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Social Media: the Wild West of CSR Communications

Ralph Tench and Brian Jones

Leeds Business School, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

Correspondence Address:

Professor Ralph Tench,
Leeds Business School,
Leeds Metropolitan University,
The Rose Bowl,
Portland Gate,
Leeds,
United Kingdom,
LS1 3HB

T +44 (0) 113 812 7539

E r.tench@leedsmet.ac.uk

Biographical details:

Ralph Tench is Professor of Communication Education at Leeds Business School, Leeds Metropolitan University.

Brian Jones is Senior Lecturer Marketing at Leeds Business School, Leeds Metropolitan University.

Purpose

The central argument that this paper posits is that traditional media of old presented a clear, ordered world of communication management for organisations to extol their CSR credentials. In contrast to this, new Web 2.0 social media is increasingly being used by activists and hactivists to challenge corporate communication CSR messages and does so by highlighting instances and examples of Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI) (Jones, Bowd and Tench, 2009; Tench, Sun and Jones, 2012).

Design/methodology/approach

The paper reports on research data from the European Communication Monitor 2010, 2011 and 2012 (<http://www.communicationmonitor.eu/>) and draws on work already published in this area (Tench, Verhoeven and Zeffass, 2009; Verhoeven et al, 2012; and Zeffass et al, 2010, 2011) to illustrate the unruly unregulated Web 2.0 social media communication landscape in Europe. A range of literature is drawn on to provide the theoretical context for an exploration of issues that surround social media.

Findings

In late modernity (Giddens, 1990) communication comes in many guises. Social media is one guise and it has re-shaped as well as transformed the nature of communications and the relationship between organisations and their stakeholders.

Originality/value

Communicating CSR in the Wild West of social media requires diplomatic and political nous, as well as awareness and knowledge of the dangers and pitfalls of CSI. The data reported on in this paper illustrates well the above points and sets out scenarios for future development of corporate communication of CSR through, and with social media.

Key words: Social media, Corporate Social Irresponsibility

Context (1) - Introduction

This paper looks at issues surrounding the communication of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) via social media. It will be of particular interest to an international audience as it draws on data from the European Communication Monitor (<http://www.communicationmonitor.eu/>) which covers 46 countries. This data are used to illustrate theory and points of argument from a review of secondary literature including books, journal articles and policy reports. The problem addressed is how businesses and corporate communication professionals manage CSR messages in an unruly, largely unregulated social media environment. Much has been written on CSR (Carroll, 1979, 1991; Friedman, 1970; Porter and Kramer, 2006) as well as on social media in academic outputs and more popular business books (Qualman, 2011; Charney, 2009). The impact of social media has been documented and detailed in relation to education (Craft, 2011), business (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), corporate reputation (Jones, Temperley and Lima, 2009), entrepreneurial marketing (Jones, 2010), sociology (Murthy, 2012) and other subject areas. The distinctive aspect of this paper is its focus on the use of social media in communicating CSR in a European context. A core finding is that co-creation of message through social media contributes to the co-creation as well as the co-destruction of value. We contend that value is in part realised in the act of co-creation of message.

At a conceptual level this paper argues that social media represents a rupture in the communication of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Old communication certainties have given way to new insecurities and a general feeling of uncertainty about how and what to communicate with regards to CSR. Where once there was one message, today in the world of social media there are many, or a polyphony of voices (see Zerfass et al, 2012; Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011; and Christensen, Morsing and Cheney, 2008). Making sense of this new world of instant, mobile communication presents a number of challenges for communicating CSR. Organisations of all types and sizes increasingly have to re-think and re-fashion their communication strategies, tools and messages. Whilst rationalization may have been the best expression of modernity (Weber, 1976, 1978), chaos and disorder serve to characterise and exemplify late modernity. In few places is this more

apparent than in the fused sphere of social media and corporate communications. The “iron cage” and formal rationality of corporate communications of old has given way to messiness, disorder, confusion and chaos. Set against the principles, practices, attitudes and behaviours of some organisations it is little wonder that the ethics, moralities and values of CSR are increasingly called into question. The spectre of Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI) (Jones, Bowd and Tench, 2009) hangs like agitated layers of air haunting organisations and those that represent and communicate their interests.

Modern CSR has now evolved to a stage that recognises the impact and changes a company can make on all external stakeholders such as the environment, general public and government. Many companies now implement some form of CSR; be it improved staff schemes i.e. childcare, recycling to reduce their impact on the environment or maybe actively supporting both national and international charities and aid projects. Some may do this through a realisation of a social obligation or merely as a new form of competitive advantage. Grunig and Hunt (1984: p. 48) have made the point that, “public, or social responsibility has become a major reason for an organisation to have a public relations function.” Increasingly businesses of all sizes and types are expected to communicate, explain and justify their CSR credentials. There is on-going debate about the meaning and definition of CSR (Friedman, 1970; Carroll, 1979, 1991; Porter and Kramer, 2006). Kotler and Lee (2005: 3) argue that CSR is “a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources.”

It is generally acknowledged that CSR is about the changing relationship and movement of responsibility between civil society, government and corporations (Van Marrewijk, 2003). Van Marrewijk (2003) positions and thereby defines CSR as being located in the changing nexus of responsibility between governments, civil society and corporations. CSR is often equated with issues surrounding sustainability and the environment. Welford (1997: p. 25) has pointed out that “industry has hijacked the more radical environmental debate taking it out of its traditional discourses and placing it in a liberal-productive frame of reference.” Placed in the liberal productive frame of reference CSR can be argued to operate at the business society interface and it becomes something that businesses can manage and address. Community

engagement, environmental issues, sustainability, ethics and governance are amongst other things that fall under the umbrella term CSR. Googins et al., (2007, p.72) argue that “for forward-thinking companies, social and environmental problems represent the growth opportunities of the future”. Communication is key to maximizing business opportunities that emerge from CSR. In the increasingly complex and competitive communication environment, social media has come to challenge traditional corporate communication methods of old.

Context (2) - Social Media: growth, change and challenge

The internet has delivered profound changes to the nature and operation of societies and economies (Kalapesi, Willersdorf and Zwillenberg, 2010). Web 2.0 or social media as it is otherwise referred to emerged from Web 1.0 or www otherwise known as the read write web. Discussion of social media very much feeds into debate about the knowledge economy (DTI, 1998). It enables and facilitates the creation, growth, distribution, sharing, exchange and transfer of knowledge.

In recent years Web 2.0 social media has become a growth academic research area (see for example Tapscott and Williams, 2006; Beer, 2008; Beer and Burrows, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Jones and Iredale, 2009). Social media is a collective term for an amalgam of communication applications that include podcasts, facebook, twitter, wikis, blogs and social network sites. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) seek to unbundle and thereby more sharply define the concepts of social media, Web 2.0 and User Generated Content. In addition to this, they explore the profitable uses to which businesses put social media such as Facebook and Second Life. As already stated, the purpose here is to focus in on the nature of the relationship between social media and CSR. In order to understand the nature, workings and operation of this relationship it is important to recognise that the key differentiator of Web 2.0 from Web 1.0 is the potential for the development of user created content (OECD, 2007). Participation and engagement can take the form of on-line conversations, blogs, wikis, social networking, You Tube, Twitter, Facebook and other social media applications. It can help bring people together through the formation of new online communities of interest. User created content serves to demarcate and differentiate Web 2.0 social media from Web 1 or www (OECD, 2007). It presents a number of

challenges to the governance, rules, procedures and regulations of traditional corporate communications.

“UCC can also be seen as an open platform enriching political and societal debates, diversity of opinion, free flow of information and freedom of expression.” (OECD, 2007, p. 6)

There are in other words a number of upsides to and benefits to be derived from the development, application and use of social media.

Upsides

Through tools of social media such as online discussion forums, the nature and ordering of the modern economy, business and society can be discussed, challenged and debated. Web 2.0 allows for individual and cultural expression through the development of user generated content. User created or, as it is also known, user generated content lies at the heart of Web 2.0. It extends freedom, choice and instils through practice the idea and ideal of democratic participative rights. Social media allow communities of interest to form, shape and influence debates. They can be used to hold corporations and corporate communicators to account. They can also be used to help us live fuller, richer and more rewarding lives as employees, consumers and citizens. One way in which social media can help communication professionals deliver on the good society is through the use of crowdsourcing which Bradshaw (2010, p. 4) describes as, “tapping the general public for ideas or assistance.” Crowdsourcing can be used by communication professionals seeking solutions to CSR related issues. Social media has potential and promises much.

The opportunities presented for creation, co-creation, collaboration in and production of knowledge are immense. They are also individually liberating and are expected to deliver social and economic transformation (Collins, 2013). Social media are changing the way in which we live, work and communicate. They are also changing the way in which businesses operate, market their offerings, communicate and manage their affairs. By way of example Edgar (2009, p.19) writes, “Burberry, the

fashion brand that has gone from classic to cutting edge, is to launch its own social networking site next month. The clothing group hopes the move will deepen its relationship with customers and attract new devotees.” Social media are increasingly being embraced and valued by a range of businesses (Boyde, 2011). Social media has potential to help create, generate, grow, add and realise value (Collins, 2013). We argue that the creation of value is in part determined by the co-creation of message. This argument builds on the established body of work surrounding co-creation of value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008). We suggest that co-creation of message facilitates co-creation of value and has much to commend it. Corporate image and reputation (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007) are in part derived from the process of co-creation of message that lies at the heart of social media. This co-creation of message and value can also result in their co-destruction (for discussions of co-destruction of value please see Plé and Cáceres (2010)). Value can of course be conceived, understood and analysed at a number of different levels. It can be derived from particular contexts or how a product or service is used or accessed and also in terms of the experience and benefits gained. Value can be expressed in monetary terms, or experience (happiness, dissatisfaction) and it can be stored for future use in individual or collective memory via photographs, company reports, films or oral history. The web and particularly Web 2.0 social media has facilitated the growth of the co-creation of message and value as well as the co-destruction of message and value. We suggest that co-creation of message and value can be argued to rest comfortably within the debate about CSR. We also suggest that the co-destruction of message and value can be argued to rest within the debate about CSI (see: Tench, Sun and Jones, 2012). It is clear that the arguments in favour of social media can be countered with those against.

Downsides

Web 2.0 bypasses and supersedes traditional media channels of communication and allows core messages to be challenged and reinterpreted. This can have a detrimental impact on businesses and companies; corporate reputation can be damaged (Jones, Temperley and Lima, 2009). Social Media enables people to communicate in new ways. Anyone with access to the tools of Web 2.0 can

participate and play a role in this new world of communication. It offers a much more effective and efficient method of communication as it reduces the number of intermediaries and messages can be better targeted. Messages can be personalised and have much wider reach and impact than those communicated via traditional methods of communication. Businesses need to react more quickly and immediately through new media than traditional media (see for example Skapinker's (2010, p. 13) advice to "Head off web insults before they escalate"). Social media needs to be resourced. They are difficult to monitor. They are not always the best way to communicate and serve as only one tool of communication. Web 2.0 raises privacy and confidentiality issues and is not appropriate for all groups or all circumstances. It is not always possible to know who is making comments and it could well be business rivals driving negative publicity. People can hide behind social media. People are more vocal and say things on line they would not say face to face (see Twitter 'storms' and public arguments e.g. Stephen Fry in the UK – when a blogger described the "national treasure" Stephen Fry's tweets as "boring", the actor responded: "You've convinced me. I'm obviously not good enough. I retire from Twitter henceforward. Bye everyone.")). Boundaries can therefore be blurred and in the world of the web things are not always as they seem. The world of social media and the presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) in that environment is in part a social construct. Furthermore some people fake online identities so as to make comments and postings that cannot be attributed to the person in a real world setting. Donaldson (2001, p. 278) makes the point that "Online you can be anyone." Elements of social media can be seen as a fad/trend – people latch on to facebook, twitter, second life etc and then move on to other fashions and trends. Social media are however here to stay and businesses and corporate communication professionals need to work with this. They have wide reach and impact.

Social media has a number of downsides as the OECD (2007, p. 6) write:

"Challenges related to inclusion, cultural fragmentation, content quality and security and privacy have been raised. A greater divide between digitally literate users and others may occur and cultural fragmentation may take place with greater individualisation of the cultural environment. Other challenges relate to information accuracy and quality (including inappropriate or illegal

content) where everybody can contribute without detailed checks and balances. Other issues relate to privacy, safety on the internet and possibly adverse impacts of intensive internet use.”

Concluding Remarks on Social Media

Social media are increasingly being used by businesses of all types and sizes to communicate CSR (Jones, 2010; Zerfass et al, 2011, and 2012). Communication and discussion of CSR is affected by the global nature and operation of open and interconnected economies and societies. Social media can help businesses position and re-position their CSR offerings (Bauer, 2014). Fragmentation rather than unified communication characterises social media. Social media provides space for creative, collaborative, value adding interactions (OECD, 2007). With regards to communication, information and relationship management there are both positive and negative effects and there is indeed strength in weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Social media has great potential for building relationships and managing communications and they have much to commend them (Inauen and Schoeneborn, 2014). They can build, protect, sustain and develop image, reputation, brand, relationships, as well as value. They can contribute to business growth and success and have social, economic and cultural value. Communication through social media can be messy as messages are open to challenge, misinterpretation, and are subject to misinformation and sabotage. It has become easier for corporate social irresponsibility to be reported and commented on with all the consequences this brings with regards to, for example, co-destruction of value (Ple and Caceres, 2010). It is therefore important that businesses, managers and corporate communicators positively engage with social media to rebut scurrilous and dubious claims; report accurately and acknowledge when things have indeed gone wrong. Control of the message is both diminished and enhanced (Tench, Sun and Jones, 2014). Where once there was one message, today there are many and this is symptomatic of an increasingly fragmented and differentiated market economy and society. Management of corporate reputation becomes more challenging with the growth of social media. In the networked society (Castells, 2009), relationship management becomes more dynamic and a greater managerial and business imperative. The narrative surrounding reputation management is in part shaped and determined by

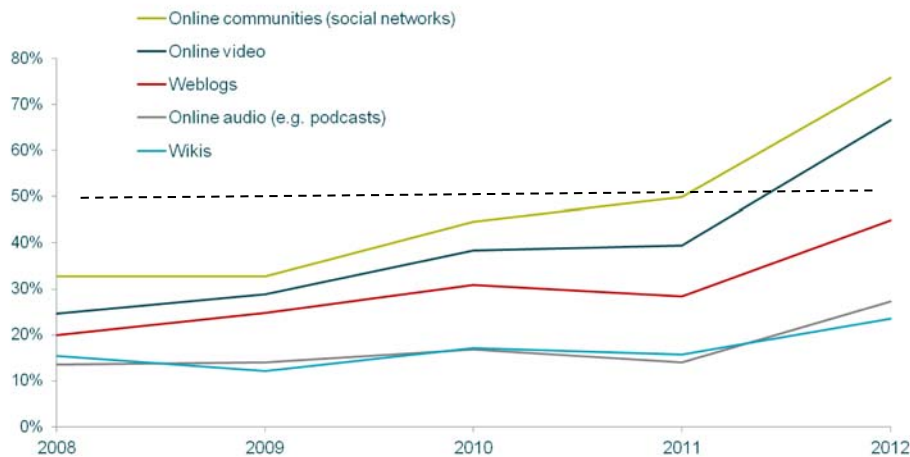
the creative and collaborative nature of social media. Social media requires the deployment of new online skills and competencies such as tact, diplomacy and communication. Social media are easily accessible and provide an instant means of communicating. They can be used to challenge, organise, protest and sabotage corporate messages and worldviews. They can undermine confidence, raise doubts, spread untruths, mis-inform, damage and destroy reputation, value, relationships and can ultimately bring down businesses. Boyde (2011, p.16) writes, "Reputation is one of the most valuable assets companies possess, but controlling it amid the rising influence of social media is a growing challenge." In today's turbulent and challenging business environment communicating CSR through social media is an absolute necessity. Set against this social media background recent findings from the European Communication Monitor serve to inform and enrich debate of CSR and CSI.

European Communication Monitor Findings (2010, 2011 and 2012)

As we consider whether social media provides opportunities for corporate communications with a passport to a new communication world it is relevant to debate whether in fact this will be a society of equality and equilibrium or alternatively an anarchic, unruly mess. So far evidence is against this ideal of social media as a utopia. For example the results from the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al, 2010) show a breakthrough in the usage of online channels, but there are still many questions linked to the place of social media within the communication mix, and the importance that it is given by communication professionals (Verhoeven et al, 2012). After years of talking about social media, European communication professionals from the 2010, 2011 and the most recent 2012 monitor findings show that they are now using social media, and developing some communication policies for these new tools.

A comparative analysis of the European Communication Monitor data 2008-12 demonstrates the growing importance of social media over the past 5 years. However, only two platforms are rated as "very important" by the majority and these are "online communities" and "online videos" (see Chart 1).

Chart 1 Growing importance of social media over the last five years: (2008-2012)



www.communicationmonitor.eu / n = 1,925 PR professionals.

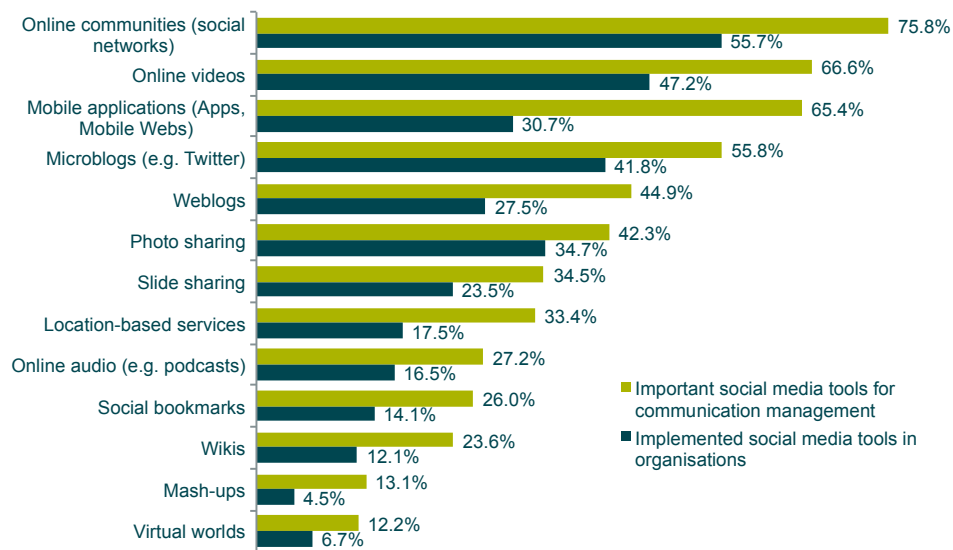
The continuing growth of online communications and social media is an established trend and in 2011 the European Communication Monitor reported that 74.8% of respondents believed websites, e-mail and intranets are important instruments for addressing stakeholders, gatekeepers and audiences; which is compared to 67.8% in 2010, 58.6% in 2009 and only 54.4% in 2007. Support for online media relations (44% 2010 – 68.2% 2011) and social media (19.8% 2010 – 40.5% 2011) grew even stronger in the 2011 findings. In 2012 the European Communication Monitor reported once again the importance of social media to practitioners with the top three platforms being ‘Online communities and social networks’ (76% importance); ‘Online videos’ (67%) and ‘Mobile applications’ (65%, see chart 2). The issue however from the 2012 data continues to be the gap that exists between practitioners’ reported importance of these tools and their actual application or implementation in practice. For example the gap for 2012 between importance and application of ‘Mobile applications’ was 35%.

The monitor reveals a large disparity between the perceived importance of social media tools for communication and the actual rate of implementation in European

organisations (see chart 2). Most obviously, mobile applications have entered the top three ranks of important social media platforms, but at the same time the backlog of implementation is higher than in any other field. Online communities or social networks are considered by far the most important social media tool available. With more than 75% support by respondents, they are leading the list of important social media tools, followed by online videos (67%), mobile applications like apps and mobile webs (65%), micro blogs like Twitter (56%) and weblogs (45%). However, less than 56% of the communication departments actually use online communities in their communication. A gap of more than 20% compared to the importance this tool is given by practitioners. The biggest difference between importance (65%) and implementation (31%) is found for mobile applications, a gap of almost 35 points.

Again from the European research 2010-12 one out of every four professionals thinks that social media, such as blogs, podcasts and online communities, are important for the profession today. Online communities are considered to be the most important social media platform for public relations (49.8%), followed by online videos (39.5%) and weblogs (28.3% - down slightly from 30.9% in 2010). Twitter is considered important (32.5% - up from 26.3% in 2010). Professionals expect a heavy growth of social media in the coming years, with online videos (moving image) leading the field with an increased importance of 37% predicted for 2012 (Zerfass et al, 2011). The reality is sometimes that predicted growth in importance does not always match the reality when measured (see chart 2, Zerfass et al 2012: p. 70).

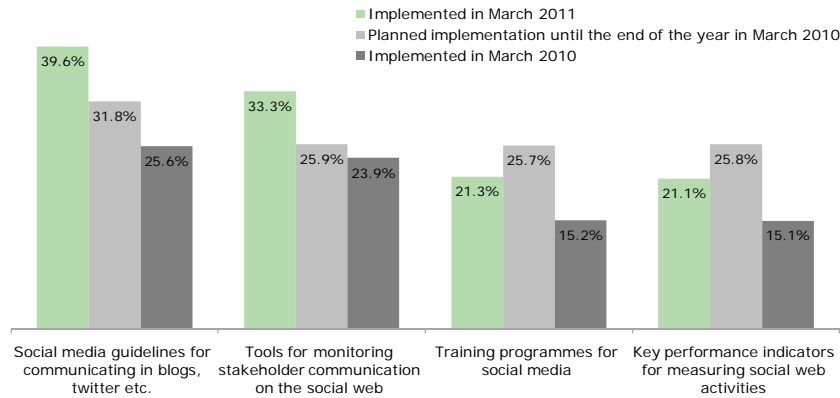
Chart 2 Gap between the importance and implementation of social media (2012)



www.communicationmonitor.eu / n = 1,900 PR professionals

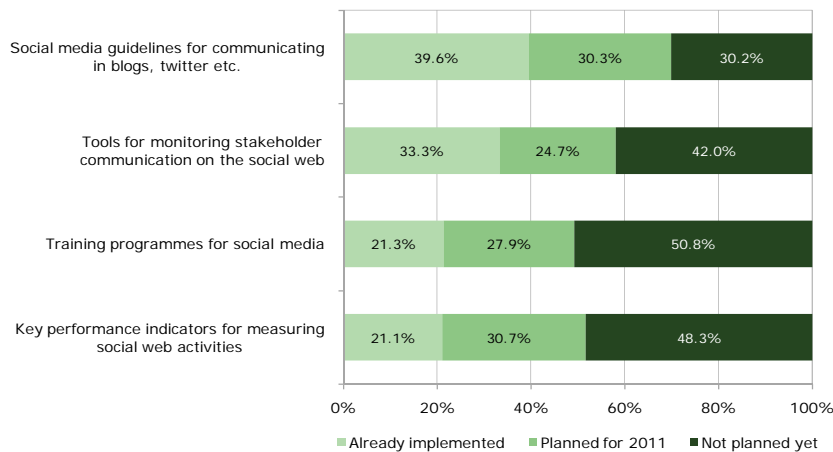
Approximately one third of organisations in Europe have already implemented the necessary prerequisites for the actual use of social media communication, such as social media guidelines, monitoring routines or even key performance indicators to define and evaluate measures of success. (see chart 3) So this is some good news for the evolution of the field. But look at the lingering gaps in guidelines, monitoring, training and measuring (chart 4). Clearly much remains to be done to avoid an opportunity lost. A cross-matrix analysis of the 2012 European Communication Monitor data shows that mobile applications, weblogs and photo sharing are considered the most important opportunities in social media communication (see chart 5). Although social media has been much discussed in the profession for many years, only two channels (online communities and online videos) are rated as very important or at least as important by a majority of the respondents. This shows that there is still a long way to go. Evaluating the potential of social media and investing in platforms and digital competencies stay at the top of the agenda for communication professionals.

Chart 3 Social media guidelines and monitoring tools have evolved stronger than expected



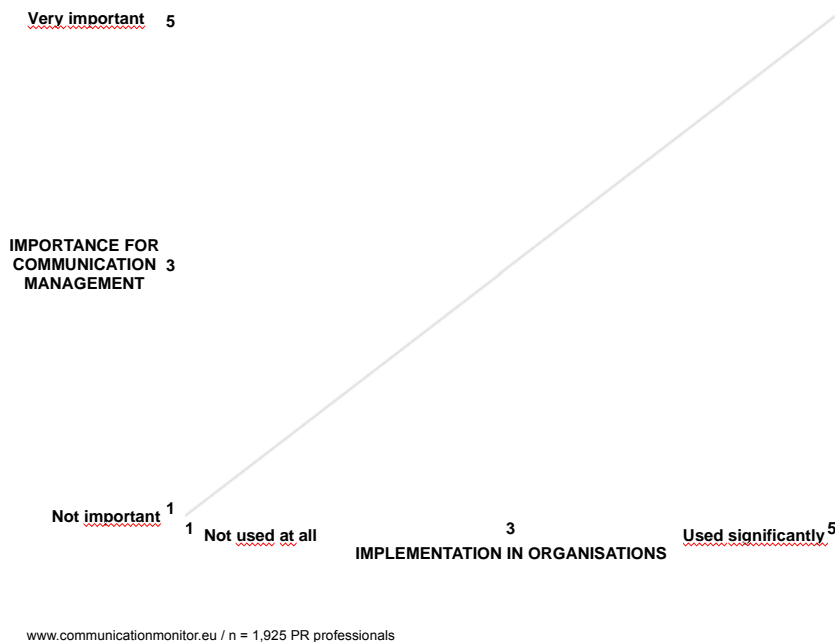
www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2011 / n = 1,572 PR professionals in communication departments: Q 15: Do any of the following measures exist in your organisation? (Already implemented; Planned for 2011; Not currently planned); Zerfass et al. 2010 / n = 1,955: Q 14: Has your organisation already implemented one of the following? (Already implemented; Planned for 2010; Not planned yet).

Chart 4 Governance structures for social media are still missing in most communication departments



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2011 / n = 1,572 PR professionals in communication departments: Q 15: Do any of the following measures exist in your organisation? (1 = Already implemented; 2 = Planned for 2011; 3 = Not currently planned).

Chart 5 Cross matrix analysis of opportunities and needs for enhancing social media communication



More positively joint stock companies (listed on the stock exchanges) lead the practice community when it comes to implementing specific concepts for social media. They are significantly further along the road than other organisations, in terms of implementing social media guidelines, tools for monitoring stakeholder communication on the web, key performance indicators for measuring social media activities and training programs for social media. Western European organisations are relatively ahead of organisations in other European regions when it comes to implementing social media policy. Sweden and the UK are at the cutting edge when it comes to implementing social media guidelines (Zerfass et al, 2011 p. 91).

Reflecting the potential anarchic perception of social media some practitioners do perceive social media as a threat through loss of control (Zerfass et al, 2012 p. 44). While most features of social media are considered as an opportunity, approximately one third of PR professionals rate open dialogue without control and the ease of spreading information as threats. Eastern European professionals especially fear these two features of social media (Zerfass et al, 2012 p. 54). The perceived threats, fears and opportunities that come with social media can in part be traced back to the inherent tensions in the CSR-CSI dualism (Jones, Bowd and Tench, 2009). Social media can be used to communicate behaviours, practices and acts of both

responsibility through the co-creation of value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000) and irresponsibility through the co-destruction of value (Ple and Caceres, 2010) in the corporate business world and beyond. Knowing or not knowing what will be communicated via social media can pose something of a conundrum for communication strategy and practice. They do indeed pose a threat in that they can all too easily be used to focus on CSI (Tench, Sun and Jones, 2012). However, they also present opportunities to communicate on CSR and to send, deliver and receive positive messages (Tench, Sun and Jones, 2014).

When considering the relative competence and practical capability of practitioners, it is clear that European communication professionals have only moderate social media skills (Zerfass et al, 2011 p. 91). One explanation or reason to consider for this skills gap is their moderate private use of social media (Zerfass et al, 2011 p. 101). Interestingly, almost every fifth practitioner uses participative platforms only once a week or not at all (Zerfass et al, 2011 p. 101). The survey 2011 reveals that a stronger private use of the tools by communication professionals leads to a clear increase in social media capabilities (Zerfass et al, 2011 p. 91). Some other unsurprising facts on social media usage are that the private use of social media decreases with the increasing age of the respondent (Zerfass et al, 2011 p. 102). There is also evidence of some sectoral diversification with non-profit practitioners privately engaging less with social media (Zerfass et al, 2011 p. 103).

The European Communication Monitor data reported on above make for interesting reading. The growth and use of social media is of course not restricted to Europe but is used across the world. Bradshaw (2010, p. 24) writes, "People in China and the Middle East are the busiest and most enthusiastic internet users, a study of the world's online habits has revealed. The survey by TNS, the market researcher owned by WPP, shows how emerging markets are overtaking Western Europe and North America in social networking and reveal sharp regional differences in patterns of behaviour." It is interesting to speculate how communication professionals in emerging markets use social media for reporting CSR and this could prove to be an area of study for future research. Building on emergent debate at the communication and CSR interface (Tench, Sun and Jones, 2014) and looking to the future, amongst other things and in no particular order, further research might focus on:

- Evaluating case study examples of “how”, “why”, “what” and “when” businesses communicate with regards to CSI and CSR.
- Growing understanding of the similarities and differences of the concepts CSI and CSR.
- Detailing the nature of the relationship between traditional and social media in the communication of both CSR and CSI.
- Challenging management systems and processes for dealing with the communication of CSR and CSI.
- Defining the role of social media in holding corporations and other businesses to account.
- Identifying the part social media plays in the destruction, maintenance and creation of business and corporate reputation.
- Understanding trust relations and the CSI, CSR and social media interface.
- Exploring the co-creation of message and the part it plays in the co-creation and co-destruction of value.
- Auditing social media channels, tools and applications, and the part each plays in communication, especially that of CSR and CSI.
- Developing knowledge and understanding of best practice for the monitoring and control of social media.

Conclusions

Business owners, managers, innovators and entrepreneurs have long been interested in the nature, operation and value adding potential of new technology. Recent years have seen growing academic interest in social media (see for example Snee, 2008; Booth and Matic, 2011; Tian, 2011). There is increasing discussion of the role and nature of the relationship between social media, corporate communications and CSR (Tench, Sun and Jones, 2014). As shown below in Figures 1 and 2 it is not always easy to untangle the various strands of debate that cut across discussion of social media, CSR and CSI.

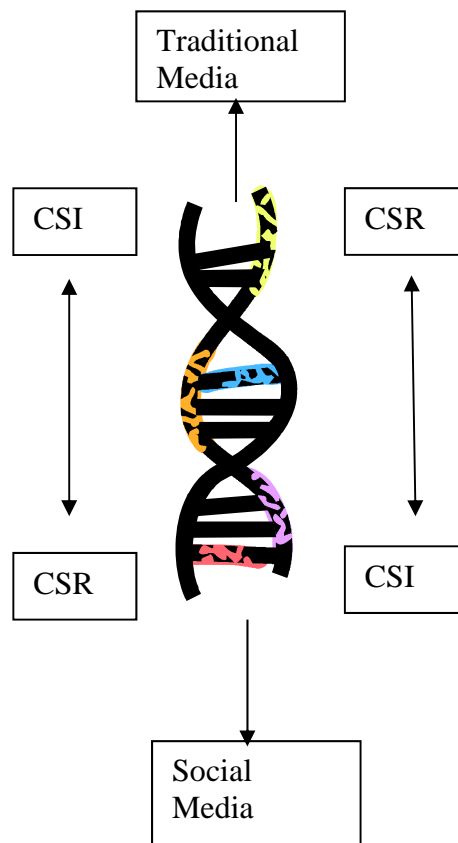


Figure 1: Traditional and Social Media Double Helix

Figure 1 shows the relationship between CSI, CSR and traditional and social media as a double helix. It suggests that the CSI and CSR genetic code runs through the double helix in opposing directions. Elements of the CSI and CSR genetic code include ethics, community engagement, the environment, the law, corporate governance, and amongst other things, fair treatment and management of supply chains, customers, and employees. Traditional and social media serve to stretch the CSI and CSR genetic code. On occasion some of the elements and concepts become intertwined, inseparable and appear to be one and the same. It is of course perfectly possible to invert the argument presented in Figure 1 and this reinterpretation can be seen in Figure 2.

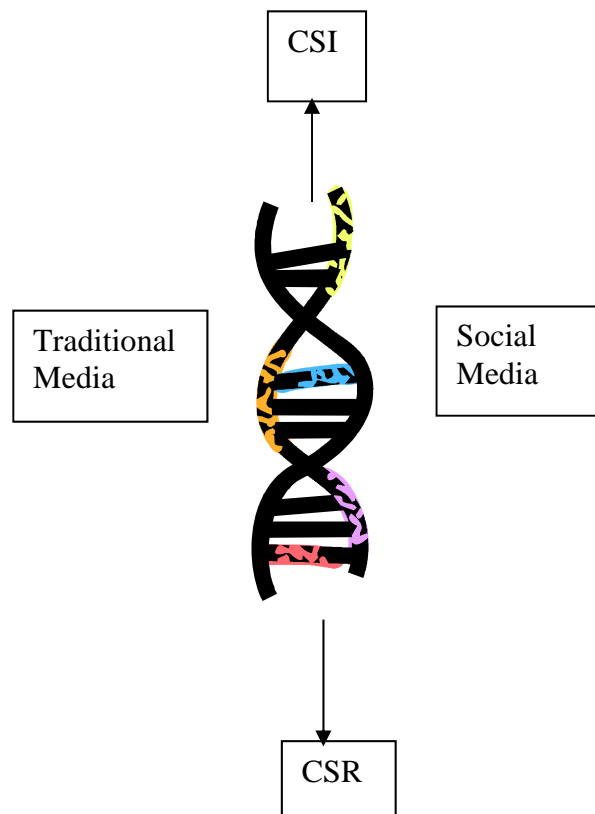


Figure 2: CSI and CSR Double Helix

Figure 2 shows the relation between traditional and social media and CSI and CSR as a double helix. It suggests that the traditional and social media genetic code runs throughout the double helix. Elements of the traditional and social media genetic code include newspapers, Facebook, television, Twitter, radio, You Tube, magazines and amongst other things, blogs. CSI and CSR serve to stretch and pull the traditional and social media genetic code. To a certain extent some of the elements and concepts of CSI, CSR and traditional and social media become intertwined, and appear inseparable and one and the same.

The big theoretical backdrop to this paper is that of the language of freedom (Berlin, 1969) and rights (Marshall, 1981). The world of social media brings the language and concepts of freedom and rights especially with regards to corporations, communication and CSR into sharp focus. This has been demonstrated and discussed in the European Communication Monitor data (2011 and 2012) and the

clear lack of established guidelines for social media usage in corporate settings. The right and freedom to communicate and express one's views and opinions through social media can and do collide with the law. Freedom and rights bring with them responsibilities, for example to behave in a way that complies with social mores and values. The Wild West of social media does not operate in a moral and political vacuum. When used appropriately, they can be used to improve the stock of societal moral worth and value. They can, for example, be used to hold companies to account for acts of corporate social irresponsibility and can be used in the act of co-destruction of value. Social media extends freedom to (Berlin, 1969) communicate on, for example, CSR but at the same time requires protection against the freedom from (Berlin, 1969) false allegations. The tensions between positive and negative liberties, along with the paradox of positive liberties are open to further exploration and analysis by communication academics, corporate communicators and social media practitioners.

Based on the aforementioned discussion we suggest the world of social media is little more than a mirror image of the Wild West of our own imaginations and the multiple worlds of reality that we inhabit, engage in and socially construct (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Schutz, 1972; Schutz and Luckmann, 1974). Social media as the Wild West of CSR communications is a reality that calls for the use of imagination and creativity. How to interpret CSR and make sense of the social media noise that surrounds it calls for a keen ear, a good moral corporate compass and an ability and skill to operate in a landscape of change and uncertainty. Communication and the noise of CSR especially with regard to social media can at times be near deafening. It requires unpicking, deconstructing and in order to make sense of it, some repackaging of the CSR message is needed. The social media world of CSR is a communicative construct.

This paper has reflected and extended interest and knowledge in social media and the uses, benefits, potential benefits along with the challenges it brings for those that deploy and engage with them. It has looked at changes in corporate communication strategy and practices through a longitudinal study of practitioners in 46 European countries and because of this, the paper will be of interest to an international audience. It has touched on and outlined ways in which CSR issues are accessed,

communicated, distributed and used to grow knowledge and information through social media. It has explained and described changes that have occurred already and has scoped out the potential for future developments and explored what some of the possible implications of these might be for CSR and corporate communicators. It is argued here that the relationship between social media and CSR, whilst not without pitfalls, is on balance of argument and evidence when appropriately managed positive and beneficial to all concerned. Co-creation of message through social media can co-create real value and the onus on communication practitioners must surely be to maximise such opportunities whilst limiting the threat of co-destruction of message and value.

“Communicating CSR initiatives externally not only sells products and creates legitimacy but potentially it could work as a driver for organisational change” (Hagen 2008, p132).

The impression that can sometimes be given is that CSR is in large part and to all intents and purposes about public relations and marketing. The accusation made is that as a business area it lacks substance. The focus on perception and reputation management detracts from the substantive work, financial commitment and management effort that go into delivering and improving on CSR. There is substance behind CSR communication. In the world of social media, the substance of CSR that businesses engage with is increasingly open to challenge by detractors, critics, competitors and activists. Equally the transparent, open and immediate nature of communication through social media means that such challenges to reputation can be repudiated, refuted and if necessary confirmed as accurate. In this new messy communication world, the communication strategies of old are found wanting. Adapting to a new communication environment requires resourcefulness, creativity, and a willingness to engage positively and constructively with new social media. It brings challenges but equally it brings potential rewards and benefits. As the European Communication Monitor data suggests this is not being achieved wholesale and there remains much work to be done.

The debate as to how best to communicate CSR is compounded by the lack of consensus around how best the concept should be defined. Nielsen and Thomsen (2007:p. 25) write,

“The lack of a common understanding and terminology in the area of CSR has made it difficult for organizations to develop consistent strategies for reporting on CSR in terms of genres, media, rhetorical strategies etc.”

Social media helps mediate business-to-consumer as well as business-to-business relations of power. In part they maintain, reproduce and reflect existing business-consumer inequalities but this tells only part of the story. They are also used to challenge prevailing power structures and modes of thought. They serve as a disruptive technology. To who does and should the responsibility of regulating social media fall? The world of social media can be a self-policed environment but equally it is a lawless landscape. How to manage messages through consent when there is so much dissent and disquiet is a conundrum and problematic with which corporate communicators struggle. One problem with the analysis detailed here is the danger of throwing the traditional media baby out with the social media bathwater.

Traditional print and broadcast media still has a prominent, important and legitimate role in communicating CSR. The world of social media may well be perceived as a utopia to which all must strive in that it offers a more level playing field which accords with the ideal of democratic communications, as well as equality, fairness and social justice. However, the reality may well be a dystopian nightmare that is nothing more than a mirror image of the society we have become. In this dystopian social media world that is reflective of the society we are, it is possible that instead of fairness we encounter a self-interested, beggar thy neighbour collective mentality. For corporate communicators navigating the worlds of utopia and dystopia through social media is an object lesson in diplomacy and management of communications. We suggest that CSR be seen as belonging to the world of utopia and CSI should be seen to belong to the world of dystopia.

Social media has been shown to contribute to and exacerbate the problem of developing fair, balanced and consistent CSR communication strategies. Both social media and CSR promise a lot. Realising this promise has the potential to unleash

new business, social, economic, environmental and community based development opportunities. The future of communicating CSR requires harnessing the Wild West of CSR. Failure to positively engage with social media is tantamount to wilful and wanton CSI (see: Tench, Sun and Jones, 2012). The world has changed and corporate communicators must move and adapt to the new landscape.

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