

# Chapter 12

## CSR Communication Through the Lens of New Media

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### 12.1 Introduction

Today communication plays an important role in our society because it contributes to the creation, development, and improvement of relationships. Thanks to new media (e.g., social media), companies have different opportunities to build and promote communication processes that can contribute to the exchange of ideas and opinions with different groups of stakeholders. Communication is the key for the success of any objective or business strategy, and this should be conceived with passion, fun, and vision (Roddick 2000). For this reason, communication is a fundamental element in the creation, planning, development, and evaluation of CSR initiatives. However, communication should not be ambiguous and manipulative, instead it must be transparent and truthful. Due to the decline of public trust in American corporations, companies must consider different ways to improve their relationships with key stakeholders. One way to achieve this is to promote transparent communication (Rawlins 2009 as cited by DiStaso and Bortree 2012).

CSR communication can be defined as the transmission of information regarding social and environmental initiatives toward different key groups of stakeholders. However, this information should be relevant and interesting in order to generate answers from stakeholders. This could lead to an exchange of CSR ideas that could evoke opinions, collaborations, and changes in attitudes and behaviors. Today, Internet has become a powerful instrument for CSR communication. Many companies have developed websites or sections for the information and communication

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of CSR practices. However, previous research has indicated that the majority of these websites have presented unidirectional messages, in other words, a one-way communication process (Gomez and Chalmeta 2011; Chaudhri and Wang 2007). On the other hand, social media has altered how companies performed their business, how they market and promote their products and services, and how they develop organizational communication processes (Bilic 2010). Thanks to social media platforms, companies can communicate easily their different CSR initiatives and projects with stakeholders.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, blogs are based on the principles of interactivity, exchange of ideas, collaboration, participation, dialogue, and commitment. Through different technologies, consumers and different groups of stakeholders are more vigilant regarding organizational actions and decisions that could affect the society and the environment. Thanks to social media platforms any person can create, contribute, and share information and ideas. In addition, these technologies allow companies to attract clients, consumers, and different actors for promoting dialogues regarding different topics (e.g., responsible and sustainable practices) and at the same time, maintain long-term relationships with them (Fieseler et al. 2010; Du et al. 2010). Stakeholders are more attracted to buy products of companies that encourage open and transparent communication. This creates a sense of community and participation (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Therefore, through social media platforms, that sense of community and participation can be reached.

This chapter proposes two theoretical frameworks of CSR communication through Internet (one for corporate websites and one for social media profiles). The frameworks contain different Web and social features (design, content, and interactivity) that are important for an interactive communication process through corporate websites and social media platforms. These guidelines were applied to the top 50 Fortune companies of 2011 through a content analysis of CSR websites and social media profiles (Facebook and Twitter). However, the complete results of this analysis are not presented in this chapter. The key findings will be show in order to propose the theoretical frameworks for effective CSR communication through corporate websites and social media. These frameworks are unique in its nature. There are no current theoretical frameworks regarding CSR online communication that can help and advise companies in what they should really communicate, what Web and social features include, how frequently they should do it, etc.

There is a potential niche in new media platforms (e.g., interactive corporate websites and social media) for engaging audiences in the contribution and commitment of responsible and sustainable practices. Promoting bidirectional and symmetrical CSR communication among organizations and public is crucial. Therefore, we should start looking at CSR communication through the lens of interactive new media. This is perhaps the missing piece for achieving a successful CSR communication process.

## 12.2 Literature Review

### 12.2.1 CSR Communication

Today organizations employ different interactive new media resources, like websites and social media profiles, instead of using traditional platforms like newspapers, TV, radio, brochures, bulletin boards, for CSR communication with their stakeholders (Isenmann 2006; Freeman 1984). Dawkins (2005) indicates that is important to provide creative communication (relevant and comprehensible content) at the moment of communicate CSR practices, and this process should be open, specific, and attractive (Lundquist 2010). Furthermore, communication should be credible, informative, and educative (Azevedo 2004 as cited by Wanderley et al. 2008). CSR communication should also be transparent and genuine (Chaudhri and Wang 2007; Golob and Bartlett 2007). Overall, promoting CSR communication could help to generate a positive image among different public, nurturing relationships with them (Ihlen et al. 2011; Morsing and Schultz 2006).

Currently, CSR communication presents two problems: (1) Lack of company interest in communicate CSR practices and (2) stakeholder skepticism (Ihlen et al. 2011; Du et al. 2010; Morsing and Schultz 2006). In spite of the different resources and tools available to facilitate communication, this important element (communication) is still considered as the missing link in CSR strategies of many companies (Capriotti and Moreno 2009; Gomez and Chalmeta 2011). Communication cannot be avoided, because it is unthinkable not to communicate with public (Morsing and Schultz 2006). On the other hand, if corporations communicate frequently, this could bring skepticism among stakeholders. This means that public are not paying attention to CSR practices, because they suspect that there are hidden motives in CSR actions (Du et al. 2010). Therefore, academic research suggests that CSR should be communicated in a way that public do not perceive it like intense (Morsing et al. 2008).

Forehand and Grier (2003) exposed that one way to reduce skepticism is taking into account intrinsic and extrinsic motives of CSR communication. These two problems could also be reduced, with the inclusion of different groups of key actors in the organizational CSR process, in other words to have consultants, employees, customers, bloggers, journalists, economists, politics, etc., participating in the development of CSR strategies and initiating dialogues (Wehmeier and Schultz 2011). Therefore, it is important that organizations should promote informal communication channels, but credible, which could be initiated and maintain by employees and other stakeholders (Dawkins 2005; Du et al. 2010).

There are considerable guidelines and models to report CSR and sustainable practices like (Global Reporting Initiative, Accountability, UN Global Compact, ISO 260006. There are also responsible indexes like Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI), FTSE4Good Index, or Ethibel Sustainability Index (ESI). Although these guidelines and indexes are an excellent resource to show the commitment that companies have for responsible practices, the way these reports are presented and

communicated demonstrates lack of interest by companies in initiate stakeholder dialogue and interactivity (Lundquist 2010; Capriotti and Moreno 2009).

Morsing and Schultz (2006) propose three strategies for CSR communication (based in the PR model of Grunig and Hunt 1984). In the first strategy called stakeholder information, communication goes in one way, from the organization to the public. Its objective is purely informational. The second (stakeholder response strategy) and third strategies (stakeholder involvement) are based on two-way communication. However, there is a difference between these two strategies. The first one is a public relations effect in favor of the company, while the second one, proposes dialogues among stakeholders, in which persuasion could occurred by any of the actors involved. According to Morsing and Schultz (2006), there is a lack of evidence that today companies are doing stakeholder involvement strategies. Therefore, it is important that companies understand the power of interactive new media platforms that can transform communication processes and derivate benefits (Crowther 2002). “In other words, communication is inescapable, it is implicated in CSR and business strategies whether management likes it or not... Communication provides the potential to help constitute stakeholder participation and ethical business practices” (Ihlen et al. 2011, p. 11).

### ***12.2.2 CSR Communication Through Corporate Websites***

According to Internet Word Stats, in December 31, 2000, there were approximately 360.985.492 Internet users. Fifteen years later, that number increased to 3.035.749.340 (June 30, 2014). These findings confirm that Internet is a media platform of rapid growth, which disseminates more information in an agile way. Internet is also more favorable in economic terms that other traditional media like TV or newspapers.

The principal advantages in using Internet as a communication tool (compared to traditional media like newspapers and magazines) are its low cost, rapid dissemination of information, unlimited space to store information, and liberty to use color, movement, and audio (Williams and Ho Wern Pei 1999; Taylor et al. 2001; Pollach 2003). Information on Internet is persistent, letting users to choose what topics see and how frequently access to them (Wanderley et al. 2008). Thanks to the great benefits that Internet has for CSR communication, companies could promote, measure, and communicate its social, economic, and environmental objectives and initiatives (Brennan and Johnson 2004; Branco and Rodrigues 2006). According to an interview developed by Fleishman-Hillard (2007), Internet has become the principal source for information regarding CSR for Americans. Seventy-three percent of Americans have employ search engines and almost 50% have use websites for looking for information or news regarding social responsibility.

Corporate websites permit companies to initiate and maintain multi-stakeholder dialogues, promoting interactive and constant communication (Kent and Taylor 1998; Esrock and Leichty 1999, 2000), and at the same time, they provide with the

opportunity to create and maintain relationships with different groups of public (Wright 1998, 2001). Using an interactive communication approach is a tremendous challenge for the traditional practice of CSR communication which is usually based in a static and sporadic process.

On the other hand, the design and content of a website should be attractive, modern, and accessible (Coope 2004). Websites should be characterized to be simple to use by any person and should pay attention to the diverse interests of audiences (Coupland 2005). Additionally, content and language should be clear and legible. Language contributes to the reproduction and transformation of power relations, (Fairclough 1995), and therefore, language is a fundamental aspect that should be effectively developed and presented for initiating a communication process regarding CSR. Usually, Web content features are employed to create a public image of the company and to cultivate relations with stakeholders (Robbins and Stylianou 2003). CSR communication through websites could lead to an innovative communication process, only if companies are taking advantages of the different and unique features that Internet has for enrich the communication process (hyperlink, feedback opportunities, documents downloading, search engines, etc.) (Isenmann 2006).

Kent and Taylor (1998) identified five principles in order to promote dialogic communication with different groups of public through corporate websites: (1) Users should navigate the website with easiness, (2) users should feel animated to navigate and remain in the website, (3) users should be encouraged to come back many times to the website in order to generate relations, (4) Websites should promote useful information to a variety of public, and (5) websites should promote opportunities for answering questions and generating feedback. In corporate websites, there are two basic approaches to communication: (1) diffusion of information (level of interactivity is low, and it is characterized by a unidirectional process of communication), and (2) generation of relations between companies and stakeholders (level of interactivity is high and bidirectional communication processes are presented) (Capriotti and Moreno 2009; Taylor et al. 2001; Esrock and Leichty 1998; Kent and Taylor 1998).

In the last decade, there have been many studies that have demonstrated the growth in the importance of CSR online communication in different parts of the world (Esrock and Leichty 1998; Maignan and Ralston 2002; Snider et al. 2003; Coope 2004; Branco and Rodrigues 2006; Birth et al. 2008; Golob and Bartlett 2007; Chaudhri and Wang 2007; Capriotti and Moreno 2009; Basil and Erlandson 2008; Tang and Li 2009; Gomez and Chalmeta 2011). Overall, these studies have analyzed the presence of CSR information and communication in websites of different organizations around the world. They have concluded that in spite of the great advantages that Internet has for communication, many corporate websites does not utilize all the potential and the available resources, in order to promote a communication process of social practices.

If companies take into account Web design and content, and promote interactivity in their corporate websites, companies could communicate effectively their CSR efforts. For example, companies should report their different CSR initiatives

(objectives, achievements, future projects, etc.), and promoting and maintain at the same time, fruitful dialogues with different key groups of stakeholders (Capriotti and Moreno 2009; Rolland and Bazzoni 2009). In that direction, CSR communication through Internet could facilitate balanced relationships among organizations and public, increasing citizen participation (Kent et al. 2003).

### ***12.2.3 CSR Communication Through Social Media***

The importance and growth of social media have brought many challenges to the organizational communication practice. Social media is not new; some of the first Internet applications were centered on communication and exchange: ‘‘For decades, we’ve watched the development of new genres of social media—MUDs/MOOs, instant messaging, chat rooms, bulletin boards, etc. (Boyd 2009, p. 1).

Social media can be defined as Web media and mobile technologies for social interaction and communication, and for the creation and exchange of content generated by users (Burkhardt 2009). Social media includes social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, etc.), micro-blogging (Twitter, Tumblr, etc.), blogs (Wordpress, Blogger, etc.), location-based services (Foursquare, Facebook places, etc.), video-sharing sites (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.), social bookmarking (Delicious, CiteULike, etc.), and virtual worlds (Second Life, World of Warcraft, etc.), among many others. Social media stimulates exchange of ideas, interactivity, and collaborative knowledge, promoting citizenship and consumer empowerment (Thackeray et al. 2008; Jones et al. 2009). In social media platforms, consumers and citizens present an active role, creating, editing, and sharing content (Burkhardt 2009).

A study developed by Nielsen (2011) found that today, four of five users are Internet active users that use social media. Facebook is the social network most employed by Americans, reaching almost 70% of active users. Other study found that social media permits to create new levels in conversations that were impossible to achieve before (Burson-Marsteller Communications Group 2010). This study analyzed the presence of social media by Global Fortune 100 companies. It found that 79% of global companies and 86% of American companies present at least one social media platform (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or corporate blogs).

Social media platforms are a vital tool for organizational communication, its effective usage impact relations with customers, workplace, and corporate culture (Creese 2007, as cited by Hearn et al. 2009). The benefits that social media present for companies are: low cost of implementation, credibility, corporate image, reputation, communication in real time, public relations, and the availability of an online archive (Pressley 2006, as cited by Schneider et al. 2007). Additionally, social media presents great potential for creating and maintaining dialogues among different groups of stakeholders, in contrast with static corporate websites (Fieseler et al. 2010). Social media also promotes authentic and durable relationships with many public, creating competitive advantage (Bilic 2010; Fieseler et al. 2010; Mangold and Faulds 2009; Schneider et al. 2007).

Through social media, organizations could evaluate the perceptions that customers, employees, and society have about them, with the purpose of identifying improvement areas (Dou and Krishnamurthy 2007). Therefore, companies could be proactive at the moment of use social media, attracting, and retaining stakeholders, in order to become advocates and messengers of CSR (Du et al. 2010). Word-of-mouth power among consumers has increase recently due to the popularity of social media. Consumers are more attracted to buy certain products or be faithful to certain brands, participating in conversations and constructing a sense of community (Mangold and Faulds 2009).

A survey carried out to 250 people that work in the area of CSR and sustainability found that social media is becoming a fundamental tool to discuss and share CSR information, but organizations are not aware of these resources for CSR communication (Lundquist 2010). One similar study by Custom Communications (2010) analyzed 287 American and European companies by industry type in order to discover if those companies communicate sustainability topics through social media. They found that only 22% of the companies communicate messages regarding sustainability and CSR through social media.

Typically, CSR communication through websites is controlled by the same corporations. However, through social media, companies do not have control of the information and communication that different users (consumers, activists, ONGs, etc.) are producing and sharing regarding the company in non-official social platforms like blogs, social networks. These actors are now informing, communicating, and mobilizing regarding organizations (Du et al. 2010). Companies could not subestimate the power of social media. Specific genres of social media could appear and disappear, but the innate characteristics of social media (participation, sharing, and collaborative knowledge, interactivity) are here to stay.

### **12.3 Methodology: Theoretical Framework**

This chapter proposes theoretical frameworks which consist of different categories and subcategories for the online communication of CSR. Two theoretical frameworks are proposed: one for CSR communication through corporate websites and another for CSR communication through social media. Both frameworks are based through an extensive literature review of studies regarding Internet, social media, and CSR communication. This section will discuss the different categories of the frameworks and the authors that support them. The next section will include the two both completed frameworks after being analyzed on the websites and social media profiles of 50 Fortune companies. The key findings are discussed also in the next section.

### 12.3.1 Corporate Websites

Three categories were established for the theoretical framework of CSR communication through corporate websites:

- (1) Web design: It includes the subcategories of presentation (supporting material like photos, videos) and navigation (hyperlinks, visualization, etc.)
- (2) Web content: It encloses the subcategories of CSR commitment (general information objectives, goals, achievements regarding CSR, etc.) and CSR initiatives/resources (CSR initiatives, news, annual reports, etc.)
- (3) Web interactivity: It includes the subcategories of basic contact information (email, phones, address of the CSR department or office, etc.), informational tools (RSS News Feed, FAQ, etc.), and communication tools (blogs, social media, chats, etc.).

Table 12.1 presents these categories and subcategories and the respective authors that support them.

In spite of the existence of considerable guidelines for the creation of websites, today there are not any rules or standards to identify the essential elements that a website should have, especially for CSR. Some websites use common features like search engine, feedbacks, maps, security information, and privacy policy (Robbins and Stylianou 2003). According to these authors, there are certain categories required for a website in order to be fully attractive and functional: design, navigation, security, velocity, and tracking. It is also important to include corporate information, communication tools, updates, financial information, employment opportunities, and social topics in the content of a website (Robbins and Stylianou 2003).

**Table 12.1** Categories for the theoretical framework of CSR communication through corporate websites

Categories	Subcategories	Theoretical background
Web design	Presentation	Esrock and Leichty (1998), Robbins and Stylianou (2003), Capriotti and Moreno (2009)
	Navigation	Esrock and Leichty (1998), Robbins and Stylianou (2003), Capproti and Moreno (2009)
Web content	CSR Commitment	Esrock and Leichty (1998), Robbins and Stylianou (2003), Capproti and Moreno (2009)
	CSR initiatives and resources	Esrock and Leichty (1998), Robbins and Stylianou (2003), Capproti and Moreno (2009), Birth et al. (2008)
Web interactivity	Basic contact information	Esrock and Leichty (1998), Capproti and Moreno (2009)
	Informational tools	Esrock and Leichty (1998)
	Communication tools	Esrock and Leichty (1998), Capproti and Moreno (2009)



The indicators of each subcategory are described below:

Web design categories permit companies to develop a functional and attractive website (Robbins and Stylianou 2003), for the identification of different resources for CSR information and communication (Capriotti and Moreno 2009). Two Web design subcategories were established: presentation and navigation. Presentation refers to visual appearance and general attractiveness of a website (Robbins and Stylianou 2003). It includes indicators like presence of supporting material like videos, photos, animations, figures, and the presence of available document formats (Word, PDF, JPG) and the presence of interactive documents (including annual reports and other relevant documents). Navigation lets users to find specific information in an easy way inside a website (Robbins and Stylianou 2003). The following indicators were established for the navigation subcategory: presence of a CSR hyperlink in the homepage of the company (this will redirect to the CSR website or section), the presence of a hyperlink of the CSR annual report in the CSR homepage, presence of internal, external, and related hyperlinks, and lastly the correct visualization of hypertext, documents, videos, audio, and animation in all popular browsers: Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera, Safari y Google Chrome.

Web content category refers to what is included on the website and the different types of information and topics presented (Capriotti and Moreno 2009; Robbins and Stylianou 2003). Content categories for CSR websites are important to be considered because it shows how the companies and top management are committed to CSR, presenting all the relevant information regarding CSR. Two content subcategories were developed: CSR commitment and CSR initiatives and resources. CSR commitment refers to key CSR information and the support of the top management has for CSR. Examples of indicators in this subcategory include: top management's commitment (through a letter, video, blog post, etc.), objectives or purpose of the CSR practice; the presentation and explanation of CSR future plans or projects, the presentation and explanation of partnerships with other institutions, organizations, and causes, the different accomplishments or achievements regarding CSR. CSR initiatives and resources include the different resources that support the CSR practice and permit the dissemination of information (Capriotti and Moreno 2009). This subcategory presents the following indicators: presence and description of internal and external CSR projects or initiatives (by CSR core area), list of key stakeholders, presence of annual reports (current and past years) in PDF and/or interactive format, and the presence of news regarding CSR (up to date).

Lastly, Web interactivity category promotes adequate information and communication with different stakeholders. Three subcategories were developed: basic contact information, informational tools, and communication tools. Basic contact information displays the way public can contact the CSR department or staff (names, postal address, phone, and email). Informational tools permit users to share relevant information regarding CSR, through the following indicators: RSS News Feed, share buttons (email this, share this on Twitter, Facebook, etc.), bulletin boards, mail lists, and FAQ section. Communication tools allow the generation of opinions and dialogues regarding CSR through interactions. The following indicators were established: blogs, chats/forums, contact forms, and social media.

### 12.3.2 Social Media

The following categories were established for the theoretical framework of CSR communication through social media (especially Facebook and Twitter):

- (1) Presentation: It includes supporting material for the CSR content like photos, videos, hyperlinks, and other resources provided by each social platform)
- (2) Content: It refers to the different messages regarding CSR core areas (e.g., according to G3 guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative and other CSR topics)
- (3) Interactivity: It encloses the purpose of the message and the frequency of those messages.

Table 12.2 presents the different categories and subcategories and the theoretical evidence that supports them.

Presentation category refers to the different resources and basic and essential information (photos, videos, and basic information of the company) that a company social media profile should present. Additional resources promote and reinforce the companies' presence in social media, for example, hyperlinks or icons of social media profiles in the corporate webpage or CSR website, and the promotion of other social media profiles (LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr, blogs, etc.) in the corporate website or social media profiles. The framework presented here is dedicated to social media profiles on Facebook and Twitter regarding CSR core areas; however, it could be applied to other social media platforms as well.

The content of a social media profile should include different messages relevant for the company and its stakeholders (general messages, institutional, promotional, news, events, new products and services, etc.). Due to this chapter proposes a framework for CSR communication through social media, in addition to the above types of messages' examples, companies must disclose messages regarding CSR core areas. Therefore, it was selected the core areas of the G3 guidelines of the

**Table 12.2** Categories for the theoretical framework of CSR communication through social media

Categories	Subcategories	Theoretical background
Presentation	Supporting material	Waters et al. (2009), Rybalko and Seltzer (2010)
	Additional resources	Waters et al. (2009), Rybalko and Seltzer (2010)
Content	GRI core areas	GRI G3 Guidelines (2009)
	Other CSR topics	Rybalko and Seltzer (2010)
Interactivity	Informational (one-way communication)	Hughes and Palen (2009), Rybalko and Seltzer (2010), Morsing and Schultz (2006), Lovejoy and Saxton (2012)
	Communicational (two-way communication)	Rybalko and Seltzer (2010), Morsing and Schultz (2006), Lovejoy and Saxton (2012)
	Mobilization	Lovejoy and Saxton (2012)

Global Reporting Initiative: economy, environment, labor practices, human rights, society, and product responsibility. Other indicators in this content category are messages regarding annual reports or CSR achievements and messages regarding CSR chats or discussions.

Lastly, interactivity category includes how frequent the messages are posted and the purpose of the message. A message is informational if it promotes one-way communication (dissemination purpose), communication (two-way communication) presents the feedback element and encourages dialogue. Mobilization or action messages motivate users to do something for the company (like, share, comment, attend an event, donate money, etc.).

Both frameworks were constructed based upon contribution of other authors (based on a literature review of CSR communication, social media, and Internet). After developing both frameworks, we tested on a small sample of 5 companies (5 websites and 5 social media profiles) in order to evaluate its efficiency and relevance. After doing this first analysis, other subcategories and indicators were found. Once the frameworks were completed, each one of the indicators and subcategories were applied and analyzed to 50 corporate websites and 50 social media profiles of Fortune companies.

## **12.4 Theoretical Framework of CSR Communication Through Corporate Websites**

Results shown that the evaluated companies (that were analyzed applying the theoretical framework) presented 84% of Web design features, 61% of Web content features, and only 33% of interactive features on CSR websites. Eighty-two percent of the companies (from the 50 analyzed) presented a dedicated website for the information and communication of CSR. These findings show a deficiency among the analyzed companies in present up-to-date and useful information regarding CSR toward audiences. In addition, these websites lacked of information and communication tools that could facilitate a rewarding experience and participative experience to users. Findings indicated that Fortune companies are doing efforts to inform regarding CSR practices; however, they are not creating communication process (two-way communication) in their CSR websites.

Therefore, a theoretical framework of CSR communication through corporate websites is proposed. Frameworks or guidelines are important to minimize subjectivity and to let reviewers evaluate different Web features (Evans and King 1999 as cited by Miranda et al. 2009). The framework proposed includes Web design, content, and interactivity features that must be presented on a CSR website that has the purpose to promote information and communication in an effective way.

After testing the framework on the CSR websites of 50 Fortune companies, other subcategories and indicators were included. Table 12.3 presents the complete framework. Here are particular explanations drawn for the analysis:

**Table 12.3** Theoretical framework of CSR communication through corporate websites

Categories	Subcategories	Indicators
Web design	Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting material</li> <li>• Documents in different formats of easy access and download</li> <li>• Interactive documents</li> </ul>
	Navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSR hyperlink on corporate homepage</li> <li>• Annual report's hyperlinks on CSR homepage</li> <li>• Internal, external, and related links</li> <li>• Correct visualization of the website structure in every popular browser</li> </ul>
Web content	CSR Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top management commitment</li> <li>• CSR objectives</li> <li>• CSR achievements</li> <li>• CSR future plans</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• CSR awards or recognition</li> </ul>
	CSR initiatives and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSR initiatives (internal level)</li> <li>• CSR initiatives (external level)</li> <li>• List of key stakeholders</li> <li>• Special content for each group of key stakeholders</li> <li>• Up-to-date annual reports</li> <li>• Past annual reports</li> <li>• Up-to-date CSR news</li> </ul>
Web interactivity	Basic contact information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Names of CSR staff</li> <li>• PO Box address— CSR office</li> <li>• Phone numbers— CSR office</li> <li>• Email (CSR staff)</li> </ul>
	Informational tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RSS News Feed</li> <li>• Participation tools (share buttons)</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Email lists</li> <li>• FAQ section</li> <li>• Calendar of events</li> </ul>
	Communication tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Forums/Chats</li> <li>• Contact formats</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul>

### **Web design**

*Presentation:* In this subcategory, the supporting material can include the presence of photos, videos, animations, and figures. It is also important to include documents in accessible formats for downloading (e.g., Word and PDF). Interactive documents can include in annual reports or other relevant documents.

*Navigation:* In this subcategory, the CSR hyperlink presented on the corporate homepage should include the less number of clicks in order to promote a better experience to the user. In addition, the hyperlink of the CSR annual report should be included in the CSR homepage and not hidden. Lastly, hypertext (documents,

videos, animations) must be visualized without problems in all the popular browsers (Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari,).

### ***Web content***

CSR commitment: The top management's commitment regarding CSR should be displayed as an interactive letter, video, or blog post. This letter is fundamental because it shows the commitment and importance that CSR has for the company (represented by the top management).

CSR initiatives and resources: Annual reports should be presented in both ways (PDF and interactive). The advantage of using interactive reports is that it brings the opportunity to the user to choose the information that he/she wants to read. In other words, each user builds a personal CSR report according to its need and preferences. In addition, it is important to disclose past annual reports (at least from 5 years). News should be up to date. In the analysis performed to companies, there was news from 2 to 3 months ago (only 38% of the companies exhibited news on the websites). If the company has a Twitter account, it could include a widget to show up-to-date information and news from Twitter.

### ***Web interactivity***

Communication tools: Regarding the social media indicator, it is important that companies must bear in mind that they must choose the social media platforms that are more adequate according to its CSR objectives and strategies. In other words, companies should have a social media plan for CSR communication. What companies want to achieve? What is the companies' goal of having a social media profile? Companies cannot have a presence in every social media platform just because popularity reasons. Is my audience in these social platforms? These all questions should be asked by companies, once they are answered, they must evaluate if these platforms are adequate and related to their CSR mission and purpose.

This theoretical framework, as stayed before, was applied to 50 websites dedicated to inform and communicate CSR. Companies were employing more Web design and content features. However, several of the Fortune companies were employing all features. In this chapter, we do not disclose the complete results. These findings are published in (Gomez and Chalmeta 2011).

This theoretical framework shows validation to be applied and used by any type of organization. It was developed taking into account studies from other authors, who found different aspects in the presentation of information of CSR in many companies around the world. Therefore, this theoretical framework can help other companies and organizations to create and evaluate CSR websites that contain design, content, and interactivity features. Furthermore, this guideline could help academics and researchers to evaluate the communication of CSR practices in different organizations in diverse countries.

## 12.5 Theoretical Framework of CSR Communication Through Social Media

Results showed that companies use social media in order to inform or promote about products and services and not for CSR issues. There is a lack of information and communication regarding CSR in social media platforms. Therefore, it is needed a theoretical framework of CSR through Facebook and Twitter for effective use of these platforms for CSR communication.

The framework proposed, as presented before, was applied to 50 official profiles on Facebook and Twitter of Fortune companies. However, only 39 official active accounts were found on Facebook and 43 Twitter official active profiles of Fortune companies were encountered. These active accounts of Facebook and Twitter were analyzed during two months in order to analyze presentational, content, and interactivity features. Companies were not using its social media profiles for CSR information and communication. However, few of the Fortune companies were employing all features and few of them have official profiles dedicated to CSR communication. In this chapter, we do not disclose specific results. These findings are published in (Gomez 2013).

The theoretical framework was developed taking into account studies from other authors, regarding the importance of communication through social media. Therefore, this framework includes different key features that must be presented in official social media profiles (in Facebook and Twitter) for the information, promotion, and communication of CSR messages.

This framework could help companies of any nature, to create a social media profile in CSR or for communication of CSR messages in official general profiles. At the same time, this model can serve as a guideline to help scholars and researchers to evaluate the communication of CSR practices through social media platforms in different types of organizations in many countries. After testing and analyzing the framework on the official social media accounts of Fortune companies, other subcategories and indicators were established. Table 12.4 presents the complete framework.

Here are some key explanations for some indicators:

1. *Presentation*: There are many applications on Facebook to include videos, events, polls, notes, discussions, and ask questions, among other applications. In addition, Twitter let users include photos, videos, and multimedia in messages (tweets). These basic resources can be used when they are relevant and adequate to the CSR message that companies are communicating. This helps to reinforce the CSR message. In addition, other hyperlinks or icons of social media profiles reinforce also the CSR promotion and presence. For example, if a company has a Twitter and Facebook profile dedicated to CSR, both should be promoted in both accounts. This is important in order to support CSR messages in other social media platforms.
2. *Content*: CSR messages must be informative, clear, interesting, respectful, and human (Sweetser 2010). For Twitter, companies must use hashtags (#) for

**Table 12.4** Theoretical framework of CSR communication through social media

Categories	Subcategories	Indicators
Presentation	Supporting material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photos</li> <li>• Videos</li> <li>• Basic information about CSR (objective, purpose) located in the bio or about section</li> </ul>
	Additional resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media hyperlinks or icons on the corporate homepage</li> <li>• Social media hyperlinks or icons on the CSR homepage</li> <li>• Hyperlinks to other social media accounts</li> </ul>
Content	GRI topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Messages about economy</li> <li>• Messages about environment</li> <li>• Messages about labor practices</li> <li>• Messages about human rights</li> <li>• Messages about society</li> <li>• Messages about product responsibility</li> </ul>
	Other topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Messages about annual reports or achievements</li> <li>• Messages about recognitions and awards</li> <li>• Messages about discussions and chat sessions</li> </ul>
Web interactivity	One-way communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transmission of messages</li> <li>• Frequency of the messages</li> </ul>
	Two-way communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback of messages</li> <li>• Presence of dialogues</li> <li>• Frequency of the feedback/dialogues</li> <li>• Presence of hashtags, retweets, and replies</li> <li>• Like and follow other organizations and causes</li> </ul>
	Co-mobilization/action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like/follow</li> <li>• Reply</li> <li>• Share/retweet</li> <li>• Comment</li> <li>• Attend</li> <li>• Participate</li> <li>• Donate</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul>

keywords like #csr #environment #sustainability, etc., in order to enrich the content of the tweet. Including hashtags promotes that these messages can be viewed by other people that are not followers of the company profile on Twitter. Other supporting topics for creating content are shares and retweets. Shares and retweets should be relevant to the company and the followers/fans. Retweeting/ Sharing is an important practice and it is complimentary to the communication of CSR messages. This means that companies are listening to what others organizations and stakeholders are saying or discussing regarding a particular topic.

3. *Interactivity*: One-way communication includes not only the dissemination of interactive information (that includes supporting material like videos, photos, or hyperlinks) that users could share but also the frequency of the messages (Rybalko and Seltzer 2010). According to Hughes and Palen (2009), a social

media profile is active when companies send at least 1 message per week. Therefore, it is important to send messages at least 2–3 times per week, avoiding being absent no more than 1 week. In addition, it is fundamental to promote two-way communication process, inviting and motivating different groups of stakeholders to dialogue regarding different, projects, initiatives, news, and ideas related to CSR (Morsing and Schultz 2006). In Twitter, hashtags (#) are an excellence resource to create, develop, track, and monitor conversations regarding CSR topics. Another resource that can help to be active in interactive CSR communication is to like or follow other organizations, people, products, or causes relevant to the organization. This action can be beneficial for the organization, because this could led to networking opportunities with the purpose of including stakeholders in other relevant activities of the company. Lastly, the concept of mobilization/action was conceived by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), mobilization means that companies are empowering customers and fans to do something for them (e.g., share information, attend an event, donate). However, it is fundamental to take into account content that promotes co-mobilization or co-action where all actors in a CSR communication process can mobilize others to take action.

Each social media platform has its advantages and disadvantages, therefore, each company, according to its social media objectives, must select platforms that are beneficial with the purpose of promoting an appropriate communication process. Social media is based on relations, therefore those companies that are ready to have a presence in any social media platform, means that they are ready to invest in people, in other words, in stakeholders and society.

## 12.6 Conclusions

In 1984, Grunig and Hunt proposed the famous public relations model (press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric). By that time, these authors indicated that only 50% of the companies promoted one-way communication (informational messages) toward stakeholders while only 35% of the companies' performed two-way communication process. In that time, few companies promoted two-way communication messages toward its public. Grunig and Hunt could think that after 30 years, companies will be more active in their communication process, but unfortunately the actual trend that predominates (in the public relations, organization communication, and corporate social responsibility world) is a unidirectional pattern. This research has concluded that this predisposition in promoting unidirectional messages has extended to online platforms like corporate websites and social media.

Create, develop, and maintain relationships with different groups of stakeholders are fundamental for effective CSR communication. Thanks to new technologies of information and communication, the importance of stakeholder relationships has



increase in value for companies. Today, consumers and citizens are more active online, creating and sharing content, participating in conversations, in fact, trusting more other users than corporations (e.g., in the review of products and services). Technology has let any person around the world to participate in discussions and create content equally. Furthermore, it has also convened and mobilized public opinion, in order to shape a new global solidarity (Aras and Crowther 2011). This “global solidarity” among citizens and active consumers will cause new communication challenges to organizations. Today, different groups of stakeholders are informing and communicating about different CSR issues, sometimes before the companies inform it (problems regarding environment, human rights violation, etc.). Therefore, organizations must be open, honest, and proactive at the moment of CSR communication. Those companies that have good relations with public, that listen and answer to them, to their needs, will have the tendency to survive and prosper in crisis (Paine 2011).

This chapter does not suggest that companies will be more responsible if they inform and communicate CSR messages. However, this research finds vital and important (due to the analysis performed) that the frequency and update of CSR information, the continuous interactive communication and feedback, and the use of all Web features. These all are indicators of effort and commitment to present an adequate CSR online communication process.

As proposed by Ihlen et al. (2011), CSR communication is the corporate use of symbols and languages. Therefore, based on the features of the theoretical framework, this chapter defines CSR online communication as the appropriate use of Web symbols or design/presentational features, which support and reinforces the content. In addition, it is the suitable use of language or content features, which present up-to-date and required information, and the use of interactivity, which promote the creation of dialogues, participation, and collaboration among actors.

Online communication of social responsible practices does not mean to upload a particular video or have a blog or a presence on Facebook, online communication goes beyond that. In other words, online communication of CSR is the combination of all Web and social features that allow the CSR communication puzzle fits. Puzzle pieces do not work alone or isolated, they should remain always together for everything to work adequately and precisely.

The reality is that companies are not using all the potential that interactive new media platforms present, neither for the communication of corporate messages (Rybalko and Seltzer 2010; Waters et al. 2009). We could think that social media is frequently used for communication due to its interactive nature. However, this study found that social media was used particularly as another information channel of products and services, failing to take into account the different interactive resources that social media platforms provide for communication and participation.

Findings indicate a lack of commitment and interest in promote a truly genuine and effective CSR communication process. Therefore, due to the inexistence of theoretical frameworks of CSR through Internet (corporate websites and social media), the frameworks proposed in this chapter can help companies to initiate or to evaluate CSR sections, homepages or websites, taking into account web/

presentation design, content, and interactive features. In addition, it can serve as a guideline for the creation, development, and evaluation of CSR communication through social media (especially Facebook and Twitter). Academics and scholars in the field of CSR and public relations could use these frameworks and applied/evaluated to other different types of companies around the world, in order to discover and analyze the progress of CSR communication.

The correct way to use the different online platforms available for CSR communication is based in understanding the communication needs that each company has in order to choose those suitable tools for reaching its communication purpose. Therefore, the frameworks proposed help as a model or guideline to comprehend the key functions of interactive CSR communication, no matter the strategy or purpose performed in CSR practices.

After 25 years of publishing the public relation model, Grunig (2009) indicates that Internet has the potential to carry out communications more strategically, two-way communication, interactive, and socially responsible. However, he asseverates that communication professionals are using these new technologies “in the same ways they used the old—as a means of dumping messages on the general population rather than as a strategic means of interacting with public and bringing information from the environment into organizational decision-making” (p. 1). We believe this panorama will change once Internet and particularly social media platforms are used for the purpose they were created: to inform, communicate, participate, and co-mobilize.

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