships, networks, and multiple stakeholders from public and private sectors as well as civil society to pursue the first 16 SDGs (Ansell et al., 2022; Canel, 2023).

Concerning the localization of SDGs, collaborations between international organizations and national governments tend to increase effectiveness among local stakeholders and communities (Ansell et al., 2022). Multinational corporations (MNCs) in Southeast Asian countries are noteworthy to examine due to their unique local cultures and MNCs' increased interest in these emerging markets (Mak et al., 2015). Thailand is a notable Southeast Asian country to explore sustainability communication in the local context. Sustainable development in Thailand has been inspired by King Rama IX through his Sufficiency Economy philosophy, making Thai stakeholders involved in sustainability issues and community development (Sison & Sarabia-Panol, 2018). Moreover, Thailand has developed a 20-year national development strategy (2018–2037) that integrates the SDGs (National Strategy Secretariat Office, 2019).

The present research aims to examine the digital CSR communication of SDGs in global and local contexts through the case study of Unilever in 2023, the halfway point to the 2030 agenda. Globally, Unilever has been named the leader in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index 21 times from 1999-2020 (Unilever, 2020) and named the corporate leader in the GlobeScan

SustainAbility Leaders Survey for 12 consecutive years from 2010-2022 (Unilever, 2022). In Thailand, Unilever has been the No.1 leading consumer products company (Unilever, 2024).

Main theoretical framework and objective of the research

To conceptualize corporate SDG communication, this study applies the following theories/concepts as the main theoretical framework: (1) the typology of seven models of framing applicable to public relations (Hallahan, 1999), (2) explicit CSR communication and implicit CSR communication (Morsing & Spence, 2019), (3) corporate SDG communication (ElAlfy et al., 2020), (4) the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Development Programme, 2022), and (5) glocal CSR communication (Jain & De Moya, 2013; Sthapitanonda & Itdhiamornkulchai, 2022) vs. lobal strategy (Kiliç, 2011). Hallahan (1999), a communication scholar, conceptualized the typology of seven models of framing applicable to public relations: (1) framing of situations, (2) framing of attributes, (3) framing of risky choices, (4) framing of actions, (5) framing of issues, (6) framing of responsibility, and (7) framing of news. ElAlfy et al. (2020), environmental scholars, conceptualized that corporate SDG communication related to businesses, such as SDG#7: "Affordable and Clean Energy", is a part of strategic CSR, while corporate communication about SDGs that are the most vital for citizens, for instance, SDG#1: "No Poverty", is intended to achieve legitimacy among stakeholders. Morsing and Spence (2019), management and economic scholars, conceptualized that explicit CSR communication refers to strategic, standardized, and formal CSR communication, including CSR reports, webpages, and campaigns, while implicit CSR communication refers to informal dialogues that engage stakeholders regarding CSR-related values and norms. In line with the UN Agenda 21 slogan "think globally, act locally" (Ansell et al., 2022), glocal CSR communication has been conceptualized by communication scholars as the adaptation of global strategies to local contexts to reach sustainable outcomes and actively enhance stakeholder engagement (Jain & De Moya, 2013; Sthapitanonda & Itdhiamornkulchai, 2022). In contrast, from a marketing approach, the lobal marketing strategy corresponds to the concept of "think local, act global" defined by Kiliç (2011) as the production of products and services in local markets that are expanded to global markets for consumption. The present study applies the lobal strategy to conceptualize lobal CSR

communication as the process of communicating sustainability-related initiatives implemented in local contexts by using media channels and communication strategies that aim to reach global audiences worldwide.

The present research applies the preceding concepts/theories to come up with the following conceptualization of corporate SDG communication:

Explicit corporate SDG communication refers to corporate communications that directly communicate the SDGs that the goals and/or implementations of the company address or educate the audience about the SDGs, while implicit corporate SDG communication refers to corporate communications of SDG-related goals and/or implementations without directly mentioning the SDGs.

The present study aims to address two main research questions:

1. How does Unilever communicate about the SDGs on global and Thai websites in 2023?
2. Which stakeholders does Unilever address in CSR communication regarding the SDGs on global and Thai websites in 2023?

Research method

Qualitative content analysis was conducted to examine CSR communication of SDGs and identify the key stakeholders addressed in explicit and implicit corporate SDG communication on both Unilever's global website at https://www.unilever.com and Unilever's website for Thailand at https://www.unilever.co.th in this study. As formal digital channels of explicit CSR communication (Morsing & Spence, 2019), corporate websites, including annual reports on webpages, were examined. Similar to the unit of analysis of Jain and De Moya (2013), CSR communications present on the homepages and "three levels down in the websites' hierarchy" (p. 214) were analyzed. Unilever's webpages, including CSR-related links on each, examined in this study include the homepage, the "Planet & Society" webpage, the "Investors" webpage, and the "News" webpage since these titles signal SDG-related corporate communications. For the "News" webpage, all articles published in 2023 on Unilever's global and Thai websites were investigated.

Preliminary results and discussions

Key findings reveal that Unilever's global website mainly uses framing of actions, framing of issues, and framing of responsibilities to explicitly communicate how Unilever's strategies and actions align with the SDGs in the sustainable business strategy entitled "the Unilever Compass". On the global website, the "Planet & Society" page communicates the 10 "Purposes in action" in the Unilever Compass, each with hyperlinks to details of "Strategy and goals," "Taking a stand", "our progress", and the SDGs that are related to each, directly aiming for 15 out of 17 SDGs altogether with various corporate sustainability goals that Unilever aims to achieve by 2030 as displayed in Table 1. Glocal CSR communication is evident in the "Take action" page of "Planet & Society" by communicating sustainability initiatives of Unilever as a corporate brand and Unilever's product brands that were adapted to suit local contexts of specific host countries and local communities to achieve global goals and SDGs in each of the 10 "Purposes in action" of the Unilever Compass.

Table 1: Relevant SDGs of Unilever's 10 "Purposes in Action"

The 10 Purposes in Action in the Unilever Compass	Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
(1) Climate action												X	X				
(2) Protect and regenerate nature						X							X	X	X		
(3) Waste-free world												X					
(4) Positive nutrition		X	X														X
(5) Health and wellbeing						X											
(6) Equity, diversity and inclusion					X					X							
(7) Raise living standards	X							X		X							
(8) Future of work								X									
(9) Respect human rights	X	X	X		X			X		X						X	X
(10) Responsible business																X	

In 2023, the performance highlights for each "Purpose in action" were also communicated in Unilever's "Annual Report and Accounts 2022 Highlights" under the "Investors" tab of Unilever's global website, including being on target to provide a deforestation-free supply chain within 2023 ("Protect and regenerate nature": SDG#6, SDG#13, SDG#14, and SDG#15) and Unilever's partnership with UNICEF's Generation Unlimited to reach the goal of preparing 10 million young people to have crucial employability skills within 2030 ("Future of Work": SDG#8).

Besides the framing of actions, issues, and responsibilities, Unilever also used framing of attributes in various news articles on global and Thai websites to communicate environmental sustainability attributes of products and processes of various product brands. Beyond glocal CSR communication of sustainability initiatives adapted to local contexts in many articles on Unilever's global and Thai websites, lobal CSR communication was evident in articles that communicate local CSR/sustainability initiatives of Unilever in specific host countries and local communities on Unilever's global website to reach worldwide stakeholders.

On the "All news stories" page of Unilever's global website, accessible by either clicking on "View All News" on the homepage or clicking on "All news stories" on the "News" page, implicit corporate SDG communication occurred where Unilever's articles can be filtered by each "Purpose in action" that corresponds to specific SDGs as shown in Table 1. Unilever's explicit and implicit corporate SDG communication on the global and Thai websites are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Unilever's Communication of SDGs on the Global and Thai Websites

Communication	Unilever's Global Website	Unilever's Website for Thailand
Language	English (reflect *globalization*)	Thai (reflect *localization*)
Homepage	*implicit corporate SDG communication:* - communicate SDG-related goals, implementations, and keywords without directly mentioning the SDGs - *glocal CSR communication* of Unilever's sustainability initiatives in host countries	*implicit corporate SDG communication:* - communicate SDG-related goals, implementations, and keywords without directly mentioning the SDGs - *glocal CSR communication* of the #EveryUDoesGood projects in Thailand
"Planet & Society" Page and Hyperlinks on the Page	*explicit corporate SDG communication:* - Hyperlinks to details of Unilever's 10 "Purposes in action" in the Unilever Compass with the SDGs that are related to each	*implicit corporate SDG communication:* - Thai translation of the Unilever Compass and Unilever's 10 "Purposes in action" - Links of each "Purpose in action" lead to Unilever's global webpages with SDGs
"Investors" Page and Hyperlinks on the Page	*explicit corporate SDG communication* in several hyperlinks, including "Unilever Annual Reports and Accounts 2021"	*N/A:* no "Investors" page
"News" Page and Hyperlinks on the Page	*implicit corporate SDG communication:* - 126 articles in 2023 - Articles can be filtered by "Purpose in action", "Brand families", "Strategy & corporate", and "Date range". - Most articles communicate SDG-related goals, implementations, and keywords without directly mentioning the SDGs	*implicit corporate SDG communication:* - 22 articles in 2023 - Articles can only be filtered by "Date range". - Most articles communicate SDG-related goals, implementations, and keywords without directly mentioning the SDGs.

In 2023, Unilever's global website published 126 articles, most of which communicate Unilever's sustainability initiatives and address key stakeholder groups highlighted in the "Unilever Annual Reports and Accounts 2021" PDF file on the "Investors" page. These stakeholders include "Our People" with updates from Unilever's executives, including the Head of Packaging regarding Unilever's progress toward plastic goals and the Global Engineering Manager regarding using heat pump technology to reach 100% thermal energy in Unilever's factories by 2030, "Suppliers & business partners" through collaborations and innovations to reach net zero by 2039, and "Planet & Society" including the call for governments to attend COP28 with the strive toward 100% renewable energy by 2030.

Meanwhile, Unilever's Thai website mostly communicates SDGs implicitly. Although the Thai version of the "Planet & Society" page has overviews of 10 "Purposes in action", the hyperlink of each "Purpose in action" redirects to the global website, which contains related SDGs. On the "News" page, accessible by either clicking on "See All News" on the Thai homepage or clicking on the "News" page, Unilever Thailand's articles, most of which communicate Unilever's sustainability initiatives in Thailand or globally, can only be filtered by month and year. Comprising 22 articles in 2023, only one article contains a "Purpose in action" goal in the preview, specifically net zero emissions by 2039. Other goals of "Purposes in action" in the body of several articles include zero emissions in Unilever's operations by 2030, 100% biodegradable ingredients by 2030, and 100% recyclable packaging by 2025.

Stakeholders addressed in Unilever Thailand's articles in 2023 correspond to ones in the "Unilever Annual Reports and Accounts 2021". These include "Consumers", for example, the communication

of the new product attributes and sustainable environmentally friendly packaging of Rexona Vitamin Plus Bright, and "Suppliers & business partners", comprising
Unilever Thailand's collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and the Mekong Sustainable Manufacturing Alliance for ethical recruitment of migrant workers.
Unilever Thailand's explicit SDG communication includes the article on Breeze Dirt is Good Bootcamp in partnership with Global Action Plan (NGO), which received the Gold Global Goods Award 2023, corresponding to the "Planet & Society" stakeholder.

Regarding additional stakeholders, in line with recommendations from recent studies (e.g., Ansell et al., 2022; Canel, 2023), both Unilever Global and Unilever Thailand communicate many collaborations with national governmental sectors and local communities. Consistent with the UN Agenda 21 slogan "think globally, act locally" (Ansell et al., 2022) and conceptualizations of glocal CSR communication (Jain & De Moya, 2013; Sthapitanonda & Itdhiamornkulchai, 2022), Unilever communicates glocalizations of SDG-related initiatives, including the glocal CSR communication of #EveryUDoesGood projects in Thailand.

Implications

This study offers academic and practical contributions. The proposed conceptualization of explicit and implicit corporate SDG communication could be applied to analyze other case studies and platforms and be extended to develop new frameworks/models in future studies. The case study of Unilever provides implications for glocal and lobal CSR communication toward SDGs. Nevertheless, a limitation of this exploratory study is the scope of the global and local websites of one corporate brand. Consequently, future research could conduct a comparative analysis of glocal CSR/sustainability communication of multiple product brands of the same corporate brand to explore diverse CSR/sustainability initiatives and SDGs that each product brand communicates to target different stakeholders.

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Keeping the fight alive in violent online contexts: energy replenishment rituals to debunk fake news

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Introduction

Being a fake news fighter (or fake fighter) is hard work. It is emotionally hard since they operate in a highly violent environment on social media platforms. Fake news fighters are often subjected to trolling, abuse, and death threats. Due to the high level of emotional stress, they often experience burnout (McCarthy & Glozer, 2022), and some of them, cannot hold the pressure and leave. Yet, others keep working as fake fighters for years. Emotional energy is key to disruptive institutional work (Barberà-Tomàs, Castelló, de Bakker, & Zietsma, 2019) but, in contexts of extreme violence and online abuse, because people are burned out, it needs to be refueled (McCarthy & Glozer, 2022). Refueling has been described as involving sensory retreat that helps people distance physically from intense emotions (Fotaki, Islam, & Antoni, 2019; McCarthy & Glozer, 2022), and affective solidarity which provides the necessary collective identification to make people feel that they are not alone in their work (Jasper, 2011). However, these two elements seem not enough when explaining how people keep fighting in extreme violence. It is still unexplained how individuals are able to replenish emotional energy to keep them dedicated to debunking fake news? To that aim we rely on the lense of Collins' (2005) interaction rituals to understand how fake news fighters' replenish their emotional energy.

Theoretical framework

Emotional energy in extreme negative emotionality

Emotional energy is "a morally suffused energy; it makes the individual feel not only good but exalted, with the sense of doing" (Collins, 2005, p. 39). It is what drives people to enact change (Barberà-Tomàs et al., 2019). Yet, in the context of extreme hate, emotional energy is hard to maintain and needs to be replenished (McCarthy & Glozer, 2022). Emotional energy is the result of a balance between emotional highs and low, what Jasper (1998) calls emotional battery. The "contrast" between positive and negative emotional states; this drives action, fosters creativity, and instills a feeling of urgency. Nonetheless, a prevalence of negative emotions can be a threat to emotional energy (Fan & Zietsma, 2017). Emotional energy can be threatened inside the organization, when there is a failure to enact values and practice aligned with a certain logic (Fan & Zietsma, 2017). When threatened and diminish emotional energy needs to be replenished for the action to continue.

Replenishment is often enacted through affective solidarity (a movement towards the collective) when experiences are aligned (Collins, 2005). Yet, replenishment also needs the self-management of the emotions activating protective agency (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018) which is more introspective. Sensory retreat also enables emotional regulation (Jarvis, 2017), which is the

"processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998: 275). This more active form of emotional work has also been described not only as an individual process of retreat but as socially distributed (Gross, 2015; Vuori & Huy, 2022). For example, Vuori and Huy (2022) show how various organizational groups helped regulate senior managers' emotions when they faced a big strategic disruption.

### *Emotional energy replenishment and rituals*

In ritual theory, rituals are at the foundation of social life because through interaction, they generate group emotions that bind people together. Successful rituals can give rise to solidarity at the group level and emotional energy at the individual level (Collins, 2005). There are four conditions to interaction rituals: "group assembly through physical proximity, a barrier to outsiders, shared focus, and a common mood or emotional experience" (Maloney, 2013, p. 109). When emotional energy lowers and negative emotions like anger and shame may arise, resulting in lower commitment, and decreasing feelings of solidarity and connectedness (Doern & Goss, 2014). Instead, positive emotions, such as pride - indicating the sense of worth of individuals and promoting acceptance and status - function in the opposite way facilitating bonding and sharing.

Fan and Zietsma (2017) see emotions as factors fuelling people's investment, commitment, and engagement to the operation of construction of institutional logic and its maintenance. They provide clarification on the meaning of emotional energy. Emotional energy in the form of positive and negative push factors can create an energetic state that pushes people to act (Fan & Zietsma, 2017) and to engage in institutional work. In line with Zietsma and Toubiana (2018) we want to explore what replenishes emotional energy when it is under attack from outside the institution. As they underline, emotional energy can also result from a collaborative work and practices enacting shared values (Fan & Zietsam, 2017). In this study our aim is to show how individuals fighting fake news engage in interaction rituals leading to emotional energy replenishment to continue to fight disinformation.

Methods

France has been described as one of the most vaccine-hesitant countries in the world (Cambon, Schwarzinger, & Alla, 2022). We study the case of the group Big Pragma and its members, the most important group of fake news fighters specializing in vaccine hesitancy in France. These individuals work as volunteers debunking misinformation and fake news in social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. They organize in small groups of 5 to 20 people (some of these groups are called VFID, SPAV, VLS, Covid-19 federation, Les Vaxxeuses). Data was collected for 4 years, beginning in 2018, the year of creation for most of the groups. We approached the case with a mix of data collection methods ranging from netnography (Twitter and Facebook), participant observation in meetings and workshops, semi-structured interviews, videos, press articles, and other secondary data from official websites. Based on an inductive theory generation approach (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) we built a data structure (Figure 1).

Figure 1: data structure
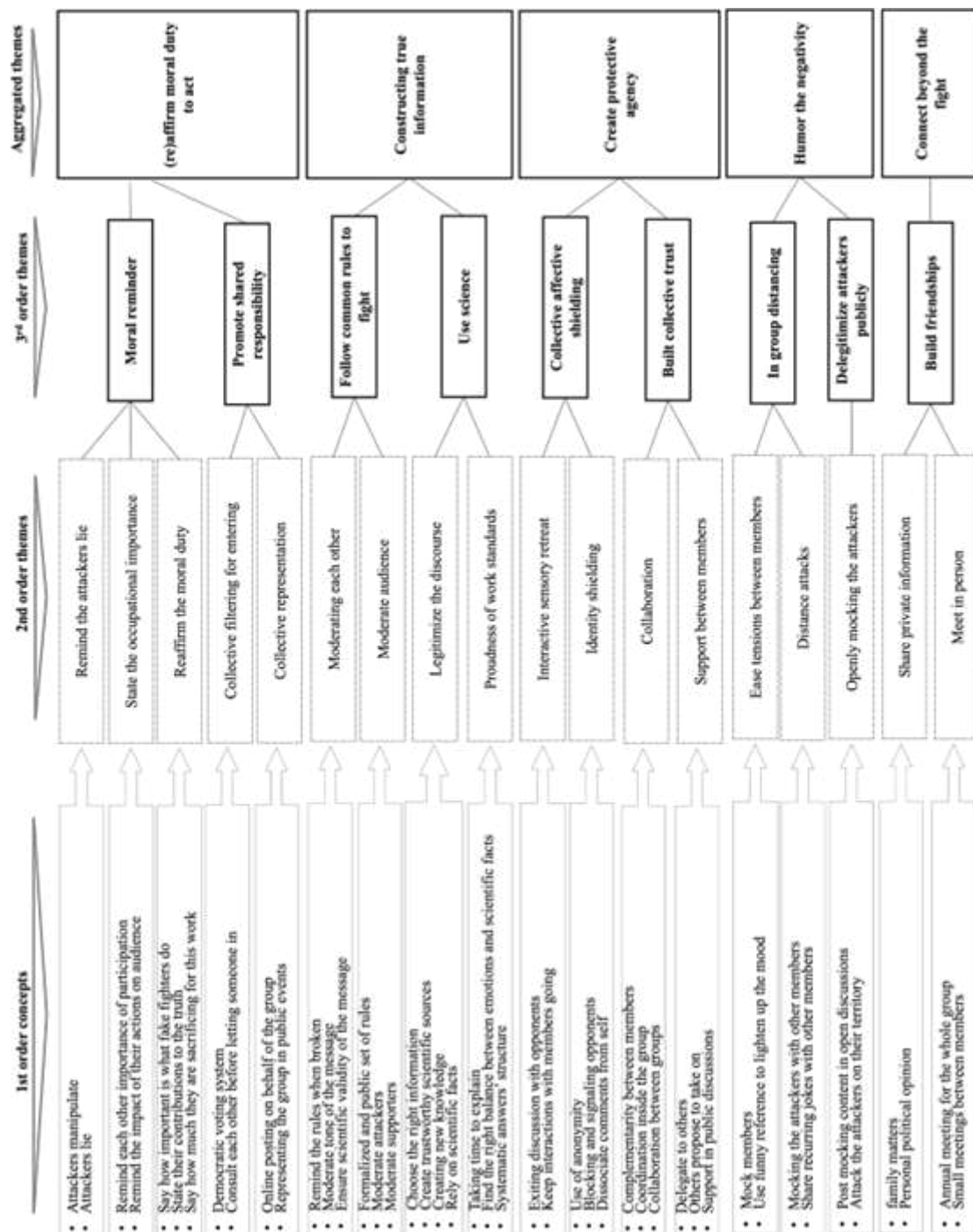
Findings

Our study aims at understanding how fake fighters replenish their emotional energy to continue to fight against fake news in extremely violent online contexts. Based on our analysis we found that they have developed five interaction rituals to overcome these negative emotions originating from the extreme online violence and work on restoring their emotional energy necessary to continue the fight (figure 2).

Figure 2: model of emotional energy replenishment rituals
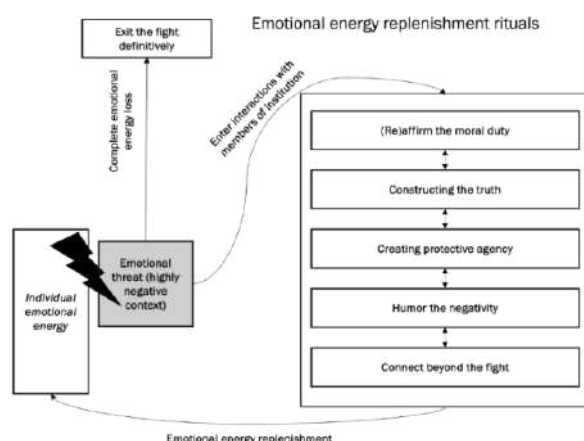
(Re)affirm the moral duty inside the collective

They can gain strength from the group, helping them counter the sense of being overwhelmed. This gives them more positive emotions to keep the fight going: "We're a group that pulls together in the face of all this difficulty, I think I'd give up or I wouldn't be as involved if it wasn't for the group." (Elizabeth, interview, 18/11/2022).

Fake fighters express relief knowing that others can take over if they feel overwhelmed by negative emotions. Anna highlights that "the advantage of being in a group is that we pass the baton to each other, motivate each other, and have a laugh about it." (Anne, interview, 17/10/2022).

Fake fighters promote shared space and a sense of belonging. They consult each other before letting someone join their group, whether it is on a long-term or temporary basis: for example, when we joined the group we first contacted Jade, who asked the other members permission to let us join the group, after introducing us and our research to them to make sure that our intentions were in line with the group's mission (Netnography, 16.11.22, Private conversation on Facebook Messenger). Additionally, they seek the input of members before crediting someone for any contributions made to a project:

Netnography, 06.04.23, Private conversation on Facebook Messenger-Kalou: 'you would like to add to the names who will appear on the debunk someone who did not participate?' -Pac: 'Hello Alex. I might misunderstand your proposition, tell me: you would like JR to be credited as an author of the debunk? -Alex: well, he's taking part by proof reading everything"

Construct the truth

Their contribution to spreading the scientific truth becomes palpable when they successfully change people's minds on vaccination, directly influencing their lives. For instance, fake fighters regularly receive grateful messages from social media users who were initially hesitant and thanks to fake fighters' actions have been convinced against disinformation, thereby reassuring them of the meaningfulness of their work:

"-FACEBOOK POST - 16/07/2020- @Nana Chevalier: Good morning! I just wanted to thank you one last time. My old daughter 3 years old is FINALLY up to date with her vaccines and my 6-month-

old baby is following the vaccination schedule and everything is fine, he has not become a vegetable 😄 Thank you for your trust, and patience, and for taking the time to reassure me and explain."

To create a common discourse, they consult each other to review and discuss any post before publication, whether it concerns the content or the tone of the message:

"We all work so much together that, in the end, it's all a bit mixed up. When we're going to do a big debunk article that's going to take a lot of time and require a lot of responses, there's a phase that's for proofreading. So this work, we do it together" (Zoe, interview, 22/11/2022).

Create protective agency

Relying on anonymity, they protect their identity, they create a barrier between their personal identity and their work, a crucial step given the influx of daily threatening messages. The group Les Vaxxeuses exemplifies this approach, with all members using pseudonyms and a unified account for social media responses. Even during our interviews (conducted on 17/10/2022 and 08/12/2022), they maintained the use of pseudonyms. Several fake news fighters have shared with us that because they rely and trust the other members they can retract from the fight when they feel overwhelmed. During these short periods of time they keep the contact with the members and continue to participate to private discussions without interacting with antivaxxers.

Humor the negativity

The virtual distance fake fighters can put between them and the violence experienced is reinforced by actions to distance themselves emotionally from this agonistic environment. Some of them rely on positive behaviors, resorting to humor. The use of humor is fundamental for fake fighters, as it helps them to: a) tone down the violence they are experiencing and dedramatize; b) make fun of opponents' arguments, either in private conversations, inside the groups, or in public discussions. For instance, Elizabeth (interview, 18/11/2022) states that humor helps them to have a break from the fight as it lightens up the conversation and eases the tensions:

"I have already used humor in the sense that it allowed me, for example, a little humorous metaphor which allows both to lighten the atmosphere and to give a nice example. (Elizabeth, interview, 18/11/2022)

Connect beyond the fight

By strongly relying on each other to regulate their emotions, fake news fighters have built friendships that go beyond the fight against disinformation). They refer to each other as "friends" and seek to maintain close relationships with the members of the groups. Friendships play a crucial role in sustaining feelings of belonging within the group, fostering a collective determination to continue the fight despite the negative emotions experienced by individuals: "In the end, we don't want to leave this group of friends either, so that's why we're staying. So I've never felt like leaving" (Zoe, interview, 22/11/2022).

Discussion

In this paper, we have explored how, in the face of extreme violence, death threats, and constant insults by anti-vaxxers when engaging with them online, Big Pragma fake news fighters can

replenish their emotional energy and continue their work. We believe that our study complements to existing research on emotional energy replenishment because we show, through the lense of rituals, that this replenishment happens in a continuous interaction with the collective, beyond a dichotomy of taping into the collective or retreating from it (McCarthy & Glozer, 2022). Our study reveals important insights not only into emotional work and how individuals facing extreme negative emotionality can replenish emotional energy but also into how energy replenishment rituals are connected with the collective construction of institutions. Our contributions are connected to the relation of energy replenishment to the substance of institutions (Friedland, 2018) showing not only what binds actors to institutions (Friedland, 2018) but also how rituals are important for the collective construction of an institution (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018).

Our first contribution is to unfold the mechanisms of energy replenishment in the social media context of extreme emotional violence. Through these nuanced descriptions of emotional energy replenishment rituals, we offer insights into what makes actors replenish the emotional energy necessary to maintain their dedication to debunk fake news. Our data shows the emotional experiences of debunking fake news and how the need to be regulated is not only done through physical protective agency (Zietsma & Toubliana, 2018) and sensory retreat (McCarthy et al. 2022) but also through humoristic shielding that emotionally distances (Castelló & Lopez-Berzosa, 2023) the fake news fighters from their opponents, easing tensions and dedramatizing conflict and violence. We also show how energy replenishment is performed through the construction of a sense of belonging to a collective during rituals. We therefore draw on the understanding of the construction of institutions and the role of emotional energy (Friedland, 2018; Zietsma & Toubliana, 2018) and provide a detailed view of how emotional solidarity intersects with the promotion of responsibility, the collective construction of truth and the shaping of norms and rules of the institution.

To what extent are energy replenishment rituals unique to the fake news-fighting institution? Friedland (2018) argues that full commitment to the institution makes actors emotionally embody the institution. However, he does not explain how strong the commitment needs to be or how the commitment is related to the sense of moral duty that some individuals experience in some types of institutions like the Church but also health care or animal care. Massa et al. (2017) have explained the importance of emotional work in inspiring evangelism in people working towards what they consider the common good. Yet, most of the studies on moral duty or evangelism present positive emotions as a driver of institutional change (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Massa et al., 2017). Although not very much explored, most forms of institutional work present some hardship. What is unique to the fake news fighters is the extreme violence they are subjected to, but also the nature of their work that relates to collective dialectical processes by which the foundations of subjective reality are questioned. Being a fake news fighter is specifically hard not only because they receive numerous threats to life but also because their work relates to the very nature of the construction of reality which is often fragile and creates doubt. Also, despite their reliance on scientist and the scientific truth for building their arguments, this is an institution that has been very much

questioned. Our work show the importance of rituals inside the group as well as with the opponents in constructing and maintaining the institution.

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CSR and Employer Attractiveness

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Abstract

The current study focuses on the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and employer attractiveness as reflected in employee retention. Using data from 946 respondents from 16 different companies (6 IT, 4 healthcare, and 6 energy) in the North of the Netherlands, we explore to what extent perceived CSR and purposeful work relate to the employer branding evaluation of current employees. Our results show that CSR and employee engagement are essential predictors of employer branding for current employees. By connecting CSR and employee engagement to employer branding within the organization, our study provides an internal perspective on employer branding and its role for current employees as a stepping stone to reflecting external experiences with the EB.

Keywords: employer branding, CSR, employee engagement, employer attractiveness

Introduction

The relationship between the attractiveness of an organization and its activities shared under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is described extensively in the literature (Jones et al, 2016), also primarily related to millennials (Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017). The CSR activities of organizations, including community involvement and environmental sustainability practices, are crucial in attracting job seekers, as these activities signal a positive work environment, financial standing, and the nature of its employees, though some job seekers also might be skeptical (Jones et al., 2016).

Applying employer branding in job advertisements has been shown to have positive effects (Hein et al., 2024; Elving et al., 2012), though many of these results have been obtained with experimental research designs. Not only in the recruiting phase, employer branding and CSR also have a significant role in retaining employees. Internal CSR activities increase employee commitment and lead to higher employee engagement rates. This emphasizes that internal CSR practices directly impact employee's intentions to stay within the organization (Ikram et al., 2021).

However, how this works has not been studied extensively, as far as we know. Therefore, we conducted a survey among 16 companies in the Northern part of the Netherlands, within healthcare, IT and energy, branches that are crucial for that part of the country. This project is part of a larger project aimed at attracting more young talents to stay in the region after their studies instead of moving to more economically advanced regions.

The main research question is to what extent do the perceived CSR and purposeful work relate to the employer branding evaluation of employees working in the healthcare, IT, or energy section in the North of the Netherlands?

Method

Through an intensive selection procedure, we were able to include 946 respondents from 16 different companies (6 IT, 4 healthcare, and 6 energy), all operating in the North of the Netherlands. The surveys were distributed through the organization and offered in Dutch or English. We first interviewed the responsible manager of branding/HR and/or recruitment and distributed the online questionnaire through this manager.

For CSR, we used the scale Turker (2009) developed, which consisted of six items. Finally, engagement was established with six items, based upon the affective commitment subscale of Meyer et al., (2004). Employer Branding was established using 18 of the 25-item Likert scale of Berthon et al., (2005). Since the data collection was finished recently, we only can present some preliminary results of the study. At the conference we will have in-depth results available.

Results

The 946 respondents (54,4% female), of whom 318 worked in the Energy sector, 65 in IT and 563 in healthcare, had an average age of 43,2 years. The average age was significantly (F (2, 945) = 7.84, p<.001) lower in IT (MIT= 37,5; MEnergy= 43,4; MHealth=43,8). Two-thirds (69%) of the respondents had at least a bachelor's degree. Of the respondents, 17,2% had a managerial function.

The scales' reliabilities are high. We did not have time for confirmative factor analysis, but we will present that during the CSR Communication Conference. (Cronbach's Employer Branding = .915; Csr= .827, and Employee Engagement =.869).

The means within the three branches (IT, healthcare and energy) on the employer branding, CSR and employee engagement variables will be presented in Figure 1.
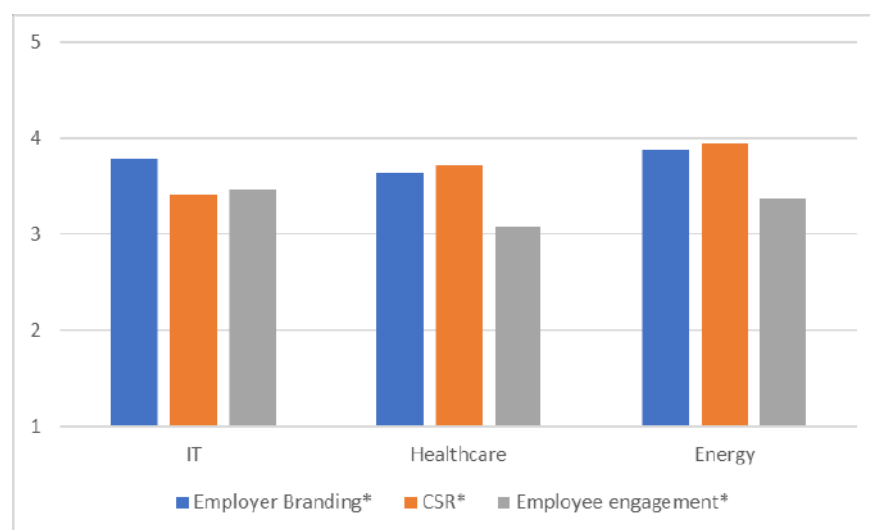
*p<.001

Figure 1: means of the scores of employees within the three branches. All differences are significant (p<.001)

Employees in the energy branch give their organizations the highest scores on Employer Branding and CSR, whereas the IT branch gives the highest scores on employee engagement. Table 1 presents the correlations between Employer Branding, CSR, and employee engagement.

Table 1: Correlations between Employer Branding, CSR, and employee engagement

	Employer Branding	CSR	Employee Engagement
CSR	-	.481[1]	.671[1]
Employee engagement		-	.614[1]
Employer Branding			-

[1]p<.01

Table 1 shows that all correlations between the variables are significant. To check how employer branding is determined by the perception of the organization's CSR and employee engagement, we conducted a linear regression, with employer branding as the dependent variable. The results will be shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of linear regression with employee engagement as dependent variable and employer branding and CSR as predictors.

	Beta	P	
Employee Engagement	.377	<.001	
CSR	.493	<.001	
Adjusted R-square			.563

F(2,917)= 592,69; p, <.001

As can be seen, the explained variance of Employer Branding is more than 55% predicted by employee engagement and the perception of CSR.

Discussion

The branding of organizations is important not only for their external stakeholders but also, and maybe even more, for internal stakeholders. Especially in times of scarcity of employees – the war for talent – it is important not only to be attractive to new talents but also to retain the existing talents already working in the organization. People do not leave their jobs, but leave their bosses (Buckingham & Coffman, 1995).

The significant influence of employee engagement on employer branding is not surprising but rather a confirmation. As Cartwright and Holmes eloquently stated in 2006, as individuals become increasingly disenchanted and disillusioned with work and fatigued by the constant demand to change and be flexible in response to organizational needs, employers now need to actively restore the balance, recognize the meaning and emotional aspects of work, and move towards creating a more energized, fulfilled and engaged workforce (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006).

CSR activities undertaken by organizations have long already passed the communication and/or PR stage (Frankenthal, 2001). Active CSR links the organization with the environment and positions the organization, ideally, within society. Our study also showed that the scores on CSR are the highest in the Energy sector, that might be due because energy related business working on the energy transition, has direct links with sustainability. Busy with the energy transition means that you are phasing out fossil fuels, so working on sustainability. Also, the higher score of Employer Branding within the healthcare sector might be since healthcare already has a longer tradition of staff shortages and pays a longer time to be an attractive employer.

Limitations

As always, there are also limitations to this study. First, as indicated we were only able to present the first, preliminary results, and did not have time to check the different underlying factors of employer branding. Second the number of employees in the different sectors are very different. Not surprisingly the responses within the healthcare sector are the highest, with several large (hospitals) that did join in the research and the relative smaller size of organizations operating in the two other sectors (IT and energy) in the northern part of the Netherlands.

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Curators of change. A typology of Sustainability, Environmental, CSR, DEI and ESG Management roles related to impact, agency, and their transformative and transformational potential

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Purpose / Objectives

Sustainability, planetary health and climate protection are becoming increasingly important for companies, as well as political institutions, NGOs, educational and cultural institutions. While related policies, regulations and frameworks developed to guide individual and organizational behavior are often abstract and criticized as recompense, the business world has also (communicatively) created their niche for sustainability management (Weder, 2023) and institutionalized new roles to drive sustainability transformation (Schaltegger et al., 2023; Beckmann et al., 2020) within safe and just system boundaries of the earth (Rockström et al., 2023). Thus, over the past decade, numerous new professional roles have emerged next to sustainability management, such as environmental, sustainability, CSR, DEI, and ESG management and communication. This includes the facilitation of related projects, training or actual reporting and controlling as well as strategic planning processes and organizational development (Pollach et al., 2023). Thus, these roles are no longer solely an 'add-on' to existing HR or Communication roles but have more and more reached the 'C-Suite,' attaining a strategic and management level.

But what exactly defines these professional roles where environmental and climate protection, innovation, and transformation as well as sustainability as guiding principle play a significant role? What qualifications are expected for these new job profiles? Who are the individuals that are needed, that potentially fuel and support organizational change toward socio-ecological and more concrete, organizational transformation? What competencies are in demand, and what definitions of sustainability, CSR, DEI and ESG are represented in these professional profiles or in the corresponding job advertisements. And what are the selfdefined roles and what is the actual 'doing' of the role holders?

To answer these questions, the study at hand explores two data sets of job announcements (n = 14.085, 2014-2023; source: greenjobs.de; and n = 1.161, Dez. 2023-Feb. 2024, sources: LinkedIN, stepstone/totaljobs.com, monster.com, jobverde.at; karriere.at, derStandard.at, greenjobs.de, stellenanzeigen.de, jobs.ch) with a mixed-method study design (statistical analysis and explorative deep-dive with a two-step categorization, QCAmap, Mayring, 2019; Fenzl & Mayring, 2017) and reflects the insights of the content analyses with n = 50 semi-structured interviews with people who currently hold a role as 'change agent', who actually work as (Chief) Sustainability Officer or Manager, Diversity and Inclusion Manager or CSR Manager.

Theoretical background

In the face of a climatic catastrophe, political instability and deep socio-cultural changes, there is an increased interest in academia to monitor the interplay between socioecological transformation and aspects of the climate crisis on the one hand and organizations, in particular companies, their role in the society and reactions to the crisis on the other hand. Studies explore the frameworks, policies and regulations that stimulate companies to further reflect and institutionalize them in their organizational structure, including all the activities they implement to be accountable, transparent and follow sustainability as guiding principle (Waddock, 2009; Rasche et al., 2017). Next to the focus on changing organizational structures to take social responsibility, there is an increased interest foremost in Management and Communication Studies to analyze the actual demand for transformation that is not only expressed in higher expectations from share- and stakeholders (Acuti et al., 2024) but also increasingly debated in the media (Schlichting & Schmidt, 2013) and in civil society (Vestergaard & Uldam, 2022). Both research perspectives shed light on the infrastructure that companies of all size and scope (co)created to meet the challenges and expectations has grown – including new roles to take responsibility for the compliance to regulations and policies but also for the institutionalization and further expansion of activities with which a company contributes to sustainable development. And the individuals holding a certain agency and power, and are also motivated, qualified and competent to implement change (Lindgreen et al., 2011), are well needed.

While there is a tradition in business ethics to focus on the CEO as responsible businessman (Bowen, 2013), on responsible leaders and their value frameworks (Hesselbarth & Schaltegger, 2014; Wesselink et al., 2015) or ethics managers as well as ethical managers (Laasch & Conoway, 2015), the concepts have been increasingly adapted in sustainability management, where earlier work (Visser & Crane, 2010; Battilana et al., 2009) already pointed to the capability of individuals to change norms and organizational culture by holding an 'agency for change'. This has been picked up by recent work on change agents for sustainability (CAS, Schaltegger et al., 2023; Borglund et al., 2023; Gond & Moser, 2021 or Girschik, 2020; Carollo & Guerci, 2017; Hesselbarth & Schaltegger, 2014; Lozano et al., 2015; Salgado et al., 2018; Schaltegger, 2013; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018; Wickert & Risi, 2019). A related milestone has just been published, offering archetypes of 'corporate change agents for sustainability' (Schaltegger et al., 2023; Journal: Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility); here, the focus is on the sustainability manager transforming organizations toward more sustainability, including the conceptual idea that „the notion of corporate 'Change Agent for Sustainability' applies to any corporate member that deliberately pursues and effectively contributes to the necessary radical change of an organization towards achieving a society that functions within the safe and just operating space of Earth system boundaries, i.e. planetary boundaries, meeting the UN SDGs and beyond." (Schaltegger et al., 2023, p. 146).

The functional role of a change agent for sustainability therefore includes deliberately pursuing radical organizational change for sustainability, addressing impact scopes beyond organizational boundaries, applying evaluation criteria and performance measures. The authors further point to the shared values and strong beliefs as well as a broad variety of skills and competences that are necessary to take the role of a change agent (ibid.; see also earlier Visser & Crane, 2010), which

leads to the statement that not every actor dealing with sustainability in an organization can be considered a CAS. While there exist further concretizations in the literature regarding the structural position of the change agents as well as their key activities, are complemented by recent work on influences and constraints of the agent's role (Pollach et al., 2023; Osagie et al., 2019; Petrocelli, 2020), there is more research needed that explores the self-defined role and the individual interpretation of agency.

Additionally, especially from a communication studies perspective, the focus on sustainability or CSR manager seems to be fairly narrow, not only because there is a manifold of sustainability and CSR related roles that are labeled as trainers, educators or consultants – just to name a few; additionally, there are roles that are not related to sustainability but definitely hold the potential to be an agent of change. This is supported by research in the area of environmental management (Nugent & Radicic, 2023; Greenwood et al., 2012) and green jobs and green skills (Stanef-Puică et al., 2022), employee representatives as moral agents (Koinig & Weder, 2021), employee and internal activists (Girschik et al., 2022) or internal entrepreneurs (Darcis et al., 2023). This is also supported by work done in (strategic) communication research on curators of change (Weder et al., 2023), journalists as transformational communicator (Brüggemann et al., 2022) or transformative PR and PR activism (Ciszek et al., 2021) or 'PRebels' (Weder, 2021).

Frameworks developed in these studies try to capture professional roles with all their functions, qualifications and competences needed as well as the self-defined role that is actually taken within the organizational structure, such as 'storyteller', 'moderator', 'mediator', 'agony aunt', or 'messenger' etc. These roles are influenced by expertise and knowledge on the one hand, and values, inspiration, communication, and moral agency on the other hand (Visser & Crane, 2010; Schaltegger et al., 2023; Weder et al., 2023; Pollach et al., 2023; Chaudhri, 2016); the identity as storyteller, moderator or messenger etc. is selfnegotiated and often under pressure (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Juretzek & Broschat, 2021). This again links also back to the literature on CSR and Sustainability managers and their critical role as mentor and stimulator (Osagie et al., 2019; Wesselink & Osagie, 2020; Quinn, 1988), however without considering the role of communication in taking these roles.

Therefore, the study at hand explores the variety of change agents for sustainability beyond the archetypes developed by Schaltegger et al. (2023) and seeks to further learn about role-modifications, factors that direct the self-identification and potential role conflicts and aims for a better understanding of the doing of sustainability communication in all its facets – and possible overlaps across the various professional roles. As a result, the study not only presents a typology of the actual job roles but also certain clusters of 'doing' sustainability management and communication which will help to re(de)fine curators of change in organizational contexts.

Study / Conceptualization

To re(de)fine curators of change, we are guided by the following research questions: What are the professional roles in the field of sustainability, CSR, ESG, DEI and environmental management and communication? What are qualifications needed, competences and skills required and how are the functional roles described? What changes over time? How do communicators describe themselves and each other – as communicators?

In the context of a crisis, how is the actual doing imagined?

To answer these questions, we apply two methodological approaches (content analysis & interviews), delving into the Austrian market and, furthermore, into neighboring countries, including Germany, France, Switzerland, as well as USA and Australia/NZ. The empirical analysis involves firstly a statistical analysis of the full greenjobs.de-database (2014-2023, n =14.085 job ads) to study changes over time. This will be complemented by a qualitative analysis of a sample of job advertisements from the largest job portals (German and English) as well as LinkedIN, also in two languages (English & German) (collected in Nov./Dec. 2023, n = 1.161). This data will be reflected with current statistics and business reports.

The mixed-method content analysis of job ads is complemented by a series of interviews with role holders (n = 10 per country/5 countries), conceptualized as semistructured interviews (Bryman, 2016). Thus, next to the descriptive data gathered from the content analysis, the specific sample of current job ads and the interviews have been treated as text material that we analyzed with a two-step inductive category formation, following the research questions. We chose this question-led approach used in qualitative content analyses using the open access analysis web-tool QCAmap (Mayring, 2019; Fenzl & Mayring, 2017) to learn the most from the data and avoid working with presumed roles.

Findings / Originality

The job announcements, firstly, give a clear picture of how sustainability management emerged as a new profession over the years (2014-2023). For example, jobs with "Nachhaltigkeit" (German: Sustainability) have increased from 193 job ads in 2014 to 2542 in 2023 (greenjobs.de/stats). Secondly, we can point to a larger variety of job descriptions and thus a divergence of functional roles since 2014. Furthermore, in the more recent job ads analyzed with an inductive categorization (2023/2024), green skills and communication competences are increasingly articulated as requirements for all kinds of transformational roles in organizational contexts. The data also shows how these roles moved from being an 'ad-on' function to existing PR or HR jobs to strategy, innovation, and management departments, with labels like 'director' or 'chief' or 'manager' in the job title. This supports earlier typologies of sustainability managers, differentiating between external and internal support roles, strategic, mainstream, and rather functional roles (Schaltegger et al., 2023), with a specific focus on strategic and management roles.

As outlined in the theoretical part, the study supports the assumption that the field of professional roles is much broader than 'just' sustainability management. For example, the findings show that DEI roles are much more institutionalized in Europe, the US and Oceania, compared to sustainability and CSR-related roles; also, the qualifications for DEI jobs are much more defined as well as communication competences are listed as one of the core competences. DEI roles are often situated on an upper management level, while Sustainability / CSR Management is still more likely to be embedded in HR, Communication or Administration – even though on a 'strategic' level.

The most compelling argument for further research on not only the divergence of the functional roles and 'archetypes' but much more on the self-defined roles that the study brings up is that the individual role and the impact perceived from the role holders is diverse and – most importantly – independent from the level (strategic, mid-management/mainstream, operational, functional).

Instead, it is influenced and driven by the agency the role holders feel, values, and authorship they are willing to take for their actions. All interviewed role holders describe themselves less as agents of or for change but rather as curators of change, with communication being at the core of their doing. With these insights, previous typologies of self-defined roles (storyteller, facilitator, moderator etc.) can be refined and differentiated, firstly, regarding the direction and mode of communication, from more information focused, one way sustainability communication (communication of sustainability, Weder, 2023) in the 'add-on' and officer roles to dialogical, participatory communication (communication about and for sustainability, ibid.) in strategic, management roles. This also correlates with the critical potential of the roles (not only transformative but also transformational) and the fact that they feel the 'ethical duty' to change, which will be further explored with the remaining interviews in the next month.

Outlook / Implications

The study at hand complements the debate around sustainability managers, skills and competencies and the professionalization in business and corporate communication. The results show that there is not one new profession but rather an increased number of organizational professionals curating change in organizations through communication for the sake of sustainability.

The findings of the study at hand add to a broader discussion about role responsibility, agency, and authorship related to public conversations in an age of social change, global crises, and a massively changing environment. Thus, the study answers the core question of what role communication competences play in these emerging new roles by showing that it's directly related to individual (moral) agency and the willingness to be disruptive, to think beyond regulatory frameworks and to be a value and culture manager. Lastly, despite the limitations in terms of a relatively small and thus not representative number of interviews with role holders, we can show that due to the increased variety of curator roles needed in socio-ecological transformation processes it will be crucial to adapt education and training programs at universities, colleges, and academies in the future.

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US Labor Unions as CSR Actors

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Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to understand how a unionized workforce influences the meaning and enactment of CSR. Grounded in a formative-constructivist view of CSR (Schoeneborn et al., 2020), this study uncovers the complementary and contradictory CSR narratives created by the corporation and the union. I explore how corporations and unions use their power and legitimacy to communicatively construct and enact the boundaries of CSR. In doing so, the study exposes the inherent boundary problems in CSR activities directed at employees and the unique ability of a unionized workforce to contest corporate attempts to colonize parts of their lives under the umbrella of CSR.

This study is situated on the Iron Range in Minnesota, USA. The area's six taconite mines produce 85% of the US domestic iron ore; approximately 31.9 million tons of taconite pellets a year 44. The Hull Rust Mahoning Mine (Hibbing Taconite; HibTac) located in Hibbing, MN, is the world's largest open pit iron ore mine and is the focus of this study. In operation since 1895, the mine employs 25 roughly 700 workers, 630 members of United Steelworkers Local 2705. HibTac is operated by Cleveland Cliffs, Minnesota's oldest and largest independent iron ore mining company and the largest flat rolled steel company in North America. (Cleveland Cliffs Inc., n.d. a; b; c).

Theoretical Framework and Research Objectives

This study approaches CSR as a dynamic concept driven by "an intricate web of social relations, power dynamics, and organizational culture interacting with constantly changing socio economic realities." (Rajak, 2006, 192). This definition complements the formative-constructivist view of CSR wherein the stakeholder-organization relationship is seen as interdependent and reciprocal around common interests that bind them together. In this sense, stakeholders and corporations are understood as co-creators of the meaning of CSR through dialogue and engagement (Schoeneborn et al., 2020). Thus, corporations are not the sole author of CSR texts; rather, corporations and stakeholders engage in an iterative process of sensemaking and sensegiving that can change CSR practices and alter their meanings (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Livesey, 2001).

The formative-constructivist view positions communication as a complex process of interactions that is central, rather than tangential, to organizing and organizations. Conceptually, researchers understand the relationship between CSR communication and practice through three different perspectives that are distinguished by temporality in that the sequence of the concepts varies. When CSR practices are antecedents to communication (perspective 1: walking-to-talk), the formative view suggests companies create messaging about existing or historic CSR practices. In contrast, when CSR communication precedes the practice (perspective 2: talking-to-walk) it serves as a form of aspirational talk that signals to internal and external stakeholders what CSR practices

are desirable and potentially forthcoming. Both perspectives suggest that while one action precedes the other, a feedback loop occurs based on stakeholders' evaluation of the walk or talk. In contrast, perspective 3, t(walking), conceptualizes CSR communication and practice as occurring simultaneously in a mutually constitutive relationship. The explication of three different formative perspectives offers useful analytical clarification. However, the three distinct perspectives sidestep the messy and complicated nature of CSR (see Schoeneborn et al., 2020 for a full explication of the formative view and the three perspectives).

This study embraces the three formative-constructivist perspectives concurrently to show unions can shift the sequence of CSR messaging and practice. This move allows me to explore how the three perspectives are an iterative process. I invoke turning point theorizing (Bullis & Bach, 1989) as a means way to better understand the broader system pressures (e.g., exogenous and endogenous shocks) that are considered essential to understanding moments of collaboration, contradiction, and conflict in CSR meaning making and practice. Turning point theorizing aligns nicely with the formative-constructivist perspectives and helps us understand the role system pressures play in CSR meaning making because it provides an anchor event through which to analyze how CSR communication and practice are dynamic and their meanings are socially constructed over time and place wherein the past informs the present and the future.

This study is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: How does a unionized workforce support the CSR boundaries communicatively constructed by the corporation?

RQ2: How does a unionized workforce communicatively create alternative CSR boundaries to the corporation?

Method

The ethnographic structure of this study provides an avenue to gain insights into how a unionized workforce uses communication to create, support, or reject CSR practices including the micro-moments and turning points that are essential elements of organizing. This approach embraces the complicated and messy evolution of CSR communication and practices and allowed me to "take seriously the everyday lives" (Smith, 2023) of miners.

The first interview was in March 2019 and the last interview that is included in this study was in January 2024. My access to interviewees occurred primarily through word of mouth and individuals' willingness to introduce me to other miners. I formally interviewed over 25 union miners including the majority of United Steelworkers Local 2705's leadership team for this part of the larger study. I spent hundreds of hours hanging out in the union office and participating in informal conversations and observations.

I also engaged in activities that could be labeled participant observation. I went on a corporate guided mine tour that included miners and mine managers, attended pre-union meeting functions when invited, hung out at the union office, and helped with mundane union activities like stapling papers and Christmas party preparation. I was also explicitly barred from events like union meetings and most social gatherings of miners; I was invited and then disinvited to the 2022 Christmas party which caused considerable discussion about whether I had earned the right to go to such events. I had no direct access to union contract documents or closed social media pages and had no mine-

site access beyond the single tour. Sometimes union members would discuss contract or social media content, but I did not have first-hand knowledge of the materials.

Two turning points occurred which inform this study. First, COVID-19 ushered in a proposed change in company policy regarding vaccinations. Second, the company's leadership changed, and the CEO is a staunch supporter of unions unlike his predecessors. These changes, coupled with new union leadership at the local level, influenced the power and legitimacy both organizations as a CSR actor. In addition to interviews and extensive fieldnotes, I collected archival data from the company's website and newspapers. Doing so allowed me to gain a fuller picture of CSR in Minnesota mines as well as provide points of comparison and triangulation. I also engaged in member reflections with the miners to gain feedback on my analysis (Tracy, 2019).

All recordings were transcribed verbatim. After transcription, the data was read and initial observations were made. During this stage, the transcribed interview transcripts were compared with field notes and the two data types were merged to create a single data set. Data was analyzed using an iterative approach, alternating between emic and etic analysis. Specifically, after completing data immersion, I engaged in first-cycle descriptive coding. Following descriptive coding, I conducted versus coding to compare what miners told me with corporate communication and newspaper articles. Finally, I conducted second cycle theoretical and axial coding. In each cycle, I used sensitizing concepts to guide my analysis in connection with the research questions posed (Saldaña, 2013).

Results

This study yields two findings that inform our theorizing about CSR. First, unions, represent a unique organizational structure that provides employees with power and legitimacy to challenge the CSR boundaries communicated by the corporation. In contrast to managerial employees whose terms of employment are at the discretion of the organization, the working conditions of union employees are defined by their negotiated, legally enforceable union contract. A union contract legally enforces many of the responsibilities (e.g., safe working conditions, health and wellness benefits, wages) corporations claim as CSR. The union transforms these loosely binding forms of CSR, including those shared through aspirational talk, into binding practices. Unions create strong, enforceable responsibilities that shift CSR from a voluntary enterprise that the company controls to a co-created activity wherein employees have power and legitimacy in establishing CSR boundaries. For corporations voluntary CSR, inclusive of wages and workplace benefits, provides desirable flexibility. The company can, at any point, shift its CSR priorities without the threat of strikes or other militant employee actions such as the very public protest that erupted in Minnesota in the wake of a proposed COVID vaccine mandate. This situation laid bare the inherent boundary problems in CSR directed at employees and exposed CSR fault lines that emerge when two powerful and legitimate CSR actors disagree on where CSR practices begin and end. Moreover, this protest exposed how union employees are able to publicly criticize the company with minimum fear of reprisal. This finding underscores how CSR boundaries are consequential, and the difficulty employees have in disrupting corporations' desire to expand the boundaries of CSR without a formal organizational structure such as a union.

Second, unionized workers represent a distinct type of employee that are simultaneously union members and company employees. The duality of roles changes our understanding of employees because miners hold dual organizational identifies: United Steelworker Local 2705 member and Hibbing Taconite miner. Both of these identities are important to the miners and the primacy of one identity over the other was situationally dependent. The two organizational identities were often compatible; particularly when the corporations stated responsibilities aligned with the union's goals. However, when there were differences in what the two organizations believed constituted responsible behavior, the miners identity as a United Steelworker took precedent. The miners communicatively constructed the union as being an alternative CSR actor who has the power and legitimacy to create its own form of CSR within and alongside the corporation's CSR. They believed that without the union, they would not have the ability to enact CSR boundaries that were incongruent with corporate priorities. I identified two novel forms of CSR enacted by the union: shadow and independent CSR. Shadow CSR refers to communication and practices enacted by the union which create alternative yet co-occurring CSR boundaries. Independent CSR refers to communication and actions initiated by the union to define the boundaries of CSR independently from the corporation. The unions' enactment of shadow and independent CSR boundaries also functioned as an impetus for the corporation to expand or alter its CSR positions. For example, the union's philanthropic activities lead to financial support for CSR that was outside of the company's communicated CSR portfolio. Similarly, the union's construction of a shadow CSR boundary in relation to safety showed how the union structure provided employees with the power and legitimacy to challenge corporate control over how CSR is practiced as well as create unique forms of CSR.

Taken together this study's findings illustrate how a unionized workforce is a second powerful and legitimate actor who can collaborate and clash in the communicative construction and enactment of CSR. These findings challenge theorizing that CSR is a set of corporate-determined, voluntary actions that corporations take to create and maintain their social license to operate (e.g., Smith, 2023) and research that has shown employees as CSR actors have limited power in pushing back against corporate proclivities (Dhanesh, 2022). While union membership in the USA is at historic lows (McNicholas et al., 2023), the findings of this study suggest that unions can provide an important counterweight to corporation's increasing encroachment into the lives of employees. Unions, as a powerful and legitimate CSR actor, negotiate for wages, healthcare, retirement and other workplace benefits in addition to having formal grievances processes and the ability to strike in contrast to non-union, at will employees who do not have the same power and legitimacy. In an era when corporations claim activities directed at employees as evidence of CSR, it is the minority of employees who have a formal structure to oppose company's efforts to expand or retract CSR boundaries such as the type of healthcare offered, wages, or other benefits. The findings of this study expose the ways a second powerful and legitimate CSR actor can, alongside the corporation, define CSR boundaries in ways that are more inclusive of employees' needs than the corporate-centric communication and practices that dominate CSR theorizing and research.

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Telework Practices and Perceptions of (Creative) Directors in Marketing and PR Agencies: Implications for Well-being and Job Satisfaction

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Introduction

Technological advancements, global market conditions, and the onset of the pandemic have forced many companies to adopt unconventional ways of working and interacting, moving away from traditional face-to-face approaches. While flexible work arrangements are nothing new, societal and cultural expectations, coupled with emerging technologies and associated digitalization, have led to its manifestation in novel formats previously unfamiliar to us.

If remote work is a circumstance where work is entirely or partially performed outside the employer's premises, then telework is a subcategory of this broad concept (Umaji & Paireekreng, 2023). Numerous authors define telework as work (1) outside the conventional workplace and (2) facilitated by telecommunications or other computer technologies (e.g., Aleem et al., 2023; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Maruyama et al., 2009; Nilles, 1997). The nature of work is undoubtedly changing, as data from Eurofound indicates that 12 % of employees in the EU work solely from home, while 18 % work in a hybrid manner (from home and in the office) (Ahrendt et al., 2022). In other words, 1 in 3 employees in the EU telework at least occasionally.

Furthermore, telework is not merely a context of work, but it can enable the development of new conditions and circumstances regarding the nature of work, which need to be considered (Belanger et al., 2012). Given the recent popularity of telework, numerous critical questions arise on the individual level (e.g., Golden et al., 2008; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007) and the organizational level (e.g., Boell et al., 2016; Golden & Veiga, 2008). However, it is important to recognize, that telework can be considered a crucial internal CSR practice (see Mayo et al., 2016), since it "promotes workplace and lifestyle flexibility, offers better work conditions for the disabled, and serves environmental goals" (p. 612). Similarly, Churilov (2023) emphasizes that telework has the potential to positively impact different aspects related to the goals of CSR, such as work-life balance, job satisfaction, and occupational health and safety. Following, Yousaf et al. (2016) suggest that internal CSR practices, such as telework, are directly linked to employee well-being.

Well-being has been studied extensively in the telework literature, but most studies have focused specifically on the well-being of employees (e.g., Chuang et al., 2024; de Croon et al., 2005; Lapierre & Allen, 2006). On the other hand, very little has been said about the well-being and job satisfaction of supervisors, even though their views are crucial for the implementation of telework within the organization (see Harker Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). This research focuses on addressing this gap and providing insights into the attitudes and well-being of directors and creative directors.

Furthermore, there has been a lack of literature focusing on work arrangements in the creative and communication industries. In general, media and communication industries are experiencing

unprecedented change and evolution (Albarran, 2009), but we have no data on how frequent telework is or what flexible work arrangement policies marketing and PR agencies employ. This research will try to fill this gap by gathering information on telework frequency and policies in marketing and PR agencies in Slovenia, and how attitudes of directors impact its implementation.

Literature Overview and Research Questions

The significance of well-being is gaining interest among practitioners and researchers due to its critical role in the sustainability of organizations (Barrett, 2017). Diener (1984) defines well-being as the presence of positive emotions (e.g., happiness), the lack of negative emotions (e.g., stress), and an overall sense of satisfaction with life. Furthermore, well-being is closely related to job satisfaction, which is seen as a component of the affective dimension of well-being (van Horn et al., 2004).

Most commonly, the job-demands-resources model (JD-R model) (Demerouti et al., 2001) has been used to explain the relationship between well-being and telework. One of the key assumptions of the theory is that high demands (e.g., time pressure) deplete individuals' energy, leading to negative work outcomes (e.g., burnout), while resources (e.g., autonomy at work) enhance motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction (Demerouti et al., 2001). Considering that job resources encompass organizational aspects that contribute to goal attainment, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth, telework can be regarded as a job resource (Hoornweg et al., 2016), as it provides employees with increased autonomy, flexibility, and control over their work (Park et al., 2023).

Yet, the empirical findings on the effect of telework on well-being are inconclusive (de Menezes & Kaliher, 2011; Charalampous et al., 2019). For example, work location flexibility has been linked to greater work-life balance and job autonomy, which in turn increases employees' well-being (Ter Hoeven & van Zoonen, 2015), while other research has shown that the spatial dimension of telework is associated with social isolation (Golden et al., 2008; Tremblay, 2002) and co-worker dissatisfaction (Golden, 2007; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), which negatively affects their well-being.

As implied, supervisor well-being is also closely related to the relationship with their co-workers and subordinates. For example, Golden (2007) found that telework is negatively associated with co-worker satisfaction. One explanation is that in the case of on-site work at the employer's premises, colleagues are in close physical proximity, providing more opportunities for informal encounters (e.g., in the hallway). Such unplanned encounters often foster camaraderie, trust, and companionship, as employees discover common interests and share professional and personal aspects of their lives (Sarbaugh-Thompson & Feldman, 1998). This negative association could also apply to the relationship between supervisors and clients, whom they work with regularly, but no empirical research was conducted to prove this assumption.

As reflected in the diverse findings regarding telework outcomes, limited studies have shown that superiors have multifaceted views on telework. Peters et al. (2010), who collected data from managers from several European countries, found that attitudes towards this type of work are extremely polarized (even in the case where telework is already an established practice in the organization). This calls for further research on supervisors' attitudes in the context of new flexible

work arrangements, such as telework, as technology is transforming leadership management practices. Van Wart et al. (2019) listed several reasons why (e-)leadership should be studied, including changes in organizational patterns facilitated by the digital revolution, changed technical requirements, and the proliferation of new communication tools. Not only do these changes affect the well-being of supervisors, but in case of mismanagement, have important implications for employee and organizational outcomes. Some issues that result from ineffective leadership in telework contexts include miscommunication and communication chaos, poor motivation, insufficient trust, and poor oversight of diversity (Van Wart et al., 2019).

One of the reasons for varied outcomes of telework is that the context of telework plays a crucial role in determining its effects, as research shows varying directions of impact depending on factors such as telework intensity, contractual regulations, and job characteristics (Mergener & Mansfeld, 2021). Marketing and PR agencies provide a very specific context and very little is known about telework policies in such communication industries. Furthermore, these agencies employ creative directors, whose job is to oversee the execution of creative work, and whose priorities and job attitudes might be very different to supervisors in other industries. One such example could be, that they value creativity over productivity.

Given the lack of research on creative directors and directors in PR and marketing agencies, this study presents a valuable opportunity to explore their attitudes, as well as their well-being and satisfaction in the context of telework. The study aims to address the following research questions:

Q1: How common is telework in marketing and PR agencies in Slovenia?

Q1a: What are the perceptions and attitudes of creative directors and directors towards telework, and how do these perceptions influence its implementation?

Q2: How does the implementation of telework impact the well-being, and overall job satisfaction of directors and creative directors, within marketing and PR agencies, and what strategies can be implemented to mitigate potential negative effects and promote well-being in a telework environment?

Q2a: How does the telework of coworkers influence the overall satisfaction and well-being of directors and creative directors in marketing and PR agencies?

Q2b: How does the telework of clients influence the overall satisfaction and well-being of directors and creative directors in marketing and PR agencies?

Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative approach. We will conduct 17 semi-structured interviews with directors and creative directors from 15 different marketing and PR agencies in Slovenia, between March and April 2024. Most interviews will be conducted face-to-face. In instances where the interviewer is currently abroad or in a different city, we will conduct online interviews using Zoom. The sample is purposive and will ensure diversity in terms of age and gender. Additionally, we will obtain informed consent from all participants prior to the interviews.

We strived to include agencies of all sizes, with a focus on those that are well-known and successful within the Slovenian communication industry. This ensures a diverse representation of perspectives and experiences among the participants, enriching the depth of insights gained from the interviews. The topics covered during the interviews will include the frequency of telework in the agencies, the

policies used for teleworking, the attitudes and perceptions of creative directors and directors towards telework, and the impact of telework on their well-being and satisfaction. We will also explore the impact of telework on coworker and client relationships.

For data analysis, we will utilize a thematic coding approach. This method will allow us to identify and analyze recurring themes and patterns within the interview data, providing valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of directors and creative directors regarding telework in Slovenian marketing and PR agencies.

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Finding the optimal CSR disclosure balance: An empirical investigation of the reputational impact of balance between walk and talk

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Introduction

Extensive research has established that responsible businesses should interact with their stakeholders on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) matters, consistently sharing information about their CSR efforts, initiatives, products, and their overall impact on society (Du et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2014; Lu et al., 2019; Minor & Morgan, 2011).

Despite a broad consensus on the importance of such interactions, the question of how to communicate these efforts most effectively continues to spark debate among scholars and practitioners alike (Christensen et al., 2013; Maignan et al., 2011; Schoeneborn et al., 2020). In particular, there is significant discussion surrounding the balance between substantive actions—actual CSR practices undertaken by companies (the "walk")—and symbolic actions—the way these practices are communicated or portrayed to the public (the "talk"). Initial empirical evidence has suggested that when CSR substantive and symbolic actions are not consistent and coherent, stakeholders not only notice the discrepancy, but are negatively affected by it, creating a perception of the company as hypocritical, and eventually leading to disengage from it (Tukachinsky, 2015). As a consequence, various academics have argued that there should be balance between what one says and what one does, and that organizations should employ concrete and measurable CSR actions and engage in symbolic communication to increase stakeholders' awareness about those activities without triggering their skepticism. This idea of a strategy that aligns walk and talk has gained a lot of traction over the years, and yet, it was never empirically tested. In fact, authors as Perez-Batres and Doh (2014) or Walker and Wan (2012) did not empirically validate the effectiveness of a balanced CSR strategy but they have derived it from theory or inferred it from the negative outcomes obtained from employing decoupling.

Furthermore, recent research has shown that a certain level of decoupling between CSR substantive actions towards symbolic actions can still be beneficial to companies engaging in CSR (Christensen et al., 2013; MacLean & Behnam, 2010; Schons & Steinmeier, 2016; Westphal & Zajac, 1998). Decoupling is a misalignment between responsible concrete actions and their communication, which is usually employed by corporates in the form of overstating their CSR efforts without corroborating them with substantive actions (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Although some academics support the use of such strategy to benefit from the many advantages that CSR can provide to

organizations without incurring in too onerous investments, other academics argue that it enhances the risks of being perceived as hypocritical and, therefore, hinder the organizations' reputation.

The objective of this paper is twofold. Firstly, we aim at empirically assessing whether the balance between CSR substantive and symbolic actions has indeed a significant effect on the corporate reputation of a company, hence answering the question of whether a strategy of "walk the talk" is indeed of great benefit for companies when engaging in CSR activities. Secondly, the paper aims at investigating whether there is an asymmetric effect between CSR substantive and symbolic actions, such that a certain degree of imbalance between the substantive and symbolic actions towards the symbolic actions can still ensure the same levels of CSR benefits.

In order to assess the effect of balance between substantive and symbolic actions, a Response Surface Analysis (RSA) was carried out. RSA is a methodology able to provide a detailed view of the interrelation between two predictor variables, in the context of this research, the level of perceived symbolic and substantive CSR actions (X and Y), and an outcome variable, corporate reputation (Z) (Rodrigues, 2021). The utilization of RSA marks a pioneering contribution to the literature on the effects of CSR strategies on organizations, providing additional evidence to the most effective strategy to employ when engaging in Corporate Social Responsibility.

Theoretical background

The recent heightened consideration toward CSR has fueled the debate on whether employing such practices leads to beneficial or detrimental effects for organizations (Bachmann & Ingenhoff, 2017; Minor & Morgan, 2011).

One of the most debated aspects of CSR is how to communicate these commitments most effectively without triggering stakeholders' skepticism or limiting the risk of being perceived as "greenwashers" (Bothello et al., 2023; Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Nyilasy et al., 2014).

Corporate Social Responsibility can be understood as a combination of two actions: substantial (walk) and symbolic (talk). The former includes all those measurable actions that involve investments to change parts of the firm's operation in order to achieve better sustainability (Schons & Steinmeier, 2016; Weaver et al., 1999). The latter involves all those activities that aim to show "ceremonial conformity" to stakeholders' expectations regarding CSR to gain public support without incurring in large investments (Schons & Steinmeier, 2016; Zott & Huy, 2007).

Various scholars support the idea that balancing substantive and symbolic actions in a "walk the talk" strategy is the most effective way to benefit from the positive effects of CSR, as improved corporate reputation and financial performance. This view considers talk as a consequence of walk. Firms need to engage first in concrete CSR practices and then, in order to benefit from them, employ communication to share information about such actions and the effects they had (Maignan et al., 2011; Perez-Batres & Doh, 2014; Servaes et al., 2023; Walker & Wan, 2012). Scholars like Hawn and Ioannou (2016) have investigated the effects of balancing internal (walk) and external (talk) CSR actions on the financial market evaluations of 1492 firms in 33 countries, finding evidence that balancing walk and talk or favoring talk leads to a higher market value compared to the average value of the industry. However, a majority of the existent literature lacks empirical evidence of the concrete effects of a walk and talk balanced strategy on corporate reputation or the methodology employed for discerning levels of symbolic and substantive actions exhibits deficiencies in accuracy.

Therefore, the widespread conviction that a walk the talk strategy is the most effective to grant organizations beneficial outcomes is partially inferred from the literature highlighting the negative effects of decoupling.

Decoupling consists in the communication of CSR initiatives in a way that overstates or represents actions that were not concretely enforced (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Usually, companies employ decoupling to lower stakeholders' pressures to align with their expectations, hence gaining legitimacy, without the large investments that meeting external requirements would need (Tashman et al., 2019). Decoupling is a divisive topic within the academic field, in fact there is literature condemning such strategy because it is likely to lead to higher risks of being perceived as hypocritical, generating a reputational and financial damage and decreasing stakeholders' trust eroding their relationship with the brand (Bothello et al., 2023; Marquis et al.,2016; Nyilasy et al., 2014; Tukachinsky, 2015; Walker & Wan, 2012). It is conceivable that research findings dissuading firms from adopting a decoupled approach may have been conflated with research advocating for the 'walk the talk' approach, resulting in a broad consensus on the subject matter without sufficient empirical substantiation.

This research aims at empirically testing the effectiveness of a balanced walk and talk on a CSR outcome, corporate reputation.

Hypothesis 1. The greater the balance between CSR symbolic and substantive activities, the higher the corporate reputation.

Nonetheless, within the academic landscape there is a body of literature sustaining the use of decoupling as a way to achieve legitimacy, reputational and image advantages of being recognized as responsible without incurring in the large investments required by substantive actions (MacLean & Behnam, 2010; Schons & Steinmeier, 2016; Westphal & Zajac, 1998). Moreover, largely engaging in CSR talk through "aspirational talk" is viewed as an initiator and driver of substantive change therefore should not be criticized (Christensen et al., 2013). For this reason, the research empirically tests the effectiveness of aspirational talk against a walk focused strategy.

Hypothesis 2. For equal levels of imbalance, imbalance with CSR symbolic actions exceeding CSR substantive actions is associated with higher levels of corporate reputation than with CSR substantive actions exceeding symbolic actions.

Methodology

To test these hypotheses, we set up a between-subjects design with 1 factor with 3 conditions experimental design, to experimentally manipulate CSR symbolic actions, randomly making respondents in a situation of balance or imbalance of CSR substantive and symbolic actions.

Participants

Data collection took place in October 2023 through university distribution channels and was sent to Italian university students. The sample comprises 115 responses, which after removing incomplete answers became 95. The survey was administered through a computer-assisted web

interviewing methodology with closed answered questions. The organization investigated is ENI, an italian global company that has a business focused on oil and gas extraction to provide energy and electricity in various parts of the world. The choice of Eni was based on its contradictory nature, in fact, although it is a petroleum and gas focused corporation, it devotes large investments to environment protection and other CSR activities. These apparently conflicting activities nurture controversial feelings among stakeholders, which provide the perfect context to conduct the research.

Procedures and materials

The survey structure was designed in five main blocks, beginning with an initial question where the respondent's familiarity to Eni, that acted as a filtering question (Stacks, 2017). In the next block, subjects were asked to define, according to their knowledge, the level of commitment that Eni showed through concrete actions related to any CSR area, so as to capture subjects' perceived CSR substantive activities of ENI. Afterwards, subjects were asked in which macro-area of CSR they thought the organization was most active in: local community support, improvement of working conditions and support to employees, environment protection, and other.

Once respondents selected the main area of activity from a CSR perspective, they were shown randomly one of three experimental conditions, depicting different CSR balance or imbalance: balance between walk the talk, imbalance with CSR symbolic actions exceeding CSR substantive actions, and a third control group with CSR symbolic actions detached from CSR substantive actions. All conditions were presented in the form of an Eni LinkedIn post, with a written section consisting of one of the three different CSR strategies and pictures related to each topic touched in the text. After that, respondents were asked the corporate reputation of ENI (Ponzi et al., 2011, p. 23), and levels of skepticism (Mohr et al., 1998), and trust (Koschate-Fischer & Gartner, 2015).

Data analysis

In order to test the complex hypotheses about the balance and imbalance effects of CSR substantive and symbolic actions on corporate reputation, cubic response surface analysis via third order polynomial model was carried out (Humburg et al., 2022). This family of models is a special case of the full third-order polynomial model, with parameter constraints that correspond to the respective hypothesis of balance, and asymmetric imbalance.

Results

Table 1 presents the results of the rising ridge cubic polynomial regression, with corporate reputation as dependent and CSR substantive and CSR symbolic actions as independent variables.

	coef	st. error	z	pvalue	ci.lower	ci.upper
Reputation ~ CSR walk b1	0.498	0.031	15.60	0.000	0.436	0.561
Reputation ~ CSR talk b2	0.498	0.031	15.60	0.000	0.436	0.561
Reputation ~ CSR walk^2 b3	-0.088	0.028	-3.096	0.002	-0.144	-0.032
Reputation ~ CSR walk*CSR talk b4	0.177	0.057	3.096	0.002	0.065	0.290
Reputation ~ CSR talk^2 b5	-0.088	0.028	-3.096	0.002	-0.144	-0.032
Reputation ~ CSR walk^3 b6	0.012	0.009	1.293	0.196	-0.006	0.032
Reputation ~ CSR walk2*CSR Talk b7	-0.038	0.029	-1.293	0.196	-0.095	0.019
Reputation ~ CSR walk*CSR Talk^2 b8	0.038	0.029	1.293	0.196	-0.019	0.095
Reputation ~ CSR talk^3 b9	-0.012	0.009	-1.293	0.196	-0.031	0.006

Table 1 – Results of the rising ridge cubic response surface regression

Hypothesis 1 predicted a direct relationship between symbolic and substantive CSR actions and corporate reputation, in the sense that the higher the balance between CSR walk and talk, the higher the corporate reputation.

From Table 1, this hypothesis can be tested by analyzing the result obtained in b3, Reputation ~ CSR walk2, through which it is possible to analyze the quadratic relation between the variables. The table shows that Reputation ~ CSR walk2 has a significant and negative coefficient (b3 = -0.088, p-value = 0.002).

Therefore, it is possible to confidently state that the balance between CSR symbolic and substantive actions has a positive effect on corporate reputation, which consequently means that the findings support hypothesis 1.

On the other hand, hypothesis 2 predicted that an imbalance towards CSR walk would more positively affect corporate reputation rather than an imbalance towards CSR walk. In other words, they stated that the levels of corporate reputation would be higher whether the CSR walk<CSR talk compared to CSR walk>CSR talk.

This hypothesis is tested through the Reputation ~ CSR walk3 coefficient. However, the results show no significant imbalance effect (b6= 0.012, p-value = 0.196).

To better understand the effects that the balance of the CSR walk and talk have on corporate reputation and simplify the interpretation of the tables above, it is convenient to present the visual representation of the cubic response surface of the polynomial regression in Figure 1.
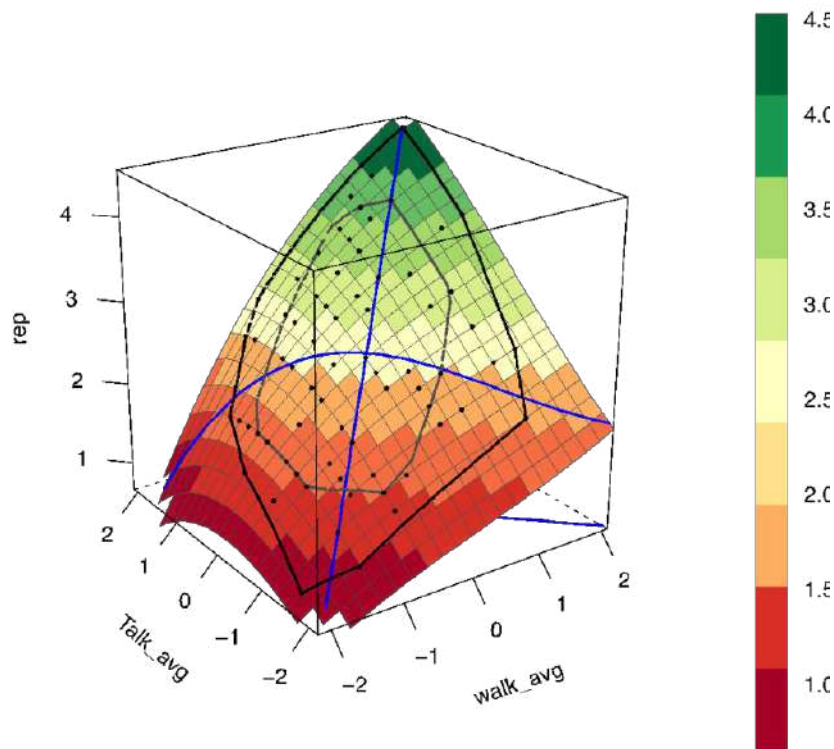
Figure 1 – Graph of the estimated values of the cubic Response Surface analysis illustrating how CSR walk and talk perceptions predict corporate reputation – Own elaboration

Figure 1 presents the data points within a three-dimensional space. This allows for a better understanding of the effects that balance and imbalance of CSR walk and talk on corporate reputation. But before discussing further this point, it is fundamental to specify how to read the graph, notably the line of congruence (LOC). It can be identified in the graph as the blue line that goes from where CSR walk_avg and Talk_avg cross, and it represents where all the possible values of X=Y, or where the level of perceived substantive actions correspond to the one of symbolic actions, are situated. The aforementioned hypothesis on the positive effects of the balance on the outcome can be tested by analyzing whether the points on the LOC, so where the levels of perceived CSR walk and talk are balanced are statistically associated with higher values of corporate reputation compared to the points off of the Line of Congruence, which correspond to any point where there is incongruence between the two independent variables.

It is visible from Figure 1 that for all possible combinations of the independent variables, the model falls on both sides of the Line of Congruence (LOC), although, with different inclines. In fact, on one side, the surface falls steeply, while on the other side, the inclination tends to be more gradual and less deep. Moreover, it is evident from the graph that on the surface the highest level of reputation is reached in the points that are situated on the LOC.

This additional graphic representation provides additional support to hypothesis 1, which is confirmed by all the obtained results.

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to empirically investigate the relationship between CSR substantive and symbolic actions in relation to corporate reputation. While extensive research has pointed out the benefit of a balance between these two actions, empirical evidence was so far not conclusive. Indeed, some scholars claim a certain degree of decoupling between symbolic and substantive CSR actions can still be beneficial to companies (Schons & Steinmeier, 2016; Westphal & Zajac, 1998). On the other hand, academics provide various reasons to not engage in decoupling since it exposes firms to the risk of being perceived as hypocritical, leading to credibility loss and reputational risks (Bothello et al., 2023; Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Tukachinsky, 2015). Moreover, decoupling prevents firms from benefiting from the advantages that engaging in CSR can have on risk and operations costs, worsening their financial performance (Walker & Wan, 2012).

Our findings show that a balance between CSR substantive and symbolic actions is indeed associated with a statistically higher level of corporate reputation, rather than any form of imbalance. In this sense, the results support Morsing et al. (2008) idea that, although the public expects companies to commit to be socially and environmentally responsible, it does not appreciate organizations that focus too much on their admirable efforts by bragging about them. This stakeholders' attitude tends, also, to result in more suspicion toward those firms that tend to extensively communicate about their CSR dedication. Indeed, it seems that the only way for an organization to reach the advantages that CSR is able to provide and avoid the risk of communicating too extensively about it, is by finding a strategy that comprise the right balance between walk and talk.

By validating the effectiveness that a balanced strategy provides in terms of reputational impact, this study's findings reveal the risk of employing a strategy where walk and talk are imbalanced. In fact, the collected results provide proof that when CSR symbolic actions, when CSR is mostly communicated to respond to stakeholders' expectations without necessarily backing it up with actions, and CSR substantive actions, considering concrete responsible actions which can be observed and measured, are perceived as aligned, stakeholders attribute better levels of corporate reputation to the firm (Weaver et al., 1999; Zott & Huy, 2007).

Overall, this research contributes to the ongoing discussion on CSR substantive and symbolic actions by offering new insights into the effects that a balanced CSR strategy has on companies.

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Responsible Sustainability Communication: Aspirational Talk in Critical Interrogation

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Introduction and purpose

In a world where organizational initiatives and strategies are increasingly couched in terms of responsibility and sustainability, a sharpened and sustained sensitivity to the possible relationships between organizational communication and action continues to be of utmost importance. Such sensitivity is relevant not only for researchers and practitioners in the communication field but also in the social and political sciences more broadly. This paper extends constitutive approaches to communication by discussing how refined insights into the performative dynamics of communication are necessary to inform and shape responsible approaches to some of the most pertinent issues of our time. Specifically, the paper focuses on sustainability communication and examines its potential effects on more substantial sustainability practices. In that particular domain, communicative performativity is frequently addressed as a conflict between aspirational talk, on the one hand, and greenwashing, on the other (e.g., Christensen, Morsing & Thyssen, 2021; Lauriano, Reinecke & Etter, 2022; Walker & Wan, 2012).

While acknowledging the significance of both notions in discussions of responsible sustainability communication, the paper revisits their relationship and examines the presumed conflict between the two. Building on a more detailed and nuanced understanding of aspirational talk than found in extant writings, the aim of this conceptual paper is to contribute to the literature on communicative performativity as well as to stimulate a more nuanced understanding of responsible sustainability communication.

Approach

The paper takes its point of departure in the recent initiative by the European Union to ban certain types of communication as greenwashing. Its "Greenwashing Directive" aims to protect consumers against deceptive advertising and other unfair practices. The following bans are explicitly focusing on sustainability communication:

▪ generic environmental claims, e.g. "environmentally friendly", "natural", "biodegradable", "climate neutral" or "eco", without proof of recognized excellent environmental performance relevant to the claim.

▪ claims based on emissions offsetting schemes that a product has neutral, reduced or positive impact on the environment.

▪ sustainability labels not based on approved certification schemes or established by public authorities.

By prohibiting such practices, the EU hopes to improve information to consumers and thereby help them make better choices. At the same time, the bans serve to increase transparency and ensure

better documentation. As such, they can simultaneously help national consumer ombudsmen to interpret and manage EU principles for green marketing.

Given its aims and potential effects, the EU initiative is likely to be lauded by NGOs, media, and social critics. At the same time, some of the bans raise a number of pertinent questions regarding the relationship between sustainability communication, on the one hand, and sustainability practices on the other: Should organizations only be allowed to claim ideals that are already fully implemented in their practices? Or is it possible that such communication could play an active role in generating and achieving such ideals (Schoeneborn, Morsing & Crane, 2020)?

More generally, will the proposed bans serve the sustainability agenda? Or will they discourage organizations from claiming ambitious environmental goals?

The paper addresses these questions by revisiting the notion of aspirational talk and subjecting it to critical interrogation. Arguing that advances in the field requires a far more detailed and critical readings of existing works than usually found in the CSR literature, the paper more specifically does the following: 1) expounds the notion of aspiration in great detail, drawing especially on the work of Finnemore & Jurkovich (2020), 2) develops an understanding of performativity that expands in time and space, primarily based on Butler (1999, 2010) and Garud et al. (2017), and 3) discusses communicative performativity in terms of several inter-related dynamics, based on the work of Jauernig and Valentinov (2019).

Implications or preliminary results

Insights from these inquiries makes it possible to conclude that aspirational sustainability communication and greenwashing charges, while being competitive and antagonistic with respect to one another, are simultaneously complementary and mutually dependent processes through which organizations can learn and develop more sustainable practices.

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Constituting sustainability aspirations for organizations through external frameworks description

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Abstract

This paper examines how organizations' aspirations for sustainability can be organized through external frameworks, understood here as texts that provide form and direction for organizing. Drawing from the literature on communicative constitution of organizations I study empirically how the interaction of organizations and a framework they use for goal setting affects the organizing processes in the context of sustainability. The case in focus is Finnish Commitment 2050 service that enables different organizations to establish themselves goals related to environmental and social sustainability. The research aims at exploring how non-human agency of such frameworks affects the setting or sustainability goals and what are the implication of such tools for the communicative constitution of organizations and their responsibilities.

Keywords: aspirational talk, sustainability communication, non-human agency

'In principle, we in the trade unions understand this and would like to work on it': Sustainability as aspirational talk for trade unions

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Abstract

Trade unions are among the key actors in the sustainability transition, as they organise and represent the interests of workers, one of the most vulnerable groups in the sustainability transition, and have played a crucial role in improving human well-being. In general, however, their uptake of sustainability orientation is still rather slow and there are still many blind spots in understanding how they engage with sustainability. This paper takes a communications-based approach to examine how trade unions at the national level have responded to calls for a commitment to sustainability. More specifically, it focuses on the talk-action dynamics associated with trade union involvement in sustainability.

Keywords: sustainability, aspirational talk, trade unions

Introduction

Our world urgently needs a socio-ecological transformation, and sustainability is now a guiding principle for this transformation. In 2015, the United Nations launched the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote sustainability. To achieve this global transition to sustainable models in a timely manner, both global and national actors must increase their efforts to tackle sustainability challenges (Montesano et al., 2023). Trade unions are among these key actors (Snell, 2021; Thomas, 2021), as they organise and represent the interests of workers, one of the most vulnerable groups in the sustainability transition, and play a crucial role in increasing human well-being (Nitsche-Whitfield, 2023). It is therefore not surprising that trade unions, as organisations that are independent of companies, primarily focused on representing workers' interests and bound by democratic internal processes (Harvey, Hodder, & Brammer, 2017, p. 45), are a formal constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at the global level and serve as the voice of workers in sustainability dialogues at the national, European and international levels (Stevis, Uzzell, & Räthzel, 2018). Trade unions are increasingly adopting environmental discourses, indicating their strategic focus on sustainability. This shift is noteworthy considering their traditional role of safeguarding jobs and wages that may depend on unsustainable modes of production and economic growth (Montesano et al., 2024; Uzzell & Räthzel, 2012; Wissen & Brand, 2021).

There is a growing body of research on trade unions' engagement with sustainability (Köhler et al., 2019; Montesano et al., 2024; Ringqvist, 2022). While some trade unions show a normative

awareness of their position and role in transitions to sustainability at a discursive level with various resolutions and documents (Montesano et al., 2024), the progress of their involvement, engagement and influence in these transitions has been rather slow, especially at the national level (Räthzel, Stevis, & Uzzell, 2021). Consequently, this paper asks how trade unions at the national level have responded to calls for a commitment to sustainability. More specifically, we focus on talk-action dynamics related to trade unions' involvement in sustainability. To explore this, we draw on aspirational talk and the performativity of strategic texts (e.g. Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013; Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2021; Cooren, 2004; Penttilä, 2020; Vásquez et al., 2018). Thus, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature on the (communicative) performativity of strategic documents on sustainability, both in terms of the communicative practices that constitute the documents (i.e. forms of knowledge) on sustainability and how these influence organisational action (Vásquez et al., 2018). Another aim of this research is to contribute to the growing debates on trade unions and sustainability issues.

Background of the study

Addressing trade union sustainability is crucial for the global challenges and trade-offs related to job preservation and climate change. The limited focus on the environmental component in trade union agendas and the oversight of labour issues in environmental and sustainability studies highlight the need for attention to this issue (Brecher, 2018; Clarke & Lipsig-Mummé, 2020; Räthzel, Stevis, & Uzzell, 2021). The literature on trade union sustainability activities shows that trade unions can play an important role in promoting sustainability. However, these efforts are often sporadic and focused on specific environmental and social issues in certain industries or areas (Räthzel, Stevis, & Uzzell, 2021). Studies about sustainability trends in international trade unions show that their positions vary between reformist and transformative approaches (Stevis & Felli, 2015; Felli, 2014). The research indicated that trade unions often adhere to a weak sustainability interpretation focused on material welfare, rather than addressing broader socio-environmental challenges. Additionally, there were differences and a lag between discursive (ideational) and operational levels, with discursive changes being more transformative while operational changes remained reformist (Montesano et al., 2024).

Based on the above, the paper takes theorising about sustainability from the communication perspective as a promising avenue for research on how trade unions engage in sustainability. The paper uses the literature on aspirational talk to shed light on how sustainability has become configured and communicatively placed within the trade union organisation as aspirational talk via 'authoritative texts' and explore what are the implications of such texts in terms of creating conditions for orienting and action (Vásquez et al., 2018). Thus, the paper raises two main questions: How is aspirational talk articulated in (strategic) texts and how have sustainability issues become matters of concern/matters of authority through modalities of aspirational talk (i.e. from collective idea formation to texts)? And whether (and how) has sustainability aspirational talk as performative been functional in the work of trade unions in specific contexts?

Research approach

The empirical study focuses on the largest trade union confederations in Slovenia. The data set consists of a publicly available strategic documents on trade unions and climate change and other sustainability communications on the website, and interviews with the authors of the documents, the presidents of the confederations and the presidents of other major sectoral unions in the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia - ZSSS (which is the largest of the confederations). The twelve interviews were semi-structured, transcribed and analysed. The study uses the abductive research strategy, which is based on generating theoretical conjectures for inductive research findings. These 'hunches' were then developed in an iterative process of working back and forth with the empirical data and the literature (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022).

Preliminary results and short conclusion

Our preliminary 'hunches' suggest that the journey from talk - which very clearly shows good intentions towards sustainability - to action is still ongoing and seems to be rather 'rocky' as Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen (2021) put it. Thus, the significance of the main document on sustainability issues in terms of progressive performativity is still unknown due to several constraints and conflicting demands that emerge from preliminary readings of our interviews.

The preliminary findings are summarised as follows:

- Initiative of a small and rather marginal TU (Youth Plus) has become an official position of the whole TU association (ZSSS) when aspirational talk established/materialized in the manifesto (i.e. authoritative text).
- Despite ZSSS and sectoral unions being very passive (sometimes even opposing) in the process of aspirations configuration, the process has shown how this issue became strategic (a matter of concern) and part of the TU agenda.
- The composition of the manifesto itself shows its aspirational character (e.g. Christensen et al., 2021; Finnemore & Jurkovich, 2020) and deliberate ambiguity (to be acceptable for everyone).
- The public announcement of the manifesto made it clear that the ZSSS and TUs within were serious about their aspirations.
- The manifesto enabled TUs to partake in the climate strike + constituted and stabilized TUs role in sustainability transitions ('this is us, this is what we fight for').
- While the manifesto led to some immediate action, the text has not made the 'matter of concern' last through time, particularly at the ZSSS level.

We can thus conclude that 'Internal' activists are very important in the process of aspirations materialisation and in pushing organizations forward (with their own strategic agendas and goals) (cf. Penttila, 2020). In addition, the context is also important; in the case of ZSSS there was clearly an 'empty space' waiting for such manifesto.

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SPECIAL SESSION: New Forms of Organizing for Irresponsibility – and the Erosion of the Public Sphere

Organizer/chair: Dennis Schoeneborn
Copenhagen Business School & Leuphana University of Lüneburg

Panelists: Elanor Colleoni, Gastone Gualtieri, Bennet Schwoon
IULM Milan, University of Lugano, University of Zurich

Discussant: Peter Winkler
University of Salzburg

Session focus & relevance

The field of CSR communication is traditionally concerned with how business firms can mobilize communication to foster responsible business practices (Christensen, Morsing & Thyssen, 2020; Schoeneborn, Morsing & Crane, 2020) and/or to legitimize their business practices vis-á-vis external constituents (Glozer, Caruana & Hibbert, 2019). Meanwhile, and powerfully facilitated by digital media, business firms are confronted with a broad landscape of 'new forms of organizing for irresponsibility' as their counterparts. These new forms tend to escape the logic of formal organization and exhibit varying degrees of organizationality (Schoeneborn, Glozer & Trittin-Ulbrich, 2022). Also, some of them proactively work towards an erosion of the public sphere (via polarization, disinformation etc.) and thus the very grounds on which public deliberations can occur. This panel session features a selection of studies which illuminate how to rethink the duties and possibilities of CSR communication for navigating this "new reality" of public discourse, in which the communicative conditions for achieving common ground are eroding (Bennett & Livingston, 2020; Knight & Tsoukas, 2019). In the same context, the contributions to this panel put a special emphasis on the role of digital communication technologies as facilitator of organized irresponsibility and the polarization of public discourses (Colleoni, Zyglidopoulos & Illia, in press; Kitchens et al., 2020). We have designed the session in a way that ensures sufficient time for interaction between the panel and the audience.

Organizing irresponsibility through AI: A systematic analysis of AI ethical violations and their collective performative nature

Elanor Colleoni & Martina Frizzo

The emergence of "new forms of organizing for irresponsibility," propelled by digital media, marks a significant challenge to the integrity of public discourse. In this context, a significant number of scholars posit that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a pivotal condition enabling this drift towards organizational irresponsibility, raising concerns about its ethical implications. Scholars, including notable figures such as Zuboff (2019) and Crawford (2013), have shed light on various ethical issues associated with AI, ranging from invasive surveillance practices to deep-rooted biases that undermine fair treatment and decision-making. At the same time, organizational scholars such as Scherer et al. (2023) and Illia et al. (in press) have extended these discussions to the impact of new technologies on the social evaluation of organisations and the wider public sphere, highlighting the intricate relationship between technological innovation and societal norms. Despite the growing body of literature on the ethical challenges of AI, these issues have so far been treated predominantly as separate entities, lacking an integrated analysis that reflects their interconnected nature. In this panel contribution, we would like to present some empirical evidence based on a unique database of more than 1,000 court cases of AI ethical violations, to develop a comprehensive framework that encompasses all these issues and explore their collective performative nature. Through this framework, we seek to shed light on the dynamics behind the emergence of an organized irresponsibility.

Connecting to divide: Polarization as an exacerbation of organizing in social media

Gastone Gualtieri & Francesco Lurati

The rise of social media has significantly bolstered the organizing of social collectives (Etter & Albu, 2021). Social media tend to enhance in-group interaction, fostering groups' coordination and structure, and even allowing the emergence of new unstructured forms of organizing (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, at the same time social-media-facilitated in-group interaction also appears to foster polarization within contemporary society (Foroughi et al., 2019; Knight & Tsoukas, 2019), creating echo chambers where one-sided conversations reinforce extreme viewpoints and impede inter-group communication, significantly eroding our public sphere into separated bubbles of judgment (Waisbord, 2018; Etter et al., 2019). This study investigates these intertwined dynamics on groups to understand how this social-media-based interactions foster both organizing and polarization. Through qualitative analysis of an anti-5G activist group using a Facebook group for organizing, we found that unchallenged interaction within closed social media spaces facilitates organization by providing a sharply defined and cohesive narrative that aligns members, offering them direction and a collective identity. However, these same organizational dynamics of alignment, direction, and identity formation intensify to the extent that they increasingly radicalize the group's perspectives and make them resistant to alternative viewpoints, effectively polarizing them. Therefore, this study establishes a link between polarization and organizing, showing how new forms of organizing in social media may contribute to group polarization and thus eroding the public sphere. Indeed, polarization seems to arise from the exacerbation of organizational practices in digital spaces. In such closed organizing environments, dynamics such as the development of strong alignment and a shared direction may escalate to the point of extreme radicalization, group solipsism, and selfreferentiality, ultimately polarizing the collective and impeding the ability to engage with alternative perspectives.

Social movement communication and the polarization of public discourses: Exploring the "sweet spot" between polarization and deliberation

Bennet Schwoon & Ferran Torres

This panel contributio examines the relationship between social movements' communication strategies and structures of the public discourse. We aim to elucidate this reciprocal influence by exploring how their dynamic interplay can lead to intended and unintended consequences. While extant research predominantly focuses on the contents and objectives of social movements' communication strategies, it tends to neglect their communicative context. Thus, the purpose of this contrubution is to explain how the communication strategies of social movements and structures of public discourse, that constitute the communicative context of social movements, relate to each other. This is crucial for comprehending the generative or hindering outcomes and consequences of social movements' communication. Drawing upon Habermas's theory of communication (1986, 1989) and Dryzek's concept of deliberative capacities (2009), we propose a deliberative perspective to conceptualize this relationship. We offer insights into the movements' intended or unintended consequences for (a) the organization of social movements themselves and (b) the structures of public discourse, which can come with an increase or decrease of polarization. We contribute to social movement theory in two main ways. First, we clarify the relation between communication strategies of social movements and public discourses by unpacking the processes through which they recursively impact each other. Second, we conceptualize the "war-torn" as a new communication strategy through which social movements navigate the paradoxical tension they face in which, on the one hand, they need to polarize to generate attention and facilitate their organizing, and, on the other hand, they need to reduce polarization as it may hinder their own organizing and their external goals. Finally, we add to theories on polarization in organization studies by highlighting the complex interplay between communication strategies of societal actors, on which these actors importantly rely to constitute their organizing, which however can lead eventually to a polarization of public discourses.

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